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Echoes of Humanity: Contemporary Voices in Social Thought

Djibie Kaptchouang Lionel, Partha Naskar, Baghit Redouan, H. Teroshanie Dahanayaka, and Subhajit Panda *Editors*

RESEARCH COLLAB.

Echoes of Humanity: Contemporary Voices in Social Thought

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PREFACE

Echoes of Humanity: Contemporary Voices in Social Thought brings together diverse scholarly perspectives on the complex realities of contemporary human society. The volume explores a broad range of themes, including culture and identity, Indigenous knowledge, gender and social empowerment, governance, education, literature, environmental ethics, technology, and community life. The contributions demonstrate how social thought continues to evolve in response to changing cultural, political, technological, and environmental circumstances. By bringing together perspectives from different disciplines and geographical contexts, this volume seeks to encourage a deeper and more inclusive understanding of the human condition.

A significant strength of this collection is its engagement with both traditional and emerging dimensions of social life. The chapters examine Indigenous identities and customary practices, gender equality and welfare policies, community institutions and governance, literary and religious traditions, environmental relationships, and the growing influence of digital spaces. These studies demonstrate that contemporary social challenges cannot be understood through a single disciplinary lens. Instead, they require dialogue among different cultures, academic traditions, and lived experiences. The title *Echoes of Humanity* therefore reflects the many voices, memories, ideas, and experiences that come together across the pages of this volume.

We sincerely acknowledge and appreciate the valuable contributions of all the authors, reviewers, academic colleagues, and members of the editorial and publication teams who made this volume possible. Their commitment to research, critical inquiry, and knowledge sharing has enriched this collective work. We hope that *Echoes of Humanity: Contemporary Voices in Social Thought* will serve as a useful resource for researchers, educators, students, policymakers, and readers interested in contemporary social issues, while also inspiring further scholarship, dialogue, and reflection on the changing dimensions of human society.

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Chapter 1: Water, Myth, and Society: Understanding Hydromythology in Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

Water has been looked upon as a cultural, spiritual, symbolic and physical resource of human civilization. Indigenous peoples have used water throughout the world as a focal point of their myths, rituals, oral histories and collective memories. The study of water–mythology is crucial to the comprehension of water–symbolic narratives and to the interpretation of phenomena, changes in the environment, and culture values within the context of a society. The present chapter addresses the issue of hydromythology and the significance of it to indigenous communities. The study isqualitative nature and uses literature analysis and comparative approach, folklore analysis, and indigenous water narratives in various cultural contexts. The chapter explores the ways in which water myths help to maintain cultural identity, pass on ecological knowledge, foster environmental ethics, and build social cohesion. The analysis of the hydromythological narratives shows that they are containers of traditional environmental knowledge and serve to direct the communities to use and conserve the water sources in a sustainable way. The results also show how these stories contribute to the memory, continuity and responsibility for nature in communities. The chapter also illustrates the enduring value of indigenous water knowledge for solving today's environmental issues such as climate change and ecological decline. The chapter makes the case for rethinking hydromythology as more than folklore, but as a treasure of ecological knowledge and culture. It is an important addition to ongoing debates on environmental humanities and indigeneity as it demonstrates the potential of traditional water stories to inform sustainable environmental practices and to help sustain indigenous knowledge systems in the contemporary world.

Keywords: *Hydromythology, Indigenous Knowledge, Water myths, ecological knowledge,Cultural identity, Indigenous societies*

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1. Introduction

Water is one of the most important things for the existence of life on earth. Water has been used for physical and biological purposes and has been a part of human imagination, belief systems and culture since ancient times. In all civilizations, rivers, lakes, springs, glaciers and seas have been considered as resources of nature as well as sacred objects with spiritual, symbolic and social values. The water has been the subject of such myths, legends, rituals and oral traditions that they still shape cultural identity of people all over the world.For many indigenous communities, water is considered a crucial and sacred component of their culture and is understood as a connection between people, nature, ancestors, and the spiritual world.Water and mythology have been so closely linked, that a new term, hydromythology, has been coined to refer to the water myths, stories and cultural beliefs that affect the perception of nature and society by humans. Hydromythological traditions provide important insights into the symbolic sense-making of communities with regard to natural phenomena, environmental change and ecological relationships, in the form of stories and memory. The customs may also hold traditions of knowledge about water usage, seasonal changes, and resource management, as well as moral values of humankind and its relationship with the environment.

Traditional knowledge is an integral part of indigenous knowledge systems and has been handed down orally. In fact, water myths play a significant part in these systems. They are not just stories of imagination but also cultural documents that shape behaviors,instil community morals and promote environmental awareness. River-related stories, springs, lakes, and other bodies of water convey ecological, spiritual, and cultural knowledge that help to build social bonds and promote environmental sustainability.

While there are many instances of hydromythology among the indigenous peoples of the world, the Himalayan region of India has especially fascinating examples of water, mythology and cultural life. In Himachal Pradesh, the myths, rituals and belief systems of the communities are closely linked with the presence of rivers, springs and glaciers, and the worldview assumes that the water is a material necessity as well as a life-giving force.

This chapter is an interdisciplinary and qualitative research to employ folklore analysis, comparative literature review and indigenous water stories analysis. It looks at the role of water myths in retaining cultural identity, in passing on ecological knowledge, in fostering environmental values, and in building social cohesion. The chapter highlights that hydromythology is not only a collection of myths or folklore, but a valuable cultural heritage, ecological knowledge, and traditional knowledge systems. The study of the relationship between water, myth and society is significant for the debates on sustainability, environment and cultural heritage today.

2. Understanding Hydromythology: Concept and Theoretical Perspectives

Hydromythology is a trans-disciplinary study of the relationship between water and myth, and of water-related narratives and their effect on cultural beliefs and social practices, as well as on human interactions with the natural environment. The word is a melding of two ideas: “hydro” for water, and “mythology” for the group of myths, legends and traditional stories, which communities use to make sense of the world around them. Thus, the hydromythology focuses on the symbolic, cultural and ecological meanings conferred by rivers, lakes, springs, glaciers, oceans, etc., in different cultures.

Throughout history water has had a unique and special place in human thinking.It gives life, represents purification, provides a means of transformation, and can create and destroy. This has led to the mention of water in different myths from various cultures. In many cultures, rivers and springs are linked to the divine and the ancestors, and to fertility, healing and protection. Water is viewed as not just a physical resource, but a being that has an agency, the sacredness and the spiritual

meaning in many indigenous traditions. These beliefs have also given rise to extensive mythologies which have in turn affected the social and cultural life.

Most myths are usually considered a traditional story that conveys belief, values, and interpretations of natural phenomena and events.Myths can have supernatural aspects but are often very practical in a social role. They aid in the interpretation of environmental events, in setting up ethics, in reinforcing group identity, and in passing on cultural knowledge from generation to generation. The functions of water-related myths have been especially marked since water is still fundamental for life, agriculture, settlement patterns, and culture development. Thus, hydromythology offers a useful tool in explaining the ways in which societies make sense of water and embed it in their daily existence.

Hydromythology is closely related to the folklore studies. It is no surprise that the folklorists have always recognized the mechanisms by which culture is remembered in myths, legends, folktales, songs, and oral stories(Dundes, 1984). Water myths are passed on through the spoken word and recorded historical experiences, observations about the environment, and community values. The art of storytelling has been and remains an important way for indigenous communities to pass on information about the rivers, springs, rain and how to use resources responsibly in relation to the seasons. These stories have the power to be repeated over and over, to become part of a community's identity, and to help preserve a community's cultural heritage.

Indigenous knowledge systems can also be explored in the context of hydromythology. Indigenous knowledge is the body of knowledge, skills, and practices that have been gained by a community through its relationship with its local environment(Berkes, 2018). Indigenous knowledge is more likely to be shared orally, as part of rituals and cultural practices, than scientific knowledge, which is commonly recorded in writing. The importance of water myths lies in their ability to carry observations about nature and ideas about ethics into the human memory, and to transmit them to others. Conservation, resource management and respect for nature are implicit in stories about sacred rivers, springs and lakes.

But another theoretical approach to hydromythology is ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a field of literary study that looks at the connections between literature, culture and nature(Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Theories on the nature of myths from an ecocritical point of view tend to locate them in the human attitude towards nature and values towards the environment. Myths about water can foster a feeling of interconnections between people and nature. They promote respect for the natural resources and the effects of disturbing the natural balance. The water-related narratives can be analysed using an ecocritical perspective, which will help students to understand the traditional societies' understanding of sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Hydromythology also plays a role in ongoing conversation in the environmental humanities today. Environmental humanities is an interdisciplinary field of study that integrates the perspectives of literature, history, anthropology and cultural studies with that of environmental science(Rose et al., 2012), as a way to explore how humans relate to the natural world. The water myths in this context are more than a relic of the past; they are cultural resources essential for different viewpoints related to the environmental issues. Reciprocity, stewardship, and respect for natural systems are common themes in Indigenous waterways and water use practices and values, and are as relevant in today's water scarcity and climate change context, as they are in the face of ecological degradation.

Hydromythological traditions do not have a specific geographical location, but are passed on in indigenous communities around the world. For many Native American cultures, rivers, lakes, and springs are sacred and represent creation, of past generations, and spiritual strength. Australian Aboriginal traditions have been able to sustain water-based

Dreaming stories, which describe the origin of waterways, water sources and landscapes, and which demonstrate a relationship between the human and the natural. In the same way, Inuit people in the Arctic also have spiritual relations to the sea, including Sedna, the traditional spirit guide of the arctic sea, which is said to control the resources and life of the sea.Examples of water spirits in several African cultures are considered to be the protectors of rivers and lakes, and water is seen as an important aspect that governs the human relationship with water. These examples show how pervasive hydromythological traditions are and the importance of water in indigenous worldviews in various cultures.

There is also a local hydromythological tradition in the region of Himalaya which continues to influence perceptions of water and of the environment. In many cases these sacred springs, rivers and glaciers are connected to deities, ancestors and communal rituals. The beliefs reinforce the culture value of water and the responsible use and conservation of water resources. These practices refer to the cultural exchange and the environment-awareness in hydromythology.

Thus, it is not a list of symbolic stories that can be called hydromythology. It is a complex system of cultural knowledge that enables communities to understand, interpret and interact with water. Hydromythology is a newly developed perspective that provides a means of bridging the gap between mythology and ecology, between culture and indigenous knowledge and in so doing represents a strong tool for looking at the long-standing relationship between societies and nature.

3. Water in Indigenous Mythological Traditions

Indigenous peoples' mythologies are intricately tied to their cultural beliefs and values, and water is viewed as a symbol of life, fertility, abundance, and spiritual well-being. In some places, such as Chamba district in the state of HP where water access has always been a significant determinant in the settlement and agriculture, water myths still influence cultural beliefs and community identity. These stories are meant for more than just recalling the origin of the water: they also recall a community, they convey ecological information and they help to reinforce social values. The hydromythological myths of Chamba represent the understanding and interaction of the local communities with the natural environment through the myths, rituals and oral tradition.

3.1 The Legend of Rani Sunayani and the Hydromythology of Sacrifice

The most important among the water legends of Chamba is that of Sui MataRani Sunayani. Local folklore has it that Raja Sahil Varman wanted to provide a sure supply of water to the newly created town of Chamba. Water channel construction was attempted on several occasions, but was unsuccessful, and the community is thus prone to water scarcity. The local priests told the king that the project could only be successful if he sacrificed the person, he loved the most. For the sake of his people, Raja Sahil Varman consented to sacrifice Queen Sunayani who was supposed to have been buried alive close to the source of water channel. According to local lore, as soon as the sacrifice was completed, water started pouring into the settlement.

This memory persists in the Sui Mata Fair which is celebrated annually in Chamba, especially by the women and children. The legend is much more than a religious tale. In terms of hydromythology it illustrates the great significance of water in mountain societies where safe access to the natural resources was crucial for survival. Water is a symbolic element that represents sacrifice, community welfare, and community survival. It also reflects the challenges involved with constructing and maintaining water channels across rugged Himalayan terrain. From a gender perspective, the legend highlights how women are often represented as custodians of collective welfare in Himalayan folklore. Thus, the narrative functions not only as a sacred story but also as a cultural reflection on water management, social responsibility, and community survival.

3.2 Khajjiar Lake and Sacred Water Landscapes

Yet another notable instance of hydromythology in Chamba is related to Khajjiar lake, one of the most striking natural features of the area. Legend has it that the epic Mahabharata is connected with the lake. The lake is believed to have been formed when Bhima, the strongest Pandava prince, went down to fetch water from the lake. The floating island in the lake also adds to its folklore, making it a part of the local folklore.

The legend tells of the building of culturally meaningful space by indigenous people in the natural environment. Through their mythological interpretation, the lake turns to become a sacred, historical and symbolic place. This type of stories fosters a sense of pride in the local landscapes and promotes appreciation for natural areas. Hydromythologically, it shows how strange or unique aspects of the environment are seen as symbolic stories which connect the local environment to the wider culture. Mythology thus serves to maintain cultural heritage and natural landscapes. By linking ecological features with sacred and historical meanings, such narratives also encourage the protection and conservation of natural water bodies.

3.3 Water, Irrigation Myths, and Indigenous Ecological Wisdom

The following is not the only place where one can find hydromythology in Chamba, such as the sacred lakes and the royal sacrifice stories. The oral tradition of the Western Himalayan region often mentions the sacrifice involved when building and maintaining irrigation channels (Kuhl's). In some stories, women or other marginalized people are sacrificed to assure that the river water flows through the new channels. These stories seem to be sad, but anthropological analyses argue that they are a symbolic reflection of the "excessive worth of water in the mountain's agrarian societies.

These stories convey the message that water was seen as a life-giving force that life depended on, and the survival of whole communities. The links between sacrifice and running water also symbolise the teamwork, labor and social dedication that is needed to build irrigation systems in challenging areas. Communities conveyed through such stories that responsibility, cooperation, and respect for nature are essential for sustainable access to water resources. The narratives therefore function as informal systems of environmental education and resource governance.

Indigenous pastoral practice in Gaddi community is also a prime example of traditional ecological knowledge in the Himalayas. Historically, the Gaddis have relied on seasonal fluctuations in water availability, rainfall and snowmelt but not extensive irrigation networks. Crop rotation and controlled cultivation, along with making efficient use of natural moisture are their main points of emphasis in their farming practices. Farm practices to maintain soil fertility and hold rainwater are favored by community beliefs. While not always in the form of supernatural myths, they carry with them hydromythological concepts that are connected to the wellbeing of humankind and the sustainable use of the natural water resources.

These traditions reveal the practical aspects of hydromythology, as do the cultural beliefs that underpin them. Traditional worldviews and practices often incorporate ecological knowledge, allowing it to be passed on from one generation to the next through the use of oral stories and practices. Thus, myths and traditional beliefs serve as cultural expressions and unwritten systems of EE and resource management.

These stories of water have been analysed and the results show that water myths are not only religious beliefs or folklore but serve other functions as well in the Chamba region. Together, the story of Rani Sunayani, the Khajjiar Lake and the traditional stories of irrigation provide a whole picture of the historical understanding that water is a life-giving resource and also a sacred cultural entity among the indigenous communities.These stories serve to remember the people, to strengthen cultural identity, to impart ecological

knowledge, and to foster ecological responsibility. They also exhibit the historical reality of the mountain cultures regarding the role of water in settlement, in agriculture and in the life of communities.

The results indicate that the hydromythological practices play a significant role in preserving indigenous knowledge and environmental ethics. Communities pass on practical knowledge of water conservation, resource management and human–nature relationships through symbolic narratives across generations. Moreover, these practices reinforce socio-spatial cohesion, as cultural practices, rituals and memories are tied to the landscape and water bodies. The discussion provides a glimpse into the study of hydromythology by showcasing the ways in which water-based stories in the Himalayas can be understood as cultural inheritance, ecological knowledge, and community-based environmental knowledge systems. In conclusion, the hydromythological beliefs and practices of Chamba reflect the continuity of indigenous narratives in today's environmental concerns, cultural conservation, and ecological consciousness.

4. Hydromythology as a repository of ecological knowledge

Traditions of hydromythology are not only the reservoir of sacred tales and cultural knowledge, they are also those of ecological knowledge. Indigenous people have exploited their surrounding natural environment by using their intimate knowledge for many centuries and a lot of their knowledge is passed along through their myths, legends, rituals and oral history(Gadgil, Berkes & Folke, 1993). Water stories can be particularly valuable in communicating local ecosystems, the seasons, water conservation, farming and other uses, sustainable resource management. Consequently, hydromythology can be an important link between cultural expression and knowledge of the environment.

There are some differences between indigenous knowledge systems and formal scientific systems with respect to how it is transmitted and preserved. Indigenous knowledge is typically verbally transmitted, through stories, rituals, songs, traditional practices and collective memory, while scientific knowledge is typically documented in written texts, or institutional research. Cultural expressions provide opportunities for communities to hold onto practical environmental knowledge for long periods of time.

The hydromythological stories are especially important in this context as water is vital to the production of food, shelter, and animal husbandry, as well as to everyday life. Communities are more likely to remember and transmit environmental knowledge when it is embedded in memorable narratives that connect ecological observations with cultural values.

In many indigenous cultures there are myths surrounding rivers, springs and lakes that convey the significance of maintaining water sources. Narratives about the sacred are usually anti-pollution, anti-excessive use, and anti-irresponsible use of water sources. Water bodies considered sacred are often preserved more rigorously than other natural resources due to cultural values creating moral responsibility to preserve these resources. Myths like these illustrate the potential of mythology to help foster a sense of care for the environment in the community.

The mythology of Chamba district is an example of the close linkage between myth and wealth of ecological knowledge. The experiences and adaptations to the mountainous environment of the region are reflected in water related stories, beliefs and customs. The traditions emphasise the importance of conserving the natural springs, irrigation system and the sustainable use of water resources. This information, which is common knowledge to the communities, has been passed on orally, retaining their everyday knowledge of water availability, of seasonal change and of the sharing of responsibility for water resources.

Ecological knowledge is particularly rich in indigenous practices including water

conservation, water use in farming, etc.For traditional water-management systems such as kuhls, knowledge of topography, water flow, rainfall patterns, and agricultural requirements was essential (Berkes, 2018).Thesesystems were accompanied by community traditions that promoted sharing and fair distribution of water, as well as the consistent maintenance of irrigation systems. These traditions sometimes conveyed in mythological or symbolic terms but they conveyed practical concepts that were essential for sustainable water use in mountain areas.

The hydromythological traditions are also a way to remember knowledge about seasonal cycles and environmental changes. Rainfall, snowfall, vegetation and water availability have always been used by indigenous communities as indicators to inform their agricultural and pastoral practices. This knowledge, passed down through many generations, allowed communities to adjust to the changing environment and to take decisions on what to grow, graze and use. Oral transmission of this knowledge helped to maintain continuity even when there was no written documentation.

Another significant area of hydromythology is that of the cultivation of ecological ethics. Whereas the 'human' element is often the theme of indigenous stories, it is also more often regarded as an integral part of a larger 'ecological system' – not separate from it. Water can have a sacred and life-giving quality, and as such should be cared for and respected. These views foster an attitude of responsibility for natural resources and sustainable ways of interacting with the environment. As opposed to a strictly functional based approach to resource use, the hydromythological traditions prioritize a sense of reciprocity, balance, and community between people and nature.

In our own times, the ecological wisdom of the hydromythology has a lot of relevance. There are many environmental problems in modern societies, such as, water scarcity, climate change, pollution and degradation of ecosystem. Although traditional knowledge cannot resolve these issues, it is important to note that indigenous hydromythological traditions provide valuable insights in the use of resources and environmental stewardship in a sustainable manner. They remind the contemporary societies that conservation of the environment is not just a technical or scientific problem, but also a cultural and ethical problem.

The study of the hydromythological traditions in Chamba shows that myths can serve as a means of retaining and passing on ecological knowledge. They convey real-world data on water management, promote water-saving practices and foster cultural connections with local ecosystems. The stories emphasize the age-old way of life of indigenous peoples in harmony with nature.

The findings demonstrate that hydromythology serves as an effective medium for preserving and transmitting indigenous ecological knowledge. By integrating environmental observations with cultural values, water narratives promote ecological awareness, resilience, and sustainable human–water relationships. Hydromythology should therefore be viewed not only as cultural heritage but also as a valuable source of environmental knowledge.

5. Water Myths, Cultural Identity, and Social Cohesion

Not only do hydromythological traditions help maintain ecological knowledge but they also contribute to cultural identity and social cohesion of indigenous communities. Water myths surrounding rivers, springs, lakes and other sources of water may serve as the collective culture memory of communities, an area in which they learn about history, values, beliefs and interaction with nature. These stories play a role in the development of a sense of community identity by offering symbols, traditions, and meanings that create a sense of connection among community members, across generations.

Stories about themselves and their environment are strongly tied to cultural identity, which is a term that is used to describe one's feelings and experiences of identity. Youth development and the collective memory are usually

preserved in stories and narratives in myths and legends in native communities which are historical memories and cultural values that have been passed down. The significance of water related myths is that water is an essential ingredient required for the survival of life, agriculture, settlement and religion. As a result, the hydromythological stories can become part of the community identity and can be tied to the people's understanding of themselves and how they view their connection to nature and each other.

Water is a significant aspect of the cultural life and social activities of the indigenous communities in the district of Chamba. Various local legends about springs, rivers and sacred water sources are still carried on through oral history. They are geospatial stories that link people and places today with those of their ancestors, and that help to establish a shared heritage, a sense of place. Water myths are perpetuated in daily cultural customs and practices, while also playing a part in the continuity of local traditions, through storytelling, ritual and community celebrations.

The legend of Rani Sunayani provides a case in point of how a hydromythological story can be the symbol of a collective identity. It is not only remembered as a story of sacrifice, but it is also a cultural story that conveys the values of communities, including those of duty, collective welfare and devotion. Hydromythology has a part to play when rituals and commemorative practices are observed, and so long as the legend remains alive, and so long as the relationship of past and present with respect to the past is maintained. These stories give a historical awareness to communities, fostering social togetherness.

In addition, hydromythology contributes to the cohesiveness of society, and encourages citizens to participate in cultural and religious events. Water-related festivals, rituals and ceremonies traditionally draw people together and provide a chance to meet and co-operate with other community members. The common practices build relationships with others, uphold cultural norms, and create a sense of community responsibility.The shared experience of such activities shows that water myths are not only narratives, but also are part of social life, sustaining social solidarity.

Another essential feature of hydromythology is the transmission of the cultural values. Cooperation, respect for nature, the responsibility for the care of community resources and ethical behavior are common themes in indigenous water narratives. These values are shared informally through communities' effective mechanisms of embedding them in memorable stories. Youth absorb cultural values and obligations by engaging in the cultural activities and traditions that take place at sacred water locations.

Hydromythological stories also help to preserve social and cultural continuity in the midst of social and economic transformations. Many facets of native life have changed due to processes like modernization, urbanisation, migration, and technology advances. However, water myths remain as symbolic connections to the traditions of the past and the local cultural heritage. They can contribute to a sense of community identity and belonging but in the face of external forces that changes social and cultural structures. Thus, hydromythology becomes a cultural asset which sustains resilience and continuity in times of change.

Concurrently, water myths help to shape place identities. Local histories or community traditions are frequently closely linked to sacred springs, rivers, lakes and other water bodies. They are significant cultural destinations, places to link people to landscape, and to strengthen emotional bonds to landscape. Natural features are given natural, and sometimes cultural, meanings through the hydromythological stories, enhancing the connections between community identity and place.

The hydromythological traditions of Chamba perform important social and cultural functions beyond their sacred significance. They preserve collective memory, reinforce cultural values, strengthen social bonds, and sustain community identity across generations.

The study suggests that hydromythology remains an important cultural process through which indigenous communities preserve identity, transmit values, and maintain social cohesion. Water myths continue to contribute to cultural resilience by linking collective memory with shared cultural practices.

6. Environmental Ethics and Contemporary Relevance

Hydromythological traditions are not only important cultural and historical resources but also important sources of environmental ethics that remain relevant in the contemporary world (Shiva, 2002). Often, values of respect, responsibility, reciprocity and balance in human interaction with nature are taught in indigenous water myths. These beliefs and practices instil in people their love for water, acknowledgement of its life-giving role and its need of protection which leads to environmental sustainability. The moral values that lie beneath the hydromyths provide insights into current environmental issues in a world where ecological problems are growing.

Environmental ethics is the moral guidance that directs human relations with the natural environment. Although philosophical and scientific discussion has been the primary expression of modern environmental ethics, the ethics of nature has long been articulated by indigenous communities based on their cultural traditions and their experiences of nature. These systems play an important role in conveying moral responsibilities associated with water resources and the environment as a whole, through the medium of hydromythological narratives. These stories tend to highlight how unwise or disrespectful use and abuse of natural resources can have social, ecological or spiritual implications, thus promoting responsible action.

For indigenous communities, water is not only a resource but it is also a cultural resource. It is seen as a life source, continuity, and a vital link between human, nature, and spiritual worlds. This is a view other than utilitarian, in which water is only considered as an economic product. Hydromythological traditions therefore support a holistic view with respect to water and its ecological, cultural, social and spiritual value. This kind of understanding fosters attitudes for conservation that are increasingly relevant in today's context of environmental degradation and resource shortage.

The Chamba district's environmental ethics are crucial examples related to hydromythological beliefs and practices. The local stories about sacred springs, rivers and water sources promote natural resource values and deter activities to harm and pollute them. These customs help to convey the message of "water responsibility" and "community sharing" to everyone in the community. Hydromythological stories play a role in the formation of community people's attitudes towards the environment.

The modern significance of the hydromythology is especially apparent when it comes to the global environmental issues. Climate change, decreasing freshwater resources, pollution, deforestation and degradation of ecosystems have become significant issues in societies across the globe. In such a context, the indigenous concepts of water conservation and care for the environment offer insights to more sustainable practices of water resource management. Collective responsibility and community involvement in conserving the environment is also highlighted in the hydromythological traditions. Water sources are typically viewed as a common resource that needs to be protected through collaboration among neighbours and provide lessons for today's environmental governance.

Another important feature of hydromythology is the role it plays in raising awareness and education of the environment. Ecological values can be communicated through stories, rituals and oral traditions which are accessible across generations. Myths captivate audiences emotionally and culturally, as opposed to technical environmental reports and scientific data, resulting in more meaningful and memorable environmental messages.

Consequently, the use of the hydromythological narratives can be a helpful tool in formal EE to promote ethical attitudes towards nature and sustainable behaviour.

Hydromythology continues to be relevant today because of the increasing importance of indigenous knowledge systems in the field of environmental studies. TEK can play a role in biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017).However,modernization, urbanization, migration, and the decline of oral traditions pose significant challenges to hydromythological practices. At the same time, digital documentation and local cultural initiatives provide new opportunities for preserving indigenous water narratives. Therefore, hydromythological traditions should be documented and safeguarded to prevent the loss of valuable cultural and ecological knowledge.

As the analysis in this chapter illustrates, the mythological patterns of water still hold a great deal of significance beyond the cultural sphere from which they originated. Indigenous water myths help to sustain cultural values of environmental ethics, attitudes towards sustainable use of natural resources, and collective responsibility for the conservation of natural resources. Overall, the results of this research indicate that traditional beliefs and practices related to the water can play a significant role in the current environmental debate, not only as a way to foster ecological consciousness but also by incorporating cultural values and ethical considerations. Hydromythology is not just a folklore and cultural studies subject, it is also a valuable tool in solving current environmental problems and educating people to living sustainably with nature.

Conclusion

Hydromythology is an important nexus of the mythology, culture, ecology and indigenous knowledge systems. As can be seen by the study of water related myths of the native people, the myths are not merely fantasies or religious beliefs. They act as an invaluable cultural asset that can help communities to hold on to their cultural memory, transmit their ecological knowledge, maintain social values, and strengthen their identity. The chapter has highlighted the various role of water myths in the social, cultural and environment relationship of people of Chamba district.

The analysis of the Rani Sunayani legend, Khajjiar Lake narratives, and irrigation-related traditions demonstrates that water myths function as repositories of ecological knowledge, cultural memory, and environmental ethics.Meanwhile, these traditions help to foster cultural continuity, by holding collective memory and building community cohesion through shared beliefs, rituals, and practices. The research also emphasizes that the hydromythological culture reflects the ethic natural values; namely the values of respect for nature, natural resources use and harmony between natural and human.

An understanding of the knowledge in the indigenous hydromythologies is relevant in the present era of global climate change, environmental degradation, and increased water resource needs. These are not necessarily scientific solutions, but they offer great insights into sustainability, community involvement, and environmental responsibility. The chapter contributes to the broader discussion of the study of indigenous knowledge systems and folklore studies in the environmental humanities, emphasising the continued importance of hydromythology in the process of understanding cultural heritages and ecological concerns. The safeguarding and documentation of hydromythological traditions can support future research, strengthen community-based conservation efforts, inform environmental policy, and promote culturally sensitive approaches to sustainable development.

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Chapter 2: Tribal Health and Policy Implementation: Structural Barriers in Melghat Region (Amravati District, Maharashtra)

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Abstract

This chapter examines the persistent challenges of tribal health and policy implementation in the Melghat region of Maharashtra, India, through a structural and multidimensional perspective. Despite sustained policy interventions under major programmes such as the National Health Mission, Integrated Child Development Services, and state-level tribal welfare initiatives, the region continues to exhibit alarmingly poor health indicators. High levels of child malnutrition, maternal anaemia, communicable diseases, and limited healthcare access reflect deep-rooted systemic inequities. The study argues that these outcomes cannot be adequately understood through a purely biomedical lens but must be situated within the broader framework of social determinants of health. Structural barriers such as geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, human resource shortages, administrative inefficiencies, and socio-cultural factors significantly impede policy implementation and socio-cultural factors—collectively impede effective policy implementation. The dispersed settlement patterns, poor connectivity, and economic dependence on subsistence livelihoods further exacerbate vulnerabilities. Likewise, the persistence of a top-down policy approach, fragmentation across sectors, and limited community participation contribute to a significant gap between policy intent and actual outcomes. The chapter further discusses emerging interventions such as telemedicine, community-based healthcare models, and the role of non-governmental organizations in addressing service delivery gaps. While these initiatives demonstrate potential, their impact remains constrained without broader systemic reforms. Overall, sustainable improvement requires the need for an integrated, context-sensitive, and participatory policy framework that prioritizes equity, strengthens institutional accountability, and enhances inter-sectoral coordination. Ultimately, achieving sustainable improvements in tribal health in Melghat requires addressing the underlying structural determinants that perpetuate exclusion, thereby bridging the divide between policy design and grassroots realities.

Key Words: *Tribal Health, Structural Barriers, Policy Implementation, Social Determinants, Melghat Region*

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1. Introduction

Tribal health in India constitutes a critically significant yet persistently neglected dimension of public health governance, shaped by a convergence of historical marginalization, economic deprivation, and socio-cultural exclusion. The health status of tribal populations continues to lag behind national averages across multiple indicators, reflecting entrenched inequities embedded within broader development processes. These disparities are not merely the outcome of individual or community-level factors but are deeply rooted in structural conditions such as unequal resource distribution, inadequate institutional outreach, and historically exclusionary policy frameworks. As a result, tribal health must be understood through a multidimensional lens that integrates social determinants, governance mechanisms, and spatial inequalities.

Within this broader context, the Melghat region in the Amravati district of Maharashtra emerges as a particularly significant site for examining the complexities of policy implementation in tribal health. Despite being the focus of sustained governmental attention through various national and state-level interventions—such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), National Health Mission (NHM), and targeted nutrition programmes—Melghat continues to report alarmingly poor health outcomes. High rates of child malnutrition, infant mortality, and maternal health complications persist, indicating a disconnect between policy formulation and on-ground realities. This paradox suggests limitations programmatic approaches that prioritize quantitative targets without adequately addressing contextual challenges.

The persistence of poor health indicators in Melghat underscores the presence of systemic barriers that extend beyond mere service delivery deficits. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained healthcare personnel, irregular supply of essential medicines, and weak monitoring mechanisms significantly impede the effectiveness of existing programmes. In addition, administrative fragmentation and lack of inter-sectoral coordination often result in policy overlap or gaps, reducing the overall efficiency of interventions. These structural constraints are compounded by governance challenges, including limited accountability, bureaucratic delays, and insufficient community participation in health planning and implementation processes.

Geographical isolation plays a particularly critical role in shaping health outcomes in the region. Situated in the rugged terrain of the Satpura ranges, Melghat is characterized by dense forests, hilly landscapes, and scattered settlements, which pose substantial logistical challenges for healthcare delivery. Many villages remain difficult to access, especially during monsoon seasons, thereby restricting regular outreach services and emergency care. This spatial marginality not only limits physical access to healthcare facilities but also exacerbates delays in diagnosis and treatment, contributing to preventable morbidity and mortality.

The socio-economic profile of the region further intensifies these vulnerabilities. Predominantly inhabited by tribal communities such as the Korku and Gond, Melghat's population relies heavily on subsistence agriculture and forest-based livelihoods, which are inherently unstable and seasonal. Chronic poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to education and sanitation collectively influence health-seeking behavior and nutritional outcomes. Cultural beliefs and traditional practices, while integral to community identity, may also interact with formal healthcare systems in complex ways, sometimes leading to delayed utilization of institutional services.

Over the years, Melghat has come to symbolize the broader challenges of tribal health governance in India, drawing attention from judicial bodies, civil society organizations, and academic researchers. Judicial interventions, particularly through public interest litigations, have repeatedly highlighted the state's

obligation to ensure the right to health and nutrition in the region. However, despite this sustained visibility and periodic policy responses, the pace of substantive improvement has remained slow. These observations suggest that increased policy attention alone is insufficient without addressing the underlying structural determinants that perpetuate exclusion.

Understanding tribal health in Melghat requires in Melghat necessitates a structural analysis that goes beyond surface-level assessments of programme performance. It requires an examination of how geography, governance, socio-economic conditions, and institutional design interact to shape health outcomes. Only by addressing these foundational barriers can policy interventions move towards achieving meaningful and sustainable improvements in the health and well-being of tribal populations.

Recent scholarly literature increasingly recognizes tribal health as a multidimensional governance challenge rather than solely a medical issue. Studies by Rao et al. (2022), Patel and Shah (2023), WHO (2023), UNICEF (2024), and NITI Aayog (2023) emphasize that health inequities among tribal populations are closely associated with poverty, nutrition, education, sanitation, institutional accountability, and healthcare accessibility. Contemporary research also advocates integrated governance models, community participation, and digital health innovations to improve healthcare outcomes in remote tribal regions. These studies provide a stronger theoretical and empirical foundation for analysing policy implementation in Melghat.

2. Conceptual Framework: Structural Barriers and Tribal Health

The health status of tribal populations is most effectively understood through the framework of the social determinants of health, which posits that health outcomes are shaped not merely by biological or medical factors but by a complex interplay of economic, social, and environmental conditions. In geographically and socio-economically marginalized regions such as Melghat, these determinants manifest in particularly acute forms. Chronic poverty, low levels of literacy, persistent food insecurity, and underdeveloped physical infrastructure significantly exacerbate health vulnerabilities among tribal communities. Limited access to balanced nutrition, inadequate healthcare facilities, and a lack of awareness regarding preventive health practices collectively contribute to the perpetuation of adverse health outcomes. These structural disadvantages reinforce intergenerational cycles of deprivation, where poor health both results from and contributes to continued socio-economic marginalization.

Structural barriers in Melghat are deeply embedded within governance mechanisms and institutional arrangements, thereby constraining the effective delivery and accessibility of healthcare services. The region's difficult terrain and geographical isolation pose significant logistical challenges, impeding regular access to health centers and emergency services. Administrative inefficiencies, including delays in policy execution, weak monitoring systems, and fragmented inter-departmental coordination, further weaken service delivery. Likewise, chronic shortages of trained medical personnel, inadequate supply of essential medicines, and poorly equipped healthcare infrastructure exacerbate the situation. Despite multiple national and state-level programmes, implementation remains inconsistent their implementation remains inconsistent and often fails to reach the most vulnerable segments of the population. This results in a pronounced disconnect between policy formulation and ground-level realities.

Socio-cultural factors also play a critical role in shaping health-seeking behavior among tribal communities. Deeply rooted traditional beliefs, reliance on indigenous healing practices, and a general lack of trust in formal healthcare systems often lead to delays in seeking timely medical intervention. Gender dynamics, social hierarchies, and cultural perceptions of illness further influence decision-making processes related to health. The concept of structural

violence provides a useful analytical lens to understand how systemic neglect, exclusion, and institutional inadequacies contribute to preventable morbidity and mortality in such contexts. It highlights how social structures and policies, rather than individual choices alone, produce and sustain health inequities. Accordingly, analysing tribal health requiresof tribal health in Melghat must adopt a comprehensive structural perspective that integrates social, economic, cultural, and institutional dimensions, moving beyond a narrow biomedical model to address the root causes of health disparities.

3. Socio-Demographic Profile of Melghat

The socio-demographic characteristics of the Melghat region play a critical role in shaping both health outcomes and the effectiveness of public health policy implementation. The region is predominantly inhabited by the Korku tribe, along with smaller populations of Gond and other tribal communities, each possessing distinct cultural practices and livelihood patterns. These communities are primarily dependent on subsistence agriculture and forest-based resources, which makes their economic stability highly contingent upon seasonal cycles and environmental conditions. Such dependence exposes households to recurring vulnerabilities, particularly during periods of drought or agricultural off-seasons, leading to fluctuations in income and persistent food insecurity. Seasonal livelihood instability contributes to chronic undernutrition, especially among children and women, thereby adversely affecting overall health indicators in the region.

Low levels of literacy, particularly among women, further compound these challenges by limiting awareness regarding nutrition, hygiene, and preventive healthcare practices. Inadequate educational attainment also restricts the ability of individuals to effectively access and utilize government welfare schemes and health programmes. Moreover, the scattered and dispersed pattern of tribal settlements across Melghat's rugged and hilly terrain presents substantial logistical barriers to service delivery. Healthcare outreach efforts often become resource-intensive and inconsistent due to the absence of well-developed transportation and communication infrastructure. Poor road connectivity, limited availability of public transport, and weak digital networks contribute to physical and informational isolation, thereby delaying timely access to medical facilities. These constraints often result in late diagnosis and inadequate treatment, ultimately contributing to elevated rates of morbidity and mortality.

In addition to economic and geographic constraints, intra-community social dynamics, particularly gender relations and hierarchical structures, significantly influence health-seeking behavior. Women, despite being central to household nutrition, childcare, and caregiving responsibilities, often experience restricted autonomy in decision-making processes related to health. Limited mobility, coupled with socio-cultural norms that prioritize male authority, constrains their ability to seek timely medical intervention for themselves and their children. In addition, the burden of unpaid labor and reproductive responsibilities exacerbates their vulnerability to poor health outcomes. These interacting socio-economic and geographical factors explain the complexity of health challenges in Melghat. It highlights the necessity for context-sensitive, inclusive, and participatory policy interventions that address not only healthcare delivery but also the broader structural determinants that sustain health disparities in the region.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Melghat Region

Indicator	Description
Dominant Tribe	Korku (majority population)
Other Tribal Groups	Gond, Nihal, Balai
Primary Livelihood	Subsistence agriculture, forest produce
Literacy Level	Low, especially among women

Settlement Pattern	Scattered and remote hamlets
Accessibility	Poor road connectivity and transport

Source: Author's Compilation (2026)

4. Health Status of Tribal Population

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21), tribal populations continue to experience disproportionately poor health outcomes compared to the national average. Approximately 35.5% of children below five years are stunted, while nearly 32% are underweight among Scheduled Tribe communities. Anaemia affects more than 59% of children and around 67% of women aged 15–49 years belonging to tribal populations. Maharashtra also reports a high prevalence of maternal anaemia and childhood malnutrition in tribal districts, including Amravati. Rural Health Statistics (2023) further indicate shortages of medical officers and specialists in Primary Health Centres located in tribal and remote areas, affecting timely healthcare delivery. These findings provide empirical support for the structural challenges discussed in the present study.

The health profile of the Melghat region reflects a disproportionately high burden of malnutrition, maternal health challenges, and communicable diseases, thereby underscoring the persistence of deep-rooted structural inequalities. Among these, child malnutrition emerges as the most critical and visible public health concern, with a consistently high prevalence of underweight, stunted, and wasted children. This condition cannot be attributed solely to inadequate food intake; rather, it is the outcome of a complex interplay of factors, including poor maternal health, inadequate infant and young child feeding practices, limited access to quality healthcare services, and insufficient awareness regarding nutrition and hygiene. Malnutrition therefore affects physical growth, cognitive development, educational attainment, and long-term productivity impairing not only physical growth but also cognitive development, educational attainment, and long-term productivity, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and ill-health.

Maternal health indicators in the region present an equally concerning scenario, particularly due to the widespread prevalence of anaemia and other nutrition-related deficiencies among women of reproductive age. The limited reach and utilization of antenatal care services significantly hinder early detection and management of pregnancy-related risks. Likewise, a substantial proportion of deliveries continue to take place at home without the presence of skilled birth attendants, increasing the likelihood of maternal and neonatal complications, including preventable mortality. Structural barriers such as inadequate healthcare infrastructure, shortage of trained personnel, and socio-cultural constraints further restrict access to institutional care. Inadequate immunization coverage compounds these challenges by leaving infants and young children vulnerable to preventable infectious diseases, thereby undermining gains in early childhood survival and development.

The prevalence of communicable diseases, including malaria, diarrhoeal infections, and respiratory illnesses, remains persistently high in Melghat, largely due to poor environmental health conditions. Limited access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, and substandard housing conditions create an enabling environment for the spread of infectious diseases. These risks are further intensified by seasonal variations, particularly during the monsoon period, when vector-borne and water-borne diseases tend to surge. Delayed health-seeking behavior, often influenced by geographic isolation, financial constraints, and reliance on traditional healing practices, contributes to the progression and severity of illnesses. In addition, gaps in public health infrastructure, including insufficient outreach services, weak disease surveillance, and inconsistent implementation of preventive programmes, exacerbate the overall disease burden.

These health indicators suggest that existing health policies and interventions have not sufficiently addressed the underlying structural determinants of health in the region. While multiple programmes have been introduced at national and state levels, their impact remains limited due to fragmented implementation, lack of contextual adaptation, and inadequate community engagement. Addressing these challenges requires a more integrated, multi-sectoral, and context-sensitive approach that prioritizes preventive care, strengthens primary healthcare systems, and actively involves local communities in the design and delivery of health interventions. Only through such comprehensive and inclusive strategies can sustainable improvements in health outcomes be achieved in Melghat.

Table 2: Key Health Indicators in Melghat

Health Indicator	Status
Child Malnutrition	Extremely high prevalence
Anaemia among Women	Very high (~70–80%)
Immunization Coverage	Moderate to low
Institutional Deliveries	Limited
Child Mortality Rate	High
Access to Healthcare	Severely constrained

Source: Author's Compilation (2026)

4.1 Case Evidence from Melghat

Melghat has received sustained attention due to recurring reports of child malnutrition and maternal health challenges. Public Interest Litigations before the Bombay High Court have repeatedly emphasized the constitutional obligation of the State to ensure adequate nutrition, healthcare, and food security for tribal communities. Government initiatives, including the National Health Mission, Integrated Child Development Services, Village Child Development Centres, and Mobile Medical Units, have improved service delivery to some extent; however, geographical isolation, workforce shortages, and socio-economic deprivation continue to limit their effectiveness. These observations reinforce the need for integrated policy implementation supported by local participation and institutional accountability.

5. Policy Framework for Tribal Health

Multiple policy initiatives have been introduced over time to address the persistent and complex health challenges in the Melghat region, reflecting sustained governmental commitment at both national and state levels. At the national level, the National Health Mission (NHM) has been a central framework aimed at strengthening rural healthcare systems, improving maternal and child health outcomes, and enhancing service delivery through decentralized planning and community-based outreach mechanisms. The mission emphasizes the expansion of primary healthcare infrastructure, deployment of frontline health workers such as Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), and improved access to essential health services in underserved areas. Similarly, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme plays a crucial role in addressing nutritional and developmental needs by providing supplementary nutrition, immunization support, health check-ups, and pre-school education through Anganwadi centres. These interventions are particularly significant in regions like Melghat, where child malnutrition and early childhood vulnerabilities are highly prevalent. Likewise, the Ayushman Bharat initiative, with its dual components of Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), seeks to strengthen comprehensive primary care while At the same time improving access to secondary and tertiary healthcare services by reducing financial barriers through insurance coverage.

At the state level, the Government of Maharashtra has implemented a range of targeted interventions tailored to the needs of tribal populations. The Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) represents a key policy instrument aimed at

ensuring dedicated financial allocations for tribal development, including health, nutrition, and infrastructure. In addition, state-specific maternal and child health programmes have been designed to address the unique epidemiological and socio-cultural context of regions such as Melghat. These initiatives focus on improving institutional deliveries, strengthening nutritional support systems, and enhancing the reach of healthcare services in remote and difficult-to-access areas. Special drives and region-specific strategies have also been periodically introduced to combat acute malnutrition and reduce infant and maternal mortality rates. Although these policy frameworks are comprehensive of these policy frameworks, their overall impact in Melghat has remained constrained, largely due to persistent contextual and operational challenges.

A critical concern lies in the enduring gap between policy formulation and effective ground-level implementation. Administrative inefficiencies, including bureaucratic delays, weak inter-departmental coordination, and inadequate accountability mechanisms, significantly hinder programme execution. Limited availability of trained healthcare personnel, irregular supply of essential medicines, and infrastructural deficiencies further weaken service delivery. In addition, insufficient monitoring and evaluation systems reduce the ability to track progress and make timely corrective interventions. Perhaps most importantly, the lack of contextual adaptation—where policies are implemented without adequate consideration of local socio-cultural practices, geographic realities, and community needs—diminishes their effectiveness. As a result, while these policies appear robust and comprehensive at the design level, their translation into measurable and sustained health improvements remains inconsistent. These implementation gaps require for strengthening implementation frameworks, enhancing local governance capacities, and adopting context-sensitive, participatory approaches that can bridge the gap between policy intent and actual outcomes in regions like Melghat.

6. Structural Barriers to Policy Implementation

Government data indicate that Melghat continues to face persistent shortages of healthcare professionals, inadequate referral facilities, poor transportation infrastructure, and seasonal inaccessibility during monsoon months. Annual reports of the National Health Mission and Maharashtra Tribal Development Department highlight that geographical isolation significantly delays institutional healthcare utilization, particularly among pregnant women and children. These statistics reinforce the argument that structural determinants rather than isolated medical factors continue to influence health outcomes in the region.

Geographical isolation remains one of the most significant structural barriers to effective policy implementation in the Melghat region. Characterized by rugged terrain, dense forest cover, and scattered settlements, the region poses considerable challenges for the establishment, accessibility, and regular functioning of healthcare facilities. Many villages are located at considerable distances from Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and sub-centres, often requiring long and physically demanding travel. Seasonal disruptions, particularly during the monsoon, further exacerbate this isolation by rendering roads impassable and cutting off entire communities from essential services. As a result, timely access to healthcare, especially in emergency situations, becomes severely constrained, thereby increasing the risk of adverse health outcomes.

These geographic challenges are further intensified by persistent infrastructural deficits within the healthcare system. Many health facilities in Melghat operate with inadequate physical infrastructure, lacking essential medical equipment, sufficient drug supplies, and even basic amenities such as electricity, clean water, and sanitation. The absence of functional referral systems and specialized services,

including emergency obstetric care, diagnostic facilities, and laboratory services, significantly limits the system's capacity to manage complex or critical health conditions. As a result, patients are often compelled to travel long distances to access higher-level care, which is frequently delayed or altogether inaccessible due to financial and logistical constraints.

Human resource shortages constitute another major impediment to effective healthcare delivery in the region. There is a chronic deficit of qualified doctors, nurses, and trained paramedical staff, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Difficult working conditions, professional isolation, limited career advancement opportunities, and inadequate financial and non-financial incentives contribute to high vacancy rates and low retention of healthcare personnel. Likewise, the overburdening of existing staff adversely affects the quality of care and limits the scope of outreach services. Frontline health workers, although crucial to service delivery, often lack adequate training, supervision, and institutional support, further weakening the overall health system.

Administrative inefficiencies and governance-related challenges further constrain the effective implementation of health policies in Melghat. Delays in fund allocation and utilization, weak coordination among different government departments, and fragmented planning processes hinder the smooth execution of programmes. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are often insufficiently robust, limiting accountability and reducing the system's ability to identify gaps and implement corrective measures. These governance deficits reflect broader systemic issues within the public health administration, where policy intent is frequently undermined by operational inefficiencies and lack of institutional capacity at the local level.

Socio-cultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping health outcomes and influencing the utilization of healthcare services. Traditional beliefs, reliance on indigenous healing systems, and skepticism toward formal medical institutions often lead to delayed or non-utilization of available healthcare services. Cultural practices, including food taboos and misconceptions related to nutrition and illness, further contribute to poor health and nutritional outcomes, particularly among women and children. In addition, communication barriers and lack of culturally sensitive healthcare delivery models limit effective engagement between service providers and tribal communities.

Economic deprivation remains a fundamental and cross-cutting barrier that exacerbates all other challenges in the region. High levels of poverty, livelihood insecurity, and dependence on seasonal agricultural income contribute to persistent food scarcity and inadequate nutritional intake. Even in instances where healthcare services are available, direct and indirect costs—such as transportation, loss of wages, and out-of-pocket expenditures—restrict access and utilization. This economic vulnerability reinforces a cycle in which poor health reduces productivity and income, thereby perpetuating further deprivation. Overall, these interrelated structural, institutional, and socio-economic constraints highlight the need for a holistic and integrated approach to health policy implementation that addresses the root causes of exclusion and inequity in Melghat.

7. Policy–Practice Gap

The continued health crisis in the Melghat region underscores a persistent and systemic disconnect between policy intent and actual health outcomes. While a wide range of policies and programmes have been formulated with the objective of addressing critical health concerns, their implementation often fails to adequately account for the region's unique socio-cultural context and geographical constraints. Policy frameworks are frequently designed using a predominantly top-down approach, wherein planning and decision-making processes remain centralized, with limited incorporation of local realities. As a result, interventions that may be technically

sound but lack contextual relevance, thereby reducing their effectiveness and acceptance among tribal communities. The exclusion of indigenous knowledge systems, traditional practices, and lived experiences from policy design further contributes to this disconnect, as it overlooks valuable insights that could enhance the adaptability and responsiveness of health interventions.

Another important limitation is in the fragmentation of policy efforts across sectors, which weakens their overall impact on health outcomes. Health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and livelihood programmes are often implemented in isolation, despite the inherently interdependent nature of these determinants. For instance, improvements in healthcare access alone cannot yield sustainable outcomes without parallel progress in food security, safe drinking water, sanitation, and income stability. However, the absence of effective inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms leads to duplication of efforts, inefficient resource utilization, and missed opportunities for synergistic action. Such fragmentation not only reduces programme efficiency but also limits the capacity of interventions to address the underlying structural causes of poor health in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

The lack of meaningful community participation further constrains the success and sustainability of policy interventions in Melghat. When local communities are not actively engaged in the processes of planning, implementation, and monitoring, programmes tend to remain externally driven and disconnected from ground-level realities. Such exclusion diminishes community ownership and accountability, leading to lower levels of utilization and long-term impact. In contrast, participatory approaches that involve community members, local leaders, and grassroots institutions can significantly enhance the relevance, acceptance, and effectiveness of health initiatives. Strengthening community engagement mechanisms, therefore, becomes essential not only for improving service delivery but also for fostering trust between healthcare providers and tribal populations.

Addressing these challenges requires., there is a clear need to reorient policy frameworks towards more inclusive, context-sensitive, and integrated models of governance. Enhancing inter-sectoral convergence, decentralizing decision-making processes, and institutionalizing community participation can play a transformative role in bridging the gap between policy design and implementation. Such an approach would enable a more holistic understanding of health as a function of interconnected social determinants, thereby facilitating sustainable improvements in health outcomes in the Melghat region.

8. Emerging Interventions and Innovations

Recent initiatives have sought to address some of the persistent challenges in Melghat by adopting more innovative and context-sensitive approaches. Telemedicine has emerged as a promising strategy to bridge geographical barriers, enabling remote consultations and improving access to basic healthcare services in otherwise inaccessible areas. Likewise, community-based interventions that engage local health workers, such as ASHAs and Anganwadi workers, have demonstrated positive outcomes in enhancing health awareness, promoting preventive care, and strengthening last-mile service delivery.

Non-governmental organizations have also played a crucial complementary role in supporting government efforts, particularly in addressing issues related to nutrition, maternal health, and child welfare. Through targeted outreach, capacity-building, and grassroots engagement, these organizations have been able to fill critical gaps in service provision. Collectively, these initiatives underscore the effectiveness of localized, participatory, and community-driven approaches in addressing complex health challenges and improving overall outcomes in tribal regions like Melghat.

9. Recommendations

Addressing the deeply embedded structural barriers in the Melghat region necessitates a comprehensive and multi-sectoral strategy that moves beyond fragmented and isolated interventions. A foundational priority in this regard is the strengthening of physical infrastructure, which remains critical for improving both the accessibility and quality of healthcare services. This includes the expansion and upgradation of well-equipped healthcare facilities at the primary, secondary, and referral levels, along with the development of reliable transportation networks to connect remote and dispersed settlements. Improved road connectivity, availability of emergency transport services, and the strengthening of digital communication systems are essential to ensure timely access to healthcare, particularly during critical situations. In addition, investments in basic amenities such as electricity, clean water, and sanitation within healthcare institutions are necessary to enhance their functional efficiency and service delivery capacity.

Another priority is is the development of robust human resource strategies aimed at addressing the persistent shortage of trained healthcare professionals in the region. This requires the introduction of targeted incentive structures—both financial and non-financial—to attract and retain doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff in remote and underserved areas. Measures such as hardship allowances, career advancement opportunities, and improved working and living conditions can play a significant role in enhancing retention. At the same time, there is a need to invest in the training and capacity-building of local community members, including frontline health workers, to create a sustainable and culturally sensitive healthcare workforce. Such an approach not only strengthens service delivery but also improves community trust and engagement with the health system.

Policy implementation frameworks must also be reoriented towards greater integration and convergence across multiple sectors, including health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and livelihoods. Given the interdependent nature of these determinants, isolated interventions are unlikely to produce sustainable outcomes. A coordinated and convergent approach can facilitate more efficient resource utilization, reduce duplication of efforts, and address the root causes of health disparities in a holistic manner. Institutional mechanisms for inter-departmental coordination, joint planning, and shared accountability should therefore be strengthened to ensure cohesive and effective programme execution.

Community participation should also be strengthened of effective health governance in Melghat. Sustained awareness and behavior change communication programmes are necessary to enhance knowledge regarding health, nutrition, and hygiene practices. More importantly, local communities must be actively involved in the processes of planning, decision-making, and monitoring of interventions. Participatory approaches that engage community leaders, self-help groups, and grassroots institutions can significantly improve the contextual relevance, acceptance, and long-term sustainability of health programmes. Such engagement fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, which is essential for the success of any development initiative.

The establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential to ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in policy implementation. Strengthening data systems to enable real-time tracking of health indicators, conducting regular field assessments, and institutionalizing independent audits can help identify gaps and inefficiencies in programme delivery. Data-driven decision-making, supported by evidence-based policy adjustments, can enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of interventions. Transparent reporting mechanisms and feedback loops between communities and administrative authorities further contribute to improved governance outcomes. Together, these measures can

facilitate the development of a more resilient, inclusive, and equitable health governance framework capable of addressing the complex challenges of Melghat in a sustainable manner.

10. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that improving tribal health in the Melghat region requires more than expanding healthcare infrastructure alone. Sustainable progress depends on addressing the broader social determinants of health through coordinated interventions in nutrition, education, sanitation, livelihood security, and institutional governance. Although several policy initiatives have been implemented, persistent implementation gaps continue to limit their effectiveness. Future policy should prioritize decentralized planning, community participation, evidence-based decision-making, digital health innovations, and stronger institutional accountability. Such an integrated approach can substantially reduce health inequities and promote inclusive and sustainable development among tribal communities.

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Chapter 3: Empowering the Girl Child in India: An Analytical Comparison of *Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana* and *Kanyashree Prakalpa*

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to make comparative analysis of two popular welfare schemes of Government of India, i.e., Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) and Government of West Bengal, i.e., Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP) with special emphasis on their different approaches and differential impact on girl child empowerment. The study employs a mixed method empirical approach to investigate the socio-economic and psychological impact of these schemes on 45 beneficiary households within the highly marginalised, agrarian micro-context of the Kharagpur II Block of the Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, through their implementation in Paparara 1 and Lachhmapur 3 Gram Panchayats.This research based on Amartya Sen's capabilities framework and Naila Kabeer's empowerment model. It clearly maps out the structural effect of these two schemes on rural, socio-economically marginalised households. The main findings suggest that KP's conditional cash transfer (CCT) mechanism generates rapid and significant behavioural changes. KP is a crucial social stabiliser as it substantially reduces the number of school dropouts, by promoting school attendance and postponing child marriage by penalising early marriage. However, SSY is a long-term investment strategy which effectively builds future financial stability and wealth accumulation. However, its effectiveness and coverage among the poorest of the poor are limited by the unstable income sources of rural agricultural workers which greatly hamper its mandatory deposit scheme. The research elaborates on the overarching political economy of subnational welfare, Labharthi politics and competitive federalism in India. Key policy recommendations include the hybridisation of SSY with a flexible deposit system for rural daily wage earners, inclusion of vocational skill development in KP to ensure economic independence after education, inflation-adjusted grants, and utilisation of local digital infrastructure for the smooth administration of benefits. The findings provide practical direction to policymakers and practitioners for improving welfare delivery, reducing gender inequalities, and enhancing developmental outcomes in rural India.

Keywords: *Kanyashree Prakalpa, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana,Girl Child Empowerment, Public Policy, Competitive Federalism, Welfare State.*

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Introduction

Modern India's progress is contingent upon the structural empowerment of girl child and her comprehensive socio-economic integration. The discourse on gender equality has dramatically changed during the last century, from a passive welfare model to an active search for agency, capabilities and fundamental human rights (Sen, 1999). Historically, patriarchal social systems which are deeply entrenched in the Indian subcontinent have created many structural barriers for girl children and have restricted their access to education, health care and economic independence to a large extent (Bhadra, 1999). Thus, the empowerment of women is not merely a localised, gender-specific development indicator, but a crucial foundation for a nation's sustainable macroeconomic stability and social prosperity. "A country cannot achieve true developmental progress without the overall development and participation of its women, just as a bird cannot fly with one wing," said philosopher Swami Vivekananda.

In response to systematic inequalities and the resultant demographic imbalances, India's welfare state, at the federal and provincial levels, has adopted several complex policy interventions towards protecting the girl child and breaking the socio-economic structures that perpetuate gender disparity (Babu, 2023; Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015). This research paper is an elaborate comparative micro-level study of two transformative and crucial state interventions in contemporary Indian public policy: Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY), a central government initiative of the Government of India and Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP), a flagship provincial government initiative by the Government of West Bengal (Department of Women Development and Social Welfare, 2013).

Despite significant improvements in female literacy rates across India in recent decades, rural areas and marginalised agrarian districts continue to face troublingly high rates of child marriage and disproportionately elevated secondary school dropout rates among adolescent girls (Sk& Ghosal, 2021). This book rigorously investigates two approaches that address these specific weaknesses through fundamentally different economic and psychological frameworks. The central government's Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana functions as a long-term, high-yield savings and investment scheme, aimed at systematically motivating parents to establish a substantial financial reserve specifically for their daughter's future higher education or marriage costs (Bhattacharya & Gandhi, 2020; Shrivastava, 2025). The Kanyashree Prakalpa of the West Bengal government is designed as a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), offering direct, regular financial stipends to adolescent girls, contingent upon their sustained school enrolment and their pledge to remain unmarried until they reach the legal age of eighteen (DWD&SW, 2013; Halder, 2018).

The main analytical goal of this comprehensive study is to critically assess the relative socioeconomic effects, community effectiveness, and behavioural impact of two distinct models- an incentive-based Conditional Cash Transfer and an investment-dependent savings scheme- on severely disadvantaged rural families. This study focuses on the Paparara 1 and Lachhmapur 3 Gram Panchayats in the Kharagpur II Block of Paschim Medinipur district to determine which scheme more effectively promotes empowerment, decreases educational attrition, and alleviates the severe psychological and economic pressures of early marriage among impoverished agricultural households facing significant income instability (Census of India, 2011).

The existing literature reveals a notable research gap: although numerous isolated analyses of the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana and the Kanyashree Prakalpa are prevalent, there is a significant lack of comparative, micro-level studies that investigate the synergistic, psychological, and socio-economic intersections of these two interventions within a localised,

tribal-dominated, and economically vulnerable rural context (Sarkar, Barman, & Chakrabarty, 2025). There is a paucity of empirical literature determining whether an investment-dependent savings scheme or a direct cash transfer system exerts a more significant cognitive and psychological deterrent against school dropouts and child marriage among daily wage labourers experiencing severe financial instability. This work is devoted to methodically analysing and bridging this significant empirical gap.

Review of Literature: Given the history of discrimination against the girl child in India, the government has to respond comprehensively. Bhadra (1999) pointed out the structural inequalities and gender stereotypes that impede women's empowerment, emphasising the significance of education and prevention of child marriage in securing the rights of girls in rural India.

The Kanyashree Prakalpa has been repeatedly assessed as an effective Conditional Cash Transfer program. Salam and Mete (2020) have examined the impact of KP on school attendance and further education and concluded that financial security directly enhances women's autonomy and decision-making capacity. Halder (2018) observed that the KP helped bring about a significant rise in girls' enrolment at secondary and higher secondary levels in the underdeveloped districts of West Bengal. Dutta and Sen (2020) report that in districts such as Cooch Behar, Murshidabad, and Howrah, KP recipients had significantly higher rates of school attendance. Also, Sk and Ghosal (2021) used NFHS data to show that KP resulted in a 12.6% reduction in marriages before the age of 18 in West Bengal.

The studies on Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, however, deal with its financial empowerment aspects. Singh and Lamba (2012) found that educated middle class parents used SSY effectively for planning higher education. One major problem is that people in rural poor areas are not able to save consistently. Bhattacharya and Gandhi (2020) found that SSY improves the status of the girl child in the family as the account is in her name and she has control over it once she turns 18 and thus builds her economic decision-making ability.

However, these assessments have a major gap. Little comparative, local research assesses the social and psychological effects of a central investment-based program and a state grant-based program on rural, marginalised families at the same time.

Methodology:

Research Design and Sample

The present study applies a mixed-methods approach, descriptive and explanatory, to measure the welfare effects, quantitatively and qualitatively. The target population is the households in the fully rural block of Kharagpur II. Primary data were collected from the Gram Panchayats Paparara 1 and Lachhmapur 3 by using purposive sampling method. This non-probability sampling ensured the targeted inclusion of families directly interacting with or eligible for respective schemes. The total sample size was 45 respondents, 22 from Paparara 1 and 23 from Lachhmapur 3, representing a cross-section of beneficiaries, parents and Anganwadi teachers.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Data were gathered using semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Based on Amartya Sen's capability approach and Naila Kabeer's empowerment framework, the questionnaire was developed to measure dimensions such as scheme awareness, financial prioritisation and educational retention for construct validity. A pilot test was conducted before the main rollout to assess the clarity of the questions, cultural appropriateness and reliability. Thereafter, the ambiguous terms were refined as per the local linguistic and socio-economic context of the Medinipur Division.

Methods of Data Analysis

The study used primary and secondary data streams. Secondary data, which included demographic and socio-economic indicators, were sourced from 2011 Census reports, government implementation guidelines and academic literature. The quantitative primary data collected from the questionnaires was coded and analysed with the help of descriptive statistics to find out frequencies, percentages and comparative distributions across the two Gram Panchayats. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data from open-ended interview responses to identify common narratives about social stigma, administrative friction.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Considerations The study was conducted under strict ethical protocols given the sensitivity around discussing household income, child marriage and gender dynamics. All participants gave consent prior to the interviews. Respondents were assured of the anonymity of the results and of the confidentiality of the data used for academic purposes.

Study Limitations

This research offers insights but has some limitations. *First*, the statistical power is limited by the study's 45-person sample. In empirical research, a small sample size increases the margin of error, making it difficult to determine whether trends are typical of the population. Thus, while this sample size is sufficient for an exploratory qualitative assessment of local dynamics and individual experiences, it is severely limiting for the statistical generalisability of the quantitative results beyond the socio-cultural context of the Kharagpur II block. One has to extrapolate these percentage results to the population of West Bengal or India with care. *Secondly*, purposeful non-probability sampling may not be a good representation of all demographic cross-sections. *Third*, the geographical coverage is limited to two purely rural Gram Panchayats, hence the results do not take into account the urban or semi-urban plan implementation characteristics. *Finally*, collecting primary data on sensitive issues such as child marriage intentions and dropout rates, often involves the use of self-reported responses to surveys, which can result in social desirability bias.

A sound theoretical framework is necessary for a comprehensive assessment of the complex gender welfare initiatives funded by the state. The study is based on the integration of two important theoretical constructs such as Amartya Sen's "Capability Approach" and Naila Kabeer's "Empowerment Framework" (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999). The analytical path of this research is grounded in a synthesis of these two theoretical perspectives. In an overall view, these paradigms offer an invaluable, multi-faceted lens to assess the real effectiveness of financial welfare initiatives beyond the scope of monetary measurements alone.

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach: Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen revolutionised developmental economics by arguing that human development should not be measured in terms of GDP or baseline economic growth, but rather as the active expansion of human freedoms and fundamental "capabilities" - the substantive, tangible opportunities that individuals have to live the lives they value (Sen, 1999). Sen has emphasised the importance of individual freedom and autonomy in selecting and attaining different life outcomes.

According to Sen (1999), the major "unfreedoms" for rural Indian girl children are systemic poverty, forced early marriage, and denial of education. These unfreedoms sharply limit the capabilities of the female child and prevent her from fulfilling her potential. Sen defines a "agent" as someone who acts and brings about change and whose outcomes are determined by her values and goals. Thus, the welfare state has to devise and implement procedures to slowly build up these capabilities.

Education subsidies and penalties for early marriage eliminate the unfreedoms that tie girls to patriarchal life paths.

Naila Kabeer's Empowerment Framework: Feminist economist Naila Kabeer views women's empowerment as a dynamic, multi-dimensional process with three indivisible, interconnected components: resources (pre-conditions), agency (process), and achievements (outcomes), building directly on Sen's philosophy. Kabeer believes that true empowerment requires both a woman's ability to make strategic life choices and the tangible, institutional support needed to aggressively oppose power relations.

Both the Kanyashree Prakalpa and the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana provide crucial resources within this theoretical nexus, albeit on distinct timescales. The Kanyashree Prakalpa provides immediate, conditional resources (annual financial stipends) that actively affect real-time decision-making or agency (the choice to stay in school and delay marriage), resulting in immediate achievements (graduation, delayed pregnancy). The Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana provides delayed, structural resources to secure long-term, intergenerational achievements (funding for university education or an independent household), assuming the family can survive until the scheme matures (Shrivastava, 2025).

The Historical Evolution of Female Empowerment in Bengal: In order to fully contextualise the operational reality and cultural reception of the SSY and KP within the Kharagpur II Block, it is important to trace the historical origins of female empowerment across the Indian subcontinent. This will allow for a more accurate understanding of the situation. According to Bhadra (1999), the growth of women's rights and social status in India has not been a linear progression. Rather, it constitutes a very complicated and fluctuating evolution that has been characterised by times of high social agency followed by centuries of deep, institutionalised patriarchal regression.

During the early Vedic period, which lasted from approximately 2000 to 1000 BCE, historical and scriptural evidence strongly suggests that Indian women enjoyed substantial autonomy, social dignity, and unrestricted access to education. These rights frequently exceeded those that were afforded to women in contemporary ancient Greek or Roman civilisations (Unkule, 2025). An era in which there was little to no gender disparity in intellectual pursuits and spiritual areas is exemplified by the presence of renowned female philosophers and academics such as Gargi and Maitreyi. During this time period, there were no severe regulations that mandated marriage at a young age, and women commonly exercised their choice to choose the people they would spend the rest of their lives with.

However, this "golden age" of female sovereignty ended. Post-Vedic and Epic ages saw a significant, systematic erosion of these privileges. Legal treatises and social codes, such as the Manusmriti, institutionalised female subordination by denying women independent identities and defining them solely as daughters to their fathers, wives to their husbands, and mothers to their sons (Sarkar et al., 2025).

The mediaeval period was the lowest point for girls' social status. Child marriage, education denial, and the rigid normalisation of customs like Parda (female seclusion) and Sati (widow burning) were fuelled by foreign invasions and domestic political instability, destroying female agency. Modern welfare schemes still fight dowry-driven patriarchal architectures that made girls a "social liability" or an enormous economic burden (Bhadra, 1999).

In the 19th century there was the important paradigm-shifting Bengal Renaissance. Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar realised that women's freedom was a prerequisite for inclusive national progress both mathematically and socially (Mukherjee, 2004). Vidyasagar was born in Birsingha, Paschim Medinipur and his

legacy is particularly important and geographically relevant to this study. With J.E.D. Bethune he founded the Calcutta Female School (1849) and was a leading advocate of the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act (1856), which put an end to child marriage. Bengal Renaissance reformism influenced the collective consciousness of Medinipur and the foundations of educational prioritisation were laid.

With the independence of India in 1947, the Constitution enshrined fundamental rights and gender equality. It required the state to take positive discrimination in favour of women and children. The initial government policies viewed women as passive recipients of "welfare". Only in the 1970s and 1980s did the Indian state adopt active, empowerment-driven models, after global feminist paradigms had changed. Landmark programs such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in 1975 and the Balika Samriddhi Yojna in 1997 targeted BPL families with financial incentives (Babu, 2023).

The Modern Welfare Apparatus: Kanyashree and Sukanya Samriddhi

The West Bengal Government introduced the Kanyashree Prakalpa on October 1, 2013, from this reform tradition. The 2011 Census showed that 54.7% of West Bengali women were married before 18 (Dutta & Sen, 2020), prompting its creation. The KP restructured the state's development strategy after Latin American Conditional Cash Transfer programs' success. It replaced passive, generalised welfare with targeted, condition-based empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). In 2017, KP received the United Nations Public Service Award (UNPSA) for its outstanding effectiveness. Its multi-tiered structure (K1, K2, K3) now provides a financial safety net from secondary school to postgraduate studies. Numerous studies show that CCTs like KP greatly enhance school attendance, delay marriage, and reduce dropout rates (Halder, 2018; Saha, 2015). academics on KP found that 94% of student beneficiaries showed improved enthusiasm in their academics and 88% said the scheme directly reduced secondary-level dropouts (Halder, 2018). Female undergraduate and postgraduate enrolment indicators increased after KP's introduction.

The Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana was launched by the Government of India on January 22, 2015 as a part of the high-profile *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) nationwide programme. Its mission to change patriarchal mind set through savings culture has been of significant historical and socio-economic significance. The programme aims to replace the harmful traditional concept of a daughter as *"Paraya Dhan"* (someone else's wealth/a marital responsibility) with the progressive concept of her as a valuable, investible human resource (Bhattacharya & Gandhi, 2020). Among the small savings schemes, SSY offers high interest rates and large tax benefits, which motivate parents to create a savings fund to mature only when the girl is aged 21 years, and the money is kept aside for her higher education or marriage (Shrivastava, 2025).

Demographic and Socio-Economic Context of the Study Area: The comprehensive 2011 Census of India (Census of India, 2011) indicates that the total number of people living in the Kharagpur II block is 183,440, all of them in rural areas. It is basically an agricultural area as it is located on very fertile laterite and alluvial soil which permits extensive agricultural activities. The demographic profile of Kharagpur II is defined and crucially marked by its huge marginalised population. According to the 2011 Census of India, Scheduled Castes (SC) are 18.61% of people in the block and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are 25.57%. The massive concentration of historically disadvantaged and structurally deprived communities means that any opportunity for socioeconomic mobility is dependent on government handouts and savings programs being perfectly executed.

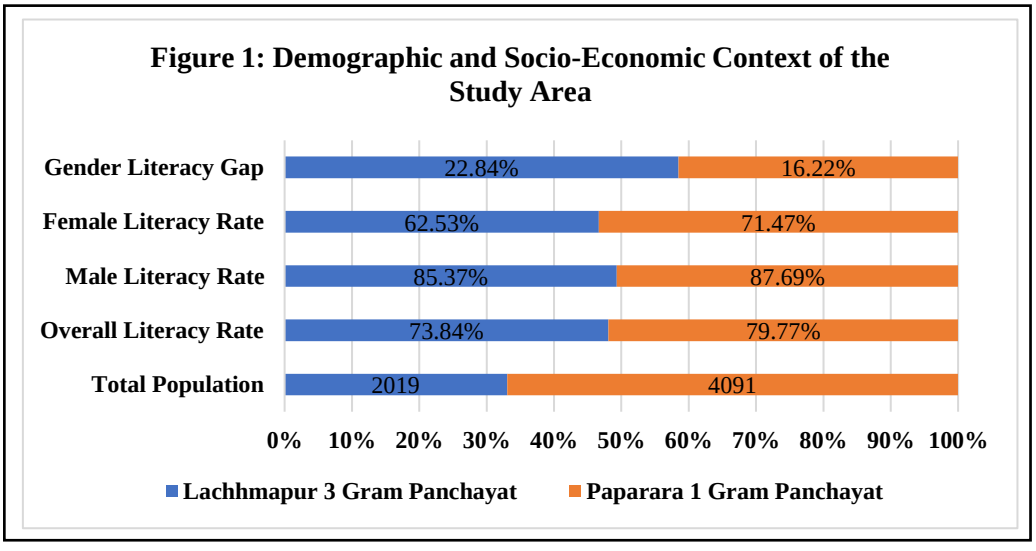
This empirical study purposely selected two separate Gram Panchayats (GPs) within the block which are socio-economically very different to each other. These Gram Panchayats are Lachhmapur 3 &Paparara 1. The purpose of this research is to provide a detailed and very precise comparison analysis.

Lachhmapur 3 residential sector is a socio-economic zone with high vulnerability and economic challenge. As per Census of India 2011, it has a total of 2,019 people in 449 households. A close observation reveals a disturbing trend - the child sex ratio. the ratio of females to males in the 0-6 years age group falls alarmingly to 879 females for every 1000 males. Despite this, the overall sex ratio is very praiseworthy at 999 females per 1000 males, which is significantly higher than the average for the state of West Bengal, at 956. Any statistical measure of this swift and steep decline is strong and undeniable evidence of deep and enduring prejudice against girl children. (Shrivastava, 2025) It highlights the need for immediate investment schemes like SSY which enhance the economic value of the girl child in the eyes of the society.

In contrast, the Paparara 1 administrative unit is larger and relatively more stable with a total population of 4,091 persons and comprising 1,015 households. The sex ratio for the whole area is 956 according to the Census of India 2011, and much more even at 970 for children. The most glaring difference between the two panchayats is in the level of education attained by their members. Literacy is the fundamental and irreplaceable engine of empowerment, but there is persistence of gender disparities with a dogged persistence throughout the district.

Demographic/Literacy Metrick (2011 Census)	Lachhmapur 3 Gram Panchayat	Paparara 1 Gram Panchayat	West Bengal State Average
Total Population	2019	4091	N/A
Overall Literacy Rate	73.84%	79.77%	76.26%
Male Literacy Rate	85.37%	87.69%	N/A
Female Literacy Rate	62.53%	71.47%	N/A
Gender Literacy Gap	22.84%	16.22%	N/A

Source: Census of India 2011



In Lachhmapur 3 the gap in gender literacy is significant at around 23 percent, a clear statistical indication of high rates of female school dropouts in the transition from primary to secondary education (Dutta & Sen, 2020). This can be observed from the comparison data which reveals that the gender literacy gap is critical and debilitating. The region as a whole has a higher literacy rate, but in Paparara 1 the female literacy rate is significantly lower than that of males (Census of India, 2011). It is in these very educational corridors with high dropout rates that the stipends of Kanyashree Prakalpa are to make their fullest revolutionary impact.

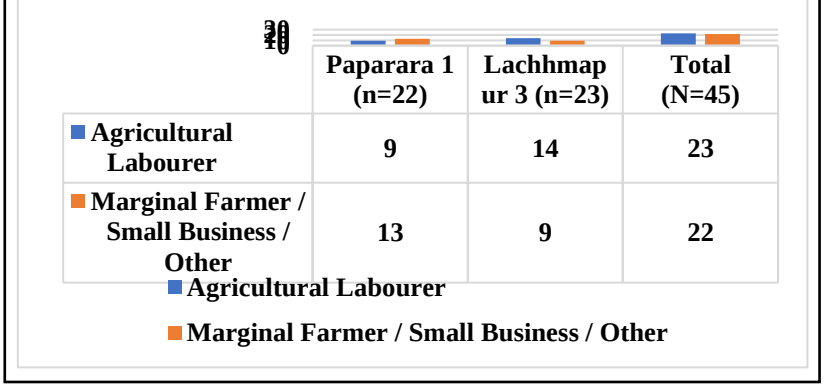
Furthermore, the caste profile of a family and the stability of its presence in the labour market wholly determine the structural capacity of the family to participate in any state-sponsored savings scheme. What is the caste composition of Lachhmapur 3? A large majority of 79.30% of the population in Lachhmapur 3 are classified as Scheduled Caste (SC). There are also 2.87% Scheduled Tribes (ST) as part of the total population of Lachhmapur 3. The percentage of SCs in Paparara 1 as per 2011 Census of India is 31.78% and the percentage of STs is 23.17%.

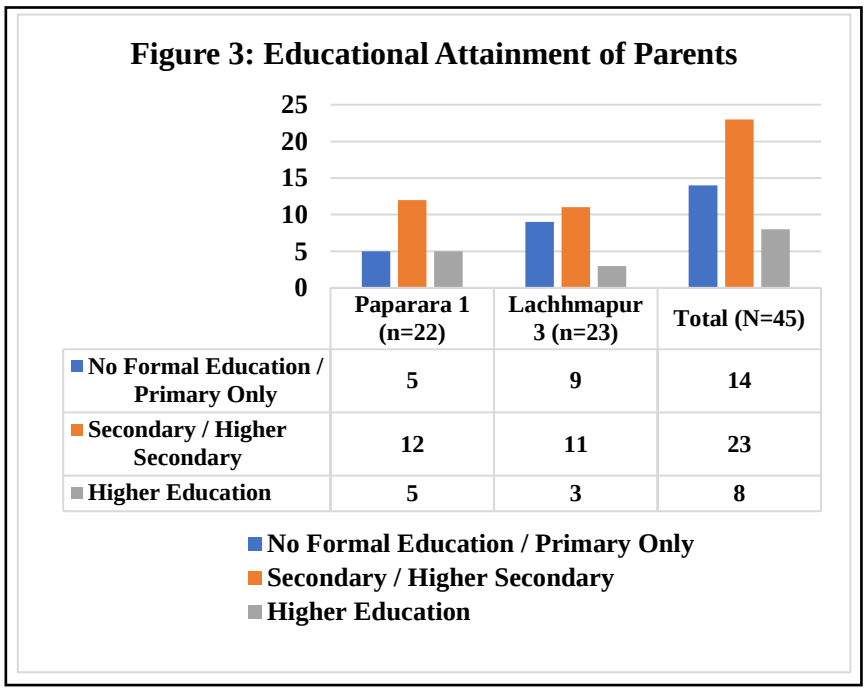
Lachhmapur 3 has 1076 active workers. 89.87% of the active workers are "Marginal Workers," who do not get work regularly for a period of less than 6 months in a year. As per the 2011 Census of India, only 10.13% are classified as "Main Workers". In this hyper-precarious labour climate with fluctuating work (Shrivastava, 2025), most of these households are unable to safely commit to the obligatory annual premiums needed to keep a Sukanya Samriddhi account open due to the uncertainty of income. More 'Main Workers' (68.92%) in Paparara 1 means more stable income and financial predictability. In Lachhmapur 3, an incentive based CCT is preferred while in Paparara 1 an investment approach works best. This underlying divergence in the economy explains why.

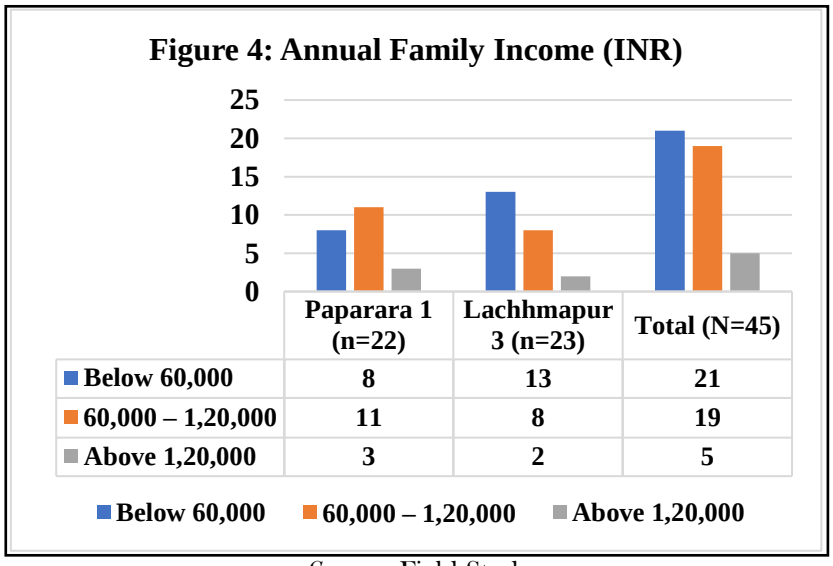
Occupational Precarity and Financial Profiling of the Beneficiary Sample: Before trying to have an accurate understanding of the disparate penetration rates of the two schemes, it is necessary to first make a thorough investigation of the severe economic limitations that are part of the respondents' everyday life. The larger district census data have indicated that the agricultural blocks in question are greatly affected by the presence of systemic poverty. The macro statistics show that about 53.57 percent of the total population of the Kharagpur II Block is living below the official poverty line (Census of India, 2011).

Figure 2: Primary Occupation of Household Head

	Paparara 1 (n=22)	Lachhmapur 3 (n=23)	Total (N=45)
Agricultural Labourer	9	14	23
Marginal Farmer / Small Business / Other	13	9	22







Source: Field Study

The resulting data set clearly and unequivocally demonstrates the increased severity of chronic poverty in Lachhmapur 3. In this particular panchayat, more than 56.5 per cent of the surveyed families reported that their total annual family income was less than ₹60,000. In hyper-constrained and unpredictable financial environments-where basic nutritional and existential necessities are often unmet-to generate any surplus wealth for annual Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana deposits is virtually and mathematically impossible. The SSY requires both intention and liquidity (Shrivastava, 2025). The Kanyashree Prakalpa, on the other hand, is specifically targeted at this vulnerable group. Its inclusive income limit (set at an annual income of 1,20,000 rupees) inherently includes most of these marginalised households without requiring them to part with any essential out-of-pocket funds (DWD&SW, 2013).

Scheme Awareness and Informational Dissemination Penetration

The success of a public policy is essentially constrained by awareness at the grassroots and the efficiency of the delivery systems. The survey data collected shows a large, systematic gap in scheme visibility for state and for federal initiatives.

The awareness on Kanyashree Prakalpa was 100 per cent among the 45 respondents surveyed in all the panchayats. This perfect ubiquity is only propelled by the innovative, localised distribution system of the scheme: it is implemented directly through the existing, highly reputable educational system. The state's principal proponents and administrativefacilitators are devoted educators at esteemed local educational facilities, who ensure smooth enrolment and monitoring for all eligible female students.

However, the awareness about the government Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana is much lower, with 35.6% of the respondents polled being completely unaware of the scheme or its benefits. Furthermore, the means by which the public becomes aware of these initiatives differ considerably. In the richer Paparara 1, knowledge of SSY was largely driven by passive consumption of mass media (TV commercials, regional newspapers), while KP was consistent through the reliable structure of local schools. The little awareness of SSY in Lachhmapur 3 was spread sporadically by stressed out Anganwadi personnel and local Panchayat leaders.

In fact, the substantial administrative challenges of SSY, including the handling of complex and intimidating financial structures, constitute a major obstacle to operationalisation. With only 6 commercial banks and two Regional Rural banks in the entire Kharagpur II block, the vast geography translates to tremendous logistical issues, time costs and lost wages due to travel for regular SSY premium payments; this further disincentivises sustained participation among daily wage labourers.

Financial Incentives and the Savings Dichotomy: Investment vs. Subsistence

The fundamental, underlying architectural difference between the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (investment-oriented product) and the Kanyashree Prakalpa (incentive-based product) leads to very different observable behavioural outcomes among the target population. The SSY is a very lucrative, completely tax-free compound interest rate. In addition, the account matures only when the girl turns 21 years of age, or post-18 specifically for marriage expenses (MWCD, 2015). The longer lock-in period is insurmountable psychologically and practically for populations living in daily precarity, even if it is theoretically sound from a macroeconomic savings perspective. In Lachhmapur 3, respondents frequently and explicitly mentioned the inability to access SSY funds during acute, unpredictable family emergencies (medical crises or crop failures) as a primary reason for their intense reluctance to invest their scarce capital.

Alternatively, the basic K1 level of the Kanyashree Prakalpa provides an annual stipend of ₹1,000 directly deposited into the student's personal bank account (DWD&SW, 2013). The sum of money is objectively small but the liquidity is everything. It addresses urgent and pressing ancillary educational needs, such as buying necessary text books, stationary or paying for daily transport too far away schools, thus avoiding imminent dropouts induced by poverty.

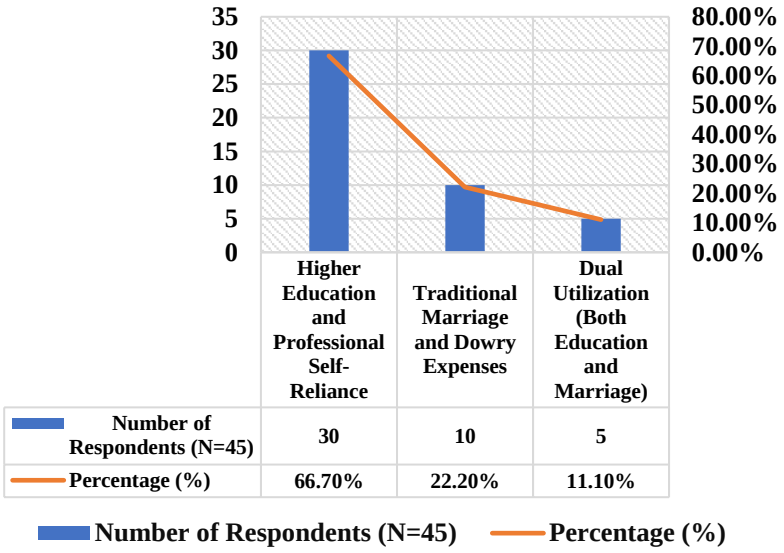
During the qualitative part of the survey, a surprising and very positive financial synergy was found among a group of proactive and financially aware parents in Paparara 1: Several households are intentionally and proactively using the K1 annual cash stipend provided by the state government to completely meet the required premium payments for their federal Sukanya Samriddhi accounts. This synthesis serves as a bridge between immediate cash relief and long-term asset building, a very

sophisticated grassroots financial optimisation strategy orchestrated by rural families.

Shifts in Patriarchal Priorities for Fund Utilization

Asked about the strategic use of the mature financial corpus - the substantial ₹25,000 K2 grant received at age 18 or the fully matured SSY account balance at age 21- respondents showed a profound, quantifiable shift in paradigm towards valuing female autonomy and long-term capability expansion.

Figure 5: Fund Utilization



Traditionally, any considerable lump sums saved for daughters were used for dowries and extravagant marriage expenses (Bhadra, 1999), reflecting the cultural conception of the female child as a purely marital liability. The survey reveals that two-thirds (66.7%) of respondents now explicitly prioritise higher education, university enrolment and professional self-reliance. This is a major break down of patriarchal norms. The collective cultural consciousness of the Kharagpur II population has successfully and permanently incorporated the conscious construction of the girl child by the state as a person who is deeply entitled to the expansion of her capabilities and not as a temporary burden of marriage.

Quantifiable Impact on Educational Retention and Child Marriage

The Kanyashree Prakalpa's strict conditionality has produced significant, quantifiable social gains. The scheme was introduced in 2013 and implemented. The number of girl students in secondary and higher secondary education in the Kharagpur II block has increased substantially since its introduction. The survey data is supported by a rich body of district literature, which shows a reduction of a whopping 56% in the educational dropout rate of adolescent girls in the region studied (Dutta & Sen, 2020).

In the same vein, systemic child marriage is also strongly deterred psychologically. Before these strong treatments, Lachhmapur 3 teenage females felt intense parental and cultural pressure to marry by 15 or 16. For availing the ₹25,000 K2 award, the girl has to be unmarried till her 18th birthday, which has a profound effect on the economic condition of the underprivileged family (Sk& Ghosal, 2021). There is a greater financial

incentive for parents to actively resist local societal pressure for early marriage.

The SSY does not stipulate continued school attendance, nor does it require deferred marriages (beyond the legal limitations), but it has huge psychological benefits. "It's a lot easier to marry off your daughter if you are not worried about her future," said one participant. Participants noted that a maturing, high-yield financial asset waiting for the daughter at age 21 greatly reduces the deep-seated concern associated with paying for a daughter's future, and thus the temptation to marry her off early.

The Dichotomy of Capability Expansion: Immediate Agency vs. Intergenerational Architecture

Theoretical implications Applying Amartya Sen's capability approach to the empirical findings, it is clearly visible that SSY and KP are working on two totally different, yet highly complementary, temporal axes of capability expansion (Sen, 1999).

The Kanyashree Prakalpa primarily functions as an instrument for immediate crisis mitigation. For Lachhmapur 3's marginal, precarious labourers, the danger of pulling a daughter out of school is not a remote possibility but a constant looming threat, triggered by even minor, unpredictable economic shocks. The conditional cash transfer offers vital, immediate liquidity that directly intercepts and vetoes the poverty-induced decision to drop out of school (Kabeer, 1999). The scheme rigidly implements Naila Kabeer's notion of agency by taking care to keep the girl physically rooted within the educational ecosystem, where she continues to socialise, learn and develop critical self-esteem through school-based endeavours such as the 'Kanyashree Clubs' (Kabeer, 1999).

Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana on the other hand is a very sophisticated tool for inter-generational wealth architecture. For the "Main Workers" (mostly in Paparara 1) who have relatively secure baseline survival and caloric needs, the SSY allows them the psychological and financial luxury of thinking their financial planning years into the future. It views the girl child as an investible, appreciating asset and not a sunk cost (Bhattacharya & Gandhi, 2020). But the inherent, unavoidable flaw in the SSY structure is its exclusionary nature toward the ultra-poor, clearly exemplified in the 89.87% marginal worker population in Lachhmapur 3. A savings scheme obviously needs additional capital. In a zero-surplus world, the scheme is pretty much closed. Thus, SSY is very successful in improving the prestige and financial security of the girl child amongst the lower-middle and middle classes but is fundamentally unable to penetrate the poorest, most vulnerable strata where the risk of early marriage is most endemic.

Transformation of intra-household power dynamics

A structurally important finding of this study is the alteration of intra-household power dynamics within the framework of financial formalisation. In patriarchal agrarian households such as those of Lachhmapur, adolescent daughters have traditionally had little agency over their timing of marriage or their education trajectory (Kishor & Gupta, 2004). However, direct crediting of KP K2 grants (INR 25,000) and SSY corpus funds into bank accounts registered only in the daughter's name is a material reordering of household economic relations. Child girl is re-conceptualised, legally and economically from a dependent unit to a primary financial stakeholder with autonomous asset ownership.

Survey datashow that 66.7% of beneficiary respondents report pursuing higher education. Qualitative interviews with parents in Lachhmapur 3 demonstrate that the anticipated availability of the K2 grant functions as a binding constraint on marital decision-making, serving as an effective incentive to delay marriage. This mechanism is in keeping with Sen's (1999) capability approach. The state is not only transferring income, but is enlarging

the set of real freedoms available to the girl child, purchasing temporal autonomy for the completion of secondary education and the consolidation of individual agency.

The Political Economy of Welfare: Competitive Federalism and *Labharthi* Politics

The comparative study of SSY and KP needs to be contextualised within the evolving political economy of India beyond economic and capability frameworks. The gap between federal and provincial welfare approaches reflects the emergence of "competitive federalism" and what scholars call "subnational welfare regimes." As Tillin (2021) observes, Indian state governments have carved out considerable autonomy to craft distinct social policies for their specific demography and politics. Kanyashree Prakalpa is an example of this subnational welfare model where the state level political legitimacy is constituted through the highly visible, localised performance of governance within a federal system. Such policies are used by the state governments to balance the interests of the local political economies and forge new discretionary ties with the electorate.

Moreover, both SSY and KP are the new generation of *Labharthi* (beneficiary) politics. This political strategy moves electoral mobilisation from traditional identity/caste-based voting to performance-based governance and targeted welfare distribution. The schemes are implemented through Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) which transfer the benefit directly to the bank accounts of the adolescent girls thereby removing the leakage of intermediary benefits and fostering a direct, uninterruptible relationship between the state and the citizen. But political scientists warn that such 'targeted largesse' can fundamentally reshape political allegiances, effectively creating citizens who are dependent beneficiaries whose future choices are heavily influenced by dependence on the state.

From the public administration perspective, the effectiveness of these schemes is strongly dependent on the governance infrastructure underpinning them. The *Duare Sarkar* (Government at Doorstep) initiative of the Government of West Bengal is a massive outreach mechanism that aims to overcome bureaucratic inertia by delivering services like Kanyashree Prakalpa at the mohalla (neighbourhood) level. This doorstep governance model, while being highly successful in improving the citizen's satisfaction and social inclusion, can also be a potent instrument of political consolidation by making the state's welfare machinery highly visible, omnipresent and accessible.

Administrative Frictions, the Digital Divide, and Delivery Bottlenecks

The two schemes are undoubtedly transformative, but the analysis reveals a lot of systemic friction in the actual welfare delivery supply chain. Serious administrative bottlenecks at the grassroots level often hinder, delay or deny the attainment of "achievements" (Kabeer, 1999).

Rural banking institutions often compromise the absolute necessity of opening and maintaining Zero Balance Accounts through unethical harassment of no formal educated parents on mandatory minimum balances or demanding complicated, redundant documentation. Moreover, in recent years both schemes' application and monitoring processes have been largely digitised. The deep and unresolved digital divide in rural Paschim Medinipur exposes poor families to external, paid agents (like predatory cyber cafes) or over-burdened school teachers to track application statuses, resulting in points of vulnerability, financial leakage, and severe delays in welfare realisation (Mondal, 2025).

The findings of this research are in strong consonance with and greatly extend the previous assessments of girl child welfare schemes. Our finding of a 56% decrease in secondary-level dropout rates in the study area

is a direct validation of Halder (2018) and Dutta and Sen's (2020) macro-level findings that the Kanyashree Prakalpa is a critical driver for school retention. Furthermore, while Sk and Ghosal (2021) have used NFHS data to show a decrease in the probability of child marriage across the state, our localised qualitative evidence reveals the very psychological mechanisms behind this statistical change. In particular, the conditionality of the K2 grant empowers rural girls with the bargaining power to resist early marriage in their own homes.

Our empirical results on the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, provide support to the hypothesis of Singh and Lamba (2012) that schemes with an investment focus are more likely to be utilised by middle income households with stable income. While Bhattacharya and Gandhi (2020) were right to acknowledge the role of SSY in improving the economic status of the girl child in adulthood, our study highlights an important caveat often missed in macroeconomic evaluations at the large scale: the mandatory annual deposit system of the scheme poses a systemic barrier to inclusion for daily wage and agricultural labourers. Therefore, while the existing literature generally considers these welfare models as universally beneficial, our localised approach demonstrates that the effectiveness of these models in practice is largely contingent on the socio-economic status and job security of the beneficiaries.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Structural empowerment of rural Indian girls is a complex, integrated process which needs constant, perfect interventions in the educational, economic and psychological domains. The detailed comparison between the central government's Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) and the West Bengal government's Kanyashree Prakalpa (KP) in Kharagpur II Block shows that these welfare structures complement each other in the fight against rural patriarchy and systemic poverty.

Kanyashree Prakalpa's highly liquid reward strategy based on conditions does a lot better in preventing immediate school dropouts and child marriages among the poorest, marginalised labour classes. With a 100% awareness rate and direct operational integration into the trusted school system, it is the best instrument for immediate crisis response and behavioural management. On the contrary, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana is a best option to secure long term financial security and to permanently increase the cultural value of girl child in secure homes. They challenge traditional dogmas and empower adolescent girls in rural Bengal to become empowered, self-reliant stakeholders in an era of competitive federalism and state-led empowerment.

The key policy recommendations for practitioners and policymakers to improve clarity, impact and developmental outcomes are:

Policy and Financial Adaptations

Liquidity and Flexibility in SSY: Considering the extreme and unpredictable income volatility of marginal agricultural labourers, the federal government needs to urgently introduce highly flexible withdrawal policies for the SSY. Allowing partial penalty-free withdrawals before age 18 in narrowly defined circumstances of acute medical emergencies or sudden, catastrophic educational needs will dramatically increase participation rates and trust among the ultra-poor demographic.

Inflation Adjusted Stipend Indexing for KP: The annual stipend of ₹1,000 for K1 has been completely eroded by cumulative inflation even though the scheme has been quite successful historically. The stipend was set over a decade ago in 2013. This significant stipend must be indexed structurally and legally by the state government to current consumer inflation rates, raising it substantially to adequately cover the modern, escalating ancillary costs of secondary and higher secondary education.

Mandatory Integration of Micro-Insurance: Federal and state governments should automatically attach a baseline, state-funded health and life insurance cover to the verified beneficiaries of SSY and KP to provide comprehensive, holistic financial security. This important addition would protect these highly vulnerable rural families from ruinous out-of-pocket health spending that so often leads to immediate school dropouts.

Administrative and Infrastructure Reforms

*Strict Alleviation of Banking Bottlenecks:*There is an urgent need for RBI and other banking regulatory bodies at the state level to ensure strict punishment and compliance with respect to the Zero Balance Account maintenance of the welfare recipients. There is an absolute requirement of having dedicated and fast-track desks for KP and SSY beneficiaries in all rural bank branches and post offices to prevent harassment and administrative delays for illiterate and daily wage earners.

*Eradication of the Grassroots Digital Divide:*Regular and fully financed digital literacy camps should be started at block level and Panchayat level administrations on the lines of the highly successful "Duare Sarkar" (Government at Doorstep) initiative. The empowerment of rural people to independently access online welfare applications, submit documentation and track their financial statuses will eliminate the need for exploitative third-party intermediaries and drastically streamline the entire supply chain of welfare delivery.

Social and Educational Integration

The already existing strong infrastructure of Kanyashree Clubs within schools needs to be massively scaled up to provide targeted vocational, digital and skill-development training to make the demographic graduate from just staying in schools to active, highly productive economic participants. A "Kanyashree Plus" model makes sure that the huge capacities created by years of educational retention are seamlessly translated into tangible labour market successes and enduring financial independence.

The end result is a sophisticated blend of Kanyashree Prakalpa's immediate educational retention requirement and Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana's robust long term financial architecture that offers a powerful and replicable model to erase gender gaps across the global south. The welfare state can ensure that the girl child does not just survive the rigid patriarchal structures of rural India but thrives as an empowered, indispensable architect of the macroeconomic future of the country by systematically addressing local administrative challenges, enhancing financial liquidity for the ultra-poor and flexibly responding to the harsh socio-economic realities of marginal workers.

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Chapter 4: Towards Inclusive Digital Learning Environments: Understanding Online Validation and Youth Identity through Meta-Ethnographic Synthesis

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Abstract

The construction of self-identity, evaluation of self-worth and negotiation of social belongings by the young people have fundamentally been reshaped by the proliferation of social media. Psychological well-being of young adults and adolescents are influenced by the salient mechanisms run by digitally mediated environments, online validation embodied through comments, likes, shares, followers and other forms of algorithmically amplified feedback. There are ample studies on the relationship of youth self-esteem and online validation. The studies are scattered and conceptually fragmented in various sectors like Media Studies, Social Science, Education, Sociology, Psychology, Digital Communication Research etc. To address the gap of limited integrated in-depth understanding of online validation by the youth and the collective influence of this on the development of self-esteem and formation of identity, a PRISMA-guided meta-ethnographic approach was used. Based on the three objectives such as synthesizing qualitative evidence of the influences of online validation on the development of self-esteem and self-worth among the adolescents and young adults, exploringthe lived experiences and perceptions of young people about online validationand developing an interpretive understanding of the concept related to the psychosocial mechanisms mediating the relationship in between youth self-esteem and online validation using meta-ethnographic synthesis were developed. Based on the guidelines of systematic literature review and PRISMA 2020 Analysis, qualitative studies were analyzed from SCOPUS, Web of Science, PsycINFO, ERIC, PubMed and Google Scholar. Nobit and Hare's (1988) meta ethnographic methodology was used by enabling reciprocal, refutational and line-of-argument translational studies. The synthesis demonstrated the function of online validation as a multidimensional psycho-social construct facilitating social connectedness, perceived belongingness and identity affirmation but at the same time,it intensifies social comparison, self-worth, body-image concerns, emotional dependency, fear of missing outand digital anxiety. This paper has generated a novel interpretive framework through the reviewsadvancing to understand youth identity formation in the digital societies. Evidence-informed understandings are also provided for the implications of digital citizenship education, social media literacy, youth mental health interventions and policy development.

Keywords: *Online Validation, Youth Self-esteem, Social Media, Digital Identity, Meta-Ethnography, PRISMA*

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Introduction

1.1 Digital Transformation and Role of Youth in Social Media

The rapid advancement in digital technologies has created a shift of transforming the ways of individual communication, relationship construction and identity-negotiation. In past two decades, social media platform has changed itself from simple communication tools towards socio-digital eco-systems of sophistication shaping human interaction, participation, learning as well as psychological well-being. Adolescent and youths with their most active participation have engaged continuously with these environments facilitating self-expression *(Zhakin, 2023),* knowledge sharing *(Naeem, 2019),* peer-interaction *(Nesi, et al, 2018)* and community-building *(Gnach, 2017).* Thoughthese technologies, opportunities for communication and collaboration are expanded, simultaneous complex psycho-social challenges *(Mahdizadeh, et al, 2017)*have been emerged warranting systematic scholarly investigation.

1.2 Online Validation, Self-esteem and Identity Formation

Online validation through feedbacks like comments, shares, reactions, followers and other algorithmic amplified approval indicators is considered in present day as one of the defining characteristics of contemporary social media. Adolescent and young adults have become keener to identity exploration and heightened sensitivity to eer evaluation *(Cresswell, et al, 2019).* So, online validation plays an influential role to shape the conception as well as perception of self-esteem, social belongings and self-worth. Confidence, interpersonal relationship, self-expression and a sense of inclusion can be developed through the positive interactions in digital spaces but excessive as well as continuous dependency on digital approval can have negative effects like social comparison, emotional dependency, body-image dissatisfaction, cyber-anxiety, psychological distress and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) *(Nesbit & Lole, 2026).* So as a multidimensional psychosocial construct, the dual nature of online validation can simultaneously promote social connectedness and at the same time psychological vulnerability *(Carcelén-García, et al, 2026).*

1.3 Inclusive Digital Learning Environment and Digital Belongings

In present day surpassing the boundaries of the classroom, digital technologies have created a virtual place where besides academic engagement, learners can negotiate identity, experience inclusion or exclusion and establish social relationship through interaction, collaboration and knowledge construction *(Chegeni, et al, 2021).* Inclusive digital learning Environments besides providing technological accessibility, encompass equitable-participation, respectful-communication, meaningful opportunities and psychological safety irrespective of various differences. *(Knickerbocker& Tawfik, 2025).* Educational institutions have to play a major role for cultivating digital citizenship, promotion of responsible online-engagement, encouragement of pedagogical practices supporting emotional well-being and academic development *(Dalinghouse, 2023; Japar, et al, 2024).*

1.4 A Meta-Ethnographic Perspective

Diverse disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Education, Communication studies, Media Studies and Digital Culture can take this topic of online validation under their purview whereas qualitative evaluation helps in understanding the issues related to identity-construction, emotional well-being, digital-participation and social-connectedness of the adolescents and young adults. Though there are ample opportunities of this investigation, there are fragmented evidences across theoretical traditions, cultural contexts and methodological approaches. Meta-ethnography, developed by Noblit and Hare (1988) provides higher order interpretative methodology which can translate studies through aggregating findings, conceptual patterns and relationships appropriate for understanding complex psycho-social process of validating self-esteem, identity formation and digital belongings.

1.5 Purpose and Scope of the Study

A qualitative study through PRISMA guided Meta-ethnographic synthesis was used to understand the role of online validation in shaping self-esteem, self-worth and identity development of youth and adolescents. The systematic study generated from various international review specific evidences, will generate the understanding of psycho-social mechanisms in a generative way based on the online validation and its implications on youth well-being. A conceptual perspective is proposed by it, informing inclusive digital learning environment designing, strengthening of digital citizenship education, initiatives related to youth mental health and evidence based educational policy formulation for future interdisciplinary research. The study seeks to provide evidences for the advancement in scholarly understanding of digital belongings and the promotion of inclusive, ethical and psychologically supportive digital well-being for creating a digital learning eco-system.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Understanding Online Validation

Onlinevalidation refers to appreciation, recognition and social acceptance which are communicated likes, comments, views, followers and reactions. These social media reactions have immediate influence on the popularity, attractiveness, competence and social worth of the adolescents. Highly engaging content as well as strategic self-presentation seem to amplify the process of artificial intelligence algorithms. Though there are the chances of improvement in the areas of confidence and social-connectedness, excessive-dependency on social media can lead to emotional vulnerability, heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation etc. So online validation can be termed as multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon intersecting psychology, education, communication, digital culture having significant implications for well-being as well as youth identity.

2.2 Youth Identity in Digital Spaces

As social media plays a crucial part in enabling self-expression, identity-experimentation and participation in different online-communities, identity-formation in emerging adulthood most of the times remains dependent on it. Online validation opens up the paths for continuous evaluation of the youths. Positive feedback can enhance self-esteem, confidence and self-expression whereas negative interactions, cyberbullying and social comparison may enhance loneliness, body image concern etc.

2.3 Inclusive Digital Learning Environments

Due to the digital transformation of education, learning occurs in interconnected online environments supporting collaboration and knowledge construction. Besides access to technology, equitable participation, respect, psychological safety and belongingness of learners in inclusivity are also developed. The inclusive pedagogical practices promote empathy, ethical communication, critical media literacy, digital citizenship and emotional resilience.

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives

Multiple theoretical perspectives can be used to understand online-validation properly. Social Comparison Theory suggests that the comparison in social media platforms shapes self-worth and social acceptance. According to Self-determination Theory, the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness may be satisfied by online feedback but intrinsic motivation can be weakened by excessive reliance on external approval. Erickson's Psycho-social Development suggests that adolescence is the critical stage of identity formation and hence it is highly influenced by peer recognition. Social Identity Theory suggests how belongingness and collective identity are fostered by online communities and at the same time creates risks of exclusion and polarization. Role of interconnection among family, peers, schools, technology and culture

of online validation are conceptualized together in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

3. Methodology

A PRISMA Guided Meta-Ethnographic Synthesis

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative meta-ethnographic research design was adopted in this study for developing the understanding the relationship in between online-validation, identity-formation, youth self-esteem and digital-belonging in social media dominated environment. Higher order explanation of the concepts developed from the qualitative studies by the translation and interpretations. Findings were developed to identify common meanings, contradictions, conceptual patterns across multiple investigations. PRISMA guidelines were followed for ensuring methodological transparency, rigor and replicability all through the review process.

3.2 Literature Search Strategy

Some internationally recognized electronic databases like Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, ERIC, PubMed, Google Scholar and in some cases some peer reviewed journals were taken for systematic literature search as this topic falls under interdisciplinary research combining Psychology, Education, Communication Sociology, Media Studies and Digital Technology together. Boolean Operators as well as keywords were used as search strategy like Online Validation, Social media validation, likes, comments, followers, digital-identity, identity-formation, self-esteem, self-worth, social belonging, adolescents, young adults, qualitative research, digital well-being and social media experiences using 'AND' or 'OR'. Reviews were taken form 2015-2025 to understand the gradual yet rapid evolution of algorithm driven social media platform and contemporary patterns of youth development.

3.3 Study Selection and Eligibility Criteria

The four stages of PRISMA 2020 guided frameworks by identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion were maintained in this study. Prior to title and abstract screening, duplicate identified records from the databases were removed. Based on the Predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, full text articles were assessed for methodological consistency.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Qualitative or mixed method study with clearly stated findings
2. Live experiences of young adults and adolescents of online validation through social media.
3. Examination of relationship in between online validation, self-esteem, psychological well-being or social belonging.
4. Sufficient interpretive data needed for meta-ethnographic studies.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Studied based on complete quantitative methodology
2. Focussed on adoption of technology without any psycho-social experiences
3. Editorials, conference abstracts, unpublished reports and dissertations.
4. Papers lacking enough methodological details or qualitative findings

3.4 Quality Appraisal

Evaluation of each article was done in respect to research objectives, sampling procedures, data collection methods, analytical techniques, ethical considerations, transparency of findings and consistence in between data and interpretations. Many of the studies were not excluded based on minor methodological

limitations due to their richness in concept and interpretative contribution.

3.5 Meta-Ethnographic Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by seven stages of interpretive phases of Nobit and Hare's (1988) Meta-ethnography. The studies were continuously read to understand the similarities in their conceptual as well as contextual meanings. Through reciprocal translation, common concepts and shared meanings in the studies were identified, convergent understanding of online validation, identity affirmation and digital belongings were highlighted whereas contradictory findings based on contextual variations of cultural settings, gender, patterns of social media engagement, psycho-social responses to online education were explored by refutational translation. Line-of-argument synthesis synthesized the emerged concepts from each stage to a higher order interpretive explanation extended beyond the findings of individual studies.

4. Meta-Ethnographic Synthesis of Findings

4.1 Online Validation as a Source of Self-Esteem and Belonging

In all the qualitative meta ethnographic synthesis, included in the review, it is continuously highlighted that according to first order constructs, social media platforms are the spaces where digital feedbacks like likes, comments, shares, followers and reactions are regarded as the symbolic indicators of recognition and acceptance *(Rides et al, 2025).*The second order constructs suggest that online validation beyond the virtual environment influences on how young people evaluate themselves and their relationship *(Khamassi, et al, 2025)* within both online and offline communities.

4.1.1 Social Connectedness

Social connectedness plays a crucial role in human mind particularly in Covid 19 situation where digital communication became only avenue for maintaining interpersonal relation *(Mojtahedzaheb, et al, 2024)* and emotional support networks *(Prescott, et al, 2025).* The first order construct reflected the perceptions of the participants about online interactions and its role in remaining socially connected in their regular life despite of geographical distances *(West, et al, 2024)* and changing social circumstances. The second order constructs believe that fundamental psychological needs for relatedness and interpersonal connection are fulfilled by online validation *(Sinanan & Gomes, 2020).*

4.1.2 Confidence

The first order constructs reflected that self-confidence of adolescents and young adults are enhanced by online validation *(Wijetunge, et al, 2025)* and at the same time it fosters the feelings of competence, personal satisfaction and achievements by sharing artistic performance, everyday experiences etc. *(Yeo & Jang, 2023)* The second order constructs reflected that authentic recognitions and supportive interactions play a crucial role in developing confidence.

4.1.3 Identity Affirmation

According to the first order constructs, participants believe that positive online feedback can affirm the beliefs, talents, cultural identities and authentic self-expression. The second order constructs believes that the experiences are used to strengthen identity affirmation through acceptance and recognition. *(Sansfacon, et al, 2020).*

The reciprocal synthesis denotes that self-worth is reinforced by online validation and also provides meaningful acknowledgement of diverse identities within the digital communities.The refutational synthesis denies the universal role of online validation on

learners' psychological well-being as they can differentiate in between meaningful recognition and superficial approval. According to line-of-argument synthesis, online validation plays a dynamic psycho-social role for negotiating self-esteem and belongingness in digital world depending on the authenticity of interpersonal relationship and quality of online interactions.

4.2 Identity Construction and Digital Self-Presentation

Continuous interaction with diverse audiences helps adolescents and young adults by providing opportunities to construct, reconstruct and negotiate various dimensions of their identities. Instead of presenting a fixed self-representation, digital identity is described by the participants as fluid, evolving and shaped by experiences related to social interaction and online validation.

4.2.1 Self-Expression

The first order constructs describes the participants view point about the role of social media in providing opportunities for their interests, opinions, emotions, creativity and achievements via various digital contents *(Popat & Tarrant, 2023, Kumar, et a, 2024).* The second order constructs demonstrate that authentic self-expression is encouraged by online validation by the reinforcement of personal voice, identity exploration *(MacNeela& Murphy, 2015; Kackar, 2024)* and confidence through appreciation and recognition.

4.2.2 Authenticity

According to the participants, in first order constructs, authenticity genuine personalities are expressed and at the same time they respond to platform algorithm, audience expectations and social norms *(Masor& Diel, 2024).* Without compromising their own core identities, many users upload selectively edited photograph, refining captions and carefully designed aspects for outworld communication *(Chua & Chang, 2016).* According to the second order constructs, authentic self-expression of the users helps in providing genuine feedback for their values and experiences whereas pressure for meeting idealized online standard can weaken authenticity by encouraging strategic self-presentation *(Baker, et al, 2019).*

4.2.3 Online Identity Negotiation

The first order construct denotes the perceptions of the participants about the continuous comments *(Pamisa, et al, 2025),* reactions and audience feedback and they often modify their communication styles in need of positive response or online perseverance. The second order constructs informs that identity negotiation can termed as a dynamic and relational process where shaping is done by personal agency, social influence and online validation. *(Hidayat, et al, 2024; Mazid, et al, 2026).*

According to the reciprocal synthesis, identity construction is facilitated by social media with the promotion of authenticity, self-expression and continuous identity negotiation. Refutational synthesis discusses about authentic self-expression and strategic self-perception. According to the line-of-argument interpretation, digital identity can be neither fixed nor can be made authentic. It represents a socially negotiated fluid construct evolving through ongoing interactions in between online validation, individual agency and audience feedback.

4.3 Psychological Risks of Online Validation

According to the findings of the literature reviews, online validation is described as double-edged phenomena by some of the adolescents as well as the young adults because besides promoting feelings of acceptance, it also exposes them towards emotional distress. When self-worth is completely dependent on

digital acceptance, it will rise emotional instability and identity issues as well.

4.3.1Social Comparison

According to the first order construct, some participants get disappointed if they get lesser likes and shares of their contents than their peers ultimately leading to negative impact on their social status and personal worth *(Miechelle, 2025, Pamissa, et al, 2025)* whereas according to the second order construct, these experiences are digitally mediated social comparison in which competition for recognition is intensified by algorithmically amplified visibility *(O'Brien, 2020, Micallef, J. M., 2023).*

4.3.2 Body Image Concerns

According to the first order constructs, youths are under pressure to meet the standardized beauty set up by social media often using filters in their uploaded images and appearances for greater online validation *(Baker, et al, 2019, Mahon & Havey, 2021).* Positive feedback online is associated with satisfaction whereas limited engagement *(Duke, 2021)* and natural appearance often generate dissatisfaction *(Jones, 2024).* Researchers in second order constructs discuss about the critical media literacy in digital environment because appearance-based self-evaluation and unrealistic beauty standard are reinforced by online validation.

4.3.3 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

According to the first order constructs, adolescents and adults in fear of missing important interactions,repeatedly check notification and frequently refresh social media feeds *(Throuvala, et al, 2019; Meradaputhi, et al, 2022).*Delayed responses and reduced online engagement lead them towards being excluded and for losing importance among peer groups. The second order construct describes thatthe increased dependence on online validation is reflected by FOMO, that reinforce anxiety related to belongingness, interpersonal recognition and social inclusion in environment mediated digitally. *(Throuvala, et al, 2021, Arlint, et al, 2026).*

4.3.4 Emotional Dependency

The first order constructs depict the experience of excitement and satisfaction at the time of receiving positive reactions on social media posts while the absence of likes and comments lead to frustration and self-doubt *(Hjetland, e al, 2021, Calancie, et al, 2017).* According to the second order constructs, instant feedback and algorithmic counts influence emotional dependency and self-worth dependent on external approval rather than internal confidencecreating challenge for psychological development *(Throuvala, et al, 2021).*

4.3.5 Digital Anxiety

According to the first order constructs, participants often feel anxiety before posting any content, sometimes delete content for less engagement, frequently check like or comments, are afraid of negative feedback and henceforth losing of their digital image can lead to anxiety *(Shankleman, et al, 2021; Popat, & Tarrant, 2023)*whereas in second order construct, performance anxiety for continuous social evaluation, emotional dependency, social comparison, algorithmic pressure are the source of constant stress *(Felice, et al, 2022).*

Though reciprocal synthesis highlights that constant need of excessive online validation leads to social comparison, FOMO, body image concerns, emotional dependency, digital anxiety and psychological vulnerability, refutational synthesis reveals that the result is not universal, it changes on strong self-esteem, supportive offline relationship and higher digital literacy for higher resilience. The line-of-argument synthesis proves that social media should not only be blamed for psychological harm, rather it depends on external digital approach for self-worth.

4.4 Inclusive Digital Participation

In spite of the psychological challenges in terms of online validation, a considerable potential in promoting participation, inclusion and social connectedness with supportive interactions and ethical communication practices are considered to be the boon of digitally mediated environments *(Ytrearne, et al, 2026; Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025).* Social media though can be considered as a risky source, can also be used for facilitating meaningful engagement for acceptance, collaboration and community support. *(Vaingankar, et al,2022).*

4.4.1 Peer Acceptance

According to the first order construct, digital platforms help the users to find people with similar opinions, interests, aspirations and experiences *(Throuvala, et al, 2019; Winston, et al, 2021).* The second order constructs view it as a way for developing friendship beyond geographical boundaries. *(Nesi, et al, 2018; Sjolie, et al, 2024).*

4.4.2 Sense of Belonging

According to the first order constructs, online communities make the participants feeling valued, heard, emotionally connected *(Hjetland, et al, 2021)* and respected in spite of having diverse identities without any judgmental fear. The second order constructs depict that emotional security, social inclusion and interpersonal connectedness beyond simple online interaction are fostered by supportive digital environments. *(Smith, et al, 2021; Theodoridis, 2021)*

4.4.3 Positive Online Communities

According to the first order constructs, trusted online spaces are used as important sources of emotional resilience *(Falcón-Linares, et al, 2023; Vaigankar, et al, 2022)* and collective learning by encouragement, personal experience sharing, discussions of mental health concerns, attainment of emphatic support and advice seeking whereas the second order constructs reveal that if embedded in inclusive, supportive and respectful communities, online validation can become psychologically beneficial *(Keles, et al, 2024).*

4.4.4 Inclusive Engagement

The first order constructs reveal that instead of differences in gender, language, ethnicity, disability *(Kaur & Saukko, 2022)* or socio-economic background, the participants in positive online space can feel heard, valued and respected. The second order constructs view these experiences as the parts of equitable participation, feeling of digital citizenship and psychological safety. *(Brough, 2020; Newman, et al, 2022)*

4.5 Emerging Meta-Ethnographic Interpretation

In case of reciprocal translations, it is found that, online validation positively affects confidence, identity development and peer relationship whereasrefutational translations reveal extreme dependence on online validation can negatively influence social comparison, emotional dependency, body image concerns, FOMO and digital identity. The line-of-argument synthesis concludes that online validation can be regarded as a multidimensional construct intersecting identity, technology, emotion as well as social relationship resulting as behavioural outcomes of varied self-esteem, social connectedness, digital belongings and emotional vulnerability.

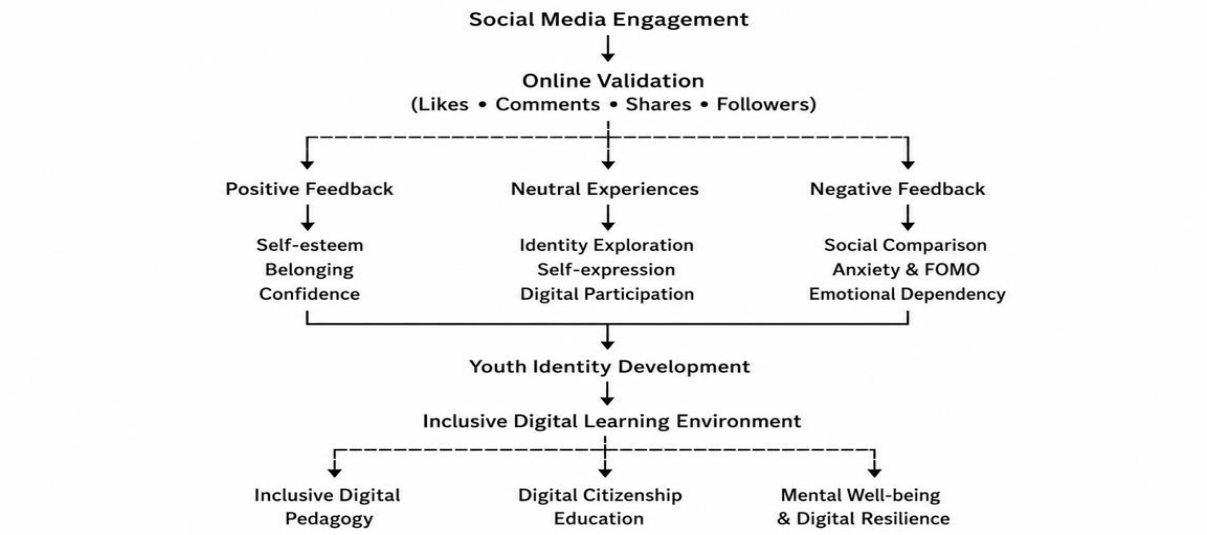


Fig. 1 (Source- Researcher's Concept Framed through Open AI, 2026)

5. Discussion and Educational Implications

5.1 Understanding Youth Identity in the Digital Age

The overall finding through the meta ethnographic demonstrated that digitally mediated environments play a crucial role in increasing youth identity by combining online and offline interconnection. In the social places of various social medias, the adolescents have started sharing their identity, self-worth and belonging through likes comments, followers, shares etc. As a positive result it helps in the development of confidence, social connectedness, identity affirmation where as excessive dependence can generate body-image concerns, digital anxiety, comparison, emotional dependency etc. Besides regarding the external medias as important tools for identity development, the institutions, policy-makers, families must understand their role in developmental contexts of the adolescents that requires guidance, critical awareness and emotional support as well.

5.2 From Online Validation to Inclusive Digital Learning

Digital interaction and digital environment play a crucial role in the psychological and educational concerns of online validation. The positive online validation can increase empathy, collaboration, respect and meaningful engagement which in turn can develop confidence, participation, sense of belongingness. Exclusion and emotional vulnerability can be reinforced by online environment driven by competition, algorithmic visibility and popularity.

5.3 Implications for Digital Citizenship Education

The need of continuing Digital Citizenship Education in schools and colleges have emerged beyond the need of technical competence and for the inclusion of emotional, ethical and critical dimensions of online participation. Learners should be made understood the role of social media algorithm for influencing visibility, popularity and perceptions of self-worth and at the same time should critically evaluate unrealistic online representations, negativity of social comparison, identity misinformation, issues of digital diversities etc. for maintenance of digital boundaries in online and offline life.

5.4 Promoting Inclusive Digital Pedagogy

The importance of digital pedagogy is understood both for academic and psychosocial well-being. The digitalclassrooms should be respectful, valuable and psychologically safe for the learners.Norms should be established by the teachers to maintain cyber-ethics, respectful communicationand collaborative learning and at the same time addressesonline discrimination, cyberbullying and exclusionary practices. The importance of media literacy is highlighted to enhance the learners' ability of differentiating authentic social interaction from unhealthy dependence on online approval to balance the use of technology. Self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationship and empathy can be strengthened by the integration of social-emotional learning into digital instruction.

5.5 Implications for Teachers, Parents, and Policymakers

The findings also highlight the importance of teachers, parents and policy makers on the promotion of safe and positive digital engagement among the learners. Besides getting continuous professional development addressing emerging psycho-social challenges of social media usage by the adolescents and young learners, teachers also should integrate media literacy, online participation and digital well-being in online participation. Parents instead of restrictive monitoring should help in developing balanced digital habits by open communication, shared reflection and emotional support about online experiences. At policy level, digital citizenship, inclusive digital learning, mental health promotion should be integrated in the policies and curriculum by governments and educational authorities.

6. Conclusion

The PRISMA 2020 guided meta-ethnographic analysis reveals the multidimensional roles of online validation for self-esteem, identity formation and digital belongings among adolescents and young youths. Both the positive and negative effects of online validation on adolescents and youths found in this study highlight the quality of digital interactions and its role in young people's psychological well-being.

To measure the long-term effects of online validation on diverse cultural, social and educational contexts, further longitudinal, cross cultural and mixed method design should be used. Practically, integration of digital citizenship, socio-economic learning, media literacy and mental health education should be included in the curricula and the promotion of inclusive educational policies can enhance responsible technology use, resilient identities, balanced self-esteem and equitable digital participation.

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Chapter 5: From Premchand to Digital Narratives: Evolution of Social Consciousness in Hindi Literature

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Abstract

Hindi literature has always served as a powerful medium for expressing the social, cultural, political, and emotional realities of Indian society. From the writings of MunshiPremchand to the contemporary world of digital storytelling, Hindi literature has continuously reflected the changing dimensions of human experiences and social consciousness. Premchand's literary contributions introduced a realistic representation of rural India, caste structures, economic inequalities, gender concerns, and the struggles of marginalized communities. His works established literature as an instrument of social awareness and transformation rather than merely a source of entertainment.With changing historical circumstances, Hindi literature expanded its boundaries through progressive movements, post-independence writings, feminist perspectives, Dalit literature, and modern narratives that questioned existing social structures. Writers began exploring themes of identity, justice, equality, globalization, and cultural transformation. In the twenty-first century, the emergence of digital platforms has further transformed Hindi literary practices. Blogs, online magazines, social media platforms, podcasts, and digital publishing have provided new opportunities for writers and readers to participate in literary conversations beyond geographical limitations.This chapter examines the evolution of social consciousness in Hindi literature from Premchand's era to digital narratives. It highlights how Hindi literature has adapted to technological changes while preserving its commitment to social representation and human values. The study explores the relationship between literature, society, and digital communication, emphasizing the role of contemporary Hindi narratives in creating awareness, encouraging dialogue, and addressing emerging social challenges in the digital age.

Keywords: *Hindi Literature, Premchand, Social Consciousness, Digital Narratives, Cultural Identity*

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1. Introduction

Hindi literature has long functioned as a significant medium for interpreting the social, cultural, and political realities of Indian society. Across different historical periods, literary works have not only reflected prevailing social conditions but have also questioned inequalities, inspired reform, and encouraged critical engagement with issues affecting ordinary people. Unlike literature that serves only aesthetic purposes, Hindi literary traditions have consistently emphasized ethical responsibility and social commitment. From the early modern period to the present digital era, Hindi writers have addressed concerns such as poverty, caste discrimination, gender inequality, colonial oppression, nationalism, migration, identity, and cultural transformation. This enduring relationship between literature and society demonstrates that literary expression is deeply connected with the lived experiences of individuals and communities (Mukherjee, 2016; Eagleton, 2011).

Among the pioneers of socially committed Hindi literature, MunshiPremchand occupies a distinctive position. His writings marked a decisive shift from romantic and idealistic narratives toward literary realism that portrayed the complexities of everyday life. Through novels such as *Godaan*, *Nirmala*, and *Karmabhumi*, as well as short stories including *Kafan* and *Sadgati*, Premchand presented the struggles of farmers, women, laborers, and marginalized communities with remarkable sensitivity and authenticity. His works exposed structural inequalities rooted in caste, feudalism, economic exploitation, and patriarchal traditions, thereby establishing literature as a powerful instrument for social awareness and moral reflection (Premchand, 1936/2009; Orsini, 2002). Rather than offering simplistic solutions, his narratives invited readers to examine the social forces shaping individual lives and to recognize the need for justice and reform.

The evolution of Hindi literature after Premchand reflects the dynamic changes experienced by Indian society. The Progressive Writers' Movement expanded literary engagement with class struggle, colonial resistance, and social justice by encouraging writers to portray the realities of oppressed communities. Following India's independence, literary discourse broadened further through the emergence of the NaiKahani movement, feminist writing, Dalit literature, and regional narratives that explored questions of identity, equality, displacement, and democratic participation. These literary developments illustrate how Hindi literature continually adapts to changing historical circumstances while maintaining its commitment to representing human experiences and social realities (King, 1994; Natarajan, 2012).

Globalization, urbanization, technological advancement, and digital communication have introduced new dimensions to contemporary Hindi literature. The expansion of internet access and digital publishing platforms has transformed both literary production and readership. Blogs, online literary magazines, e-books, podcasts, social media platforms, and independent publishing have created opportunities for emerging writers to share their work without relying exclusively on traditional publishing institutions. Digital spaces have also enabled readers to participate actively through discussions, reviews, collaborative writing, and literary communities that transcend geographical boundaries (Jenkins, 2006; Kumar, 2021). Consequently, literature has become more interactive, accessible, and responsive to contemporary social issues.

The chapter has three primary objectives.

1. It examines Premchand's contribution to establishing social realism as a defining characteristic of modern Hindi literature.
2. itanalyzes the evolution of social consciousness through major literary movements and changing socio-political contexts after Premchand.
3. it evaluates the impact of digital communication on contemporary Hindi literary practices and its role in

expanding public engagement with social issues.

2. Understanding Social Consciousness in Literature

Social consciousness is a multidimensional concept that refers to an individual's or a community's awareness of the social realities that shape human life. It encompasses an understanding of social relationships, inequalities, cultural values, economic structures, political systems, and ethical responsibilities. In literature, social consciousness is reflected through narratives that critically engage with societal issues and encourage readers to examine the conditions affecting individuals and communities. Rather than presenting fictional events solely for entertainment, socially conscious literature explores the complexities of human existence and inspires reflection on justice, equality, and collective well-being (Freire, 1970; Eagleton, 2011).

The relationship between literature and society has long been recognized as reciprocal. Society influences literary production by providing historical experiences, cultural traditions, and social conflicts that become themes of literary expression. At the same time, literature shapes public opinion by presenting alternative perspectives, questioning dominant ideologies, and promoting ethical reflection. This interaction enables literature to function as both a mirror of society and a catalyst for social transformation. Writers interpret lived experiences through imaginative narratives that make social realities more accessible and emotionally meaningful for readers (Wellek& Warren, 1949; Williams, 1977).

Hindi literature has consistently demonstrated this close relationship between literary expression and social reality. From the Bhakti movement to contemporary digital writing, Hindi authors have addressed issues concerning religion, caste, gender, class, morality, and national identity. Their works illustrate that literature is deeply connected with the everyday experiences of ordinary people rather than being confined to artistic imagination alone. As social conditions evolve, literary themes also change to reflect emerging concerns, making literature a dynamic record of historical and cultural transformation (Orsini, 2002; Mukherjee, 2016).

In the Indian context, social consciousness has acquired particular significance because of the country's diverse social structure and complex historical experiences. Colonialism, caste hierarchies, economic disparities, linguistic diversity, gender discrimination, and religious pluralism have influenced literary production across different periods. Hindi writers have responded to these realities by presenting narratives that emphasize human dignity, social justice, and democratic values. Their works often give voice to communities that have historically remained underrepresented in mainstream discourse, thereby expanding the scope of literary representation (Natarajan, 2012; King, 1994).

The emergence of feminist and Dalit literature significantly broadened the understanding of social consciousness in Hindi literary studies. Feminist writers challenged patriarchal structures by foregrounding women's experiences, agency, and identity, while Dalit authors highlighted the lived realities of caste-based discrimination and social exclusion. These literary movements demonstrated that social consciousness is not a fixed concept but an evolving framework that responds to changing historical conditions and emerging demands for equality and inclusion. By incorporating diverse perspectives, Hindi literature has become more representative of India's social complexity (Rege, 2006; Valmiki, 2003).

In the twenty-first century, technological advancements have introduced new dimensions to social consciousness in literature. Digital communication has transformed the ways in which literary texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted. Writers can now reach readers through blogs, online journals, social media platforms, podcasts, and digital publishing, enabling faster dissemination of ideas and wider public participation. Readers are no longer

passive consumers of literature but active participants who engage in discussions, share interpretations, and contribute to literary communities. This interactive environment has expanded opportunities for addressing contemporary issues such as digital inequality, environmental sustainability, mental health, migration, and online activism (Castells, 2010; Jenkins, 2006).

Thus, understanding social consciousness provides the theoretical foundation for examining the development of Hindi literature from Premchand's realist vision to contemporary digital narratives. It explains why literature remains an influential cultural institution capable of documenting social realities, challenging injustice, and fostering a more informed and compassionate society. The following section examines how Premchand established this tradition of social realism and laid the foundation for later developments in Hindi literary discourse.

3. Premchand and the Foundation of Social Realism

The emergence of modern Hindi literature is closely associated with the development of social realism, a literary approach that seeks to portray society in its actual form while critically examining the conditions affecting ordinary people. Among the writers who established this tradition, MunshiPremchand occupies a central position. His literary works transformed Hindi fiction by shifting its focus from romantic imagination and moral idealism to the realities of rural life, economic deprivation, caste discrimination, gender inequality, and colonial oppression. Through his novels and short stories, Premchand demonstrated that literature should not merely entertain readers but should cultivate social awareness, ethical responsibility, and critical reflection (Orsini, 2002; King, 1994).

Premchand wrote during a period of profound political and social transformation in India. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed British colonial rule, agrarian exploitation, the rise of nationalist movements, widening economic disparities, and deeply entrenched caste hierarchies. Rural communities experienced severe poverty, indebtedness, and social exclusion, while women continued to face patriarchal restrictions that limited their education, autonomy, and participation in public life. These realities became the foundation of Premchand's literary imagination. Rather than presenting idealized characters, he portrayed individuals whose lives were shaped by oppressive social structures and economic hardship (Premchand, 1936/2009; Sharma, 2011).

Important dimension of Premchand's social realism is his critique of caste discrimination. His writings reveal how caste functions as a system of social exclusion that denies individuals equal access to dignity, opportunity, and justice. Instead of treating caste as an abstract social issue, he illustrates its consequences through the everyday experiences of marginalized characters. These narratives expose the emotional and psychological effects of discrimination while questioning the legitimacy of social hierarchies based on birth. In doing so, Premchand anticipated many of the concerns that later became central to Dalit literature and social justice movements (Omvedt, 1994; Rege, 2006).

Premchand also devoted considerable attention to the condition of women in Indian society. His female characters confront challenges such as child marriage, dowry, domestic oppression, limited educational opportunities, and unequal social expectations. Rather than depicting women solely within traditional domestic roles, he explored their emotional struggles, moral dilemmas, and aspirations for dignity and independence. Although his perspectives reflected the social context of his time, his writings represented a significant departure from conventional portrayals of women by emphasizing their individuality and agency. This sensitivity toward gender inequality contributed to the development of socially engaged Hindi fiction and influenced later feminist literary traditions (Tharu&Lalita, 1993; Chakravarti, 2003).Premchand's literary

philosophy was grounded in the conviction that literature carries a moral responsibility toward society. He regarded writers as observers and interpreters of social reality whose task was to reveal injustice without sacrificing artistic integrity. His works avoid simplistic moral judgments and instead encourage readers to engage critically with the institutions and values that shape human lives. This balance between artistic excellence and social commitment established Premchand as the foremost architect of social realism in Hindi literature. His contribution continues to influence contemporary writers who address new forms of inequality while preserving literature's enduring commitment to human dignity, justice, and social transformation (Eagleton, 2011; Orsini, 2002).

3. Premchand and the Foundation of Social Realism

Premchand's commitment to social realism is most effectively understood through an examination of his major literary works, each of which addresses specific dimensions of Indian society while collectively presenting a comprehensive critique of social inequality. His novels and short stories portray the interconnected realities of poverty, caste discrimination, gender injustice, religious harmony, and moral conflict. Rather than presenting isolated incidents, these narratives reveal how social institutions and historical circumstances shape individual experiences. Consequently, Premchand's fiction remains relevant because it raises questions concerning justice, dignity, and human values that continue to resonate in contemporary society (Orsini, 2002; Natarajan, 2012).Among Premchand's novels, *Godaan* is widely regarded as his greatest literary achievement and one of the finest examples of social realism in Indian literature. Published in 1936, the novel presents the life of Hori Mahato, a poor farmer whose aspiration to own a cow symbolizes dignity, social respectability, and economic security. Despite his honesty and commitment to family, Hori becomes trapped in a cycle of debt, exploitation, and social obligation created by landlords, moneylenders, and rigid village customs. Premchand illustrates that poverty is not merely an individual condition but the outcome of structural inequalities embedded within colonial agrarian society. The novel also examines class divisions, gender roles, caste relations, and religious practices, demonstrating the interconnected nature of social injustice. Through Hori's tragic life, Premchand emphasizes the resilience of ordinary people while exposing the institutions responsible for their suffering (Premchand, 1936/2009; Datta, 2010).

The novel *Karmabhumi* expands Premchand's social vision by exploring themes of nationalism, communal harmony, political responsibility, and nonviolent resistance. Set against the backdrop of India's freedom movement, the novel portrays characters who struggle to reconcile personal morality with collective social obligations. Premchand advocates social cooperation across religious and caste boundaries while emphasizing education, ethical leadership, and civic responsibility. His portrayal of communal relationships reflects the belief that national progress depends upon mutual respect, justice, and democratic participation rather than division and conflict. This perspective remains significant in contemporary discussions concerning social cohesion and inclusive citizenship (King, 1994; Sharma, 2011).Premchand's short stories demonstrate the same commitment to social realism through concise yet emotionally powerful narratives. *Sadgati* provides a profound critique of caste oppression by depicting the tragic fate of Dukhi, an impoverished Dalit who dies while performing unpaid labor for an upper-caste priest. The story exposes the dehumanizing effects of caste hierarchy and questions religious practices that legitimize social exclusion. Premchand's portrayal avoids exaggeration, allowing the ordinary events of the narrative to reveal the cruelty embedded within everyday social relations. The story later gained wider recognition through its cinematic adaptation, further strengthening its relevance as a critique

of caste discrimination (Omvedt, 1994; Rege, 2006).

A distinctive feature of Premchand's literary method is his balanced integration of realism and ethical inquiry. His narratives neither romanticize poverty nor reduce marginalized communities to passive victims. Instead, they portray individuals as morally complex human beings whose choices are constrained by social, economic, and cultural structures. This nuanced representation allows readers to recognize both personal agency and systemic injustice, making his fiction intellectually engaging as well as emotionally compelling (Abrams, 1999; Wellek& Warren, 1949).In the contemporary digital era, Premchand's legacy continues to shape discussions on literature and social responsibility. Digital storytelling, online literary forums, podcasts, blogs, and social media have introduced new modes of literary expression, yet many contemporary Hindi writers continue to draw inspiration from Premchand's humanistic vision. Issues such as caste discrimination, gender equality, migration, environmental degradation, digital inequality, and cultural identity are now explored through digital platforms that reach wider audiences. This continuity demonstrates that while literary forms and technologies have changed, the ethical commitment to social consciousness established by Premchand remains a defining characteristic of Hindi literature. His works continue to remind readers that literature possesses the power to cultivate empathy, encourage dialogue, and contribute meaningfully to social transformation (Castells, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Kumar, 2021).

4. Evolution of Social Consciousness after Premchand

The expansion of social consciousness in post-independence Hindi literature became more visible with the emergence of feminist writing, Dalit literature, and narratives representing marginalized communities. These literary developments challenged the dominant perspectives that had traditionally shaped Hindi literary discourse and introduced new voices that reflected diverse social experiences. While Premchand had initiated discussions on gender inequality, caste discrimination, and social justice, later writers examined these issues from the standpoint of those who directly experienced exclusion and oppression. As a result, Hindi literature became increasingly democratic, inclusive, and representative of India's social diversity (Natarajan, 2012; Rege, 2006).

The rise of **feminist writing** marked a significant turning point in the evolution of social consciousness. Earlier literary works often portrayed women as symbols of sacrifice, morality, and family honor. Although these representations highlighted women's suffering, they rarely emphasized women's autonomy or independent identity. Feminist writers questioned these conventional portrayals by foregrounding women's lived experiences, aspirations, and struggles against patriarchal structures. Their writings examined how family, marriage, education, employment, and social expectations shaped women's lives and limited their opportunities. This shift transformed women from passive subjects into active participants in literary narratives and expanded the understanding of gender justice within Hindi literature (Tharu&Lalita, 1993; Chakravarti, 2003).

Among the leading voices of feminist Hindi literature, **Krishna Sobti** occupies a distinguished place. Her novels and short stories present women as complex individuals capable of independent thought and emotional agency. Works such as *MitroMarjani* challenged conservative notions of femininity by openly addressing female desire, personal freedom, and social restrictions. Sobti rejected idealized representations of womanhood and instead portrayed women negotiating identity within patriarchal social systems. Her bold narrative style encouraged Hindi literature to engage with subjects that had previously remained marginalized in mainstream literary discourse (Sobti, 1966/2018; Dhar, 2008).

Similarly, **MannuBhandari** explored the changing realities of urban middle-class women

in post-independence India. Her novel *AapKaBunty* examines the emotional consequences of divorce and family disintegration through the perspective of a child, while simultaneously revealing the pressures experienced by women within conventional family structures. Bhandari's fiction demonstrates that social consciousness extends beyond public institutions to include intimate relationships, emotional well-being, and domestic inequalities. By highlighting women's perspectives, she contributed significantly to the development of gender-sensitive literary criticism in Hindi literature (Bhandari, 1971/2019; Kumar, 2017).

The contribution of **MridulaGarg** further broadened feminist discourse by examining female identity, sexuality, personal freedom, and moral responsibility. Her writings question rigid social norms and advocate individual autonomy without reducing women to stereotypical roles. Garg's narratives illustrate that genuine social transformation requires not only legal reforms but also changes in cultural attitudes and interpersonal relationships. Through her literary interventions, Hindi literature became more responsive to debates concerning gender equality and human rights (Garg, 1996; Tharu&Lalita, 1993).

Alongside feminist and Dalit writing, Hindi literature increasingly incorporated the voices of **tribal communities, linguistic minorities, migrant workers, and other marginalized groups**. These narratives expanded the geographical and cultural scope of Hindi literature by representing regions, traditions, and identities that had received limited attention in earlier literary works. Questions concerning environmental justice, displacement due to development projects, cultural preservation, and indigenous rights became important literary themes. Such writings illustrate that social consciousness continually evolves in response to changing social realities and emerging forms of inequality (Baviskar, 2004; Guha, 2000).

The economic liberalization of the 1990s further transformed Hindi literary discourse. Rapid urbanization, globalization, technological development, consumer culture, and migration introduced new social challenges that influenced literary production. Writers increasingly examined issues such as unemployment, economic inequality, changing family structures, cultural hybridity, media influence, and identity formation in an interconnected world. While these themes differed from the agrarian concerns of Premchand's era, they reflected the same ethical commitment to understanding the consequences of social change on ordinary lives (Appadurai, 1996; Fernandes, 2006).

An important feature of post-Premchand Hindi literature is its ability to integrate continuity with change. Although literary movements differed in style, ideology, and thematic emphasis, they shared a common commitment to representing society critically and responsibly. Progressive writers emphasized class struggle and political justice. NaiKahani authors explored psychological realities and urban life. Feminist literature foregrounded gender equality and women's agency. Dalit literature challenged caste oppression and demanded social dignity. Regional and tribal narratives highlighted cultural diversity and environmental concerns. Together, these traditions broadened the meaning of social consciousness and strengthened Hindi literature as a platform for democratic dialogue and social inclusion (Natarajan, 2012; Orsini, 2002).

5. Contemporary Hindi Literature and the Rise of Digital Narratives

The beginning of the twenty-first century marks a significant phase in the evolution of Hindi literature. While the fundamental commitment to representing social realities has remained intact, the contexts in which writers create and readers engage with literature have undergone substantial transformation. Globalization, economic liberalization, rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and digital communication have reshaped Indian society, introducing new opportunities as well as new forms of inequality. Contemporary Hindi literature reflects these changes by expanding its

thematic concerns beyond traditional issues of caste, class, and rural poverty to include migration, identity, environmental degradation, consumer culture, mental health, digital citizenship, and cultural hybridity. These developments demonstrate that social consciousness in Hindi literature is not static but continuously evolves in response to changing historical and social circumstances (Appadurai, 1996; Nayar, 2020).

The economic reforms initiated in India in 1991 fundamentally altered the country's social and cultural landscape. Liberalization accelerated urban growth, expanded employment opportunities, increased mobility, and strengthened India's integration into global markets. At the same time, these developments generated new forms of social disparity, including economic inequality, job insecurity, displacement, and the commercialization of everyday life. Hindi writers increasingly turned their attention to these emerging realities, examining how globalization influenced personal identity, family relationships, and community structures. Contemporary fiction illustrates that material progress does not necessarily eliminate social injustice but often creates new ethical and cultural dilemmas that demand literary engagement (Fernandes, 2006; Chakrabarty, 2000).

Urbanization has become one of the defining themes of recent Hindi literature. Migration from villages to cities has transformed the experiences of millions of Indians, creating narratives centered on adaptation, alienation, employment, housing insecurity, and fragmented social relationships. Unlike the rural settings that dominated Premchand's fiction, many contemporary narratives portray metropolitan life as a space characterized by opportunity as well as isolation.

Questions of identity have acquired increasing importance in contemporary Hindi literary discourse. Writers explore how gender, caste, religion, language, region, and class intersect to shape everyday experiences in a rapidly changing society. Identity is no longer viewed as a fixed social category but as a dynamic process influenced by migration, education, media, and globalization. Literary narratives frequently depict individuals negotiating multiple cultural affiliations while attempting to preserve personal dignity and social belonging. Such representations encourage readers to appreciate the complexity of contemporary Indian society and to recognize the diverse experiences that contribute to national identity (Hall, 1996; Sen, 2006).

Environmental concerns have emerged as another important area of literary engagement. Climate change, pollution, deforestation, water scarcity, and ecological displacement increasingly affect everyday life, making environmental justice an important component of social consciousness. Contemporary Hindi literature portrays the relationship between humans and nature not merely as an aesthetic theme but as a question of survival, sustainability, and social responsibility. Narratives addressing ecological crises often highlight the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on rural communities, indigenous populations, and economically disadvantaged groups, thereby linking ecological concerns with questions of social justice (Guha, 2000; Nixon, 2011).

The emergence of digital communication has transformed the production, circulation, and reception of Hindi literature more profoundly than any previous technological development. Internet accessibility, smartphones, and affordable digital platforms have reduced barriers between writers and readers, enabling literary participation beyond conventional publishing institutions. Blogs, online literary journals, web magazines, podcasts, YouTube channels, and social networking platforms now function as important spaces for literary expression and discussion. These digital platforms encourage experimentation with language, narrative techniques, and multimedia storytelling while significantly expanding the readership of Hindi literature (Jenkins, 2006; Castells, 2010).

6. Conclusion

Hindi literature has consistently evolved in response to the changing social, political, cultural, and technological realities of Indian society. From the realist vision of MunshiPremchand to the dynamic landscape of digital narratives, it has remained a significant medium for expressing human experiences, questioning injustice, and promoting social awareness. Although literary themes, narrative techniques, and modes of dissemination have transformed over time, the fundamental commitment of Hindi literature to social consciousness has remained remarkably consistent.

Premchand established the foundations of modern Hindi social realism by portraying the everyday struggles of farmers, women, labourers, and marginalized communities. His literary philosophy demonstrated that literature possesses the capacity to challenge oppressive social structures while cultivating empathy, ethical responsibility, and collective reflection. The generations that followed expanded this tradition by responding to new historical developments such as Independence, Partition, industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and economic liberalization. Progressive writers, NaiKahani authors, feminist scholars, Dalit writers, and regional literary voices enriched Hindi literature by incorporating diverse experiences and perspectives into its evolving discourse.

The twenty-first century has introduced unprecedented opportunities through digital communication technologies. Blogs, online literary journals, podcasts, social media platforms, digital libraries, and self-publishing initiatives have transformed literary production and readership by making Hindi literature more participatory, accessible, and globally connected. These platforms have amplified voices that were previously underrepresented and have encouraged broader public engagement with issues such as gender equality, caste discrimination, environmental sustainability, migration, mental health, and cultural identity. Nevertheless, challenges including digital inequality, copyright concerns, misinformation, algorithmic visibility, and declining editorial standards require careful consideration to ensure that technological innovation strengthens rather than weakens literary quality and ethical responsibility (Castells, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013).

The analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates that the evolution of Hindi literature is characterized by continuity as well as transformation. While the contexts of literary production have changed from printed texts to digital platforms, literature continues to function as a powerful instrument for documenting social realities, preserving cultural memory, encouraging democratic dialogue, and advocating social justice. The journey from Premchand to digital narratives reflects not a departure from literary tradition but its adaptation to the needs and aspirations of contemporary society. As digital technologies continue to reshape communication and cultural practices, Hindi literature is likely to remain an influential force in promoting inclusive social consciousness, critical thinking, and human values for future generations.

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Chapter 6: Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems in Higher Education: Advancing Education, Society, and Sustainable Development under NEP 2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a transformative vision for Indian education by emphasizing the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into teaching, learning, research, and institutional practices. The policy recognizes that India's rich intellectual traditions, encompassing philosophy, Ayurveda, Yoga, mathematics, astronomy, environmental ethics, literature, arts, architecture, and indigenous technologies, constitute valuable knowledge resources that can contribute significantly to holistic education and sustainable development. This chapter examines the role of IKS in advancing higher education within the framework of NEP 2020 and explores its potential to strengthen educational quality, societal well-being, and sustainability. The chapter adopts a qualitative methodology based on an extensive review and synthesis of policy documents and contemporary scholarly literature. It analyses how the integration of IKS promotes multidisciplinary learning, value-based education, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, cultural preservation, environmental consciousness, and experiential learning. The discussion also highlights the contribution of IKS to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fostering responsible citizenship, ecological balance, social inclusion, and lifelong learning. Despite the policy emphasis, several challenges continue to hinder effective implementation, including limited institutional preparedness, inadequate faculty training, insufficient curriculum integration, scarcity of quality teaching resources, language barriers, and the predominance of Western-centric academic frameworks. The chapter argues that meaningful integration of IKS requires comprehensive curriculum reforms, faculty capacity building, interdisciplinary research, digital documentation of indigenous knowledge, collaboration with traditional knowledge practitioners, and sustained policy support. It concludes that the successful implementation of IKS under NEP 2020 can create an education system that is globally competitive while remaining culturally rooted, socially responsive, and environmentally sustainable. Such an approach not only preserves India's knowledge heritage but also prepares learners to address complex contemporary challenges through innovation, ethical leadership, and inclusive development.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge Systems, National Education Policy 2020, Higher Education, Sustainable Development, Holistic Education*

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1. Introduction

Higher education today is expected to address complex global challenges, including climate change, technological transformation, social inequality, cultural homogenisation, and sustainable development. Universities are no longer viewed merely as centres for knowledge transmission; they are expected to foster innovation, ethical leadership, critical thinking, and responsible citizenship. Within this evolving educational landscape, many countries have begun recognising indigenous and traditional knowledge systems as valuable resources for addressing contemporary societal challenges. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift by placing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) at the centre of educational reform.

Indian Knowledge Systems represent one of the world's oldest and most comprehensive intellectual traditions. Developed over centuries, these systems encompass philosophy, Ayurveda, Yoga, astronomy, mathematics, architecture, linguistics, governance, agriculture, environmental management, performing arts, literature, and indigenous technologies. Unlike conventional disciplinary approaches, IKS promotes a holistic perspective that integrates scientific inquiry, ethical values, cultural continuity, environmental stewardship, and human well-being. Knowledge is viewed not only as a means of individual advancement but also as an instrument for collective welfare and sustainable development.

The historical dominance of Western educational models resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge within formal higher education. Consequently, many valuable Indian intellectual traditions remained confined to specialised institutions or local communities, creating a disconnect between formal education and India's knowledge heritage. Recognising this gap, NEP 2020 advocates the systematic integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into higher education while maintaining a balanced relationship between traditional wisdom and contemporary scientific knowledge.

The integration of IKS extends beyond cultural preservation. It offers practical insights into sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, preventive healthcare, environmental ethics, governance, architecture, and community-based development. These knowledge traditions are increasingly recognised for their relevance in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to quality education, good health and well-being, sustainable communities, climate action, and responsible consumption. Consequently, integrating IKS into higher education contributes not only to educational reform but also to national development and global sustainability.

Although recent scholarship acknowledges the transformative potential of IKS, much of the existing literature remains descriptive and policy-oriented. Limited attention has been devoted to critically synthesising contemporary research, analysing implementation challenges from an institutional perspective, and developing conceptual frameworks that explain the relationship between policy initiatives, institutional practices, and educational outcomes. This chapter addresses these gaps by critically reviewing recent literature and proposing a comprehensive framework for understanding the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems in higher education under NEP 2020.

1.1 Research Gap

A review of recent literature indicates that most studies primarily explain the conceptual foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems and the policy provisions of NEP 2020. Comparatively fewer studies critically examine the relationship among curriculum reform, faculty development, institutional preparedness,

interdisciplinary research, community engagement, and sustainable development. Moreover, limited efforts have been made to develop an integrated conceptual framework that links policy initiatives with institutional implementation and educational outcomes. This chapter addresses these gaps by synthesising contemporary scholarship, providing critical analysis, and proposing a conceptual framework for understanding the role of IKS in transforming higher education.

1.2 Significance of the Chapter

This chapter contributes to the growing literature on Indian Knowledge Systems in several ways. First, it provides a critical synthesis of contemporary research rather than merely presenting descriptive summaries. Second, it develops a conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between policy initiatives, institutional implementation, and educational outcomes. Third, it identifies practical opportunities and challenges associated with integrating IKS into higher education institutions. Finally, it proposes evidence-based strategies for strengthening curriculum reform, faculty development, interdisciplinary research, and institutional collaboration, thereby contributing to educational policy, academic research, and sustainable development.

2. Objectives of the Study

The chapter is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the philosophical foundations and educational significance of Indian Knowledge Systems in higher education.
2. To analyse the role of the National Education Policy 2020 in promoting the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems in higher education institutions.
3. To critically synthesise contemporary literature on Indian Knowledge Systems and evaluate their contribution to education, society, and sustainable development.
4. To identify the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing Indian Knowledge Systems in higher education.
5. To propose strategies for strengthening the effective integration of Indian Knowledge Systems to achieve holistic, inclusive, and sustainable higher education.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative review-based research design to critically examine the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in higher education within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. A qualitative review is appropriate because the study seeks to synthesise existing scholarly knowledge, analyse policy developments, identify emerging themes, and develop a conceptual understanding of how IKS contributes to educational transformation, societal development, and sustainable development. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the study develops evidence-based interpretations through a systematic review and critical analysis of published academic literature and policy documents.

The study is based entirely on secondary data collected from multiple academic and institutional sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, JSTOR, and UGC CARE-listed journals. Government publications such as the National Education Policy (2020), documents issued by the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission (UGC), AICTE Indian Knowledge Systems Division, and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) were also consulted. Additional sources include edited books, conference proceedings, institutional reports, and book chapters related to Indian

Knowledge Systems, higher education, curriculum reforms, and sustainable development.

A systematic search strategy was employed using keywords such as Indian Knowledge Systems, IKS, NEP 2020, higher education, multidisciplinary education, holistic education, indigenous knowledge, and sustainable development. Priority was given to literature published between 2020 and 2026 to capture recent developments following the implementation of NEP 2020. However, classical educational literature and foundational policy documents were included wherever necessary to strengthen the conceptual framework.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the review, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were followed. Studies were included if they (i) examined Indian Knowledge Systems in relation to higher education or NEP 2020, (ii) discussed curriculum, pedagogy, sustainability, or educational policy, (iii) were published in peer-reviewed journals or recognised institutional reports, and (iv) provided significant theoretical or empirical contributions. Opinion articles lacking scholarly evidence, duplicate publications, and non-academic online sources were excluded.

The collected literature was analysed using thematic content analysis. Similar ideas were organised into six major themes: (i) conceptual foundations of IKS, (ii) policy initiatives under NEP 2020, (iii) curriculum integration and pedagogy, (iv) educational and societal contributions of IKS, (v) opportunities and implementation challenges, and (vi) future policy directions. These themes provide the analytical framework for discussing the five research objectives of the study.

To enhance credibility, evidence was triangulated across policy documents, scholarly literature, and institutional reports. Rather than merely summarising existing studies, the chapter critically compares different scholarly perspectives, identifies areas of agreement and disagreement, and develops an integrated conceptual understanding of IKS implementation in higher education. This analytical approach enhances the originality and academic rigour of the study.

Despite providing a comprehensive synthesis of recent literature, the study has certain limitations. As it relies exclusively on secondary sources, it does not include empirical evidence from students, teachers, or higher education institutions. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as conceptual and policy-oriented. Future empirical studies involving surveys, interviews, and case studies across universities may provide deeper insights into institutional implementation and educational outcomes.

4. Conceptual Framework

Most existing studies discuss the provisions of NEP 2020 or the implementation challenges of Indian Knowledge Systems independently. However, few studies explain how policy initiatives, institutional mechanisms, educational processes, and societal outcomes are interconnected. To address this gap, the present chapter proposes a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationship between policy, implementation, and educational transformation.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework for Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems in Higher Education under NEP 2020

Level	Components	Description
Policy Framework	National Education Policy (NEP) 2020	Provides the policy foundation for transforming higher education through holistic, multidisciplinary, and value-based education.
Core Initiative	Integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)	Promotes the inclusion of India's indigenous knowledge, values, traditions, and practices within higher education curricula and research.
Key Implementation Areas	Curriculum Reform	Incorporation of IKS into academic curricula across disciplines.
	Faculty Development.	Capacity building, training, and orientation of faculty for effective IKS integration.
	Research and Innovation	Promotion of interdisciplinary research based on Indian knowledge traditions.
	Multidisciplinary Learning	Integration of IKS with science, technology, humanities, and social sciences.
	Experiential Pedagogy	Adoption of activity-based, practice-oriented, and experiential teaching-learning approaches.
	Community Engagement	Collaboration with local communities, artisans, traditional knowledge holders, and cultural institutions.
Institutional Implementation.	Universities, Colleges, Research Centres, UGC, AICTE, and Community Partnerships.	Institutional support and implementation of IKS through policy, curriculum, research, faculty initiatives, and collaborative partnerships.
Expected Educational Outcomes	Holistic Learning	Development of intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of learners.

	Critical Thinking	Enhancement of analytical, creative, and problem-solving abilities.
	Ethical Leadership	Promotion of values, integrity, and responsible leadership.
	Employability	Development of practical skills and competencies aligned with contemporary needs.
	Sustainable Development	Integration of indigenous sustainable practices to achieve long-term societal well-being.
	Cultural Preservation	Protection and promotion of India's cultural heritage and traditional knowledge.
	Social Transformation	Creation of an inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive education system.

Source: Author's Compilation (2026)

The conceptual framework illustrates that NEP 2020 serves as the primary policy driver for integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into higher education. The implementation process is supported by curriculum reform, faculty development, interdisciplinary research, experiential pedagogy, innovation, and community engagement. Universities, regulatory bodies, and research institutions operationalise these initiatives through curriculum redesign, faculty training, research projects, institutional collaboration, and partnerships with indigenous knowledge holders.

Successful implementation of these initiatives leads to improved educational outcomes, including holistic learning, ethical leadership, critical thinking, employability, cultural preservation, sustainable development, and social transformation. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on policy recommendations, the present framework demonstrates the dynamic relationship between policy, institutional implementation, educational processes, and long-term societal outcomes. Thus, it provides a comprehensive analytical model for understanding the integration of IKS in higher education.

Table 2. Core Components of Indian Knowledge Systems and Their Relevance to Higher Education

Component of Indian Knowledge Systems	Application in Higher Education	Expected Educational Outcome
Ayurveda .	Health education, preventive healthcare, interdisciplinary. medical studies	Holistic well-being and scientific understanding of traditional medicine
Yoga	Physical education, mental health, stress management.	Physical fitness, emotional resilience, and well-being
Indian Philosophy .	Ethics, value education, critical inquiry	Ethical reasoning, reflective thinking, and responsible citizenship
Vedic Mathematics	Mathematics education, logical reasoning.	Analytical thinking and problem-solving skills
Environmental Ethics	Environmental studies, sustainability education.	Ecological consciousness and sustainable lifestyles
Traditional Agriculture.	Agricultural sciences, rural development.	Sustainable farming and food security
Indigenous Technologies	Engineering, innovation, vocational education.	Contextual innovation and entrepreneurship
Classical Literature and Languages	Humanities, multilingual education.	Cultural preservation, communication, and linguistic competence
Traditional Arts and Crafts	Fine arts, design education, vocational learning.	Creativity, cultural appreciation and livelihood skills

Source: Author's Compilation (2026)

The core components presented in Table 2 demonstrate that Indian Knowledge Systems extend across multiple disciplines, including health sciences, philosophy, mathematics, environmental studies, agriculture, engineering, languages, and fine arts. Their integration into higher education supports holistic learning, interdisciplinary education, innovation, ethical reasoning, environmental responsibility, and cultural preservation. The table also highlights the practical relevance of IKS in enhancing students' employability, critical thinking, and sustainable development competencies.

5. Indian Knowledge Systems under the National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark reform that seeks to transform Indian higher education by integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. Unlike previous educational policies, which largely emphasised Western academic models, NEP 2020 advocates a balanced approach that

combines India's indigenous intellectual traditions with contemporary scientific knowledge. This approach aims to develop graduates who are academically competent, ethically responsible, culturally rooted, and globally competitive.

The policy recognises India's long-standing contributions to philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, governance, linguistics, agriculture, environmental conservation, literature, and performing arts. By incorporating these knowledge traditions into higher education curricula, NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, value-based education, multilingualism, innovation, and research. Consequently, Indian Knowledge Systems become an essential component of educational quality rather than merely a subject of cultural preservation.

To facilitate implementation, several institutional initiatives have been introduced. The establishment of the AICTE Indian Knowledge Systems Division, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2023), faculty development programmes, research grants, digital documentation of manuscripts, and dedicated IKS centres in universities demonstrate the Government of India's commitment to mainstreaming indigenous knowledge within higher education. These initiatives encourage curriculum redesign, interdisciplinary research, collaboration with traditional knowledge holders, and integration of subjects such as Yoga, Ayurveda, Indian philosophy, Vedic Mathematics, environmental ethics, and indigenous technologies.

Despite these policy initiatives, successful implementation depends largely on institutional preparedness. Many higher education institutions continue to face challenges related to inadequate faculty expertise, shortage of teaching-learning materials, limited research infrastructure, financial constraints, language barriers, and lack of standardised curriculum frameworks. Therefore, effective implementation requires coordinated efforts involving policymakers, universities, regulatory bodies, faculty members, researchers, and local communities.

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems has the potential to strengthen educational quality, preserve India's cultural heritage, promote sustainable development, and foster innovation. By combining traditional wisdom with contemporary scientific inquiry, higher education institutions can produce graduates capable of addressing complex national and global challenges through ethical leadership, interdisciplinary thinking, and socially responsible practices.

6. Literature Review

The growing emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has stimulated extensive academic discourse on its relevance to higher education, educational reform, and sustainable development. Recent studies consistently acknowledge that integrating indigenous knowledge into higher education enriches curriculum, strengthens cultural identity, promotes multidisciplinary learning, and contributes to holistic human development. At the same time, researchers identify several institutional, pedagogical, and policy-related challenges that require systematic attention for effective implementation. Based on the reviewed literature, the discussion is organised into four major themes.

6.1 Indian Knowledge Systems and Educational Transformation

A recurring theme in contemporary scholarship is that IKS has the potential to transform higher education by promoting holistic, multidisciplinary, and value-based learning.

Kumar and Kishor (2024) argue that NEP 2020 represents a significant shift from conventional educational models by recognising indigenous knowledge as an essential component of quality education. The inclusion of disciplines such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Indian philosophy, Vedic Mathematics, astronomy, arts, and classical languages broadens the scope of higher education beyond disciplinary specialisation. Their study highlights experiential learning, multilingual education, ethical development, and critical thinking as major educational outcomes.

Similarly, Mishra et al. (2024) emphasise that integrating traditional Indian knowledge with modern scientific education promotes innovation, employability, interdisciplinary research, and problem-solving abilities. Rather than viewing indigenous knowledge and contemporary science as competing systems, the authors argue that their complementary integration creates a more comprehensive educational framework.

A critical comparison of these studies suggests that curriculum reform alone is insufficient. Educational transformation also depends on institutional preparedness, faculty competence, research opportunities, and innovative pedagogical practices. Therefore, universities must adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates IKS into teaching, research, extension activities, and community engagement.

6.2 Indian Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Development

Another significant theme emerging from the literature is the contribution of Indian Knowledge Systems to sustainable development. Contemporary sustainability discourse increasingly recognises indigenous knowledge as a valuable resource for addressing environmental degradation, biodiversity conservation, climate change, public health, and responsible resource management.

Lal et al. (2024) observe that Indian Knowledge Systems integrate environmental ethics, philosophy, agriculture, healthcare, and community-based resource management into a holistic educational framework. Such integration enhances ecological awareness, ethical responsibility, and sustainable lifestyles among students. Likewise, Dei (2025) argues that traditional agricultural practices, indigenous healthcare systems, water conservation techniques, and local craftsmanship contribute significantly to environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and economic resilience.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that IKS supports several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). However, greater empirical research is required to evaluate the practical impact of integrating indigenous sustainability practices into university curricula.

6.3 Institutional Initiatives and Policy Support under NEP 2020

The successful implementation of Indian Knowledge Systems depends significantly on institutional support and educational policy. NEP 2020 has created a favourable policy environment by encouraging curriculum reform, multidisciplinary education, faculty development, research, innovation, and collaboration with traditional knowledge practitioners.

Mandal (2026) highlights that initiatives such as the establishment of the AICTE Indian Knowledge Systems Division, National Curriculum Framework (2023), digital learning platforms, and dedicated research centres have strengthened institutional

recognition of indigenous knowledge. Similarly, Singh (2026) notes that government initiatives focusing on curriculum revision, faculty development, digitisation of manuscripts, and interdisciplinary research have accelerated the integration of IKS into higher education.

Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven across institutions because of differences in infrastructure, funding, institutional commitment, and faculty expertise. Therefore, policy reforms must be accompanied by adequate institutional capacity building, financial support, and continuous monitoring to achieve meaningful educational outcomes.

6.4 Challenges and Emerging Research Gaps

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of Indian Knowledge Systems, existing studies consistently identify several implementation challenges. These include inadequate faculty preparedness, limited institutional resources, lack of standardised curricula, language barriers, insufficient funding, limited interdisciplinary collaboration, and inadequate mechanisms for scientifically validating traditional knowledge.

The literature also reveals important research gaps. Most available studies are conceptual or policy-oriented, while relatively few examine institutional practices, faculty perceptions, student learning outcomes, curriculum effectiveness, or long-term educational impacts. Comparative studies across universities and states remain limited. Addressing these gaps requires rigorous empirical research that evaluates the effectiveness of IKS implementation across diverse institutional contexts.

7. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into higher education extends beyond cultural preservation and represents a comprehensive educational reform that supports innovation, sustainable development, and social transformation. The findings are discussed according to the five objectives of the study.

7.1 Objective 1: Philosophical Foundations and Educational Significance of IKS

Indian Knowledge Systems are grounded in the philosophy of holistic education, which emphasises the balanced development of intellectual, emotional, ethical, spiritual, and physical dimensions of learners. Unlike conventional education that often prioritises disciplinary specialisation, IKS promotes experiential learning, critical inquiry, value-based education, and lifelong learning.

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that integrating Indian philosophy, Yoga, Ayurveda, Vedic Mathematics, environmental ethics, and indigenous knowledge enhances analytical thinking, creativity, ethical reasoning, and responsible citizenship. Therefore, the educational significance of IKS lies not only in preserving India's intellectual heritage but also in developing globally competent and socially responsible graduates.

7.2 Objective 2: Role of NEP 2020 in Promoting IKS

The analysis indicates that NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive policy framework for mainstreaming Indian Knowledge Systems in higher education. The policy promotes multidisciplinary education, flexibility in curriculum design, research, innovation, multilingual education, faculty development, and collaboration with indigenous knowledge practitioners.

Government initiatives such as the AICTE Indian Knowledge Systems Division, National Curriculum Framework (2023), faculty

development programmes, and establishment of IKS Centres have significantly strengthened institutional support. However, effective implementation depends upon institutional readiness, qualified faculty, adequate financial resources, and continuous policy support.

7.3 Objective 3: Contribution of IKS to Education, Society and Sustainable Development

The literature demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems make significant contributions to educational quality, social development, and sustainability. Educationally, IKS promotes holistic learning, interdisciplinary knowledge, ethical values, creativity, and innovation. Socially, it preserves cultural heritage, strengthens national identity, encourages multilingualism, and promotes inclusive education.

From the perspective of sustainable development, IKS contributes to environmental conservation, biodiversity management, traditional healthcare, sustainable agriculture, responsible resource utilisation, and ecological awareness. Consequently, integrating IKS into higher education directly supports several Sustainable Development Goals and prepares students to address emerging global challenges.

7.4 Objective 4: Opportunities and Challenges

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems offers several opportunities, including curriculum innovation, interdisciplinary research, faculty collaboration, community engagement, skill development, entrepreneurship, and global academic recognition.

However, implementation continues to face significant challenges such as inadequate faculty expertise, shortage of teaching-learning materials, limited institutional infrastructure, insufficient funding, language barriers, lack of empirical research, and absence of standardised curricular frameworks. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts among policymakers, regulatory agencies, universities, researchers, and local communities.

Table 3. Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategic Interventions for Integrating IKS in Higher Education

Dimension	Opportunities	Challenges	Recommended Strategies
Curriculum	Multidisciplinary and holistic education.	Lack of standardized curriculum	Curriculum redesign integrating IKS across disciplines
Faculty	Interdisciplinary teaching and research	Limited faculty expertise	Faculty development programmes and refresher courses
Research .	Indigenous innovation and knowledge creation	Limited empirical research	Interdisciplinary and evidence-based research
Students	Holistic development and employability	Limited awareness of lKS	Experiential learning, internships, and field engagement
Institutions	Academic innovation	Financial and	Dedicated IKS centres

	and global visibility	infrastructural constraints	and institutional funding
Society	Cultural preservation and sustainable development	Weak university-community collaboration	Partnerships with indigenous communities and knowledge practitioners

Source: Author's Compilation (2026)

7.5 Objective 5: Strategies for Effective Integration

The analysis suggests that effective implementation of Indian Knowledge Systems requires a comprehensive institutional strategy. Universities should redesign curricula to integrate IKS across disciplines rather than treating it as an isolated subject. Continuous faculty development programmes, interdisciplinary research projects, institutional collaborations, and partnerships with indigenous knowledge practitioners should be strengthened.

Greater investment is also needed in establishing dedicated IKS Centres, digital repositories, research funding, and multilingual teaching-learning resources. Universities should encourage experiential learning through field visits, internships, community-based projects, and documentation of indigenous knowledge practices. In addition, regulatory bodies should formulate standard curriculum guidelines and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure consistency across institutions.

Collectively, these strategies will strengthen the implementation of NEP 2020 and contribute to building a higher education system that is inclusive, culturally rooted, globally competitive, and sustainable.

8. Major Findings

The findings of this review are organised according to the five research objectives to ensure consistency between the objectives, analysis, and conclusion, as recommended by the editorial review.

Finding 1: Indian Knowledge Systems provide a holistic foundation for higher education (Related to Objective 1)

The review reveals that Indian Knowledge Systems extend beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge by integrating intellectual, ethical, emotional, cultural, environmental, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Unlike conventional education, which often emphasises subject specialisation, IKS promotes holistic development through experiential learning, critical inquiry, value-based education, and lifelong learning. Consequently, integrating IKS enhances students' analytical abilities, ethical reasoning, creativity, and social responsibility, making higher education more inclusive and learner-centred.

Finding 2: NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive policy framework for integrating IKS (Related to Objective 2)

The analysis indicates that the National Education Policy 2020 provides a strong policy foundation for mainstreaming Indian Knowledge Systems within higher education. Its emphasis on multidisciplinary education, curriculum flexibility, promotion of Indian languages, faculty development, research, innovation, and institutional collaboration creates favourable conditions for effective implementation. Initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of

Education, AICTE, UGC, and other regulatory bodies demonstrate the Government's commitment towards strengthening IKS integration. However, successful implementation depends on institutional preparedness and sustained policy support.

Finding 3: Indian Knowledge Systems contribute significantly to education, society, and sustainable development (Related to Objective 3)

The review demonstrates that IKS contributes substantially to educational transformation, social development, and sustainability. Educationally, it promotes holistic learning, multidisciplinary education, ethical leadership, and critical thinking. Socially, it strengthens cultural identity, multilingualism, social inclusion, and responsible citizenship. Environmentally, IKS supports sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, traditional healthcare, environmental ethics, and responsible resource management. These contributions closely align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 3, 4, 11, 12, and 13.

Finding 4: Multiple institutional challenges hinder effective implementation of IKS (Related to Objective 4)

Despite the favourable policy environment created by NEP 2020, several challenges continue to hinder effective implementation. These include inadequate faculty preparedness, shortage of qualified resource persons, insufficient curriculum integration, limited institutional infrastructure, lack of quality teaching-learning materials, financial constraints, language barriers, and inadequate empirical research. These findings indicate that policy reforms alone cannot ensure successful implementation unless supported by institutional capacity building and adequate financial investment.

Finding 5: Collaborative and strategic institutional interventions are essential for successful implementation (Related to Objective 5)

The review suggests that the effective integration of Indian Knowledge Systems requires coordinated efforts among policymakers, universities, regulatory agencies, researchers, local communities, and traditional knowledge practitioners. Curriculum redesign, faculty capacity building, interdisciplinary research, digital documentation of indigenous knowledge, community engagement, multilingual educational resources, and dedicated IKS centres emerge as the most important strategies for strengthening implementation. A collaborative institutional approach is therefore essential for realising the objectives of NEP 2020.

9. Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a transformative vision for Indian higher education by advocating the systematic integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into teaching, learning, research, innovation, and community engagement. This chapter has critically examined the philosophical foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems, analysed the role of NEP 2020, synthesised contemporary literature, identified implementation opportunities and challenges, and proposed strategies for strengthening the integration of IKS in higher education institutions. In doing so, the chapter has addressed all five research objectives and provided a comprehensive understanding of the educational significance of IKS.

The analysis demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems represent a dynamic and evolving body of knowledge with significant relevance for contemporary higher education. Their contribution extends beyond cultural preservation to include educational innovation, ethical leadership, interdisciplinary research,

environmental sustainability, community development, and responsible citizenship. The integration of indigenous knowledge with modern scientific inquiry provides opportunities for developing graduates who are intellectually competent, culturally rooted, socially responsible, and globally competitive.

The study further highlights that NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive policy framework for integrating IKS through curriculum reforms, multidisciplinary education, faculty development, research promotion, innovation, multilingual education, and institutional collaboration. Nevertheless, meaningful implementation requires more than policy provisions. Universities need adequate institutional infrastructure, qualified faculty members, financial resources, standardised curriculum frameworks, research support, and continuous capacity-building initiatives to translate policy objectives into effective educational practice.

An important contribution of this chapter lies in demonstrating the close relationship between Indian Knowledge Systems and sustainable development. Indigenous knowledge relating to environmental conservation, traditional healthcare, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity management, architecture, water conservation, and community governance provides valuable solutions to several contemporary global challenges. Integrating these knowledge traditions into higher education contributes not only to preserving India's intellectual heritage but also to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through socially responsible and environmentally sustainable educational practices.

The chapter also identifies several implementation challenges, including inadequate faculty preparedness, limited research infrastructure, shortage of quality teaching-learning materials, language barriers, financial constraints, and uneven institutional readiness. Addressing these challenges requires curriculum innovation, faculty development, interdisciplinary research, stronger collaboration with traditional knowledge practitioners, digital preservation of indigenous knowledge, and sustained policy support.

Finally, the conceptual framework proposed in this chapter offers an integrated understanding of how policy initiatives, institutional implementation, curriculum reform, faculty development, research, and community engagement collectively contribute to educational transformation. The framework provides a useful foundation for future empirical studies and institutional planning.

In conclusion, the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems should not be viewed merely as a cultural initiative but as a transformative educational strategy capable of strengthening higher education while promoting social inclusion, ethical leadership, innovation, and sustainable development. When implemented through evidence-based policies, interdisciplinary collaboration, and institutional commitment, IKS has the potential to create a higher education system that is academically excellent, culturally rooted, globally relevant, and sustainable.

Future Research Directions

Future research should move beyond conceptual discussions and undertake empirical investigations involving students, teachers, university administrators, policymakers, and traditional knowledge practitioners. Comparative studies across universities and states, evaluation of student learning outcomes, assessment of curriculum implementation, and analysis of innovative pedagogical practices will further strengthen the evidence base for integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into higher education. Such studies will contribute significantly to

refining policy implementation and achieving the transformative vision of NEP 2020.

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Chapter 7: Transforming Commerce and Management Education Through Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities, Challenges, and a Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly transforming Commerce and Management education, evolving from a peripheral tool into a foundational architecture for teaching, learning, and career preparation. This study examines how adaptive learning platforms, intelligent tutoring systems, learning analytics, generative AI, and immersive technologies are reshaping pedagogy across accounting, finance, marketing, economics, human resource management, and business analytics. Adopting a conceptual, literature-driven review methodology, the study synthesizes existing scholarship to map the opportunities and challenges of AI integration in this domain.

Findings indicate that AI enables significant pedagogical shifts—such as real-time market simulations replacing static case studies in finance, and generative tools accelerating campaign design in marketing—thereby enhancing personalization, industry readiness, and skill acquisition. Administrative automation is found to free up faculty time, while learning analytics strengthens institutional decision-making. However, the review also identifies critical challenges, including algorithmic bias, data privacy risks, digital inequality, and gaps in faculty preparedness, all of which underscore the need for robust ethical governance.

The study concludes that realizing AI's potential in Commerce and Management education requires continuous curriculum redesign, sustained faculty development, and deeper university-industry collaboration that moves beyond conventional internships toward co-created learning ecosystems. A framework integrating pedagogical, technological, ethical, and career-readiness dimensions is proposed to guide responsible adoption. Ultimately, the study argues that the future of this field will be determined not by whether AI is adopted, but by how thoughtfully and equitably it is integrated into academic practice.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Commerce Education, Management Education, Higher Education, Digital Literacy, Generative AI, Ethics in AI

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence has shifted from a niche branch of computer science into a force that is actively reconfiguring economies, industries, and higher education. Machine learning, natural language processing, generative AI, and predictive analytics now extend far beyond automating clerical routines; they enable complex decision-making, knowledge creation, and individualized learning trajectories. AI is not merely a tool but a strategic driver of digital transformation across universities and the global business environment (Wang et al., 2024).

Within higher education, the adoption of AI-powered systems is accelerating. Intelligent tutoring, adaptive platforms, learning analytics, virtual assistants, and generative applications are producing flexible, data-rich learning environments. These technologies alter the educator's role from transmitter of knowledge to orchestrator of dynamic learning experiences, while students gain agency through personalized pathways. The result is a pedagogical shift toward continuous skill development rather than static content delivery (Bond et al., 2024).

Commerce and Management education cannot remain insulated. Modern organizations deploy AI in financial analysis, marketing intelligence, human resource management, supply chain optimization, and strategic decision-making. Today's employers need graduates who can do more than just pass tests; they want people who understand AI, think critically, and know how to solve messy, real-world problems. Look at accounting, for example: instead of doing rote ledger exercises, students now need to work through AI-driven audit simulations where the real skill lies in interpreting data, not just balancing numbers (Peláez-Sánchez et al., 2024).

This means universities have to change how they teach. Higher education needs to work hand-in-hand with local businesses so students are trained on the exact software they'll use on day one of the job. At the same time, ethics can't be an afterthought—students need to know how to spot algorithmic bias and protect user privacy (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2024).

The key drivers necessitating this transformation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Drivers Necessitating AI Integration in Commerce and Management Education

Driver	Educational Implication
Digital transformation	Curriculum modernization
Industry 4.0	AI-enabled business education
Data-driven decision making	Analytical skill development
Automation of business functions	Higher-order thinking
Employer demand	AI-ready graduates
Generative AI	AI literacy for students and faculty

Source: Author's Compilation

1.2 Research Gap and Chapter Objectives

While researchers have written extensively about AI in higher education, the current literature is deeply fractured. Most studies either hype up the latest tech tools or look strictly at classroom teaching methods. What we actually need is a unified view—one that connects teaching methods, career prep, ethics, faculty training, university policy, and the specific ways AI is changing fields like commerce and management (Bond et al., 2024).

This chapter addresses that gap by focusing on five core goals:

- **Reshaping Business Education:** Examining how AI is fundamentally

changing what students need to learn in commerce and management programs.

- **Analyzing New Tech Tools:** Evaluating how platforms like adaptive learning systems, virtual tutors, and generative AI are changing classroom dynamics.
- **Weighing Pros and Cons:** Looking honestly at both the benefits of AI and its serious ethical risks, from data privacy concerns to algorithmic bias and tech inequality.
- **Building a Career-Ready Framework:** Developing a clear model that ties AI training directly to a graduate's actual hireability and workplace readiness.
- **Offering Actionable Steps:** Providing practical advice for teachers, administrators, and policymakers trying to update their educational systems.

By taking this comprehensive approach, we can ensure business schools don't just add AI to their brochures as a gimmick, but actually weave it into their programs responsibly and strategically (Ogunleye et al., 2024).

2. Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

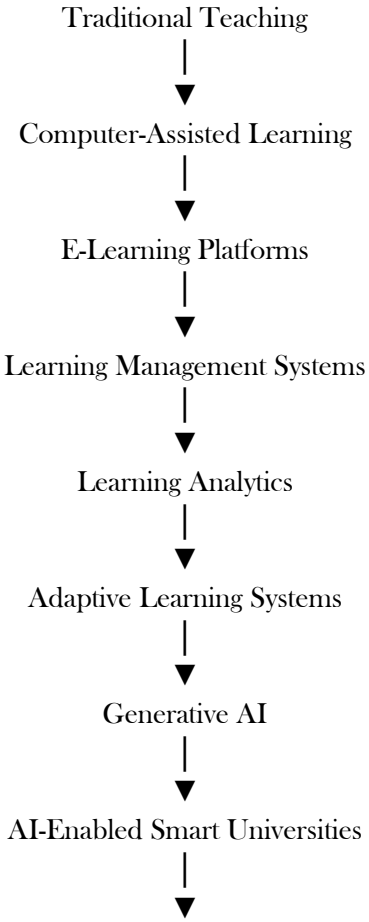
Artificial Intelligence has journeyed from the early days of computer-assisted instruction and rule-based expert systems into a transformative force reshaping universities worldwide. Initially, its role was modest—supporting limited learning activities. With the rise of machine learning, cloud computing, big data, and natural language processing, AI began to power adaptive learning, intelligent tutoring, automated assessment, and predictive analytics. The most recent leap—generative AI—has expanded the horizon dramatically, enabling content creation, personalized learning, academic writing support, and real-time problem-solving. What began as technology-assisted education has matured into intelligent ecosystems that continuously adapt to learner needs (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2024).

This educational transformation mirrors the industrial revolutions. Industry 4.0 emphasizes digitalization, automation, cyber-physical systems, and intelligent decision-making. In parallel, Education 4.0 advocates learner-centred, technology-enabled, competency-based approaches. Universities now deploy AI to create flexible learning environments, streamline administration, monitor student performance, and support evidence-based decision-making. AI-powered learning management systems and analytics reveal learning patterns, personalize instructional strategies, and strengthen student retention.

Generative AI has accelerated this trajectory. Unlike earlier systems that primarily analyzed data, generative models produce text, images, presentations, code, simulations, and interactive materials. Educators are rethinking instructional practices—using AI for lesson planning, assessment design, personalized feedback, and collaborative learning. Students, meanwhile, employ AI for research support, concept clarification, language refinement, programming assistance, and self-directed study. For example, business schools increasingly integrate AI-driven audit simulations, allowing accounting students to practice with real-world datasets rather than static exercises (Ribeiro et al., 2024).

Yet this rapid adoption demands balance. Institutions must safeguard academic integrity, ensure ethical responsibility, and establish responsible governance. The evolution of AI in higher education is not simply technological—it is pedagogical, ethical, and institutional, requiring universities to adapt with foresight and accountability (Bond et al., 2024).

Figure 1. Evolution of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education



Source: Author's Compilation

3. Literature Review and Research Gap

The scholarly discourse on Artificial Intelligence in higher education has expanded rapidly, yet its treatment remains uneven. Current scholarship widely acknowledges that AI transforms classrooms and administration, yet it routinely neglects the unique demands of Commerce and Management education. A thematic synthesis of the literature reveals five fragmented research streams (Bond et al., 2024):

- **AI-Enabled Pedagogy:** Intelligent tutoring systems and adaptive platforms customize instruction to individual learning paces. However, implementation success is highly uneven, split sharply between resource-rich institutions and digitally unequipped campuses.
- **Analytics and Assessment:** Automated grading systems accelerate feedback while predictive data shapes curriculum design. The core risk here is over-reliance on algorithms, which threatens to replace human academic judgment with opaque "black-box" decision-making.
- **Generative AI Integration:** Tools capable of producing text, code, and financial models have revolutionized content creation. While they boost productivity for both faculty and students, they simultaneously spark fierce debates over

academic integrity, misinformation, and intellectual dependency.

- **Literacy and Employability:** The modern workforce demands AI-literate graduates. Beyond basic technical skills, employers prioritize candidates who possess the analytical reasoning and professional judgment required to manage intelligent systems effectively.
- **Ethics and Governance:** Responsible adoption requires strict data privacy protocols, algorithmic fairness, inclusive policies, and continuous faculty upskilling to maintain institutional trust (Watters et al., 2025).

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of Existing Literature and Research Gaps

Research Theme	Current Understanding	Identified Research Gap
AI-enabled teaching and learning	Improves personalization, engagement and learning efficiency	Limited discipline-specific pedagogical models for Commerce and Management education
AI-supported assessment and learning analytics	Enhances feedback, monitoring and evidence-based decision-making	Insufficient research on ethical assessment frameworks and human oversight
Generative AI in higher education	Supports content creation, research assistance and productivity	Limited evidence on long-term learning outcomes and responsible classroom integration
AI literacy and graduate employability	AI competencies increasingly influence employability	Weak integration between AI literacy, curriculum design and professional competency development
Ethics, governance and institutional readiness	Privacy, bias and transparency are widely recognised concerns	Lack of comprehensive governance frameworks integrating policy, faculty readiness and institutional transformation

Source: Author's Compilation

The identified gaps provide the rationale for developing an integrated conceptual framework that explains the relationships among AI technologies, pedagogical innovation, student competency development, career readiness, and graduate employability within Commerce and Management education.

4. Proposed Conceptual Framework for AI Integration in Commerce and Management Education

Current literature too often treats AI as either a technical artifact or a pedagogical add-on; it rarely situates these capabilities within the full business education ecosystem. I propose a systems view: AI functions as an operational catalyst, not a cosmetic upgrade. Generative engines, predictive analytics, adaptive learning platforms, and automated assessment tools interact to reconfigure instructional architecture—producing personalized learning trajectories, continuous formative assessment, and empirically driven pedagogy. Where traditional LMS updates tweak delivery, AI alters the locus of decision-making in the classroom by surfacing learner signals and enabling real-time instructional adjustments (Zhou & Schofield, 2024).

That pedagogical shift produces different graduate competencies. Employers no longer seek only disciplinary knowledge; they demand interpretive capacity for algorithmic outputs,

robust digital literacy, sharpened ethical judgment, and organizational adaptability. In short: students must learn to interrogate models, not merely consume their outputs. AI-infused programs prioritize meta skills that enable graduates to translate data insights into managerial action (Kassorla et al., 2024).

Competency development drives career readiness, which in turn shapes employability. The pipeline is causal: pedagogical design → competency formation → workplace preparedness → graduate outcomes.

Institutional Moderators of AI Integration

Yet this pipeline's integrity depends on institutional moderators. Five factors decide whether AI actually produces workforce-ready graduates rather than just workforce-adjacent ones.

Faculty AI Literacy

If instructors can't read, critique, or actually deploy the models they're teaching with, the pedagogical exercise loses credibility fast. This is the enabler everything else depends on.

Institutional Infrastructure

Scalable platforms, compute access, and technical support aren't optional extras — they're baseline requirements for any implementation to hold up beyond a pilot.

Ethical Governance

Policy on academic integrity, data privacy, and algorithmic fairness needs to be operationalized rather than written into a document and forgotten. Declared standards mean little without practice to match.

Curriculum Design and Leadership

Strategic curricular architecture and sustained executive sponsorship are what turn a one-off pilot into a lasting program. Without leadership backing, good ideas rarely outlive their first semester.

Digital Inclusion and Industry Collaboration

None of the above works without equitable access and real industry ties. Unequal access and disconnection from employer needs both undercut relevance quickly.

How These Factors Interact

These five don't operate independently. Weak governance can undo strong infrastructure investment just as easily as a lack of faculty fluency can waste a good industry partnership. Robust leadership and clear ethics, conversely, can stretch modest technical investment further than expected.

Scholarly Contribution of the Proposed Framework

The framework advances the literature in four distinct ways:

- **Unified conceptual model** — It integrates AI technologies, pedagogical innovation, competency development, and employability into a single structure, moving beyond fragmented studies that treat these dimensions in isolation.
- **Institutional and ethical moderators** — It introduces governance, infrastructure, faculty literacy, and ethical safeguards as moderating variables, highlighting that technological adoption alone cannot ensure educational quality or equity.
- **Commerce and Management perspective** — It situates AI integration within the specific demands of business disciplines, extending general higher education debates into accounting, finance, marketing, HRM, and analytics.
- **Foundation for empirical research** — It provides a practical basis for future studies to validate, refine, or extend the relationships between AI-enabled pedagogy, competency development, and employability outcomes.

5. AI Applications in Commerce and Management Education

Artificial Intelligence is no longer peripheral in business education; it is embedded across disciplines, transforming how knowledge is taught, applied, and assessed. Rather than existing

as a standalone subject, AI functions as an enabling technology that strengthens analytical reasoning, experiential learning, and industry preparedness. Rather than treating AI as a standalone IT topic, modern business curricula integrate it as an analytical tool to enhance student reasoning and decision-making (Saxena et al., 2025).

The classroom no longer trains students to memorize fixed facts; it trains them to probe adaptive models and deploy AI as an active analytic partner. In contemporary finance education, for example, trainees no longer perform manual database extracts and spreadsheet manipulations as ends in themselves. There is a shift from retrieval labor to on-demand model interrogation, where hypothesis testing and model governance replace rote extraction. Across commerce disciplines the transformation is deep and discipline-specific.

- **Accounting.** Traditional ledgers and checklist audits cede ground to automated audit engines and anomaly detection pipelines. Students focus on designing control logic, interpreting algorithmic exception reports, and quantifying compliance exposure and fraud propensity rather than transcribing entries.
- **Finance.** Predictive analytics and machine learning recast asset valuation practice. Learners construct algorithmic forecasting systems, calibrate time series and factor models, and embed portfolio optimization solvers to quantify market and credit risk with formal statistical rigor.
- **Marketing.** Static campaign briefs are replaced by predictive customer architectures. NLP and sentiment classifiers feed automated campaign orchestration, dynamic pricing experiments, and highly granular persona targeting; practitioners run A/B tests driven by continual behavioral signal streams.
- **Economics.** Econometric coursework broadens into large-scale simulation and causal discovery across noisy macro datasets. Students specify structural models, run counterfactual policy experiments at scale, and stress test systemic responses beyond simple regression frameworks.
- **Human Resource Management.** Teaching shifts from personnel administration to algorithmic workforce design. Coursework evaluates automated résumé triage, workforce scheduling optimizers, and employee sentiment analytics, with an emphasis on auditing models for bias, disparate impact, and privacy leakage.
- **Business Analytics.** Machine learning and visual analytics form the operational backbone. Trainees translate high-velocity, messy data streams into decision rules and KPIs, implement feature engineering pipelines, and assess model explainability for executive decision support.
- **Operations and Supply Chain.** Predictive logistics becomes baseline practice. Real-time simulations inform inventory policies, route planning, and disruption mitigation.
- **Entrepreneurship.** Generative models accelerate ideation. Founders prototype competitor analyses, draft business models, and simulate product-market fit before committing capital.
- **Business Communication.** Beyond grammar checks, students use multilingual translation, negotiate with interactive AI role players, and critically evaluate AI-generated messaging for authenticity and tone.

This integration amplifies, rather than replaces, foundational business theory. Grounding AI tools in rigorous frameworks—valuation theory, audit standards, causal inference, organizational behavior—ensures graduates can translate algorithmic output into defensible managerial action. The contrast is stark: where traditional curricula trained recall, AI-infused programs train interrogation, interpretation, and ethical stewardship (Ballantine et al., 2024).

6. Opportunities, Challenges, and Ethical Issues in AI-Enabled Commerce and Management Education

Bringing AI into Commerce and Management education comes with real promise, but also real risk — and how well institutions manage that risk determines whether AI ends up strengthening or undermining educational quality (Navigating Opportunities and Challenges of Generative AI in Higher Education, 2025).

Opportunities

Adaptive systems can track student behaviour, spot gaps, and recommend pathways suited to the individual learner. For management programmes especially, this means students with very different starting points can work toward advanced analytical and financial competencies at their own pace.

On the teaching side, generative AI is already useful for lesson planning, case development, and feedback, while learning analytics let faculty catch struggling students early rather than after the fact. That frees up time for the parts of teaching that still need a human — mentoring, discussion, experiential work.

There's also a career angle. Students who work with AI tools in finance, marketing, HRM, and operations classes pick up digital literacy and decision-making skills that map fairly directly onto what employers are asking for now.

Challenges

Generative AI has made plagiarism and ghostwriting harder to catch, which pushes institutions toward assessment formats — project-based work, oral exams — that are harder to fake.

Reliability is a separate problem. AI outputs can be wrong, can cite sources that don't exist, and can carry bias forward from training data. Leaning on it too heavily risks dulling the critical thinking it's supposed to support, so it needs to stay a tool rather than become the answer itself.

Access is uneven too. Not every institution or student has the same infrastructure, and closing that gap takes real investment in affordable technology and support — not just good intentions.

And faculty, in many cases, simply haven't caught up. Structured professional development isn't optional here; without it, AI adoption stalls or gets implemented badly.

Ethical Issues

Student data privacy is a growing concern as AI platforms collect and process more of it, raising questions about consent and security that most institutions haven't fully worked out.

Bias is the other major issue — training data that reflects existing inequalities can end up reproducing them at scale unless institutions actively check for it.

Governance ties both together. Clear policy, regular audits of how these systems are actually being used, and compliance with legal standards are what make responsible adoption possible rather than just declared

7. Faculty & Institutional Readiness

The success of Artificial Intelligence in Commerce and Management education depends less on the sophistication of the tools themselves than on the preparedness of faculty, the strength of institutional leadership, and the clarity of supportive policy frameworks. Without these, even the most advanced AI systems risk becoming underutilized or misapplied (Katsamakas et al., 2024).

Faculty Readiness

Educators must evolve from knowledge transmitters into facilitators of AI-supported learning environments. This requires continuous professional development in:

- AI literacy and digital pedagogy

- Prompt engineering for effective generative AI use
- Learning analytics to interpret student data responsibly
- Ethical AI practices and AI-assisted assessment design

Structured capacity-building programs should encourage experimentation while teaching critical evaluation of AI outputs. Interdisciplinary collaboration—between Commerce, Management, Computer Science, and Data Analytics faculty—can foster innovative practices aligned with industry needs (Liang et al., 2025).

Institutional Readiness

Universities must invest in:

- Robust digital infrastructure (secure LMS, cloud computing, AI-enabled platforms)
- Clear AI policies defining acceptable use, academic integrity, data governance, and intellectual property
- Mechanisms to protect student privacy while promoting transparency, accountability, and equity (McDonald et al., 2024)

8. Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping business education by changing how we teach, assess, and prepare students for employment. This chapter moves past the view of AI as a mere tech upgrade, positioning it instead as a structural catalyst. By synthesizing current research, we targeted critical literature gaps and introduced a framework linking technology, teaching innovation, skill acquisition, and career readiness. Successful deployment relies heavily on faculty readiness, robust digital infrastructure, ethical governance, and tight corporate partnerships. While AI customizes learning and sharpens student analytics, schools must actively manage threats to academic integrity, data privacy, and equitable access.

Looking ahead, researchers must test this framework across varied global institutions. Next-generation technologies like multimodal AI and autonomous agents will continue to shift classroom boundaries. By taking a balanced, learner-centered path, universities can graduate professionals who mix technical AI fluency with the deep human leadership required to guide a digital economy (Castillo-Martínez et al., 2024).

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Chapter 8: Rethinking Tribal Resurgence: The Politics of Identity and Indigenous Rights of Assam

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Abstract

The abstract foregrounds the resurgence of Karbi and Dimasaidentity politics incontemporary India. Traditionally, tribes in Northeast India have practisedvillage councils and village courts at the village level. In the modern system, tribes were granted autonomy, communities, and ethnic constitutional rights to organise their own land. However, research on the factors behind Indigenous revival and the protection of customary rights and traditions is limited. The main objective of this study was to explore the beliefs and narratives of the Karbi and Dimasa customary elements in Assam'sSixth Schedule districtcouncils and long-standing demands for a settled autonomous state within it.Data were generated from structured interviews and questionnairesand analysed to examine how respondentsrelate to traditional village councilsand customary resurgence.The analysis revealed that the Indigenous communities share several main characteristics. First, a tribal-identity-based rights framework for cultural protection isexamined in the context ofrevival of peoplehood. Second, revival of indigenous customsenhances protection and safeguards constitutional rights, and the analysis examines the model that reclaims responsibility-based ethics. Third, the tribal resurgence framework is used to protect the Karbi and Dimasa communities and assess how ecological site development is on ancestral lands. Finally, indigenous assessment development uses standard constitutional metrics to assess existing rights and duties. The findings suggest that Indigenous communities should be aware of their anthropological needs and reflect on how to fulfil them. Furthermore, village council governance should trust the headman and elders and actively support their socio-cultural development,as well as that of villagers and elders. This study aims to examine how Indigenous communities can foster identity and moral self-governance, such as village councils at the grassroots and autonomous councils at the district level.

***Keywords**: Karbi, Dimasa, rights, moral governance, traditionalstate apparatus, resurgence.*

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Introduction

Thisstudyfocuses on the earliest tribes of Assam, safeguarded by the Sixth Scheduleof the Indian Constitution.States in Northeast India, such as Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, and Karbi and Dimasa in Assam, are included in this Schedule. Tribes in Assam face many issues, including economic backwardness, poor infrastructure for basic and higher education, and communication and language barriers. They need special attention and supportthrough ground ethnographic research, distinct cultures, faith, heritage practices and socio-cultural identities (Roy, D., 2026, 1-13).The study background highlighted that colonial ethnography constructed tribes as 'primitive" and uncivilised, forestmen, Jungliwala, and the burdens they bore.However, several uprisings in India, such as the Santhal Hul (1855-56), Munda Ulgulan (1899-1900), and Telangana Rebellion (1946-51), revealed that exploitation rooted in land rights and ecological care is reflected in this study.This study examines endurance discourses: the government shouldpromotethe idea that Indigenous peoples are intertwined with their ancestral landsand culturalidentity (Dr Rukhaiyar, B., 2025). Their distinctive customary laws and native beliefsare consideredconstitutive difficulties in the study.

At present, the main issue is thatgovernmenturbanisation activities and selfhood politics erode autochthonous culture, ancestral land, political rights,and Aboriginal communities faceheartbreakingpolitical issuesin India (De Debasree, 2025), which addresses the unspoken tension of depopulation, depriving immemorial land for infrastructure, and creatingthemas strangers in their homeland.This issue highlights the erosion of immemorial rights and bourgeois expansion, revealing how constitutional rights deteriorate to conserve the Indigenous soul identity (Tiwary, Ed.), reflecting a problem-constructive model ofvanishing immemorial customs and modernity that segregates them, fulfilling the stated research objectives.The study of self-governance and indigenous politics approaches has yielded several results, and itsshortcomings in Indigenous identity politics provide uniform assessments and address viability issues.

The basic objective is to explore a tribal identity-based rights paradigm and torevivecustomaryconstitutional rights. This study exploreshowtraditional villages can revive their historical inclusion and exercise their ancestral rights. This research adopts resurgence methods to analyse identity-based, historical and customarydiscourse,and deliberativeapproaches. The research question adopted in this study is: How can Indigenous people revive their traditions and selfhood rights in Assam's Tribal Hills Districts?In what wayscan the hill tribesrevive their customs and traditions? What differentiates tribal resurgence from identity politics?The proposed paradigmwas trained to usepeoplehood and reassertthe obligation-based ethicsparadigm, and its consensus-building was assessed for its accuracy and precision.

This study remainsorganised as follows: Section 1 presentsthe introduction,and Section 2 presents related literature on the politics of Selfhood and Indigenous resurgenceand offersan Aboriginal rights-based discourse. Section 3 briefly analyses the proposedapproach. Section 4 presents the findings and ananalyticaldiscourse. Section 5 presents the findings,limitations, andimplications.Section 6 concludeswith anoverview of the innovative aspects and outlook for further study.

Review of Literature

Section 2 presents a literature review of related studies. Kyle et al. (2019) urged the recognition of Indigenous communities' need to protect their ancestral lands and freshwater resources from pollution. This suggests that the three main advantages of Indigenous land conservation- traditional wisdom, community-based policymaking, and customs are lacking. He urges that Canada, Australia, and Brazil hold vast Indigenous lands that are prominent in international biodiversity and conservation efforts. Another prominent scholar, Andrea Casquez-Fernandez and Ahenakew P. T. P.

Taa (2020) stated that Indigenous voices are excluded because of the neoliberal framework of privatisation. They propose a common ontology grounded not merely in opposition but in Indigenous respect for the connections among humansand ancestral worlds. This suggests separating heritage survival, territorial integrity, and environmental custodianship does not regenerate relations, as highlighted in Indigenous and environmental anthropologies(Andrea and Ahenakew, 2020). Sherwin (2021) urges a reassessment of comparative political theory (CPT) studies to 'deparochialise' political thought by engaging with regions beyond Europe and the USA. This suggests that CPT research has been conducted in Asian and Islamic texts, while Indigenous traditions in North America remain unexplored. In this literature, Indigenous intellectuals such as Alfred and Cornstassel highlight resurgence as a form of colonial resistance and emphasise treaties and sovereignty as vital to Indigenous politics(2021: 46-70). Senapati (2019) notes that the Karbi and Dimasa assert non-political issues, such as language, development, livelihood, and rights, in their political assertion and demands. The autonomy movement for the Hill tribes of Assam under Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution demanded that this article be implemented within the state of Assam (2019, 3-4). In the final literature,as Borthakur (2018) urges, the two hill districts adopted the Action Committee of the Mikir and North Cachar Hills Leaders Conference and a Memorandum to Indira Gandhi, the P.M. of India, demanding that a separate state under Article 244(A) be created, as inMeghalaya. Changes occurred with various organisations forming the Central Autonomous State Demand Committee (CASDC), the Karbi Anglong State Demand Committee (KAASDC), andthe Karbi Anglong North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHASDCOM) to demand an autonomous state. Finally, the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC)andKSA (Karbi Students Association) submitted a memorandum to the PM of India, later signed an MoU on April 1, 1995, between the CM of Assam and the leaders of ASDC, KSA, and NCHSF (North Cachar Hills Students Federation) and DSU (Dimasa Student Union) in the presence of S.B Chavan, Union Home Minister, and received 30 departments for the NCHAC and KAAC, for the creation of an autonomous state. Decades later, militant groups emergedduring the UPA government in 2011 to the NDA government in 2021; agreements were made by the UPDS, DHD, and KLNLF-3 factions (2018, 56-57). This study provides insight into how indigenous culture and identity can be identified through a territorial council among the Karbis and Dimasa communities.

One limitation of past studies is their focus on land and cultural protection delayed by the state governments, rather than the electoral agenda. This study aims to examine why others neglect tribal people and the loss of their unique biodiversity.A long-standing demand by the Indigenous communities of the two Hill districts is the struggle for ancestral settlement; for this reason, the KAAC and the DHAC address full self-governance and the development of heritage preservation. This study identifies a gap between ancestral rights, legal outcomes, insurgency, and identity formation. This study examines the location of indigenous communities in hill areas and their governance by traditional institutions in the following sections.

Method

Section 3 describes the tribal identity-based rights methods suitable for this study, including narrative discourse, historical and heritage analysis, and topical methods. Northeast India is diverse in culture, tradition, and customs, as reflected in the Karbi and Dimasa communities. This study used secondary sources, such as government reports and comments, journals, blogs, and books, which were analysed for Karbi and Dimasa. Primary data were obtained from 100 respondents through semi-structured interviews and deliberative discussions. The proposed paradigm is trained and evaluated using the

resurgence approach. Using a conceptual approach, the collected data and their models will be analysed in relation to "land deprivation, selfhood resurgence, state-sponsored projects, and ancestral practice approach."

Result and Analysis

Section 4 presents the findings of the study in relation to the study objective:

The first objective is to highlight the "***tribal identity-based rights framework for cultural protection***" of the Karbi and Dimasa in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which provides autonomous councils to protect the core elements of culture, language, tradition, and customs (Deori 2013). It finds that Article 244(2) of this Schedule governs tribal areas through Autonomous District Councils in the two Hills districts, empowering them toenforce customary laws, village governance, control forest land and property inheritance (Das, 2024), language, education, festivals, and heritage(Boruah, 2025) and Karbi Rong-Asar and Dimasa Khunan manage local affairs and issue No Objection Certificates (NoC). This study finds that reviving cultural festivals, such as the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF), Hacha Kekan (post-harvest), and Karbi Lament Amei (KLA), preserves traditions as the core identity (www.karbianglongasbb.assam.gov.in). This study finds that, other than council areas, the Karbi Welfare Autonomous Council Bill (2025) promotes and calls on the government to enhance the Territorial Councils under Article 244(A) to preserve core traditions.

2.The second objective is to analyse the "***revival of tribal customs and enhance protection and safeguard constitutional rights"*** of the Karbi and Dimasa tribes by operationalising Autonomous Territorial Councils.At the village level, Indigenous traditions represent a strategic rethinking of customary resurgence. They are 'First Peoples' with distinct cultures and traditions (Debasree, 2025, 162) and are recognised as Scheduled Tribes under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Madam and Mohanty (2025) note that tribes are forced to relocate and experience land loss (2025, 165). Such people, reviving tribal traditions, such as dirge songs, folklore, and festivals, would strengthen this Schedule and are considered pillars of ST(H), which is linked to their ancestral land and nature-based rituals.

3.The third objective reflects the ***rethinking of the tribal resurgence framework for the protection of the Karbi and Dimasa communities*** in Assam, emphasising that protection at the council level will not yield the fruit of village governance at the village level. Political self-government advocates the Sixth Schedule, which promotes the Karbi and Dimasa Autonomous Councils (Senapati, 2019) through direct funding from the Central government. Mobilising indigenous heritage preservation can organise workshops and seminars that strengthen the knowledge of tribal village councils and courts. Territorial Pillars, as ancestral principles, demand protection of ancestral land, such as Professional Grazing Reserves (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserves (VGR); similarly, Dimasa people need to enforce customary land rights in tribal territories. These councils prioritise Indigenous people to revive sustainable traditions (Michael et al., 2018). This finding indicates that the resurgence of our identity promotes village governance, such as customs, traditions, rituals, festivals, dirge songs, and so on, which can preserve Indigenous traditions (Boruah, 2025; Das and Gogoi, 2025).

4. The fourth objective reflects on ***indigenous development*** using standard constitutional metrics under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution for the Karbi and Dimasa identities and traditions, which have separate governing bodies. It finds that the separate governing bodies include village councils and courts. These governing bodies, administered by Autonomous Councils (ADCs), constitute a self-governance metric. There are cultural differences between the Karbi and Dimasa ethnic groups that need to be improved through customs and traditions (Deori 2013). Pallathadka et al. (2025) demonstrated that councils should support the revival of culture and tradition (2025:54). Bezbaruah (2017)

found identity markers for two hill tribes of Assam, the hills and the plains. Thousen (2021) also notes that auspicious things use 'Hor-Alang' and 'Hor-Arak', meaning rice-beer and steamed rice-liquor, used during festivals, rituals, and occasions described as cultural identity markers asserting ethnicity (2021:205-209).

Primary Data Collection Section:

Case Study Reports:

1. A Karbi activist, Mr Litsong Rongphar, responded that the ongoing agitation in Karbi Anglong is solely against alleged illegal encroachment and the illegitimate settlement on PGR/VGR and government-related land in the district. After 1951, individuals without legal licences or land pattas are considered 'illegitimate'. He added that the British-created Sixth Schedule should cover such areasand be governed by a District Council. He stated that agitation would continue until a final solution was reached based on constitutional rights and tribal areas.
2. KRA President Rupen Hanse stated that the Rong-Asar and Sartheshiphave formal authority to control land ownership throughfree and fair certification,without corruption. At the village level, it is common for the Sarkari Gaon Burah to provide NOC for individuals rather than land rights. The Rong-Asar has authority in the village and follows the rules during marriages, family welfare rituals, Chojun worship, the Rongker festival, oral chanting, and many events.
3. Babu Engti, a member of "Karbi-Rong-Asar (KRA)", stated that politicians who are actively involved misuse the selection of the chairman of Rong-Asar Amei and other related officials. A new member of this organisation follows the existing laws at the village level.
4. A respondent from the KRA,Sarthe Rongphar, stated that on 14April 2017 at 10 AM, the KRA collectively and collaboratively organised a meeting at Harmon Club, Phuloni, Karbi Anglong, to discuss how to promote, upgrade, and revitalise the Traditional Village Council and Village Court as the oldest traditions in our respective villages. In this conference, the KRA stated that governance and administration in every village would be looked after by the 'Rong-Asar.' The selected President and Secretary of this organisation should be aware of the village's ancient traditions and customary laws. The KRA acknowledged that 'Ser-Van-Kep' is the pillar supporting traditional village councils and courts. This includes designated posts and traditions practised in ancient times. They are (i) Chintong Asar, (ii) Ronghang Asar, (iii) Me-Kar Asar, (iv) Pherangke, (v) Riso Basa, (vi) Kurusar, (vii) Klengsarpo, (viii) Basapi, (ix) Lunsepo, (x) Lunsepi, and are collectively called the 'Ser-Van-Kep' in the Karbi tradition. To administer at the village level, the state government acknowledged that theSixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution was approved on 14 July 2021, andthe 'Ser-Van-Kep' is a village council member.
5. Respondent from Hamren, Longki Teron, West Karbi Anglong, our traditional village council and court are strictly governed by law. Thus, a three-tiered political system was created. Tierone, or the top position, is headed by *Lindok*. The middle, or Tiertwo, is represented by the Habe. The third tier is represented by villages, with headmen of the village popularly called the 'Sarthe'. Similarly, the Karbi has several positions: the Basapo assists the Sarthe, who is incharge of the bachelor's dormitory.
6. Respondent from the Karbi Riso Adorbar, Shri Ajit Timung, stated that an autonomous state would be

achieved at a later time but that they should not go against the government until the fruit ripens. He said no organisation should be created to sign an accord in the future in the name of an 'autonomous state'. Our final destination was Assam.

7. The CEM of Karbi Anglong invited all the ex-to-the-present CEMs, EMs, MACs, MLAs, MPs, and notable dignitaries tothe conference at Arboretum-cum-Craft-Centre, Diphu. Said the Karbi Customary Law should be implemented as soon as possible, and that there would be a workshop in each constituency where it was applicable. He said any convicted violator of the law could be jailed for years under the Karbi Customary Law, and the basic use of this law at the village level is based on the Karbi language, which translates English into Karbi using the Roman script.
8. Manai Katharpicommented that in Karbi and Dimasa, polygamy and polyandry are not applicable and are strictly prohibited in these districts of Assam,as well as polygamy and polyandry are strictly prohibited. Rather, exogamy is not practised and is not relevant to the Karbi community, as the Garo have their cultural relevance.
9. Smt. Tiluttoma Hasnu, Dhansiri MAC, said the Dimasa Customary Law prevails in the Dimasa community,witha three-tier governance and administrative structure. They discussed how to strengthen it at the village level in the future. The Dimasa community, in an introductory seminar at Farmers Growth Centre, Diphu, deliberated on how to use the village council and village court by the elders and dignified offices.
10. Daniel Langthasa argued to Bihari people that the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam have specific provisions for the tribal community. Land occupied by non-tribal people, such as Bihari and Muslims,is strictly restricted, illustrating that 'a Bihar place cannot be a Tribal area; Dimasa or Karbi districts cannot be non-tribal districts; the government has given you a specific area, and you have to survive'. He reported that the Bihari people encroached on tribal land.

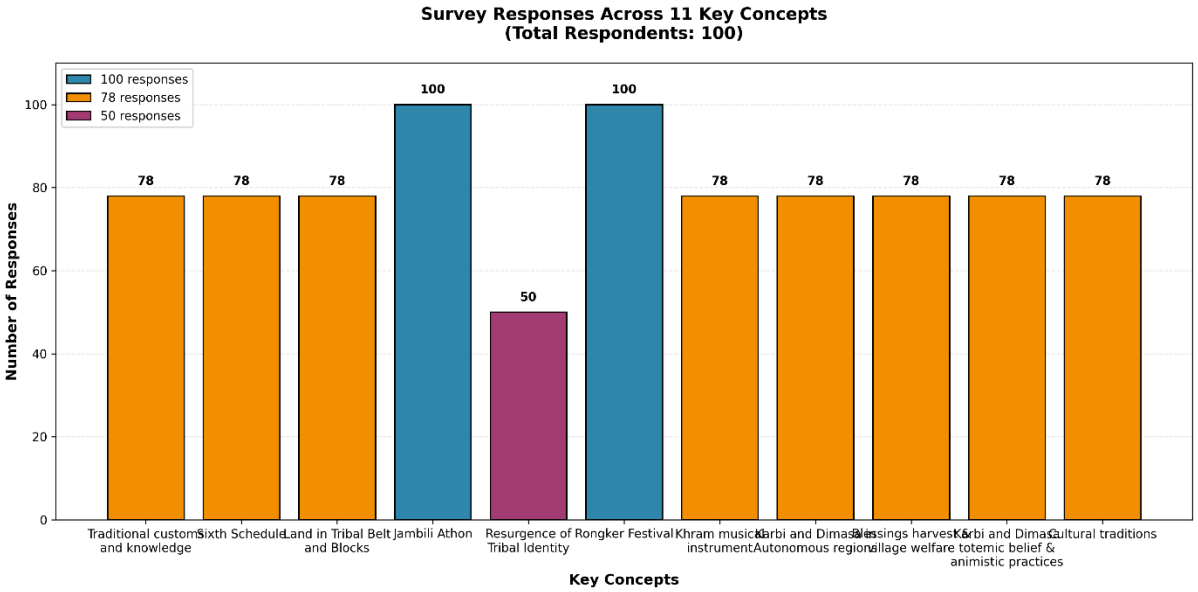
Semi-structured questionnaires:

It revealed that 100 respondents included (1) the traditional languages, customs, and indigenous knowledge are being adequately protected and practised by the new generation in the community. (2) Our constitutional frameworks, such as the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, have effectively empowered our tribal community with genuine political self-determination. (3) The tribal belts and blocks in Assam are strictly safeguarded against illegal encroachment by non-tribals. (4) Jambili Athon is the Karbi Cultural Emblem. (5) The recent resurgence of tribal identity has given our people a stronger and more respected voice in shaping the future of Assam's democratic process. (6) Rongker is a prominent traditional festival celebrated by the Karbi community to thank deities for a good harvest and pray for well-being. (7) Khram, a traditional wooden musical instrument, is heavily associated with the Dimasa tribe's folk dance. (8) The Karbi and Dimasa Districts of Assam are prime examples of autonomous regions formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. (9) Seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest and village welfare before the jhum season is the primary significance of the annual Rongker festival, celebrated by the Karbi community. (10) The Karbi and Dimasa have unwritten ecological conservation methods that provide specific plants, animals, and forest zones; the traditional totemic beliefs and animistic practices of these tribes are part of their daily lives. (11) The cultural traditions of these Indigenous communities use forest resources, such as plants and forests, which are integrated into religious rituals, traditional medicine, and

food, regulating deep reciprocity with their ancestral lands.

Histogram of Karbi and Dimasa Community:

This figure shows the analysis of the above result, and the figure below shows the respondents in the histogram.



Source: Created by the author

The main findings summarised from the histogram response distributionare that out of 100 responses, two concepts, Jabili Athon and the Rongker Festival, received maximum engagement. Whereas 78 responses with eight concepts included traditional customs, language, and knowledge; the Sixth Schedule; land by tribal belt and blocks; Khtam Dimasa musical instrument; Karbi and Dimasa in autonomous areas; blessings of deities of harvest and village welfare; Karbi and Dimasa totemic beliefs and animistic practices; and cultural traditions. Finally, there were 50 responses to one key concept,such as the resurgence of tribal identity, whichhad the lowest level of engagement. However, the overall statistics show that therewere874 out of 1,100 possible responses across 11 concepts with 100 respondents. The average response rate per concept was 79.5 per cent. In short, the histogram patterns used distinct colours, such as deep blue for the highest concepts, orange for the majority, and purple for the lowest. The value labels are correctly displayed above each bar.

Comparative Analysis of Karbi and Dimasa Community:

The following lines include a brief comparative analysis of the two communities:

a) Both the Karbi and Dimasa communities belong to the Indo-Mongoloid peoples and the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic family, the earliest inhabitants of Northeast India (Bhattacharjee2024).

b) Both the Karbi and Dimasa indigenous tribes are located in central Assam and follow patriarchal rules,with men and women having equal status and following monogamy in an egalitarian society.

c) The Dimasa community follows a clan system with40 male clans, known as Semphong, and 42 female clans, known as Julu. The Karbi prescribe five major clan systems that reflect Jambili Athon. Therefore, marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited.

d) Both the Karbi and Dimasa are devoted to ritualistic animism, andidol worshiphas existed since ancient times.

e) Sacred Groves: The Dimasas consider ancestral gods associated with the Madai,who look after different parts of

the Dimasa settlement and have their own areas of jurisdictioncalled daikho (similar to sacred groves). It is believed that the Madai, a spiritual being residing in specific daikho, protects the people in the vicinity and controls their destinies (Bhattacharjee 2024). Vulli and Bejita (2022) note that in the Karbi belief system, sacred groves are categorised into two types:(1) naturallyrelated and (2) Old Kingdom-related. The naturally related groves in Karbi beliefs arealso sub-categorised as (i) Artu or Arnam-Kesoas sacred groves and (ii) sacred sites as Arnam Kerai. A site where rituals are practised is also called a sacred site or place. While the Rongkerritual remains anunseen guardian or protector to propitiate them,such places are identified as 'arnamkeso',spelt as 'angry god,'as well as sacred groves (2022: 46863-64).

f) Festivals: The 'Hacha-Kekan' of the Karbi festival and the Bisu of the Dimasa festival are held in January to celebrate the winter harvest with religious rituals, traditional dances, folk music, and traditional cuisines.

Suggestion and Proposal

The following are the suggestions of this study

1) This suggests that the Karbi and Dimasa havethreePeace Agreements with four main proposals. First, policies must be implemented to ensure territorial and administrative integrity. Second, policiesmust increase the councils' powers and political aspirations of tribal political elites. Third, it should protect and promote socio-cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identities. Fourth, policies demand sustainable peace and rapid development.
2) This suggests implementing MoS through a commission in the Assam Legislative Assembly under Article 371 B of the Constitution, renamed the AutonomousTerritorial Councils. Like the BTAD (Boro Territorial Autonomous District to Boro Territorial Region (BTR), the KAAC andNCHAC should be renamed as KAATC,increasing from 30 to 50 seats and DHATC from 28 to 40 seats.
g) It suggests the efficiency of implementing agreementsto createvillage councils and townsto improve governance at the grassroots level and timely allocation of funds under Article 280 for the two hill district councils.
h) Thissuggests that the two ethnic communities mustpromote their mother tongues and preservetheir indigenous cultures, languages, and identities. It would be better if their respective councils made it the official language.
i) This suggeststhat providing financial assistance builds sustainable peace, rehabilitation, and resettlement of armed cadres who surrendered after the conflict. The government should withdraw its existing policy of taking action based on non-heinous crimes registered and reviewed on a case-by-case basisagainst armed cadres.
j) It suggests that during the autonomous demand movement, compensation should be paid to the person who lost their life in the incident. This plan uses well-defined criteria in the Special Development Package (SDP) to focus on improving education, health, and cultural infrastructure for two councils that received an economic package (https://idsa.in, 2024).

Critical Interpretation of Result:

In this section, the objectives and research questions are based on this interpretation.

1) Indigenous Rights-Based (IRB): This analysis highlights theimpact of dam construction on tribal communities in Northeast India, particularly the Dimasa and Karbi land illegal encroachers,as outlined in Begum

(2024)and the 2011 Census. These Indigenous Peoples face displacement from large-scale projects in remote areas. Article 244(A) of the Karbi and Dimasa Autonomous Councils protects their economic and political rights. The NEP 2020 supports mother tongue instruction in education.Additionally, the 89th Amendment Act of 2003 mandates a special enquiry by the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST), and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 must align with the Forest Rights Act of 2006to safeguard the rights of forest dwellers (Begum2024).

2) Indigenous Moral Governance (IMG):Self-governance refers to traditional institutions, also known as customary laws. Sarmah and Gogoi (2010) describeda three-tier administrative system,including the 'King' as the apex body locally as 'Lindokpo' or 'Recho' in the Ronghang Rongbong area. Its Parliament member is called 'Pinpomar'. The village council,as 'Mei' at the bottom,is referred to as 'Sartheship'. In the Dimasa context, the village system is termed 'Nolai', with councils known as 'Hosom'. The council is led by 'Khunan', appointed by the government and known as 'Sarkari Gaoburah' (SG). The 'Khunan' is appointed by the government. Zaman (2019) highlighted that the Karbi and Dimasa communities havelocal laws that impose fines or penalties forviolations related to marriage, theft and land transfer. There is an urgent need to implement these traditions to establish legitimate local governance through village councils and courts.
3) Customs and Traditions of State Apparatus (CTSA): This study by Das et al. (2025)highlights the Karbi's dual system of traditional and modern administrative bodies, emphasising how these institutions maintain unique cultural identity and customs through village courts led by 'Rong-Asar' alongside the 'Sarthe' and Dimasa'Khunan' with Gaonburah. The revival of these traditions is contingent upon financial support, guidance, and understanding of customs. As noted by Zaman (2019), the Sartheshipacts as a second authority,whereasthe Dimasa upholdssarkarigaonbura customary law in villagegovernance.
4) Resurgence Tribal Identity (RTI): This study, conducted by Payeng(2024), found that the Mikir and North Cachar Hill Districts,which were included under the Sixth Schedule, are a core part of India's Constitution. It emphasises the need for tribes to revitalise their identity through village governance under Article 244(A), initiate the Karbi Lamet Amei (KLA) for language and the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) for cultural expression. While Dimasa traditions are evolving, they require updates to core elements tied to myths and ecological practices. The 2011 and 2021 tripartite agreements, while significant, faced delays with the state government regarding statehood issues. Critics argue that peace agreements are fragile, with identity compromisedby bureaucratic control and uneven resource allocation.The transition from insurgency to peace agreements reflects a radical shift in identity politics (2024, 180-186), emphasising the resurgence of tribal identity rooted in local traditions.

Proposes Action Plans for Policymakers:

The action plans proposed for policymaking on Indigenous identity are as follows:

1) Strengthening Village Councils: This study proposesstrengtheningKarbi and Dimasa village councils through a three-tier administrative system: an apex court led by the King or

Lindokpo; a middle level governed by the Habe; and village councilstermed 'Mei', headed by the 'Sartheship'. Customary law is essential for managing family life, communal and ancestral land rights, and pursuing restorative justice in the region. The Sixth Schedule at the village level is crucial to the effective functioning of these councils and courts in resolving disputes based on traditional norms (Soni, www.vidhigyata.in).

2) Recognition of Customary Law: This study proposesthe legal recognition of customary law to embody the deep-rooted traditions of the two communities and enforceable rights grounded in tradition. It emphasises aspects such as (i) immemorial custom based on ancient custom, (ii) continuity and peaceful enjoyment, (iii) certainty and objectivity, (iv) reasonable justice,and (v) Article 13, whichdeclares any custom conflictingwith Fundamental Rights as void. The research suggests that tribal customary law overseeing personal matters such as marriageand succession is influenced by religious affiliation, Hindu law applicable to Hindu societyand tribal law relevant to tribal customs.
3) Protection of Ancestral Land: This study advocatesfor the protection of legally designated traditional village headmen, such as Karbi 'Rong Asar' and Dimasa 'Khunan', by grantingthem the authority to issue 'No Objection Certificates' (NoC) for land transfers. The Council within the Sixth Schedule supervisesland transactions recognised by 'Rong-Asar' (Timungpi, 2025, p. 68),ensuring that land laws support indigenous communities.According to these agreements, Assam Land and Revenue aims to prevent demographic changes and preserve cultural identities, safeguarding the rights and heritage of indigenous monuments, as highlighted by Mission Basundhara's efforts to protect ancestral lands.

Conclusion

This study addressed the critical research problem of assessing the impact of tribal identity-based rights on contemporary approaches, particularly on socio-cultural growth, indigenous customs, and the stability of the village council. The primary objective was to highlight how Indigenous communities revive ethnic rights-based approaches, protect customary rights and cultural stability,and relocatethe stability of the tribal village council and village courts among the Karbi and Dimasa. The main findings indicate that tribal identity-based rights are cultural protection; revival of indigenous customs supports village court protection and constitutional rights; relocating the tribal resurgence on biocultural rituals links for the upliftment of the two communities, and lastly, indigenous assessment using standard metrics on existing rights and duties to perform their responsibility by establishing village court at the village level and setting up of centrally religious office in the district.The analyses also revealed that marginalised communities within the districts should be aware of their peoplehood needs and reflect on them in the face of the increasing population of outsiders in the district. The implications of these findings are significant. They underline the urgent need for policymakers and contemporary approaches to integrate customary risk management into religio-cultural planning and development strategies. Incorporating identity resilience measures could mitigate economic impacts and foster sustainable growth. Moreover, the study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the cultural dimensions of customary-related risks and promoting 'Rong-Asar' and 'Ser-Van-Kep' to consider cultural sustainability as integral to long-term socio-cultural policy-making. This research acknowledges the limitations and uncertainties in long-term cultural projects and the inherent complexity of accurately modelling socio-economic impacts over extended periods.

Future research should focus on refining socio-cultural models to reduce uncertainties and provide more precise predictions. Investigations into area-specific identity-customs vulnerabilities would also enrich the present understanding, enabling more targeted adaptation strategies. Further studies examining the effectiveness of specific identity protection policies could significantly contribute to policy formation. In conclusion, the identity risks posed by cross-cultural participation have drawn immediateglobal attention. Active and strategic responses, grounded in research and inclusive socio-cultural planning, are essential to safeguarding a stable global identity and ensuring sustainable prosperity for future generations.

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Chapter 9: Planetary Ecologies and Justice in N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* Trilogy

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Abstract

This chapter examines posthuman agency, embodiment, and ecological entanglement in N. K.Jemisin'sTheBroken Earth trilogy. While existing scholarship has approached the trilogy through ecocriticism, climate fiction, and posthumanism as discrete frameworks, little attention has been paid to how these perspectives converge to illuminate the relationship between the Earth, orogenic bodies, and planetary justice. Drawing on the posthumanist theories of RosiBraidotti, Donna Haraway, and N. Katherine Hayles, this chapter argues that Jemisindestabilises human-centred epistemologies by rendering the Earth not as a passive setting but as a sentient, responsive agent that registers and retaliates against historical violence. Through close textual analysis, the chapter positions orogenic bodies as hybrid sites where environmental, social, and political forces intersect, and traces how human, geological, and technological agencies become distributed rather than remaining anthropocentrically bounded. In doing so, it reconceives identity, power, and survival within the Anthropocene. The chapter concludes that the trilogy critiques human exceptionalism and articulates an ethics of coexistence, shared responsibility, and planetary interconnection, offering a significant contribution to posthumanist and ecological justice scholarship.

Keywords: *Posthumanism, Ecocriticism, Planetary Justice, Orogenic Bodies, N. K. Jemisin, The Broken Earth Trilogy.*

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Introduction

N. K. Jemisin's*Broken Earth* trilogy—*The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016), and *The Stone Sky* (2017)—is set on the Stillness, a supercontinent racked by recurring civilisation-ending catastrophes called Fifth Seasons. Survival depends on orogenes, humans able to sense and channel seismic energy, who are simultaneously indispensable to civic order and violently disenfranchised, trained at the Fulcrum, tattooed with rings of rank, and stationed as node maintainers whose drugged, immobilised bodies are used to suppress tremors. Jemisin's Earth, however, is not an inert backdrop. Across the

trilogy, Father Earth is characterised as a wounded, deliberate agent: the moon's expulsion and the resulting Seasons are attributed to an act of ancient exploitation, the Plutonic Engine and the severing of the moon, rather than to impersonal geology, and the planet's ongoing seismic violence is repeatedly framed by characters such as Alabaster and later Hoa as intentional retribution. This framing invites posthumanist inquiry, since it refuses to locate agency, memory, or ethical standing solely within the human.

Scholarship on the trilogy has expanded quickly, engaging it through critical race theory, disability studies, ecocriticism, and climate fiction. Ecocritical readings have attended to the Stillness's extractive history and the Seasons as figures of environmental collapse; climate fiction scholarship has situated Jemisin's world-building within Anthropocene discourse; and posthumanist criticism has examined how orogenic and stone-eater bodies (Hoa, Antimony) blur boundaries between human, geological, and technological categories. These strands, though, have largely proceeded separately. Few studies connect the Earth's sentience, the orogenic body, and the trilogy's technological remnants—obelisks, the Obelisk Gate, the underground network Essun and Nassun eventually access—into a single account of how planetary justice is imagined. The relationship between Essun's fractured, multiply-renamed body (Damaya, Syenite, Essun), the Earth's memory of harm, and the eventual Gate-working that closes the trilogy remains underexamined as a unified posthuman structure rather than three separate thematic concerns.

This chapter addresses that gap, reading the trilogy through RosiBraidotti's nomadic subjectivity, Donna Haraway's models of companion species and symbiosis, and N. Katherine Hayles's account of distributed cognition. Together, these frameworks make legible a mode of agency spread across human, geological, and technological actors rather than concentrated in an autonomous human subject. The chapter argues that the Earth functions as an active narrative participant with memory and intent; that orogenic embodiment shaped by Fulcrum training, the node stations, and the intergenerational transmission of harm from Essun to Nassun constitutes a hybrid political-ecological site; and that the trilogy's technological remnants bind human, planetary, and mechanical agency into a single network of interdependence, culminating in Nassun and Essun's shared, contested choice at the Gate.

The chapter proceeds in three movements: first, the Earth as sentient and historically injured; second, the orogenic body as a site where biology, state control, and planetary function converge; third, the hybrid networks of obelisks, stone eaters, and the Gate, through which agency is finally redistributed rather than reclaimed by any single actor. Together, these movements support the chapter's central claim: that the *Broken Earth* trilogy offers an integrated posthuman ethics in which planetary justice requires recognising the Earth, orogenic bodies, and residual technologies as co-constitutive participants in a shared and precarious existence.

The Earth as a Sentient and Responsive Agent

One of the most significant aspects of *The Broken Earth* trilogy is its representation of Earth as a living, conscious, and responsive entity. Unlike traditional narratives in which nature is a passive backdrop, N.K. Jemisin redefines the planet as a living entity that actively participates in the narrative. This change in how readers understand the Earth is important for understanding the trilogy's posthuman framework. It challenges the idea that humans are the only ones with power and control.

The Earth is not merely a background but an active participant in the narrative. It is a part of the story. From the start of *The Fifth Season,* the planet is represented as unstable. The book starts with the line "Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we?"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 1). This shows us that destruction is a part of life in the Stillness. As the narrative develops, we see that this destruction is not just random or natural. The Earth's violent reactions are connected to the way humans have treated the planet. The big disasters called the Fifth Seasons are not natural events. These are the Earth's way of reacting to actions humans have caused and how humans have exploited the planet. This conception of the Earth resonates with Bruno Latour's interpretation of Gaia. Latour argues that the Earth functions as a responsive system that reacts to human actions (Latour, 2017). In trilogy,

the Earth is not kind or uncaring. It reacts to what humans do. This shows that Earth possesses its own form of agency. Jemisin further blurs the boundary between humans and the Earth. She says,"You are she. She is you."(Jemisin, 2015, p.15). This means the Earth is not separate from humans. It is connected to us.

The orogenes are capable of sensing the Earth's movements. They can manipulate the geological forces. This interconnectedness reflects a posthuman view that humans and the Earth are closely connected rather than existing as separate entities. This challenges the anthropocentric idea that humans exist separately from nature. The Earth's movements are experienced rather than merely observed. They are something we feel and are a part of. From the posthuman perspective, this challenges the anthropocentric assumptions often associated with the Anthropocene. It shows that the Earth has power. It shapes what happens, affects how people survive, and decides how life can exist. The Earth's power is also connected to memory and trauma. The planet remembers what happened to it in the past. The damage done by the civilisation of SylAnagist is still felt. Its responses are shaped not only by present conditions but also by the historical trauma of exploitation.

Ecocritical thinkers argue that environmental damage has deep, lasting consequences. It alters the earth permanently, links human survival to nature, and exposes flaws in how society values life. Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" is also relevant. He says ecological phenomena are vast, dispersed, and difficult to comprehend (Mortons 2013). Morton's concept helps us understand that the Earth's reactions are not just single events. They happen over a long period of time and show the lasting effects of human actions on the environment. The Earth's power also raises questions. If the Earth can feel and remember, we need to think about how we treat it. This challenges the way we think about the environment. We need to think about coexisting with the Earth, not controlling it. Donna Haraway's idea of the "Chthulucene" supports this. She argues that human and nonhuman are interconnected and that survival depends on coexistence rather than domination (Haraway, 2016, p. 2).By presenting the Earth as an active part of the story rather than a passive background, Jemisin redefines agency beyond humans. The Earth's actions shape the ecological, political, and ethical aspects of the narrative, showing that survival depends on the relationship between humans and the planet. Through this representation, the trilogy challenges anthropocentric thinking and offers a posthuman understanding of coexistence between humans, nonhumans, and the Earth.

Orogenic Bodies as Hybrid Ecological-Political Systems.

Although the former part discussed the Earth as an agent that is sentient and responsive, this part shifts to the orogenic body as one of the strongest expressions of the posthuman in thetrilogy. The orogene in Jemisin's is not merely a human with extraordinary abilities but a hybrid being, a living interface between biological, geological, and political forces. Jemisin challenges the traditional idea of identity, embodiment, and power through the character of the orogene, showing how even the human body is turned into a site of ecological and political relations.

At a fundamental level, orogenes are characterised by their ability to sense and control the Earth's seismic energy. This power is, however, not external or mechanical, but deeply embodied. The orogene does not merely control the Earth; they feel it and experience it as a part of their own bodies. This close association of body and planet breaks the veil between human and nonhuman, suggesting that the body is not separate from the Earth but deeply embedded within it.The embodied relationship is captured in a moment of the narrative: "when there is no earth power nearby, an orogene can still make the earth move"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 91). This sentence suggests that orogenes' power is not limited to existing seismic energy; they can generate force from any alternative source, including their own body and surrounding life.Theoretically, this follows posthumanist conceptions of relational embodiment. RosiBraidotti argues that the body is not an isolated object but is a part of a system of relationships that can extend to the environmental and material systems. In the trilogy of Jemisin, this notion is pushed to the limit. The body of the

orogene is literally tied to geology, and the human and the planet cannot be divided.

This connection is not merely empowerment. The same body that enables ecological awareness also becomes a site of fear, control, and violence. Orogenes do not take pride in their skills; they are hunted, suppressed, and manipulated by the Fulcrum. This is an institution that trains orogenes but also punishes and controls them, transforming their bodies into instruments of the state. Such dehumanisation can be traced in the language that is used to describe orogenes: "You are a weapon meant to move mountains"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 78). These words reveal the functioning of power by depriving people of their human nature and transforming them into functions. The body of the orogene, rather than being accepted as a site of connection, is seen as a threatening tool that should be tamed. This is indicative of larger oppressive systems where non-normative bodies are subjected to surveillance and control.The Fulcrum exercises not only physical but also psychological control over the orogens. They are conditioned not to express their feelings, since any emotional instability is regarded as dangerous. This leads to a situation where the body has to be continuously monitored and managed, both internally and externally.One of the main scenes depicting this internalised control is: "Friends do not exist. The Fulcrum is not a school. Grits are not children. Orogenes are not people. Weapons have no need of friends"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 297). This passage shows thatorogens were treated as weapons, not as living beings, rather than as living beings, they are treated as instruments of the institution. The orogene must master their own powers to survive, and the body becomes a place of unceasing discipline. This echoes the idea of bio-power by Michel Foucault, whereby the control is not exercised merely by means of force but rather by controlling bodies and behaviours (Foucault, 1978). This shows that the Fulcrum controls not only the orogens' abilities but also their identity and everyday lives.

Meanwhile, the orogenic body does not comply with this control. Orogenes have the power to destabilise power structures, despite the systems that are placed on them. Their relation to the Earth provides them with a kind of agency that cannot be completely absorbed. Such a duality, between being controllable and uncontrollable, makes the orogene a potent icon of resistance.The orogenic body is even further highlighted as being hybrid by connecting it to ancient technologies like the obelisks. These floating structures interface with orogenes, in a manner that obscures the border between organic and technological systems. The orogene is neither entirely human nor natural but a component of a greater network which consists of both biological and artificial components. This reflects N. Katherine Hayles'idea of the posthuman as a being that exists within informational and material networks. The orogene in the world created by Jemisin supports this idea and serves as a node in a system comprising the Earth, technology, and society. Furthermore, the orogenic body questions the conventional ideas about identity. Identity is no longer fixed or stable but fluid and relational. It is the relationship with the Earth, the place in social hierarchies, and the capacity to manoeuvre systems of control that create the orogene sense of self.

This fluidity is especially noticeable in the character of Essun whose identity changes through different roles and names. These transformations leave visible marks on her body, showing how identity is not a given state but one acquired through experience. The conflict between control and connection, oppression and power, makes the orogenic body one of the most dominant locations to investigate the posthuman identity. It shows that the body is not something physical but a place where the ecological, political, and social forces meet.

On a more profound level, the orogenic body is an expression of a challenge to anthropocentrism. As Jemisin blurs the line between human and Earth, it implies that the human cannot be perceived outside of its connection with the Earth. This idea also raises ethical questions. If the body is connected to the Earth, then harming and exploiting the environment also means harming the bodies that depend on it. In this way, violence against the orogenes becomes inseparable from violence against the Earth itself. The orogenic body therefore becomes an important example of posthuman identity. By blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman, Jemisin shows

that identity is shaped through the relationship between the Earth, technology, and society. Rather than showing humans as separate from nature, the trilogy presents existence as something that is shared and interconnected.

Hybrid Ecologies, Technological Networks, and Distributed Agency

The previous section explored the orogenic body as a place where biological and geological forces meet. This section examines the broader systems within which these bodies exist. This system consists of ecological networks that define the world of the trilogy. It does not see ecology as a system that is separate from human or technological influence. Instead, it shows a world where nature, technology, and human existence are deeply connected. They form a network of interaction and dependency. Through this, the Jemisin trilogy questions the distinction between the natural and artificial.

At the core of this system, the idea is that agency is distributed rather than anthropocentric. In traditional narrative, agency is given to the individual human characters who act on a passive world; however, in the Jemisin trilogy, no single entity has complete control. Agency comes from the interaction between multiple entities, including the Earth, orogenes, ancient technologies, and social structure. This concept is close to posthumanist theory by N. Katherine Hayles. She argues that agency does not reside in a single subject but comes from a network of relations. This helps explain why agency in the trilogy is created through the relationship between the Earth, technology, and human bodies rather than belonging to a single individual.

The obelisks are one of the elements that show this distributed agency. They are floating structures that interact with both the orogens and the Earth. The obelisks are not merely floating objects that respond, resonate, and participate in the flow of energy across the planet. They are mysterious and very old. Their function cannot be understood in isolation as they work within a system that includes human bodies and geological processes. A moment that shows this interconnectedness is when the relationship between orogens and obelisks is described as a form of alignment: "an obelisk sits at the centre of each. They dot the face of the world, two hundred and fifty-six spiders in two hundred and fifty-six webs, feeding each city and being fed in turn"(Jemisin, 2017, p. 4). This suggests that technology in Jemisin's world is not a tool that humans can control easily, but an active participant that requires communication and cooperation. From this perspective, Jemisin challenges the traditional view of technology as something separate from nature. Instead, Jemisin presents technology as a part of systems that can be understood as a hybrid ecology. The obelisk technology is deeply connected to the Earth's energy. This blurs the line between artificial and natural.

The idea is similar to Timothy Morton's concept of entanglement. He suggests that all humans and non-humans exist within a web of relationships that cannot be easily separated (Morton, 2010, p. 28). In the trilogy, this entanglement is not abstract but physically lived. The actions of one element, whether technological or geological, have consequences that affect the entire system. This shows that no single action remains isolated because every action affects the wider ecological network.The hybrid nature of these ecologies is shown through the way the energy flows in the narrative. Orogenes do not just use their own power; they use the Earth's energy, which is guided by the obelisks and shaped by ancient technological systems. This creates a network where power is not something a person can own but is constantly moving between orogenes, technology, and the planet."He takes all that, the strata and the magma and the people and the power, in his imaginary hands. Everything. He holds it. He is not alone. The Earth is with him"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 7). This line challenges the idea of acting alone and instead suggests that all action is shaped by broader systems. The concept of ecologies also helps us understand control and instability. The recurring disasters show that no system can completely control the Earth. Instead, the trilogy suggests that survival depends on adapting to these ecological systems and learning to live with them rather than trying to control them.

This aligns with posthumanist critiques of human exceptionalism. Which argue that humans cannot live independently from the environment that they inhabit. In Jemisin's world, this is made clear

through the interactions between bodies, technologies, and the Earth itself. The idea of distributed agency, where power is shared rather than only held by one person, also applies within the trilogy. Power is not just held by individuals or institutions; it is spread across all over the network that includes both human and non-human. This instability reflects the reality of the Stillness, where change is constant and nothing is predictable; unpredictability is normal.

These hybrid ecologies challenge conventional understanding of responsibility and ethics; if the power is shared, then the responsibility must also be shared. Humans must recognise their actions affect every part of the network, and harming one part of the network affects the entire network. The hybrid world of the trilogy also reflects the concerns about climate change and the impact of technology. As in the real world, the boundaries between natural and man-made are becoming increasingly blurred. Jemisin's narrative shows the reality of how ecological and technological systems are inseparable and must be understood together. The concept of ecologies in the trilogy challenges readers to rethink how we see the world. It suggests that boundaries between nature and technology, human and non-human, are not actually fixed but constructed. Through the idea of hybrid ecologies and distributed agency, Jemisin shows that survival depends on the relationship between humans, technology, and the Earth. The trilogy does not separate nature from technology but shows that both areconnected and work together as part of the same ecological system.

Embodiment, Trauma and the Politics of Control

The narrative explores how bodies are connected to the world around them. It presents that bodies are not merely biological entities but as sites where power, violence, and resistance intersect. Through the experience of orogenes, the trilogy demonstrates how bodies are shaped by trauma, oppression, but still how they remain capable of resistance and transformation. Embodiment refers to the way bodies shape our experience of the world. In Jemisin's world, this experience is powerfully shown through the orogenes. Theydo not just think about their power; they experience it through their bodies. This connection is more of a curse than a gift. When orogenes feel the power in them, it's often in a painful way and sometimes difficult to control. This physical toll of orogeny is best described by constant suffocation and restraint: "He breathes deeply and becomes a fixture of the earth. They tread upon the filaments of his nerves; their voices stir the fine hairs of his skin; their breaths ripple the air he draws into his lungs. They are on him. They are in him"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 4).This passage highlights the physical toll that orogeny places on the body. Instead of power being external, the orogene body becomes a site of control, where the world's heavy forces are trapped, creating constant tension between holding it in and letting it go. This shows that the body becomes the place where ecological power and human experience meet. For them, this power is not freedom but a trauma. They are forced to constantly fight their own bodies and keep their abilities under control, just to stay safe from a world that is ready to punish them.

From a theoretical perspective, this fits with the posthuman idea that sees the body as something open and connected to the surrounding environment and material world. The orogene body is not closed or self-contained, but it is deeply open to the environment, making it incredibly vulnerable to both ecological and social pressure. This helps explain how trauma develops throughout the trilogy.In the Jemisin narrative, trauma is not something that happens to one person through a single event; it's built into the entire system. Orogenes are forced to face violence from a very young age, often being removed from their families because of their power, broken down during brutal training, and they are constantly monitored by guardians. Because of this, trauma is not simply an isolated event; it's a core part of their life, what they have to face daily just to live. A powerful expression of this systematic violence is found in the following passage: "When Nassun comes home that afternoon, Uche is already dead. Jija is standing over his cooling corpse in the den, breathing hard"(Jemisin, 2016, p. 8-9).This passage demonstrates how little value is placed on the lives of orogenes. Jija, the father of Nassun and Uche, killed his own son because his son was an orogeny. This scene shows how fear of orogenes destroys relationships and becomes part of the violence experienced by orogens. "The orogenes of the

Fulcrum serve the world,"he says. "You will have no use for a name henceforth, because your usefulness lies in what you are, not merely some familial aptitude. From birth, an orogene child can stop a shake; even without training, you are an orogene. Within a comm or without one, you are an orogene. With training, however, and with the guidance of other skilled orogenes at the Fulcrum, you can be useful not merely to a single comm, but all the Stillness"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 34).This statement reveals the control of the Fulcrum, the institution where they control orogeny. The power of orogeny is something which cannot be taken lightly, so in the fear of orogenic power, the system prioritises domination over understanding. The body becomes something the Fulcrum can control, reshaped and disciplined, rather than respecting their humanity. This aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where institutions use strict rules and monitor bodies to keep them in check. In the Fulcrum, this control is both physical and psychological. Orogenes are not just taught how to use their abilities but also conditioned to be afraid of themselves, who they are, soaking up the idea that they are inherently dangerous.

Essun is the perfect example of this. Her story shows how trauma lives inside the body, shaping her understanding of the world and how she acts in it. Her control over her power is directly tied to her ability to shut down her emotions, showing how her body has become a battleground between her true emotions and her will to survive. However, trauma in the trilogy is not limited to humans; it is also planetary. The Earth bears suffering, mirroring what Orogeneshas experienced, suggesting that the planet and body are traumatised in the same way. Both are exploited, carrying the scars of old violence, and both eventually react in ways that shatter the systems trying to control them. "You are a weapon meant to move mountains"(Jemisin, 2015, p. 78). This line shows how Orogenes are stripped of their humanity and treated like equipment. They deal with oppression, where their bodies and power are used to serve society's needs instead of their own freedom and safety.

Agency is not just about being powerful; it's about how you find a way to act when the world is trying to control you. For an orogene, agency is messy and complex; it's a mix of what they can do and the system that is constantly trying to stop them from doing it. With constraint, the trilogy shows us moments of real resistance and change. The resistance is not always a loud rebellion. Sometimes it's about surviving, adapting, or quietly refusing to be what others expect them to be. The body becomes a place where rules are questioned and new possibilities for living emerge. Jemisin also uses this focus on the body; an orogene's identity is always shifting based on what they have been through, their struggles and experience, their bond with Earth, and the power structures they live under. This focus on embodiment reminds us how much our senses matter. Orogenes feel the world differently; they feel vibrations and shifts that no one feels. They experience the world through their bodies rather than just in the head. This sensory knowledge challenges the old idea that thinking is better than feeling. Through embodiment, trauma, and control, Jemisin shows that the body is shaped by ecological, political, and social forces. The trilogy presents the body as a site where oppression, resistance, and transformation exist together. It shows that identity is not fixed but changes through experience, trauma, and the connection between the body and the Earth.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that N. K. Jemisin's*Broken Earth* trilogy stages a systematic redistribution of agency across human, geological, and technological registers, thereby offering a posthuman model of planetary justice that existing single-framework readings—ecocritical, climate-fictional, or posthumanist in isolation—have not fully articulated. Three critical findings emerge from this analysis. First, the Earth's violence in the trilogy is not an incidental catastrophe but structured retribution: the Fifth Seasons function as a geological archive of the SylAnagist exploitation, such that planetary instability operates as historically legible memory rather than neutral disaster. This finding extends ecocritical accounts of the trilogy by demonstrating that Jemisin's climate crisis is inseparable from a politics of ecological debt. Second, the orogenic body emerges as a hybrid site where biological capacity, institutional discipline, and geological function

converge; the Fulcrum's regime of control—training, naming, and node confinement—reveals that bodily agency and bodily subjection are produced by the same relational structure, not opposing ones. This complicates straightforward readings of orogenes as simply empowered or simply oppressed, showing instead that their power and their subjugation are mutually constitutive. Third, the trilogy's technological remnants—obelisks, stone eaters, the underground network—demonstrate that agency in the Stillness is genuinely distributed rather than merely shared rhetorically: no single entity, human or otherwise, retains sovereign control, which unsettles the assumption, common even in posthumanist criticism, that distributed agency necessarily implies equitable agency.The chapter's distinct contribution lies in synthesising these findings into a single interpretive claim: that Jemisin's trilogy does not simply illustrate posthumanist theory but reworks it through the specific historical grammar of racialised exploitation and environmental extraction. Reading Braidotti's relational subjectivity, Haraway'ssympoietic entanglement, and Hayles's distributed cognition togetherreveals that the trilogy's ecological and political critiques are structurally inseparable: planetary harm and bodily harm are narrated as the same event viewed at different scales. This integrated approach offers a transferable analytical model for other climate fiction and posthumanist narratives in which environmental catastrophe and embodied oppression are entangled, suggesting that future scholarship on the Anthropocene imaginary might productively read ecological agency and biopolitical control as co-constitutive rather than as parallel concerns.In this respect, the *Broken Earth* trilogy makes a significant contribution not only to posthumanist literary criticism but to broader debates on environmental justice, demonstrating that survival within ecological crisis is inseparable from the redistribution of responsibility across human and nonhuman actors alike.

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Chapter10: Influence of Home Environment On Mental Health And Psychological Wellbeing Among Higher Secondary School Students In Thodupuzha Taluk, Kerala

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Abstract

Parents, who provide a warm, responsive and supporting environment, encourage exploration, stimulate curiosity and provide play and learning materials accelerate their children's intellectual development. Within the home environment we must examine both the roles of mothers and fathers because differentiate parent behaviour has often been implicated as a variable affecting children's development and their mental health status. The present study is intended to study the mental health of higher secondary students in relation with home environment in Thodupuzha taluk, Kerala state. Out of the total sample of 800 higher secondary students 400 higher secondary students were selected from the schools situated in rural areas and 400 higher secondary students were selected from the schools situated in urban areas. They were selected through stratified proportionate random sampling method. A simple random sample should be taken from each stratum by adopting a random number table method. The researcher observed that 24.5 percent of the respondents have a high level of overall level of mental health, half (50 percent) of the respondents have a moderate level of overall level of mental health, whereas 25.5 percent of the respondents have a low level of mental health. The study also explored that 26.5 percent of the respondents felt that their home environment is good, 48.5 percent of the respondents felt that their home environment is moderate, while 25 percent of the respondents expressed that their home environment is not good. High schools generally give students access to free mental health care through a specific counselling centre or the general health centre and enhancing their emotional intelligence. Some schools also provide training for teachers and parents to provide support to learners as they seek help. Some schools provide regular check-up for students who are suffering from depression, which allows teachers, nurses, or guidance counsellors to find out how they're coping with problems and pressures. This gives students a strong support system that helps them handle their illness and succeed in school.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Home Environment, Intellectual development and Depression*

How to Cite this Chapter:

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is the most turbulent period of human life. Due to abrupt vast changes, both physical and mental, during adolescence one's adjustment with environment becomes difficult. Besides, the stress or fear and frustration of our complex modern civilization add fuel to fire (Agarwal, 1995). It is sometime results in psychological as well as sociological imbalances. Not only the adolescents but the whole humanity has been ceased with a great threat of social, emotional, educational and above all personal adjustment. Our population has large number of adolescents (Deb et al., 2015). In the modern time it is felt that if adolescents are understood and taken care of, various problems of individuals and society would be solved. It is realized that the main hurdle in the progress of world is adjustment problems of its youth, especially in a country like India. More over adolescents are our future and this is our prime responsibility to help them solve their problems, make them more confident and relaxed so that talent, potential and capability of our youth may not go waste. If something could be done to protect adolescents from the scourge of maladjustment, it would be a great service to humanity. Many parents, educators and administrators feel greatly concerned about child's adjustment in this period because of the countless problems of adolescents and their adjustments (Bernard, 1970). This has received great attention and major investigations have been carried out and as a result parent's outlook has been diverted towards better care and good mental health of their adolescents. But in India much work yet remains to be done for the adolescents to develop good mental health and resource for better adjustment. Authorities in home, schools, colleges and universities are worried over the problems of adjustment of adolescents (Goel, 2010). They are anxious to know and solve their problems. Adjustment as an important component of personality of adolescents needs special attention at this stage and the study of factors influencing adjustment will help in facilitating better learning, controlling wastage and developing balanced personality among adolescents. It will also help parents, teachers, concerned adults and authorities in better understanding of factors influencing the adjustments (Arkoff, 1968 and Singh, 2015). In modern society, where life is becoming more complex and conflicting day by day one often comes across a large number of maladjusted persons in various social situations. Their problems may range from excessive over generalized worrying up to simpler character logical defects like nail biting, thumb sucking, stuttering, marital disharmony, mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction and so on. Hence prevention of such problems is essential not only for the individual but for the community and country at large (Nihira et al., 1980).

Home environment is the most important institution for the existence and continuance of human life and the development of various personality traits (Bernard, 1970 and Kaur (2007). An ideal home environment is one where there is proper reward to strengthen the desired behaviour, a keen interest in and love for the child, provision of opportunities to express its views freely, where parents put less restrictions to discipline the child, not preventing the child from acting independently and not continuing infantile care, optimum use of physical and affective punishment, where the children are not compelled to act according to parental desires and expectations (Mangala and Satyaparkasha 2009 and Muola, 2010). Hence, it is very important for parents to develop self-understanding of their emotions and feelings in order to transform that understanding in their children (Misra, 1984). The more the parents are able to understand their emotions, the better they will be able to manage their child's emotional personality (Paul, 2015). Emotional competence or incompetence of parents has affirmative or adverse effects on adolescents. Findings of many research indicated that children raised in loving, caring, secure, consistent and stable home environment have a greater probability of developing well in socially, psychologically, physically, emotionally and morally (Arkoff, 1968). During the adolescence period individual begins to form a sense of self, seeks to develop

more mature relationships with peers and family and attempt to increase independence. Supportive relationship with family members has been shown to influence a broad range of social behavioural, emotional and academic outcomes, including depression, anxiety, self-esteem, delinquency, social competence, involvement with drugs and alcohols, achievement motivation and academic achievement of an adolescents (Shukla and Bhanot 2016). The home environment is a most powerful informal learning situation in which the family, more specially parents, acts as an educator. The family is a place in which, the whole ranges of human experiences take place, it is what parents do in the home that counts for learning development of children (Vasuki and Raj 2015). It goes without saying that lack of encouragement, low quality of parental involvement and lack of stimulating activity in the home will reduce the home's effectiveness as a learning environment for higher secondary school students. Therefore, the researcher is intended to study the mental health of higher secondary students in relation with home environment in Thodupuzha taluk, Kerala state and give suggestions to improve the mental health status of higher secondary students.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To find the mental health status among the higher secondary students.
2) To study the home environment among the higher secondary students.
3) To examine the mental health status in relation to home environment among the higher secondary students.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

For the present study, it was necessary for the researcher to highlight the problems /issues encountered by adolescents which affects their mental health and home environment. Thus, in order to achieve all the above mentioned objectives, researcher has adopted descriptive research design for the present study.

2.3. UNIVERSE

The universe of the present study includes all the higher secondary students who are studying in the jurisdiction of Thodupuzha Taluk of Kerala State. The sample of the present study was drawn from 20 senior secondary schools of government, government aided and privately managed schools in Thodupuzha Taluk, Kerala state. The universe consists of 5402 higher secondary students are studying in 20 senior secondary government, government aided and privately managed schools in Thodupuzha Taluk, Kerala state.

2.4. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Out of the universe 4003 adolescents are studying in rural based schools which include 2059 boys and 1944 girls and 1399 adolescents are studying in urban based schools which include 686 boys and 713 girls. For the present study 20 boys' and 20 girls' higher secondary students were selected from each senior secondary school in Thodupuzha Taluk, Kerala State. From this sample frame the researcher selected 800 adolescents for data collection. Out of the total sample of 800 adolescents 640 adolescents were selected from the schools situated in rural areas and 160 adolescents were selected from the schools situated in urban areas. Out of the 640 rural adolescents 320 girls and 320 boys were selected. Similarly, out of 160 urban adolescents 80 girls and 80 girls were selected. The sample for the study was selected randomly to ensure that every unit of the population gets equal chance of being selected. The researcher ensured that discretions of the researcher should not get involved in the selection of the sample from the population. They were selected through stratified proportionate random sampling method. A simple random sample should be taken from each stratum by adopting a random number table method.

3. MAJOR FINDINGS

Table No: 1
Distribution of the respondents according to their perception towards various dimensions of Mental Health

S. No.	Various dimensions of Mental Health	No. of Respondents (n = 800)	Percentage
1.	**Positive Self-Evaluation**		
	Low	200	25.0
	Moderate	440	55.0
	High	160	20.0
2.	**Perception of Reality**		
	Low	228	28.5
	Moderate	408	51.0
	High	164	20.5
3.	**Integration of Personality**		
	Low	220	27.5
	Moderate	332	41.5
	High	248	31.0
4.	**Autonomy**		
	Low	232	29.0
	Moderate	368	46.0
	High	200	25.0
5.	**Group Oriented Attitude**		
	Low	252	31.5
	Moderate	356	44.5
	High	192	24.0
6.	**Environment competence**		
	Low	208	26.0
	Moderate	412	51.5
	High	180	22.5
7.	**Overall level of Mental Health**		
	Low	204	25.5
	Moderate	400	50.0
	High	196	24.5

Source: Author's Creation

Table 1 depicts that nearly half of the respondents have a moderate level of mental health in various dimensions such as positive self-evaluation (55 percent), integration of personality (41.5 percent), autonomy (46 percent), group oriented attitude (44.5 percent) and environment competence (51.5 percent). However, one-fourths of the respondents have low level of mental health and one-fifths of the respondents have a high level of mental health. Further, 24.5 percent of the respondents have a high level of overall level of mental health, half (50 percent) of the respondents have a moderate level of overall level of mental health, whereas 25.5 percent of the respondents have a low level of mental health.

Table No: 2
Distribution of the respondents according to their perception towards various dimensions of Home Environment

S. No.	Various dimensions of Home Environment	No. of Respondents (n = 800)	Percentage
1.	**Control**		
	Low	240	30.0
	Moderate	404	50.5
	High	156	19.5
2.	**Protectiveness**		
	Low	224	28.0
	Moderate	416	52.0
	High	160	20.0
3.	**Punishment**		
	Low	252	31.5
	Moderate	316	39.5
	High	232	29.0
4.	**Conformity**		
	Low	224	28.0
	Moderate	384	48.0
	High	192	24.0
5.	**Social Isolation**		
	Low	276	34.5
	Moderate	324	40.5
	High	200	25.0
6.	**Reward**		
	Low	216	27.0
	Moderate	416	52.0
	High	168	21.0
7.	**Deprivations of Privileges**		
	Low	200	25.0
	Moderate	408	51.0
	High	192	24.0
8.	**Nurturance**		
	Low	252	31.5
	Moderate	364	45.5
	High	184	23.0
9.	**Rejection**		
	Low	248	31.0
	Moderate	392	49.0
	High	160	20.0
10.	**Permissiveness**		
	Low	288	36.0

	Moderate	336	42.0
	High	176	22.0
11.	**Overall level of Home Environment**		
	Low	212	26.5
	Moderate	388	48.5
	High	200	25.0

Source: Author's Creation

Table 2 discernible that half of the respondents have a moderate level of perception towards various dimensions of home environment such as control (50.5 percent), protectiveness (52 percent), punishment (39.5 percent), conformity (48 percent), social isolation (40.5 percent), reward (52 percent), deprivations of privileges (51 percent), nurturance (45.5 percent), rejection (49 percent) and permissiveness (42 percent). However, one-thirds of the respondents have a low level of perception towards various dimensions of home environment, whereas one-fifths of the respondents have a high level of perception towards various dimensions of home environment. Further, 26.5 percent of the respondents felt that their home environment is good, 48.5 percent of the respondents felt that their home environment is moderate, while 25 percent of the respondents expressed that their home environment is not good. The researcher concluded that family is oldest and the most valuable of all the institutions that man has devised for regulating and integrating his behavior. He strives to satisfy his basic needs. The family provides care and support to the child; child care may be equally shared by the parents. Though it is the total environment of a family that influences the child development, but one cannot deny that parents constitute a major part of family environment. Home environment or parent-child rearing practices consists of characteristics of permissiveness, willingness to devote time to the child, parental guidance, parental aspiration for achievement, provision for child's intellectual needs, effective reward, instrumental companionship, prescription, physical punishment, principled discipline, neglect, deprivation of privileges, protectiveness, power achievement, demands, indulgence, conformity, independence, dependence, emotional and verbal responsibility, involvement with the child, physical and temporal environment, avoidance of restriction and punishment and provision of appropriate play materials. It is the duty of each and every member of the family to pay due respect to the individuality of the child and foster in him a sense of belongingness and responsibility towards his own self and others. Because each family has its own culture and sets up which is quite distinct from the other, therefore no two children are the same neither in the beginning, nor during development or as a growing up adult citizen.

Table No: 3

'Z' Test between the Gender of the respondents and perception towards Various dimensions of Mental Health

S. No	Gender	Sample size (n=800)	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Statistical Inference
1.	**Positive Self-Evaluation**				Z = 0.689 0.491>0.05 Not Significant
	Male	400	27.1000	5.70846	
	Female	400	27.3700	5.36377	
2.	**Perception of Reality**				Z =0.038 0.970>0.05
	Male	400	26.7975	5.93587	

	Female	400	26.7825	5.33257	Not Significant
3.	**Integration of Personality**				Z =4.218 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant
	Male	400	28.2975	6.58654	
	Female	400	30.1925	6.11178	
4.	**Autonomy**				Z = 3.567 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant
	Male	400	27.2875	5.98367	
	Female	400	28.7125	5.29528	
5.	**Group Oriented Attitude**				Z = 4.880 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant
	Male	400	24.0900	5.39116	
	Female	400	25.9600	5.44817	
6.	**Environment competence**				Z =2.676 0.008<0.01 Highly Significant
	Male	400	33.9900	7.37909	
	Female	400	35.3500	6.99176	
6.	**Overall level of Mental Health**				Z =3.566 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant
	Male	400	167.5625	28.38106	
	Female	400	174.3675	25.51057	

Source: Author's Creation

Ha= There is a significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health.

H_0= There is no significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health.

It is surmised from the table 3 that there is a highly significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their perception towards various dimensions of mental health such as integration of personality, autonomy, group oriented attitude and environment competence. However, there is no significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their perception towards various dimensions of mental health such as positive self-evaluation and perception of reality. Further, there is a highly significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health (Z=3.566, 0.000<0.01). It is observed from the table that gender of the respondents has influence on the level of perception towards mental health. It is observed from the statistical analysis that the mean score ($\overline{X}$ =28.38106) indicates male respondents have a high level of positive mental health than female respondents.

Statistical Inference:

'Z' test was used to test the above hypothesis and it was found that there is a significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health (Z=3.566, 0.000<0.01). It is seen from table that the calculated value of the 'Z' test is more than the table value at the 1 percent level of significance.

Hence Research Hypothesis is accepted.

Table No: 4

Association between the Age of the respondents and perception towards various dimensions of Home Environment

S. No	Age	Various dimensions of Home Environment			Statistical Inference
		Low	Moderate	High	
1.	Control	n=240	n=404	n=156	χ^2 = 19.963

	15 Years	36	60	16	df = 6 0.003<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.156
	16 Years	128	172	76	
	17 Years	60	132	60	
	18 Years	16	40	4	
2.	**Protectiveness**	**n=224**	**n=416**	**n=160**	$\chi^2 = 58.987$ df = 6 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.262
	15 Years	28	44	40	
	16 Years	76	212	88	
	17 Years	92	132	28	
	18 Years	28	28	4	
3.	**Punishment**	**n=252**	**n=316**	**n=232**	$\chi^2 = 14.954$ df = 6 0.021<0.05 Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.135
	15 Years	32	40	40	
	16 Years	128	140	108	
	17 Years	68	120	64	
	18 Years	24	16	20	
4.	**Conformity**	**n=224**	**n=384**	**n=192**	$\chi^2 = 65.222$ df = 6 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.275
	15 Years	44	40	28	
	16 Years	132	144	100	
	17 Years	32	168	52	
	18 Years	16	32	12	
5.	**Social Isolation**	**n=276**	**n=324**	**n=200**	$\chi^2 = 24.919$ df = 6 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.174
	15 Years	48	40	24	
	16 Years	120	148	108	
	17 Years	96	96	60	
	18 Years	12	40	8	
6.	**Reward**	**n=216**	**n=416**	**n=168**	$\chi^2 = 36.848$ df = 6 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.210
	15 Years	40	60	12	
	16 Years	100	180	96	
	17 Years	48	148	56	
	18 Years	28	28	4	
7.	**Deprivations of Privileges**	**n=200**	**n=408**	**n=192**	$\chi^2 = 9.745$ df = 6 0.136>0.05 Not Significant
	15 Years	24	56	32	
	16 Years	88	196	92	
	17 Years	64	132	56	
	18 Years	24	24	12	
8.	**Nurturance**	**n=252**	**n=364**	**n=184**	$\chi^2 = 14.815$ df = 6 0.022<0.05 Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.135
	15 Years	36	44	32	
	16 Years	108	192	76	
	17 Years	80	108	64	
	18 Years	28	20	12	

9.	**Rejection**	**n=248**	**n=392**	**n=160**	$\chi^2 = 27.174$ df = 6 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.181
	15 Years	44	52	16	
	16 Years	92	204	80	
	17 Years	80	116	56	
	18 Years	32	20	8	
10.	**Permissiveness**	**n=288**	**n=336**	**n=176**	$\chi^2 = 21.097$ df = 6 0.002<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.160
	15 Years	56	36	20	
	16 Years	124	152	100	
	17 Years	92	116	44	
	18 Years	16	32	12	
11.	**Overall level of Home Environment**	**n=212**	**n=388**	**n=200**	$\chi^2 = 39.373$ df = 6 0.000<0.01 Highly Significant Contingency Coefficient=0.217
	15 Years	36	44	32	
	16 Years	84	184	108	
	17 Years	60	144	48	
	18 Years	32	16	12	

Source: Author's Creation

H_a= There is a significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of home environment.

H_0= There is no significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of home environment.

It is proved from the table 4 that there is a highly significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception towards various dimensions of home environment such as control, protectiveness, punishment, conformity, social isolation, reward, nurturance, rejection and permissiveness. However, there is no significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception towards a dimension of home environment such as deprivations of privileges. Further, there is a highly significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of home environment (χ^2=39.373, 0.000<0.01). It is found from the table that age of the respondents has influence on the perception towards various dimensions of home environment. The researcher concluded from the statistical analysis that the respondents who are in the age of 16 years have a high level of positive perception towards various dimensions of home environment such as control, protectiveness, punishment, conformity, social isolation, reward, nurturance, rejection and permissiveness. The contingency coefficient has explained that the strength of association between the age of the respondents and their overall level of home environment is at 21 percent. It is disclosed from the statistical analysis that the age of the respondents is strongly associated with their perception towards various dimensions of home environment such as control (15 percent), protectiveness (26 percent), punishment (13 percent), conformity (27 percent), social isolation (17 percent), reward (21 percent), nurturance (13 percent), rejection (18 percent) and permissiveness (16 percent).

Statistical Inference:

'χ^2' test was used to test the above hypothesis and it was found that there is a significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of home environment (χ^2 =39.373, 0.000<0.01). It is seen from table that the calculated value of the 'χ^2' test is more than the table value at the 1 percent level of significance.

Hence Research Hypothesis is accepted.

Table No: *5*

Two way Analysis of Variance among Educational Qualification of the respondents' Father & Mother and perception towards overall level of Mental Health among the Adolescents

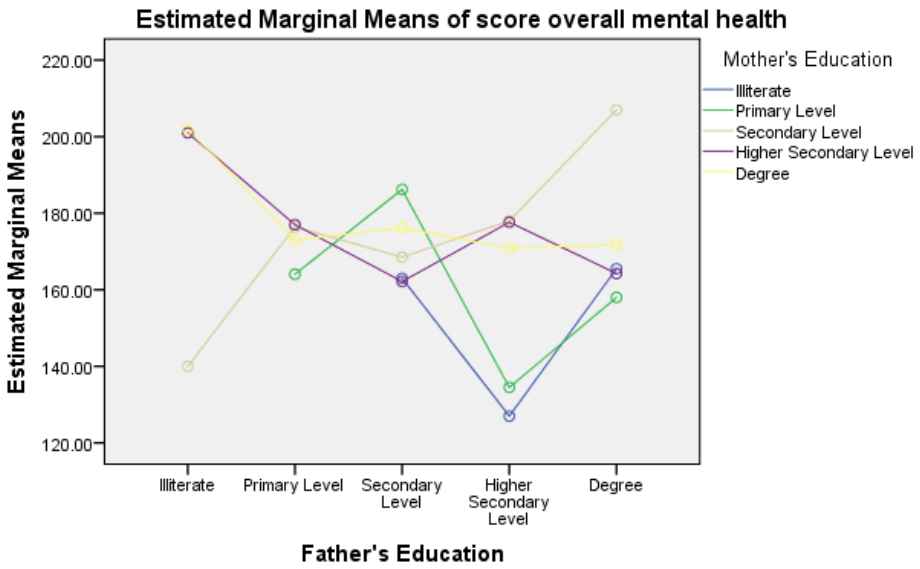
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: **Overall level of Mental Health**					
Source	**Type III Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Corrected Model	65811.289[a]	21	3133.871	4.648	.000
Intercept	4842553.124	1	4842553.124	7182.992	.000
Father education	9474.328	4	2368.582	3.513	.007
Mother education	16878.965	4	4219.741	6.259	.000
Father education * Mother education	52158.147	13	4012.165	5.951	.000
Error	524503.731	778	674.169		
Total	23973540.000	800			
Corrected Total	590315.020	799			

Source: Author's Creation

a. R Squared = .111 (Adjusted R Squared = .088)

Profile Plots

The plot of the mean "overall level of mental health" score for each combination of groups of "father's educational qualification" and "mother's educational qualification" are plotted in a line graph, as shown in below figure. An interaction effect can be seen as a set of non-parallel lines. The lines crossing each other confirm the interaction effect from the independent variables.



H_a= There is a significant variance among the father's and mother's educational qualification of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents.

H_0= There is no significant variance among the father's and mother's educational

qualification of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents.

It is inferred from table 5 that there is a highly significant variance among the father's educational qualification of the respondents and their overall level of metal health (F=3.513, 0.007<0.01, Significant). Moreover, there is a highly significant variance among the respondents' mother's educational qualification and their overall level of mental health (F=6.259, 0.000<0.01). This means that respondents' fathers and mothers' educational qualification have influenced their perception towards overall level of mental health. Furthermore, when these factors are intersected with each other, it is clear that respondents' fathers and mothers' educational qualification influences their overall level of perception towards mental health (F= 5.951, 0.000<0.01, Significant). The particular rows we are interested in are "father's educational qualification", "mother's educational qualification" and "father's educational qualification* mother's educational qualification" which are highlighted above. These rows inform us whether our independent variables ("father's educational qualification" and "mother's educational qualification") and their interaction (the "father's educational qualification*mother's educational qualification" row) have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, "overall level of mental health". It is important to note that "father's educational qualification* mother's educational qualification" have a statistically significant (F=5.951, 0.000<0.01) interaction at the 1 % level.

Statistical Inference

"Two-way analysis of variance" test was used to test the above hypothesis and it found a significant variance among the father's and mother's educational qualification of the respondents and their perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents (F= 3.513, 0.007<0.01 and F=6.259, 0.000<0.01). Furthermore, when these factors are intersected with each other, it is clear that respondents' fathers and mothers' educational qualification influences their overall level of perception towards mental health (F= 5.951, 0.000<0.01, Significant). It may be seen from table that the calculated value of the "Two-way analysis of variance" test is more than the table value at the 1 percent level of significance.

Hence Research Hypothesis is accepted.

Table No: 6
Multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis

Independent Variables: Overall level of Mental Health among the Adolescents

Dependent Variable : Domicile, Mother's Education, score for overall home environment, Order of Birth, Type of family, category for father monthly income, Gender, Nature of School, Subject Groups, Father's Education, Father's Occupation, Class Studied, Family Monthly Income, Home Environment, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Concept

Table No: 6 A
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.662[a]	.438	.426	20.59087

Source: Author's Creation

Table No: 6 B
ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	258759.713	17	15221.160	35.900	.000[b]

	Residual	331555.307	782	423.984		
	Total	590315.020	799			

Source: Author's Creation

Independent Variables: Overall level of Mental Health among the Adolescents

Dependent Variable : Domicile, Mother's Education, score for overall home environment, Order of Birth, Type of family, category for father monthly income, Gender, Nature of School, Subject Groups, Father's Education, Father's Occupation, Class Studied, Family Monthly Income, Home Environment, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Concept

Table No: 6 C

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	86.644	22.375		3.872	.000
Gender	6.884	1.560	.127	4.413	.000
Domicile	4.104	1.573	.113	3.245	.001
Father's Education	3.573	1.170	.110	3.053	.002
Mother's Education	2.636	.985	.085	2.677	.008
Father's Occupation	2.362	.513	.083	2.657	.008
Father's Monthly Income	4.629	1.003	.092	2.277	.023
Family Monthly Income	1.983	1.003	.078	2.277	.023
Type of family	2.244	1.606	.083	2.642	.008
Order of Birth	1.712	1.002	.053	1.909	.057
Class Studying	5.055	2.212	.118	3.641	.000
Subject Groups	5.979	.728	.121	4.090	.000
Nature of School	6.376	1.388	.134	4.593	.000
Home environment	2.477	0.593	.096	2.904	.002
Emotional Intelligence	12.550	.027	.621	20.564	.000
Self-Concept	1.820	0.667	.074	2.180	.020

Source: Author's Creation

H_a= There is a significant association between the respondents' perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents due to variation in domicile, mother's education, score for overall home environment, order of birth, type of family, category for father monthly income, gender, nature of school, subject groups, father's education, father's occupation, class studied, family monthly income, home environment, emotional intelligence,

H_0= There is no significant association between the respondents' perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents due to variation in domicile, mother's education, score for overall home environment, order of birth, type of family, category for father monthly income, gender, nature of school, subject groups, father's education, father's occupation, class studied, family monthly income, home environment and emotional intelligence.

The results of regression analysis for the dependent variable on overall level of mental health are presented in table 6 A. In the column labelled R are the values of multi-correlation

coefficient between the predictors and the outcome. When group of predictors are used, this is the correlation between the overall level of the mental health and predictors (0.662). The next column gives us a value of adjusted R^2, which is a measure of how much of the variability in the outcome, is accounted for by the predictors. In this model value is 0.438, which means that group of predictors account for 43 percent of the variation on overall level of the mental health is explained by fourteen underlying variables of domicile, mother's education, score for overall home environment, order of birth, type of family, category for father monthly income, gender, nature of school, subject groups, father's education, father's occupation, class studied, family monthly income, home environment, emotional intelligence and self-concept. It can be seen from table 6 B, the next part of the output contains an analysis of variance (ANOVA) that tests whether the model is significantly better at predicting the outcome using the mean. Specifically, the F-ratio represents the ratio of the improvement in prediction of results from fitting the model. For the initial model the F-ratio is 35.900, which is highly significant (P<0.000), it means that group of predictors has positively influenced the overall level of mental health among the adolescents. The socio-demographic variables such as domicile, mother's education, score for overall home environment, order of birth, type of family, category for father monthly income, gender, nature of school, subject groups, father's education, father's occupation, class studied, family monthly income, home environment, emotional intelligence, self-concept have significantly influenced the level of adolescents' perception towards overall level of mental health. It can be seen from table 6 C that socio-demographic variables of the adolescents have positively related with the level of perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents such as domicile, mother's education, score for overall home environment, order of birth, type of family, category for father monthly income, gender, nature of school, subject groups, father's education, father's occupation, class studied, family monthly income, home environment and emotional intelligence.

The level of perception towards emotional intelligence of the respondents has highest beta coefficient of 0.621 and t value of 20.564, 0.000 <0.01 is statistically highly significant at 1 percent level. Nature of school of the respondents has highest beta coefficient of 0.134 and t value of 4.593, 0.000 <0.01 is statistically highly significant at 1 percent level. Gender of the respondents has highest beta coefficient of 0.127 and t value of 4.413, 0.000<0.01 is statistically significant at 1 percent. Studying subject group of the respondents is positively highly correlated with the perception towards overall level of mental health and statistically found to be significant at 1 percent level (Beta value=0.121, t=4.090 0.000<0.01). Respondents' gender is positively highly correlated with the perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents and statistically found to be significant at 1 percent level (Beta value=0.127, t=4.413, 0.000<0.01). Respondents' fathers' monthly income is positively highly correlated with the perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents and statistically found to be significant at 1 percent level (Beta value=0.116, t=3.414 0.001<0.01). Father's education of the respondents has highest beta coefficient of 0.110 and t value of 3.053, 0.002 <0.01 is statistically highly significant at 1 percent level. The level of home environment of the respondents has beta coefficient of 0.096 and t value of 2.904, 0.002 <0.01 is statistically highly significant at 1 percent level. Mother's education of the respondents has beta coefficient of 0.085 and t value of 2.677, 0.008<0.01 is statistically significant at 1 percent. Father's occupation of the respondents is positively highly correlated with the perception towards overall level of mental health and statistically found to be significant at 1 percent level (Beta value=0.083, t=2.657 0.008<0.01). Respondents' type of family is positively highly correlated with the perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents and statistically found to be significant at 1 percent

level (Beta value=0.083, t=2.642, 0.008<0.01). Respondents' family monthly income is positively correlated with the perception towards overall level of mental health among the adolescents and statistically found to be significant at 5 percent level (Beta value=0.078, t=2.277 0.023<0.05). Respondents' perception towards self-concept is positively correlated with the overall level of mental health among the adolescents and statistically found to be significant at 5 percent level (Beta value=0.074, t=2.180, 0.020<0.05). Order of birth of the respondents has beta coefficient of 0.053 and t value of 1.909, 0.057 <0.05 is statistically highly significant at 5 percent level. The result shows that the regression analysis accepted that the Respondents' perception towards emotional intelligence, nature of school and gender were significant predictor of overall level of mental health among the adolescents. It is also observed from the statistical analysis that socio-demographic variable such as subject groups, class studying, father's monthly income, domicile, father's education, home environment, mother's education, father's occupation, type of family, family monthly income, self-concept and order of birth. The Overall predictors contributed Multiple R of 0.438. The F ratio computed for the significance of multiple R is 35.900, which is significant at 1 percent (P<0.000) probability level.

The researcher concluded from the statistical analysis that among the various predictors' emotional intelligence of the respondents plays a dominant role in determining their overall level of mental health among the adolescents followed by nature of school and gender. The researcher also concluded from the table that the subject groups, class studying, father's monthly income, domicile, father's education, home environment, mother's education, father's occupation, type of family, family monthly income, self-concept and order of birth have been broadly linked with determination of overall level of mental health among the adolescents.

Statistical Inference:

'Multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis' test was used to test the above hypothesis and it was found that there is a significant association between the respondents' overall level of mental health among the adolescents and their selected socio-demographic variables such as domicile, mother's education, score for overall home environment, order of birth, type of family, category for father monthly income, gender, nature of school, subject groups, father's education, father's occupation, class studied, family monthly income, home environment and emotional intelligence. The Overall predictors contributed Multiple R of 0.438. The F ratio computed for the significance of multiple R is 35.900, which is significant at 1 percent (P<0.000) probability level. It is seen from table that the calculated value of the 'Multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis' test is greater than the table value at the 1 percent and 5 percent level of level of significance.

Hence Research Hypothesis is accepted.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- This study has shed light on the fact that the home environment can be a strong source of support for developing adolescents' mental health, providing close relationships, strong parenting skills, good communication, and modelling positive behaviour, so that modifications in the home environment can be made to make it more favourable for the enhancement of mental health of the children. The findings of this study have implications for counsellors, educationists as well as parents that there is a need to facilitate good quality of home with proper communicative and supportive environment to their adolescent children.
- Meditation helps people slow down their minds, which is beneficial to those who have problems with concentration. In addition, meditation is associated with decreased stress, better sleep patterns, and a more positive mood. Similarly, other relaxation exercises like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation,

and guided visualizations can help increase clarity and focus.

- School environment should be encouraging for adolescents. They should be counseled for their career ahead as teenage is a stage of choosing next upcoming career. This counseling may help a child to get serious for their future. Parents should allow children to go for excursion so as they may be become more expressive and responsible.
- In order to boost the level of aspiration of the adolescents the teachers in the class room as well as outside the classroom should provide all possible study material as well as moral boosting to the adolescents. In addition to these teachers should provide feedback to the students so that students may come to know their level of aspiration from time to time. This will enhance the mental health of the adolescents.
- Parents and administrators should provide congenial environment in the school in order to boost the self-concept of adolescent which in turn will enhance the level of self-concept of adolescents. For this, various curricular and co-curricular activities must be organized in the school. Principals should see that adolescents should not be scolded and should not feel any inadequacy of educational environment in school. If possible some guidance service should be provided in the school so that mental health of the adolescents may not be disturbed in any way.

5. CONCLUSION

The mental health plays an important role in guarantying the dynamism and efficiency of society. Adolescence is accompanied by puberty and significant changes in physical, cognitive, affective and social aspects. It ranges from 12 to 20 years, and high school students belong to this range. Adolescence is usually considered as a critical period, so if students pass adolescence without considerable difficulty, they will be successful adults. The millions of students who struggle with emotional and behavioral problems affect their learning and the learning of others. The healthy, motivated and cheerful students are considered as a main goal in the education systems of different societies because having such human resources can facilitate the development and progress toward the achievement of the predetermined goals. Mental health is very important factor for high school students as they are in the turning point of their life in academic aspect and personal aspect. Mentally disturbed students may become a burden to the school and society. This study revealed that the high school students have moderate level of mental health. So, providing the mental health for different social classes, especially for students in school environments is one of the most significant factors which educational authorities must pay close attention to because the future performance and great comprehensive cultural and value development of millions of students rely on their today's personalities.

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Chapter11: The Dynamics of Lexical Morphology in Nigerian English

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Abstract

The English language has evolved as a global lingua franca, and as such, has metamorphosed into varieties and typologies. This chapter foregrounds Nigerian English typology as one of the varieties of the language in use in the geo-linguistic space of Nigeria. This unit has justified the existence of Nigerian English by reviewing existing scholarships in the variety and identifying its lexico-morphological features as distinct from other varieties in the world. Various forms of lexico-morpholgical patterns of Nigerian Englishare revealed in this exposition. Those forms of lexical and morphological patterns of this variety of English identified in the chapter include the use of new lexemes borrowedfrom Nigerian local languages, English analogies that result in new idioms , the use of coinages and calques. It is also found in the study that some lexical and morphological processes of Nigerian English lexemes and expressions are similar to standard English, but the process in Nigerian English ends up creating vocabulary items different from Standard form or world Educated English. The chapter contributes to language and linguistic literature in particular and knowledge in general in the sub-discipline of lexical morphology, especially by identifying and foregrounding those words and expressions that are currently in use in Nigerian English as well as their lexico-morphological processes

Keywords: *Lexical Morphology, Nigerian English, Syntax, Interlanguage, Lexemes*

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Introduction

Today, the English language has ceased to be an exclusive preserve of its ancestral home. A number of its varieties across the globe have emerged, but they are not adequately studied by scholars. Nigerian English (henceforward, referred to as NgE), undoubtedly, has features that mark it out from other varieties of English in the world. This means that the typology of English spoken and written in Nigeria today is distinct from the World Standard English (WSE) or Standard English (SE). One of the ways to realize this difference is in the lexico-morphological patterns of English words used by Nigerians. Such lexico-morphological patterns to be looked for in this chapter include idioms, acronyms, coinages, compositions, conversions and loan words.On this account, the aim of this book chapter is to explorecertain lexical and morphological patterns found in NgEtypologywhich is one of the extant varieties of the English language. In this chapter, the concept of Morphology in language is explained. The relationship between Morphology and its allied discipline, Syntax, is given attention. The chapter provides a detailed exposition of the differences between the two types of Morphology which are lexical morphology and inflectional morphology. A justification of NgE typology as a legitimate variety that is worthy of scholarship is made in this unit.This is followed by the illustration of the lexical and morphological features of NgE.

The Concept of Morphology

Etymologically, the word "Morphology" was derived from the two Greek word units, 'Morphe' (from) and 'Ology' which means science of word forms, function and occurrence of a morpheme.Morphology is one of the levels of linguistic description as well as a branch of Linguistics, and as such studies various patterns of word formation within a language and across languages. According to Brown and Miller (1980), Morphology is concerned with the internal structure of words, forms of words and all the possible combinations that form words or parts of words. A broader meaning of Morphology is that it is a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of patterns of word formation within and across languages. It, as well, formulates rules that govern such patterns.

Morphology is divided into two major branches. They are lexical morphology, also known as derivational morphology and inflectional morphology. Lexical morphology is regarded as the more productive form of Morphology because it creates new words in a language by changing the syntactic category of a word. This change also results in change in the meaning of word. Examples include **paint= painter, well=unwell**These new words **painter** and **unwell** were formed by the process of suffixation and prefixation , respectively. On the other hand, inflectional morphology does not cause a change in the syntactic category of words. Rather, itshows grammatical changes of words. Such changes are changes in tense or aspect, pluralizatioin and grammatical concord in general

Relationship between Syntax and Morphology

Syntax is about how sentences are formed from words to phrases, from phrases to clauses and finally, to sentences. In other words, syntax is concerned with allthe possible combinations of the units that result in sentences, almost the same way morphology examines possible internal structures of words or various ways through which words are realized. Therefore, various realization rules in syntax such as constituent structure rules, lexical insertion rules, treeor vine diagrams also apply in the study of morphology

Illustration of Derivational Morphes from Different Word Classes to Different Syntactic Categories

The examples below which are extracted from Yule (2020)show how new words are created from different word classes through the process of lexical morphology. The derivations also result in change in meaning.

- **NOUN to ADJ**
- boy + ish = boyish
- Affection + ate = affectionate
- Elizabeth + an = Elizabethan
- Coward + ly = cowardly
- **NOUN to VERB**
- dark + en = darken
- haste + en = hasten
- brand + ish = brandish
- moral + ize = moralize
- **VERB to NOUN**
- argue + ment = argument
- sing + er = singer
- confer + ence = conference
- clear + ance = clearance

- **VERB to ADJ**
- Read + able = readable
- Create + ive = creative
- Run + ny = runny
- **ADJ to NOUN**
- Tall + ness = tallness
- Feminine + ism = feminism
- Specific + ity = specificity
- **ADJ to ADV**
- exact + ly = exactly
- quiet + ly = quietly

Yule, however, instructively stated that not all derivational morphemes cause a change in syntactic category. This is justified by the following examples:

- Friend + ship = friendship (n)
- Human + ity = humanity (n)

Justification for Nigerian English Typology

The polemics on whether NgE exists or not and the extent of its intelligibility to the speakers of other varieties of Englishare no longer a controversy. This is because , as Jibril (2005) contended, the debate which was active in the 1960's and 1970's has become settled in the affirmative. It has not only been settled, but has produced an extensive description of NgE syntax, phonology and lexis written by notable Nigerian and foreign linguists. They include Banjo (1996), Jibril (1982b), Awonusi (1985), Jowitt (1991), Bamiro (1994), Partridge (1961). With regard to its formal code, a trailblazing feat has also been achieved by Igboanusi (2002) by providing a lexicon for NgE.

As highlighted by Nwoko (2016), the concept of NgE and its features are insightfully and vividly demonstrated by Walsh (1967) with the use of a recurring sentence in Nigerian usage thus: "The escaper fled into the bush for his dear life". He dismisses intelligibility here as what is at issue, arguing that any user of English, whether as ENL or ESL or EFL will no doubt understand the sentence and will also realize that it is not World Standard English (WSE) generally adopted by educated users throughout the world which should be: "The escaper ran for dear life into the bush". This is what is meant by NgE: those expressions that have been so fossilized in Nigeria that they have ceased to be merely imperfectly learned British English and have now become part and parcel of the English language used in Nigeria. In another context, Walsh brands them "Acceptable Local Variants" (P 47) just as 'car park' is British, but 'parking lot' American English.

It is also posited that English, having emerged as

the language of the world, is no longer the possession of the British and for this reason the speaker is no longer subjected to the English assumptions of correctness. This is a proof that the language is no longer an exclusive preserve of the British. It explains why almost all the countries in the world have given it some official status, either as English as a Native Language(ENL) or English as A Second Language (ESL) or English as A Foreign Language (EFL). These new Englishes, which are at variance with Standard English (SE), also exist in West African countries so as to fulfill the socio-cultural and linguistic functions of such speech communities.

In acknowledging new Englishes in Africa, Grieve (1964) argued:

> If English is to be an effective means of communication in Africa --- it is essential that it adapt itself so as to be able to express African concepts.

Such arguments follow that nativization or domestication of the English language in Nigeria is already in progress, especially at the level of lexical morphology.

The Basic Concern of Lexical Morphology

Lexemes are an indispensable part of a language and as such, are very important to any society and speech community. A language or its variety keeps accommodating new lexical items that reflect the socio-political and economic situations of a society, and such lexemes generate new meanings that fulfill the communicative functions of such a linguistic environment. Jowitt (1991) corroborated it thus: "Language and society develop side by side; social changes bring linguistic changes" (p.26)

Morphology is concerned with the internal structure of words, forms of words and all the possible combinations that form words or parts of words (Brown and Miller 1980). The basic concern of morphology and its processes are how morphemes are realized from allomorphs to morphs and from morphs to morphemes or words. These processes result in the two main types of morphology such as inflectional morphology which is concerned with the way lexical stems are brought together with grammatical markers as in pluralization of 'boy + ish' = boyish and lexical morphology.

In the English language, words belong to different syntactic categories and for this reason, a specific type of inflection or affixation appropriately applies to a specific category of words as in negative prefixes like '*unhappy'*, *'indecent'*, but not nouns like *unbook* (Radford 1997). Correspondingly, English mode of adverbializing as in suffixing**'-ly'** to adjectives to form adjective/adverb pairs does not apply to other grammatical classes.

At the level of word formation, lexical and inflectional morphology have a meeting point. This is illustrated with some syntactic categories that are associated with a lexical category such as verbs. For this reason, the morpheme that goes with the morpheme (past) such as **ed** is realized in such verb words as **gain-ed;tend-e**d,etc, but not in nominal words like **Lagos, house, car** and **book**. Again, an aspect of syntactic category that denotes definiteness by the use of the definite article always co-occurs with nouns which belong to the lexical class as in **the boy: the girl; the man, the school,**etc(Brown and Miller 1980). To demonstrate further this type of relationship between lexical and inflectional morphology,

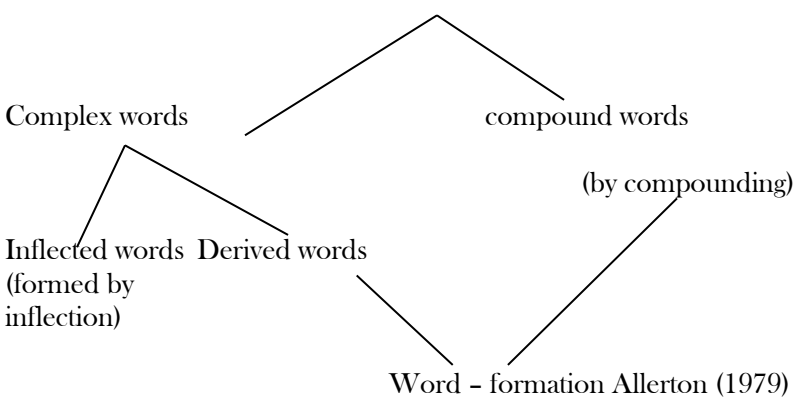
Brown and Miller cited an example of a nonsense English poetry thus:

Twasbrillig and the slithytoves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe
(p.169)

The observation here is that all the grammatical words are purely English; the non-sense stems are lexical words. The interpretation of the nonsense poem is still possible because while the lexical stems are unintelligible, the grammatical ones are not. Similarly, some NgE words become intelligible and interpretable to the audience as a result of the presence of pure grammatical English words, as in some traditional titles that denote institutions of kingship as in: **The Shehu of Borno, The Obi of Onitsha, the Sultan of Sokoto**, etc. This same observation applies to NgE affixation processes by the suffixation of the agentive markers to some action words like verbs, resulting in words formed with such morphs as **–er, -ee, - es, -nian**, etc. The following NgE words exemplify this position: **launch+ er** = **launcher**.

Decamp +ee = decampee
Devote+e = devotee
Arrange + e = arrangee
Lagos + ian = Lagosian
Chase + r = chaser
Vulcanize + r = vulcaniser
Abia + n = abian

Lexical morphology, being the production of new lexical items, also involves the process of derivation and compounding. Allerton (1979) provides a vivid description of this type of morphology which has to do with the process by which derivational affixes are added to stems (including simple roots) in order to form a derived word, while in compounding two stems are combined as in *foot + ball, football + player.* The diagram explains it clearly.



This diagram explains word-formation processes that result in the two main types of morphology such as derivational and inflectional morphology. It further states that non-simple words have different processes of forming words. They are by inflection; that is the way agentive markers are brought to the stems to denote tense and number, for example: **run + s = runs; eat + en = eaten**. The other process is by compounding which results in compound words by bringing two stems together or derivational affixes together as in **dark + room = darkroom; foot + ball = football; third + term = third term.**

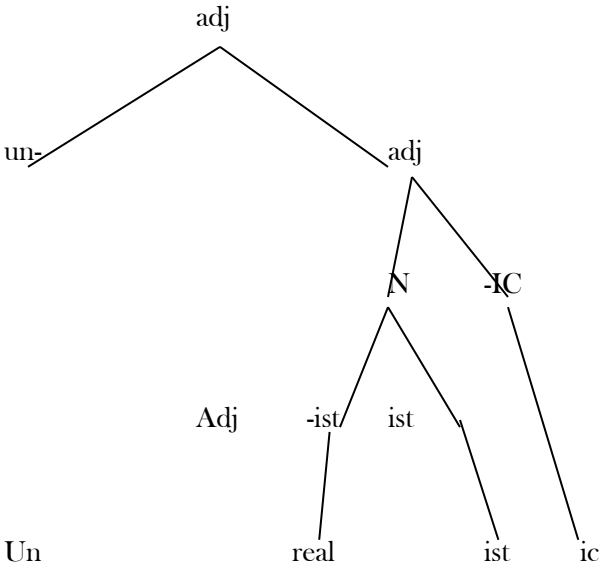
Lexemes can be analysed into segments as in the following NgE words.

Newspaper+ing = news papering
Third + term = third term
Bad + mouth = badmouth
Khaki + boys = khaki boys
Bottom + power = bottom power.

These individual segments that make up these words are their morphs or lexical formatives. They are **-ing – term; - mouth,-boys,** and **power**. It is, however,

observed that some lexical items even in NgE are unanalyzable as in **fly; awilo**, etc while others are analyzable and complex as in **un-realistic** which is formed by the suffixation of the noun formative '**-ist**' to the root of the adjective, 'real' to form realist which is a noun. In order to derive its adjectival counterpart the stem ***realist*** which is now complex can be suffixed with the adjective formative **-ic** to form 'realistic' and this process can go on to form another negative adjective, '**unrealistic**' which is derived by prefixing the adjective formative.

This type of derivation is an indication that lexical items have internal constituent structure, which can be graphologically stated thus:



This diagram illustrates the internal constituent structure of Lexical Items. It should also be understood as representing some general word-formation rules. Again, this possession of an internal constituent structure by a word informs the following word formation rules:

Adj + ist ⟶ N realist.

V + al ⟶ N refusal

N + ish ⟶ adj girlish

N + ify ⟶ v beautify

V + able ⟶ adj readable

Adj + -en ⟶ V ripen

Adapted from Brown and Miller (1985)

These formation rules do not mean that word formation rules are unsystematic and haphazard. For this reason, such words as **bindy, wental, slowen**, if ever formed, are un-English. Brown and Miller (1980) who stated that word formation rules are of limited productivity rather than general productivity affirmed this observation. In other words, while some are still productive, others are not, but have somewhat arbitrary application to particular stems.

INTERLANGUAGE AS A FACTOR IN THE CHOICE OF LEXICAL ITEMS

Enunciated by Selinker in 1969 and popularized by Corder (1981), interlanguage, as a linguistic situation, puts a learner of a Target language (TL) in dilemma as to the right choice to make between their Mother Tongue (MT) and TL. It always occurs as a result of growing together or coming together of two linguistic situations which are MT and TL (the English Language). This is not to say that NgE and its various forms should be branded interlanguage. The reason, according to Jibril (2005), is that they are not in an intermediate transitional stage between some variety and target language of the native speaker's norm. Interlanguage should also be understood to be errors that arise as a result of transfer or interference of MT features.

As a factor that determines and influences an L2 learner's choice of words or expressions between SE and NgE, interlanguage demonstrates some traces of idiosyncratic attitudes in respect of rules as one makes some progression towards the TL rules. This could be as a result of educational attainment, experience, vocation, exposure and frequency of use. This is one of the reasons for such items of clothing in vogue, whose names reflect close analogies to those of the western counterpart as in ***dirty blue jean, awilo, figure eight***, *etc.*

FORMS OF LEXICO-MORPHOLOGICAL PATTERNS OF NgE

One of the lexical and morphological patterns of NgE is a new lexeme coined from existing items or borrowed from the local languages or Pidgin. This is exemplified in the use of the English noun "barber" which is now freely used in NgE as a verb as in to **barb hair**. Another is **invitee** used at present in NgE as a noun, derived from Standard English (SE) verb, ***invite***.Some other examples of lexical items coined from the local languages that have gained access to NgE are the Yoruba word, **tokunbo** used in the following way in the *Newswatch Magazine* of 10th June, 2002. 'They argue that Nigeria is atokunbo country where age does not matter'. The Yoruba word ***Tokumbo***actually means brought from overseas, and was originally used to name children born abroad. Currently, it means an imported fairly used product, hence equivalent to SE ***second-hand***.

Another pattern is some lexical items acquiring new meaning. This is a case of deviation from the original meanings of words as is it is the case with the English word **corner**which NgE uses to mean a bend on a road; NgE**launcher** meaning somebody invited to declare a fund raising ceremony open as well as the expression **to land** which in NgE means to finish or to conclude one's discussion.

In contrast, new idioms are developed as a way of analogy to the SE counterparts in order to form NgE idioms. A remarkable example is recorded in the Vanguard of 7th June, 2002 which is an extract of President OlusegunObasanjo's words of encouragement on the telephone to the national team, the super eagles. It contains such new idioms as **show them pepper**, which means in SE**to defeat** or **overpower an opponent**. It is

also this principle of developing new idioms in NgE that informs the emergence of such local idioms today as '**to be on seat**' which in SE means to be in office. Others are **off-head** in NgE, which in SE means**from memory** or**off the cuff** and **to take in in NgE**which is**to become pregnant** in SE

Acronyms in NgE result in new meanings acquired by such English letters as in VIP's = very important personalities

EFCC = Economic & Financial Crimes Commission

BA's = Born Agains

As a feature of neologism or forming new words, in coinages, users of English contract words or word groups as in the following common Nigerian expressions:

Sweet sixteen – Female teenage lover.

Senior boy – A rich middle-aged and an elderly Nigerian man who likes the styles of teenagers such as frequenting night clubs, dating teenage girls and wearing clothes which are in vogue.

Jambite – A fresher in a Nigerian university admitted through entrance examination conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

Badmouth – An extremely rude and malicious individual.

Pure water – Filtered water packaged in a polythene bag and sold as drinking water.

Composition, which is the same as compounding, has been observed to be a common source of new lexemes in NgE as it is in WSE. This attribute informs such NgE compound word as:

Bush meat = a sort of game or a girl whom men consider very cheap in matters of sex.

Godfatherism– An act of an influential person who grants favours to a relative or associate in order to control their actions.

Quota System – A federal government system reflecting all the states and ethnic groups in Nigeria in respect of admission, employment and appointment to federal government owned establishments.

Bottom Power – Use of sex by a female to gain undue advantage.

Collocational innovations in NgE result in such expressions used today as *boys' quarters, senior brother or sister, third termites, anti – third termites, palm rubbing, etc.*

Conversion is another interesting feature of NgE formation. At this level, English verbs are shifted to the nominal class and vice versa by the process of zero derivation as in **'free for all fight', gisting, 'root causes'***, etc.* For example, '**gist'** is a noun in SE and cannot be used as a verb, but it is converted to verb in NgE.

Morphologically, loan words form part of the evolving Nigerian lexicon and become necessary in NgE because there is hardly any one word equivalent in SE for such items of Nigerian origin. The items are found in the areas of clothing fabric, food, transport, titles and culture, hence the following words:

Akwete – A type of cloth woven in the eastern part of Nigeria.

Tuwo– paste prepared from rice and corn.

Others are the **Obi of Onitsha., The Emir of Kano,** *etc.*

Conclusion

Nigerian English words and expressions are currently developing side by side with the

Standard or World Educated English forms. This linguistic developmentispotentially posing some challenge to the standard form. The chapter has been able to identify some of the patterns of forming new words in Nigerian English usage through the process of lexical morphology. These patterns bring about change in Standard English lexemes, expressions and idioms as well as their meanings Given the lexicalization of NgE formations which are at variance with SE, a Nigerian user of English, especially a school child should be taught the two forms or varieties in order to know the difference between the two. That is, one is the standard form, while the other is Nigerian. This should be done in the classroom at the early stage of learning: from nursery or at latest, from the primary school level when much of fossilization has not taken place in the vocabulary stock of the learners and when they have not been deeply exposed to the high frequency words.This chapter contributes in the area of lexical morphology especially by its revealing those words and expressions that are currently in use in Nigerian English as well as their lexico- morphological processes

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Chapter 12: Sacred Spaces and Social Transformation: A Socio-Geographical Analysis of Srimanta Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam

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Abstract

The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardev during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries represents a landmark in the religious, cultural, and social history of Assam. While existing scholarship has extensively examined Sankardev's contributions as a saint, philosopher, literary figure, and social reformer, comparatively limited attention has been given to interpreting his movement through the perspectives of social and cultural geography. Addressing this gap, the present chapter examines the institutional networks of Satras and Namghars as more than places of worship, interpreting them as lived sacred spaces where social interaction, collective participation, cultural transmission, and identity formation were continuously negotiated. Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of social geography, cultural geography, and the geography of religion, the study explores the dynamic relationship between religion, space, and society and its role in shaping Assam's cultural landscape. Adopting an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology based on historical analysis and geographical interpretation, the chapter analyses the spatial distribution, institutional significance, and long-term socio-cultural influence of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement within the wider context of Assamese society. The findings suggest that geographical spread of Satras and Namghars particularly in the Brahmaputra Valley and river island of Majuli enabled the spread of the philosophy of neo-Vaishnavism, reinforced social bonds, maintained cultural continuity, and promoted regional identity. The study also shows that these institutions developed into permanent socio-spatial hubs, combining religion, education, cultural expression and community life, and created unique and sacred cultural landscapes which continue to impact Assamese society. The chapter, which reads the institutional vision of Sankardev in a geographically different way than a mere historical andor theological approach does, helps in interdisciplinary explorations about sacred spaces, cultural landscapes and social transformation and also underscores the ongoing significance of Neo-Vaishnavite institutions in the maintenance of cultural identity and social bond in the current context in Assam.

Keywords: *Srimanta Sankardev; Neo-Vaishnavism; Social Geography; Sacred Spaces; Cultural Landscape; Satra; Namghar; Social Transformation; Cultural Identity.*

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1. Introduction

Throughout human history, religion has been one of the basic components that have influenced the development of the human society by defining its belief systems, culture, social forms and production of space. Houses of religion have also provided venues for teaching and learning, social engagement, cultural identity and cultural practices. The phenomena of religion and space have never been the subject of systematic academic study before, and the development of the sub-field of human geography – the 'geography of religion' – has allowed for the growing importance of this topic for research for the past few decades (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Kong, 2001; Lefebvre, 1991). In recent years, geographical studies of "sacred places" have tended to see them not only not just as places of worship, but also as sites where religious beliefs, practices and daily patterns of life across a community intertwine to influence the physical environment and social world of the community (Eliade, 1959; Kong, 2001).

There are many examples in India to illustrate how religious groups have 'colonized' and lasting sacred organizations have established a presence in regional societies. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement, which was started from the fifteenth and the sixteenth century in Assam by Srimanta Sankardev, occupies a unique place in the cultural history of Assam amongst these. The movement came into existence at a time when society was in a state of transition, evolving into the social stratification that is now common to Hindu India; it was also a time that experienced significant ethnic-cultural diversity, and it spread the "idea of Ekasarana Nama Dharma"devotion to a single deity, congregational worship, ethical living, and spiritual equality. Most importantly, Sankardev established satras and namghars which eventually became multifunctional institutions that developed various aspects of life including religious practice, education, performing arts, literary traditions, participation of community and local governance (Neog, 1998; Sarma, 1966; Borkakoti, 2023). The Neo-Vaishnavite tradition, which continues to hold sway even today, places these institutions prominently in socio-cultural life of Assam.

Historians, literary scholars, religious thinkers and cultural historians have enthusedprofusely about the contributions made by Srimanta Sankardev. Works by Maheswar Neog (1998) are still essential to the understanding of the historical evolution of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, and its institutional and infra-institutional base. Similarly, Satyendranath Sarma (1966) spoke about the development of Satra institution and its religious aspect and Birinchi Kumar Barua (1960) reflected upon the contribution of Sankardev towards Assamese society and culture. In recent years, Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti (2012, 2021, 2022, 2023) has enriched the debate by articulating and analysing, in detail, Sankardev's life and philosophy, his literary works and his social vision. Edward Gait (1906/2008), H. K. Barpujari (1990-1999), Amalendu Guha (1983) and Sanjib Baruah (1999) have also tried to locate the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in the overall historical and political context of Assam. All these studies have provided a firm footing on Sankardev's historical and cultural value.

Although this scholarship is vast, most literature on the Neo-Vaishnavite movement has been dealt with from historical, religious, literary or philosophical points of view. Lesser scholarly focus has been given to an understanding of how the satras and namghars' institutional network worked as socio-spatial institutions which influenced settlement patterns, community interactions, cultural landscapes and collective identities. Likewise, there have been limited efforts to shed light on its movement by integrating with social geography and cultural geography, as well as with the geography of religion. This chapter challenges that view by exploring sacred space as not only a religious space, but also a space of social change and structuring of society and the formation of regional identity in Assam. The study hopes to make at least some contribution

to the burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship on the role of religion in space and society and provide a geographical interpretation of the institutional legacy of Sankardev.

The ideas that inform this chapter are developed from an understanding of the process of social production and continuous cultural production of space, as continually shaped by human practices and interactions (Lefebvre, 1991). What transform sacred spaces into dynamic arenas where social relations, cultural values, and collective memories are negotiated and reproduced, though, is the process itself (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976). In the context of the Neo-Vaishnavite tradition, satras and namghars can be interpreted as socio-spatial institutions that could serve multiple functions such as devotional praxis, cultural production, social integration, conflict resolution, and community governance. They also diffused over the various parts of Assam, leading to the creation of a common cultural space that can be seen to have broken across many social and ethnic lines. A geographical interpretation of these institutions can help to understand both how religion shaped the political geography and how its influence helped bring about social change in medieval and modern Assam.

In this context, this chapter is trying to explore the role of sacred spaces in the social transformation of Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Srimanta Sankardev in Assam from a social geographic perspective, cultural geographic perspective as well as the religion geography perspective.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To examine the socio-cultural and historical context that facilitated the emergence of Srimanta Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam.
- To analyse the role of *satras* and *namghars* as sacred socio-spatial institutions within Assamese society.
- To investigate how these institutions contributed to social transformation, community cohesion, and the formation of cultural landscapes.
- To interpret the Neo-Vaishnavite movement through the conceptual frameworks of social geography, cultural geography, and the geography of religion.
- To assess the continuing relevance of Sankardev's institutional legacy in shaping the cultural identity and social fabric of contemporary Assam.

The chapter is fragmented up into several sections. The chapter then focusses on the historical context of medieval Assam and the emergence of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and then the evolution of sacred socio-spatial institution of the old satras and namghars. They are assessed in the upcoming sections in terms of social transformation and formation of cultural landscapes and the final part of the our study considers the pattern of main conclusions and implications of the analysis of sacred spaces from a social geographical perspective.

2. Literature Review

The study of life, philosophy and works of Srimanta Sankardev has been a subject of continuous research in history, religion, literature, cultural studies and Assamese intellectual history. Research works focusing on the origin of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, its philosophy, literary creations, institutional growth, socio-cultural role in Assamese society over the past couple of decades have been done. These studies suggest that Sankardev's teachings was one of the most important factors in the creation of Assamese civilisation as a whole. However, where studies have focused on scholarship beyond the historical or theological and literary or cultural literature has tended to be dominant. Few attempts have been made to understand the movement in the

conceptual lens of social geography and the geography of religion and particularly through the spatial meaning of satras and namghars. This review analyzes present literature critically in order to help anchor the current study in the scholarship and identify the gaps to be addressed by this chapter.

Studies on Satras, Namghars, and Assamese Society

In addition to the studies about Sankardev himself, there are also a number of studies which have dealt with the cultural and institutional meaning of satras and namghars. These institutions have been studied historically and in the modern past and have consistently been identified as more than a place of religious worship. They were used for congregational prayers, educational purposes, artistic events, manuscript preservation, settling quarrels and community interaction, and played a crucial role in shaping the cultural fabric of Assam. Recent research also contends that the institutional structure, created by Neo-Vaishnavism, was vital in promoting social cohesion, in bringing together a myriad ethnic communities, and in elevating a regional consciousness. Recent historical interpretations have also explained the Neo-Vaishnavite movement as one of the most significant socio-cultural shifts, that challenged the social fragmentation and promoted more people to participate in communal activities by engaging in the devotional practice for that movement. Namghars, satras and cultural performances like bhaona are important aspects of collective identity and laying cohesiveness within the context of medieval Assam, has been pointed out by scholars. While these studies provide great additions to the knowledge of the institutional significance of Neo-Vaishnavism, they tend to be limited in scope to either historical or sociological/anthropological or religious contexts. The spatial layout of these institutions, and their contribution to the creation of cultural landscapes, are therefore comparatively little understood and poorly analysed.

Geographical Perspectives on Sacred Space

A number of theoretical frameworks have been outlined with regard to the 'religion – space' nexus in the context of studies on human geography that are not pertinent to the context of Assam. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) showed that space is significant not only because of its physical attributes, but because it is significant in the human experience, by way of memory, and by cultural attachments. Edward Relph (1976) also emphasised the significance of lived experience and social interaction to the nature of place, and Henri Lefebvre (1991) applied a social constructivist approach to the nature of space as socially produced through political, economic and cultural processes. These works are characterized as a move by cultural and social geography away from the concept of space as a physical environment and to consider socially constructed spaces. Religious places have been examined within the geography of religion, whereby Mircea Eliade (1959) theorised that these sacred spaces could become symbolic centres that structure the religious experience, while Lily Kong (2001) suggested that religious place be interpreted as a fluid site that overlaps with cultural identity, politics, memory and ordinary social life. The theoretical advances given the impetus have led researchers to consider religious institutions as producers of social organisation and culture instead of merely the space of worship. Geographically, these viewpoints offer an informative framework for understanding satras and namghars, not only as sacred institutions or spaces, but also as socio-spatial surroundings constituting deep-seated places to perform devotional practices, to produce culture, to interact with others, and to exist as community.

Research Gap

The above review reveals that the scholarly work has rightfully provided adequate insights on the historical development, philosophies, literary works, and socio-cultural impact of Srimanta Sankardev and also the Neo-Vaishnavite movement as a whole. Similarly,

historians and social scientists have noticed the role of satras and namghars in maintaining the Assamese culture and establishing Assamese community. But there is comparatively little research on these institutions in a holistic model combining social geography, cultural geography and religion geography. In particular, the social dimensions of sacred spaces have received little study in terms of the pattern of social interaction that they fostered, the process of the cultural landscape being created by worship, and the long-term process of social transformation and identity produced through worship. To fill this gap, the understanding of satras and namghars from a social geographical perspective, which interprets their role as socio-spatial institution or workplace, is used for breaking interpretation to find the role of them beyond religion. The study intends to show through the area of geographical and historical research how the Neo-Vaishnavite movement not only had changed the religious outlook but also the spatial organisation of community life and the cultural landscape of Assam. In the process it plays its part in the interdisciplinary discussions on sacred spaces, religion and society, and in so doing provides better geographical interpretation to the institutional legacy of Sankardev.

3. Methodology

The present study uses a qualitative research method in analysing secondary sources only. The chapter is based on an interdisciplinary review of the scholarly volumes of books, peer reviewed journal articles, edited volumes, historical records and various forms of publications in the academic sphere related to Srimanta Sankardev, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, satras, namghars and the socio-cultural history of Assam. Theories of social geography, cultural geography, and of the geography of religion are also taken into account and applied to the relationship of sacred space and social change in this study. An analytical thematic method, has been used to analyse and synthesize various theoretical and conceptual approaches. The study is not just historical but attempts to see satras and namghars as socio-spatial institutions which have played a role in cultural continuity, community organisation and identity formation in Assam. The analysis has an interpretative focus and aims to put together the best of history and geography to communicate a social geographical perspective of the Neo Vaishnavite movement.

4. Limitations of the Study

In an academic research like the present one, there are some limitations which have to be noticed to way them in the context and make situations transparent.

- **Dependence on secondary sources:**The study is reliant on the secondary sources primarily the books, works in edited books, peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly materials. It is not dependent on primary data gathered through field-survey, interviews and participant observations.
- **Conceptual scope:**The chapter mostly uses the social geographical point of view. While the literature regarding the historical, literary, philosophical and religious contributions of Srimanta Sankardev is discussed whenever it is relevant it is not examined in detail since it falls outside the main thrust of the study.
- **Absence of empirical field validation:** The work does not directly assess the functioning of the individual satras and namghars in the field or involve interactions with stakeholders because no fieldwork was undertaken.
- **Regional diversity:**Assam has a great degree of regional variation in the socio-cultural practices, institutional organization and historical

development of satra and namghar. The very wide range of this chapter does not allow for detailed case studies of variations at regional or institution level.

- **Interpretative nature of the analysis:**Interpretations and syntheses of existing scholarly texts and sources provide the basis for the findings presented in this chapter. Theories from other fields of study, like anthropology, sociology, religious studies, or political science, may provide other perspectives on the Neo-Vaishnavite movement.
- **Scope for future research:**Further substantiation of the changing socio-spatial role and the present position of satras and namghars in Assam can be achieved by future research initiatives involving field based investigations, spatial mapping, ethnographic work and comparative analysis of various Satras and namghars in Assam.

5. Historical Context of Medieval Assam and the Emergence of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement

The rise of Srimanta Sankardev's Neo-Vaishnavite movement in 15th–16th century was greatly related with the historical, social and cultural background of medieval Assam. The movement was not simply a product of religion, but emerged in a region of social, cultural, and political change that included multiple religious traditions and ethnic diversity, as well as shifting settlement patterns. To understand these historical contexts is crucial in the analysis of the path of the formation of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement as one of the powerful socio-cultural movements in Assam and the reason behind its institutional legacy influencing the socio-cultural fabric of the region (Gait, 1906/2008; Barpujari, 1990; Neog, 1998).

During the medieval period the Assamese territory had been divided among several political powers – the Ahom kingdom, the Koch kingdom and several small principalities ruling various region of the Brahmaputra Valley. These kingdoms were distinct not only in their political structures, but also in how they were related to each other by trade, waterways, migration, and cultural exchange. The Brahmaputra River and its many tributaries were not only a vital source of water for agriculture and trade but also played a significant role in facilitating the flow of people, ideas, and religious practices throughout the region. Thus, Assam became a culturally vibrant geographical region with the presence of diverse communities which had regular interaction with each other irrespective of the political differences (Gait, 1906/2008; Barpujari, 1990).

The social setup of the medieval period in Assam was quite diverse in terms of ethnic and cultural aspects. There were a variety of languages, customs, and beliefs, with communities speaking Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Austroasiatic, and other tongues scattered throughout the region. This diversity accentuates cultural attributes of Assam but also generates variations in its social organisation and religious practices. The relationship among those communities over time led to the development of a larger regional identity which did not suppress the local cultural traditions, but was connected (Guha, 1983; Barua, 1960).The religious life during this time period was similarly varied. There existed in Assam, besides followers of Hinduism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Buddhism and various kinds of Vaishnavism. Temples, sacred groves, pilgrimage centres and local shrines were not only places of worship, but were also important points of social interaction and cultural exchange. Religious activities were sometimes elaborate, and local and regional traditions and practices added to and defined daily spiritual activity. In this pluralistic religious atmosphere, a space was developed for the birth of new

devotional movements and these new movements were slowly gaining audience from a larger section of the populace (Neog, 1998, Sarma, 1966).

It is within this time period that Srimanta Sankardev (1449-1568) introduced Ekasarana Nama Dharma dedicated to unconditional devotion to Lord Krishna through congregational worship, devotional music, proper behaviour and remembrance of the sacred name. Sankardev took forward the basic principles of Vaishnavism, addressing the socio-cultural context of Assam, with an approach to devotion that was simple, moral, and collective. He was also a great writer and artist, who introduced the religious teachings in people's way of living with his extensive writing works like devotional compositions, Borgeet, Ankiya Naat, Bhaona, etc., and developed the Assamese culture and language as well (Neog, 1998; Borkakoti, 2012; Borkakoti, 2023).Much of the success of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement was due to its successful institutionalisation. Sankardev, together with his leading disciple Madhavdev and later the religious leaders, created a set of principles that allowed devotional ideals to remain and are passed on through the generations. This culminated in the formation of Satras and namghars, which evolves beyond all individual spiritual practices into a daily activity of the Assamese society. Satras developed into institutions of religious education, scriptural preservation and art education and spiritual guidance; Namghars were openings where villagers joined together for prayers, cultural work, discussion, and decision making. These institutions helped to bestow on the movement a permanent organisation, which in turn facilitated its expansion to every corner of the Brahmaputra Valley (Sarma, 1966; Neog, 1998; Borkakoti, 2021).

Contrary to religious philosophy, the historical significance of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement from a social geographical point of view is even greater. Along with Satras and Namghars a new type of spatial centres emerged where the community life, cultural activities, and social interaction organized. These institutions were slowly transformed into the centre of the local society which served to promote social continuity, to develop collective identity and to pass on religious and art heritages to the younger generations. Their geographical distribution also enabled them to create a series of contiguous cultural pictorial scene illustrations which actually broke down regional boundaries and culturally particularistic identification marks. Working through these devotional teachings, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement also had some contribution to making the religious ideal become concretized in a lasting social institution. Incorporating spiritual activities into the structured community environments created by Sankardev, the group formed an institutional network which restructured cultural geography of Assam and creates a special tradition of collective religious and social life. It is important therefore to look at how these institutions have evolved if one is to attempt comprehension of their increasingly important role in social changes, as discussed in the following section.

6. Satras and Namghars: Sacred Socio-Spatial Institutions

The institution of Satra and Namghar have had a lasting impact on Assam and the development of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement that was founded by Srimanta Sankardev cannot be separated from that of such institutions. Sustained by the founding of institutions and an emphasis on religion in the context of daily community living, Ekasarana Nama Dharma focused on devotion to Lord Krishna through belief, collective worship and ethics. As a result, Satras and Namghars started functioning as education hubs, cultural icons, historic memorials, and administrative hubs to people in the locality. Dispersal of this Neo-Vaishnavism throughout the Brahmaputra Valley not only made available the spread of

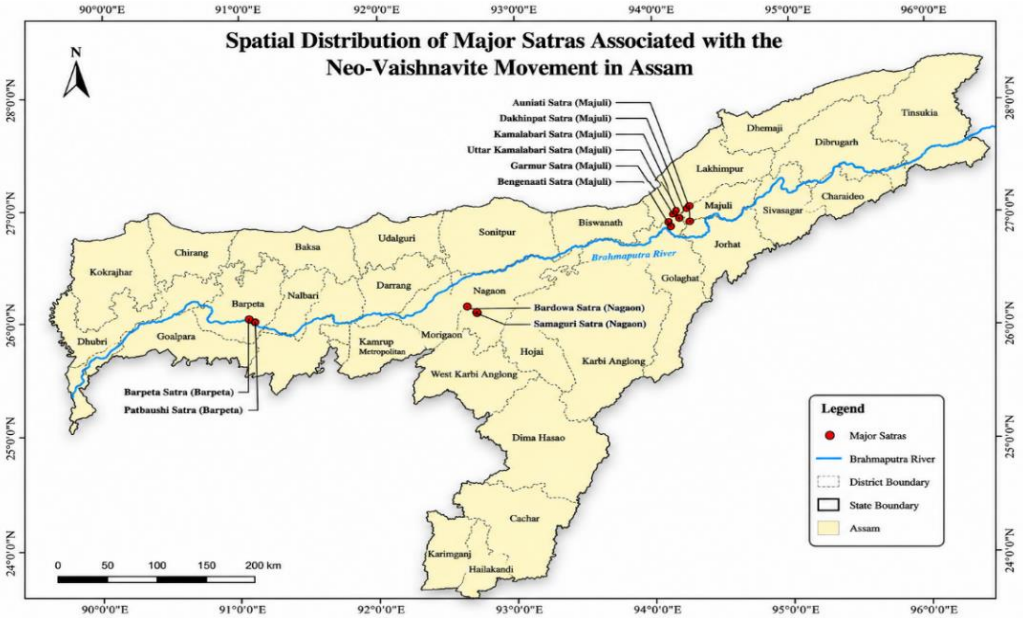
the ideals of the Neo-Vaishnavism but also changed the cultural geography of Assam by generating connectedness and sacred spaces wherever the group went, whether physical or cultural (Neog, 1998; Sarma, 1966; Borkakoti, 2023).

The Satra became the main institutional structure of Neo-Vaishnavite movement. These monastic institutions were set up by spiritual masters also known as "satradhikars" and developed into well organised religious education centres, scriptural learning centres, repository for manuscripts, and devotional practice centres. They also ensured the continuity of literary activities, music, theatre, dance and copying of manuscripts to ensure the philosophical and cultural values of Sankardev and Madhavdev were passed on to later generations. Satras evolved from religious centres to becoming important cultural institutions over the years and played a significant role in the promotion of Assamese language, literature, performing arts and intellectual traditions besides its religious functions (Neog, 1998; Sarma, 1966; Borkakoti, 2021). Namghars were the most accessible institution in the village to embody Neo-Vaishnavism, and were complementary to the Satras. The Namghar was a congregational prayer hall rather than a monastic one as was the Satra but was a meeting place of the members of the community for Naam-Prasanga, recitations of scriptures, devotional songs, and religious talks. But, over time, the manufacture and use of the Namghar evolved into more aspects of everyday life. In many of the Assamese villages, it became the major forum for the community assembly, cultural displays, social discussions, traditional binding and resolution of conflicts and community decision making. These various aspects created the Namghar as a public space, in which religious piety, cultural engagement and community organisation were intermingled, building up a sense of local connectivity and community(Barua 1960; Borkakoti 2022).

These linkages between Satras and the Namghars helped to spread the movement of Neo-Vaishnavites in the entire geographical region of the Brahmaputra Valley. The Satras were centres of religious authority, cultural continuity while the Namghars facilitated wide-spreading access to the communities in the devotional/cultural domain. This supplementary system of institutions facilitated the spread of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement to the towns and villages, respecting and binding it to the personal experiences of the common people rather than to abodes of monks. The institutional network's development further promoted cultural exchange across different areas, aiding the process of establishing a common cultural identity for Assam (Neog, 1998; Borkakoti, 2023).

One salient feature of the Neo-Vaishnavite institutional network is the sense of localisation he has, to be specific, in the Brahmaputra Valley. Most important historical Satras have emerged in the fertile riverine plains and islands of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, meeting the confluence of communication, crop production and settlement density and allowing to foster a continuous interaction between the communities. This river system was a significant geographical channel for the movement of cultural items, such as cultural traditions, manuscripts, religious teachers, and pilgrims, between different regions of the world. As such, the spatial distribution of Satras is not only indicative of religious expansion but also how the cultural institution can be affected by environments, transportation and settlement geography.

Figure 1. Spatial Distribution of Major Satras in Assam



Source:Prepared by the authors using publicly available geographical data and published scholarly sources.

The pattern of institutionalisation of Neo-Vaishnavism, as shown in figure 1, is well linked to a riverine mode of geography in Assam. Major Satras were not set up at random locations, but were built in areas where there were relatively stable settlements, agricultural productivity, and accessibility by the Brahmaputra River system. This pattern suggests the control that geographical factors exercised over not only the physical setting of the institutions of sacredness but also their role as cultural link and regional integration.

Table 1. Regional Distribution and Characteristics of Major Satras in Assam

Region	Satra	District	Geographical Setting	Institutional Significance
Central Assam	**Bardowa Satra**	Nagaon	Alluvial plains of the Brahmaputra Valley	Birthplace of Srimanta Sankardev; important pilgrimage and cultural centre
Central Assam	**Samaguri Satra**	Nagaon	Floodplain and rural settlement landscape	Renowned for Bhaona and traditional mask-making (Mukha Shilpa)
Upper Assam (Majuli)	**Auniati Satra**	Majuli	River island (Majuli)	Major centre of Neo-Vaishnavite scholarship, manuscripts and devotional traditions
Upper Assam (Majuli)	**Dakhinpat Satra**	Majuli	River island (Majuli)	Important religious institution known for Ras Mahotsav and Vaishnavite traditions
Upper Assam (Majuli)	**Kamalabari Satra**	Majuli	River island (Majuli)	Centre of Sattriya dance, literature and cultural education

Upper Assam (Majuli)	**Uttar Kamalabari Satra**	Majuli	River island (Majuli)	Preservation of classical Sattriya dance, music and monastic education
Upper Assam (Majuli)	**Garmur Satra**	Majuli	River island (Majuli)	Significant centre of manuscript preservation and Neo-Vaishnavite learning
Upper Assam (Majuli)	**Bengenaati Satra**	Majuli	River island (Majuli)	Repository of historical artefacts, manuscripts and devotional heritage
Lower Assam	**Barpeta Satra**	Barpeta	Riverine alluvial plains	Major centre of congregational worship and community participation
Lower Assam	**Patbaushi Satra**	Barpeta	Agricultural floodplain	Associated with Sankardev's later missionary activities and regional expansion of Neo-Vaishnavism

Source: Compiled by the authors from Neog (1998), Sarma (1966), Borkakoti (2021, 2023)

From the social geographical point of view, Satras and Namghars stand far more than as religious institutions. As socio-spatial structure, they are instances in which space is being culturally redefined repeatedly through religious practice, collective memory and community involvement (Tuan, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991; Kong, 2001). Their importance, in addition to their architecture and religious iconography, is their ability to provide for their people daily social life, to hold on to cultural norms, to enhance community linkages and to establish lasting and sacred geographies. In these institutions, normal villages had become the centres of common identity, the sense of religion had been melded with the arts, education, and co-natured business. The geographical spread of Satras and Namghar and their institutional development therefore suggest that the Neo-Vaishnavite movement was a phenomenon that not only launched a religious reform but also a movement that reshaped the cultural scene of Assam. They not only were present at numerous locations around the state, but their institutional connections resulted in a lasting web of sacred space, social contact and regional identity. On the basis of this institutional structure, the next section explores the significance of the spatial structure of these sacred spaces with regard to the social and cultural dynamics of Assam.

7. Spatial Analysis of Sacred Spaces and Social Transformation

The distribution of Satras and Namghars in Assam is a larger phenomenon than mere expansion of a religious movement. They also help to convey the spatial arrangement of sacred installations, which delineated settlement systems, social relationships, the continuity of culture and regional identity. In religious, sociological, and geographical terms, they are thus dynamic relational spatial centres in which the religious message, cultural patterns, and daily social life of the people were intertwined. Beyond religion, their value is in their ability to organise the human interactions in space, and to they are the ability to generate and leave behind culture landscape which is lasting and continues to influence the Assamese society (Kong, 2001; Tuan, 1977). It is evident from figure 1 that most of the historically important Satras are set in the fertile flood plains of

Brahmaputra Valley and are located on Majuli Island.Here through the ages the Brahmaputra has been the major geographical corridor for communication, trade, agriculture, migration and cultural exchange for Assam. This riverine area allowed the diffusion of religious teachers, pilgrims, manuscripts, and art forms within into settlements in an efficient manner: this helped the gradual diffusion of the Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy throughout the area. The river systems provided good geographical accessibility that played an important role in expanding the scope of the movement and promoting links between the scattered communities (Barpujari, 1990; Neog, 1998).

A major case study of the geographical relationship with the development of religion is provided by a number of prominent Satras which are located in Majuli. Majuli is one of the largest inhabited river islands in the world, and offered a fairly secure space for monastic institutions to develop, but still be in communication with other parts of the region by boats. Gradually, the island became a significant cultural field of operation, and the learning of religion and the preservation of manuscripts were deeply linked with Sattriya dance, devotional music and theatrical culture. The Satras of Majuli were not individual religious institutions, but worked together to generate a unique sacred environment that still shapes the cultural consciousness of Assam (Neog, 1998; Borkakoti, 2023). The second spatial process is the distribution of the Namghar by village, also. Namghars were not necessarily institutional centres of learning and spiritual authority like Satras but were integrated into the life and space of rural settlements. Having them in the middle of the villages fostered frequent communication among villagers by daily mutual prayers, festivals, dances, educational sessions, and village gatherings. Thus, sacred space merged with 'community space' for religious activities provided reinforcement to social cohesion and 'community responsibility' in the local community (Barua, 1960; Borkakoti, 2022). This linkage between rituals and settlement organisation helps confirm the human geographer's more abstract theory that space is built socially by reiterated man's activity. Lefebvre (1991) stated that space will be continually produced and reproduced by the social practice(s) of everyday interactions; Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), however, wrote of how places are meaningful due to lived experience and emotional bond. These theories, applied to the Neo-Vaishnavites, indicate that the significance of Satras and Namghars was not just in their physical architecture, but through the generations of people who made them meaningful to themselves and to other people as vehicles for their collective memory, cultural engagement and social identity. So, their importance came about as a result of ongoing person–place–religious interaction.

The institutional web developed by Satras and Namghars has also been responsible for the creation of a network of interconnected cultural landscapes across Assam. Institutional individuals catered to specific communities within the region yet at the same time they established a regional network for the exchange of devotional practices, art forms, literature, cultural symbols and moral beliefs throughout the Brahmaputra Valley. This network was capable of binding together cultural continuity and also fostering regional diversity at the same time, allowing various communities to get involved in the common culture of the Neo-Vaishnavites without compromising their cultural identities. To escape from a purely spiritual basis, the action lasting across distance in geographical space created the scene of interwoven sacred space that touched into and permeated social as well as cultural life. Satras and Namghars have their greatest socio-spatial importance as places of collective action and community unity. The Namghar was a common communal area where people would gather for communal worship, as well as cultural activities, community gatherings and local affairs. These frequent contacts contributed to a sense of community, trust and

cooperation among community members. Despite the social hierarchy that persisted during the medieval period in Assam, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement fostered a deeper sense of inclusion within religious practices, which drew the individual and the sacred into interaction with each other and thus strengthened social relations and building up community solidarity (Neog 1998; Sarma 1966). As well, these institutions played a vital role in the protection and dissemination of Assamese cultural heritage. Satras developed devotional literature, manuscript traditions, Borgeet, Ankiya Naat, Bhaona and Sattriya dance, and Namghars provided accessible community spaces where these traditions were developed and regularly practised and passed on. Thus, accompanied by religion, culture also developed, so that religious institutions became not only places of worship, but also places where culture and religion continued through the ages. Such continuity of institutions has also been an important factor in maintaining Assam's linguistic, art and spiritual legacy over centuries (Neog, 1998; Borkakoti, 2023).

Satras and Namghars also developed a regional identity through a geographical organisation. The ubiquitous presence of these spread throughout the Brahmaputra Valley allowed for locally connected organised centres of religious and cultural practice, that linked geographically dispersed communities through their shared devotional practices and cultural traditions. Thus, through this, sentiments of attachments to place and space ability to a larger Assamese cultural landscape was reinforced by sacred institutions. Tuan (1977) holds that meaning attaches to places as they are lived; and Kong (2001) stresses the role of sacred place in creating a social identity. Both of these viewpoints are reflected in the process of how the institutional network of the Neo-Vaishnavites came into existence by the reiteration of cultural practices, making religious institutions the lasting symbols of regional identity. The other important geographical aspect is the connection between sacred structures and the surrounding topography. Several of the well established religious institutions of Majuli are proliferating as a characteristic of its physical geography, transforming it and in turn being moulded by it. With time, the island became an important sacred environment and cultural landscape of Assam where the traditions of monasticism, performing arts, manuscript conservation and ritual activities have been grafted into the native local environment. The interaction of the natural and the cultural processes shows that sacred landscapes are continually created in the interaction of people, place and religious practice.

Combined, the above observation indicates that the impact of Sankardev's neo-Vaishnavite movement was not only in philosophy but also in other areas. The institutional network of Satras and Namghars created a unique socio-spatial system that nurtured the socio-cultural functions of sacred spaces and influenced the socio-cultural life of Assam, namely, social organisation, cultural inheritance, regional identity and cultural formation. Social-geographical studies on these institutions have been analysed in much depth in the past, but this chapter illustrates how a social-geographical approach can complement the historical and religious focus of past research on their continued impact. Instead of merely becoming centres of devotion, Satras and Namghars began to become places of dynamic socio-spatial operations and presence whose presence remains apparent in the culture of the present-day Assam and collective identity of the people of the state.

8. Recommendations of the Study

Considering all the finding from the present investigation, the following recommendations are suggested to enhance the preservation, management and socio-cultural value of Satras and Namghars in Assam:

1. **Strengthen Heritage Conservation Policies:**It is recommended for government agencies, heritage institutions to give special attention to the Conservation, systematic documentation, restoration and regular maintenance of these historically significant Satras and Namghars while maintaining their historical authenticity and cultural integrity.
2. **Promote Community-Based Heritage Management:**There should be involvement of the local communities in the management and preservation of these institutions. Community involvement will help facilitate a continuation of the living traditions of Neo-Vaishnavism, and help ensure that conservation programs are culturally relevant and socially inclusive.
3. **Integrate Sacred Heritage into Educational Programmes:**Inculcating knowledge about Satras and Namghars in educational curricula and reaching out to the people. These efforts can help promote the awareness of the rich Assamese culture and promote it among the younger generation of people.
4. **Encourage Sustainable Cultural Tourism:**Tourism policies regarding Satras and Namghars must be planned sensibly, taking proper precaution for promoting heritage while maintaining cultural sensitivity. Sustainable tourism can serve to develop local economies and to preserve the spiritual atmosphere and traditional activities of these sacred sites.
5. **Strengthen Documentation and Digital Preservation:**Improve documentation of intangible cultural heritage of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, such as Manuscripts, Archival records, Oral traditions, Devotional music, Ritual practices and other intangible cultural heritage, which are to be preserved for long-term access to the future generations and research.
6. **Prioritise Conservation of Sacred Cultural Landscapes:**The culturally sensitive heritage places particularly those in fragile riverine areas like Majuli need holistic conservation strategies including safeguarding of cultural heritage and environmental protection and risk management.
7. **Promote Interdisciplinary Research:**Ongoing future studies on Satras and Namghars should include multidisciplinary research that incorporates the disciplines of geography, history, anthropology, religious studies, cultural heritage and environmental studies. All these partnerships will help them to get a wider picture of their ongoing contribution to the cultural geography and overall identity of Assam.

9. Conclusion

For the study of Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Srimanta Sankardev, the social geographical view point has been taken to gain insight in how the sacred spaces in the study area in Assam contributed to social transformation and cultural continuity. It also discussed socio-spatial aspects of Satras and Namghars, which reveal their significance on community organisation, the preservation of cultural heritage and enriching regional identity for centuries, but not the common historical and theological viewpoints regarding Satras and Namghars. The analysis has shown how the socio-political and cultural background of the medieval Assam has been related to the emergence of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. Sankardev and his disciples used to form Satras and Namghars and thus established a persistent institutional network spread around the Brahmaputra Valley with regard to the

devotional philosophy. While these institutions were meant to be places for religious worship, they developed into places where learning, creative expression, cultural values and social interaction were intertwined in the daily life of the Assamese people. One of the key results of this study is that the geographical spread of Satras and Namghars is more remarkably characterized by a distinctive socio-spatial pattern which is closely linked with the settlement geography and riverine landscape of Assam. These both supported the spread of Neo-Vaishnavite philosophy along the Brahmaputra Valley and helped to bring cultural unity among communities spread out geographically. The sacredestablishments thus played a significant role in disseminating religious concepts, but also in shaping interwoven cultural territories that today shape the cultural and social identity in an area. The chapter also suggests that to interpret Satras and Namghars in the analytical framework of social geography, it would be a complementary approach to the existing historical and religious research on Sankardev. This research does not look at these edifices as places of worship, but rather as a long-lived and lasting socio-spatial institution wherein religion, culture, community and place intersect. As a result of their uninterrupted relevance, sacred spaces are shown to engage in the constitution of social relationships, in the use of cultural heritage and in the creation of meaningful cultural landscapes. In present days, the importance of Srimanta Sankardev's institutional vision is still visible in the present Assam and the religious vision and mission behind Satras and the Namghars is still playing its role in Assamese society even in the changed social and environmental condition. They retain their vitality because they have managed to deal successfully with historical changes, whilst not losing sight of their core philosophy and highest ideals. To summarize, the conclusion of this study would suggest that the Neo-Vaishnavite movement would not only have to be viewed as a spiritual revival, but one that was also geographical in nature, setting sacred areas as permanent efforts for social organization and cultural continuity. Through its engagement with social geography and previous work on Sankardev, the chapter adds to a wider understanding of the interaction between religion, space, and society and its ongoing importance in the formation of regional identity and cultural strength of the Assamese people.

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Chapter 13: Atheism, A Dissociated Mental Stage: Reflections on Bhagat Singh's Sinews as a Refined Thinker

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Abstract

Atheism, in true sense, implies one's transcendental attainments, rational outlook and high wisdom and Saheed Bhagat Singh's later life and his erudite writing are testimony of this fact. Devoid of any fear of unseen and frenzied devotion, he represents dissociated, rational and objective approach to life. The book Why I am an Atheist and Other Works is a repository of his unpartisan, objectivity, humanitarianism anddisbelief in inherited religion and his assertion of being atheist. His atheism and sublime mentality rest on his being devoid of any stereotypes, conformism and politically contrived socio-religious structures as he evolved a critical thinking which questioned what was wrong or evil. An atheist like Bhagat Singh had ability to realize the true freedom which was not moored to prescribed structures of make-believe reality.His genuine concern for humanity and sublimity helped evolve a streak of true spiritualism that he was able to embrace death with no fuss.

Keywords: *atheist, communal, religion, true, society, rational, erudition*

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Atheism, A Dissociated Mental Stage: Reflections On Bhagat Singh's Sinews As A Refined Thinker

On the face of it the very title of this paper may tend to be categorically taken as a study pertaining to a mental state possibly having originated from the tendency to aloofness from the rest. One, who got a thinking head upon their shoulders, is better to abstain from taking the term into critical pieces as something leading to any indifference, cynicism and denunciation. The titular paradox can be resolved to get the meaning that an atheist is one who comes to shift their philosophy to such a mental state when association to the society is sought through dissociations. Atheistically objective approach is acquired onthe basis of long-waged erudition, academics, self-reflection, wisdom, rather than imbibed cynicism. Such a transitional shift, through continual learning and refinement of wisdom, leads one to transcendental state of mind.A sublime state of mind, in fact, makes one analyze the reality objectively; it is objectivity that helps perceiving the reality as devoid of bias, prejudice and stereotypes.

This paper aims at analyzing the positive shades of an atheistic mind that how for an atheist humanity is of paramount importance; unlike motley of followers who accept everything, no matter inhuman and evil, with conformism. The methodology herein involves taking into view the ideologies, reflections of great thinkers on atheism and contrast to the prevailing practices of institutionalized religions. This paper takes up often untouched issues of atheism being helpful to humanity and the propagated religious practices that has been keeping general masses in fear, darkness of ignorance and in deep slumber. Bhagat Singh's assertion of atheism finds echo in this paper which has been not much taken indiscourses.

A rationalmind, having chiseled wisdom, is the outcome of the realization that instead of tending to accept anything prevalent as a notion or norm one should deal with realityrather rationally with no bias.One who is truly freeapplies cerebral faculty in life,unlike those who are driven by the stipulated social standards to accept things as blind-folded. The cult of atheism or rationalism hinges upon the fact that the meaning of freedom is not restricted to mere political liberty, rather one should be free from the cleverly-designed shackles of imposed dogmas and social conditioning of make-believe practices. Attaining the sublimity of atheism, and thus higher mental fitness, has not been and still is not everybody's cup of tea.One cannot argue with all and sundry on the ontological questions about man-made God as a mundane mind may not be free from the freaks of religion-generated fears and fervour.

Years ago the rationalist philosopher Voltaire well understood this fact when he came forward with his universally quoted statement about the fact of man's conspiracy against man for having had coined the image or name of 'god' to exercise authority and spread fear, "There is no god, but don't tell that to my servant, lest he murder me at night."

(Voltaire at: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9398147-there-is-no-god-but-don-t-tell-that-to-my)

Over the centuries there has been jostling war between two antithetical voices i.e. the bulk of orthodox fundamentalists, the bigger proportion of populace, and the rational atheists, a sparse of intellectuals who had awakened from slumber. Amongst several religious, political, communal thinkers in modern Indian scenario there has been the one who is known for his radicalized ideology and fervour for freedom—Saheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, as we fondly address this iconic hero of freedom struggle. Just holding the image of Bhagat Singh on the basis of as they say and without endeavour to delve deep into the

truth of real Bhagat Singh will be disobedience to his philosophy.

If one goes by what people hold of this great revolutionary thinker, as millions do, the idea of Bhagat Singh is bound to be effaced, it is to be a disservice to him. As an avowed atheist Bhagat Singh was a strong opponent of the practice of conformism, the conformists just believe what they are made to believe without applying cerebral capabilities. Indian socio-cultural phenomena has been workshop of such practices that one assimilates into what is there without raising any question and accepts whatever is prescribed through generations. Rationalist cult, on the other hand, asks one to raise question and feed what has been the key of human development viz. curiosity. Easily accepting what has been passed down and never raising question and inability to develop curiosity has cost Indian society much as pondered over by Nishant Saxena in The Times of India:

> The reluctance to question and conform to what has been told has also led to a lack of progress in social issues. India is still struggling with issues like gender inequality, caste-based discrimination, and communalism. The conformist attitude has made it difficult to challenge these issues and bring about change.
> Sadly, India's conformist attitude has had a detrimental effect on the country's growth and progress. (at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/the-write-wing/the-curse-of-conformism-how-blind-acceptance-has-cost-india/)

There goes no second thought for the universally known fact that the seeds of a community's or nation's developments germinate from the fecund soil of education and right learning. Ironically, those who are neck-deep involved in the dogmatic practices of religious fanaticism, blind faith paganism, blindly accepting anything in the name of heritage--- are found making hue and cry for sub-continent being the citadel of education, wisdom and learning in olden past. These very strata, comprising the large populace who accept anything with no question, also take academic education as anything, merely to be a springboard to get a position and propagate what others have been propagating. Jayant Narlikar rightly focuses on this crux and shows concern on Indian education culture:

> Whatever the reason, curiosity takes a backseat well behind memorization of the subject matter. We may proudly assert that this is the way our ancestors acquired knowledge, which was orally learnt, memorized and then passed on to the next generation. This is the way the Vedas were handed down from generation to generation. It also tells why we do not have the wealth of written knowledge of ancient origin as in the West or in China. (Narlikar, "*It's Question Time*", Ideas Aglow. p. 19-20, 2004)

A rationalist, may he be Narlikar or Bhagat Singh, is understandably against such conformism which makes people memorize and not learn in natural ways. It is conformist who blindly accepts what is given and passed down without having ability to discern and learn the implication of what has been received. Non-acceptance of the prescribedby rational mind breeds skepticism, a skeptic or full of doubt, though not suspicious, prefers to take the paths of further learning which leads to atheism. Bhagat Singh had been through such pedantic odyssey as his skepticism and curiosity to know led him to higher and more eruditions. The fact of his continuous evolution into the higher mental realms through unchecked erudition is evident in his reflections as below:

> As there were no important activities in the field of action, I got ample opportunity to study various details of the world

> revolution. I studied Bakunin, the Anarchist leader, something of Marx, the father of Communism, and much of Lenin, Trotsky and others, the men who had successfully carried out a revolution in their country. They were all atheists,. Bakunin's *God and State*, though only fragmentary, is an interesting study of the subject. Later, still I came across a book entitled *Common Sense* by Nirlamba Swami. It was only sort of mystic atheism.
>
> (*Bhagat Singh: Why I am an Atheist and Other Works*, p. 12, 2022)

In his political, social, theological assertions Bhagat Singh has stated, in no ambiguous manner, his devout stand for being an atheist. Rightly enough, he has made it clear that his being staunch atheist is not the outcome of overnight decision or transformation, rather it has been a development, a shift from inherited, imposed religious beliefs. The strong edifice of his earned and acquired atheism stands erect on the ground of erudition, mainly western philosophies, literature, the poetry of great P.B. Shelley. Bhagat Singh gives clear view on this stance that it is not his arrogance or vanity that he is an atheist:

> There are only two ways. The man should either begin to think himself a rival of God or he may begin to believe himself to be God. In neither case can he become a genuine atheist. In the first case, he does not even deny the existence of his rival. In the second case as well, he admits the existence of a conscious being behind the screen, guiding all the movements of nature. It is of no importance to us whether he thinks himself to be that supreme being or whether he thinks the supreme conscious being to be somebody apart from himself. The fundamental is there. His belief is there. He is by no means an atheist. Well, here I am. I neither belong to the first category nor to the second. I deny the very existence of that Almighty Supreme being. Why I deny it shall be dealt with later on. Here I want to clear one thing, that it is not vanity that has actuated me to adopt the doctrines of atheism. I am neither a rival nor an incarnation nor the Supreme Being Himself. (*Bhagat Singh: WIAA...*, p. 8-9. 2022).

It goes without saying that Bhagat Singh was rich with high spirit, inner strength and much spunk to challenge the mighty British. Such a great soul is possible to exist and work diligently owing to certain attributes in one's character as Bhagat Singh was richly endowed with. He owed such spunk and revolutionary zeal to his potential and inner belief in himself. The idea of Bhagat Singh's motivational caseleads one to the truth of 'self-belief'and in their own strength. And this very truth further leads to the unadulterated idea of freedom, true freedom; the person like Bhagat Singh could wage his fight against injustice and freedom simply he himself believed and understood the idea of freedom.

Being driven by the widely-held religious belief simply implies the fact of dependence on the assumed strength and powers of the imposed sect and deity. Blindly following such practices without asking any question leads one down to ignorance as imposed religion keeps one stupefied in slumber. Great iconic thinker and revolutionary Karl Marks also shared this fact in 19th century-- "Religion is the opium of the people. It is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heatless world, and the soul of our soulless conditions."
(Marks at: https://law.marquette.edu/facultyblog/2015/01/karl-marx-on-religion/comment-page-1/)
An atheist is free from such dependence and believes in their own strength and potential as Bhagat Singh did. Such freedom from within makes one true volunteer to devote to a crusade

in actual sense; self-reliant Bhagat Singh even denied the fatherly help in his trial for the sake of the set cause:

> In have always been of opinion that all the political workers should be indifferent and should never bother about the legal fight in the law courts and should boldly bear the heaviest possible sentences inflicted upon them. They may defend themselves but always from political considerations and never from personal point of view. Our policy in this trial has always been consistent with this principle; whether we were successful in that or not is not for me to judge. We have always been doing our duty quite disinterestedly. (*Bhagat Singh: WIAA...*, p. 30).

As this thinking revolutionary states above that he, and his comrades, has been doing duties to the humanity quite disinterestedly, the statement carries within the indication of true devotion to work with even no iota of reward. On the contrary, the contemporary history reveals the hypocrisy of dogmatic religiouspractices and beliefs that the followers have been caught into. The common phenomena of devotion in India reveal the fact that the blind believers' practices are primarily for some reward. The statement of atheist Bhagat Singh above implies 'selflessness', the denial of self and selfish motives for the sake of the service to humanity. Propitiation or pleasing some authority or unseen powers cannot be the business of an atheist; rather an atheist like Bhagat Singh takes service to humanity at prime and even can sacrifice their life for others. The rationale behind atheists' realistic approach, selflessness and service to humanity is based on the fact that what is visible and seen (humans and the world) is to be accepted and served while something concocted or imagined, made to be ecclesiastically believed, cannot be accepted. Bhagat Singh's devotion to humanity and real is evident in the following, "We are sorry to admit that we who attach so great a sanctity to human life, who dream of glorious future, when man will be enjoying perfect peace and full liberty,..." (*Bhagat Singh: WIAA...*, p. 42)

To further assess the mindset of an atheist, based on selflessness and with no intentions of rewards and pleasing the deities, it has to be put to the contrast of belief-ridden mentality. Past historical reality and the contemporary history of Indian society speak of the phenomena that showcase the life of masses is determined by certain norms which are primarily based on religious orthodoxy and practices. The prevailing social form of religion can rightly be ascribed to the fact that such a religion of make-believe is strategically instrumented at the hands of governing authorities to reign the masses; to put control on the boundless thinking of ordinary man and keep them within control inducing fear of God. In today's media scenario such practices may be likened to the practice of fear-mongering.May it be fear, political agenda to control the masses, whatever is sold outside determines the inner self on an ordinary man in India, unlike a refined, rational mind of an atheist like Bhagat Singh. V.S. Naipaul, the iconic critic Nobel laureate, quotes Sudhir Kakar, a renowned psychologist in India:

> We Indians, Kakar says, use the outside reality to preserve the continuity of the self amidst an ever changing flux of outer events and things. Men do not, therefore, actively explore the world; rather, they are defined by it. It is this negative way of perceiving that goes with 'meditation', the striving after infinite, the bliss of losing the self; it also goes with *karma* and the complex organization of Indian life. Everything locks together; one cannot be isolated from the other. (Kakar Qtd. in Naipaul 91-92)

Such psycho-analytical reflection by Dr. Sudhir Kakar is indicative of prevalent fact that the ordinary mindset is the outcome of the outer reality, rather than inner strength of one's true character. Institutionalized religion, with prescribed dogmatic norms, is the outer reality among other things that is sold and the mundane mind easily imbibe what is sold and propagated. An atheistic mind, on the other hand, is based on long-waged erudition, refinement and acquisition of wisdom. The mind of atheist Bhagat Singh was outcome of such attainment of sublimity who could manage to be unaffected by the age-old slumber of ordinariness and religious frenzy. In much contrast to atheism the traditional Indian spiritual quests for truth, the mystic religion that makes the devotees believe in absolute raptures—ironically advocates indifference to the pathos of humanity and no need of empathy, "Those people whose minds are pained by the sufferings of other people have not yet reached a state of tranquility characterized by correct perception of the highest truth, but rather they are still caught in the turmoil of worldly life..." (Abhinavgupta in G.N. Devy, *Indian Literary Criticism: Theory and Interpretation*. p. 62, 2010)

One who is perennially awakened and untouched by the intoxication of prescribed religion and slumber Acharya Osho, unprecedented visionary and enlightened soul, could also see the truth of an atheist or agnostic mind's sublimity when he condemned the pseudo practices and man-made god:

> Now, nobody knows who this God is, what is for him and what is against him. There are three hundred pseudo religions on the earth. Just think of three hundred sciences upon the earth, three hundred schools of Physics, condemning each other, finding fault with each other, declaring, "Only our school is the true school, and all the other schools are misleading humanity." What will be the situation of the earth if there are three hundred schools of Physics, three hundred schools of Chemistry, three hundred schools of medicine, three hundred schools of mathematics—what will be the situation? The whole earth will go mad. And that is what has happened as far as religion is concerned. (Osho, Quoted at: https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/religion-pseudo-religion-guilt-78d609e1-a59?p=34aeb240a92afe900f6396271605e839)

Great Osho relates, hereabove, the selling religion to the chaos in society and thus in mind, the mindset governed by such prevalent religion may lead one to the state of pigheadedness, utter confusion and fairy-tale beliefs in something what has been sold and prescribed. Rationality in mind is a far cry for such society which is governed by chauvinistic religiosity and communal togetherness. Such chauvinistic mentality serves as the breeding point for arrogance, communal disharmony and hatred, the phenomena of which are ubiquitous everywhere—may it be terrorism, mob-lynching, communal riots and other unrests. On the basis of what had been and what would be in future Vikas Swarup could foresaw such unsound mental health based on communal hatred:

> Each one of you say your name. All those who are Hindu are allowed to step down from the bus, all those who are Muslim should keep sitting,' the ruffians announced. One by one trembling passengers said their names. Usha. Jatin.

> Arun. Vasanti. Jagdish. Narmada. Ganga. Milind. The bus started emptying. The ruffians watched each of the passenger with hawk-like eyes. They checked the vermilion in the partings of the ladies' hair, asked some of the men further question to establish their religion, and even forced a little boy to open his shorts. I was nauseated by this barbaric display, but was also quivering in my seat...(Swarup, *Q&A* p. 228-229)

The study above, in light of Bhagat Singh's reflections, is evident for the truth that the religion that is politically sold and prescribed, preserved for running economy only and that pushes the humanity into segregated segments is bound to deteriorate the human mentality. Whereas, the mentality based on high erudition, self-realization, continual learning is rather far sounder one and an atheist is blessed with it like Bhagat Singh.

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Chapter 14: Education, Knowledge and Society in India: A Critical Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary Transformations

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Abstract

This text examines the contemporary crisis in Indian education through an anthropological lens, arguing that the disjuncture between educational policy, knowledge systems, and societal realities reflects deeper colonial legacies and structural inequalities. Drawing on recent ethnographic scholarship and policy analysis, the review synthesizes three thematic axes: the persistence of colonial epistemologies in educational frameworks, the reproduction of social hierarchies through school differentiation, and the contested integration of Indigenous knowledge systems in the National Education Policy 2020. The Paper contends that an anthropological perspective—with its emphasis on cultural relativism, holistic understanding, and "perspective from below"—offers critical tools for diagnosing and addressing the disjunctions that characterize India's educational landscape. The review concludes by identifying pathways for anthropological engagement in educational reform, particularly in documenting Indigenous knowledge practices and advocating for culturally responsive pedagogies.

Keywords: Educational anthropology, India, knowledge systems, NEP 2020, social inequality, decolonization, indigenous knowledge

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Introduction:

For decades, India's formal education system has been constrained by what Mehta (2019) describes as "dated dictums, ideas, and alien designs aimed at producing subservient subjects who sought education only for remunerative work." This colonial legacy, further reinforced in the post-independence period, contributed to the marginalization and systematic devaluation of indigenous knowledge systems and their diverse epistemic traditions (Nandy, 1983; Kumar, 2005). As a result, education in India often evolved as a mechanism for administrative and economic utility rather than a culturally grounded process of holistic learning.

From an anthropological perspective, these developments require critical interrogation. Anthropology, with its commitment to holistic inquiry and cultural contextualization, offers a valuable lens for understanding contemporary educational challenges. As Mehta (2019) further argues, anthropology "encourages integrated learning from science, social sciences, philosophy, and humanities, and is rooted in experiential learning," thereby fostering an inclusive epistemological framework that values cultural, social, and ethnic diversity. This orientation makes the discipline particularly suited to examining the intersections of education, knowledge, and society in India. Anthropological scholarship also emphasizes that knowledge systems are socially embedded and culturally constructed rather than universally fixed (Geertz, 1973; Lévi-Strauss, 1962). In this sense, education becomes a site where multiple epistemologies interact, compete, and are hierarchically organized.

This paper reviews existing literature on education in India through an anthropological lens, organizing the discussion around three interconnected themes: the colonial legacy and decolonizing imperatives in education; the reproduction of social inequalities through educational differentiation and systemic disjunction; and the contested incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems within contemporary policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Government of India, 2020). The review concludes by identifying possible pathways for anthropological engagement in educational reform, particularly through culturally responsive pedagogy, epistemic pluralism, and participatory policy design.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the contemporary crisis in Indian education through an anthropological lens, analyzing the disjuncture between educational policy, knowledge systems, and societal realities as reflections of deeper colonial legacies and structural inequalities. The study focuses on-

- To analyze the colonial legacies in Indian education and examine the ongoing processes of decolonization.
- To examine how educational differentiation contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities in India.
- To investigate the emerging disjunctions within India's knowledge society.
- To identify the methodological contributions of anthropology to the study of education and propose pathways for anthropological engagement in educational reform.

Methodology:

This study adopts a **qualitative anthropological approach** to examine contemporary issues in education, knowledge, and society in India. It is based on an **interpretive and ethnographic framework** that helps understand education as a cultural and social process. The study follows an **exploratory research design** using anthropological perspectives to analyse how

education interacts with caste, class, gender, and indigenous knowledge systems. The collected data were analyzed using thematic interpretation, focusing on patterns related to inequality, knowledge systems, and educational change. The study will ensure **confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for cultural diversity** throughout the research process.

Research Gap and Scholarly Contribution

Although a growing body of scholarship has examined the colonial legacy of Indian education, educational inequality, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, these issues have largely been investigated as separate areas of inquiry. Existing studies tend to focus either on educational policy, sociological critiques of inequality, or the documentation of Indigenous knowledge, with limited attention to how these dimensions intersect within a comprehensive anthropological framework. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how historical legacies, contemporary policy reforms, epistemic pluralism, and everyday educational practices collectively shape the transformation of education in India.

This chapter addresses this gap by synthesizing contemporary anthropological scholarship to develop an integrated analytical perspective on education, knowledge, and society in India. Rather than examining educational change through a single disciplinary lens, it brings together debates on decolonization, educational differentiation, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the emerging knowledge society to demonstrate their interconnectedness. By emphasizing ethnographic evidence, cultural context, and the methodological strengths of anthropology, the chapter offers a distinct scholarly contribution to the anthropology of education. It further argues that anthropological perspectives provide valuable insights for designing culturally responsive educational policies, promoting epistemic diversity, and advancing socially inclusive educational reforms in contemporary India.

Interpretation, Findings and Discussion

Colonial Legacies and the Decolonization Imperative

The Colonial Foundation of Indian Education

The relationship between colonialism and education in India is deeply embedded in the historical formation of knowledge systems. As Chaudhuri (2016) observes, sociology and anthropology in India emerged during the colonial period, and their intellectual trajectories remain "deep and complex" due to their entanglement with colonial structures of knowledge production. This colonial origin has significantly shaped both the institutional architecture of education and the epistemological categories through which knowledge is defined, classified, and transmitted.

In her critique of modernization theory in the Indian context, Chaudhuri highlights a crucial historical divergence: while modernization in Europe was associated with industrialization and urban transformation, in India it coincided with deindustrialization and the destruction of indigenous industries, particularly the handloom sector, due to the influx of British manufactured goods (Chaudhuri, 2016; Mukherjee, 2010). This led to widespread economic displacement rather than progressive development. Such historical specificity demonstrates the limitations of applying Universalist Western theoretical models to Indian educational and social realities.

Furthermore, modernization theory in Indian sociology often treated colonialism as an implicit or absent category, despite its central role in shaping educational discourse. Even though Indian students were exposed to nationalist critiques such as Dadabhai Naoroji's

"drain of wealth" theory, colonialism remained under-theorized within dominant academic frameworks (Naoroji, 1901; Deshpande, 2003).

The Quest for Indigeneity in Indian Sociology

Within Indian sociology and anthropology, there has been a sustained intellectual effort to interrogate Western epistemological dominance and to construct indigenous frameworks of analysis. Chaudhuri (2016) notes a "much longer history of debate on the limits of alien concepts and a quest for Indigeneity," reflected in scholarly discussions in journals such as *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *Sociological Bulletin*, and *Seminar*.

This intellectual tradition represents an early form of decolonizing thought, though it has not always produced consensus regarding what constitutes "indigenous" theory or method. Early Indian sociologists were broadly engaged with nation-building, social reform, and scientific modernization. However, alongside this dominant strand, there existed a parallel intellectual current—"always present but long muted"—that emphasized India's civilizational uniqueness and the need for context-specific analytical categories (Uberoi, 1991; Chaudhuri, 2016).

This tension between Universalist social science frameworks and culturally specific epistemologies continues to shape contemporary debates on education and knowledge production in India. In recent years, however, the rise of Hindutva politics has further complicated this discourse. The institutionalization of a hegemonic "Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)" framework has led to the appropriation of decolonial rhetoric within nationalist ideological projects, raising concerns about the politicization of epistemic decolonization (Nanda, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2021). This convergence demands careful anthropological scrutiny of how knowledge systems are mobilized within state and ideological agendas.

Decolonizing Pedagogy and Curriculum

The pedagogical challenges of decolonization become particularly visible in classroom practices and curriculum design. Chaudhuri's reflections on teaching gender studies in India illustrate the tensions involved in engaging with Western theoretical frameworks in non-Western contexts. In the early 1990s, she experienced "a certain unease concerning beginning with the mandatory reference to liberal, socialist, and radical feminist theories in Western textbooks," noting that a more meaningful entry point often lay in historical and contextual narratives (Chaudhuri, 2016).

This pedagogical shift was not merely methodological but epistemological. It reflected the recognition that dominant theoretical frameworks often lack adequate space for non-Western historical experiences. As Chaudhuri argues, feminist theory in India was being actively debated and reworked, but within historically and culturally distinct trajectories that could not be fully captured by Western feminist paradigms.

She further notes that while engagement with non-Western feminist perspectives is optional for Western scholars, for scholars in postcolonial contexts, modernity itself is mediated through colonial histories. This asymmetry has profound implications for knowledge production, curriculum design, and academic authority (Mohanty, 2003; Chaudhuri, 2016).

Importantly, decolonization is not a singular or completed project but an ongoing process. As Chaudhuri emphasizes, "decolonizing is not a singular thing; it is more about 'doing,' better grasped as a verb and therefore a process." This processual understanding aligns closely with anthropological approaches that emphasize lived experience, practice, and the situated nature of knowledge (Geertz, 1973; Chakrabarty, 2000). In this sense, decolonizing pedagogy is not simply about replacing content

but about rethinking the very practices through which knowledge is produced and transmitted.

Differentiation and Disjunction: The Reproduction of Inequality

The Crisis of Indian Education: An Anthropological Diagnosis

A. R. Vasavi's ethnographic work provides a comprehensive anthropological diagnosis of the contemporary Indian education system. In *Differentiation and Disjunction: Interrogating India's Education System*, Vasavi (2022) draws on over two decades of multi-sited fieldwork to argue that the education system is "riddled with multiple challenges at every level," shaped by structural inequalities and institutional fragmentation.

She conceptualizes the crisis through two key analytical categories: differentiation and disjunction. Differentiation, which ideally should respond to diverse educational needs, instead operates as a mechanism that segments learners into distinct consumer groups, thereby reproducing inequality. Disjunction refers to the misalignment between educational processes and social-economic realities, "vitiating educational policies, ideals, and goals" (Vasavi, 2022). A key manifestation of this disjunction is the rise of "shadow education" and coaching industries, where graduates seek additional training to secure employment, revealing a systemic gap between education and employability.

School Differentiation and the Reproduction of Privilege

Vasavi (2022) further demonstrates that school differentiation operates through institutional stratification. Schools function as "processual sites" with distinct objectives serving different social groups:

- Government schools primarily reflect welfare state rationality, serving mass education and electoral legitimacy.
- Non-elite private schools cater to middle-class aspirations and mobility.
- Elite private schools reproduce cultural and social capital, consolidating privilege.

This stratified system contributes to what Vasavi identifies as democratic deficits in education, as the decline of "common schools" undermines egalitarian educational ideals. The disappearance of shared schooling spaces weakens the formation of a common democratic culture and reinforces structural inequality (Vasavi, 2022).

Government Elementary Schools as Sites of Reproduction

Government elementary schools (GES), despite enrolling over 200 million children, remain central sites where inequalities are reproduced. Vasavi (2022) introduces the concept of critical bifocality, which examines the interaction between macro-level political economy and micro-level sociocultural processes in schooling.

Her ethnography highlights how teachers, local political actors, and dominant caste groups shape school functioning. Bureaucratic structures, described as an "iron cage of educational bureaucracy," often sustain institutional inertia regardless of policy reforms. In such settings, pedagogical disjunction leads to poor learning outcomes and contributes to "anti-school sentiments," particularly when education fails to translate into employment opportunities (Vasavi, 2022).

Community–School Linkages and Caste Politics

The introduction of community participation in education governance, particularly through School Development and Management

Committees (SDMCs), was intended to democratize school administration. However, Vasavi (2022) shows that such structures are embedded within caste hierarchies and local power relations.

Rather than functioning as participatory democratic institutions, SDMCs often become arenas for caste-based political contestation, dominated by local elites. As Indian "communities" remain structured by caste, participatory governance is frequently co-opted by dominant groups, limiting its transformative potential. Thus, community-school relationships cannot be understood independently of broader political and economic structures.

Higher Education, Caste, and Employment Regimes

In her analysis of higher education, Vasavi (2022) uses life-history narratives to examine how caste shapes educational and employment trajectories. Although expansion of higher education has increased access for marginalized groups, it has not ensured equality in outcomes or institutional experience.

A Dalit graduate in rural Karnataka, for instance, was labeled a "Government Brahmin," reflecting the persistence of caste stigma even within state institutions. Such experiences highlight how access does not eliminate humiliation or structural disadvantage.

Comparative ethnographic studies also show differentiated experiences of unemployment and aspiration. Jeffrey (2010) notes that upper-caste educated youth often navigate unemployment with relative security, whereas lower-caste youth experience precarious waiting within discriminatory recruitment systems. These differences underscore the intersection of caste, education, and labour market inequalities.

The Classroom View: The "Notebook Economy"

Miriam Sharon Thangaraj's ethnographic study of a middle-school classroom in Kanchipuram offers a micro-anthropological perspective on learning processes within marginalized settings. Drawing on comparative education anthropology, she critiques dominant "learning crisis" narratives that homogenize educational failure.

Thangaraj (2021) identifies the emergence of a "notebook economy", a locally produced pedagogical system shaped by material scarcity and social disadvantage. This system enables students and teachers to construct meaningful learning practices within constrained environments. While often dismissed in global education discourse, these practices are adaptive responses that connect schooling to students' lived realities and future labor opportunities.

Importantly, Thangaraj (2021) argues that "learning crisis" narratives obscure structural inequalities by portraying classrooms as uniformly deficient. Instead, such narratives divert attention from the political-economic conditions that produce unequal educational environments in the first place.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the NEP 2020

The Promise and Limitations of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, announced on July 29, 2020, represents a significant attempt to restructure the Indian education system. The policy formally acknowledges the importance of ancient Indian knowledge systems (IKS), Indigenous traditions, and vernacular languages, positioning them as integral to a holistic and culturally rooted education framework.

Srivastava and Patel (2021) critically examine the role of anthropology in relation to NEP 2020 and argue that anthropological perspectives—particularly those emphasizing cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge systems, multilingualism, and social equity—closely align with the policy's stated objectives. The policy also attempts to integrate Janjati and tribal knowledge systems into mainstream education, an idea historically resonant with earlier pedagogical experiments such as Rabindranath Tagore's Brahmacharya model initiated in 1901.

However, Mehta (2020) identifies significant limitations within the policy. She notes that NEP 2020 remains largely silent on the protection and systematic documentation of Indigenous and Janjati knowledge systems. Given that these knowledge forms are deeply embedded in oral traditions and lived cultural practices, the absence of a clear methodological framework for their preservation represents a major gap. Even within sections addressing *Lok Vidya*, the policy does not explicitly engage with the diversity of tribal epistemologies or their institutional support mechanisms.

Anthropology's Role in Documenting Indigenous Knowledge

Mehta (2020) highlights the critical role of anthropologists as traditional documenters of Indigenous knowledge systems. She proposes the creation of structured encyclopedias of Indigenous practices, which could then be transformed into pedagogical tools for use across different levels of education. This proposal reflects anthropology's methodological strength in recording oral traditions, cultural practices, and experiential knowledge systems that are often excluded from formal textual archives.

Similarly, Srivastava and Patel (2021) emphasize anthropology's methodological contributions in areas such as contextual learning, cultural relativism, and participatory research methods. They argue that these approaches can significantly inform curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, and institutional reform. Their analysis highlights key intersections between anthropology and NEP 2020, particularly in relation to Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), inclusive education, and global-local integration. They further advocate for the strategic incorporation of anthropological insights into educational policy implementation to ensure cultural sensitivity, equity, and contextual relevance.

Critiques of NEP 2020 from an Anthropological Perspective

From a critical anthropological standpoint, Vasavi (2022) argues that NEP 2020 may intensify existing patterns of differentiation and disjunction within the Indian education system rather than resolving them. She suggests that the policy's structural reforms risk further centralization of educational governance, thereby placing greater control in the hands of dominant political regimes and reducing institutional autonomy.

According to Vasavi (2022), NEP 2020 promotes a narrowly defined vision of education that may reinforce dominant cultural frameworks while marginalizing alternative pedagogic traditions and critical approaches. This raises concerns about the exclusion of plural epistemologies and the potential weakening of democratic educational spaces.

Mehta (2020) also critiques NEP 2020 for its partial engagement with Rabindranath Tagore's holistic vision of education. Although the policy emphasizes inclusivity and alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4, she argues that it does not fully incorporate Tagore's emphasis on experiential, creative, and integrative learning systems. This reflects a broader tension between policy rhetoric and epistemological depth from an anthropological standpoint.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems as Resilient Practices

Mehta (2020) further emphasizes that Indigenous and Janjati knowledge systems are among the most adaptive and resilient knowledge traditions, particularly in relation to ecological sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. However, she notes that NEP 2020 does not provide adequate institutional mechanisms for their preservation, documentation, or pedagogical integration.

This omission raises critical questions regarding whether the policy's recognition of Indigenous knowledge is substantive or merely symbolic. Anthropological scholarship suggests that Indigenous knowledge systems are not static relics of the past but dynamic, evolving practices that remain highly relevant to contemporary global challenges.

In this context, anthropology plays a crucial bridging role. Mehta's call for systematic documentation and pedagogical translation of Indigenous practices reflects anthropology's longstanding commitment to making oral traditions and culturally embedded knowledge accessible within formal educational systems (Mehta, 2020). This approach underscores the discipline's potential contribution to developing a more inclusive, pluralistic, and sustainable educational framework.

Knowledge Society, Identity, and Social Transformation

The Emergence of Knowledge Society in India

SinghaRoy's study *Towards a Knowledge Society* (n.d.) examines the emergence of a knowledge society across both rural and urban India and among diverse social collectivities. The work highlights the new economic momentum and socio-cultural transformations accompanying this transition, as well as its impact on pre-existing forms of social identity, marginality, and exclusion (SinghaRoy, n.d.).

The analysis captures the dual character of this transformation, identifying both hope and despair generated by the rise of the knowledge society. While new opportunities for mobility, identity formation, and economic participation emerge, they are simultaneously accompanied by renewed inequalities and structural exclusions. This duality reflects a central anthropological concern with the coexistence of structural constraint and human agency within processes of social change.

Disjunctions in the Knowledge Society

SinghaRoy further demonstrates that the emergence of a knowledge society in India is marked by deep contradictions. The Planning Commission's aspiration that India should not "miss the information and knowledge revolution" reflects an optimistic developmental vision centered on knowledge-based economic growth (Planning Commission, 2001). However, empirical realities reveal a more uneven transformation.

As noted in critical reviews of SinghaRoy's work, the expansion of the knowledge economy simultaneously produces inclusion for some and exclusion for many, particularly marginalized populations. The knowledge society thus becomes "a story of despair for the millions who are excluded and marginalized, but also hope for liberation from oppression and for the formation of new identities". (SinghaRoy, n.d.)

This contradiction closely aligns with Vasavi's (2022) concept of disjunction in education, where institutional expansion coexists with structural inequality. From an anthropological standpoint, these disjunctions are not anomalies but integral features of how knowledge economies operate within stratified social systems. Different social groups experience the knowledge society in radically unequal ways,

shaped by caste, class, gender, and regional location.

Social Transformative Learning as a Response

In response to these structural contradictions, Vasavi proposes Social Transformative Learning (STL) as a pedagogical and institutional intervention in higher education. STL emphasizes the development of critical thinking, reflexivity, and social awareness among students, aiming to enhance their capacity for meaningful engagement with society (Vasavi, 2022).

However, Vasavi also critically notes the limitations of existing implementations. For instance, initiatives such as Kerala's Centre for Research and Education in Social Transformation (CREST) have succeeded in building confidence among disadvantaged youth but often channel aspirations toward corporate employment, thereby reinforcing dominant definitions of success tied to market integration rather than broader social transformation (Vasavi, 2022).

A key anthropological insight in this critique is the argument that Social Transformative Learning should not be restricted to marginalized groups alone. Instead, it must also include privileged sections of society. This is essential to address the structural imbalance in which the burden of social change is disproportionately placed on disadvantaged communities. As Vasavi (2022) argues, genuine transformation requires reorienting education as a collective social process rather than an individual mobility strategy.

From an anthropological perspective, this approach aligns with broader concerns regarding equity, reflexivity, and the redistribution of responsibility in processes of social change.

6. Discussion:

The Methodological Contributions of Anthropology

The literature reviewed in this manuscript highlights several key methodological contributions that anthropology offers to the study of education in India. First, ethnographic engagement with local contexts provides deep insights into everyday educational practices. Thangaraj's study of the "notebook economy" demonstrates how ethnographic methods reveal the agency, creativity, and adaptive strategies of teachers and students operating in resource-constrained environments. This challenges homogenizing global narratives of educational failure by foregrounding situated learning practices (Thangaraj, 2021).

- Second, the concept of critical bifocality, developed by Vasavi (2022), offers an important analytical framework for understanding education as simultaneously shaped by macro-level political economy and micro-level sociocultural dynamics. This approach allows for a more nuanced interpretation of how institutional structures and everyday practices interact within schooling systems.
- Third, the anthropological emphasis on a "perspective from below", as articulated by Oommen (1997), is crucial for apprehending social reality in hierarchical societies. This perspective foregrounds the lived experiences of marginalized groups, enabling a deeper understanding of how educational policies are experienced unevenly across caste, class, and gender locations.
- Finally, anthropology's commitment to cultural relativism provides an essential corrective to universalizing discourses such as global "learning crisis" narratives. By situating educational

practices within their cultural and historical contexts, anthropology challenges externally imposed standards of evaluation and highlights local forms of meaning-making and adaptation.

The Challenge of Policy Implementation

A consistent theme emerging from the literature is the persistent gap between educational policy formulation and its implementation. Mehta (2020) notes that although NEP 2020 formally acknowledges Indigenous knowledge systems, it lacks a concrete framework for their documentation, preservation, and pedagogical integration. This absence highlights a significant disconnect between policy aspiration and operational design.

Similarly, Vasavi (2022) demonstrates how structural factors such as school differentiation, caste hierarchies, and local power relations undermine the democratizing potential of educational reforms. Even well-intentioned policies are often reshaped by institutional constraints and socio-political realities at the ground level.

While Srivastava and Patel (2021) highlight the potential of anthropology to inform policy implementation—particularly in areas of cultural diversity, multilingualism, and inclusive education—they do not fully engage with the institutional and political barriers that limit the translation of anthropological insights into practice. This suggests that anthropological engagement must extend beyond policy critique to sustained involvement in implementation processes, field-level interventions, and institutional ethnography.

The Decolonization Project: Process, Not Product

Chaudhuri's reflections on decolonization emphasize that it should be understood not as a fixed outcome but as an ongoing process. Decolonization, in her formulation, is best conceptualized "as a verb and therefore a process," rather than a completed intellectual project (Chaudhuri, 2016). This understanding has significant implications for educational anthropology.

From this perspective, decolonizing pedagogy does not involve a simple substitution of Western theories with indigenous frameworks. Instead, it requires continuous engagement with the tensions, contradictions, and situated challenges that arise in teaching and learning contexts. It is through "learning from the everyday challenges" of pedagogical practice that new epistemological possibilities emerge (Chaudhuri, 2016).

Anthropological approaches to decolonization also recognize that global histories have unfolded unevenly, producing multiple and differentiated experiences of modernity. As Chaudhuri (2016) notes, "our global histories have played out differently," and consequently, "our modernity was therefore different." This recognition calls for pedagogical approaches that are sensitive to historical specificity and resistant to both Western universalism and nationalist essentialism. In this sense, anthropology provides a critical framework for developing contextually grounded, reflexive, and plural educational practices.

Broader Policy Implications and Future Research

The findings of this review have important implications for educational policy and practice in India. Educational reforms should move beyond structural and administrative changes to embrace culturally responsive, context-specific, and socially inclusive approaches informed by anthropological evidence. Policymakers should develop institutional mechanisms for the systematic documentation, preservation, and integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems into curricula while ensuring that such initiatives

remain inclusive, participatory, and free from ideological appropriation. Greater attention should also be given to reducing educational inequalities by addressing disparities across caste, class, gender, region, and language through equitable resource allocation, teacher preparation, multilingual pedagogy, and community-based educational governance. Furthermore, anthropology can play a significant role in monitoring the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 through ethnographic evaluation, enabling policymakers to understand how reforms are experienced in diverse local contexts rather than relying solely on quantitative indicators. Future anthropological research should therefore prioritize comparative ethnographic studies across rural, urban, and tribal settings, investigate the impact of digital technologies and emerging knowledge economies on educational inequalities, and examine how educational policies are negotiated, adapted, and transformed in everyday institutional and community practices. Such research will contribute to the development of a more equitable, culturally grounded, and socially transformative education system in India.

Conclusion:

This paper has reviewed the anthropological literature on education, knowledge, and society in India, identifying three thematic axes: colonial legacies and decolonization; differentiation and the reproduction of inequality; and the contested integration of Indigenous knowledge systems in educational policy. The review identifies several pathways for future anthropological engagement:

- **Documentation and translation of Indigenous knowledge**: Mehta's call for anthropologists to document Indigenous knowledge systems and convert them into pedagogic resources provides a concrete agenda for anthropological research and practice.
- **Critical engagement with educational policy**: Srivastava and Patel's call for the "strategic integration of anthropological insights into policy implementation" suggests a role for anthropologists as policy critics and advocates.
- **Ethnographic studies of educational practice**: Thangaraj's study demonstrates the value of ethnographic attention to the everyday realities of classrooms, revealing agency and creativity that policy discourse often obscures.
- **Interrogating the knowledge society**: SinghaRoy's work on knowledge society invites anthropological engagement with the broader social transformations shaped by education, technology, and economic change.
- **Social Transformative Learning**: Vasavi's proposal for STL provides a framework for connecting educational practice to broader projects of social justice.

The anthropological perspective, with its commitment to holism, cultural relativism, and "perspectives from below," offers critical tools for diagnosing and addressing the disjunctions that characterize India's educational landscape. As Mehta argues, anthropology "evokes anthropologists—the traditional chroniclers of these knowledge systems—to prepare encyclopedias of these indigenous practices and convert them into easy pedagogic exercises to be adopted by various educational systems at different levels" . This vision of anthropological engagement combines scholarly rigor with practical commitment to educational transformation.

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Chapter 15: Navigating Educational Change: Systemic Competencies, Digital Pedagogy, And The Evolving Role Of The Contemporary Educator

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Abstract
Rapid technological acceleration and shifting societal dynamics demand a thorough re-evaluation of how future educators are trained. Although contemporary scholastic reforms are widely documented, a distinct gap in current research exists regarding the precise mechanisms through which teacher training centres translate high-level policies into actionable classroom skills, particularly concerning hybrid teaching and emotional intelligence. Addressing this issue, this investigation focuses on two core objectives. First, it analyses the complex interplay between major societal shifts—specifically digital transformations and increasingly diverse student demographics—and their direct impact on modern classrooms. Second, it assesses how educators actively generate classroom knowledge while pinpointing the fundamental capabilities needed to upgrade current preparation curricula. By synthesizing contemporary academic literature, regulatory frameworks, and international scholastic movements, this inquiry yields vital insights. Critically, conventional training methodologies fail to reconcile theoretical coursework with actual classroom environments, leaving incoming educators ill-equipped to handle the digital and psychological complexities of modern student populations. Furthermore, evidence demonstrates that institutional frameworks rooted in localized action research elevate instructors from mere implementers of pre-packaged curricula into active originators of educational knowledge. Conclusively, the study suggests that modernizing educator preparation depends on a systemic transition toward extended classroom residencies and fully integrated digital instructional methods rather than superficial technical workshops. Ultimately, this chapter contributes both a theoretical framework and a practical blueprint for redesigning teacher education, providing actionable strategies to develop agile, equitable, and forward-looking learning environments.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, Twenty-First Century Skills, Educational Change, Knowledge Society, Teacher Competencies, Social Realities, Professional Development, Digital Pedagogy*

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Introduction

The shift from the old way of teaching that was used during the industrial era to the more complex and connected way of learning in today's world has caused major changes in education around the globe. For many years, formal education worked as a strict system that passed on fixed knowledge in one direction. Now, that idea is becoming less relevant over time (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Quick changes in technology, easier access to information, and big changes in how society works have broken down the old way of teaching.This means we need to completely rethink how we imagine, train, and use future teachers (Fullan, 2007; Zhao, 2020). At the centre of this change is the big change in how society uses digital technology. Today's classroom isn't just a physical room in one place; it's a connected learning environment that keeps changing and growing (Selwyn, 2014). The growing use of hybrid learning platforms has changed how we understand learning itself, which means teachers need to move from being the main source of knowledge to helping students make sense of information and guide their thinking (Biesta, 2015). Using technology in education needs advanced teaching methods that understand how digital environments affect how people think and work together to learn (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Falloon, 2020). At the same time, classrooms are now very diverse, showing changes in how people are divided by wealth, social status, and different kinds of brain functions (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The mix of different groups of people, along with the mental pressures from living in a digital world, puts a lot of stress on teachers. This means they need strong emotional skills and the ability to create learning spaces where everyone feels included (Binkley et al., 2012; Brackett, 2019; Dede, 2010).

Even though there is agreement around the world about the need for big changes in education systems (OECD, 2018), there is still not enough research on how teacher training programs actually turn these big ideas into real skills that teachers can use in the classroom (Zeichner, 2010; Gore et al., 2017). Traditional programs usually use strict methods, focusing on theory and separate skills in separate classes, as mentioned by Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich in 2010. This causes "praxis shock," which happens when new teachers aren't ready to handle both hybrid teaching and the different needs of their students (Garet et al., 2001). In the end, we are training teachers for a world that is already gone (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). To tackle this, educators need to shift from being just someone who follows procedures to becoming creative problem-solvers who generate new ideas (Schön, 1983; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This change helps the next generation gain the skills they need to succeed in a world that keeps changing.

Conceptual Background

To systematically analyse the mechanisms of educational change and the gaps in teacher preparation, it is imperative to establish a robust theoretical framework. As the contemporary educational landscape operates as a complex adaptive system, it cannot be understood through isolated variables. This research grounds its inquiry by deconstructing three core conceptual pillars: Systemic Competencies, Digital Pedagogy, and the Evolving Role of the Educator.

1. Systemic Competencies: Beyond Instructional Delivery: In the past, being a good teacher mainly meant knowing the subject well and managing the classroom effectively. But today, the way we think about teacher skills has changed.Now, there's a bigger focus on "Systemic Competencies," which means teachers need to understand how different parts of the education system work together. This idea comes from Voogt and Roblin in 2012. This framework understands that a classroom is part of many connected influences, which matches ecological systems theories (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Therefore, a truly skilled teacher needs to understand the bigger

picture of education (Fullan, 2007).They should be able to take national and global goals and turn them into everyday classroom actions (OECD, 2018).They also need to help shape and work within the school's culture by joining and contributing to teams that share ideas across different subjects (Gore et al., 2017).Additionally, they must consider many factors like students' emotional and social needs, as well as the use of technology, to support learning that is both meaningful and project-based (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In the end, systemic competency isn't just about having a fixed set of skills.It's more about the ability to adjust and respond to the ever-changing, complex connections within today's educational systems, as stated by the OECD in 2018.

2. Digital Pedagogy: A Philosophical Framework: A common mistake in teacher training is mixing up "Educational Technology" (EdTech) with "Digital Pedagogy." EdTech is just about the tools and equipment used in schools, like computers and software (Selwyn, 2014).Digital Pedagogy, on the other hand, is a way of understanding how using digital tools changes the way people think, find information, and work together to build knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). True digital teaching is based on ideas that say knowledge is shared through networks and learning happens by linking together experts in different areas (Selwyn, 2014; Falloon, 2020).Because of this, real digital teaching needs to be thoughtful.It asks teachers to look closely at what is not being taught, check for unfairness in how computers make decisions, and deal with the gap between people who have access to tech and those who don't.This gap makes unfairness in society worse (Falloon, 2020). Because of this, teaching staff need to learn more than just how to use technology—they need to understand the reasons and the right times to use it in education (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010).

3. The Evolving Role of the Educator: From Technician to Reflective Originator: Changing from an industrial society to a knowledge society completely changes what it means to be a teacher.In the past, teachers were seen more like technicians, following a system where they just passed on set knowledge created by others.This old model is no longer as relevant, as the role of teachers now involves more than just delivering information—they play a different and more complex part in education. Instead, the modern teacher needs to have a wide range of different qualities and roles. First, they act as a helper and someone who makes sense of things; when students have unlimited access to raw information, the teacher's role is to help them think critically, put information together, and use it to solve difficult, open-ended problems (Binkley et al., 2012; Dede, 2010). Second, they serve as a source of emotional support; in a world that feels broken, building mental strength, understanding emotions, and the ability to bounce back has become a main goal of education, not just something that happens along the way (Brackett, 2019). Finally, building on the idea of the "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983) and "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), today's educator works as a local researcher and actively creates new knowledge. By doing action research—looking closely at their own classroom and studying particular teaching methods—they gain real, useful knowledge about how to teach that works better than general theories from above (Zeichner, 2010; Gore et al., 2017).

Review of Literature

This study's theoretical framework is based on a wide range of research areas including how knowledge is gained in digital environments, supporting social and emotional learning, and training future teachers. Table 1 below shows a summary of the main themes from the reviewed studies. It outlines the main goals and important results from key researchers, which help explain the problems this paper is trying to address.

Table 1: Thematic Synthesis of Reviewed Literature on Educator Competencies

S. No.	Name of the Author(s)	Year of study	Title of the study	Results	Theme
1.	Fullan	2007	The new meaning of systemic educational change within modern schooling environments	Educational change is a complex, non-linear process demanding a fundamental transformation in institutional culture and teacher beliefs.Top-down policy mandates are insufficient for actual classroom reform. So, teachers must be empowered as active participants in meaning-making rather than treated as passive recipients of systemic directives	Systemic Educational Change
2.	Biesta	2015	What is education for? On good education, teacher judgment, and educational professionalism	There is an urgent need to restore critical, values-based teacher judgment in pre-service training in place of Learnification.	The Evolving Role of the Contemporary Educator
3.	Hargreaves and Shirley	2012	The global fourth way: The quest for educational excellence	For achieving systemic excellence requires elevating the teaching profession into a highly trusted, autonomous, and intellectually demanding field	Systemic competencies and excellence
4.	Mishra and Koehler	2006	Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge	Effective teaching requires a deep, simultaneous understanding of how pedagogy, content, and technology intersect, rather than treating technology as an isolated instructional domain	Digital Pedagogy and Systemic Competencies
5.	Ertmer and Ottenbreit-	2010	Teacher technology change: How Knowledge,	Teacher's pedagogical beliefs and the immediate institutional culture act as	Digital Pedagogy and Institutional

	Leftwich		Confidence, Beliefs, and Culture intersect	the strongest gatekeepers to meaningful technological integration in the classroom	Culture
6.	Falloon	2020	From digital literacy to digital competence: The teacher digital competency (TDF) framework	Future educators should be trained to critically assess the cognitive and social implications of the digital tools because technical skills alone do not equate to digital pedagogical competence	Digital pedagogy and teacher's competencies
7.	Selwyn	2014	Digital technology and the contemporary university: Degrees of digitization	Digital technologies are not neutral tools, they possess inherent biases that fundamentally restructure how knowledge is accessed, evaluated by both teachers and students. So, they put emphasis on the need of critical digital pedagogy.	Digital Technology transformations
8.	Zhao	2020	COVID-19 as a catalyst for educational change	Recent disruptions exposed the extreme vulnerabilities of transmissive pedagogies, proves that the hybrid, digitally mediated instruction has become a permanent structural reality in education. Hence new era requires an agile educational workforce capable of adapting technological and societal shifts.	Educational change and transformation
9.	Brackett	2019	Permission to feel: Unlocking the power of emotions to help our kids, ourselves, and our society thrive	This study demonstrated that when teachers are equipped with the psychological tools to handle classroom trauma and diverse emotional needs, both behavioural issues and teacher burnout significantly decreases. Hence, there is a necessity for including explicit socio-	Emotional Intelligence

				emotional training in teacher preparation curricula.	
10.	Darling-Hammond	2017	Teacher education around the World: What can we learn from International Practice	This cross-sectional study reveals thatpreparing teachers to mediate socio-economic disparities is as vital as subject mastery, hence the program should also focus on culturally responsive pedagogy.	Teacher Education Upgradation
11.	Zeichner	2010	Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in College and University-based teacher education	This study suggests the creation of "Hybrid Spaces" in teacher education that bring academic knowledge and practitioner knowledge together, ensuring novice teachers are not left to bridge this gap on their own	Teacher Education Upgradation
12.	Cochran-Smith and Lytle	2009	Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation	The result showed that empowering educators to systematically observe their classrooms and conduct localized action research elevates them from mere implementors of pre-packaged curricula to localized knowledge creators	Evolving Role of Teacher

Looking at the research that has been reviewed, there's a major problem in the system: even though there's a lot of talk about the need for digital changes and including all groups in education (as shown by Darling-Hammond, 2017, and Zhao, 2020), the way teacher training programs are set up doesn't match these important needs. There is a big gap between the big-picture needs for major changes in education systems and the small-scale training that pre-service teachers get. Often, this training is based on old, traditional methods that don't match what's needed today. This gap directly stops you from turning your first goal into real action, because new teachers don't have the full training needed to handle the mix of digital knowledge ideas and different social and emotional needs. Moreover, the research shows that there is a big problem with how teachers are trained to be active creators of knowledge through inquiry-based methods (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Gore et al., 2017). This lack of focus on local action research means teachers aren't prepared to carry out the big changes in the curriculum that your second goal needs. As a result, they end up just following orders from outside instead of being active creators of teaching methods that fit their specific situations. This shows that there is a strong need to move away from training that is just

theory and happens in isolation, and instead create a better system that includes important skills and research done by teachers as key parts of their professional development.

Objectives of the study

This investigation focuses on two core objectives:

1. To investigate the complex dynamics between overarching societal transformations, specifically systemic digitalization and demographic pluralism, and their manifestation within contemporary pedagogical settings.
2. To explore the active role of educators as generators of pedagogical knowledge, with the aim of determining the core competencies necessary to fundamentally overhaul pre-service teacher training frameworks.

Macro-Societal Shifts and Contemporary Pedagogical Ecosystems

The contemporary classroom can no longer be analysed as an isolated, static environment. It is a micro-ecosystem that is deeply penetrated and structurally mediated by massive macro-societal forces. To deconstruct this mediation, it is essential to examine the dialectical intersection of systemic digitalization and demographic pluralism across the following eight distinct dimensions:

1. The Epistemological Disruption of Digitality: Moving into a digital knowledge economy brings big changes in how we understand and handle knowledge, how it's created, checked, and shared. In the industrial-era model, the textbook and the teacher were the only sources of academic information. Nowadays, information is everywhere, easily connected, and carefully selected by algorithms. This change in the digital world means that learning isn't just about remembering facts, but about choosing what information to use, checking its usefulness, and combining it with other ideas in a connected way.The transition into a digitized knowledge economy represents a profound epistemological disruption, a fundamental change in how knowledge is constructed, validated, and distributed. In the industrial-era model, the textbook and the educator held a monopoly on academic information. Today, information is ubiquitous, hyper-linked, and algorithmically curated. This digital transformation dictates that learning is no longer about information retention, but rather about information curation, critical evaluation, and networked synthesis.

2. The Shift from Knowledge Transmitter to Cognitive Sense-Maker: Because of that change in how we understand knowledge, the way the classroom is organized now needs the teacher to have a new role. The teacher is no longer the main source of truth. Their role now is more about helping students make sense of information. Teachers have to support students who are dealing with a lot of information at once. They need to help students separate true information from false stuff, connect different pieces of information, and use what they've learned to solve real-life problems.

3. The Threat of Techno-Centrism vs. True Digital Pedagogy

When educational ecosystems attempt to absorb systemic digital transformations without upgrading pedagogical philosophies, they fall victim to "techno-centrism." This occurs when schools invest heavily in advanced digital infrastructure (smartboards, tablets, AI tools) but use them merely to perform outdated, transmissive tasks—like projecting a static lecture. True structural mediation requires training educators in deep digital pedagogy, where technology is utilized to fundamentally transform learning modalities rather than merely digitizing old habits.

4. The Amplification of Demographic Pluralism: At the same time as digital technology is speeding up, there is a huge variety in the students coming into the system. Today's classrooms are more diverse than ever

because of globalization, changes in the economy, and a better understanding of different ways people's brains work. The educational environment is no longer a single, uniform place where a standard, "one-size-fits-all" curriculum can be equally understood and learned by everyone. Today, teachers have to handle many different cultures, languages, and economic backgrounds all in one class.

5. The Psycho-Social Imperative and Emotional Intelligence:This diversity brings in complicated mental and social situations to the classroom, like the lasting effects of recent worldwide events and the high stress from always being connected online. If a teacher doesn't have emotional intelligence, their technical teaching abilities become useless. The establishment of an environment where academic learning can take place requires more than just peripheral soft skills.It requires systemic competencies such as psychological safety, inclusion, and trauma-informed practices.

6. The Intersection of Digital Inequity and Social Disparities: The real clash between these two big idea systems happens when talking about fairness. Digital tools can help bring together different groups of people, like using special software that helps students who have learning challenges. However, they also have the potential to greatly worsen these differences through the "digital divide." Today's teachers are right in the middle of this problem, always trying to give fair and good lessons to students who might have very different access to things like computers, fast internet, or help with using technology at home.

7. The Necessity of Critical Digital Pedagogy: As these ideas come together, today's teachers need to use "critical digital pedagogy." Digital tools aren't fair or unbiased; their algorithms have hidden preferences that influence how students learn and which information shows up. Teachers need to clearly teach students from different backgrounds to understand how algorithms can be unfair, protect their personal information online, and act responsibly when using the internet. Finding the right path needs a teacher who is skilled with technology and also understands society and its challenges well.

8. Praxis Shock Due to Siloed Teacher Preparation: The main issue found in this study is that the current way teachers are trained doesn't adequately prepare new teachers for this complicated situation. Traditional training programs often teach educational technology in one subject area and educational psychology in another. So, new teachers have to figure out all these big societal influences by themselves. This leads to something called "praxis shock"—a situation where new teachers feel stuck because they realize their training from university doesn't fit well with the changing, complex, and technology-filled classrooms they now have to teach in.

The way these big changes connect with each otherand how together they create 'praxis shock' in today's teaching environmentis shown in Figure 1 below.

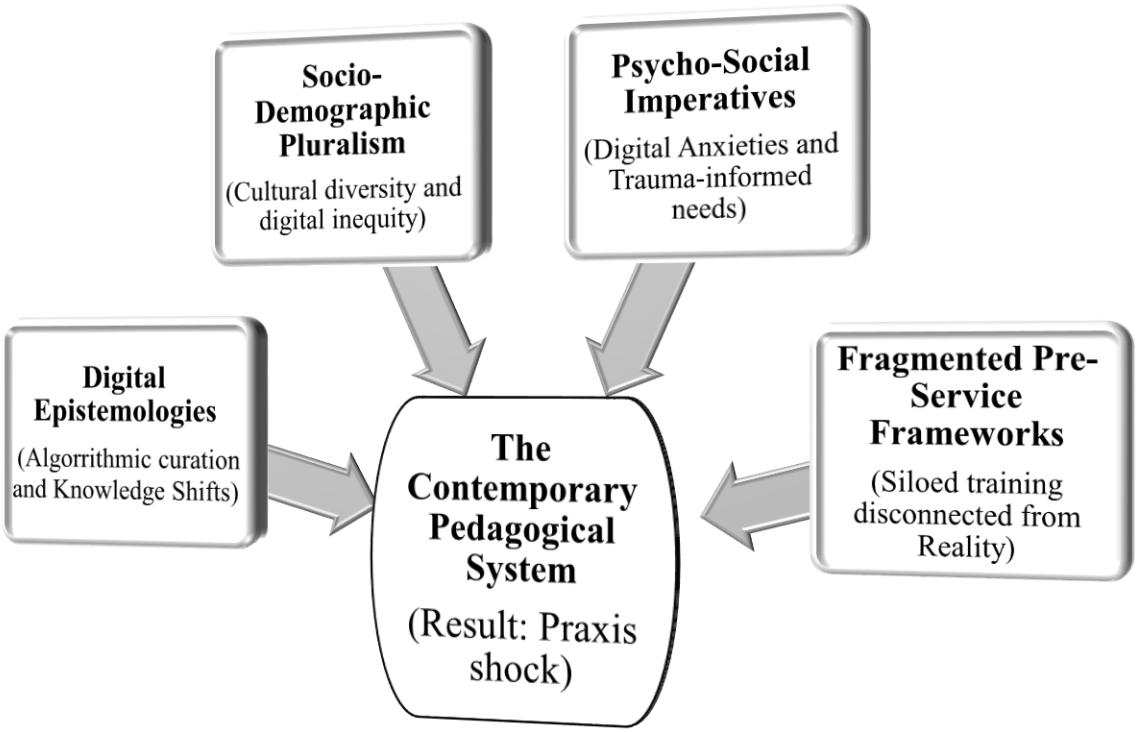


Figure 1: Macro-Systemic Forces Shaping the Contemporary Pedagogical Systems

Educators as Knowledge Generators and Core Competencies for Curriculum Reform

To resolve the "praxis shock" and systemic disconnects identified in the first objective, the foundational identity of the teacher must be reimagined. This section assesses the mechanisms through which modern educators construct contextualized knowledge and pinpoints the specific, non-negotiable competencies required to overhaul current pre-service preparation frameworks across eight critical dimensions:

1. The Paradigm Shift from Curriculum Consumer to Knowledge Creator: In the past, teacher training placed the teacher at the lower part of the education system—they were seen as someone who just followed and used standard lesson plans made by outside book companies and college experts. Changing how teachers are trained needs a big shift in this approach. Today's teachers need to be seen as strong, creative problem-solvers who can really understand the different thinking and feeling styles of their students and create personalized learning plans that fit each group's needs.

2. Institutionalizing Localized Action Research: Educators mainly create this classroom knowledge by doing local action research. Teachers take an "inquiry as stance" approach by carefully watching a specific teaching problem, like when students lose interest during digital activities. They then try a focused teaching strategy, gather information to understand what's happening, and look closely at the results to learn more. This process keeps happening in a cycle, making sure that teaching methods are closely matched to the real situation of the students in the classroom, connecting the ideas from academic studies with what actually happens in the classroom.

3. Prioritizing Contextualization over Standardization: When teachers create their own knowledge for the classroom, they naturally focus more on fitting lessons to the specific needs of their students rather than just following strict test scores. Because today's classrooms are made up of many different kinds of students, a teaching method that works well in a suburban school might not work at all in a poorer urban school. Teachers who are trained to create and share knowledge have the important freedom to change, adjust, or even stop using standard lesson plans that don't fit the unique cultural and thinking needs of their students.

4. Core Competency: Agile Hybrid Instructional Design: To allow people to take an active part, training programs need to clearly teach important, up-to-date skills. The first is agile hybrid instructional design. Teachers can't depend only on controlling the classroom in person anymore. They need to be very skilled at combining live lessons with independent, digital learning in a smooth and effective way. This means being able to create flipped classrooms, lead projects that involve working together online, and adjust how lessons are taught depending on what students are saying and doing in class at that moment.

5. Core Competency: Diagnostic Digital Data Literacy:In a digital educational system, creating teaching knowledge needs strong skills in understanding and working with data. Educational software and learning management systems collect a lot of data about how students are involved in learning, how much time they spend on tasks, and where they might be struggling with understanding. A key skill that today's teachers need is the ability to read, understand, and use the information from digital learning analytics. This changes assessment from a final grading tool used at the end of a unit into an ongoing process that helps teachers make daily adjustments to their lessons.

6. Core Competency: Embedded Socio-Emotional Facilitation: As we've seen, having a population with many different groups requires a lot of psychological support and adjustment. So, a key skill that should be part of teacher training is helping with social and emotional support built into the teaching process. Instead of seeing socio-emotional learning as something extra that happens once a week for just 15 minutes, teachers need to learn how to naturally include emotional intelligence, ways to respond to trauma, and methods to build resilience right into their regular lessons and academic teaching.

7. Curriculum Overhaul: The Mandate for Extended Clinical Residencies: Improving teacher training programs means changing the old way of having short, separate periods for teaching practice. University classes should be closely connected to long, year-long medical training programs. Like medical residencies, this hands-on method lets future teachers live through the whole school year, including all the mental, management, and teaching parts, all while being closely guided and supported by experienced, skilled teachers.

8. Cultivating Reflective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Finally, the creation of teaching knowledge can't take place by itself. If teachers work on their own in their classrooms, then good ideas that work in one place don't spread to other areas. Pre-service training programs need to clearly teach the skills needed for working together to ask questions and explore ideas. Future teachers need to learn how to work in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where they often talk about their research on teaching methods, give feedback on each other's blended lesson plans, and together help improve the overall teaching skills across the whole school.

To show this change, Figure 2 shows the ongoing, repeating process that modern teachers use to do action research and create teaching knowledge that fits their specific classroom situations.

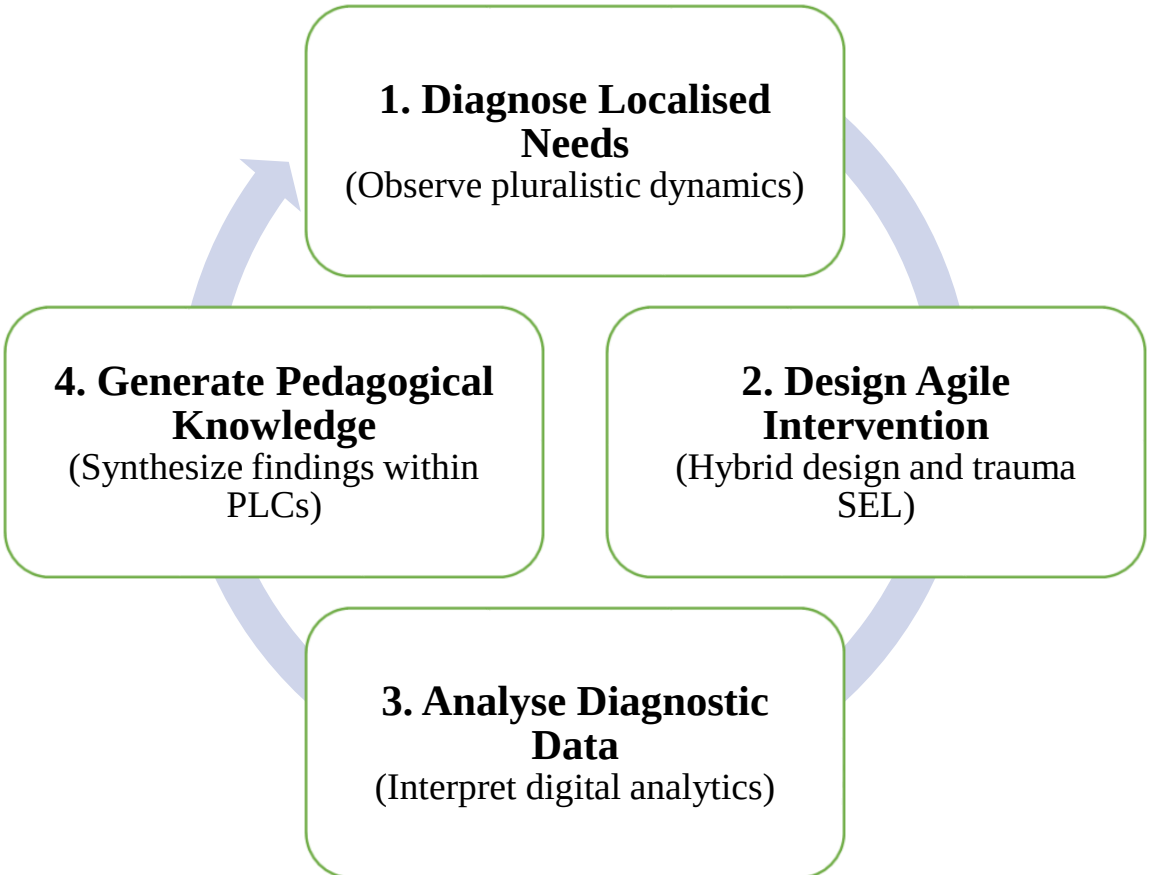


Figure 2: The Continuous Cycle of Localised Pedagogical Knowledge Creation

Discussion of the Results

The main conclusion of this conceptual study is that traditional, isolated ways of training teachers are not enough for today's classrooms. By looking at the combined research and ideas through the study's two main goals, important findings become clear.

1. Discussion Pertaining to Objective 1: The Impact of Macro-Societal Shifts on Pedagogical Ecosystems

The analysis focused on the first goal shows that there is a major delay in how current education systems are structured. While society has quickly adopted new ways of knowing through digital tools and become more diverse in terms of people and cultures, the way teachers are trained is still stuck in old, outdated systems from the industrial era. The research shows that when student teachers learn about educational technology and educational psychology as separate subjects, they aren't ready for how these two areas actually interact and influence each other in real teaching situations.

The findings show that the common experience of "praxis shock" faced by new teachers isn't because they're not good at their job, but because of problems in the system as a whole. When a teacher doesn't have the proper training to use critical digital teaching methods together with culturally sensitive emotional and social support, the whole teaching environment falls apart. This supports the views of Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) and Selwyn (2014), who say that improving digital tools without changing the way teachers think or dealing with unfairness in society only makes the "digital divide" worse. The results show that having good technical skills but not enough understanding of people's emotions leads to

teaching that feels cold and distant.This confirms that today's way of teaching through technology needs both digital skills and the ability to connect with others emotionally, together and not separately.

2. Discussion Pertaining to Objective 2: Knowledge Generation and the Necessity of Curriculum Overhaul

Meeting the second goal, the results clearly show the importance of changing how teachers see themselves in their jobs—from someone who just follows standard lesson plans to someone who creates their own teaching methods that fit their specific classroom needs. The analysis shows that general, top-down teaching methods don't work well in classrooms that are very diverse and use a lot of digital tools.

The findings show that giving teachers the tools to do local research is the best way to create useful knowledge for the classroom. This matches closely with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) idea of "inquiry as stance." When teachers carefully look at their own classrooms, they gain the skills to create flexible lesson plans and understand student performance data better, which helps them support students with different learning needs. The results show that quick, short technical training sessions are no longer useful. To develop these advanced systemic skills, the conversation clearly emphasizes the need for a complete change in how teacher training programs are designed. This means breaking up short teaching periods with longer, more hands-on training in real healthcare settings, making sure digital teaching tools are used in every subject, and focusing on checking how well students understand and manage emotions. As shown by Gore et al. (2017), when school systems encourage teamwork and local knowledge sharing, teachers become more resilient and their teaching effectiveness improves a lot.

Educational Implications

1. The Transition to Extended Clinical Residencies: Teacher education programs need to completely change how they handle practical training for teachers. The usual way of teaching, where trainees do short, separate practicums, isn't enough and actually causes "praxis shock" for new teachers. Institutions need to shift to a longer, year-long clinical residency program, similar to how medical residencies work. This hands-on method lets future teachers go through the whole year of school management, student behaviour, and teaching; all while being guided by experienced and skilled teachers.This helps them feel confident and prepared to handle difficult classroom situations on their own when they start teaching.

2. The Deep Embedding of Digital Pedagogy Across Curricula: Standalone courses on "ICT in Education" or basic computer skills should no longer be part of teacher training programs. Schools and colleges need to use a combined method where using digital tools in teaching becomes a regular part of all the courses that teach how to teach different subjects. For example, future teachers shouldn't just learn how to use a learning management system; they need to learn how to teach subjects like math or literature using a mix of online and in-person methods. This change helps future teachers see technology not just as extra tools for managing tasks, but as a key part of teaching that encourages deep and engaging learning.

3. Institutionalizing Localized Action Research for Certification: To properly change how an educator sees their role from just following a set curriculum to creating and sharing knowledge, the organizations that set standards need to update the rules for getting certified. Teacher training programs should change from focusing on long, theory-based essays to requiring teachers to carry out, study, and explain a local action research project. By setting up the "inquiry as stance" approach, schools make sure that new teachers come into the profession with the ability to carefully examine and adjust standard school rules to fit the different groups of students in their classrooms.

4. Rigorous Evaluation of Socio-Emotional and Cultural Competencies: The strong mental challenges in today's varied classrooms mean that how we check if teachers are ready needs to change. Schools and licensing organizations need to stop seeing socio-emotional learning (SEL) as just a nice-to-have soft skill. When certifying someone, they should carefully check their emotional intelligence, ability to understand different cultures, and skill in helping people who have experienced trauma—just as seriously and thoroughly as they check their knowledge of the subject they're teaching.

5. **Cultivating Collaborative Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**: Finally, schools and training programs need to change the old way that teachers work alone and stay separate from others. When teachers stay isolated in their own classrooms, any new teaching ideas that are created in a specific area don't spread or work well in other places. Therefore, a big result of this study is that school leaders need to officially include Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in the school's schedule. Schools need to set aside organized time for teachers to work together, look at digital learning data, discuss what they learn from their research, and plan mixed-learning solutions as a team. This helps improve the overall teaching skills and effectiveness of the whole school.

Conclusion

Today's educational changes need much more than just updating policies or adding digital tools to old classrooms. They need a deep and complete rethink of what it means to be an educator and how teachers are trained. The inability of traditional teaching methods to connect abstract theory with the different, digital, and mental experiences of today's students is a major weakness in the global education system.

This study shows that the current teaching environment is shaped by the ongoing balance between the increasing use of digital tools and the diversity of students from different backgrounds. To deal with this situation, we need to completely change the old way of thinking about teachers as just following a set list of lessons without any input of their own. The evidence shows we need to create a new group of teachers who are flexible, caring, and able to take charge of creating knowledge in the classroom.

By moving towards longer clinical training periods, using digital tools that are built into teaching methods, and strongly promoting local action research, teacher education programs can really connect big policy decisions with everyday teaching practices. Making instructors into local knowledge creators isn't just a nice idea—it's something we really need to do. These big changes in the system offer the best way forward that can help our teachers and, in turn, our young people keep up with the continuous changes happening in society today.

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Chapter 16: Gender Equality in Workplace: A Mythical Discourse

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Abstract

The evergreen sizzling topic globally is gender equality and women's empowerment. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls has been proposed by the United Nations in its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-5) as a target. Despite numerous efforts and initiatives at global, regional, and local levels to eliminate gender inequality, it remains in many forms and levels. In modern times, women have become sensitised to their rights and have come a long way in terms of women's empowerment. However, patriarchal attitudes are stagnant, and gender bias is still experienced by women not only in society but also at home. Though women work outside the home, household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving are their responsibility. Some men tend to contribute their time and energy to household work, but it is still considered optional for them. This chapter discusses the details and reasons for gender inequality (specific attention to females and males) in the workplace. It explores the improvements that have been made so far and possible avenues to mitigate gender inequality in the workplace.

Keywords: gender inequality, gender equality, gender roles, gender discrimination at workplace, gender pay gap

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Introduction

Gender bias or gender inequality relates to the prospects and social attitudes towards men and women in different walks of life. It discusses prejudice or discrimination based on gender, as well as conditions that substitute for fixed notions of gender roles. The old societal norms created and established women's status as secondary beings and the weak sex. However, becoming a woman an object in multimedia, movies, soaps, animated films, and especially in pornography continues to create a kind of low esteem, especially of working women. Many atrocities like sexual assault, human trafficking, and domestic violence that women face in society or at home are the point of today's concern. According to Holly Martinez, in**"What Is Gender Equality? Definition & Examples,"**gender equity is defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality as the "provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women, men and all genders" (Martinez). Gender equality is important because, historically, societies around the world have deemed females, transgender people, and non-binary people as "weaker" or less important than males. These days, women are progressing in many professions and trying very hard to prove themselves. Though women are working outside the home, household work is still only their responsibility. A strong ingrained notion that household chores are the responsibility of only women has restricted them from growing in the professional arena.

Apart from home, women are discriminated against in the workplace as well. This discrimination includes being demeaned, treated differently, or even threatened due to their gender or minority status. In addition to this, sexism in the workplace is overpowering discrimination against women in different aspects like pay, promotion, and providing amenities. These aspects intimidate women in the workplace and stop them from growing ahead. Gender inequality continues to prevail through interconnected social, cultural, and established notions that provide men more privilege than women.

One of the major contributors to persistent gender inequality is patriarchy, which shapes societal expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of men and women. In a patriarchal system, women are assigned primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving duties. However, men are the primary breadwinners. Such gendered expectations become deeply embedded within family systems and social institutions, influencing opportunities available to both sexes throughout their lives (UN Women). Gender roles have been ingrained into the attitudes of people for ages, and they operate consciously and subconsciously always, as these gender role codes are planted in the brains of people since their childhood. Moreover, they are considered like the codes of conduct that dictate how each gender should behave. This aspect of gender superiority makes men refuse a female as their superior or boss.

Though a lot of effort has been made to bring gender equality, there is a long way to go. Now, gender equality is not just a fundamental human right; it has emerged as a requirement to achieve sustainable development, economic prosperity, and social justice. In contemporary society, gender equality and women's empowerment have become prerequisite concerns of world governments. Hence, the United Nations incorporated gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG-5) by distinguishing the importance of it in this modern era. (UNICEF; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). Taking this into account, the government has focused on gender equality in every respect.

Understanding Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality means that both women and men must have equal benefits from the same resources and opportunities. Hence, gender disparity exists when females are discriminated against compared to males in any respect. Gender differences generally begin indistinctly in childhood; as the girl child reaches adolescence, the disparity is clearly noticeable. Girls and boys are to be registered for the immunization program against life-threatening diseases in equal ratios. In many societies, boys and girls attend preschool in nearly equal proportions. As they grow, girls show a little more development than boys, but by the time they reach puberty, girls are subjected to hindrance in every respect. In

general, girls get more domestic responsibilities and more confinement at home. In addition to this, the physical fragility of females is shown as a focal factor for discrimination in every sphere of life. These disparities are more prevalent in developing countries and considerably less prevalent in developed economies.

Gender discrimination and bias have serious consequences in the case of the economy, social participation, and politics. Many research outcomes have shown that societies with higher gender equality indicate enhanced educational opportunities and better health indicators. **(Iqbal et al.)**. Decision-making for women is the most unattainable goal in developing countries. Though they are earning, they are deprived of many economic opportunities. Moreover, their assets and earnings are managed by their male relations like father, brother, or husband. Women yield to social norms, so are prone to domestic violence and social exploitation. These deprivations are directly connected to patriarchal attitudes, norms, and practices in societies. These conditions have severe consequences for their health and well-being and for the participation of females in higher education and the workforce.

Women entered the workforce during World War II, as the war created a large workforce shortage due to the military taking men. Though they continued to pursue careers after the war, there were many barriers and hiccups. According to Holly Martinez, "Gender equity in the workplace would be where men, women, and all gender identities [are] forging the career path they want and being afforded the same opportunities, including promotions, leadership roles, projects, and more, without their gender being a deciding factor in workplace decisions" (Martinez).

People should be treated equally irrespective of their gender, age, class, caste, language, or ethnicity (Iqbal, A, et al, 2020). But across the world, women have a slightly smaller life expectancy at birth; even their health is not given much importance, and they are more neglected and deprived of many social opportunities than men. Women face a double burden, working at home and in the workplace; this factor limits women's opportunities for career advancement (UN Women). Even though women's participation in the paid workforce increased considerably, they are expected to take the load of domestic responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, child care, and elder care**(Andreassi and Thompson).** In developing countries, gender roles are not defined properly, and many times women are doubly burdened. In addition to this, financial benefits, health facilities, ownership of assets, business partnerships, participation in family decision-making, etc., are restricted in many ways. At households, gender inequality is noticeable in unequal division of domestic labour, and in the workplace, their work is not valued as par with their male counterparts.

The article "Gender Equality Begins at Home states, "Gender equality matters as much in private as it does in public. We must understand 'power and decision-making' to be just as much about the power to decide how a couple spends their money or their leisure time, as it is about the power to decide on business strategies or national policies." To satisfy women's right to a healthy and quality life, women's active participation in decision-making over their health is crucial. They should have a say in decisions about getting married or becoming a mother. One of the major hindrances to achieving gender equality is violence against women and girls. It exists in many forms and in many places, including domestic violence, mental and physical abuse, and sexual exploitation. Gender based violence has found its roots in discriminatory social norms and unequal power relations. These factors negatively affect women's mental health and educational and professional advancement. **(Dahal et al)** The outcomes of gender inequality affect not only women and their families but also society as a whole.

Understanding Gender Inequality at the Workplace

The most important step to understanding and quantifying gender equality in the workplace is to conduct an audit of female participation. Domestic work makes women think twice about joining the workforce. Another reason for less female workforce participation is sexual abuse at the workplace. It is a serious issue that demoralizes the dignity, confidence, and professional integrity of

women. Despite stringent policies and legal frameworks, it is still prevalent. Most of the times, women are not bold enough to report it to the concerned authorities. (Samani and Kadigi).In addition to these reasons, unequal pay and promotion to higher positions discourage women to join paid workforce. More specifically, the number of women are few in numbers in decision-making key roles, senior managerial positions, and on the board of directors, and the total number of women in any organization. The under-representation of women in leadership positions and the gender pay gap are clear examples of gender inequality in the workplace. Though women have advanced in education, employment, and political participation, gender inequality remains as an invisible glass ceiling. Women appointed or promoted to decision-making positions or leadership tend to take up during crises. In the present day, women have better access to education and professional opportunities than their earlier generation; still, disproportions are conspicuous in leadership positions, pay structure, and resource provisions. Moreover, very few women are permitted to participate in decision-making processes. **(Guthridge et al.).**Organizational policies fail to provide amenities for employees' caregiving responsibilities, and this is causing great discomfort for working women **(Andreassi and Thompson)**.As a result, women encounter difficulties in balancing work life and family commitments, which can impede their professional growth.

The gender wage gap is one among many reasons for the underrepresentation of females in the workplace. Women are paid less than men for the same work. Even though the standards are maintained, the pay gap is conspicuous in many industries, organizations, and companies. It undermines the confidence and self-esteem of women in workplaces. In developing countries, male dominance is more prevalent in the economy, and women are confined to taking care of the household. It is evident in many cases that men also manage women's finances. Gender differences lessen the productive utilization of human resources and limit economic productivity. Many studies suggest that increased gender equality contributes positively to economic growth, educational development, and social stability **(Iqbal et al.)** Likewise, the **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations** argues that empowering women boosts food security, household welfare, and community development. Hence, attaining gender equality is necessary for sustainable development.

All women should understand that women's empowerment is not a facility; it is a necessity for them. According to Nature Editorial, "Systemic discrimination against girls and women by men, in many contexts, remains a colossal barrier to achieving gender equality. But "patriarchy is not some natural order of things'", argues Ruth Mace, an anthropologist at University College London. The efforts to improve gender equality identify the root causes as the considerations about gender stereotypes (how men and women are like). Maggie Woll, in her article "Gender inequality in the workplace: The fight against bias," holds, "For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 86 women are promoted. This problem is compounded at higher levels of leadership: fewer women managers means there are fewer candidates to promote to heads of department, directors, and C-suite positions, too" (Woll). Despite significant progress in recent decades, gender inequality remains a pervasive issue globally.

Invisible barriers prevent women from advancing to higher positions in organizations, and the glass ceiling is prevalent in most workplaces. This disparity exists even when women are often equally or more qualified than their male counterparts. Working women are burdenedtwice, by their household responsibilities and workplace duties. The preconditioned mind-set that women should prioritize family over work can hinder their professional growth and result in the gender gap in wages and opportunities. Many indices, such as the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and the Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) show the level of women's development or empowerment. The WEI measures women's

ability and freedom to make their own choices; the GGPI describes the gap between women and men in cases such as health, education, inclusion and decision-making. These index reports are not so encouraging:114 countries feature in both indices, but countries that do well on both scores cover fewer than 1% of all girls and women.

Apart from the patriarchal predefined norms, women are distressed by their own fixed mind-set. Imposter syndrome, a concept in which individuals doubt their self-worth, stops women from accepting their desirable and deserved positions at workplaces. Though women have achieved success, most of the time they attribute it to their luck. And they worry that others may consider them imposters and never ask for incentives or pay raises. This impression is prevalent among women in many organizations and curbs their professional growth.

"Unpaid work undermines women's empowerment regardless of their level of education, income, position, or the level of country development." says the report on "Empowering Women through Reducing Unpaid Work: A Regional Analysis for Europe and Central Asia" by UNCE.According to the report, even though some countries have made advances in this direction, with the 5R framework (recognizing, reducing and redistributing, reward and representation), and although women's participation in paid employment has increased, the largest share of unpaid work continues to fall on women particularly vulnerable women, who are from lower socioeconomic groups, rural areas and women from ethnic minority groups). An increase in education leads to a divide between various female communities; still, it will help the enrichment and growth of their life. Even though women are working, they have to look after their household chores, which increases their workload. An effort to lessen the gender gap still mostly puts women at a disadvantage. Working women take both household and professional responsibilities, and few men will share household responsibilities with women.

Challenging Gender Inequality: Empower the Next Generation

For better gender equality in the future, it is necessary to empower and educate the younger generation. In this modern age, support at home can put women on the path to success. Moreover, for some to succeed in society, they must first succeed in private life. Financial freedom is one of the strongest decisive elements of women's autonomy and social participation. When women have access to the paid workforce, their financial independence, self-confidence, and decision-making power within households and communities will be compounded (World Bank). Economic freedom will enhance the self-confidence of women and encourage them to excel in all fields. If they can work toward strengthening their rights, they can overcome inequalities in any field. It has become crucial to ensure gender equality in the workplace to increase the inclusiveness of the female workforce. It can only be possible by confirming equal opportunities in promotions and equal pay. Women can perform better in a conducive environment; flexible hours and parental leave policies support work-life balance.

To promote gender equality, successful women should be lauded openly on every possible forum. There is no lack of successful, intelligent, and powerful females in the world, and they have to share the limelight. Women should shoulder the responsibility of supporting their fellow women who are exemplary in their careers. According to Halley, "You can get involved by giving, advocating or volunteering, as well as by educating yourself more on equity by earning an Equity Advocate Badge, taking United Way NCA's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Quiz, signing up for the 21 Day Race Equity Journey and more. Rohlinger et al. opined that gender equality is an interrelated aspect; when women's lives are improved, gender equality is achieved. It includes education, work participation, economic participation, political involvement, and many other fields in society (Rohlinger et al). Women should have clear notions about their gender roles, and education is key for improving the quality of women. Furthermore, an increase in

education facilitates career opportunities and overall living standards. Hopefully, technically designed interventions have helped in reducing gender discrimination. Educational advancement, women's leadership mentoring programmes, workplace diversity programmes, and organizational policies about gender sensitivity can significantly support the endorsement of equality among different genders (Guthridge et al.,).

Family-oriented interventions, such as encouraging shared parenting and equitable distribution of household responsibilities, can challenge traditional gender norms and foster more egalitarian relationships (UN Women; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). However, employment alone cannot ensure equality unless workplaces provide equal opportunities in recruitment, promotion, leadership, and remuneration. Persistent gender wage gaps, occupational segregation, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions continue to hinder progress across many countries (International Labour Organization).Organizations can promote gender equality by implementing transparent promotion policies, ensuring equal pay for equal work, offering flexible working arrangements, expanding parental leave, and providing affordable childcare support. Such initiatives not only improve work-life balance but also enhance organizational productivity and employee retention.

Additionally, governments can strengthen gender equality through legislative reforms, equal-pay policies, parental leave provisions, and investments in childcare services. One example comes from the Mosuo people in China, who have both 'matrilineal' and 'patrilineal' communities, with rights such as inheritance passing down either the male or female line. Researchers compared outcomes for inflammation and hypertension in men and women in these communities. They found that women in matrilineal societies, in which they have greater autonomy and control over resources, experienced better health outcomes. The researchers found no significant negative effect of matriliny on health outcomes for men.To address inequalities in the system, identifying and observing women's achievements is essential and important.Strong female role models will challenge traditional gender stereotypes, inspire younger generations, and encourage women's participation in leadership, science, business, and politics. Leadership development programmes, mentoring initiatives, and workplace diversity policies have been shown to improve career advancement opportunities while reducing barriers associated with gender bias (Guthridge, Komm, and Lawson).

To achieve gender equality, women need to go a long way;however, the mind-set of the younger generation is optimistic. Many studies have shown that creating gender equality in every aspect could build a world that is conducive for all genders.

Conclusion

Even though substantial development has happened over many decades, gender equality is still a persistent global issue. For future social transformation, the attitudes of younger generations should be more progressive and welcoming.Gender inequality in the workplace persists due to a complex interplay of historical norms, biases, structural barriers, and cultural factors. Determined patriarchal attitudes, unequal household accountabilities, workplace discrimination, and gender-based violence continue to hinder women's full participation in professional and social life. Tackling these challenges needs cooperation and support from governments, organizations, communities, families, and individuals. Despite significant progress in recent decades, disparities in hiring, promotion, pay, and representation continue to hinder women's advancement and limit their opportunities for career growth.

Addressing gender inequality requires a concerted effort from organizations,

policymakers, and individuals to challenge stereotypes, promote inclusive policies, and create supportive work environments where all employees can thrive regardless of gender. By recognizing and addressing the root causes of gender inequality, we can work towards building more equitable workplaces where everyone has an opportunity to succeed based on their skills, qualifications, and contributions, irrespective of gender. An inclusive model that assimilates education, financial freedom, legal security, healthcare, and cultural transformation is essential for building societies where individuals are appreciated according to their abilities rather than reserved by gender-based expectations.**Apart from this, equally important is the continuous assessment and reinforcement of policies to ensure that equality initiatives produce measurable outcomes rather than figurative change. Moreover, continuous civic awareness, research, and inter-sector collaborations will play an important role in progressing towards an inclusive and unbiased society.** Finally, gender equality is not only a matter of women's rights but also a prerequisite for social justice, economic prosperity, and sustainable development.

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Chapter 17: Education as Social Praxis in the Digital Age: Integrating Freirean Critical Pedagogy, Deweyan Experience, and Vygotskian Mediation in Higher Education

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Abstract

The world is undergoing major shifts towards digital acceleration, artificial intelligence, growing socio-economic polarization and new paradigms of knowledge, communication and human relationships. The changes involve rethinking education not merely as the institutionalization of the knowledge transfer, but as a process that is socially located in which people become intellectualized, form identity, and engage in social life. In this chapter, education is conceptualized as social praxis, a movement that combines Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, John Dewey's experiential philosophy, and Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning, into a single paradigm for the understanding of education in digitally mediated societies. Freire's focus is on dialogue, critical consciousness, and the emancipatory power of education. Dewey emphasizes in his work the importance of experience, reflection, and inquiry as bases for meaningful learning. Vygotsky shows us the importance of social interaction and cultural mediation in the development of cognition. On this basis, this chapter proposes a socio-digital praxis perspective that helps to understand how learning happens when critical awareness, lived experience, collaborative processes of knowledge construction, and ethical interaction with technological environments are intertwined. It contends that the traditional pedagogies of instruction and transmission are inappropriate for today's problems of digital inequalities, algorithmic influences, epistemic exclusion, and disciplinary fragmentation. The chapter compares multimodal learning, digital storytelling, peer-supported writing, reflective activities and collaborative projects which create learning contexts in higher education classrooms in Pakistan within the humanities, law and engineering disciplines that bring students into the construction of meaning and provide opportunities to develop agency. This series of classroom experiences suggests that the use of technology is not a distinguishing feature of transformative pedagogies. Their transformative power comes when technology is embedded in the dialogic, reflective and ethical relationships of learning. This chapter critically reflects on the theories of critical pedagogy and experience, while also placing social and cultural theories in a digitally diverse context, furthering the social conversation by positioning education as a place of knowledge production, identity construction and social change. The chapter emphasizes the need for both technological innovation and the nurturing of inclusive, reflective, and participatory pedagogical practices to help learners critically engage with and respond to the complex realities of the digital age.

Keywords: *Critical Pedagogy; Experiential Learning; Social Constructivism; Education as Praxis; Digital Pedagogy; Artificial Intelligence in Education*

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1. Education, Digital Transformation, and the Development of a Praxis-Oriented Theoretical Framework

Education has always been central to social thinking, as it not only serves as a tool for knowledge transfer, but also as a way for societies to make sense of themselves, socialize cultural norms and values, and train people to engage in collective life. However, in the present education system, digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), globalization, and growing socio-economic inequalities have created a significant transformation. The linear view of education, where the institutions instruct students with approved information, has fallen short to a great extent in understanding the complexity of modern learning contexts. Knowledge production now happens in interconnected knowledge spaces like universities, online platforms, professional networks, social media, artificial intelligence systems and informal learning communities. These shifts are being further accelerated by Generative AI, which calls into question traditional notions of knowledge authority, academic writing, assessment, and the human-technology connection. AI systems have evolved beyond just being learning tools to active epistemic actors shaping how knowledge is accessed, constructed, and evaluated by learners, as indicated by recent scholarship (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Chan & Hu, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023). Thus, in the present times, theoretical frameworks that not only review the adoption of technologies, but also the social, ethical and epistemological changes that these technologies generate in the learning process are needed.

Critical pedagogy is a valuable tool for comprehending education as a social practice that has the capacity to transform. Freire's (1970) critique of the “banking model” of education is a criticism of traditional models that place students in a passive role as recipients of knowledge. Rather, Freire advocated "dialogical education" in which the teacher and learner work together in a process of critical reflection and collective inquiry to comprehend and change their social realities. In later critical pedagogy, these concepts were further developed and highlighted by thinking about student voice, participation and identity. For instance, hooks (1994) envisioned engaged pedagogy, which sees meaningful learning as the result of valuing students' lived experiences and their active involvement in the processes of knowledge production. Giroux (2011) also reiterated the importance that democracy should be fostered through education, as should critical citizenship. But although critical pedagogy has significant insights to offer to the understanding of relations of power and emancipation, it offers less explanation of the cognitive processes via which learning progresses.

The experiential learning and socio-cultural perspectives complement each other in explaining the construction of knowledge through experience, interaction and mediation.Dewey (1916, 1938) believed that meaningful learning is a process of active engagement with real-world experiences, inquiry, problem solving and reflection/reconstruction.This concept has inspired current pedagogical ideas, like reflective practice, inquiry-based learning and project-based learning (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983) especially relevant for digitally oriented classrooms, where digital storytelling, collaborative projects and knowledge production through media prevail.However, experiential approaches also need to be mindful of inequalities in access to meaningful learning opportunities.Taking this a step further, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory considers learning as a socially mediated process which is influenced by language, culture and interaction.The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a way of thinking that he developed to explain how teachers, peers, and cultural tools can aid in a learner's thinking process.Current studies on collaborative learning and communities of practice also show that knowledge is created by engaging in common

social practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Daniels, 2016).Such views are particularly useful in various higher education contexts such as students with varying disciplinary identities, technological capacities and linguistic backgrounds, as well as in the context of addressing questions of power, inequality and technological mediation.

In line with contemporary post digital perspectives, digital technologies are no longer considered as external tools that are introduced to education, but are becoming an integral part of education, education institutions, and social relations (Jandrić et al., 2022; Rapanta et al., 2021). In the modern world, Castells (2010) has coined the term "network society" indicating a society in which social, economic, and cultural relationships are increasingly being structured around information flows. In education, this change has helped to dismantle traditional barriers to knowledge and opened up new opportunities for learning.In the field of education, this shift has led to a greater inclusivity of knowledge, extending beyond the boundaries of traditional institutions. Connectivist scholars believe that learning in the digital age includes the capacity to make, assess and link connections between fragmented sources of data, individuals and technologies (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2012). Digital environments thus offer potential for learning in collaboration and flexibly, but the digital connectivity does not automatically imply educational inclusion or an educational justice.

Digital education scholarship challenges technological determinism by taking into account that digital systems are influenced by the wider social, economic and political structures.Selwyn (2016) sees educational technologies as not merely being efficient, but also socio-political arrangements, and Williamson (2021) points to the increasing role of data governance and algorithmic decision-making in educational participation and evaluation.Likewise, Noble (2018) demonstrates how algorithms can re-create the inequalities that they see by prioritizing some knowledge over others.These views foreground the idea of cultural capital in digital spaces to argue that inequality has not only to do with how people access technology but also with how they are able to engage meaningfully in algorithmic environments.Digital inequity thus continues to be a persistent challenge in modern educational practice.Although previous studies focused mainly on computer and Internet access inequities (van Dijk, 2005; Warschauer, 2004), recent research has highlighted the importance of digital skills and competencies, digital confidence, usage and appropriation of digital resources and the ability to leverage digital resources to educational outcomes (Helsper, 2012; Ragnedda, 2018).This is especially significant in the Global South, like Pakistan, where digital learning experiences are influenced by infrastructural constraints, language diversity, and varying institutional support.Although many efforts have been made to study critical pedagogy, experiential learning, socio-cultural theory and digital education, these viewpoints have still largely evolved independently.This chapter fills this void by conceptualizing education as socio-digital praxis, a conceptualization that combines Freire's critical agency, Dewey's experiential reconstruction, Vygotsky's social mediation, and current debates on the nature of digital transformation as a process that is socially embedded, ethically driven, and transformative through critical consciousness, experiential inquiry, and meaningful human interaction.

2. Methodological Orientation: Pedagogy as Reflective and Interpretive Practice

The methodological approach of this chapter is qualitative, interpretive and reflective, based on practitioner inquiry and critical educational research.Pedagogy is not seen as a technical activity that is independent of its social and institutional context, but rather as a process of inquiry that produces practical and theoretical knowledge in the classroom (Schön, 1983).The

methodological foundations are those of the reflective practitioner, where reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are considered as processes whereby educators respond to complex and changing educational environments (Schön, 1983).This framework resonates with current views on teacher professionalism which focus on ongoing interpretation, adaptation and critical reflection, as opposed to adherence to a fixed teaching model (Korthagen, 2017; Loughran, 2019; Stenberg et al., 2022).The chapter is based on reflection on the teaching practices of higher education institutions in Pakistan, such as functional English classes for science students, expository writing for law students and technical writing for engineering students.The importance of these contexts lies in the fact that cultures of discipline shape the ways in which knowledge is generated, shared, assessed and validated (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Knorr Cetina, 1999).The differences across disciplines show us that education as praxis demands sensitivity to the different epistemological traditions, teaching approaches, and modes of engaging with students (Tight, 2020; Ashwin, 2022).The study adopts the theoretical synthesis of Freire's critical pedagogy, Dewey's experiential learning, and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory as a basis for the methodological framework.Freire's concept of praxis places learning within the context of action, reflection and critical consciousness, while Dewey's approach is based on inquiry, experience and problem solving (Dewey, 1938).Socio-cultural theory by Vygotsky (1978) adds to the understanding of learning as a process that is socially mediated and in which interaction, language and cultural tools can expand learners' capabilities in their Zones of Proximal Development.As explored in this chapter, qualitative materials include reflective teaching journals, student-created digital artefacts, collaborative writing, visual narratives, multimedia projects, and classroom experiences that reveal the processes of knowledge construction, disciplinary identity and meaning making in multiple communicative modes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Silverman, 2021; Tracy, 2020).The reflective practitioner research is sometimes challenged because it may be viewed as subjective and lacking in generalizability; however, this chapter considers reflexivity and transparency of interpretation methodological strengths that support the validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Finlay, 2021).The methodology is based on theoretical triangulation and systematic interpretation, which conceptualize the teaching as an intellectual and socially embedded practice in which the production of knowledge, digital learning and learner agency is continuously negotiated in a certain context within a particular culture and a specific discipline as well as a technological context.

3. Pedagogical Practices in Digital and Hybrid Classrooms

The pedagogical practices analyzed in this chapter connect education with praxis in higher education in digital environments and across different disciplines. Digital technologies are not viewed as neutral tools or solutions but are considered as processes that are situated in a social context where students apply them to build knowledge, negotiate their identity and engage in knowledge cultures in the present day. This view calls into question the instrumentalism of technology, which sometimes equates with innovation in education simply as the spontaneous use of digital platforms without taking into account their social, cultural, and political implications. Digital technologies become educational when they are contextualized in ways of design, implementation and experience (Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2021). Thus, the pedagogical interventions introduced here are concrete manifestations of Freirean critical pedagogy, Deweyan experiential learning, Vygotskian social mediation and recent notions of multimodal, networked and digitally mediated learning.

These practices are predicated on a key understanding that knowledge is generated today in "complex knowledge environments", and that meaning is produced in multiple ways through communication, interaction, and representation. Traditional education has been characterized by the importance of texts and teacher-centred explanations as dominant ways of passing on knowledge. But today's societies demand that learners interpret and make sense of the world in a variety of language modalities: visual, aural, and interactive. Multimodal literacy research suggests that literacy has evolved from traditional reading and writing to the capacity to manipulate various symbolic systems and to critically interact with digitally mediated information environments (Kress, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). In this context, digital and multimodal activities are not just pedagogical methods but ways of learning that include the acquisition of knowledge of the discipline and the construction of ways of interpreting and engaging in social worlds (Bond et al., 2021).

3.1 Multimodal Learning and Visual Storytelling

Student-produced comics and visual narratives of language structures, communication problems, and moral aspects of language use are another important pedagogical practice discussed in this chapter. This draws upon the theory of multimodal literacy, which focuses on meaning constructed through the dynamics of several semiotic resources – such as images, symbols, spatial arrangements and written language (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2016). But, unlike traditional grammar instruction, which often views language as a set of rules that are static, visual storytelling views language as a social practice that sits in relationships, identities, and cultural contexts. Students who depict communication problems in a comic or visual storytelling must think about how meaning is conveyed and how it changes based on audience, context, and purpose to make abstract language tangible and meaningful to others.

The theoretical value of this practice is related to the experience philosophy of Dewey and the concept of mediation of Vygotsky. Dewey's perspective holds that learning is that it takes place when people actively reconstruct their experience through inquiry, reflection and problem-solving (Dewey, 1938). Students need to be able to comprehend authentic communication experiences and convert conceptualizations into meaningful visual representations in the process of creating visual narratives. A Vygotskian approach to visual artefacts suggests they act as cultural tools that facilitate the development of cognition and offer other ways of comprehending complex concepts (Vygotsky, 1978). The findings of research on multimedia learning also reveal that combining verbal and visual representations can support better understanding, conceptual understanding, and engagement with the learning materials when structured pedagogically (Mayer, 2009).

However, it is not a transformative experience that is assumed to be happening in multimodal pedagogy. Buckingham (2007) warns that digital and visual activities could be superficial if students are not challenged to engage in critical analysis of deeper meanings, assumptions, and social contexts within the representations. Reflective dialogue and critical interpretation, therefore, are the components of education that must go together with the use of visual stories. In this chapter, comics and visual stories are conceptualized as epistemic spaces where students engage in the negotiation of relationships between language, identity, culture, and communication. In this way, multimodal learning is similar to Freire (1970), who emphasizes dialogue, placing the student in the position of being a producer and interpreter of knowledge instead of just a receiver of information.

3.2 Digital Writing, Social Media Pedagogy, and Networked Learning

Another facet of education as praxis is that of digital writing practices and networked learning environments.Students are encouraged to extend learning beyond the classroom through online discussions, collaborative writing, and short form digital compositions. These practices align with the "connectivist" view of learning, where learning is defined as the capacity to form and traverse connections among information, people, and technologies (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2012).Digital societies provide learners with knowledge, but in addition, with the possibility to interact with various information networks critically.The learning potential of networked writing is realizing the transformation from writing as a product to writing as a process of knowledge construction.Digital environments focus on interaction, an awareness of the audience, giving and receiving feedback, and making meaning, not just grammatical correctness.Well-designed online writing communities have been shown to improve participation, collaboration and reflective learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Greenhow & Gleason, 2014).However, the use of digital learning environments should be critically scrutinized since its use depends on access to technology, platform constructions, and algorithmic systems.Digital inequality is not just about access to technology but also digital confidence, skills and the capacity to positively and productively use digital resources (van Dijk, 2005; Warschauer, 2004; Ragnedda, 2018).Moreover, algorithmic systems shape the ranking of information (Noble, 2018).Hence, the critical digital literacy is vital to empower learners to comprehend the effects of the digital platforms on communication, participation and power relations (Pangrazio, 2016; Selwyn, 2016).Experiential and collaborative learning is further enhanced by digital storytelling and short-film production.Students create knowledge through developing scripts, producing multimedia narratives and representing social and ethical issues; they also gain communication and technological skills.These practices are based on Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory, which suggests that learning takes place in a process of action, reflection, revision and interpretation.Likewise, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle emphasizes the connections between concrete experiences, observing and reflecting, conceptual development, and active experimentation.Prior research shows that digital storytelling can increase the narration competence, critical thinking, engagement and reflective awareness of students by linking academic learning with their personal and social experiences (Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008; Lambert, 2013).Likewise, from a Freirean point of view, digital storytelling is a way to make students the creators and interpreters of knowledge, so they can choose their themes and create representations and read and interpret the social realities critically.But critical reflection is required to avoid uncritical representations and/or reproduction of stereotypes.The objective of digital storytelling should not simply be the creation of media artefacts but in the development of pupils' critical approach to meaning-making processes, the formation of identity and social representations.

3.3 Peer Scaffolding and Collaborative Writing Practices

Vygotskian social constructivism is seen in collaborative writing and peer scaffolding in the interdisciplinary classroom.These activities allow students to be guided through the process of structured peer review, to understand what is expected of them in their disciplines, and to create awareness of the rhetorical choice in writing intensive disciplines (such as expository writing for law students and technical writing for engineering students).These practices problematize the notion of writing as a universal

skill and view academic literacy as being situated socially within disciplinary communities (Lea & Street, 1998).Peer scaffolding is based upon Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD in which learning is a process of interacting with peers and interacting with cultural tools.Students share knowledge and determine their own gaps in understanding by working together.Studies have shown that structured peer feedback enhances writing, when guided appropriately, metacognition and self-directed learning (Topping, 2005; Nicol et al., 2014).In addition, collaborative writing is in line with the ideas of Lave and Wenger (1991) about the legitimate peripheral participation in which learners can be integrated into disciplinary communities with authentic participation.Through interdisciplinary collaboration, students can share a variety of epistemological viewpoints: students in the humanities can share interpretive ways of thinking, students in law can share ways of thinking in argument, students in engineering can share ways of thinking in analysis.In sum, multimodal storytelling, digital writing, multimedia production, and collaborative learning practices shift the education from a transmission model to a praxis-oriented model in which the students actively produce knowledge.These practices are based on the theories of Dewey, Freire and Vygotsky of experiential learning, critical consciousness and socially mediated cognition.But their transformative power will rely on reducing inequalities of technology access, disciplinary differences and politicalness of digital systems.Digital pedagogy thus entails not just the integration of new technologies but a foundational reconfiguration of how we relate to knowledge, society, and identity.

4. Disciplinary Variation and Epistemic Diversity

Interdisciplinary higher education demonstrates that learning is shaped by disciplinary cultures, communication practices, and epistemological assumptions rather than being a universal cognitive process. Disciplines function as distinct knowledge communities that influence how evidence is defined, arguments are constructed, and knowledge is communicated (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Hyland, 2004). The concept of epistemic cultures further explains how disciplinary communities develop specific practices, values, tools, and standards of validity, challenging the idea of a single universal knowledge system (Knorr Cetina, 1999). While humanities emphasize interpretation, contextual analysis, and theoretical reflection, engineering prioritizes problem-solving, modelling, measurement, and application, requiring students to communicate technical knowledge effectively across contexts (Felder & Brent, 2016; Male et al., 2011). Similarly, legal education requires students to interpret texts, analyze precedents, construct arguments, and communicate persuasively, as legal discourse functions as a professional language for interpreting social realities (Mertz, 2007). These differences highlight the importance of developing not only disciplinary competence but also the ability to translate knowledge across epistemic boundaries. The notion of threshold concepts further explains this challenge, as transformative disciplinary concepts reshape learners' understanding of knowledge domains and require educators to uncover underlying assumptions across disciplines (Meyer & Land, 2005). This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, where interaction with new cognitive tools and perspectives extends intellectual development.

Digital and multimodal learning environments further increase the need for epistemic flexibility because knowledge is increasingly produced through diverse forms of representation, including disciplinary texts, digital narratives, multimedia projects, and online collaboration. Kress (2010) argues that contemporary

communication is fundamentally multimodal, while Cope and Kalantzis (2015) emphasize multiliteracies as essential for engaging with complex digital environments. Practices such as digital storytelling, collaborative writing, and media production enable students from different disciplines to encounter alternative ways of knowing and communication. Although interdisciplinary engagement may initially create epistemic tensions, such as differences between interpretive reasoning in humanities and technical precision in engineering, these tensions represent opportunities for intellectual growth rather than barriers. Through interaction with diverse disciplinary perspectives, learners extend their Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), transforming interdisciplinary learning from simple knowledge exchange into a process of knowledge reconstruction and intellectual development.

5. Digital Inequality and Educational Access

Digital pedagogy has increased access to knowledge, collaboration, and flexible learning opportunities, but digital transformation has not reduced educational inequality.Instead, it has transformed inequalities based on access, participation, and recognition in digital places.Digital technologies should thus not be conceived of as neutral educational tools, but as socio-technical systems which are part of cultural, economic and institutional contexts (Selwyn, 2016; Williamson, 2021).These challenges are exacerbated by socioeconomic and geographical constraints, linguistic diversity and unequal institutional capacity in Global South higher education settings.COVID-19 has seen a sharp increase in online and blended learning which exposed the existing challenges, such as poor quality connectivity, low device ownership and low levels of digital competence among the least privileged learners (UNESCO, 2021).Recent studies also show that digital inequality is manifested in the use of home resources, institutional support and digital competency, even if connectivity is improved (Ma, 2021).Thus, digital participation needs to be meaningful beyond just technological access; it needs confidence, skills, and supports to participate in digital knowledge practices.

A praxis-oriented approach challenges the conceptualization of digital literacy as an individual technical competency and considers it instead as a socially mediated and collaborative process.In line with Vygotskian (1978) socio-cultural theory, digital learning is a process that goes through interaction with teachers, peers and cultural tools.Digital inequality today is also manifested in the form of epistemic participation—"the power to engage with digitally mediated knowledge production, to assess and create knowledge, to participate in and engage with it" (Helsper, 2012, p. 33).As algorithmic systems are becoming more and more influential in determining what information is visible and authoritative, learners need to be critical of the ways that technologies shape knowledge, identity and participation (Noble, 2018; Pangrazio, 2016).It builds upon Freire's (1970) idea of critical consciousness to digital contexts, in which learners are not merely to be using technologies but also learning to raise questions about their social and ethical implications.Inclusive digital pedagogy can be supported by frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that encourage multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression for diverse learners (Meyer et al., 2014).However, digital inequality is not only a matter of access to technology but also one of socially just learning structures that allow learners to critically deal with and change digital knowledge spaces that are influenced by Artificial Intelligence, algorithms and networked communication systems.

6. Discussion: Education, Society, and Ethical Formation

Freire's critical pedagogy, Dewey's experiential learning, and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory offer a multidimensional perspective to education as cognitive, social and ethical practice. Freire (1970) highlights dialogue, agency and critical consciousness, Dewey (1938) emphasizes inquiry and reflective reconstruction of experience, and Vygotsky (1978) theorizes learning as social and cultural mediation. These traditions have had a significant impact on the field of educational research, but they have evolved to a large degree in isolation. However, recent scholarship persists in seeking ways to link learning processes with the social, cultural and technological shifts that take place in broader society (Biesta, 2020; Jandrić et al., 2019). In this chapter, these perspectives are synthesised and extended, specifically to a digitally mediated and interdisciplinary higher education context, and specifically to contexts of the Global South, where there is a confluence of technology and structural inequalities.

These pedagogical practices explored in this chapter illustrate how this theoretical synthesis works in practice. Digital storytelling, multimodal learning, collaborative writing and peer supported activities shift the role of the learner from information receiver to knowledge producer. These strategies incorporate the experiential inquiry approach of Deweys, the dialogue approach of Freires, and the mediation approach of Vygotskys, all of which involve students in meaningful construction of meaning in a participatory, reflective, and collaborative manner. These practices are also based on current research in digital and multimodal learning which suggests the increasing use of diverse representational means and participatory practices in the production of knowledge (Kress, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015).

Yet, there are a number of tensions that arise from digital transformation. Digital platforms increase access, collaboration and the sharing of knowledge, but they are also part of algorithmic systems and commercial interests, as well as unequal infrastructures. In contrast, within critical digital scholarships, digital technologies are not necessarily seen as improving; if the technologies' power structures are not analyzed, they will reproduce social and epistemic inequalities (Selwyn, 2016; Noble, 2018; Williamson, 2021). Thus, it is necessary to go beyond digital competence and strengthen digital literacy—students' ability to comprehend how technologies shape visibility, participation, and knowledge authority (Pangrazio, 2016).

In addition, this chapter shows how disciplinary diversity is not a pedagogical constraint, but an epistemic resource. There exists a variety of disciplinary cultures, with students of humanities, of law, and of engineering using different assumptions about evidence, reasoning and communication. (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Knorr Cetina, 1999). Students experience multiple modes of knowing and enhance their mental flexibility as a result of collaborative and interdisciplinary activities. This is in line with Lave and Wenger (1991) view that learning is not a solitary process, but rather one that emerges from the process of participation in a community of practice.

7. Conclusion: Advancing a Praxis-Oriented Educational Future

This chapter theorises education as praxis, as a socially embedded, transformative and action-oriented process of learning and knowing, learning and becoming, learning and doing, in which learners produce and reproduce knowledge, identities and societies in critical relations with each other.It goes beyond transmission models of learning to see learning as a continuous reflection, dialogue, participation and transformation of knowledge.The chapter's core contribution is the use of a socio-digital

praxis framework, which combines critical pedagogy, experiential learning, and socio-cultural theory and thinking with modern views on digital learning, multimodality, and epistemic diversity.The framework integrates the theories of Freire, Dewey and Vygotsky in digitally mediated and interdisciplinary settings in higher education, thereby expanding current theories of education to account for how learning takes place in complex knowledge spaces.The analysis demonstrates that digital writing, collaborative practice, multimodal production and peer supported learning create a classroom that is more of a space of knowledge creation than of knowledge transfer.It also points out that disciplinary differences between humanities, law and engineering are themselves areas of epistemic exchange and not necessarily barriers to learning.For this, a critical approach must be taken to digital transformation that recognizes inequalities, influences of algorithms, and unequal participation and highlights critical digital literacy.In the field of higher education and in the context of Global South countries, education as praxis can be used as a tool to bridge gaps and inequalities between languages, technologies and structures, through dialogue and collaboration, and through inclusive knowledge production.Finally, the socio-digital praxis framework posits that the future of education should transcend the mere transmission of information and the adoption of technology, and become a process of critical awareness, ethical responsibilities, creativity, and democratic participation, in which technology is used in conjunction with 'human agency, social justice, and meaningful learning' (Tapscott et al., 2015).

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Chapter 18: Ritual, Nature, and Belief: A Philosophical Study of Nude folk dance (Heluweli Baliya)as a Rainmaking Practice in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study examines nude folk dance(Heluweli Baliya), a distinctive rainmaking ritual practiced in the Nuwara Kalawiya region of Sri Lanka, as an indigenous expression of the dynamic relationship between ritual, nature, and belief. Performed during prolonged droughts, the ritual departs from conventional devotional practices by centering on the worship of the Gana deity through acts of symbolic inversion. Participants carry the deity's image to a village tank, subject it to verbal abuse, perform ritual dances in states of nudity, and temporarily abandon it in the mud. Rather than constituting sacrilege, these transgressive acts function as a culturally sanctioned form of ritual negotiation intended to invoke rainfall and restore ecological balance. Upon the arrival of rain, the deity is ceremonially reinstated in the temple, reaffirming the reciprocal relationship between the human and divine realms. Drawing on oral histories, folklore, ethnographic evidence, and ritual theory, this study investigates the symbolic structure and philosophical foundations of nude folk dance(Heluweli Baliya). It explores how the ritual reconfigures concepts of reverence, reciprocity, agency, and environmental ethics, while mediating relationships among community, deity, and the natural world. Furthermore, the study situates nude folk dance(Heluweli Baliya) within the broader context of comparative rainmaking traditions to demonstrate its distinctive contribution to indigenous ecological knowledge and ritual philosophy. The findings suggest that, despite contemporary social transformations, the ritual continues to embody communal resilience, reinforce cultural identity, and articulate a locally grounded philosophy of human–nature interdependence.

Keywordsnude folk dance(Heluweli Baliya), Gana deity, rainfall ritual, nudity, Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Ritual Studies

Ritual has been a central subject of inquiry across anthropology, sociology, religious studies, psychology, and philosophy because it reveals how human beings construct meaning, negotiate uncertainty, and establish relationships with both the visible and invisible worlds. Rather than being merely repetitive ceremonial acts, rituals are symbolic practices through which societies communicate shared beliefs, reinforce collective identities, and maintain social and cosmic order. As Emile Durkheim argued, rituals are fundamental to the creation of collective consciousness, strengthening social solidarity by reaffirming shared values and moral commitments.

The philosophical study of ritual extends beyond its external performance to examine the meanings embedded within symbolic actions. Mircea Eliade viewed ritual as a re-enactment of sacred time that connects ordinary human existence with transcendent realities. Through ritual, individuals temporarily transcend ordinary experience and participate in a sacred cosmos structured by myth and religious belief. Likewise, Victor Turner emphasized that rituals are dynamic processes characterized by liminality, a transitional state in which ordinary social structures are temporarily suspended, allowing participants to negotiate transformation, renewal, and communal integration. These perspectives show that ritual is not simply a religious obligation but a meaningful philosophical process through which communities interpret existence and respond to life's uncertainties.

Contemporary ritual theory has further expanded this understanding by emphasizing ritual as embodied practice rather than fixed religious tradition.Catherine Bell argues that ritualization is a strategic mode of action through which people create and negotiate social realities instead of merely expressing pre-existing beliefs. Clifford Geertz similarly interprets ritual as a cultural text composed of symbols that communicate a society's worldview and ethos. These approaches encourage scholars to investigate rituals not only as performances but also as systems of knowledge through which communities conceptualize relationships among humanity, divinity, and nature.

From a psychological perspective, rituals also play an essential role in reducing anxiety and restoring emotional stability during periods of uncertainty. William James suggested that religious practices provide experiential frameworks through which individuals confront existential challenges and cultivate hope. Carl Jung further proposed that ritual symbols emerge from the collective unconscious, expressing archetypal patterns that give psychological meaning to communal experience. Consequently, rituals simultaneously perform social, philosophical, and psychological functions, making them indispensable for understanding both individual consciousness and collective cultural life.

1.2 Rainmaking Rituals in Sri Lankan Culture

Sri Lanka possesses a long and diverse history of ritual practices closely connected to agriculture, seasonal change, and environmental well-being. Although Buddhism has shaped the island's dominant religious traditions for more than two millennia, numerous indigenous ritual practices continue to coexist with Buddhist beliefs, reflecting a process of religious and cultural connection. Throughout rural Sri Lanka, rituals associated with healing, fertility, protection, prosperity, and rainfall demonstrate the continuing importance of folk religious traditions within everyday community life.

Among Sri Lankan ritual traditions, *Bali*, *Tovil*, *Kohomba Kankariya*, *Pattini* ceremonies, and various village devale rituals illustrate the interaction between Buddhist ethics, Hindu deities, indigenous guardian spirits, and local cosmological beliefs. Many of these ceremonies seek to restore harmony between human beings and supernatural powers while addressing practical concerns such as illness, crop failure,

epidemics, and natural disasters. Their continued practice reflects the enduring belief that human welfare depends upon maintaining balanced relationships with both spiritual and ecological forces.

Rainmaking rituals occupy a particularly significant place within Sri Lanka's dry-zone agricultural communities, where prolonged droughts have historically threatened livelihoods dependent upon irrigation tanks and seasonal cultivation. Communities have therefore developed distinctive ceremonial practices invoking deities associated with fertility, water, and protection. These rituals vary considerably across regions.

Among these traditions, nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*, practiced in the Nuwara Kalawiya region, represents one of the most distinctive examples of indigenous rainmaking ritual. Its unusual symbolic structure and ritual inversion distinguish it from more conventional devotional practices, making it a significant subject for philosophical investigation. Understanding this ritual within the broader context of Sri Lankan rainmaking traditions provides an essential foundation for exploring its unique symbolic, psychological, and ecological meanings.

1.3 Importance of Heluweli Baliya

Among the diverse rainmaking traditions practiced in Sri Lanka, , nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*stands out for its distinctive ritual structure, symbolic complexity, and enduring cultural significance. The ritual is traditionally performed in the Nuwara Kalawiya region during periods of prolonged drought, when agricultural communities face severe threats to cultivation, water resources, and livelihoods. Unlike conventional religious ceremonies characterized by offerings, prayers, and acts of devotion,nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*employs a ritual of symbolic inversion. Participants carry the image of the Gana deity to a village tank, verbally rebuke the deity, perform ritual dances while nude, and temporarily leave the deity's image in the mud until rainfall occurs. Once rain falls, the deity is ceremonially returned to the temple with reverence and thanksgiving.

These actions appear to contradict conventional religious attitudes toward sacred images. However, within the indigenous worldview of the participating community, such acts do not constitute blasphemy or disrespect. Instead, they represent a culturally sanctioned form of communication through which the community negotiates with the deity during a period of ecological crisis. The ritual therefore illustrates a sophisticated symbolic system in which apparent irreverence functions as an expression of profound faith and trust in divine responsiveness.

The importance of , nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* extends beyond its immediate ritual performance. It represents an indigenous philosophy of environmental reciprocity in which human beings, deities, and nature are understood as mutually dependent. The ritual also serves as a mechanism for strengthening communal solidarity, preserving oral traditions, and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations. In an era marked by rapid modernization and the decline of many traditional practices,nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*remains an important cultural heritage that reflects local understandings of ecological balance, collective responsibility, and spiritual engagement with the natural environment. Consequently, studying this ritual contributes not only to Sri Lankan folklore but also to broader discussions in philosophy of religion, ritual studies, environmental humanities, and indigenous knowledge systems.

1.4 Research Questions

What are the philosophical foundations underlying nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*as a traditional rainmaking ritual in Sri Lanka?

What philosophical and psychologicalfunctions does nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*perform in helping communities cope with drought, uncertainty, and environmental crises?

1.5 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*as a philosophical expression of the relationship between ritual, nature, and belief within the indigenous cultural context of Sri Lanka.

The sub-objectives are,

To analyze the symbolic and philosophical dimensions ofnude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* as a rainmaking ritual.

To examine how the ritual mediates relationships among the community, the Gana deity, and the natural environment.

To investigate the psychological functions of the ritual in promoting collective resilience, emotional stability, and communal identity during periods of drought.

To explore the ecological knowledge and environmental ethics embedded within the ritual tradition.

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Literature

International scholarship on ritual has established a strong theoretical foundation for understanding ritual as a symbolic, social, and philosophical practice. Emile Durkheim (1912/1995) argued that rituals reinforce collective consciousness and social solidarity, while Mircea Eliade (1959) interpreted them as expressions of the sacred that reconnect human beings with transcendent reality. Victor Turner (1969) introduced the concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*, emphasizing ritual as a transformative process that creates social cohesion. Catherine Bell (1992) further viewed ritual as a strategic cultural practice through which societies construct and negotiate meaning, whereas Clifford Geertz (1973) interpreted rituals as symbolic systems that communicate cultural values and worldviews. Studies of rainmaking rituals in Africa, India, Australia, and Indigenous American communities demonstrate that such ceremonies function as mechanisms for negotiating human relationships with nature, reinforcing communal identity, and preserving indigenous ecological knowledge. However, these studies rarely address the philosophical significance of ritual inversion or its psychological implications, leaving a gap in understanding unique rainmaking traditions such as Heluweli Baliya.

2.2 Local Literature

Sri Lankan scholars have extensively examined folk rituals such as *Bali*, *Tovil*, *Kohomba Kankariya*, and *Pattini* rituals from anthropological, historical, and religious perspectives. Works by G. Obeyesekere (1969), H.L Seneviratne (1978), B. Kapferer (1983), and R.F Gombrich (2006) show how these rituals promote healing, social integration, and religious continuity within rural communities. Existing literature also highlights the coexistence of Buddhism with indigenous beliefs and deity worship in Sri Lankan folk religion. Nevertheless, research onnude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*remains scarce and primarily descriptive, focusing on its performance and folkloric characteristics. There is little analysis of its philosophical foundations, symbolic inversion, psychological functions, or ecological worldview. Consequently, a comprehensive philosophical investigation ofnude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*is necessary to understand how ritual, belief, and nature intersect within this unique indigenous rainmaking tradition.

3. Methodology

This study explores a qualitative research methodology to examine the philosophical, psychological, and ecological dimensions ofnude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*, a traditional rainmaking ritual practiced in the Nuwara Kalawiya region of Sri Lanka. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret the symbolic meanings, beliefs, and cultural values embedded within the ritual rather than to measure or quantify its outcomes.

The research is primarily based on library research and ethnographic inquiry. Primary data were collected through field observations of the ritual where possible, informal interviews with ten village elders, ritual practitioners, and oral traditions transmitted within the community. These sources provided firsthand accounts of the ritual's performance, symbolism, and cultural significance. Secondary data were gathered from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, folklore records, and reports related to ritual studies, philosophy of religion, psychology of religion, Sri Lankan folk culture, and indigenous ecological knowledge.

The collected data were analyzed using philosophical conceptual analysis, symbolic interpretation, and thematic analysis. Philosophical conceptual analysis was employed to interpret the meanings and concepts of ritual symbols and practices within their cultural and religious context. Symbolic analysis was used to examine ritual elements such as nudity, verbal abuse, the deity's image, mud, and water as expressions of indigenous beliefs concerning reciprocity between humans, deities, and nature. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring themes related to ritual, belief, ecological knowledge, communal identity, and psychological resilience.

4. Historical Background of Heluweli Baliya

4.1 Geographical background

Nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*is a traditional rainmaking ritual practiced in the Nuwara Kalawiya region of the North Central Province in Sri Lanka. Nuwara Kalawiya is one of Sri Lanka's ancient agricultural regions, renowned for its dry zone civilization established during the Anuradhapura Kingdom. The region is dotted with reservoirs, canals, and fertile paddy lands that have supported agrarian communities for centuries. The characteristics of this region are a dry-zone climate, seasonal rainfall, extensive irrigation tanks (*wewa*), forests, and agricultural settlements. Rainfall is essential for cultivating paddy cultivation and village livelihoods. Thus, local communities have historically developed ritual practices that express their dependence on natural forces and divine intervention during periods of drought.

4.2 Historical Origins

The origin of nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*is not documented in written historical records; instead, it has been preserved through oral tradition and folklore. It is believed to have originated among farming communities as a public response to long drought and crop failure. The ritual shows pre-Buddhist indigenous beliefs that were later added into Sri Lanka's broader religious culture. As time goes on, nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*became an important ceremonial practice performed to invoke rainfall and restore harmony between the natural and spiritual worlds.

4.3 Agricultural Context

Nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*come out within the agricultural economy of Sri Lanka's dry zone, where successful cultivation depends on seasonal rainfall. Drought threatened food production, livestock, and village survival, making rainmaking rituals an essential cultural response to environmental uncertainty. Beyond seeking rain, the ritual reinforced working together, collective hope, and transmitted indigenous ecological knowledge across generations. Thus, nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*represents not only an agricultural ceremony but also a philosophical expression of the interconnected relationship between human society, nature, and spiritual belief.

5. Description of Ritual

5.1 Occasions for Performing Heluweli Baliya

Since agriculture in Sri Lanka's dry zone relies primarily on rainfall and irrigation reservoirs, long periods without rain lead to situations such as water shortages, receding reservoir water levels, and severe difficulties in cultivating paddy and other crops. Such environmental conditions often lead to problems like crop destruction, food shortages, and economic

instability. To seek protection from these situations, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual is performed in expectation of rain. This ritual is performed not for individual aspirations, but for the well-being of the community. Therefore, the decision to conduct it is based on the collective consensus of the village elders and the rural community.

According to the villagers' belief, drought arises from disruptions in the relationship between humans, nature, and divine forces. Therefore, thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual is performed to restore this balance and to invoke rainfall through the intercession of the deity Gana. This is not only a matter of religious belief, it also fosters a resilient mindset that enables one to remain faithful in the face of adverse environmental crises.

5.2 Ritual Procedure

Thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* ritual is an ancestral and traditional practice observed by farmers in the Nuwara Kalaviya region. Its central feature involves carrying a statue of the deity Gana in a procession to the area of the village tank (wewa) where the ritual takes place.As the procession moves along, participants perform traditional songs, rhythmic chanting, dancing, and drumming while naked. Only men from the village take part in this, women and children are prohibited from participating.

During this ritual, verses containing obscene and vulgar language intended to insult and shame the deity are sung, and the deity is further humiliated by having its idol cast into the mud and trampled upon; for the villagers, this also serves as a form of entertainment. As the ritual is performed in a state of nudity, it is known as the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya).* It is conducted on anauspicious day, with the expectation that rain will fall by the following auspicious day.

In this instance, the offerings placed before the deity figures are not fruits or similar items, but rather waste materials such as termite mound clay, balls of coconut dregs, and the residue left over after rendering oil. Instead of lighting oil lamps for illumination, a log is set ablaze. This unconventional Bali ritual continues until daybreak. At dawn, the main ritual officiant arrives to chant prayers, lamenting the indignity inflicted upon the deity and making fervent supplications.

Afterwards, the statue of Lord Ganesha is taken to the village tank and placed in the mud at the water's edge, where it remains until rain falls. This symbolic act serves to encourage divine intervention to bring about rainfall. The community believes that this ritual will restore the natural balance disrupted by the drought. Throughout this period, the villagers continue to offer prayers and express their hope and collective anticipation for rain.

5.3 Symbolic Objects and Ritual Materials

The ritual of nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*employs a range of symbolic objects and materials that are essential to its performance and cultural meaning. Although these objects serve practical functions during the ceremony, they also embody the beliefs and traditions of the farming communities that practice the ritual.

5.3.1 Gana Deity Statue

The statue of the deity Gana is the primary sacred object in thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual. Typically crafted from wood or clay, this statue is believed to influence rainfall and agricultural prosperity. During the ritual, the statue is carried through the village in a procession, becoming the focal point of all ceremonial activities. It acts as a symbolic intermediary between the human community and the supernatural realm, reflecting humanity's reliance on metaphysical forces when facing challenges that are difficult to confront.

5.3.2 Mud

Mud can be identified as a highly distinctive ritual material used in thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ceremony. At the conclusion of the ritual, the statue of the deity Gana is deposited in the mud near the village tank. Mud is not considered a sacred substance; rather, it is a material used to insult the deity. Within the traditional belief system, the mud symbolizes the parched earth awaiting rain, agricultural fertility, and the intimate bond between humanity and the natural environment. The temporary placement of the deity's statue in the mud marks the climax of the ritual, a state that is maintained until the rains arrive.

5.3.3 Village Tank

The village tank serves as a primary ritual site because it is the fundamental water source for agriculture. Water symbolizes life, prosperity, purity, and the fertility of the crops. A drop in the tank's water level during periods of drought clearly reflects the environmental crisis facing the village. Conducting this ritual at the tank underscores the community's reliance on rainfall for survival and agricultural production.

5.3.4 Nudity

While there is traditional village attire, the participants in this ritual adopt this practice to capture the attention of the deities. Nudity signifies the absolute helplessness of the human being. During a long drought, crops are destroyed, and with the loss of food, water, and livelihoods, human life becomes wretched. Disrobing symbolizes man appearing as a creature devoid of power in the face of nature and the divine.

5.3.5 Offerings

A distinctive feature here is that, unlike many other rituals, there is no extensive use of offering materials. The primary focus of this ritual is not on material offerings, but rather on symbolic, ritualistic actions. Generally, offerings made to deities involve items such as flowers, betel leaves, coconuts, oil lamps, and incense sticks, all intended to show reverence. However, in the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual, the materials used for the offering consist of refuse or waste matter. This symbolizes the fact that if a lack of rain damages the crops, nothing will remain for human consumption or for making offerings to the deities.

5.4 Social and Cultural Characteristics

Thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* ritual is not merely a religious observance performed in anticipation of rain; it can also be regarded as a significant cultural institution that preserves the social cohesion, cultural heritage, and indigenous knowledge of rural society across generations. The following social and cultural characteristics can be clearly identified within this ritual.

5.4.1 Collective Participation

A key feature of the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual is the coming together of the entire village. Everyone including farmers, elders, and the youth contributes to the ritual according to their respective abilities. The organization of the ritual, the procession carrying the image of Lord Ganesha, the singing, the drumming, and all other ceremonial activities are carried out collectively. This fosters unity and a sense of shared responsibility among the villagers. Since the problems caused by a lack of rain affect everyone equally, the villagers unite to address the situation.

5.4.2 Oral Tradition

The nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual is not based on written texts; rather, it is a folk tradition passed down from generation to generation through oral transmission. Elders teach the stories, legends, songs, protocols, and beliefs associated with the ritual to the younger generation by word of mouth. Consequently, this ritual serves as a medium for preserving local folk memory and cultural heritage.

5.4.3 Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge from Generation to Generation

Through this ritual, indigenous knowledge regarding nature, rainfall patterns, agricultural seasons, the tank system, and the environment is transmitted from generation to generation. This is not theoretical knowledge. It is a wealth of practical knowledge acquired through traditional practice. By participating in the ritual alongside the village elders, the younger generation learns about their ancestors' way of life, religious beliefs, and the folk wisdom connected to the environment.

5.4.4 Community Solidarity

Since drought is a crisis affecting the entire village, thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual unites the villagers around a common purpose. Participation in this ritual fosters cooperation, mutual trust, collective responsibility, and a spirit of mutual support rather than self-interest. This strengthens social bonds within the village and enhances the psychological resilience needed to face times of crisis.

5.4.5 Preserving Cultural Identity

Thenude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual is a unique cultural heritage of the farming communities in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone. Despite the spread of modern social changes, industrialization, globalization, and modern agricultural technologies, this ritual preserves the rural population's historical memory, indigenous religious beliefs, and traditional way of life. Therefore, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual can be regarded not merely as a practice performed to invoke rain, but also as a significant socio-cultural tradition that preserves local cultural identity and heritage across generations.

6. Philosophical Representatives onNude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*

The nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual is not merely a religious observance; it is a cultural tradition rooted in profound philosophical and psychological foundations. Philosophically, this ritual emphasizes the interconnectedness between humanity, nature, and the divine. Drought is regarded not only as a natural phenomenon but as a manifestation of the imbalance between humanity and the environment, with the ritual serving as a symbolic process to restore that balance. Philosophical concepts inherent in this include traditional worldviews, cosmology, interdependence, symbolism, environmental ethics, and moral ecology.

From a psychological perspective, this can be viewed as a collective response aimed at alleviating the fear, uncertainty, helplessness, and mental distress caused among the people by the drought. Participating in the ritual fosters hope, self-confidence, social unity, and emotional relief among the villagers. Psychological concepts inherent in this includebehaviourism,collective consciousness, emotional catharsis, psychological empowerment, stress management, and social identity.

Therefore, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual can be regarded as an indigenous cultural practice of both philosophical and psychological significance, reflecting the relationship between nature, faith, and the human mind.

6.1 Ritual and Belief

This expresses the rural population's worldview, religious beliefs, understanding of nature, and philosophical reflections on human existence. From a philosophical perspective, the concepts of ritual and belief within this practice are inseparable. In an agricultural society, rain was regarded not merely as a natural phenomenon but as a divine blessing. Drought is perceived not just as a physical problem, but as a disruption of the balance between humanity, nature, and the divine. The nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* ritual represents a collective effort to restore that disrupted balance.

According to Emile Durkheim, ritual as an act that expresses a society's collective beliefs. Accordingly, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*custom reaffirms the villagers' shared belief system as they unite for a common purpose. Therefore, from a philosophical perspective, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual demonstrates that faith is not merely a state of mind, but a social and religious reality brought to life through a ritualistic process. Rituals serve not only as a medium for expressing religious belief but also as a philosophical process that renews that belief and imbues the community's life with meaning.

6.2 Ritual Inversion

Through the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual, certain actions normally considered taboo or disrespectful in everyday social life are temporarily transformed into sacred and meaningful ritual acts. Examples include verbally insulting the deity Gana, participating in the ritual while naked, and placing the deity's image in the mud. According to scholars of ritual studies, including anthropologist Victor Turner, ritual inversion is a process that restores balance to a state of disequilibrium by temporarily reversing society's ordinary rules, norms, and relationships. Through this process, the tension, crisis, and imbalance existing within society are articulated, alongside a collective aspiration to overcome them. Philosophically, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual demonstrates that sacred rites often transcend ordinary moral and social norms, creating a new interpretation for the sake of societal well-being, balance, and the collective good.

6.3 Human-Nature Relationship

The nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual embodies a profound philosophical understanding of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature. This ritual does not attempt to control or conquer nature; instead, it expresses humanity's humility, respect, and reliance in the face of natural forces. It acknowledges that rain is a natural force beyond human control and emphasizes that, to receive it, humans must live in harmony with nature.

Therefore, the environmental philosophy depicted in the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual can be identified as an indigenous environmental philosophy grounded in the principles of coexistence, interdependence, and respect for nature. This philosophy emphasizes that human beings are not entities separate from nature but are an integral part of it, and that the well-being of the environment is directly linked to the well-being of human life.

6.4 Reciprocity between Human and Deities

Philosophically, this concept expresses the idea that a relationship of mutual responsibility exists between humans and metaphysical forces. Within this relationship, it is believed that while humans fulfill their ritual obligations, the divine realm provides rain and fertility to maintain natural balance. In this ritual, the relationship between the villagers and the deity Gana can be viewed not as one of unilateral dependence or subordination, but as a bond built upon mutual expectations, trust, and symbolic communication.

6.5 Sacred and Secular

When interpreting the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual, the distinction between the sacred and the secular is a philosophically significant concept. This concept has been extensively analyzed by Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade. According to them, human life is structured around two realms the sacred and the secular and rituals serve as a symbolic pathway for transitioning from the profane world to the sacred world.

As Mircea Eliade points, sacredness is not an inherent quality of actions themselves, but rather a special meaning conferred through symbolic interpretation and ritual. Similarly, in the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual, the sacredness of acts such as baring the body, rebuking the deity Gana, or placing the statue

in mud arises not from the actions themselves, but from the religious and symbolic meanings the community attributes to them. Accordingly, from a philosophical perspective, it is pointed out that rituals enable one to temporarily transcend ordinary social reality and create a metaphysical world.

7. Findings

The objective of this research was to examine the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya),* an indigenous rain-invoking ritual in Sri Lanka from philosophical and psychological perspectives An analysis of relevant literary, folkloric, and anthropological sources, as well as philosophical concepts, revealed that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* ritual is not merely a religious ceremony performed to invoke rain; rather, it is a complex cultural philosophy that articulates the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, divinity, and society.

7.1 Ritual as an Environmental Philosophy

One of the most significant findings of this research is that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*is a ritual embodying an ecological worldview. Villagers regard the tank, rain, soil, fields, and forests not only as physical resources, but as integral components of an essential ecosystem that sustains life. This ritual shows how humans live in harmony with nature rather than attempting to control it. Consequently, this study reveals that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*is a cultural heritage reflecting an indigenous ecological philosophy centered on respect for nature, environmental conservation, and water resources.

7.2 Belief as Environmental Adaptation

This research reveals that the religious beliefs associated with the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* ritual function as a mechanism for adapting to the environment. Since the farming communities of the Dry Zone depend on rainfall for their livelihoods, their religious beliefs and rituals provide them with psychological strength and hope in the face of drought.This enables one to find meaning in life amidst natural crises and to build confidence in the future. Accordingly, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* can be regarded as a cultural and philosophical process through which humans adapt to the natural environment.

7.3 Community Resilience

This research also revealed that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual fosters the villagers' collective resilience. By coming together to participate in this ritual amidst the economic and psychological pressures caused by drought, the villagers demonstrate unity, mutual cooperation, and a shared commitment to a common goal. Ultimately, the strengthening of the community's psychological resilience and social bonds is a significant outcome of the ritual, transcending the question of whether or not rain actually falls.

7.4 Ritual Inversion

This research also highlighted the concept of ritual inversion. Actions considered disrespectful in ordinary social life such as nudity, verbally berating the deity Ganesha, and placing the idol in the mud, acquire a sacred significance within the ritual context. Rather than rejecting religious belief, these acts serve to symbolically articulate the hardships faced by the villagers and seek to draw the deity's attention.

7.5 Symbolic Communication with Nature

Another significant finding here is that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*is a ritual that establishes symbolic communication between humanity and nature. Activities such as the ceremonial procession of the Lord Ganesha statue, singing, dancing, placing the deity in the mud, and conducting the ritual near the tank can all be interpreted as a symbolic appeal for rain, water, and fertility. Accordingly, the nude

folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)*ritual can be regarded as an indigenous form of cultural communication that fosters a meaningful relationship with nature through symbols, beliefs, and collective activities.

8. Conclusion

This research revealed that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* an indigenous rain-making ritual in Sri Lanka, should be understood not only as a folk belief or religious rite, but as an indigenous knowledge system imbued with profound philosophical, psychological, ecological, and socio-cultural significance. The key findings of the research reveal that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* is a philosophical expression articulating the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the divine, and that it is deeply intertwined with the lived experiences, environmental understanding, and collective beliefs of the farming communities in the Dry Zone.

From a philosophical perspective, the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* ritual conveys the idea that human beings are not superior to nature but are, in fact, an integral part of it. Accordingly, its fundamental philosophical message is that nature should not be viewed as an object to be subjugated, but rather as a living system to be protected with respect and responsibility. From a psychological perspective, facing a problem clearly demonstrates the importance of collective unity, stress management, and avoiding isolation.

In conclusion, this research determines that the nude folk dance (*Heluweli Baliya)* is not merely a rain-invoking ritual practiced by the farming community in the past, but a unique cultural heritage that integrates indigenous wisdom, philosophical thought, and ecological sensitivity regarding the maintenance of balance among humanity, nature, the divine, and society.

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Chapter 19: Governance Under Patronage: Citizen Experience and Institutional Change in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This chapter explores the nature of political patronage and clientelism in Sri Lanka in terms of their impact on governance, allocation of public resources, and inequalities. It is based on survey research conducted with 390 citizens and 360 government officials in 15 districts and 9 provinces, which sheds light on the effect of patronage networks on everyday experience of access, fairness and trust in the state. The findings show that 62.1% of citizens consider the allocation of public spending inefficient and 54.8% consider the allocation of infrastructure as unfair or very unfair. The informal political influence is also acknowledged by 50.0% of government officials in organizational decision-making, and 60.6% of government officials said it affects project prioritization. The chapter argues that patronage is not an aberration but is an integral part of governance, and that it reinforces inequalities in the region, reduces institutional autonomy, and reduces accountability. They are disproportionately borne by the rural poor and the poor, and political allegiance is more important than social need. At the same time, the study reveals that the public is very demanding of meritocracy, transparency and participatory governance, thus suggesting the need and social acceptability for reform. The chapter sets out an agenda for institutional change that includes merit-based administration, the transparency of budgets, improved oversight and electoral incentive reform and citizen empowerment. The chapter helps to shed light on the impact of citizens' perceptions and informal political behavior on development results in a South Asian democracy and the need to reform both the political incentives and the administrative structure if the reform is to be meaningful.

Keywords: *patronage, clientelism, governance, inequality, Sri Lanka, institutional reform, citizen perception.*

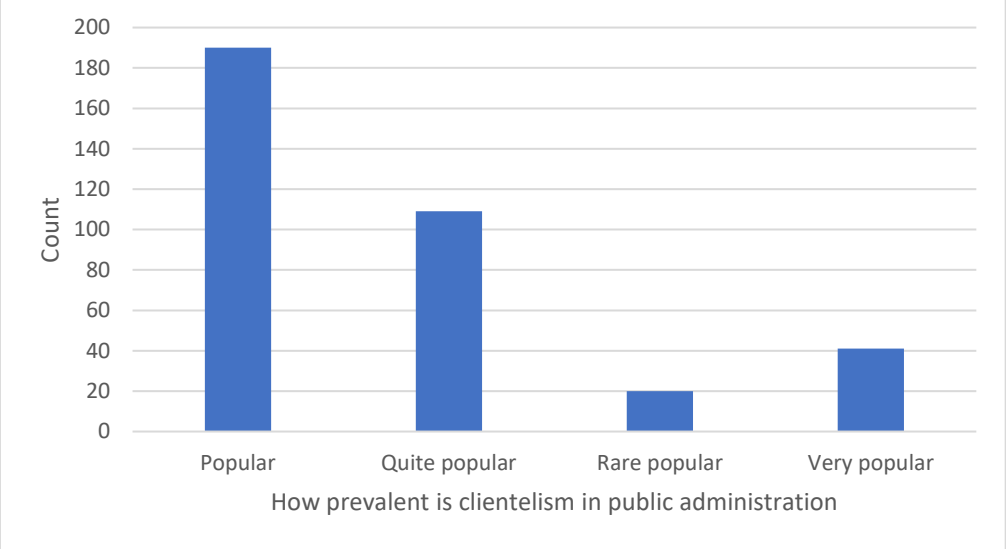
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Introduction

Political clientelism is not only a way of distributing benefits, it is also a way of organizing power, trust and citizens' everyday interactions with the state. Patronage has a long history in Sri Lanka in terms of public employment, allocation of welfare, location of infrastructure, and access in administration, which gives the impression of formalism in law but informalism in practice with regard to governance. This chapter considers public resource allocation, institutional legitimacy, and social inequalities from citizens' and government officers' points of view in the context of such arrangements.

The central argument is that patronage in Sri Lanka is not a fringe phenomenon, but a 'form of governance. The results of the study show that the population in general considers that public spending is inefficient and discriminatory: 62.1% of the respondents feel that public expenditure in their region is not distributed efficiently, and 41.5% feel that public expenditure in their region is discriminatory. Clientelism is acknowledged as a structural reality: 52.8% of the officials consider it "prevalent" in public administration (Figure 1). The officers and the respondents from rural communities (58.0%) and low-income families (42.6%) are the communities that are hardest hit by the system. The implications of these results are important since they reveal that inequality is created not only by economic processes, but also by political processes and administrative choices.

Figure 1: How prevalent is clientelism in public administration



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

The themes of governance, inequity, social change, and ethics in public life run throughout this chapter and are evident in this chapter. It connects Sri Lanka's experience with more general issues of informal political transactions and their effects on institutional autonomy and democratic accountability, and their ability to distort development agendas. Meanwhile, it shows that citizens are not merely recipients of patronage but that they are aware of it, that they criticise it, and that they express demands for meritocracy, transparency, and participatory governance.

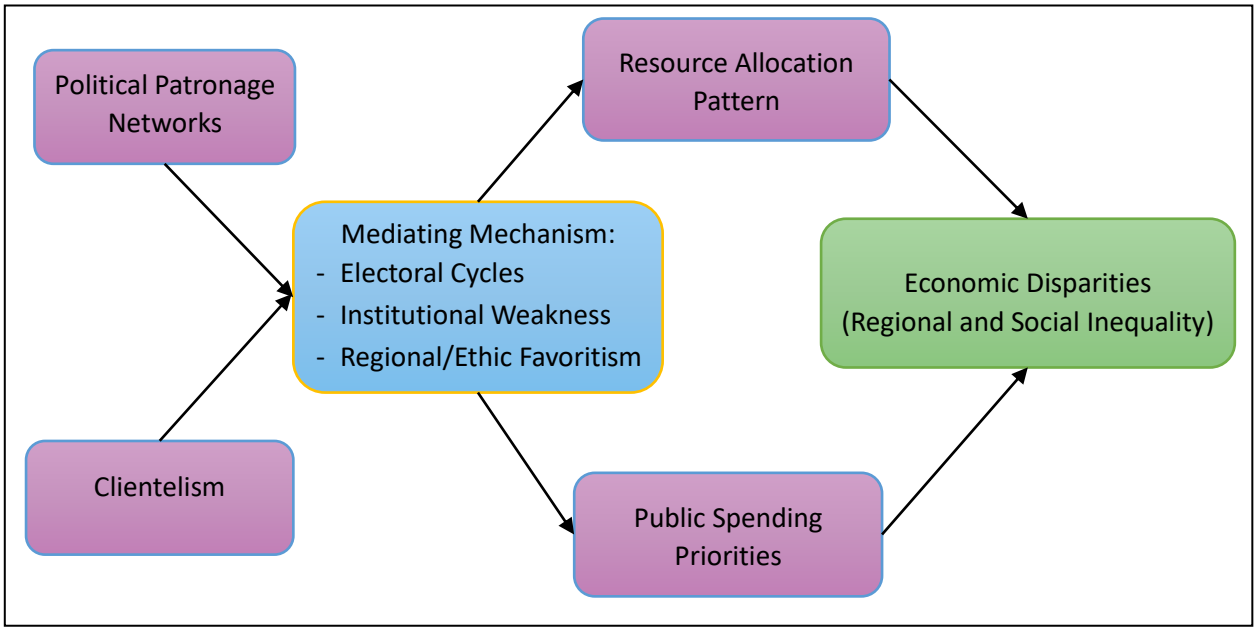
Conceptual Background

This chapter differentiates between patronage and clientelism, and explains how patronage and clientelism are linked in reality. Patronage is the systematic allocation of jobs, contracts and access to the state based on political considerations in return for political allegiance.

Clientelism is a more direct, transactional relationship between the political and the local recipients, whereby material benefits or services are given in exchange for political backing. In Sri Lanka, they are not distinct aspects but rather components of the political economy in which the power of the minister, the posts that are held, the provision of welfare and the location of projects are all interdependent.

These phenomena are explained by three theory lenses. One strand of political economy theory is on the informal power of elites to direct public resources to politically valuable ends. Political clientelism flourishes in settings of high inequality, as Izzulhaq and Kurnia (2023) argue, when the elites use their resources to gain political allegiance. This can be understood through institutional theory, which was developed by Douglas North (1990), which shows that if accountability is weak and administration is discretionary, such practices can flourish. Lo Bue et al. (2021) have shown that clientelism has adverse consequences on the quality of governance and the coverage of welfare programs. Studies of development reveal that patronage has a negative impact on spatial equality and human development and leads to a vicious circle of underinvestment in the peripheral regions (Venugopal, 2018; Dunham & Jayasuriya, 2001).

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Research



Source: Created by authors

The conceptual framework of this study (Figure 2) shows how political patronage networks and clientelism affect the allocation of public resources and public spending, which in turn affects economic disparities. The political patronage and clientelism are treated as independent variables, which affect the allocation of resources and public spending decisions through intermediary factors such as electoral cycles, institutional weakness, and regional or ethnic favoritism. These dynamics lead to the creation of economic differences, which are reflected in the differences in income levels between regions and unequal provision of services. The framework also makes due recognition of moderating factors such as political awareness, socio-economic status, governance quality, and historical political alignments.

The conceptual approach is essential, as it is about the whole governance system and not about specific cases of favoritism. The study chooses to understand patronage as a causal process that acts along electoral cycles and institutional weakness that generates the uneven

distribution of resources and social inequality and through partisan geography. This results in an institutional order with formal rules that are, in turn, subject to political relationships.

Historical Roots in Sri Lanka

Patronage politics is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka; it is a historical phenomenon. They stem from colonial power systems that recruited local elites as part of the bureaucracy and administration, establishing the basis for post-colonial patron-client relations (Jayawardena, 2000). The establishment of independence in 1948 saw patronage politics taking root and spreading more strongly as the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) sought to build up bases of support. These parties institutionalized patronage networks by allocating public sector jobs, development projects and public services in a manner that would strengthen political allegiance (Moore, 1985).

Patronage was used during the civil war period (1983-2009) to build loyalty on behalf of the government and NPA. Geographic inequality was exacerbated by the fact that government-controlled regions tended to be targeted for development investment to a greater extent than conflict-affected regions (DeVotta, 2004; Venugopal, 2011). Patronage was firmly established and, in the post-war era, even in the face of rhetorical promises for reform. Electoral cycles remain to have an impact on the allocation of public goods with a bias towards politically relevant constituencies (Dunham & Jayasuriya, 2011). The establishment of Provincial Councils and Local Authorities also provided additional spaces for resource allocation, but did not reduce patronage: in the Eastern Province, there are evidence of strategic manipulation of the instruments of coalition maintenance, allocations of portfolios and administrative postings, in order to consolidate power (Klem, 2024).

This history is relevant because it helps to understand the longevity of patronage. It is ingrained in political expectations, bureaucratic procedures, and citizens' survival tactics. Patronage cannot be fixed on a case-by-case basis; it is not enough to take measures to reduce the negative impact of patronage; a change in the conditions and institutional structures that create it is needed.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, which uses quantitative analysis through survey and qualitative analysis through thematic interpretation. This two-stage process involves first obtaining generalisable patterns from quantitative data and then examining the dynamics of these patterns through qualitative analysis.

Sampling Strategy

General Public Sample: The survey population comprised of people aged 18 years and above, from a total estimated national population of more than 16 million (Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey, 2021). Stratified random sampling of 390 respondents was done to ensure representation across the different districts, urban/rural, and socio-economic groups. The data was gathered in 18 Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSD) from 15 districts in all nine provinces. For each of the selected DSD, households were selected by systematic sampling; every third house on the right side of the road and every second house on the left side of the road were selected.

Government Officer Sample: 360 government officers were interviewed (Public Management Service officers and Development Office Service officers). According to the Performance Report 2022, the population of government officers in the selected divisions is 106,133. Officers were drawn from the same DSDs as

the public survey, allowing contextual and comparative analysis of how local political patronage works from the citizen and official perspectives.

Survey Instrument

The public survey questionnaire had six sections: (A) Demographic Information, (B) Awareness and Perceptions of Political Patronage and Clientelism, (C) Experience with Public Services and Spending, (D) Economic Inequality and Disparities, (E) Views on Governance and Reforms, and (F) Open-Ended Questions. The government officer questionnaire consisted of four parts: Demographic Information, Political Patronage Networks and Clientelism, Resource Allocation and Public Spending, Economic Disparities and Governance, and Recommendations.

Analytical Techniques

The quantitative analysis was done using descriptive statistics and cross tabulation with chi square test of independence.

Thematic content analysis was used for qualitative analysis, and the data were analyzed using NVivo software and manual coding for deductive and inductive thematic content analysis.

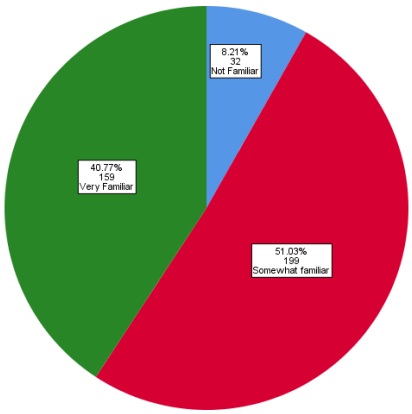
Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out in an ethical manner. A full explanation of the purpose of the study, its rights and uses of the data were given to all participants. Participation was voluntary and anonymous and confidential was ensured. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Ruhuna.

Citizen Perceptions

Citizen perceptions are significant for understanding political clientelism because they offer insights into citizens' conceptions of their relationship to power, and their views of the state. The results show that participants have a very high level of awareness of patronage and clientelism, indicating that these are not political concepts that are only known by elites or experts. Rather, they are components of the regular practice of civic learning, and they are influenced by inequalities in access, different levels of assistance, and the salience of the links between political partisanship and public service.

Figure 3: Familiarity with Political Patronage and Clientelism

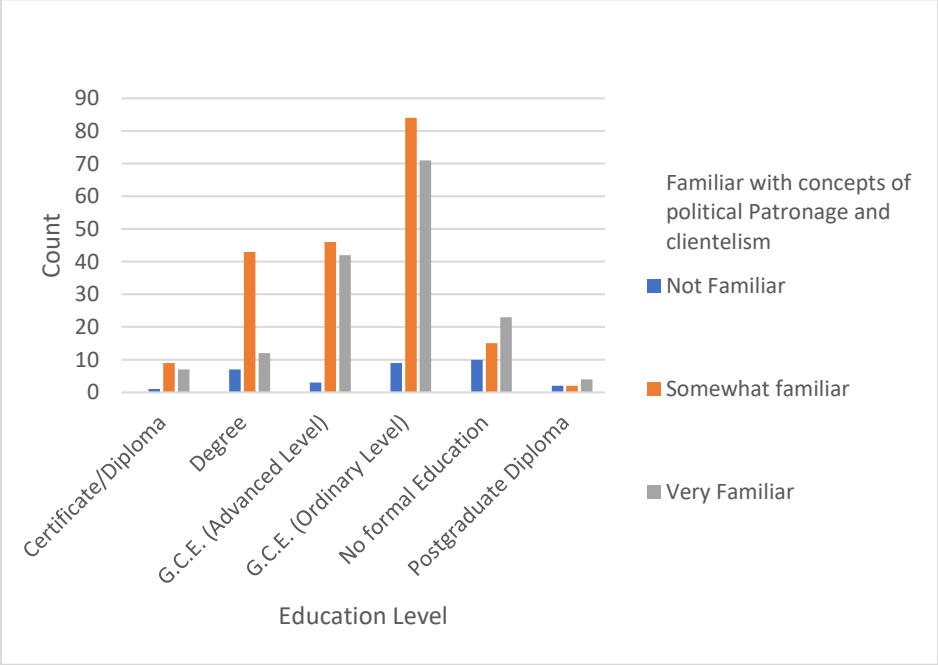


Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

The data reveal that 54.0% of the respondents are "somewhat familiar" with political patronage and clientelism and 40.8% are "very familiar" (Figure 3). 8.2% indicated that they were "not familiar. It suggests that instead of political education, patronage is part of the social

memory of communities and recognized in daily life. However, despite the limited education, the study indicated significant awareness (Chi square analysis showed that there was a significant relationship between level of education and awareness, $\chi^2 = 34.545$, df = 10, p = 0.000, but education was not a determining factor in awareness). As seen in Figure 4, respondents who have G.C.E Ordinary Level (O/L) and Advanced Level (A/L) qualifications have the highest level of familiarity, while even those who have no formal education have a high level of awareness due to their lived experiences of political favouritism at the grassroots level.

Figure 4: Familiarity with Patronage/Clientelism by Education Level



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Table 01: Perception of Political Patronage's Influence on Resource Allocation by Province

Province	Belief in Patronage Influence on Resource Allocation				Total
	No	Unsure	Yes, Significantly	Yes, to some extent	
Central	2	0	11	15	28
North Center	0	0	18	14	32
North-Western	2	5	17	30	54
Northern	13	8	11	34	66
Sabaragamuwa	6	4	20	14	44
Southern	2	7	41	34	84
Uva	0	0	10	29	39
Western	0	2	35	6	43
Total	25	26	163	176	390

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

The proportion of respondents who felt that political patronage affects public resource allocation "significantly" or "to some extent" was generally similar across the sample (Table 01), with 81.8% stating that it does affect the allocation of public resources at least "to some extent. This perception varies significantly by province ($\chi^2 = 96.740$, df = 21, p = 0.000). The

regional differences in the level of perceptions in North Central Province (56.2%) and Northern Province (51.5%) are due to the different historical experiences, political rivalry, and visible allocation of projects.

Table 02: Belief in Political Patronage Influences vs Observed Patronage Projects

Observed Patronage Projects	Belief in Patronage Influence on Resource Allocation				Total
	No	Unsure	Yes, Significantly	Yes, to some extent	
Constantly Observing	5	9	69	49	132
Impossible to Give a clear answer	3	5	19	10	37
Never Observed	5	1	7	13	26
Observed in Some Cases	12	11	68	104	195
Total	25	26	163	176	390

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

The study also shows that one's perception is related to observation. The relationship between the belief in patronage influence and observation of patronage projects was confirmed by the chi-square analysis (χ^2 = 26.99, df = 9, p = 0.001). For those who felt that patronage does have a significant impact on allocation, 42.3% said they "constantly observe" patronage projects. Overall, 33.8% of respondents said they were "constantly observing" patronage projects, with 50.0% saying they were observing "in some cases" (Table 02). This indicates that citizens base their judgments on experience, not rumor or partisan propaganda.

Table 03: Perceptions of Fairness in Resource Allocation

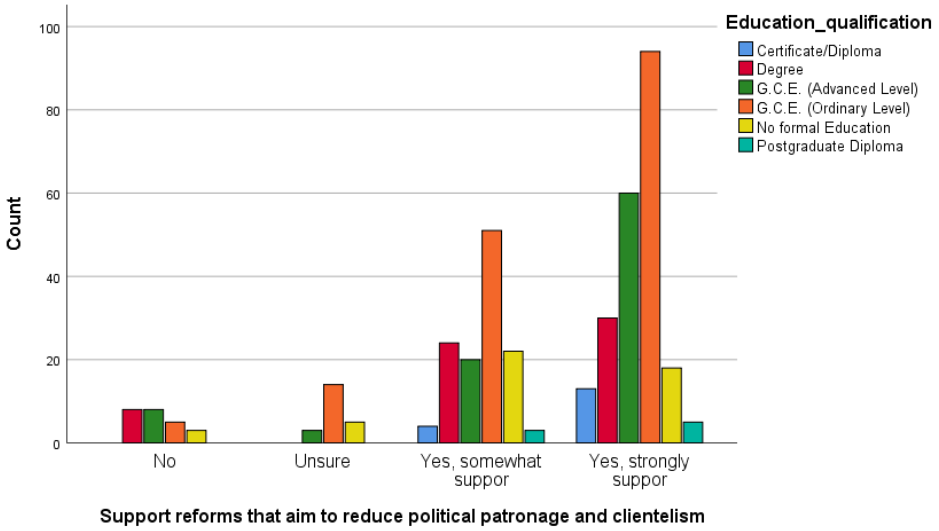
Response Category	Infrastructure Projects	Social Services	Social Welfare
Very fair	21 (5.38%)	13 (3.33%)	14 (3.59%)
Fair	85 (21.79%)	73 (18.72%)	66 (16.92%)
No clear idea	70 (17.95%)	115 (29.49%)	101 (25.90%)
Unfair	122 (31.28%)	118 (30.26%)	127 (32.56%)
Very unfair	92 (23.59%)	71 (18.21%)	82 (21.03%)

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

There are significant negative perceptions about the fairness of resource allocation. The combined percentage of 31.3% and 23.6% of "unfair" and "very unfair" rated allocations was 54.8% for infrastructure projects (Table 03). The same was true of social welfare programs (32.6% "unfair" and 21.0% "very unfair). Only 21.8% felt infrastructure allocation was "fair" and 5.4% "very fair. Qualitative information indicated that these perceptions were supported with respondents stating that "resources need to be distributed according to need not politics.

Support for reform is related to education levels. There was a significant association between education and support for patronage reforms (χ^2 = 35.540, df = 15, p = 0.004) as determined by the chi-square analysis. In figure 5, it is observed that the G.C.E Advanced Level (A/L) and degree qualified respondents were more supportive of the reforms than the lower qualified respondents.

Figure 5: Support for Patronage Reforms by Higher Education Qualification



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Citizens' perceptions of the environment in which they live suggest that they sense an unequal governance environment, in which political mediation is common and in which they experience unequal treatment in their everyday lives, which leads to low trust in government. This discovery reinforces the chapter's broader argument that patronage is not merely useful politically but also necessary for citizens' everyday life.

Public Spending and Fairness

Public spending and fairness are determinants of real-world distributive results from political power. Table 04 shows that 62.1% of them think that public expenditure is not distributed efficiently in their region, while only 18.2% think it is distributed efficiently. Public finance is a moral problem as well as a technical one when citizens believe that the spending is inequitable.

Table 04: The perception of public spending

Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
It is impossible to give a clear answer	77	19.7
Not Distributed efficiently in the living region	242	62.1
Distributed efficiently in the living region	71	18.2
Total	390	100.0

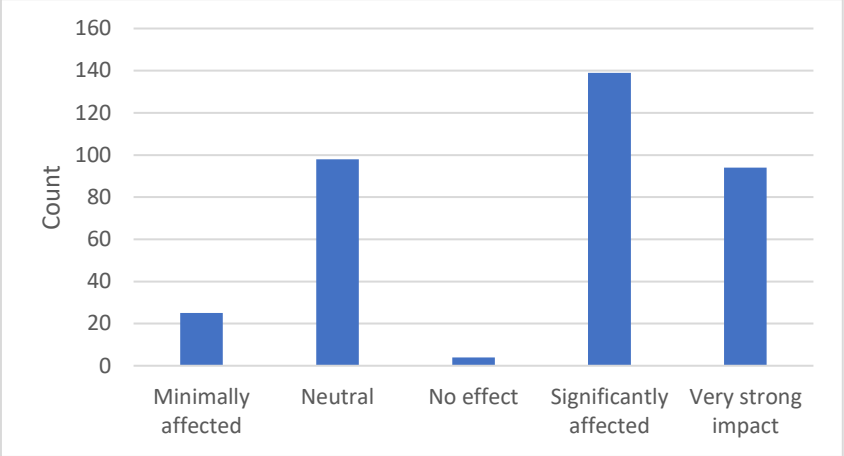
Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

Table 03 reports on perceptions of fairness in three areas—infrastructure projects, social services, and social welfare. In each of the domains, perceptions of unfairness dominate. When asked about allocations of infrastructure, 54.8% of respondents said it was unfair or very unfair, while 27.2% said it was fair or very fair. Social welfare had similar trends: 53.6% Unfair/very unfair versus 20.5% Fair/very fair. Social services were slightly less polarized: 48.5% unfair/very unfair, 22.1% fair/very fair, and 29.5% had "no clear idea," which is likely to be due to limited visibility or uncertainty about how services are allocated.

A high percentage of "no clear idea" answers, especially in social services (29.5%) and social welfare (25.9%), indicates that the allocation process is not transparent, that information is not communicated to the public, or that citizens do not know how allocation is done at the local level. Under these conditions, citizens are deciding "fairness" based on the results instead of the actual processes.

As presented in Figure 6, 64.7% of government officers believe that political patronage has a significant impact (38.6%) or very significant impact (26.1%) on the distribution of resources fairly. Only 1.1% reported "no effect. The areas most impacted by politically biased allocation were infrastructure development (51.9%) and social welfare programs (45.8%) (Table 05).

Figure 6: The extent to which political patronage affects the effective distribution of resources



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Table 05: Areas Most Affected by Politically Biased Resource Allocation

Areas Most Affected by Politically Biased Resource Allocation	Responses Percent (%)
Public job opportunities	28.6
Regional Development Funds	36.1
Infrastructure development	51.9
Social welfare programs	45.8

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

This study finds there is some variation across sectors in perceptions of unfair spending. Infrastructure projects were particularly likely to be felt to be unfairly distributed, possibly due to their high visibility and symbolic use for political ends. Social welfare programmes were also perceived to be vulnerable to bias, especially in a country where welfare is a political issue and has a strong local power network. Social services were not as politicized as roads or grants, but were often considered to be tainted. The findings suggest a systemic issue in the system of public provision rather than just a policy problem.

Fairness in this study is thus a multi-faceted concept. The question is not only about the equality of spending but also whether allocation is done on a needs basis, procedures are transparent and citizens feel that the State is neutral. Project assignments to specific areas and welfare benefits according to loyalty, that is, according to loyalty, are not necessarily fair, even though the quantities of welfare benefits may appear high. Fairness is thus a distributive and a procedural expectation.

A governance problem identified in this section is that when taxpayers see the state spending money on something that they think is politically motivated, it is hard for them to imagine the state as a neutral provider of collective goods. This weakens the legitimacy of access and leads to people thinking that access has to be brokered through local intermediaries or people they know. Then public spending is another area of selective access.

Overall, the study depicts public spending as an arena of contestation, in which fairness is constantly invoked, and in which citizens perceive inequity not just as a lack but also as a manipulation by politicians. The importance of this perception lies in its impact on people's perception of the state, their understanding of development, and their willingness to believe institutional promises.

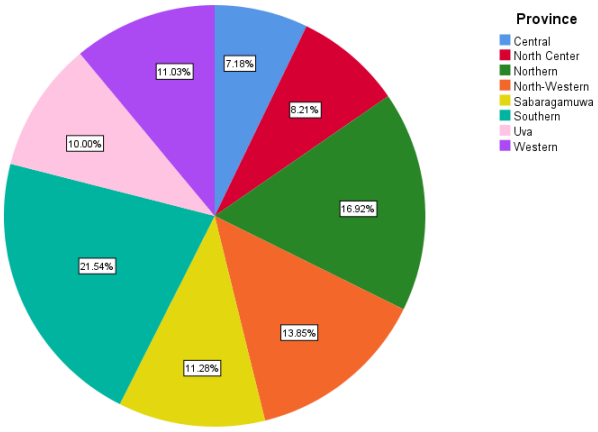
Spatial Inequality

Spatial Inequality Political patronage may be manifested in the most obvious way: that of spatial inequality, whereby power is distributed based on space. The study reveals significant differences in experiences of patronage, among citizens in different parts of Sri Lanka in relation to their awareness of the extent to which the allocation of resources is influenced by political factors. This means that there are social and economic inequalities, as well as geographical inequalities like political neglect of certain areas while others are always in the spotlight.

As depicted in figure 7, the highest number of respondents were recorded from Southern (21.5%), Northern (16.9%) and North-Western (13.8%) provinces respectively. There was a significant variation between districts for observations of politically favored projects as shown in Table 06. In Hambantota district 58.3% of respondents reported to "constantly observe" patronage projects, in Gampaha 52.6% and in Kalutara 41.7% reported this. In contrast, Polonnaruwa reported no "constantly observing," but 83.3% reported "in some cases. Moderate patterns were observed in Anuradhapura (53.8%), Matale (64.3%) and Ratnapura (40.9%).

The chi-square test revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between district and observation of patronage projects ($\chi^2 = 64.103$, df = 45, p = 0.032). Patronage influences the allocation significantly in North Central Province with 56.2% and in Northern Province with 16.7% and 40.5% in Southern Province, respectively, and in the remaining provinces, the percentage of those who reported "significantly" or "no" was found to be roughly equal.

Figure 7: Respondents Distribution by District



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Table 06: Distribution of Observations on Politically Favored Projects by District

District	Constantly Observing	Observed in Some Cases	Never Observed	Impossible to Give a clear answer	Total
Anuradhapura	5	14	3	4	26
Badulla	5	12	0	2	19
Galle	9	22	3	1	35
Gampaha	10	8	0	1	19
Hambantota	7	5	0	0	12
Jaffna	6	11	7	6	30
Kalutara	10	11	0	3	24
Kurunegala	9	11	1	3	24
Matale	7	18	2	1	28
Matara	16	17	1	3	37
Monaragala	4	10	3	3	20
Polonnaruwa	0	5	0	1	6
Puttalam	14	12	0	4	30
Rathnapura	19	18	4	3	44
Vavuniya	11	21	2	2	36
Total	**132**	**195**	**26**	**37**	**390**

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

Spatial inequality is significant because of the cumulative advantage/disadvantage it brings. Selected districts develop additional infrastructure, administrative skill, and political clout to draw in additional future resources. In contrast, districts that are not consistently engaged are likely to end up in a cycle of less visible and impactful service provision and less influence. This results in a geography of development that gets "stuck" and reinforces inequality over time and that the very institutions set up to solve the problem of inequality become a cause of inequality.

The argument of the chapter is particularly relevant here as it demonstrates that spatial inequality is not a mere by-product of administrative inefficiency. Rather, it is an outcome of political processes that are made through the development decisions made after being filtered through loyalty, electoral significance, and local brokerage. In such a system, then, location is a proxy for political

value. Communities don't live in space; they live in the inequalities of political maps of access and exclusion.

Ethical concerns are concerned with these spatial patterns. When the state's attention seems to be more focused on certain areas than others over time, it seems to be divided or lacking in universal services. The feeling of development being offered to another group or that they are excluded can be a source of further alienation and distrust among citizens living in disadvantaged areas. Spatial inequality can therefore be viewed as one of the factors that cause the overall governance crisis the study revealed: governance that is unequal at the national level.

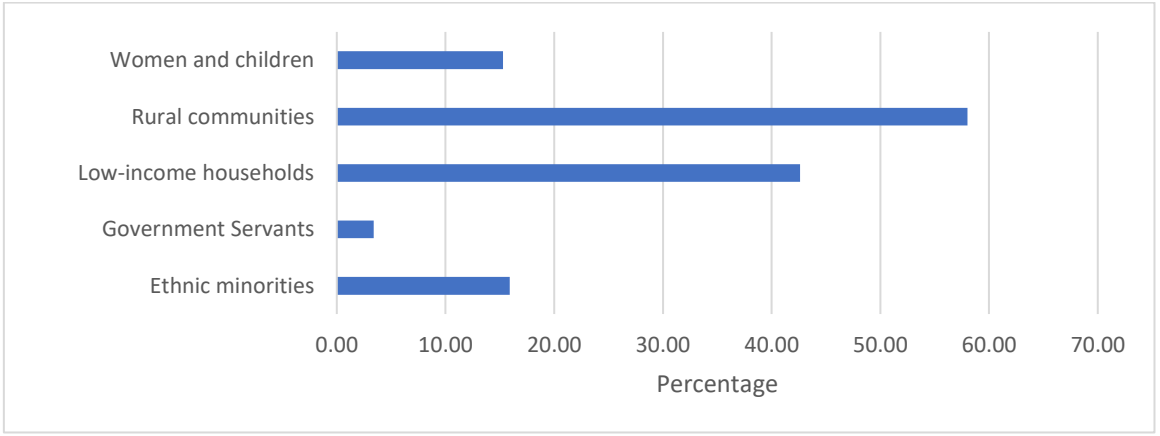
This finding suggests that there is a geographic dimension to patronage as well. It generates discontiguous areas of development, recognition, and opportunity, and territories are focal points where the political inequality of everyday life is realised.

Vulnerable Groups

The study finds that patronage does not affect everyone in the same way; it has the greatest impact on those with less political influence who depend on more state services. Government officials indicated that the most affected populations were rural populations and low-income groups, indicating that patronage affects social and spatial inequities. At the bottom line, this means that on the ground, vulnerability is created and aggravated in the allocation of political resources.

Figure 8 shows officers' perception of the most vulnerable groups with respect to political patronage. 58.0% of respondents considered the rural communities to be most affected, followed by low-income families (42.6%). There is also evidence of women and children (15.3%) and ethnic minorities (14.7%), but they are less visible. The least affected group was government servants (3.4%), indicating that perhaps the worst parts of the system are kept at bay by the bureaucracy.

Figure 8: Groups Most Affected by Political Patronage



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Rural communities are particularly vulnerable, as they tend to be more reliant on public services, local administrative services, and intermediary relationships for access to development opportunities. Low political status can be an obstacle for rural citizens to receive welfare, infrastructure, and administrative responsiveness. This is not only a matter of distance from the city centers but also a matter of less influence in political systems.

Another but related vulnerability for low-income families is that they are less likely to have access to jobs, education, and housing. They have less capacity to fund the exclusion and administrative hurdles to accessing resources. Therefore, there is more to patronage than the lack of access to public

goods: it also involves the need to be loyal, to be mediated, or to have informal access. This can lead to a vicious circle of inequities in which those who need help the most get it the least.

Table 07 gives the results of officers' perceptions of the consequences of patronage-driven public spending. The most common consequences identified were increased corruption (51.7%) and inefficiency in the use of resources (48.6%), while undermining institutional trust (33.3%) and neglecting marginalized regions or groups (31.4%) were also among the most common. In this way, one can be sure that vulnerability is not only a lack of resources but also a management attribute of patronage systems

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Table 07: Consequence of Patronage-Based Public Spending

Consequence of Patronage-Based Public Spending	Responses Percent (%)
Corruption has increased	51.7
Undermining institutional trust	33.3
Inefficiency in resource use	48.6
Public disapproval	0.6
Neglecting marginalized regions groups	31.4
Public officials are frequently criticized	0.6

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

Patronage is a way of creating vulnerability as an institutional effect. This is not an abstract form of institutional exclusion of the poor, rural and socially marginalized; it is a process of making these groups more vulnerable, by denying them access to the resources of the state, which are available to those who are politically loyal and have informal networks. Hence the emphasis in this chapter on patronage as a means of creating inequality, rather than as a means of correlating to politics.

The section as a whole illustrates the skewed nature of the impact of clientelism and the fact that its targets are primarily people who are not likely to claim entitlements based on political party. That implies that vulnerable groups are at the center of any reform program: how vulnerable and marginalized they are being looked after should be the criterion of evaluating institutional reform.

Bureaucratic Consequences

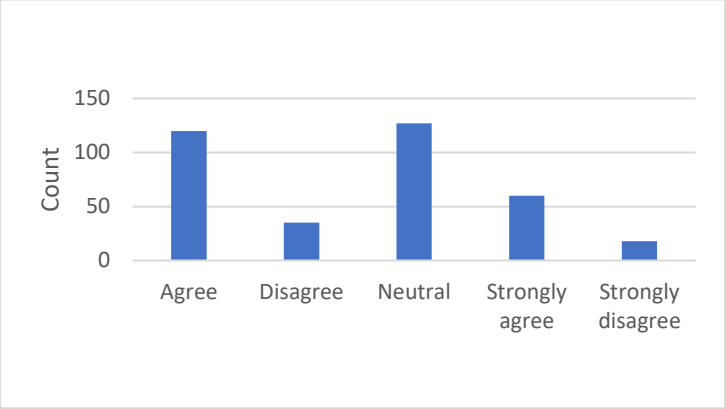
Among the most negative implications of the study are the bureaucratic implications of political patronage, which show how informal politics slips into the state system. The officer survey reveals that the clientelism is seen as an integral component of government decision-making, implementation, and service delivery. Patronage from above is not only a weakening of the state, but it is the state.

Table 08: Impact of Political Patronage on Resource Allocation

Impact of Political Patronage on Resource Allocation	Responses Percent (%)
Distributing public benefits to political supporters	49.7
Allocating funds to politically important regions	51.7
Jobs based on political affiliations	44.2
Prioritizing projects for political gain	60.6
Other	2.2

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

Figure 9: Influence of Political Patronage on Organizational Decision-Making



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Table 08 shows officers' perceptions of the effect of patronage on resource allocation. The issue that had the largest impact on prioritization was allocating funding to politically important regions (51.7%), while distributing public benefits to political supporters (49.7%) had the second largest impact. As for the political affiliation, 44.2% of respondents indicated that employment was based on political affiliation. As can be seen in Figure 9, 50.0% of officers agreed (33.3%) or strongly agreed (16.7%) that political patronage has a significant impact on decision-making in their organization.

Table 09: Varieties of Clientelism Observed at Work

Varieties of Clientelism	Responses Percent (%)
Recruitment based on political allegiance	35.0
Offering goods/services in exchange for political support	38.9
Allocation of resources for election promises	37.5
Political loyalty in the provision of public services	32.2
Local politics is dominated by women	0.3
Other	4.4

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

Table 09 describes the different forms of clientelism found. The most widely reported forms of offering goods/services in exchange for political support were allocation of resources for election promises (37.5%) and recruitment based on political allegiance (35.0%). 32.2% of officers identified political loyalty in public service provision. Table 10 presents the mechanisms for maintaining patronage networks: political interference in project implementation ranked highest (50.3%), informal networks of influence (23.6%) and management of the state budget (21.1%).

Table 10: Mechanisms Used to Maintain Sponsorship Networks

Mechanisms Used to Maintain Sponsorship Networks	Responses Percent (%)
Establishing informal networks of influence	23.6
Controlling government contracts	18.1
Handling the state budget	21.1
Political interference in project implementation	50.3

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

This research also shows that it's a problem that keeps repeating itself. Political pressure can become a regular phenomenon, and the officials may be expected and prepared for it, thereby diminishing the impact of rules and procedures. Such an environment could undermine even good policies when they are put into practice. This is why the chapter does not consider patronage to be a one-off issue of corruption but rather an ongoing structural issue that affects the way administration functions on a day-to-day basis.

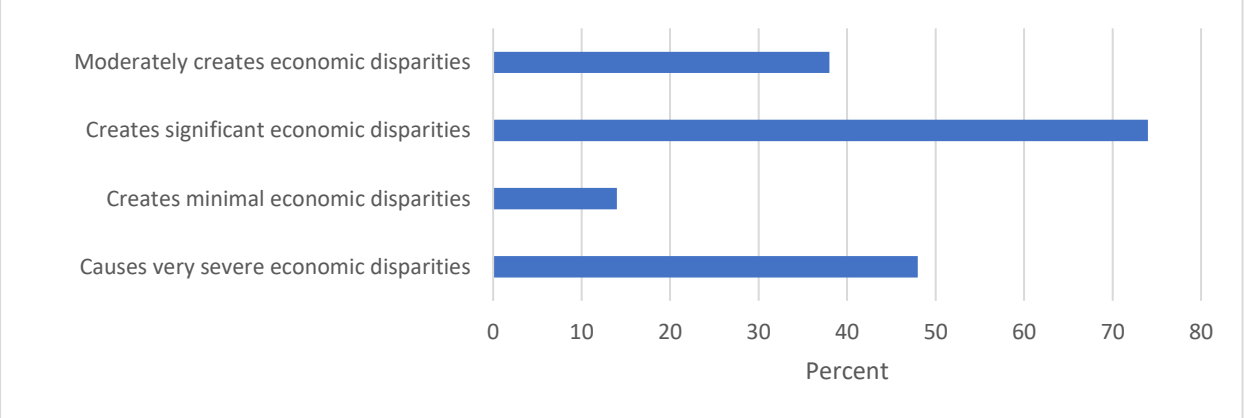
Loss of transparency is one of the significant effects. Informal decision-making is hard for citizens to comprehend because the rationale behind project approvals and prioritization of services and benefits to the individual are not clearly understood. This confusion was recognized as a source of mistrust and inefficiency by officers. The end effect is a structure that continues to function formally, but with uncertainty and lack of accountability.

The level of implementation is particularly at risk. Political interference is most visible at the program/policy-to-project and services level. This is important because budgeting and high-level planning reforms will not be successful without thinking about how policies will be put into practice, tracked, and utilized at the local level. Patronage can be most detrimental at the point where policy becomes practice.

As shown in Figure 9, officers feel that political patronage has a "significant" or "very significant" effect on worsening the inequity in the economies of the regions (42.0% and 27.3%, respectively). Loss of public trust in government institutions (70.3%), reduced transparency and accountability (41.1%), inefficiencies in public administration (30.8%), and erosion of meritocracy (24.4%) are identified as governance challenges (Table 11).

The bureaucratic impacts are not just efficiency; they're also legitimacy. The public may lose faith in both officers and the state's ability to be fair if it appears officers are operating under political pressure. This threatens the quality of public service in two ways: citizens learn that institutions are for partisan use, not for the public good. It's a huge failure of the system of public trust.

Figure 9: Extent of Political Patronage in Exacerbating Regional Economic Disparities



Source: Author's computation using SPSS (version 26) based on 2025 survey data.

Table 11: Governance Challenges Arising from Political Patronage and Clientelism

Governance Challenges	Responses Percent (%)
Reduced transparency and accountability	41.1
Erosion of meritocracy	24.4
Inefficiencies in public administration	30.8
Loss of public trust in government institutions	70.3

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

To summarize, the study shows that the patronage system is not only a cause of bureaucratic consequences but also one of the main mechanisms of reproduction of this system. Political clientelism can affect the nature of decision-making, the enforcement of the rules, and public perceptions of the state. The first step towards any serious governance reform must begin from the bureaucracy rather than the political class.

Lived Experience

The most concrete results of the chapter are related to the experience of patronage, which is expressed in routine communication with the state. Patronage is not a mere concept or an idea but a reality where citizens are denied jobs, have access to little support, are denied development projects, or have to go through intermediaries to get support. In this respect, the use of patronage is a real circumstance of citizenship.

The qualitative findings suggest that citizens' perceptions of public services are largely negotiated and not entitlement-based. Political brokers, party representatives, and local power holders are given access to welfare, infrastructure, and administrative attention. This is changing the definition of citizenship, from equal entitlement to relationships and loyalty. The state can seem remote, exclusive, or inaccessible to individuals who don't come from the establishment political system.

The study has confirmed that it does get worse during the election periods. Respondents described a greater number of projects and material benefits that come out during election periods, when political actors have greater motivations to show responsiveness. This creates a short-term political cycle in which citizens learn to look out for them only at election time and not at the regular cycles of institutional processes. This can create increased dependency in that people might start to think about accessing services as a political negotiation.

Exclusion is one prime characteristic of lived experience. This can make it seem as though their needs are not being met or that they are not being served, even when they are. This can be discouraging, embarrassing, giving in, and distrustful. The emotional dimension is important, as governance is not only about the policy outcomes; it is about being treated fairly, recognized, and treated with dignity.

The study does not, however, render citizens as victims. People know, think, and understand the concept of the political logic of distribution. The generalizations about inequality, unfairness, and the need for change were made by the respondents. This implies lived experience also generates critique and civic awareness. It is not the citizen's obligation to take patronage; it is something that he or she may do if it is advantageous.

Given the facts, this is a significant paradox. For some, patronage offers instant access; for others, it means that they come to feel dependent, that they are not citizens, and that they are "supporters of the government," not "citizens of the country. This is a process of having or not having a resource and forms people's perceptions of themselves within the political system.

The general finding of this section is that clientelism is an instrument that influences daily life in different ways—in negotiations, in frustration, and in strategic adaptations. It is living in uncertainty for some, a way to exploit the state by others, and a way of living with the awareness that everyone does not have access to the state for others.

Reform Demand

The study is in line with many others that have addressed this problem of patronage and clientelism and that call for reform. Patronage

is not just a bad thing; it was a good thing as well: citizens and officers wanted a "transparent, merit-based, and accountable" state. It is important because it's a statement of who isn't, not only pointing out a problem but also what a better governance system should be like.

The most obvious reform message is that of meritocracy. The consistent weightage given by the respondents to recruitment, promotion, and placement decisions on the basis of competency and rules, over political loyalty, suggests that the emphasis was on merit-based selection. The respondents' preference for merit-based recruitment, promotion, and placement decisions, consistently over political loyalty, indicated that the focus was on competency-driven selection. This is a dream of bureaucracy to be predictable and unpartisan and to use public resources based on partisan relationships. In Sri Lanka, meritocracy is not only a governance solution to the governance issues, it is also an administrative principle. As can be seen from Figure 9, the attitudes of the respondents towards reform are strong when their education is higher (A/L and degree).

Another key demand is for transparency. The results showed that the citizens' dissatisfaction is not just in relation to inequality of distribution but also because they do not receive clear information about the process of decision-making. Enhancing the transparency of project selection, how funds are spent, and what welfare is measured by would lessen the uncertainty and make public institutions more 'legible' to the people who use them. Transparency is more than a technical solution; it's a way to rebuild confidence.

Also stressed is the need for institutional independence. Citizens and officers valued the fact that politics is an enemy of administration and that reforms should be made so as to protect administration from the influence of politics. Greater security for public officials, effective separation between political leadership and administrative action, and more effective oversight institutions are needed. Even with the best of intentions, reforms can be incorporated into existing patronage networks.

Table 12 shows officers' rankings of measures to address political patronage. Transparency initiatives (73 respondents ranked #1) and public participation mechanisms (44 respondents ranked #1) came in next, with merit-based recruitment coming in at #1 for 142 respondents. This means that internal administrative changes are more important than outside or technology-based changes.

Table 12: Measures to Reduce Political Patronage in Public Administration: Respondents' Ranking

Measure / Ranking	1	2	3	4	5
Merit-based recruitment	142	34	20	16	21
Transparency initiatives	73	63	53	29	11
Public participation mechanisms	44	40	36	35	59
Anti-corruption legislation	46	41	40	59	21
Technology-driven governance	40	28	38	41	59

Source: Compiled by the authors based on 2025 survey data

The demand structure includes the demand for electoral reform. Given that elections are more likely to be a source of clientelism, respondents called for changes in the incentives that lead political actors to engage in clientelism. Localized spending can be minimized in political terms by regulating campaign finance, disclosure requirements, and the closer monitoring of such spending. Reform, then, should take an issue with both the political environment in which public administration functions and with public administration itself.

Lastly, participatory governance needs are identified. Citizens are not only interested in a more equitable distribution of resources but also want to say what development priorities are and how services are provided. Participative budgeting, citizen hearings, social audits, and local accountability mechanisms can help to facilitate voice and participation. These tools are significant because they can help to shift citizens from being "clients" to "citizens" who can engage in the public decision-making process.

Table 12 also indicates that anti-corruption law and technology-based governance were given a more varied ranking, with a significant number of respondents giving them a lower ranking (4 and 5). This indicates that the importance of legislation and technology is recognized, but they are not seen as solutions that are immediate without implementation and institutional changes.

The reform demands of the chapter are general, utilitarian, and moral. They are symbolic of the shift from dependence to entitlement, from secretiveness to transparency, and from favoritism to fairness. It's not simply a policy agenda; it's a democratic expectation and one that will be likely to continue.

Discussion

The results should be viewed as the product of a political and administrative system in which patronage is becoming an integral part of the political contest and administration. Clientelism does not seem to be a sporadic aberration but is evident in who gets projects, welfare, and influence, and especially during election periods and in significant political sites. This reflects the main theme of this chapter: that inequality is not only geographically and poverty-based but also actively created by the political allocation and bureaucratic practice.

The results shed light on the political economy lens on distributive decisions in the presence of electoral incentives. The apparent patronage emphasis on infrastructure and welfare (51.9% of officers said infrastructure was the most affected, 45.8% said social welfare; Table 05) fits with the idea that politicians want to provide short-term, high-visibility goods that can be politically rewarded with loyalty and a sign of responsiveness. The effects of these projects are not only quantitative but can actually be seen in citizens' reports of seeing politically influenced projects in their community (Table 02).

The study suggests that the institutional dimension is not very clear-cut between formal rules and informal political influence. Patronage's influence on decision-making is not a problem on the margins, but one that is deeply entrenched in institutional design and incentives, and failure to enforce them (Figure 9) is reflected in government officials' awareness of its impact. The formal procedures once negotiated are not impartial public value allocation by the state anymore.

The implementation stage is of particular importance. Political interference is more evident at the planning-to-implementation of projects and services stage (Table 10: 50.3% saw political interference as a key mechanism in project implementation). But for many reforms in the budgeting or policy-making processes, they will have little impact if they do not reach the level of supervision of procurement processes, local administration, project monitoring, and implementation on the ground. If not, every word of a policy statement might be affected by the political will.

The implications for development are very strong. Patronage hurts rural communities (58.0% of officers) and low-income families (42.6%, Figure 8), and it worsens inequalities. The uneven distribution over time results in path dependency: some districts develop infrastructure, influence, and administrative capacity; others remain in low-quality service environments. This results in a favorable/unfavorable geographical distribution, which can last over the course of an election cycle and further perpetuate the geographical disparities.

A tension is apparent in the findings that is also discussed. Patronage is not a desired principle, but some respondents also consider clientelist networks as informal access networks that serve as a complement to the formal institutions. This is not a justification for patronage but does give a clue as to why patronage is so effective—people patronize when they are at risk of being left out. It is important that there is a reform that is careful not to shut down these informal channels while simultaneously creating institutions that are truly responsive, accessible, and fair.

As per table 07, 51.7% of the officers stated that the increased corruption is the consequence of patronage-based spending, while 48.6% pointed to the inefficiency, 33.3% to erosion of institutional trust and 31.4% to neglect of marginalized areas. These problems with governance are connected: corruption allows for inefficiency, which leads to loss of trust, which leads to more neglect of marginalized groups.

Finally, the chapter incorporates the perspectives of citizens and officers as evidence to back its argument. Both groups independently identify the same mechanisms, inequalities, and reform priorities, further bolstering the evidence. There is general agreement on the principles of merit, transparency, institutional autonomy, and participatory governance, which reflects the public awareness of the principles of reform. It is less a problem to recognize the problem and more a problem to turn that recognition into political and administrative activity.

Reform Agenda

The first point in the reform program is to dissociate political from administrative decision-making. Patronage is most dangerous when officials have to be flexible in hiring or deciding on projects or in providing services to appease the leaders. The first step is to strengthen institutional independence, including by ensuring that officers cannot be improperly interfered with in their work through merit-based appointments. Table 12 verifies the results of the previous question: Officers agree that merit-based recruitment is the most effective (142 officers ranked #1).

Second is transparency. Citizens' lack of transparency in allocation procedures was consistently reported (Table 03: 29.5% "no clear idea" for social services, and 25.9% for social welfare), highlighting the need for more transparency in government spending decisions, project selection criteria and welfare targeting. Opening data systems, participatory budgeting, and increasing audit systems would help to monitor and make it harder to manipulate allocation.

Third, electoral incentive reform. Patronage tends to grow during election seasons, so regulation of campaign funds, publicizing of campaign funds, and increased restrictions on distributing funds to constituencies are necessary. The fact that electoral reform is mentioned, but not ranked so high as merit-based recruitment, indicates that internal administrative reforms are perceived as more immediately effective than electoral reform, as illustrated in Table 12.

Fourth is needs-based planning. The study points out that rural areas and low-income populations are hardest hit (Figure 8) and that regional planning should be based on objective rather than partisan considerations, such as

poverty rates, infrastructure needs, and service deficiencies. This is especially important for those districts that have been under-invested in the recent past.

Citizen empowerment is number five. Social audits, citizen report cards, public hearings, and local oversight forums can involve citizens as active public watchdogs rather than passive receivers. Any reform will only be sustained if citizens can observe, probe, and participate in the allocation of public resources. Table 12 indicates that although public participation mechanisms are recognized, they are not viewed as a replacement for reforms but rather as a complement, as they are ranked lower than merit-based recruitment (44 ranked #1).

Short-term (0–12 months) actions under the action plan include public spending audits, open expenditure portals, merit-based recruitment safeguards, and piloting citizen report cards. Medium- to long-term actions (12 to 60 months) involve legal changes to give autonomy to the bureaucracy, regulation of campaign financing, performance-based budgeting, decentralization with accountability, and civic education initiatives.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that clientelism in Sri Lanka is a form of governance that has institutional, spatial, and ethical dimensions. The results reveal that both citizens and officers believe there is a high level of patronage, public spending is inefficient and inequitable, and that it negatively impacts the poorest and least well-off. They are not just observations but a picture of informal politics and its effect on development and inequality.

The quantitative evidence is quite remarkable: 62.1% of citizens say public expenditure is inefficient (Table 04); 54.8% say infrastructure allocation is unfair or very unfair (Table 03); 60.6% agree that it affects project prioritization (Table 08); 69.3% agree that it worsens regional economic disparities (Figure 9); 70.3% say loss of public trust is a governance challenge (Table 11). The results show that patronage is not a marginal phenomenon, and it is a part of the structure of governance in Sri Lanka.

But it is also important to look at the spatial dimensions, as district-level differences in observations of patronage projects (Table 06) and provincial-level differences in perceptions (Table 01) indicate that political geography affects development outcomes. This is particularly likely to be borne by low-income families (42.6%) and rural communities (58.0%; Figure 8). The key to any reform program is the vulnerable groups.

Yet at the same time, one of the most significant sources of hope is referenced: "But, at the same time, one of the most important sources of hope is referenced: People know what is wrong, and many know what should replace it. This recognition of merit, transparency, independence, and participation is not just for scholars and reformers; it is an experience of governance. Not only are these problems, but they also represent reform consensus; that merit-based recruitment is ranked most effective (Table 12), that losing trust is a challenge for 70.3% of officers (Table 11), and that 86.9% of citizens believe that there is a link between merit-based recruitment and trust.

It is not enough to engage in negative criticism; it is necessary to present a positive vision of the state: a meritocratic, transparent, autonomous, and participatory state. This reform program is moral, utilitarian, and general. It's a search for becoming more independent, transparent, and fair rather than favouritist. This is not only a policy agenda, it's a democratic expectation.

This chapter adds to the theme of social change in the volume and demonstrates that change begins with people who live with and give meaning to institutions. The real challenge is not merely identification of the problem but changing the recognition of the problem into political and administrative action that can increase institutional autonomy, improve

transparency, change electoral incentives, improve equitable development, and give citizens a chance to be active players in governance and not mere recipients of patronage.

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Chapter 20: Protecting the Vulnerable: A Policy Analysis of Cyberbullying in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is an increasingly prominent social problem in the digital era, affecting people all over the world, including in Sri Lanka. In this paper, cyberbullying is defined as behaviour involving the use of digital technologies to humiliate, socially exclude, abuse, threaten, or otherwise harm people, especially children and young people, in accordance with the European Commission's Action Plan against Cyberbullying (2026). In the Sri Lankan context, internet access, smartphone use, and social media platforms have expanded rapidly. Consequently, cyberbullying has increased significantly in recent years.Cyberbullying can affect people of all ages. However, some groups, including children, adolescents, women, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, are at higher risk and suffer disproportionate effects. This paper adopts a doctrinal legal research approach. It draws primarily on academic literature, legal instruments, policy documents, analytical studies, and media reports. Thus, this study aims to identify the groups that are most vulnerable to cyberbullying in Sri Lanka. It also critically analyses the adequacy of Sri Lanka's existing legal framework, examines the existing legal gaps in protecting vulnerable groups from online abuse, and provides recommendations to strengthen Sri Lanka's response to cyberbullying and enhance the protection of vulnerable groups.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying; Sri Lanka; Vulnerable Groups; Digital Safety; Online Harassment; Public Policy.*

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1. Introduction

Digital devices, the internet, and social media have rapidly transformed daily life in Sri Lanka, particularly among young people. Internet penetration rose from approximately 44 per cent of the population in 2021 to around 60 per cent by late 2025. The number of internet users now approaches fourteen million (DataReportal, 2025; Daily Mirror, 2026). UNICEF further reports that just over half of young people in Sri Lanka now access the internet. Sri Lanka has never before experienced digital expansion on this scale. However, the benefits should not be overlooked, especially during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when the internet made it possible for communities to stay connected and continue their education, work, and entertainment online. Nevertheless, such expansion generates both positive and negative outcomes. UNESCO defines cyberbullying as a global problem that affects about one in ten children and disproportionately impacts girls and young women in terms of online harassment. Further, UNESCO reports that only sixteen per cent of countries have adopted legislation to prevent and respond to bullying and cyberbullying through schools (UNESCO, 2024).

Internet-enabled devices and social media platforms have transformed how young people communicate, socialise, and access information in Sri Lanka. A UNICEF report finds that just over half of young people in Sri Lanka now access the internet, typically for the first time around age thirteen. This proportion has grown steadily over the past decade (UNICEF Sri Lanka, 2019). It has been repeatedly shown that while expanded connectivity has generated substantial educational and developmental benefits, it has also created new opportunities for online harassment, humiliation, and abuse.

Cyberbullying involves the repeated use of electronic communication to threaten, harass, demean, or exclude another person. It is not confined to any single country. Kiriakidis and Kavoura (2010) note that scholars continue to debate a universally accepted definition of cyberbullying. Nevertheless, both academic and practitioner literature recognise cyberbullying as a significant threat, particularly to children and young people. Research has consistently linked cyberbullying to depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation (Landstedt& Persson, 2014; Kiriakidis&Kavoura, 2010).

Building on Landstedt and Persson's (2014) findings, Sri Lanka's experience reflects this broader global pattern while presenting distinct social, cultural, and legal characteristics. Evidence suggests that between approximately four per cent and thirty-five per cent of young Sri Lankans have experienced cyberbullying or other forms of online harassment. These figures vary because of differences in methodology, sample populations, and definitions. The lower estimate comes from UNICEF's national study, Estimating the Prevalence and Drivers of Bullying including Cyberbullying in Sri Lanka, while the higher estimate is drawn from a 2022 Cyber Safety Committee survey, as reported by Egodage (2025). In other words, this variation reflects the measurement and not the underlying risk. In general, certain groupssuch as children, women and girls, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by online abuse, and in some cases face much more severe consequences. Sri Lanka's legal and institutional response to cyberbullying is also patchy. The Online Safety Act is now in place, but the first year of the law has been used mainly for political and media-related disputes rather than to protect vulnerable people from cyberbullying (Factum Perspective, 2025; Global Network Initiative, 2025).

In this paper, cyberbullying in Sri Lanka is examined from a policy and legal perspective. It

first puts cyberbullying at the heart of the international literature on definitions and then it characterizes the groups most at risk of cyberbullying in Sri Lanka and what the specific threats are that they may face. Next, in this paper, the legal system in Sri Lanka is critically examined and comparative experience is drawn from other countries to assess the gaps in the legal and policy landscape. Finally, it provides recommendations for policy improvement to safeguard vulnerable groups in society to a greater extent from cyberbullying in Sri Lanka.

2. Methodology

This research primarily adopts a doctrinal legal research approach, supplemented by a critical review of academic literature, policy documents, and media reports. Through doctrinal analysis, it examines the text, scope, and application of Sri Lanka's principal cyber-related laws, including the Computer Crimes Act No. 24 of 2007, the Penal Code, the Obscene Publications Ordinance, and the Online Safety Act No. 9 of 2024. This study also takes into account subsidiary regulations and the obligations of the institutions that deal with cyber-related crimes in Sri Lanka. Given the evolving nature of cyberbullying and the limited empirical research available in Sri Lanka, it also draws on media reports, civil society publications, and policy commentary to provide more contextually specific insights. This research does not develop new empirical data. The study, therefore, combines existing legal, policy, and scholarly sources to identify gaps in Sri Lanka's current framework and make recommendations for policy-based change.

3. Understanding Cyberbullying: Concepts and Global Context

3.1 Defining Cyberbullying

There is no single definition of cyberbullying that is accepted in the literature, and the literature generally recognises this fact (Kiriakidis&Kavoura, 2010; Chang, 2010; Angrove, 2015). However, early academics generally adapted Olweus's definition of bullying in schools to the online environment. In this approach, cyberbullying is the intentional harm caused through the use of electronic messages, images, or other digital material (Kiriakidis&Kavoura, 2010). While some scholars are against the repetition requirement, others believe that it is appropriate in digital environments. A single humiliating post, picture, or message can be shared, copied, or viewed repeatedly, causing continuous harm to the victim (Landstedt& Persson, 2014). In the context of this study, cyberbullying is defined in the European Commission's Action Plan against Cyberbullying (2026) as behaviour that uses digital technologies with the intention or effect of repeatedly or continuously humiliating, socially excluding, abusing, harassing, threatening, or otherwise harming individuals, especially children and young people (European Commission, 2026). In addition to providing a common definition, the European Commission's Action Plan against Cyberbullying promotes prevention and education, reporting and victim-support mechanisms, improved data collection, and better coordination between Member States. Therefore, this definition is especially relevant to Sri Lanka, as a strict repetition requirement may exclude conduct such as the non-consensual sharing of a single intimate image, which can nevertheless cause severe and long-lasting harm.

Another point of debate is the power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. However, anonymity and the nature of digital communication make it difficult to identify or establish this imbalance (Kiriakidis&Kavoura, 2010). In light of these debates, this research paper has adopted a functional, harm-based understanding of cyberbullying that reflects the

European Commission's definition. Cyberbullying is defined as the repeated and sustained use of digital technologies to humiliate, socially exclude, threaten, or otherwise harm another person.

3.2 Forms and Prevalence

Cyberbullying takes many forms. Perpetrators may send threatening or abusive messages, create fake profiles or derogatory websites, post or share photographs without consent, hijack online accounts, or manipulate victims into revealing private information that is subsequently shared with others (Kiriakidis&Kavoura, 2010). Recent work on online harassment in Sri Lanka has found similar patterns of abuse (ScienceDirect, 2025). Sexualised cyberbullying is one of the most harmful types of online abuse. It disproportionately impacts girls and young women through unwanted sexual messages, slut-shaming, threats of sexual violence, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (Angrove, 2015).

Prevalence estimates vary significantly from study to study because of differences in definitions, age groups, and methodologies (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010). Studies conducted in developed countries in the late 2000s found that one in ten or one in four teenagers had been cyberbullied, with prevalence rates as high as 50 per cent depending on how they defined cyberbullying (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Chang, 2010). Swedish research also finds that cyberbullying is now the most common type of bullying in teenagers and occurs in nearly one in five students (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). Nevertheless, according to UNESCO, only sixteen per cent of countries have passed legislation to prevent and respond to bullying and cyberbullying in schools (UNESCO, 2024).

A UNICEF study on cyberbullying in Sri Lanka reported that about four per cent of internet-using children had experienced cyberbullying. However, this figure is likely to be high in reality because many children do not recognise harassment on messaging platforms like WhatsApp as cyberbullying (UNICEF Sri Lanka, n.d.). A survey conducted in 2022 by Sri Lanka's Cyber Safety Committee reported that about thirty-five per cent of students had experienced some type of cyberbullying (Egodage, 2025). The Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT) has also reported that the majority of young internet users have experienced identity theft, account hacking, or misuse of their photographs, but most victims do not report what happened (Pulse, 2021). A large national study on non-sexual online harassment in Sri Lanka also found that less than twelve per cent of more than four thousand respondents had experienced non-sexual online harassment, with prevalence varying across school, university, vocational and workplace settings (ScienceDirect, 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that the wide variation in reported prevalence largely reflects differences in research methodology, study populations and definitions, rather than true differences in the underlying level of risk.

3.3 Psychological and Social Effects

Researchers have documented the psychological and social effects of cyberbullying in a variety of cultures. Victims often experience frustration, anger, sadness, hopelessness, and a lower degree of academic performance and school attendance (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010). A large Swedish study revealed that exposure to traditional bullying, cyberbullying, or both significantly increased depressive symptoms in boys and girls. All bullying types also increased psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, sleep disturbances, and lack of appetite (Landstedt & Persson, 2014). Depression and psychosomatic complaints among adolescents who had experienced both

traditional bullying and cyberbullying were significantly higher than among those who had been subjected to only one form. These results suggest that cyberbullying compounds, rather than simply replicates, the harm of traditional bullying (Landstedt& Persson, 2014).

The psychological impact is particularly severe when cyberbullying is sexualised and directed at girls and young women. Canadian studies have linked such abuse to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, academic difficulties, self-harm and, in some cases, suicide (Angrove, 2015). Similar patterns have also been observed in South Asia. A longitudinal cohort study of adolescent victims of cyberbullying in India indicated that children with cyberbullying victimisation were more than twice as likely to report depressive symptoms and about two and a half times more likely to report suicidal ideation than their non-victimised peers. Although Sri Lanka-specific longitudinal evidence is scarce, the available research suggests that the psychological consequences of cyberbullying are likely to be comparable to those documented elsewhere.

4. Vulnerable Groups in the Sri Lankan Context

Cyberbullying can affect anyone with internet access. However, its risks and consequences are not distributed equally. This section examines four groups that the literature and Sri Lankan policy discussions consistently identify as facing disproportionate exposure to, or disproportionate harm from, cyberbullying: children and adolescents, women and girls, the LGBTQ+ community, and persons with disabilities.

4.1 Children and Adolescents

Both international and Sri Lankan research consistently indicates that children and young people are the most vulnerable to cyberbullying. UNICEF Sri Lanka reports that young people usually first access the internet at around thirteen years of age and that increasing their participation in the internet is associated with greater exposure to online threats (UNICEF Sri Lanka, 2019). Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable because they may lack the digital literacy needed to identify and respond to online threats. In addition, they are still developing the emotional resilience needed to cope with public humiliation and online abuse (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Chang, 2010). Sri Lankan prevalence estimates vary from one study to another, but the evidence is consistent that most school-aged children experience some kind of online harassment. However, most victims do not report these incidents—meaning cyberbullying is still relatively underreported (Pulse, 2021).

4.2 Women and Girls

A substantial number of studies have shown that women and girls experience gender-specific cyberbullying that is often more severe than that experienced by males. Angrove (2015) also identifies forms of sexualised cyberbullying, such as slut-shaming (i.e. sharing of sexually intimate images and sexual harassment) and other forms of cyberbullying which are sexualised and often target young girls. These types of abuse have been associated with anxiety, depression, academic difficulties, low self-esteem, self-harm and suicide in some cases. Landstedt and Persson (2014) found that girls exposed to cyberbullying developed psychosomatic symptoms much more frequently in comparison to boys, which were likely to be worse as they usually have been subjected to sexualised online abuse. In Sri Lanka, conservative social and cultural norms may accentuate the reputational and social effects of sexualised cyberbullying in the lives of victims, which can be damaging, as in the case of family rejection, community stigma and social exclusion. An analysis of Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act also argues that the current legal framework does not adequately address the gender-specific nature of online abuse experienced by women and girls

(Oxford Human Rights Hub, 2025). However, empirical evidence on Sri Lanka is sparse.

4.3 The LGBTQ+ Community

There are distinct risks to LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka's online environment. The continued criminalisation of same-sex activities in the Penal Code makes online harassment particularly serious. In Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act (2024), identity verification requirements may expose LGBTQIA+ individuals to targeted harassment and involuntary disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Oxford Human Rights Hub, 2025). Based on a Westminster Foundation for Democracy study in 2022, LGBT people in Sri Lanka are discriminated against and harassed by the government (online and offline), especially on social media, because of their sexual orientation or gender identity according to a majority of Sri Lankans (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2022). If social stigma and legal vulnerability are reinforced, cyberbullying is likely to exacerbate existing harms, deter victims from taking recourse to help, and leave many without sufficient legal protection. Commentary on Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act also states that current legal frameworks do not adequately address the gender-specific nature of online abuse experienced by women and girls (Oxford Human Rights Hub, 2025). Nevertheless, there is limited empirical evidence on the issue in Sri Lanka.

4.4 Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities represent another group that faces heightened vulnerability to cyberbullying, although this issue has received limited attention because it has not yet been well studied in the Sri Lankan context. From Canada, there is a much higher risk of sexual violence and abuse for women with disabilities compared to the general population (Angrove, 2015). Data from other countries suggest that students with disabilities are almost twice as likely as other people to experience cyberbullying and are significantly more likely to have depression and suicidal ideation (Ruderman Family Foundation, as cited in CHC Online, n.d.). These findings are not specific to Sri Lanka, but they highlight the increased risk faced by people with disabilities in online spaces. Sri Lanka has not done much research on cyberbullying in people with disabilities. The lack of disaggregated national data represents a significant research and policy gap that should be addressed by future studies and national prevalence surveys.

5. Sri Lanka's Legal Framework Governing Cyberbullying

Sri Lanka does not have a single law that deals with cyberbullying. Instead, cyberbullying is treated through general cybercrime legislation, provisions of the Penal Code, the Obscene Publications Ordinance, and more recently, the Online Safety Act. The following sections outline this fragmented legal framework.

5.1 The Computer Crimes Act No. 24 of 2007

The Computer Crimes Act No. 24 of 2007 was Sri Lanka's first dedicated cybercrime legislation. It was passed to criminalise unauthorised access to computer systems, unauthorised modification of data, illegal interception and other computer-related crimes and to establish procedures for investigating such crimes (Digital Watch Observatory, n.d.; Sri Lanka Law, n.d.). The Act is intended to protect the confidentiality, integrity and security of computers and data, not to protect individuals from online harassment. Therefore, most of the cyberbullying activities such as sending abusive messages or posting embarrassing content or creating fake profiles to harass another person are generally not covered by the Act unless the conduct involves unauthorised access to, or interference with, computer systems or data (Wickramasinghe, 2024). The Act is still relevant in Sri Lanka's

cybercrime system but was not designed to combat interpersonal online abuse.

5.2 The Penal Code and the Obscene Publications Ordinance

In the absence of specific cyberbullying legislation, Sri Lankan authorities have traditionally relied on general provisions of the Penal Code concerning criminal intimidation, defamation and offences of abusive or threatening conduct. If the online abuse is sexually explicit, the Obscene Publications Ordinance might also be applied (Wickramasinghe, 2024; Sri Lanka Law, n.d.). Similar approaches were adopted in other countries before cyberbullying-specific legislation was even in place. For example, in Missouri, prosecutors used computer fraud legislation to pursue cyberbullying because existing harassment laws were too weak (Berkeley Technology Law Journal, 2009). As in these countries, reliance on legislation that was not specifically created to deal with online harassment presents significant evidentiary and interpretative difficulties and could lead to different legal outcomes.

5.3 The Online Safety Act No. 9 of 2024

The Online Safety Act No. 9 of 2024 is the most recent development in Sri Lanka in the regulation of online content. The Act establishes an Online Safety Commission with powers to address prohibited online statements including violence, false information and other kinds of harmful online communication (Digital Watch Observatory, n.d.; Parliament of Sri Lanka, 2024). It is promoted as a tool to protect women, children and other users from cyberbullying, defamation, and misinformation (Lanka Law, n.d.). The Act has been heavily criticized by academics and civil society organisations (Access Now, 2024; Article 19, 2024; Center for Sustained Dialogue, 2025). Almost fifty petitions challenging the Bill were filed before the Supreme Court, which found thirty provisions to be unconstitutional (Center for Sustained Dialogue, 2025). The Act has been criticized for being a broad and vague law that would disproportionately restrict freedom of expression, journalism, and legitimate public criticism and therefore not address cyberbullying. Critics have also argued that identity verification could create a significant risk for LGBTQIA+ people who are forced to report their identities (Oxford Human Rights Hub, 2025; Access Now, 2024). Early estimates of the Act have also been consistent with the arguments and the current situation. The publicly reported cases under the Act have mostly been political and media-based, and there is no clear evidence that this Act has been successful in preventing cyberbullying for women, children, or the oppressed (Global Network Initiative, 2025; Factum Perspective, 2025). Faced with the public's anger and outrage, the Government is looking to amend the legislation. It is not yet known how these amendments will address cyberbullying (Sri Lanka Brief, 2025).

5.4 Institutional Mechanisms

Sri Lanka's institutional approach to cyberbullying is shared by several agencies. Sri Lanka CERT conducts awareness programmes, publishes surveys on online safety, and coordinates technical responses to cyber incidents. The Cybercrime Division of the Criminal Investigation Department focuses on crimes under the Computer Crimes Act, while the National Child Protection Authority addresses online harms affecting children in line with wider child protection responsibilities. Sri Lanka has no dedicated institution to receive, coordinate, investigate, and respond to cyberbullying complaints. Sri Lanka also has no special national reporting system or an integrated victim-support system, unlike several comparative countries. Consequently, institutional responsibility remains fragmented, and the country's response to cyberbullying is limited.

6. Comparative Perspectives: Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

Comparative experience from Canada, the United States, and the European Union provides valuable lessons for strengthening Sri Lanka's legal and policy response to cyberbullying.

Canadian research has shown that education law, not criminal law alone, can be an effective tool for preventing cyberbullying, particularly sexualised cyberbullying. Angrove (2015) argues that education systems based on principles of equality respond more effectively than those based on punitive measures. Looking at Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia, provinces that have equality as a guiding principle in education law have adopted a more comprehensive approach in terms of preventing and addressing cyberbullying in schools as opposed to those where equality is a secondary consideration (Angrove, 2015). These findings suggest that Sri Lanka's Ministry of Education should be doing more to ensure digital literacy, equality, respect for online behaviour and cyberbullying prevention as part of its curriculum and not just through criminal law. The United States has seen the legal risks of a broad web of cyber-harassment legislation. Chang (2010) argues that broad statutory terms like "annoy," "harass," or "embarrass" have been used to defend cyberbullying laws in court as constitutional arguments against them in the absence of clear and free speech. In the Megan Meier case, the prosecution relied on a federal computer fraud law which did not address interpersonal online harassment. Courts found it hard to interpret that legislation in a way that criminalised the use of the Internet (Berkeley Technology Law Journal, 2009). These experiences are of particular relevance to Sri Lanka because of the broad language of the Online Safety Act and its potential impact on freedom of expression. Early implementation has also revealed that the Act has been applied in political and media-related matters and not to protect victims of cyberbullying (Global Network Initiative, 2025). More recently, the European Commission's Action Plan against Cyberbullying (2026) has adopted a much broader policy direction that combines cyberbullying as a common category of violence and also prevention, education, reporting mechanisms, victim support services and coordinated data collection and collaboration through public institutions and digital platforms. The integrated approach is one that acknowledges that cyberbullying cannot be stopped with the use of criminal law alone. It requires cooperation among government, schools, families, civil society, online platforms, and law-enforcement agencies. Overall, these comparative data suggest that criminal sanctions alone cannot effectively address cyberbullying. Sustainable responses require comprehensive measures to prevent cyberbullying, digital literacy education and prevention, reporting mechanisms, victim support services, and collective action by the relevant parties (Chang, 2010; Angrove, 2015; European Commission, 2026). These lessons in Sri Lanka provide the basis to better prepare Sri Lanka's legal and institutional response to cyberbullying.

7. Legal and Policy Gaps

There are several legal and policy gaps in this analysis that arise from the above analysis. First, Sri Lanka does not have a clear statutory definition of cyberbullying, which makes it distinguishable from cybercrime, obscenity and public order crimes. As a result, the courts and law enforcement agencies need to interpret new types of online harassment in different legal categories that were not designed for the interpersonal, repeated and often intimate nature of cyberbullying. Second, the Online Safety Act has not yet been able to shield vulnerable people from cyberbullying. Such public cases have mostly been political and media-related ones and do not concern women, children, LGBTQ+

persons or people with disabilities. So far, there has been a large gap between the Act's stated protective purpose and its application. Third, Sri Lankan law does not put sufficient protection in place for victims of different kinds of online abuse. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexualised harassment and the non-consensual sharing of private information. LGBTQ+ individuals can face outing, identity-based harassment and other exposure related to identity disclosure requirements. At the same time, those with disabilities have an increased risk of being exposed to violence online but their experiences are largely not considered in national research and policy. Furthermore, Sri Lanka does not have a comprehensive education-based response to cyberbullying. Schools do not have a clear statutory mandate, standardised reporting mechanisms, or dedicated resources to promote digital literacy, equality education, and cyberbullying prevention. This is preventing the education system from being proactive in tackling cyberbullying. Also, institutional responsibility is fragmented; Sri Lanka CERT, Cybercrime Division of the Criminal Investigation Department, National Child Protection Authority and Online Safety Commission are all relevant. However, no single institution has been given responsibility for receiving, coordinating, investigating, and responding to cyberbullying complaints. For victims, there is no single point of contact through which they can report abuse and obtain support. National prevalence data are also inconsistent. UNICEF, Sri Lanka CERT and other independent studies report very different findings in a variety of ways, with different definitions, samples and research methods. The lack of uniform and disaggregated national data makes evidence-based policymaking more difficult and makes it difficult to identify groups and platforms most vulnerable.

8. Policy Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes several measures to strengthen Sri Lanka's legal and policy response to cyberbullying. Sri Lanka must first establish a specific statutory provision for cyberbullying and online harassment, separate from the overall provisions of the Online Safety Act. Policymakers should build on the European Commission's Action Plan against Cyberbullying (2026) and adopt a harm-based policy approach to cyberbullying for prevention and education, reporting mechanisms, victim support services, data collection, and cooperation with other institutions to develop this legislation. The legislation must also acknowledge that the same online act of sharing (i.e., the non-consensual sharing of a picture) may continue to cause harm through repeated sharing and should not be excluded by a strict repetition requirement (Landstedt & Persson, 2014; European Commission, 2026). Second, any changes to the Online Safety Act, or any cyberbullying legislation, should include specific protections for vulnerable groups. These protections should protect LGBTQIA+ people who do not want to disclose their identity but need protection. The law should also recognise the non-consensual distribution of intimate images and other forms of gender-based online abuse as distinct offences, taking their psychological and social effects into account (Angrove, 2015). Third, Parliament should give the Ministry of Education a statutory mandate to incorporate digital literacy, online safety, cyberbullying prevention, and equality education into the national school curriculum, and teacher education programmes should be supported with funding, age-appropriate teaching materials, and school-based reporting systems (Angrove, 2015; Chang, 2010). Fourth, Sri Lanka should establish a national institutional framework to fight cyberbullying. This could be achieved by making the National Child Protection Authority more accountable, creating a specialist unit in the Cybercrime Division of the Criminal Investigation Department to serve the victims, or changing the structure of the Online

Safety Commission to be more concerned with victim protection, not political speech. In any case, victims should have a single, accessible reporting mechanism with referral and victim support services. Fifth, the Government should commission a standardised national survey on cyberbullying at regular intervals in collaboration with academic institutions, UNICEF, Sri Lanka CERT, and other relevant players. The survey should have a uniform definition of cyberbullying and collect data by age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity (if required and ethically collected), as well as educational setting and online platform. Such data would provide a solid basis of evidence for future policy development and better target prevention efforts. Finally, legal reform should be complemented by psychological, counselling, and victim-support services that are available to the public. Because cyberbullying, depression, psychosomatic illness, self-harm, and suicidal ideation are known to be linked (Landstedt & Persson, 2014; NCBI, n.d.), support services should be integrated into current school counselling systems, child protection services, and national helplines to offer victims timely and appropriate assistance.

9. Conclusion

Cyberbullying in Sri Lanka has become a major public policy problem as it combines the effects of rapid digital transformation with an evolving legal environment that has not yet adequately addressed the particular harms inherent in online interpersonal abuse. Although Sri Lanka has enacted cyber-related legislation in the form of the Computer Crimes Act No. 24 of 2007 and the Online Safety Act No. 9 of 2024, neither law is specifically aimed at tackling cyberbullying and so there are still significant gaps in the protection of victims. This paper has demonstrated that children and adolescents, women and girls, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and persons with disabilities are the most likely to experience cyberbullying and face more serious psychological, social, and legal threats compared to the general population. The study also shows that Sri Lanka's current legal and institutional framework is fragmented and has not yet been able to respond in a unified and victim-oriented manner. Publicly reported implementation of the Online Safety Act has not been for the protection of the most vulnerable individuals but rather political and media-based disputes and not cyberbullying. Drawing on the experiences of Canada, the United States, and the European Union, this paper argues that an effective response requires more than criminal punishment. Sri Lanka has to have a comprehensive policy package that has a clear legislative definition for cyberbullying and how to prevent it together with digital literacy and education, reporting, victim support services, and coordination of institutions and a national database to collect data. Such an approach would better protect vulnerable groups and respect fundamental rights like freedom of expression. As internet access and digital engagement continue to grow across Sri Lanka, cyberbullying will only be more of a legal and social issue in the future and therefore needs to be addressed through an evidence-based and rights-based approach that focuses on prevention, protection, and assistance and provides legal accountability.

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Chapter 21: A comparative study of divine intervention in *The Odyssey* (Greek literary tradition) and *The Mahavamsa* (Sinhala Buddhist tradition)

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Abstract

This study examines divine intervention in Homer's The Odyssey, a work of Greek literature, and in The Mahavamsa, a chronicle in the Sinhala Buddhist literary tradition. The primary objective of the research is to examine how the relationship among divine power, action, destiny, and moral responsibility is depicted in these two works from religious and philosophical perspectives. The research question is: How do the nature of divine intervention in these two works compare, and what are the philosophical backgrounds of the Greek and Buddhist concepts of God? The primary data sources for this research were The Odyssey and The Mahavamsa, translated into English by William Geiger. Secondary data sources included works on the concept of God in Greek and Buddhist traditions, as well as other works related to The Odyssey and The Mahavamsa. A qualitative research methodology was employed, and data collected from libraries and the internet were analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods. In this study, the divine influence on human existence is directly depicted in The Odyssey.In contrast, in The Mahavamsa, the divine influence is observed to operate on human Karma, meritorious energy, and moral existence. Thus, in the Greek tradition, human destiny is shaped by the interaction between divine will and human intelligence. In contrast, in the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, it is understood to result from moral Karma and individual actions. Accordingly, this research identified differences in philosophical and universal worldviews between Greek polytheism and Buddhist philosophy. It concluded that religious belief systems, literary narrative structures, the concept of human destiny, and human responsibilities are depicted differently across cultures.

Keywords: *Divine intervention, Greek literary tradition, The Mahavamsa, The Odyssey, Sinhala Buddhist literary tradition*

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Introduction

Epic literature is an important literary genre that is studied in the context of world literature. Epics have been written in various cultures around the world and have unique characteristics. A distinctive feature found in many epics is the relationship between divine intervention and human destiny. Across many literary traditions, the intervention of the gods directly impacts human existence by shaping events and determining outcomes. The nature of this intervention varies significantly across different religious, social, philosophical, and cultural frameworks. This research is a comparative study of divine intervention in The Iliad and The Odyssey, considered Greek classical epics, and the Mahavamsa, a historical chronicle written by Mahanama Thero, found in Sinhala literature. This study further examines the two literary traditions represented by these works. Accordingly, The Odyssey represents the Greek literary tradition, and The Mahavamsa represents the Sinhala Buddhist literary tradition. Accordingly, this study examines how the traditions depict the relationship between divine intervention and human destiny, the similarities between them, and their philosophical background.

Homer's The Odyssey, considered one of the foundational works of Western classical literature, primarily recounts Odysseus's long journey home after the Trojan War. The influence of the Greek gods is evident throughout this epic poem. Some gods help Odysseus succeed in his journey, while others hinder him for various personal reasons. While Athena, the daughter of Zeus, repeatedly helps Odysseus, Poseidon creates obstacles for him for his own reasons. Thus, the Greek gods become a factor in manipulating the disguised forces of nature and determining human existence. The following statement by Athena at the council of the gods reveals the close influence of the Greek gods on Odysseus's fate.

"Odysseus alone was prevented from returning to the home and wife he yearned for by that powerful goddess, the Nymph Calypso, who longed for him to marry her, and kept him in a vaulted cave. Not even when the rolling Seasons brought in the year which the Gods had chosen for his Homecoming to Ithaca was he clear of his troubles and safe among his friends. However, all the gods pitied him except Poseidon, who persuaded the heroic Odysseus with relentless malice till the day when he reached his own country." (Homer,2003, p.3)

In the Greek tradition, divine and human destiny are determined by the personal will of the gods; in contrast, the Mahavamsa, which represents the Sinhala Buddhist literary tradition, presents a different view. There, divine intervention and human destiny reflect a cosmic order. In ancient Sinhala literature, including the Mahavamsa, events in human history and activities are shaped by the principle of Karma taught in Buddhism. According to this worldview, a person's actions, whether good or bad, have moral consequences that determine that person's existence. The concept of Karma in Buddhism has been analysed in great depth in the Culakammavibhanga Sutta, Mahakammavibhanga Sutta, and the Dhammapada, among others. It is worth noting that human destiny is not entirely based on Karma, but is analysed in Buddhism as one of the principles that determine human existence. Accordingly, the focus is on how divine influence shapes human existence through Karma, as well as how ancient Sinhala literature has depicted it. Accordingly, although gods are depicted in literary studies, they operate within the framework of the law of Karma rather than controlling events through individual will. For example, the Mahavamsa states that King Dutugemunu's victory is attributed to the influence of his meritorious deeds.

"Albeit the world of God was within the sight, yet didst thou, renouncing heavenly bliss. Returning to this world, he did many works of merit in manifold ways.Moreover, the setting up of solesovereignty by thee did serve to bring glory to the doctrine. Oh, then who art thou in merit? Think on all those works of merit accomplished by thee even to this present

day; then will all be well with thee straightway." (Geiger, 1986, Chapter 32, verse 21,22)

By comparing these two literary traditions, this study can identify how religious worldviews shape literary representations of fate and human responsibility. Accordingly, epic poetry presents individual fate as the outcome of a negotiation between divine personalities and human agency. Similarly, in the literature of the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, fate is interpreted through the moral framework of Karma. Accordingly, the philosophical basis of divinity is central. Deities such as Athena derive from anthropomorphic Indo-European polytheism, in which the gods are characterised as human (Burkert, 1985). In Buddhism, the concept of God derives from Vedic polytheism, and divine influence is grounded in Karma, meritorious deeds, and morality, ultimately interpreted as impermanent gods lacking sovereignty (Collins, 1982).

Literature review

The ideas of divine intervention, fate, Karma, and human morality in Homer's The Odyssey and the Mahavamsa have been studied separately by various scholars on various occasions. Various theoretical approaches have also been presented in the field of comparative literature. However, studies that compare these two literary traditions within a single analytical framework and conduct an in-depth investigation of divine intervention, fate, and human agency are very limited. Furthermore, this study focuses on identifying the similarities in the philosophical approaches that influenced the determination of divine intervention and human fate in these literary traditions. Therefore, this literature review examines the ideas of relevant scholars and identifies the research gap.

Previous studies on the Greek tradition and Homer's The Odyssey

Gregory Nagy, a leading scholar who has advanced various views on the Homeric epic tradition, points out that Homer's epic poems, including The Odyssey, evolved as an extension of the Greek oral tradition, in which divine intervention, heroism, and the construction of fate were essential literary devices. According to him, the Olympian gods shape the heroism of Greek heroes and the occurrence of heroic deeds through their actions. Thus, their intervention strongly contributes to the epic's narrative meaning.

Also, Walter Burkert's idea of the Greek gods in his work Greek Religion (1985) offers a distinctive intervention in understanding divine intervention in the Greek literary tradition. According to him, the Greek God is an anthropomorphic force with human qualities, desires, jealousies, anger, and political ambitions. He further points out that the Greek gods directly intervene in human affairs according to their personal motivations without moral sovereignty. Accordingly, this idea provides important religious and philosophical significance for understanding divine intervention in The Odyssey.

Furthermore, parallel to Gregory Nagy's ideas, but analysing the narrative structure of Homer's epics, Seth L. Schein points out that the divine intervention depicted in the Greek epics is not simply a Greek mythological element, but a literary device used by the Greek writer to construct the heroism, fate, and social structure of the heroes of the epics.

Previous studies on the Sinhala Buddhist tradition and the Mahavamsa

Extensive research has examined the Mahavamsa as a historical chronicle, focusing on its archaeological, religious, and political significance. According to the English translation and commentary by Wilhelm Geiger, which synthesises various editions of the Mahavamsa, it can be considered not only a historical chronicle but also a religious narrative grounded in Theravada Buddhist philosophy. Further analysis reveals that kingship, merit, and religious values are central themes of this work.

Steven Collins' Selfless Persons (1999) discusses the karmic doctrine taught in Buddhism in the chapter 'The Cultural and Social Setting of Buddhist Thought.' There, he points out that the theory of Karma is

fundamental to understanding human existence in Buddhist philosophy. He analyses the Buddhist worldview, which, while accepting the existence of God, holds that God is subject to Karma and impermanence; therefore, God cannot independently determine human destiny. Collins' definition is important for understanding the divine influence and human destiny within the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, which is grounded in Buddhist philosophy.

Gananath Obeysekera (1930-2025) is a scholar who researched Sri Lankan Sinhala Buddhist culture and society from an anthropological perspective. Among his research articles, the great tradition and the little in the perspective in the Sinhalese Buddhism, published in The Journal of Asian Studies vol. xxii No.2 (Feb 1963), in which he analyses the concept of God in the Buddhist tradition, he points out that God is placed at a lower level than the Buddha and worshipped by the villagers, and that the villagers believe that God influences the good and bad of people based on the natural nature of human existence. He further points out that, overall, the gods in the Sinhala Buddhist tradition do not function as moral rulers but as cultural symbols that reinforce moral values in society. Gananath Obeysekera's analysis is an important approach to understanding divine existence and human destiny in Buddhism, especially within the Sinhala Buddhist tradition.

A Theoretical Approach to Comparative Literature

Since this study is primarily based on two literary works from two traditions, examining various scholarly views on comparative literature provides a theoretical basis for the research. Susan Bassnett, who is engaged in a comprehensive analysis of comparative literature, points out in her book Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction (1993) that.

"The simplest answer is that comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary, and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space." (Basnett, 1993, p. 3).

Accordingly, comparative literature provides interpretations as a dialogue between linguistic cultures and intellectual traditions. In her work, she further emphasises that a true comparison is not only about similarities but also about revealing the philosophical meaning of differences.

Comparative study is an important research methodology in the study of world literature. Commenting on world literature, David Damroch points out in his book What is World Literature that a literary work acquires new meaning when read outside its original cultural boundaries, and that this approach can comparatively examine ideas rooted in different civilisations, human existence, religion, destiny, and morality.

Research Gap

A review of the above scholarly studies shows that the divine intervention in The Odyssey and the Buddhist philosophical basis of Karma in The Mahavamsa are grounded in divine intervention, and that there has been extensive research in comparative literary theory. To a large extent, this study has developed independently of the Greek and Sinhala Buddhist literary traditions. However, there are very few studies that have analysed these two traditions within the same comparative framework and conducted an in-depth investigation of divine intervention, fate, Karma, human agency and moral responsibility. Therefore, this research examines Greek polytheism in the Sinhala Buddhist literary tradition and the Sinhala Buddhist tradition from a new perspective, drawing on The Odyssey and The Mahavamsa. Through this, this study hopes to make a new contribution to comparative literary religious studies and intercultural philosophical inquiry.

Research problem

Divine intervention becomes a central theme in most epic traditions in literature. However, the way divine intervention operates

in literature reflects deep religious and cultural backgrounds. In Greek literature, divine intervention shapes human existence through the gods' personal motivations and is represented by the gods as powerful images. Buddhist literature emphasises moral conduct, causality, and the law of Karma. Accordingly, the research problem raised in this study is: How do the nature of divine intervention in Homer's epic poem The Odyssey and in Sinhala Buddhist literature (Mahavamsa), and the philosophical background of the Greek concept of God, compare with the Buddhist concept of God?

Research object

This study primarily examines the distinct dynamics of two literary traditions and pursues several key objectives. Accordingly, the objectives are to examine how divine intervention is depicted in Homer's epic poem The Odyssey, which mainly describes the return of Odysseus; to study the influence of Athena and other gods on Odysseus' journey; to examine how karma and moral law shape human destiny in Sinhala Buddhist literature, such as the Mahavamsa; to conduct a comparative study of Greek god-mythological interventions and Buddhist karmic causality; and finally to demonstrate how religious worldviews and their philosophical foundations affect narrative structure and literary meaning.

Research Method and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative literary research methodology. The research focuses on the literary and philosophical interpretation of divine intervention, fate, Karma, and human responsibility in The Odyssey and The Mahavamsa; therefore, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study.

The main approach of this research is comparative literature. This approach enables a systematic comparison of two literary traditions that differ in language, culture, religious traditions, and historical backgrounds. Drawing on comparative literary theories by scholars such as Susan Bassnett (1993) and David Domrosch, the divine influence, human fate, moral responsibility, and religious thought in the Greek and Sinhala Buddhist literary traditions are comparatively examined. This study uses a hermeneutic approach. This approach interprets both The Odyssey and The Mahavamsa within the religious, philosophical, social and cultural context in which they were written. The Odyssey is read within the Greek polytheistic religious and epic traditions. At the same time, the Mahavamsa is analysedin terms of Theravada Buddhist philosophy, karma theory, moral causality, and Sinhala folk consciousness. Through this hermeneutic approach, it is possible to understand the similarities and differences between the two works in depth.

Primary and secondary data sources were used in data collection in this study. The primary data sources used were Book 1 (The Council of the Gods), Book 5 (Hermes and Calypso), Book 13 (Return to Ithaca), and Book 22 (The Destruction of the Sailors) of The Odyssey by Homer, translated by Richmond Lattimore (1999), as well as The Odyssey by Homer, translated by E.V. Rieu (2003), and Chapters 7-10 (The Tales of Victory and Dutugemunu) of the English translation by W. Gaiger (the original work written in the 5th-6th centuries AD). Secondary data sources included works and articles on the religious and philosophical background, focusing on the concept of gods in the East and the West.

Content

The Greek God Concept and the Odyssey Divine Intervention

This study will primarily focus on the divine intervention depicted in Homer's epic Odyssey, beginning with the origins of the Greek concept of the divine and its philosophical and religious background. When examining the Greek gods, various interpretations and myths emerge. Focusing on the philosophical background of the Greek concept of the gods, developed through Indo-European polytheism, Greek goddesses such as Athena trace their origins to Mycenaean polytheism (1600 – 1100 BC) and evolve into

arbitrary representatives of Homeric theology, as seen in Hesiod's Theogony (Burkert, .(1985

Western Civilisations by Edward Menall Burns, Robert E. Lerner, and Standish Meacham engages in a formal study of the origins and dynamics of the Greek concept of God. The Greeks never expected their religion to save them from sin or to grant them spiritual blessings. It was not a matter of devotion or faith as they understood religion. According to their religion, it was not a precept in any way. They were free to believe what they liked and to live their lives as they chose, without fear of God's wrath. They mainly identified with religion

.1To unearth the wonderful mysteries of the physical world and build a relationship with it for man

.2To recognise human nature and to succeed as a Greek warrior

.3Good luck, longevity, craftsmanship and high yield, etc., to meet the characteristics related to human existence. Further, the nature of the concept of God in the Greek tradition is analysed as follows.

"As is commonly known, the deities of the early Greek religion were merely human beings writ large. This was necessary if the Greeks were to feel at home in the world over which they ruled. Remote, omnipotent beings like the gods of most oriental religions would have inspired fear rather than a sense of security. What the Greeks wanted was not necessarily gods of great power, but deities who could be bargained with on equal terms. Consequently, gods were endowed with attributes similar to those of humans, including human bodies, weaknesses, and wants. The early Greeks imagined the great company of divinities as frequently quarrelling with one another, needing food and sleep, mingling freely with mortals, and occasionally even procreating children with mortal women.They differed from humans only in the fact that they subsisted on ambrosia and nectar, which made them immortal. They dwelt not in the sky or in the stars but on the summit of Mount Olympus, a peak in northern Greece with an altitude of about 10,000 feet."(Burns, Lerner, Meacham,1980, p. 111)

Accordingly, in the Greek concept of the Gods, there was no distance between the gods and humans. God and man were beings with similar characteristics. The Greek concept of the Gods was completely polytheistic, and no god was made superior or inferior to any other. Also, there was no dualistic concept of good and evil in the Greek tradition, as in Buddhism (the Buddha and Mara) or Christianity (God and Satan). Accordingly, any Greek god could do good deeds as well as bad deeds. Thus, it appears that the concept of God in the Greek tradition was not represented as a spiritual being. However, it can be recognised as one of the natures of humanity that developed with human existence. The ideas presented by Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher, regarding the Greek concept of the Gods help us understand the origin and nature of their existence. Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek religion and mythology argues that the Greek gods are not moral authorities, but rather aesthetic and life-affirming projections of human instincts, desires, and power. In his work The Birth of Tragedy, he emphasises:

"The Greek knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence...in order to endure them, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream. Birth of the Olympians." (Nietzsche,1923, pp.34-35)

This statement suggests that the Greek gods are not moral lawgivers but rather imaginary creations that make life bearable and give it meaning. They embody strength, beauty, conflict, and excess. Nietzsche emphasises that Greek religion does not impose moral guilt, a quality he associates with the Dionysian and Apollonian forces.

"The gods justified the life of man by living it themselves, the only satisfactory theodicy" (Nietzsche,1923, p.35)

Nietzsche's understanding of this idea is particularly relevant to the Odyssey, where the gods behave more like powerful men than moral judges. Thus, Nietzsche's approach can help identify how the Greek concept of the

gods is constructed. Here, the Greek concept of the gods is represented as embodying human instincts rather than moral ideals.

In the Odyssey, Homer's depiction of the Greek gods' intervention is a fundamental feature. In particular, divine intervention takes on a personal and anthropomorphic nature. The gods from Greek mythology who actively influence the events of Odysseus's journey to Ithaca are mentioned here. Among the Greek gods, Zeus, considered the king, presides over the council of the gods and decides Odysseus's fate. Athena, often considered a grey-eyed goddess who acts as Odysseus' protector, is among the main gods here. Poseidon, the God of the sea who holds a personal grudge and hinders Odysseus' journey, plays a special divine role in this epic. In addition to these gods, Hermes, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hephaistos, and Hera can be identified. All of these gods represent divine roles that act both for and against Odysseus.

The Greek gods are endowed with qualities that are closer to human existence, and the invisible power they possess is the main factor that separates them from humans. These gods have human emotions such as anger, loyalty, and jealousy. In the Odyssey, the gods sometimes support Odysseus on his journey, while at other times they become angry with him for various reasons and obstruct his journey. Odysseus is angry because Poseidon's son, Polyphemus, has blinded him, and he vents his anger by creating storms in his path.

"It is the Earth Encircler Poseidon who, ever relentless, nurses a grudge because of the Cyclops, whose eye he blinded" (Homer, 1999,p.34(

"Coming back from the Aithiopians, the strong Earthshaker saw him...Poseidon was angrier with him. He spoke, and pulled the clouds together...and staggered the sea, and let loose all the storm blasts" (Homer, 1999, pp.103-104(

Thus, the personal enmity between Poseidon, the God of the sea, and Odysseus is illustrated by the Greek concept of the gods as another individual entity, similar to human society.

The goddess Athena, who appears in the Odyssey, acts as a guiding figure, protecting Odysseus and supporting his son Telemachus. For example, Athena declares her intention to help Odysseus return home.

"I shall make my way to Ithaca, so that I may stir up his son...and put some confidence in him" (Homer, 1999,p.11(

Thus, when examined as a whole, it is possible to recognise how divine power directly operates in the human world. This reflects the basis of Greek metaphysics.

The Buddhist concept of God and the divine intervention of the Mahavamsa

The Buddhist concept of God, developed as a causal philosophy, evolved in a context completely different from Greek theism. In Buddhist philosophy, a causal law system based on Karma operates. This system becomes the ultimate truth that extends throughout the entire universe. According to the principle of Karma, every action has consequences that shape future events. Therefore, fate is determined not by divine will but by moral causality.

The concept of God in Buddhism developed from Vedic polytheism, which featured various gods. Some gods were superior to others in different functions, and gods ruled over different regions. These gods were superior to humans, and humans constantly worshipped them. However, above the gods was the Buddha, and Buddhism was preeminent. According to Buddhist philosophy, gods cannot directly influence human existence. Humans are influenced by their actions (Karma), and the gods' influence is based on that. In the Culakammavibhanga Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya, the Buddha points out that Karma is fundamental.

"Student Beings are Owners of their actions. Heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions. Bound to their actions are bound to their actions. Their refuge. It is an action that distinguishes between the inferior

and the superior" (Culakammavibhanga, Sutta Central. net)

Thus, Buddhism holds that individual actions, or Karma, determine human destiny. Gannath Obeysekera, who is further engaged in a study on this, points out that human destiny in Buddhism is based on Karma.

"Anthropologists who have studied South Asian Buddhist countries have emphasised the fact that events in a human's fortunes are explained by concepts derived from the Theravada theory of Karma, chiefly the idea of merit and demerit. According to which responsibility for Fortune lies not in our stars but in ourselves" (Obeysekera, Feb 1963,vol.xxii No.2,p.147)

Thus, the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, which represents the Theravada Buddhist tradition, emphasises that individual actions, or Karma, determine human destiny. According to Buddhist teachings, divine intervention is entirely different from that in the Greek tradition, and human actions determine the gods' influence.

Furthermore, in this Buddhist concept of God, it is argued that the gods do not intervene to punish people for bad personal behaviour but instead help those with good personal behaviour. The idea presented in this study regarding the structure of the Sinhala Buddhist concept of God is important for understanding it.

"The pantheon described here is neither a Theravada Buddhist nor a specifically animist one, but a Sinhalese Buddhist Pantheon. The Buddha, gods, demons and an array of lesser supernatural beings constitute a single pantheon which displays a wholly consistent structure. Moreover, the gods in the Sinhalese pantheon are not necessarily those mentioned in the Theravada Pali texts, but rather the deities, both local and foreign, who have been incorporated into the pantheon by various Mechanisms. (Obeysekera, Feb 1963,vol. xxii No.2, p.147)

When focusing on the concept of the divine in the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, although the concept of God has been shaped by various religions, especially the Indian concept of God, the Sinhala Buddhist concept of God has been localised around the essence of Buddhism. Accordingly, this inspiration can be seen, more or less, in Sinhala literature built on the Sinhala Buddhist tradition.

In historical narratives such as the Mahavamsa, rulers succeed or fail based on their moral behaviour and accumulation of skills. The following text describes Vijaya's arrival.

"Karma had brought him hither" (Geiger, 1992, p. 52)

Although Eastern culture has accepted that an omnipotent god who controls everything, from the polytheism that existed in the Vedic era to the monotheism that existed in the past, determines the existence of man, the concept of God in Buddhist philosophy is built by rejecting this omnipotent divine law. Buddhism teaches that gods can never directly influence an individual's life, and that divine influence occurs according to the individual's karmic strength. Gods help righteous people, but their Karma cannot be changed. Accordingly, the concept of God, grounded in this Buddhist philosophical foundation, is employed in Sinhala Buddhist literature. Accordingly, rather than divine men controlling events, the universe operates according to a karmic, causal, moral law.

"The fruit of deeds done in the past...ripens now" (Mahavamsa, 1992,p.89(

In the Mahavamsa, King Dutugemunu's achievements are not due to divine will but to his skill in building stupas. Accordingly, he receives the blessings of the gods. Thus, the gods are not seen as a force controlling man, but as helpers in Karma.

Comparative Analysis

Although both The Odyssey and The Mahavamsa examine the relationship between human life and divine power, their portrayals differ significantly given their respective religious, cultural, and philosophical backgrounds. The Odyssey represents the Greek polytheistic tradition, while The Mahavamsa represents the Sri Lankan Sinhala

literary tradition, rooted in Theravada Buddhist thought. Therefore, although both works present ideas about divine intervention, the nature and purpose of that intervention are fundamentally different.

In The Odyssey, the Olympian gods are portrayed as an active force that directly intervenes in human life. Athena protects and guides Odysseus, while Poseidon angrily delays his return. The hero's success, therefore, depends on his personal intelligence and courage, as well as on the favour of the gods. In this narrative, human effort and divine power work in tandem. By contrast, in the Mahavamsa, human fate is primarily determined by karma, merit, and moral actions. Although the gods' role is acknowledged, they are not above the law of karma and are depicted only as figures who uphold the dharma and support those who live moral lives. Thus, divine intervention in the Mahavamsa is presented as a force that upholds a moral universe. Another important difference between the two works concerns the concepts of kingship and leadership. In The Odyssey, legitimate kingship is determined by the gods' approval and the hero's personal abilities. In contrast, in the Mahavamsa, the legitimacy of the king is determined by the protection of the Buddha's teachings, dharma-based rule, and public-beneficial governance. Accordingly, heroism is prominent in the Greek tradition, while moral governance is prominent in the Buddhist tradition.

However, both works acknowledge that human life is not random and is guided by a higher law or force. In The Odyssey, that law is embodied in the actions of the Olympian gods, whereas in the Mahavamsa,it functions as a moral law grounded in Karma and Dharma. Therefore, this comparative analysis illustrates how different worldviews regarding divine power, human responsibility, and destiny are represented in the Greek and Sinhala Buddhist literary traditions and provides important insights for comparative literary and cross-cultural studies.

Philosophical Implications

This comparative study of The Odyssey and the Mahavamsa shows that although both address divine intervention and human destiny, their philosophical foundations are fundamentally different. The Greek polytheistic worldview, derived from Indo-European polytheism, contrasts with a moral framework grounded in Theravada Buddhist philosophy. This difference reveals distinct philosophical concepts of human destiny, free thought, and moral responsibility.

In The Odyssey, the gods are portrayed as active forces that intervene directly in human life. Events such as Athena's protection or Poseidon's opposition alter the course of Odysseus' journey. However, Homer does not present man as a character entirely subject to the gods' control. This human nature, as depicted in the Greek tradition, is further confirmed by the following analysis.

"They were humanists who worshipped the finite and the Natural rather than the otherworldly sublime. For this reason, Refused To invest their gods with awe-inspiring qualities or invent any Conception of Humans As depraved and Sinful Creatures. Finally, they were devoted to Liberty in an even more extreme form than most of their descendants in the Classical period were willing to accept" (Burns, Lerner, Meacham,1980, p.113)

Thus, Odysseus' intelligence, patience, and decision-making ability are also necessary for his success. Accordingly, in Greek philosophical thought, human effort and divine power appear to work in complementary ways.

In contrast, in the Mahavamsa, human fate is determined not by the will of the gods but by Karma and moral actions. Although the existence of gods is accepted, they are not above the law of Karma and are portrayed only as characters who support those living in accordance with the Dharma. A basic feature of Buddhist philosophy, which is based on causality, is the influence of divine concepts on human destiny. Therefore, the Mahavamsa emphasises that human responsibility and moral choices are the primary factors determining life outcomes.

This comparison also reveals a fundamental difference between divine justice and moral justice. In The Odyssey, justice is often implemented through the decisions and interventions of the gods. In contrast, in the Mahavamsa, justice is implemented as a natural consequence of the law of Karma. Buddhist philosophy holds that the universe is governed by moral law, showing that good deeds bring good results and bad deeds bring bad results. The two works also present two different worldviews about the relationship between humans and higher powers. In The Odyssey, the universe operates within a polytheistic model, and the gods' personal will, desires, and decisions directly affect human life.

In contrast, in the Mahavamsa, the universe is governed by a moral law grounded in Karma and Dharma. This divine power is not a force that overrides an individual's Karma, but a symbolic force that operates in accordance with a universal moral order. This difference is significant from a comparative literary perspective. Although both works acknowledge the meaning of human life, the philosophical basis for constructing that meaning differs. In the Greek tradition, human life is in constant dialogue with divine forces, whereas in the Buddhist tradition, human life is determined by one's own moral choices and Karma. Thus, although these two works represent different philosophical approaches to human existence, both traditions examine universal questions of human life, morality, and responsibility. This comparison offers a new comparative reading of the relationship between human beings, God, and the moral law in Western and Asian literary traditions, and it makes an important contribution to the fields of comparative literature, religious studies, and intercultural philosophy.

Analysis

The research conducted under the title of "A Comparative Study of Divine Intervention, Fate, Karma and Moral Causality in the Odyssey and Sinhala Buddhist Literary Tradition (Mahavamsa)" focuses on the philosophical, religious, and cultural background in which the concept of God is represented in the Greek tradition as well as in the Buddhist tradition. Accordingly, in Greek epic literature, divine intervention is portrayed as a direct and personal force rooted in polytheism. Similarly, the Olympian gods, including Athena, influence human destiny through emotional and political motivations. This contrasts with Buddhist philosophy, which holds an opposite attitude. Accordingly, in Sinhala Buddhist literature, karmic causality is emphasised more than divine control, and the gods are considered a group subject to moral law. Thus, literary representations of fate are closely related to religious philosophy, from Greek theism to Buddhist karmic retribution. Thus, comparative analysis reveals cultural and philosophical interpretations of human and divine relationships, and epics provide access to them.

Conclusion

This study compares the divine intervention in the Odyssey with the karmic causality of the Sinhala Buddhist literary tradition. The analysis shows that these two traditions present fundamentally different models of fate. In Greek epic, the gods directly intervene in human affairs and influence events through personal motivations. The narrative begins with a vision of the gods as indispensable. Human success depends, in part, on divine favour.

In contrast, Sinhala Buddhist literature emphasises the impersonal moral law of Karma. In this tradition, gods, reimagined from Vedic origins, serve as the source of moral causality. Accordingly, human destiny emerges from Karma, or action, rather than from divine intervention. Thus, comparing these traditions reveals a deep connection between religion and literary representation. Epic narratives do not simply tell a story. They reveal the philosophical and cosmological beliefs of the cultures they represent and provide insights for the study of world literature.

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Chapter 22: Broken Bodies And Toxic Landscapes: Reading Ecological Trauma And Slow Violence In Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

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Abstract

This paper explores the topic of bodily vulnerability and environmental resilience as represented in Animal's People (2007) by Indra Sinha, and the context of the novel in relation to the ecocriticism, posthuman theory, and environmental justice. Relocating the events after the gas tragedy in Bhopal in 1984 with the fictional city of Khaufpur, Sinha does not depict the industrial disaster as an eventuality but as a permanent ecological state that is marked on the harmed bodies and polluted landscapes. With questions centered on the disfigured body of the narrator, Animal, this paper holds the thesis that disability is an ecological archive, material traces of toxicity and corporate insensitivity, and structural disavowal. Based on the idea of slow violence by Rob Nixon, and material ecocritical approaches to trans-corporeality, the paper shows the permeation of environmental degradation through the flesh, memory, and identity to disrupt anthropocentric views of autonomy and normalcy. Meanwhile, the analysis examines the role of grotesque humour and testimonial narration in turning vulnerability into political action that opposes humanitarian pity and institutional denial. Foregrounding multispecies entanglement and relational ethics, the novel re-formulates the meaning of resilience as precarious survival in the toxic modernity rather than a recovery of disaster. The paper finally argues that the Animal's People is relevant to the current environmental humanities because it remakes the broken body as an eyewitness and resistance to ecological injustice.

Keywords: *Bodily vulnerability, environmental resilience, industrial disaster, slow violence, toxic modernity and environmental humanities.*

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Introduction

The industrial modernity has brought unprecedented technological superiority but it has also created the technologies of environmental destruction, the effects of which are not limited to the time of disaster. In contrast to immediate natural catastrophes, industrial accidents ecological crisis can be long-term and with time, they can become a permanent part of the landscape, body and even social systems. One of the most catastrophic examples of such toxic modernity is the Bhopal gas disaster in 1984. When a pesticide plant discharged gas containing methyl isocyanate, it exposed thousands of people to harmful contamination which caused immediate deaths, respiratory disorders, neurological and reproduction complications and long-term health effects on the generations (Dhara and Dhara 391). Tainted groundwater and incurable diseases that still impact the lives of survivors, decades after the incident, reveal that environmental disaster cannot be made to fit into the time slot of a single event. Instead, it is manifested as a sustained state of helplessness. Literature has played a critical role in rendering this slow and often invisible violence visible by transforming medical reports and legal abstractions into lived and embodied experiences.

Through the fictionalized city of Khaufpur, *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha rewrites the narrative of Bhopal disaster through the fictional city and foregrounds not only the disaster's spectacle but also, its long termed ecological and corporeal impacts. The novel takes a turn at the focus of the corporate rhetoric to embodied suffering through the narration of Animal, a young man whose spine is permanently bent as a result of toxic exposure. The distorted pace of Animal,when he steps on all fours, is a literal and metaphorical writing of industrial violence on the flesh (Sinha 1). Nevertheless, Sinha does not want to present disability as a personal tragedy. Rather, bodily deformity is placed in the context of wider social connections of corporate carelessness, state abandonment and environmental inequality in the novel. By doing so, it imaginatively redefines the damaged body as a place where an ecological destruction manifests itself in a material manner.

The novel has been examined by critiques in various ways. The postcolonial ecocritical readings perceive that the novel reveals the structural injustices that are inherent in global capitalism whereby oppressed groups become sacrifice zones to industrial gain (Parui 7). Likewise, Pradeepa describes the disaster as an industrial holocaust because Sinha criticizes developmental ideologies that favour economic development to the environment and human welfare (Pradeepa 480). It is through these readings that systemic injustice is effectively foreshadowed with the culpability of multinational corporations and weak regulatory systems. Through the disability studies, other scholars read the novel and argue that the corporeal

difference of Animal, destabilizes the normative constructions of humanity and challenges humanitarian practices of pity and rehabilitation (Chandrashekhar 27–29; Muñoz and Helena 147-149). In these discussions, disability comes out as not a lack of something but rather a critical position where social gap is revealed.

Materialecocritical approaches take this argument to the next level by viewing the novel as an expression of toxic embodiment where environmental pollution is integrated into the body and it consequently alters identity (Cao 70). Rather than treating the environment as passive background, material ecocriticism regards matter such as chemicals, toxins and bodies as narratively active (Iovino and Oppermann 4). In *Animal's People*, industrial chemicals are no longer some external pollutants rather they penetrate lungs, blood, and genetic memory. The twisted spine of Animal is, therefore, not only a metaphor, but also a material testament to the ecological interpenetration. This view fits with the rest of the environmental humanities' discussion concerning trans-corporeality, in which bodies

and environments are interpreted as porous and constitutive of each other.

However, as much as disability, postcolonial capitalism, and material embodiment have been studied by existing scholarship, there is still a need to help pull these strands together, using the prism of slow violence and political agency. According to Rob Nixon, slow violence refers to a form of harm that takes place over time and spreads throughout time and space and in many cases, it is invisible within the dominant media accounts(Nixon 2). Violence in Khaufpur does not stop with the initial gas leak, but continues in the form of chronic illnesses, polluted water and genetic defects. This temporally prolonged violence is stored in the body of Animal as a living archive. His deformity documents the accretion of the toxic exposure, which exposes the way, the environmental disaster is embedded in everyday life. Through advancement of this time aspect, Sinha undermines disaster discourses which are based on immediacy and closure over long term responsibility.

Atthe same time, the novel disrupts anthropocentric beliefs portraying humans, animals, microbes, and toxic substances as highly interconnected within mutual ecological structures. Posthuman theorists like Donna Haraway believes that living forms do not exist as independent human in itself (Batalla 124). His transformed embodiment questions the notions of enlightenment of upright posture, rational autonomy and bodily integrity as a measure of personhood. Humanity cannot be spared of contamination in the toxic environment of Khaufpur. The border between the organism and nature collapses showing an exposure to a posthumanistic state of vulnerability and interdependence.

Notably, Sinha does not make the vulnerability look like passive victimhood. Animal reasserted his narrative control in his maimed body through grotesque humour and irreverent narrative, as well as by addressing a foreign listener directly. His rejection of sentimental pity is an anti-humanitarian voyeurism and anti-institutional narrative that attempts to downgrade corporate accountability. The vulnerability is then politically generative. Khaufpur does not show environmental resilience in the form of restoration or recovery, but in the form of precarious survival in the polluted spaces. The society does not exist due to the state but through the memory, solidarity, and narration. The idea of resilience is redefined as connected endurance as opposed to victorious conquering.

The paper contends that in *Animal's People*, bodily deformity serves as an ecological archive, that materializes slow violence and disrupts anthropocentric modernity. Through the concepts of ecocriticism, posthumanism and environmental justice, the novel redefines the damaged body as the witness and site of resistance. Sinha proves that the ecological disaster is not external to the human life but it forms identity, agency and social membership. The text challenges the readers to deal with the close materiality of toxic modernity and to rethink about the ethical responsibility within multispecies entanglements through the figure of Animal. By foregrounding vulnerable bodies as sites of ecological witnesses and political actions, *Animal's People* contributes to the current discussions in environmental humanities and renders resilience as a prolonged survival within the networks of environmental injustice.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

1.Bodily Deformity as Ecological Vulnerability

The most significant act of *Animal's People* is that the issue of bodily deformity is shown as the material writing of ecological disaster. Animal, the narrator, the permanently twisted spine owing to the toxic exposure, is the representation of the longlasting afterlife of the industrial violence. His inability to stand upright is not given as a birth defect or family tragedy; on the contrary, it is spelt out clearly at least in connection with the leak of chemicals that was a disaster in Khaufpur. Animal talks of his back being a question mark (Sinha 15), which is not

only physically deformed but also epistemically barbaric. Industrial modernity leaves some scars on the body. This corporeal transformation enables Indra Sinha to break down the distinction between environment and embodiment, and prove that ecological harm is not external to human existence but materially embedded within it.

Animalkeeps on repeating;"I was a human once"(Sinha 1). This statement is not ironic at al, this is an indicator of the destabilization of normative human-kind. The straight back has been used as a historical representation of rational independence and evolutionary excellence. By compelling his protagonist to crawl, Sinha reveals how weak these anthropocentric hierarchies can be. The distorted spine does not represent fallenness, but the chemical aftermath. As Parui observes, Animal's existence becomes a signifier of massive disaster and corporate apathy (Parui 11). Deformity thus becomes an example of structural vulnerability as it manifests itself in the ecological domain and produced structurally and politically.

The body-contamination relationship that is explained by the concept of toxic embodiment, is expressed by S. Cao. Cao argues that the ruined bodies in the novel are a result of trans-corporeal entanglement of the human flesh and corrupted spaces (Cao 70). It is not just the spine of Animal that is made up of toxicity. The gas finds its way into the lungs and it spreads into bloodstreams which affects the skeletal growth. The destruction of the environment therefore, infiltrates the biologicalsystems, challenging the illusion of bodily autonomy. The body serves as a permeable point of encounter between industrial chemicals and organic tissues.

Thisreading is further supported by material ecocriticism. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann posit that matter is narratively active and has the potential to create meaning by interacting with each other (Iovino and Oppermann 4). In the novel, the toxic gas is a working element and not a background element. It changes the reproductive systems, causes blindness, develops respiratory diseases and affects spines. The body of Animal is the closest document of this agency. His deformity is unquestionable, unlike in the case of corporate documents where the author attempts to eliminate accountability. The disaster lives in the flesh.

Notably, Sinha does not romanticize this physical injury. Animal does not put himself forward as a subject of pity. He derides the stare of strangers and does not want to be sympathetic to mankind. H. Style Munoz points out that the grotesque body in the novel interferes with the spectatorship and does not allow readers to absorb suffering as aesthetic spectacle (Muñoz and Helena 148–149). The quadrupedal movement of Animal leaves the reader in a state of discomfort forcing him or her to face industrial violence at the level of flesh. His deformity cannot be incorporated into normative humanity and this is where the assumptions of ableism come in and bodily integrity is equated with moral value.

Furthermore,physical vulnerability in Khaufpur is grouped rather than individual. The situation of Animal is reflected on other residents who have chronic respiratory disorders, infertility, and visual impairment. Shwetha Chandrashekhar conceptualises this situation as a debilitating condition, which stresses the fact that the disability in the novel is not a specific traumatic experience, but a structural condition developed under the influence of toxic exposure and systemic neglect (Chandrashekhar 29–31). Debilitation points to the ways in which environmental injustice carries on in the form of poor healthcare, legal stalling and bureaucratic apathy. Vulnerability is thus socially constructed. Exposure to the initial gas leak is a continuous state of exposure of the body even after the disaster occurred.

Thiscontinuity contradicts developmental accounts that consider the disaster as a momentary discontinuity, which is succeeded by restoration. Animal's spine does not heal. It is in a permanent curve, bringing the past to the present. Biological continuity is thus ecological catastrophe. The tragedy dwells in bodies.

Pradeepa calls the catastrophe an industrial holocaust because it has a lasting and irreversible effect on human and environmental systems(Pradeepa 481–482). The deformity of Animal is the embodiment of this irreversibility. History is embedded in the body in a manner that it cannot be swept away by legal settlements. Simultaneously, the state of vulnerability does not mean passivity. The mutilated body of Animal forms the basis of narration power. He turns corporeal weakness to epistemic strength by narrating his story in recorded tapes. His stance or the proximity to the ground, gives him a unique viewpoint about contamination and injustice. Instead of giving him a muted voice, deformity gives him one. The body reshaped by industrial negligence becomes a vehicle of testimony and accusation.

Animal in *Animal's People* redefines bodily deformity as an ecological script. That crooked backbone is not figurative but physical residue. It records unhealthy exposure, corporate immunity and structural negligence. By writing disaster onto the body, Sinha makes it clear that environmental vulnerability is personal, embodied, and long-term. The destructed body presents both witness and resistance within toxic modernity, making vulnerability a crucial site of intersection between ecology, politics and survival.

2.Environmental Resilience Within Toxic Modernity

Although the vulnerability of the body is shown in *Animal's People* as an ecological inscription, resilience under toxic modernity is also redefined.Thenovel does not involve resilience in the form of recovery, healing, or the restoration of normalcy. Rather, resilience becomes precarious survival in contamination. In Khaufpur, it is not a victory over a disaster but a bargain in every day of life with the polluted environment. By doing so, Indra Sinha is confronting dominant developmental discourses which reduce resilience to infrastructural reconstruction or economic compensation.

Khaufpur has high chemical contamination even after the leakage of the gas. Contaminated water keeps on circulating, the diseases linger between generations and legal claims are still unfastened. According to Rob Nixon, environmental degradation is a form of slow violence, which is slow, scattered and normalized among marginalized societies (Nixon 2). The disaster in the novel is not limited to a specific moment in history, but it is embedded into the life. Children are born in contamination and the outcomes of industrial negligence are passed on to them. Resilience thus cannot imply going back to a pristine past. It has to be perceived as survival under structurally maintained vulnerability.

The story of Animal is an example of such endurance. Although he has a twisted spine and is in constant pain, he does not want to keep it to himself. He voices down his tale on tapes and speaks to a listener outside the world, whom he refers to as Eyes. This act of storytelling becomes a form of ecological resilience. Animal finds resistance while narrating his experience. The novel places testimony as a political claim to corporate impunity. The continuity of narrative becomes an anti-institutional push. In this regard, memory serves as survival.

Moreimportantly, the resiliency of Khaufpur is not an individual phenomenon, but a collective one. The society assembles, demonstrates and holds them responsible. Residents pursue justice even in cases of exhaustion and sickness. The concept of debilitation proposed by Shwetha Chandrashekhar can be used to explain this condition. Debilitation refers to continuous structural damage, but not an event (Chandrashekhar 30–31). But inside this condition of being crippled, the society lives on. The fact that survival does not eradicate vulnerability does not imply that they do not coexist. This coexistence critiques neoliberal discourses that conceive resilience as the self-reliant adaptability which is unrelated to structural change.

Theinstitutional forms of resilience that favour legal settlements instead of ecological

restoration are also criticized in the novel. Corporate compensation schemes are trying to smother the story of disaster through settlements. Nevertheless, according to the analysis of environmental law, as R. Abinaya claims in her article, the legal standards fail to resolve the issue of long-term contamination and physical harm. Bureaucracy is a procrastination of suffering instead of its solving (Vinayakaselvi and Abinaya 2304–05). It is therefore,through communal solidarity and continuity of the stories that resilience is created and not by the intervention of state.

The humour of Animal is a major part of this reframing. His jokes and mocking voice do not allow the story to break down into despair. Humour turns into a survival strategy that embraces vulnerability and converts it into expressive power. As H. Style Munoz notices, the grotesque voice breaks the humanitarian pity and subjugates passive victimhood (Muñoz and Helena 148–149). Animal does not allow himself to be limited to the role of a person striving to be pitied. He laughs at his own deformity and mocks those who scrutinize him. This type of resistance showspsychological strength. It claims agency in bondage.

Notably,*Animal's People* does not reject agony in its portrayal of environmental resilience. The novel is still responsive to chronic pain, infertility, blindness, and death. The invincible magnitude of the damage is highlighted when Pradeepa describes a disaster as anindustrial holocaust (Pradeepa 481). Yet, Sinha refuses fatalism. The determination that the community displays despite contamination, becomes a silent form of resistance. Survival is even a political matter. In addition, resilience in the novel is relational. Memories, bodies and environments are still interrelated. According to material ecocriticism, matter gets involved into narrative processes (Iovino and Oppermann 4). The contaminated environment influences everyday life, use of water and physical experiences. Thus, resilience is the process of adjusting to the changed ecological conditions without accepting injustice as normal. Normalization of toxicity is not possible because the community does not want to forget the disaster.

The novel redefines the concept of resilience as staying alive in polluted systems, instead of purification, as shown in Khaufpur. Vulnerability is not eliminated, but it forms the basis of survival. The further narration of Animal, the collective protests of the community and the continuation of memory, all of these come up and form the ecological resilience. Defining resilience as precarious survival and resistance, Sinha undermines the dominant rehabilitation discourses and reveals themoral imperatives of survival in the world of toxic modernity.

3.Vulnerable Bodies as Sites of Political Agency

Although *Animal's People* foregrounds the ecological vulnerability of the body and its ecological resilience, it eventually turns to a more radical assertion namely : the harmed body turns into the site of political agency. Powerlessness in Khaufpur does not lead to silence or passivity. As an alternative, it produces witness, opposition and moral confrontation. Indra Sinha re-forms disability as deficit position through the narrative voice of Animal into a critical standpoint.

This transformation revolves around the refusal of pity by Animal. He constantly ridicules foreigners who seek to portray him as one who is to be pitied. Defied with the humanitarian speech, he replies with irreverence, sarcasm, exaggeration. He identifies himself as an animal and this term upsets a very category he is marginalized under (Sinha 1). Instead of wanting to be reintegrated into normative humanity, he reveals the vulnerability of human/nonhuman boundary. Animal, as Oihana Jimenez Batalla claims, is in a liminal space that breaks the hierarchies of species and exposes the politicization of the construction of personhood (Batalla 124). His corporeal difference serves as a position from where the hegemonic moral structures are questioned.

Thisresistance works according to the narrative structure of the recorded tapes. Animal narrates his story in his own words and he is able to deal with an outside audience whom he refers to as Eyes. Agency is the very process of narration. He does not speak on behalf of journalists or corporations and state representatives, but directly. Therefore,the novel puts testimony as a counter-discourse to corporate impunity. The tapes of Animal play the role of alternative archives where the experiences are preserved that the institutional narratives try to remove. The weak body becomes not only a proof of injustice but also a medium of accusation. Notably, ecological vulnerability cannot be separated from this political agency. Animal's twisted spine causes him to be viewed as less than human but at the same time, this aspect is what makes him authoritative to be able to narrate the calamity. His body represents contamination and thus, his testimony is epistemic. Toxic embodiment creates new ways of perception, which are based on material entanglement. As S. Cao argues :Animal is close to the ground, both literally and metaphorically, which sets him in the polluted environment literally and metaphorically in ways that upright and normative bodies do not. His transformed embodiment generates the understanding of industrial violence.(Cao 70).

Inaddition, exposure is transformed into political power. The people of Khaufpur hold demonstrations, claim indemnity and clash with the organs of law. Despite their illnesses and poverty, they do notdisappear. The notion of debilitation developed by Shwetha Chandrashekhar explains this situation: structural injury exists and within that existence comes relational solidarity (Chandrashekhar46–47). The collective vulnerability helps to develop collective resistance in the community. Political agency thus, is not something that comes with bodily damage but it occurs through it.

Theissue of humanitarian structures commodifying suffering is also criticized in the novel. Outside observers have a tendency to shape the inhabitants of Khaufpur as helpless people who need to be taken care of. However, Animal resists this framing. The grotesque voice, as H. Style Munoz observes actually disrupts humanitarian spectatorship and denies the reader the opportunity to consume pain as spectacle (Muñoz and Helena 148–149). The rude humour and tone of Animal, disrupts cozy sympathy. He disavows moral superiority of the audience and demands recognition and not charity. By doing so, he regains the narrative agency over his injured body.

This reclaiming contradicts the institutional discourses that pursue closure by legal settlements. According to Abinaya, the environmental law in the novel continues to fail, in regard to long-term bodily damage, on several occasions (Vinayakaselvi and Abinaya 2303–04). Corporate compensation tries to give ecological trauma a financial value, hence nullifying political urgency. Animal's narration does not allow such a resolution. By preserving the disaster through active memory rather than allowing it to become a closed chapter of history, he resists erasure. His body is still a living testimony of unaddressed injustice.

More importantly, the politics of vulnerability created does not obliterate pain. Animal continues to experience humiliation and is excluded. But these experiences do not put him to silence. They instead render his criticism sharper. Since the description of the disaster as an industrial holocaust by Pradeepa is reminiscent of the destruction being as large as it was, the extent of it warrants the ethical challenge (Pradeepa 482). Animal gives him that fight. His broken body cannot normalize toxicity and demands responsibility.

Thenarrative authority exercised by Animal reveals that vulnerability may be used as political resource. The contorted spine, which was a sign of marginalization, forms the basis of resistant subjectivity. Through the transformation of ecological harm into testament, Sinha brings out that harmed bodies do not only bear disaster, but speak it. Vulnerability therefore becomes a site where ecological injustice is revealed, criticized and

recalled. Through reclaiming his body as a narrative instrument, he begins to define the new connection between political power and suffering, claiming his position as an agent of toxic modernity.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the reconceptualization of environmental disaster in *Animal's People* through the intertwined structure of bodily vulnerability, resilience and political agency. Reading the damaged body as an ecological inscription, the analysis has shown that the concept of disability in the novel is not a personal tragedy but the physical legacy of the industrial modernity. Curved spine of Animal serves as a biological record of poisonous exposures and it shows the infiltration of environmental contamination into the flesh and the reconstitution of identity. At Khaufpur, the catastrophe does not lie in the contaminated soil or the factories that are no longer in use but rather tragedy exists in the bones, in the posture, in the sickness and in the sufferings that have been passed through generations. The degradation of the environment therefore, does not exist as a separate state but as a part of human embodiment itself.

The novel also demonstrates the fact that vulnerability is structurally created and maintained. The respiratory diseases, deformities and sexual injuries are presented as systemic effects of corporate irresponsibility and state desertion instead of random consequences. By highlighting the long-term nature of contamination, the narrative challenges developmental models of disaster as a onetime disruption and recovery. Rather, it introduces debilitation as a long-term condition which is determined by the toxic temporality. Court cases and dying media coverage do not end the disaster; the damage to the environment remains physically in bodies and societies. The novel places the reader in a position to face environmental injustice in the form of temporal and embodied experience.Simultaneously,vulnerability in *Animal's People* does not mean passivity. The concept of resilience is not exemplified as healing or restoration to purity, but rather as tenuous survival in unhealthy modernity. Khaufpurians live together and resilience is redefined as a process of relational persistence rather than individual triumph. The irreverent narrative voice of Animal creates corporeal harm to testimonial power. He reinvigorates his power to narrate his story through recorded speech and counters bureaucratic efforts to make suffering bureaucratic or remove it. His physical variation, which was originally a sign of marginalization, turns into the location of epistemic power and reveals corporate impunity and state negligence.Thedestroyed body therefore becomes a political site. Deformity can act both as a testimony of ecological violence and as a resistance device. The novel demands dignity based on self-articulation and not through pity by disrupting humanitarian structures of commodification of suffering. Thus, vulnerability is repositioned as a condition of ethical pervasiveness. It allows us to add to the modern ecological humanities. The environmental decline is not an abstract concept but a lived, corporeal experience of industrial disaster. By focusing on the permeability between the environment and the human body, the novel challenges the anthropocentric premises of bodily autonomy. Toxicity alters the identity and ecological ethics cannot be detached from social justice. By conceptualizing resilience as a moralized struggle to survive in the polluted systems, Sinha shows how literature could bring into focus the hidden violence of a slow environmental destruction associated with industrial modernity. In such reconfiguration, vulnerability is no longer silent but a testimony that demands recognition of ecological injustice.

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Chapter 23: Namghar as a Civil Society Institution in Assam

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Abstract

Traditionally a society is divided into three distinct sectors namely; government, market and the civil society. In this paper we would be studying about third sector of the society i.e., the Civil Society which not a single institution but an umbrella network of multiple nonprofit institutions that is acting as a bridge between the individual and the state machineries. It involves various non profit institutes like NGOs; Community-based groups; Labor and Trade Unions; faith-based organizations, social movements and so on. One such faith-based organization in Assam was established approximately 600 years back by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva; a saint-scholar, poet, dancer, actor, musician, playwright and socio-religious reformer of Bhakti movement- *Namghar(নামঘৰ)*. It's a sacred place or a prayer hall; where devotees from different castes and creeds gathers and are followers of *Eksaran Naam Dharma.* Sankardeva was the pioneer of the concept of '*Eksaran Naam Dharma*'; who believes there is one god and rejects the complex Vedic rituals, caste distinctions and idol worshipping. This paper examines how Namghar is not just a religious institution but evolves as a civil society institution among the people of Assam with promotion of social cohesion, collective identity and local governance. With qualitative approaches the study explores how it's acting as a community-based platform for people's participation, decision-making, conflict resolution and social regulation. The paper is centralized with grassroots democratic practices and community solidarity among the people of Assam. The study concludes by pointing out Namghar as a living institution of civil society in Assam that acts as a bridge between tradition and modernity alongside sustaining community participation and collective values.

Keywords: Namghar, Civil society, Religion, People participation, Local governance

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Introduction

Namghar is a distinctive place of Assam's socio-political life that not only functions as a place for worshipping but a community institute which sustains collective actions, public discussion and local social order. In the villages of Assam, it has served as a shared space where people gather with different socio-economic background, in turn making it more relevant for the study of civil society rather than only as a religious place. This paper argues how Namghar need to be taken as a tool of civil society institution in Assam because of its historical encouragement of public participation, consensus building, moral regulation and community cooperation. The recent studies on Namghar functioning in contemporary times indicate a strong correlation between the community governance and traditions of the society.

The historical traces of Namghar are closely tied with the Neo-Vaishnaism movement that was influenced by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva which helped in reshaping the Assamese society by promoting the egalitarian values and collective devotion. With due course of time this institution expanded beyond religious practicing to a social forum where ordinary people gathers to discuss-debate on common concerns, resolve disputes and organize community activities. It compels generations to believe Namghar not merely as religious forum rather a living institution that adapt the changing social realities. In the contemporary times the relevance of Namghar is still seen as an institute that is promoting social cohesion, local meditation and public engagement in the Assamese society. It remains to be a place where community norms are protected and discussions on common concerns still taking place in participatory manners. At the sametimes, it also facing pressures from the factors like politicization, modernization and changing patterns of youth involvement which is making the present day study more significant. The paper even examines the bridge between tradition and modern civic life that continues seeking a meaningful expression of Assamese civil society by emphasis more on identity formation, local governance and community engagement.

Conceptual Framework

The paper is centralized to the concept of civil society in Assam through Namghar as a traditional yet living institution in many villages of the region. The paper explores the role of Namghar as a civil society institution in Assam by connecting concepts like voluntary association, mass involvement, self governance and informal social regulation. Civil Society is regarded to be the third sector of the society which doesn't comprises a single institute but an umbrella network of multiple nonprofit institutions that acts as a linkage among the individual and the state operators. It's basically a forum where people organize themselves to pursue shared interests, regulate social life and create public spaces for the discussion and cooperation among the people of the region as well as with the state. And such features are historically brought by Namghar. It's an institute where the village people gather under a common forum and encourages public engagement, collective responsibility and social coordination. It also influenced by the idea of traditional institutions whose social structures retain legitimacy over time as they are rooted in shared values and everyday practices. Namghar is not just an imposed administrative body but evolved through the community life, Neo-Vaishnaism and by the influence of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva embedded in Assamese social organization. It reinforces the traditional institutions which remain politically relevant in modern settings too by serving the collective needs of the society.

The theoretical understanding Namghar from the existing literature is not explicitly engaging with the concepts of civil society theorists but consistently illustrating the major features of civil society which is strengthening the core analysis of the paper. The Civil society theory helps to explain why Namghar is significant as a voluntary and community based institute; lets through understanding of few theorist like the Tocqueville's theory is related with local association, Putnam's theory of social capital,

Gramsci who talks about cultural leadership in civil society and the Habermas' idea of public sphere all are explicitly depicting the natures of Namghar as a civil society institution. Namghar has put into practice all these theories through mass involvement, building of trust, formatting of moral code of conduct and public spheres which is providing a common space for discussion on common matters of masses. The idea of informal governance is another concept that is seen in Namghar as it is provides dispute settlement mechanism based on shared norms over formal state settings. It is also generating social capital by building trust, coordination and networks among the ordinary people to make supportive actions for the welfare of every individual in the society. Lastly the concept of public sphere acts as the forum of open discussions and debate on common concerns of people from different backgrounds.

The primary objective of the paper is to discuss theoretically the concept of Namghar as a civil society institution. Then tries to examine how it works as a public space as well as religious space. The discussion further moves towards its continuing role in the contemporary Assam in relation to identity formation, social inclusion and local governance. It also examines how it is a living institution that helps to form a bridge between the traditional and modern society. All these aims are constructing the framework of the paper that is highly relevant with both the past and present debates. The methodology of the study is based on qualitative, descriptive and analytical methods by mainly focusing on secondary sources that includes research papers, journals, reports and recent commentaries related to the main theme of the paper. The paper uses descriptive and analytical methodology by describing how different scholars define Namghar and then interprets those texts by means of civil society theories. It is a useful approach as the theme is mostly conceptual in nature rather than statistical based. The sources uses both old and new publication in order to get accurate findings of the paper and remains contextual to ensure no other narrative discussed except the main theme of the paper.

Literature Review

The existing literature on Namghar is highlighting its role as institution of socio-culture that is shaping the Assamese society for ages by functioning beyond its religious structure. Various scholars gave a detailed descriptive as well as analytic view on Namghar through their texts from historical, cultural, political, and civil society angles to get the overall overview of the main theme of the paper. These studies all together are illustrating how this institute remains deeply rooted to the Neo-Vaishnavite traditions of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva and adjusting with the changing social realities of contemporary Assamese society. It also indicates deeper study of its contemporary roles as civil society institution particularly in the spheres of mass participation, self governance and public ethics.

Bhuyan (2011) study remains one of the earliest and major works on this context. It saw Namghar as a socio-political space rather seeing it through the narrow lens of religion. His comparative works illustrate the functioning of Namghar as a common sphere where village people gather, deliberate, builds consent and maintain the social order of the society. The importance of his work lies in focusing the practical sites of Namghar in the community life of Assamese villages. He described how this institute historically worked as a forum of social integration and decision making that is creating a linkage between spiritual practices as well as with the local governance.

Rahman (2015) talked about the identity discourses made by Satra and Namghar in the emergences of Assamese identity. The scholar argued how these institutes were central to the birth of greater Assamese socio-cultural identity under the influence of Neo-Vaishnavite. According to Rahman reformist approach by Sankardeva compel the masses from different backgrounds to come together under a shared religious and cultural structure. This view is helpful as it is connecting this institute to a broader history of social integration and identity

forming. At the sametime the scholar studies the historical as well as the civilization orientation that in turn not giving a full exploration of modern socio-political dimensions of Namghar in contemporary Assam.

Dutta (2017); later expands the discussion by creating relationships between traditional institute and state in identity formation. She demonstrated how this institute still continues to function as a key forum in holding the Assamese identity specifically in the situation of social change and fragmentation within the Vaishnavite communities. She further argued that traditional spaces not simply just preserving their cultural heritage but is also acting as a mediator between social belonging and collective identity in contemporary Assam. That's made her work significant to see Namghar not only as a historical phenomenon but as a living institute that is shaping everyday identity of the communities. Although when her work referring the social importance of Namghar it's leaving a question of how such institutes works specifically as civil society institutions in contemporary Assam.

Bhargav (2025) explores this institute from a more contemporary lens and argues how Sankardeva establishes Namghar a forum of socio-cultural reform that emphasizes on egalitarian and inclusive values. He describes how it helps to challenge the existing caste based exclusion through the creation of an open social and spiritual platform that is accessible by all. His work shows the connection of this institution with its past to the modern relevance in contemporary Assam that retains its core values and accepts the social changes of current societal settings. Yet, his work remains more descriptive than analytical in establishing relationship among Namghar and democratic involvement still requires deeper studies.

Another similar work was made by Nath and Barua (2022) who highlighted the significance of Satras and Namghar in Assamese society and their roles in preserving the culture, identity and social harmony among communities. They picturesque Namghar as a widely familiar institute in the communal life and viewed it as a stabilizing institute of the Assamese society. In the same way, Hazarika (2019) describes the materials and architectural proportions of Namghar. Although didn't remark on the political or civil society matters. But this work is still helpful to know the durability and spatial designs of Namghar as it aids to social functioning of communities under a shared space.

Kusre (2013) added the linking of Namghar as democratic institute with the positive psychology & health. Her work is important as it is related to the institute as a platform that is supporting the wellbeing, emotional balance and social interaction among the people. The democratic nature of the space is clearly illustrated here as ordinary people meet, speak and take part in communal life through it. Her work thus reinforces to accept the participatory nature of Namghar by operating as an informal actor of civil society institution of Assamese society.

The most recent works on Namghar put emphasis to highlight its continuing relevance in contemporary Assam. Lamba (2025) illustrated Namghar as a social and religious space that is still holding their heritage while adopting the changing social orders. Her works further reflects how Namghar is not an outdated tradition but a living institute that still continues to serve the community needs of Assamese society. Bhuyan H.R (2024, 2025, 2026) in his series of journalistic write-ups in The Sentinel picturesque Namghar as a centre to Assamese identity and social integration. Even though these writings didn't have any academic impact but is reflecting the continuing importance of this institute and its ideals of social harmony and cultural continuity. India Today NE (2024); likewise explains it as the cultural heartbeat that continues to be seen beyond the academic arenas. Nevertheless, the recent exploration of Baruah & Sarma (2026) analyses Namghar and Satras as a living institute of Assamese society. They argued how this institute still is shaping the democratic ethos, community engagement

and interpretation of contemporary Assam. This work is a significant way forward in the literature as it is going beyond cultural heritage and identity formation to civil and political functioning of the society. Same way the ETV Bharat (2025) reports on Harijan Namghar of Jorhat reflecting resistance against caste based inequalities and further Namghar acts as an actor of social justice and inclusion in today's Assam.

So, the existing literature establishes Namghar as an institute of religious, cultural, social, and political hub that reflects the nature of identity forming, social harmony, democratic engagement and socio-cultural reforms. The literature argues that Namghar is not merely a heritage site but a living platform with mass engagement, informal governance and social cohesion. And by doing so, it is adding to an in-depth comprehension of how traditional institutes continue to matter in contemporary Assamese society. However, more research is needed on Namghar as a civil society institute in contemporary Assam.

Historical Background

The traces of evolution of Namghar are closely linked with the Neo-Vaishnaism Movement led by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva in the 15th and 16th centuries. In the then Assamese society; caste based hierarchies, ritualism and fragmented identities were at peak and under such social order Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva reinforces a religious reformist approach with the introduction of *Eksaran Naam Dharma*. According to him there is one god and he rejects the complex Vedic rituals, caste distinctions and idol worshipping. And within this movement Namghar was born as one of the key innovation that embodies and spreads all these values into everyday social life. Initially Namghar was introduced as a prayer hall where devotees gather to chant the name of God (Naam), listen to recitations and participate in collective worship. Sankardeva establishes first Namghar in Borduwa in the Nagaon district of Assam that became a model for future institutions across the state. The initial motto was to create religious and spiritual space but its nature of being open, inclusive and participatory consciously designed to create a shared space across different caste, tribe and class division that led to the experiment of an egalitarian community life. It was established in such manner that excluded the rigid and concrete religious practices from highly ritualized, priest centric Brahminical temples to a more accessible one and a community led form of devotion. He also integrated music, drama and art like naam kirtan, bhaona and other performances into devotion and Namghar is providing spaces to practice such performance in order to worship the God. Moreover, the designing of Namghar was influenced heavily by the indigenous tribal communal structures like Dekachang or Morang ghar to intentionally create an architectural symbol of cultural integration.

With time Namghar evolves to closely relate with Satras (Vaishnavite Monastery). Even though both functioned collectively as a centre to religious and social life but Namghar tends to have more direct contacts with village communities as it was located within or nearby which is open for all. Satras provide a residential monastic composition and Namghars serve the assembly for regular collective prayers of villagers. This presences of Namghar into the people's daily lives not only limited to their religious aspect but goes to include other aspects like festivals, regulation of community norms and facilitation of public deliberation. Gradually the Namghars outnumbered Satras and started functioning autonomously in many places that further consolidated their roles as local community centres. This transition of Namghar into something beyond the extension of Satra facilitated to function as autonomous village forum with its own authority and distinct role.

It is defined as a democratic procedure where people gather to discuss their common issues and resolves disputes through locally evolved procedures. It is creating a routine to hold meetings to discuss-decide and resolve common matters related to social conduct, community projects and collective rituals and

thus seen as a morally binding institute. In some villages Namghar is functioning as an informal Panchayat or Village Parliament that strengthen its status as self governing forum with its roots in popular participation. It provides a shared area for multi-ethnic and multi-caste gatherings that aids to integrate different groups into a common cultural framework which is centered upon the Neo-Vaishnaism values and language art music of Assamese society. Over the years it's becoming a symbol of Assamese civilization which is not only remembered as a religious but as a forum of fostering unity, equality and social consciousness.

As Civil Society Institute

To understand Namghar as Civil Society institute, let's first begin with the definition of civil society. In Political Science it is generally refers to the third sector of the society basically a non government institute where people joins voluntarily with collective actions and huge public involvement like Trade Unions, Labor Unions etc. It is a place where ordinary people share a common space, common ideas and concerns, sets social norms, resolve conflicts and influence social life without direct state involvement. And through this lens Namghar cannot be seen just as a religious institution but a space that shows different major features of a civil society institution at grassroots level.

Namghar functions the phenomena of public participation where ordinary people gathers to interact and discuss their common concerns. It's a most important feature of civil society and the historical evidences of Namghar clearly depict such spaces in Assamese villages. As Bhuyan (2011) noted in his study how Namghar provides a common platform for the villagers to gather and discuss their common concerns through public dialogue. This participative nature allows communities to involve in decision making processes outside the formal political setups which promoting local governance at grassroots level too. In this manner, it showcases civil society features through the ideals of community organization and self governance through voluntary cohesion over external compulsions. It is also demonstrating the nature of social capital which refers to trust, cooperation and networks that binds people together to work more efficiently. The recent commentary describes how Namghar is reducing social distancing by creating an environment with collective presence and shared obligations that were made more significant over social ranking. A healthy civil society needs a space where people can negotiate, speak, interact, debate and build consensus such an environment is created by Namghar where people from different backgrounds came together and openly discusses their common concerns. The recent studies deny that Namghar and Satras continue to influences the political behavior and democratic ethos in such kind of spaces by availing the public deliberation feature in it. It also is creating a platform for resolving disputes which is directly a most significant feature of a civil society institution. Several texts denote Namghar as a village court or a village parliament where conflicts are settled through local proceedings and community consensus. These kinds of concerns are related mainly to land dispute, family dispute, community clashes or some socially unaccepted behaviors. This role is helping to prevent disputes by giving cultural legitimacy, accessibility and morally respected platform for settlements. Moreover, its principle of moral regulation is another most significant feature where Namghar like civil society institute sets some moral norms that need to be followed by all. It's about shared norms, public ethics and social responsibilities. As human fears for God more than legal authorities, Namghar is likely to maintain the social order of the society by saying that if someone does this then God will curse you.

At the sametime, the critical analysis of civil society is must as the literatures on Namghar indicates not entirely operating same way because participation and decision making settings are bordered by caste and gender

hierarchies of the society. This matters as civil society is not democratic even if Namghar is a community based institute as they are producing social inequalities even though creating social cohesion and participation. Thus, Namghar is reflecting contradictory features by having strong qualities of civil society in the backdrop of social structure of where it exists.

In Contemporary Assam

In the advent of modernization, Namghar still remains relevant to contemporary Assam that continues to retain its core civic and cultural functioning. The recent studies reflects that the institute is actively still operating in both the rural-urban settings by supporting collective devotion, community participation, cultural continuity, debate-discussion and informal social regulations. The existing literature argues how in rural areas it is functioning as a de facto village courts to resolve conflicts and discusses on common matters for collective welfare of the community. This gives Namghar the continuing relevance in local governance at grassroots level as it is still providing spaces for participation and consensus building among the masses. As per VKIC report, Namghars in urban areas showing flexibility of the institution as it holding the Vaishnavite traditions in the age of modernization and at the sametime providing space of moral and cultural values for the younger generations. Both the genders have equal access and elderly population is responsible for passing the cultural traditions and values to the younger generations. This shows how it is preserving Assamese identity in modern urban settings. Moreover, the gender participation is another significant contemporary change of recent times that highlights how women can now actively and openly take part in collective devotional, cultural, as well as organizational activities. It is marking a significant transition towards a greater inclusiveness in the structure of the society. At the sametime the newer studies symbolizes Namghar as a symbol of resistance to caste exclusion and a space of social inclusion; for example the Harijan Namghar of Jorhat which was formed to challenge the severe caste discrimination inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's 1934 Harijan Tour across India. All these growth shows how it continues to matter not just as a heritage site but as a place where social values are updated with changing social setups.

Conclusion

The paper shows that Namghar is not merely religious place but important social structure of the Assamese society. It rooted in the Neo-Vaishnaism tradition that was initiated by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva that served as place for collective devotion, community gathering, moral norms and decision making on common matters collectively. With time its functioning expanded beyond worshiping to the inclusion of social cooperation, informal governance and dispute settlements that is deeply injected in everyday lives of Assamese society. Further, the paper explains how it still remains in contemporary Assam by adapting the changing social realities, holds its core cultural and moral values. Thus, Namghar can be termed as a living institution at the junction of tradition and modern civil society in Assam. In term of civil society theories, it is representing the locally rooted institution that links tradition with mass involvement, community responsibility and public life. This is thus, making a significance example of how indigenous institutes are contributing to maintenance of social order and public participation outside the arena of formal state settings. So, all of these reasons aligns to accept the fact that Namghar is living institution that continues to act as a civil society institution to shape the Assamese society.

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Chapter 24: National Education Policy (NEP 2020): Reimagining Vocational Education

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Abstract

To achieve full human potential, Education is very important. For any country to continuously grow in the field of economy, scientific advancement justice equality, culture and society, there is an important requirement of access to quality education. And to achieve this there is also need for skilled work force. To prepare students for occupations requiring specialized skills, vocational training is a must. Over the years, many commissions and policies on Education recommended to bring vocational educational into mainstream education yet, there is very slow and stagnant growth in vocational Education. The present study aims to analyze the manner in which the National Education Policy introduced by Ministry of Education is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student. The study further explores the significance of Vocational Education in present times and focuses on the provisions in National Education Policy for its practical implementation. The NEP 2020 proposed the revision and revamping of all aspects of education, including vocational Education, to create a new education system which is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st Century students. NEP 2000 also intends to focus on areas of vocational Education based on skill-gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities. The NEP 2020 also stated that there will be no hard separation between the vocational and academic streams. This policy aims to overcome the social status hierarchy associated with vocational education and integration of vocational education into mainstream education in all educational institutions-middle and secondary school, Higher Educational Institution in a phased manner. This paper discusses the present status of vocational education as well as Reimaging Vocational Education and skill building as proposed by NEP 2020.

Keywords- *Education, Employment, Student, Policy, Vocational, NEP 2020*

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Introduction:-

There are two kinds of education - Education for living and education for life. Our entire education system, delivers education for living and not for life. Along with the life skills, there is urgent requirement of gaining practical knowledge and hands-On training, learning experience which will make the students employable and industry ready. Students who do not have the necessary skills, find themselves struggling in their new positions. Vocational education and training, allows students to gain practical experience in their chosen career path before they even graduate. Vocational learning opportunities play a critical role in skills development and employability. Vocational education help with bridging the skills gaps between work and education.

Vocational education should be introduced to students from the school level to help them understand their interests and career preferences in a better way. Immersive learning as part of the vocationalization of students' education would help them gain exposure to practical and hands-on skills. It will also help them develop the necessary life skills which they lack otherwise.

The NEP 2020 is a comprehensive policy that extensively discusses the revamping of vocational Education and bringing it into mainstream education. According to the policy, by 2025 at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education, for which a clear action plan with targets and timelines are to be developed.

Vocational Education in India:-

According to 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017) it is estimated that 5% of the Indian workforce in the age group of 19-24 received formal vocational Education; as comparted to Egypt 30%, Denmark 50%, USA - 52%, Germany - 75% andSouth Korea-96%. Various Education Commissions have recommended to bring Vocational Education into mainstreameducation.

The Kothari Commission report of 1966 was one of the earliest to emphasize diversifying the curriculum at highersecondary levels through vocational courses.

Socially

The National Education Policy, 1986, focused on improving the organizational and management structure of vocational Education. It recommended vocationalization, both at secondary and higher education levels, by introducing Society Useful Productive Work (SUPW) as a separate subject in secondary classes and vocational degree course at highereducation level.

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) (2005) considered Vocational Education and Training (VET) as an important element of the nation's education initiative.

NKC recommended the following long and short term strategies:-

- Place vocational Education entirely under the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Increase the flexibility of VET within the mainstream education system.
- Quantify and monitor the impact of Vocational Education.
- Increase resource allocation to VE and expand capacity through innovative delivery models.
- Strengthen the current institutional structures.
- Ensure proper certification and a robust regulatory and accreditation framework.

Even after all these recommendations, very slow growth can be witnessed in the field of vocational education. National Institute of Open

Schooling (NIOS) has assessed the vocational training scenario and highlighted that only 2% of the total population in between 15-29 years of age have received formal vocational training and only 8% have received non-formal vocational training.

Need for Vocational Education:-

The vocational education space, over the years, has witnessed a painfully slow and stagnant growth. An assessment by the National Institute of Open Schooling highlights that only 2% of the total population in between 15-29 years of age have received formal vocational training, and only 8% have received non-formal vocational training. The NEP 2020 highlights the issues that teachers, especially at higher secondary levels, are not fully skilled to teach vocationalcourses. There was no proper detailed curriculum, only basic introduction to all the vocational courses, which proves to be ineffective in sparking an interest in vocational education among school students. The existing system, therefore, fails to attract students from taking up vocational courses in future. Even if students opt to pursue vocational courses at higher education level, there are no proper admission criteria (especially in the general higher education system) for vocational education qualifications, which constraints the vertical mobility in this education system.

Significance of Vocational Education in Present Times:-

Vocational Education helps people in the better performance of their jobs as they acquire a great learning experience. Working professionals get a chance to hone their skills while making money. Many students who are in a dilemma whether they should attend college or not, Vocational education really opens a completely new door. It makes an individual a responsible and independent whereas those who study regular courses lack in this sphere.

The career of one's own choice is one of the major benefits of this education. A vast majority of people are caught in the wrong jobs because they were in it for the sake of job, money, lack of alternative and professional compromise whereas an individual pursuing Vocational Education is already pursuing his dream job. Vocational Education as the term itself denotes the students are specialized and therefore they have more chances of employment as compared to others.

Reasons for Stagnation of Vocational Education:-

In India, Vocational Education is treated as poor cousin of the main stream education system. There is mismatch between demand and supply in the job market. In our country, vocational education is imparted at two levels - VE (Theory) and training (practical). Theoretical part of vocational education was taught through SUPW which hasn't proved to be effective and students as well as teachers take it as an additional burden. The SUPW courses were neither well defined nor properly segregated. There was only basic introduction to all the vocational courses, which failed to create interest in vocational education among school students. At higher Secondary levels, there is huge shortage of fully skilled teachers to teach vocational courses. The vertical mobility in the field of vocational education from secondary, higher secondary to higher education level was constrained due to no proper admission criteria and courses. A student pursuing a vocational course is considered inferior to those opting for main stream HEI.

National sample Survey Office (NSSO) data of 75th round (2017-18)

reported that as compared to 24% students from rural areas enrolled in ITI's or VTI's, only 8.3% of Urban students are enrolled in any kind of vocational education. Large number of Vocational Training Institute were established by govt., but only 15.3% of the student population is enrolled in formal vocational training institutes. This indicates that VE is still not a preferred choice among students and parents. The main reason behind this can be - there is limited mobility between general and vocational education. Our society has a belief that mainstream education gives a more dignified employment, than vocational education.

The main issues and challenges for vocational education are:-

1. Mismatch between demand and Supply
2. Less acceptance of vocational education as a career of choice.
3. Lack of professional growth and career advancement for the vocational pass outs.
4. The stakeholders have a mindset that vocational education is considered as last opportunity in the career progression.
5. There is over emphasis on skill development than education and training.
6. Development of Quality standard, acceptable to industries is a big challenge.
7. No pathways for employability of vocational pass out and institutional assessment and certification.

Vocational Education And Skill Enhancement in the NEP 2020.:-

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has Education at the central place for success of all the SDG.In the Goal 4 on 'Quality Education' - four out of its seven targets are related to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The NEP 2020 has embraced the Education 2030 Agenda in a complete manner and is totally committed to expansion of TVET by providing quality life long learning opportunities for all.

TARGET: NEP 2020 aims at 50% of Learners through school and Higher Education System to have exposure to vocational education by 2025. It also suggests that while arriving at the GER target, the number of students in vocational education will be considered.

Integration Into Mainstream Education:-

NEP 2020 recommends to integrate vocational Education Programmes into mainstream education in a phased manner. Vocational exposure should begin at early ages, quality vocational Education needs to be given through Middle and Secondary School and should continue smoothly in Higher Education.

Collaboration:

Academic Institutions with vocational education should collaborate with Industrial Training Institutes, Polytechnics, Local Business, Industries, Hospitals, farms and NGO's to provide practical hands on exposure to students.

FOCUS AREAS: Vocational Education courses will be chosen based on skills gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities, and technical and vocational education will become part of the larger vision of holistic education.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION: The Ministry of Education will constitute a National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE), along with industry participation, to oversee the effort for integration of Vocational Education and should also earmark budget for promoting this integration.

Vocational Exposure at Upper Primary Stage:-

For students of classes 6-8, year long fun based activities will be organized to give hand on experience of important vocational crafts, such as, carpentry,

electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc.

Vocational Education at Secondary and Higher Secondary Level: In classes 9-12 in Secondary Schools, along with traditional academic courses, vocational courses, will be offered. Students from classes 9-12 will be allowed to mix and match academics with skills education, with sports and arts and with soft skills training. At Secondary and Senior Secondary level, expansion of implementation of vocational education is proposed.

Vocational Education through open Schooling - At present 5% of the cumulative enrolment of 27 lakhs in National Institute of Open School (NIOS) is under vocational courses. Vocational courses offered by NIOS will be expanded and strengthened by open and Distance learning Programmes (ODL), to meet the learning needs of those aspirants who are unable to attend a physical school.

Vocational Education in Higher Education Institutes: Higher Education Institutions will offer vocational education either on their own or in partnership with industry. B.VOC Degrees which were introduced in 2013 will continue to exist. In all other bachelor's degree programmes, including the new 4 year holistic Bachelor's programmes, vocational courses will be available to students enrolled.

Mapping of Vocational Job Roles Under NSQF: The National skills Qualification Framework is a nationally integrated education and competency-based skill and quality assurance framework to provide for multiple pathways, horizontal as well as vertical, including vocational education, vocational training, general education and technical education, thus linking one level of learning to another high level. Under NSQF, Mapping of vocational job roles offered in schools to the B.Voc. and other vocational courses offered at higher educational institutions is recommended in NEP 2020. NSQF will encourage more Higher Education Institutions to offer vocational degrees and skills based courses. Weightage will be given to students who have cleared NSQF Level 3 or 4 courses at school level to enter higher level vocational courses so that their vertical mobility is ensured.

Short Term Vocational Courses in Higher Education Institutions:-

NEP 2020 proposed that Higher Education Institutions will be allowed to conduct short term certificate courses in various skills including soft skills. Along with short term courses, Lok Vidya', knowledge developed in India, will be made accessible to students through integration into Vocational Education Courses.

Monitoring Mechanism:

A Portal for monitoring and tracking of the Vocational Education will be maintained. This portal will fetch data of students moving to ITI's, Polytechnics and skill development Programmes of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). For the students undergoing Vocational Courses, NIOS will provide the data.

NEP 2020-Impementation Plan:-

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the shortcomings in the existing education system and aims at making it inclusive and aspirational. The main objectives of NEP 2020 are- renewed emphasis on vocational education and bridging the skills gap. A skilled work force can help India achieve its goal of self reliance.

Table:- Vocational Education Goals and Strategic Action Plan under NEP 2020

S.	GOAL	Action to be Taken

No.		
1.	By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education	Students will be exposed to vocational education from class 6 onwards in all secondary and higher secondary schools through integration of Vocational Education with general education subjects.
2.	Awareness about the importance of vocational education and destigmatisation through social media and ICT	• Awareness programmes will be organized to change the general perception and attitude towards vocational education. • Focus on good practices and innovations by teachers and students.
3.	Students will be allowed to mix and match academics with skills education, with sports and arts, and with soft skills	• Collaboration of schools with Industrial Training Institutes, Polytechnics, Local businesses, industries, hospitals, agriculture farms, local artisan and NGOs for imparting skills training.
4.	Career Counselling and guidance will be provided to children in classes 9 to 12 so that children can make a career choice, based on their interest, aspiration and abilities.	• Skill Based Aptitude Test (SBAT) will be introduced in class 8 to provide guidance to the students for making informed career choice.
5.	Innovation and entrepreneurship will be promoted in schools through problem based learning and enterprise education	• Vocational courses on new and emerging skills demands of the industry, such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Internet of Things (IOT) will be introduced and enterprise education will be promoted from class 6 onwards.
6.	Preparation of Vocational Teachers/Trainers in selected job sectors by National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) in consultation with MOE, MOSDE, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and University Grants Commission (UGC)	• Pre-service Training and Short-Term Training (STTP) Courses for preparing vocational Teachers/ Trainers through online and offline mode to be offered through SCERTS and DIETS. External trainers, who are experts in their vocations will be invited to train local teachers at Cluster Resource Centers (CRCs) Block Resource Centers (BRCs) and DIETS.
7.	Vocational Teachers Training. programs for promoting use of	• New Learning Methods and digital tools, like Massive open Online

	ICT in VET.	Courses (MOOC), Flipped Learning and Virtual learning methods will be used for training teachers.

Source:- Compilation based on the National Education Policy (2020), National Curriculum Frameworks, and relevant Government of India policy documents.

NEP 2020 requires all the educational institutions to integrate vocational education into their offerings, for growth of vocational education in our country. In the coming decade, a large number of schools, colleges and universities will become the potential Vocational Education & Training (VET) Providers.

Conclusion:-

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has envisaged for some transformational reforms in the Indian education system. It talks about the education system that lays emphasis on experiential learning along with a focus on 21st- century skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, etc. It is believed by many that by implementing these changes, the Indian academic system will be taken a step higher.

Vocational education has played a major role in economic development of a country. For meeting the requirement of skilled manpower for India's economy, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training System was always needed. Till date the vocational Development programs have not been very successful despite governments paying much attention to it in the past years. Two major challenges faced by vocational development programs are - the quality of vocational institutions and lack of linkages between providers and industries. To boost the employability skills and vocational skills of the learners at all levels, the New Education Policy 2020 has given due importance to vocational Education and capacity development of teachers. To improve the quality and sustainability of the VET Programmes, at national level common norms and skill standards are to be identified, and vocational courses need to be designed and developed accordingly. A strong system of capacity development of the stakeholders at Institutional, District, State and National level would be required for the administration and management of the vocational Education and Training System. To enhance the quality and sustainability of the VET programmes, accreditation of vocational course and providers should be done. Through proper planning and effectives implementation of VET Programmes, as recommended by NEP 2020, a young work force equipped with skills and practical experience will enhance productivity and will play a very important role in reducing unemployment and building a self reliant India.

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Chapter 25: Ritualizing Risk: Gendered Labour and Vernacular Epistemologies in Plantation Folk Traditions

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Abstract

This chapter examines how plantation folk traditions in India and Sri Lanka ritualize labour-related risk through localized protective deities and oral performance practices. Focusing on Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami in tea plantation communities, it explores how these rituals emerge from the material conditions of industrial and plantation labour. Rotha Muni derives from rotha ("wheel" or "roller") and is associated with factory machinery, industrial accidents, and workers' fears of bodily injury. Kawathu Sami is linked to kawathu, the pruning of tea bushes with a curved knife, a hazardous task predominantly performed by male labourers. In contrast, women plantation workers experience equally significant occupational risks, including harsh weather, leech bites, falling trees, insect attacks, encounters with wild animals, bodily exhaustion, and reproductive strain, but these vulnerabilities have not generated comparable protective sacrificial rituals. Instead, women-centred rituals emphasize tea growth, fertility, and productivity.The study employs a multi-sited qualitative methodology combining oral histories, semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, and textual analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in the Nilgiris (India), Nuwara Eliya, and Badulla (Sri Lanka), complemented by interviews with Hindu priests, academic scholars, and analysis of translated Tamil texts on plantation rituals. Drawing on Victor Turner, Richard Schechner, Diana Taylor, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, the chapter argues that plantation rituals function as vernacular epistemologies of risk and survival, transforming labour uncertainty into sacred protection while preserving collective memory through embodied performance. It further offers a feminist analysis of ritual visibility, demonstrating that gender shapes which forms of occupational vulnerability become ritualized, recognized, and remembered. The chapter contributes to debates on vernacular epistemologies, folk philosophy, labour, performance, and gender in South Asian plantation cultures.

Keywords: Rotha Muni, Kawathu Sami, plantation labour, ritual, gendered labour, vernacular epistemologies.

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1. Introduction

The history of tea plantations in Sri Lanka is closely connected with British colonial expansion, labour migration, and the formation of plantation communities. During the nineteenth century, the British established coffee plantations in the central highlands and recruited large numbers of South Indian Tamil labourers to meet plantation labour demands (Wesumperuma, 1986). Following the collapse of coffee cultivation due to Coffee Rust disease in the 1860s, tea production expanded rapidly after 1869 (Nadesan, 1993). The plantation economy required a permanent and controlled workforce, leading to the establishment of residential plantation settlements (Nadesan, 1993). Within this colonial labour structure, work became highly gendered: men were mainly involved in factory operations, transport, maintenance, and physically demanding tasks, while women were predominantly assigned to tea plucking and field labour (Karunanayake, 2010).

Plantation labour has historically involved multiple occupational risks. Ethnographic research conducted in tea plantation communities in Sri Lanka and India reveals that male workers operating machinery and processing equipment experienced industrial dangers, while field workers faced environmental hazards such as extreme weather, steep landscapes, insects, wild animals, and physical exhaustion. In response to these uncertainties, plantation communities developed ritual traditions and protective deities through which they interpreted danger, negotiated vulnerability, and sought collective security (Jeyaseelan, 2020). These traditions include Rotha Muni, associated with factory machinery; Kotte Muni, connected with caves and rocky landscapes; Thavaranai Muni, related to tea nurseries; Kawathu Sami, associated with pruning activities; Kambi Muni, linked with cable transportation; and Kolunthu Sami and Mattathu Sami, connected with tea shoots and tea production.

Among these traditions, Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami remain particularly significant as protective deities associated with male labour. Rotha Muni, derived from rotha (wheel or roller), is worshipped mainly by factory workers seeking protection from machine-related accidents and injuries. Kawathu Sami, associated with the cutting of tea bushes using curved knives, represents protection from risks involved in physically demanding plantation work. Annual rituals dedicated to these deities often include communal worship, animal sacrifice, and collective feasting, transforming occupational dangers into shared cultural practices of protection and reassurance. In contrast, women-associated rituals, such as Kolunthu Sami and Mattathu Sami, are more commonly connected with productivity, cultivation, and continuity rather than occupational protection.

However, plantation ritual traditions have continuously transformed alongside technological and social changes. The decline of cable transportation reduced the significance of Kambi Muni worship, while changes in settlement patterns weakened Kotte Muni traditions. Today, Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami remain among the most actively practiced protective rituals. Oral histories from the Nilgiris region of South India suggest that aspects of Rotha Muni worship travelled through the movement of plantation Tamils following the Sirima–Shastri Pact of 1964, when many Indian-origin Tamils from Sri Lanka were repatriated to South India.

These ritual practices can be understood as vernacular epistemologies through which plantation communities produce local knowledge about danger, survival, and collective protection. They represent culturally embedded ways of interpreting occupational vulnerability beyond formal systems of workplace safety. However,

these systems also reveal gendered patterns of recognition. While male occupational risks associated with machinery and cutting tools are symbolically represented through protective rituals, women's labour-related vulnerabilities remain comparatively less visible.

This chapter addresses the following research question: Why is ritualized protection symbolically organized around male labour and male vulnerability, while women's occupational risks remain less visible within plantation ritual traditions?

The chapter has three objectives: first, to examine how plantation deities emerge from the material realities of labour and occupational risk; second, to analyse rituals as vernacular epistemologies of danger, protection, and survival; and third, to explore the gendered politics of ritual recognition and symbolic representation.

The chapter argues that Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami rituals function as vernacular philosophies of plantation risk, transforming experiences of danger into sacred meaning and collective assurance. At the same time, they reveal gendered inequalities in symbolic visibility, where male vulnerability receives public recognition while women's labour-related suffering remains normalized and under-recognized.

The study is based on multi-sited qualitative research conducted in the Nilgiris (India), Nuwara Eliya, and Badulla (Sri Lanka). Data were collected through oral histories, semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, and textual analysis. Following ethical approval and informed consent procedures, data were analysed thematically to identify key themes related to labour risk, ritual practice, gender, vulnerability, and vernacular knowledge production.

In this chapter, vernacular epistemology refers to locally produced systems of knowledge that emerge from the lived experiences of plantation communities rather than from institutional science or formal religious doctrine. Such knowledge is generated, transmitted, and sustained through oral traditions, ritual performances, and everyday practices, enabling communities to interpret occupational danger, assign cultural meaning to suffering, and collectively negotiate uncertainty. The protective rituals surrounding Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami are therefore understood not merely as religious observances but as vernacular epistemologies of risk and survival that embody local philosophies of labour, protection, and communal resilience.

2. Historical Background

The history of plantation communities in Sri Lanka is deeply connected with British colonial expansion and the migration of South Indian Tamil labourers during the nineteenth century (Nadesan, 1993). Coffee cultivation was introduced by the British in the central highlands and expanded rapidly, creating a significant demand for plantation labour. To meet this demand, thousands of workers were recruited from South India through the kangani recruitment system (Karunanayake, 2011). Migration was driven by conditions such as drought, famine, indebtedness, poverty, and limited employment opportunities in South India (Wesumperuma, 1986). The journey to Sri Lanka was extremely difficult, involving long-distance travel and dangerous crossings of the Palk Strait, with many workers suffering from disease, exhaustion, and inadequate living conditions.

Initially, coffee plantation labour was largely seasonal, with workers returning to India after completing cultivation tasks (Phadnis & Kumar, 1975). However, the collapse of coffee

production due to the outbreak of coffee leaf rust, caused by *Hemileia vastatrix* (Mohanraj, 1984), transformed the plantation economy. As tea cultivation expanded after the late nineteenth century, plantation owners required a permanent workforce to ensure continuous production (Nadesan, 1993). Consequently, families were recruited and settled permanently within estates, leading to the development of line-room settlements. These settlements became important social and cultural spaces where plantation communities developed their own traditions, identities, and religious practices.

Although the British plantation system imposed harsh working and living conditions, labourers were permitted limited social and cultural freedoms, including the practice of religion and the operation of toddy shops. These concessions helped maintain social stability while reducing the likelihood of resistance to colonial authority. Religious freedom was particularly significant because it enabled migrant communities to recreate familiar forms of worship while adapting them to their new environment. As Jeyaseelan (2020) observes,

> "*The facilities for religious activities were important among the social facilities provided to them in the plantations. Due to this, places of worship emerged all over the plantation*" (p.165).

Consequently, temples, shrines, and sacred sites became important centres of religious practice, cultural continuity, and community life within the estates.

Plantation labour was structured through a clear gendered division of work (Karunanayake, 2011). Men were primarily employed in factory operations, transport, maintenance, road construction, timber cutting, and tea bush pruning, while women were mainly engaged in tea plucking. Although both men and women performed physically demanding labour, their occupational risks differed according to their assigned roles. Men faced industrial dangers from machinery, heavy equipment, and pruning tools, often resulting in serious injuries. Women, however, experienced environmental and bodily risks through prolonged exposure to extreme weather, steep and slippery landscapes, leech bites, insect attacks, snake bites, falling trees, and encounters with wild animals. In addition, women carried the combined burden of plantation labour and unpaid domestic responsibilities.

Within this environment of uncertainty and occupational vulnerability, plantation communities developed localized ritual traditions centred on protective deities. These deities reflected specific forms of labour and danger experienced within plantation life. Important traditions included Kotte Muni, Thavaranai Muni, Kambi Muni, Rotha Muni, Kawathu Sami, Kolunthu Sami, and Mattathu Sami (Jeyaseelan, 2020). However, many of these traditions declined due to technological developments, changing transportation systems, and transformations in plantation settlements. Today, Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami remain among the most actively practiced protective rituals in plantation communities in Sri Lanka and the Nilgiris region of India.

The movement of plantation communities across national borders also contributed to the transmission of these ritual traditions. Following the Sirima–Shastri Pact of 1964 between Sri Lanka and India, many Indian-origin Tamils were repatriated to India and resettled in plantation areas, particularly in the Nilgiris (Premkumar, 2020). Oral histories collected for this study suggest that traditions such as Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami travelled with these communities and continue to be practiced in parts of South India, demonstrating the

movement of vernacular religious knowledge across borders.

Although plantation labour in Sri Lanka and the Nilgiris continues to be shaped by gendered divisions of work, the symbolic recognition of occupational vulnerability remains unequal. Protective rituals are primarily associated with male occupations involving machinery and pruning, while women's extensive labour risks remain comparatively absent from protective ritual traditions. This historical background provides the foundation for examining plantation rituals as vernacular epistemologies through which communities interpret labour, danger, protection, and collective survival.

3. Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative, multi-sited ethnographic methodology to examine plantation folk rituals and their relationship to labour, gender, and vernacular epistemologies. Fieldwork was conducted in tea plantation communities in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, India, and in the Nuwara Eliya (Hatton and Ragala) and Badulla districts of Sri Lanka. These locations were purposively selected due to their historical significance as plantation settlements and their continued engagement with ritual traditions connected to labour, occupational risk, and collective protection.

The study employed purposive sampling to recruit participants with direct knowledge and experience of plantation labour, ritual practices, and community history. In total, data were collected through 47 in-depth interviews with plantation workers (13 in the Nilgiris, 17 in Nuwara Eliya, and 17 in Badulla), six interviews with educationalists (two in the Nilgiris, three in Nuwara Eliya, and one in Badulla), three focus group discussions in the Nilgiris, three oral history interviews (one in Nuwara Eliya and two in Badulla), and two interviews with Hindu religious leaders, one each in Nuwara Eliya and Badulla. These diverse participants enabled triangulation of perspectives and provided a comprehensive understanding of plantation ritual traditions and their social meanings.

Primary data were collected through ethnographic observation, oral histories, and semi-structured interviews. Ethnographic observations focused on ritual spaces, including shrines, sacred objects, and sites associated with Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami worship. Oral histories explored memories of migration, plantation labour, ritual practices, and the intergenerational transmission of vernacular knowledge. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with plantation workers, ritual practitioners, Hindu priests, community elders, educators, academics, and researchers. Documentary analysis of translated Tamil texts, folk songs, and other materials on plantation religion complemented the field data and provided historical and cultural context for contemporary ritual practices.

The research involved collaboration with a Tamil researcher based in Tamil Nadu, whose linguistic and cultural familiarity facilitated engagement with plantation communities in India. This collaboration was essential for interpreting Tamil ritual terminology, understanding culturally specific meanings, and accessing oral narratives. In Sri Lanka, Tamil interpreters were employed where necessary to facilitate communication during interviews. These processes of translation and interpretation were carefully monitored to preserve linguistic accuracy and cultural meaning.

Researcher positionality was an important consideration throughout the study. As a Sinhala female researcher from outside the Tamil plantation community and different caste and class locations, continuous reflexivity was required regarding issues of identity, trust, and power relations. At the same time, the Tamil

researcher's cultural familiarity provided valuable insights into community experiences and ritual meanings. Both researchers' academic positions created opportunities for research access while also requiring awareness of social and educational distance between researchers and participants.

Gendered access to ritual spaces became an important methodological insight. Direct observation of Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami rituals involving animal sacrifice was limited because women are traditionally excluded from participation in certain ritual activities. Therefore, knowledge of these practices was reconstructed through interviews with male participants, priests, and community elders, alongside observation of ritual sites, sacred objects, and community narratives. This limitation itself reflects the gendered structures of visibility and exclusion that the chapter examines.

Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated where required. Digital tools, including NotebookLM, assisted initial transcription and translation, while all transcripts were manually reviewed to ensure accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and contextual interpretation.

The collected data were analysed through thematic analysis, identifying key themes related to occupational risk, ritual protection, gendered labour, collective memory, embodied knowledge, and vernacular epistemologies. These themes were interpreted through perspectives from ritual theory, feminist philosophy, performance studies, and postcolonial thought to examine how plantation communities create and transmit knowledge about danger, survival, and belonging.

By integrating ethnographic observation, oral histories, interviews, collaborative interpretation, and documentary analysis across multiple sites, this study provides a comparative understanding of plantation rituals as dynamic knowledge systems. The multi-sited approach demonstrates how vernacular traditions adapt to changing historical, technological, and social conditions while preserving collective understandings of labour, risk, protection, and identity.

4. Ritual Traditions: Rotha Muni, Kawathu Sami, and Other Plantation Deities

4.1 From Village Deities to Plantation Deities

Plantation folk deities emerged from the everyday experiences of Tamil plantation communities, reflecting their labour, environment, fears, and aspirations. Rather than fixed theological entities, they function as vernacular knowledge systems through which communities interpret work, nature, danger, illness, and survival (Valk & Lourdusamy, 2007). In classical Tamil society, religious traditions were closely linked to ecological zones (tinai) and occupations. For example, Mayon was associated with the pastoral (Mullai) landscape, while Indra was worshipped as the deity of the agricultural (Marutham) landscape (Murugesan, 2026; Alphonsa, 2017).

When South Indian Tamil labourers migrated to the tea plantations of colonial Sri Lanka, they encountered an unfamiliar industrial and environmental landscape characterized by factory machinery, electricity, cable transport, railways, and mountainous terrain. Rather than abandoning their inherited beliefs, they adapted existing Muni traditions and developed new occupational deities that addressed the risks and uncertainties of plantation labour. These deities emerged not only from fear of workplace accidents but also from workers' sense of wonder at unfamiliar industrial technologies.

A plantation folk song captures this experience:

> *"Engine carriage*
> *Going both sides*
> *It is difficult to go without a bull*

> *Maya Vellakkaran (British) carriage."(*Annakamu, 1959)

The song contrasts the traditional bullock cart with mechanized transport introduced by the British. The phrase Maya Vellakkaran ("magic" or "mysterious British carriage") reflects workers' attempts to understand unfamiliar machinery through cultural ideas of mystery and the supernatural. Consistent with Radhakrishnan's (1923/2008) argument that religion emerges not only from fear but also from wonder, plantation workers transformed industrial technology into sacred presence through ritual practices such as Rotha Muni worship.

4.2 Occupational Deities in the Plantation Economy

As the plantation economy developed, workers created protective deities corresponding to different stages of tea production and occupational risks. Thavaranai Muni protected tea nurseries and newly planted tea bushes, while Kolunthu Sami, largely worshipped by women, promoted the healthy growth of tender tea shoots through non-sacrificial offerings emphasizing fertility and productivity. Mattathu Sami, also associated with women, protected the weighing of harvested tea leaves and similarly involved vegetarian rituals(Jeyaseelan,2020).

Other deities were directly connected with dangerous forms of labour. Kawathu Sami protected men engaged in pruning tea bushes using curved knives, and annual rituals involving goats, chickens, toddy, and arrack sought protection from workplace injuries. Kambi Muni was associated with the cable transport system used to carry tea leaves before road construction, while Kotte Muni protected workers living in temporary cave settlements from wild animals and environmental dangers. Mottu (Mettu) Muni was worshipped in mountainous regions to protect workers from falls and strong winds. Many of these ritual traditions gradually declined with technological developments and changing settlement patterns.

4.3 Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami: Ritualizing Industrial Risk

Among plantation deities, Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami remain the most significant. Rotha Muni derives from the Sinhala word Rodaya ("wheel" or "roller") and refers to the large mechanical rollers used in tea factories. Early workers, unfamiliar with industrial machinery and electricity, interpreted these machines as powerful and potentially supernatural forces. Frequent factory accidents involving crushed limbs reinforced these beliefs, leading workers to ritualize machinery itself as a source of protection.

Annual Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami rituals are performed primarily by male workers at sacred sites marked by a Vel (spear), symbolizing divine protection. Goats and chickens are sacrificed, and the sacrificial blood is sprinkled on machinery and workplaces to invoke safety. Estate managers often participate, reflecting the collective importance of these rituals within plantation life. Women are traditionally excluded from both the ceremonies and the consumption of sacrificial meat. Rather than worshipping machinery itself, Rotha Muni rituals transform experiences of industrial danger into sacred protection, enabling workers to express shared vulnerability and strengthen collective solidarity in hazardous working environments.

4.4 From Ritual Protection to Vernacular Epistemologies

Plantation deities demonstrate that plantation communities creatively adapted inherited village traditions to new industrial and environmental conditions rather than simply reproducing earlier religious beliefs. Each deity corresponds to a

particular stage of tea production and addresses specific occupational risks. Although many traditions, such as Kambi Muni and Kotte Muni, declined as transport systems and housing changed, Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami continue to be actively practiced. Oral histories collected during this research indicate that Rotha Muni worship was transmitted to the Nilgiris following the repatriation of Indian-origin Tamils under the Sirima–Shastri Pact of 1964, illustrating the movement of vernacular religious traditions across national borders.

Collectively, these deities constitute vernacular epistemologies through which plantation communities interpret labour, danger, and survival. They provide culturally meaningful explanations for occupational risk while strengthening psychological resilience and communal solidarity. However, they also reveal a gendered politics of ritual recognition. Protective sacrificial rituals are concentrated around occupations historically performed by men, whereas women's labour is primarily represented through rituals emphasizing productivity, cultivation, and continuity rather than protection from occupational hazards. Plantation folk religion therefore transforms labour-related danger into sacred meaning while simultaneously producing a gendered symbolic order in which male vulnerability is publicly recognized and ritualized, whereas women's occupational suffering remains comparatively invisible.

5. Vernacular Epistemologies of Risk and Survival

Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami are not residual superstitions surviving at the margins of plantation modernity but vernacular systems of knowledge through which plantation communities interpret, manage, and transmit understandings of occupational danger across generations. These rituals constitute vernacular epistemologies of risk and survival: embodied, orally transmitted, and performatively enacted ways of knowing that exist alongside, and often in the absence of, institutional systems of occupational safety. As Primiano (1995) argues, vernacular religion should be understood through the lived experiences of ordinary practitioners rather than institutional doctrine, while Geertz (1983) emphasizes that knowledge is produced within specific cultural and material contexts. Together, these perspectives suggest that Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami are parallel epistemic systems generated by the material realities of plantation labour. However, this epistemology is not gender neutral. While male occupational risks become publicly recognized and ritualized, women's occupational suffering remains largely invisible within plantation ritual traditions.

5.1 From Fear to Sacred Knowledge: Ritual as an Epistemic Response

When South Indian Tamil labourers entered the tea plantations of colonial Sri Lanka, they encountered industrial machinery, electricity, and factory environments unlike anything experienced in their agrarian villages. Turner (1969) argues that rituals emerge as social responses to uncertainty and crisis, enabling communities to make sense of experiences beyond ordinary understanding. For plantation workers, unfamiliar machines inspired both fear and wonder, which became the foundation for a new system of knowledge. Without access to engineering knowledge or formal safety training, mechanical danger was interpreted through an existing folk-religious worldview.

A plantation folk song reflects this encounter,

> *"Sir, the engine is dancing*
> *Sir, the copper wheels are grinding*
> *Sir, the belts are running*
> *Sir, hide and see this wonder."*(Velupillai, 1970)

The song illustrates workers' amazement at unfamiliar industrial technology while simultaneously expressing awareness of its danger. An oral history participant similarly explained:

> *"People saw machines cutting some people's hands, so they believed this ritual prevents accidents. That's why they sacrifice goats or hens for the deity."* (O.H. 03)

Rather than attributing accidents to mechanical failure or inadequate safety measures, workers understood them through the presence or absence of divine protection. This was not irrational thinking but an alternative epistemic framework that offered explanation and agency where institutional safety knowledge was unavailable. Ritual therefore became a practical means of managing danger in a context where workers lacked access to formal occupational protection.

5.2 Liminality, Communitas, and the Limits of Solidarity

Turner's model of ritual process, involving separation, a liminal "in-between" state, and reaggregation, is directly legible in how Rotha Muni functions for plantation workers. Workers enter the ritual carrying anxiety about occupational hazards, pass through a liminal stage during the ceremony, and return to work with renewed confidence and a sense of protection. As one priest explained:

> *"We spare blood near the machine; deity protects us. No further blood."* (R.L. 02)

The sacrificial offering symbolically resolves uncertainty and enables workers to continue dangerous labour with psychological reassurance.

Turner's concept of communitas is also evident but only partially realized. Ritual temporarily dissolves caste distinctions, bringing workers together through a shared experience of industrial danger:

> *"People in various caste in the estate, but all caste people come and join the rituals; women can only observe, not conduct the ritual."* (R.L. 02)

While caste boundaries are suspended, gender boundaries remain firmly intact. Women are excluded from performing the ritual and from consuming sacrificial offerings. Consequently, Rotha Muni does not simply reflect existing gender hierarchies but actively reproduces them through repeated ritual performance. Rather than universal communitas, the ritual creates solidarity among male workers while excluding women from the sphere of sacred protection.

5.3 Restored Behaviour and Embodied Knowledge

Schechner's (2003) concept of restored behaviour explains how Rotha Muni functions as an intergenerational system of knowledge transmission. As one participant simply noted:

> *"They do the same ritual annually."* (O.H. 03)

Annual repetition is not merely customary; it is the mechanism through which knowledge about danger and protection is preserved. Younger generations learn appropriate responses to occupational risk by participating in rituals rather than through written instruction.

Taylor's (2003) distinction between the archive and the repertoire further clarifies this process. Knowledge of Rotha Muni exists almost entirely within embodied performance, oral tradition, and

collective memory rather than written texts. A university lecturer explained:

> *"People get knowledge from the performance and they are aware of protection from the machine and always remember those are not safe."* (A.I. 02)

Ritual performance therefore functions as an ongoing form of safety pedagogy, continually reminding workers of occupational hazards. The absence of written documentation is not a weakness but the defining feature of this vernacular epistemology, which survives through embodied practice rather than textual preservation.

5.4 Ritual and the Disciplined Body

Foucault's (1988) concept of "technologies of the self" provides another perspective on plantation rituals. Beyond explaining danger, Rotha Muni prepares workers psychologically and ethically for hazardous labour. One participant observed:

> *"In this ritual people protect themselves from uncertainty. Reduce fear."* (A.I. 01)

Ritual participation reshapes workers into moral subjects capable of confronting dangerous work with confidence and collective responsibility. In this sense, the ritual not only reassures workers but also contributes to the continuity of plantation production by making hazardous labour psychologically bearable without eliminating the dangers themselves.

5.5 Gendered Epistemologies of Risk: The Politics of Ritual Visibility

Although Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami explain danger, transmit knowledge, and sustain collective memory, they do not extend the same ritual recognition to women's occupational risks. Male dangers, such as machinery accidents and pruning injuries, are sudden, visible, and linked to identifiable causes, making them readily transformed into ritual events. Women's risks, however, arise through prolonged exposure to heavy rain, lightning, leeches, insects, snake bites, falling trees, steep mountain slopes, chronic physical exhaustion, and the combined burden of productive and reproductive labour. These hazards are continuous rather than episodic and often accumulate over time.

A plantation folk song reflects these dangers:

> *"Of leeches that suck the blood*
> *Of sharp-toothed stumbling stumps*
> *Strewn along the pitiless trek*
> *You can see in Kandy."(*Velupillai, 1970)

Despite these serious hazards, no comparable protective deity or sacrificial ritual has emerged for women. Butler's (1993) theory of recognizability helps explain this asymmetry, male injury becomes culturally visible and publicly acknowledged, whereas women's suffering is normalized as an ordinary condition of plantation labour. Similarly, Foucault suggests that some forms of harm become objects of governance while others are absorbed into everyday life without recognition. Women's work is represented through rituals such as Kolunthu Sami and Mattathu Sami, which celebrate fertility and productivity rather than bodily protection. Thus, plantation ritual life sacralizes the safety of male workers and the productivity of tea but not the safety of women's bodies.

This gendered order is reinforced through ritual participation itself. Comparative fieldwork shows that women are completely excluded from Rotha Muni rituals in the Nilgiris, while in Nuwara Eliya and Badulla they may observe but cannot conduct rituals or consume sacrificial offerings. Although the degree of exclusion varies, the underlying principle remains consistent: women may witness sacred protection but cannot author

or control it. Vernacular epistemologies therefore travel and adapt across borders while preserving a durable gendered structure of ritual authority.

Overall, this chapter argues that plantation rituals should not be understood simply as survivals from a pre-modern past but as vernacular philosophical responses to industrial modernity. They constitute locally generated systems of reasoning through which plantation communities explain danger, negotiate uncertainty, and cultivate collective responsibility. At the same time, these epistemologies are shaped by gendered labour relations that determine which forms of suffering become publicly recognized and ritually protected. Male occupational danger becomes visible, sacred, and collectively remembered, whereas women's labour-related suffering remains normalized, cumulative, and comparatively unrecognized. The central finding of this chapter is therefore not that women experience less occupational risk, but that their risks remain largely absent from the ritual systems through which plantation communities produce and transmit knowledge about labour, danger, and survival.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami should not be understood merely as local religious customs or remnants of superstition. Rather, they constitute vernacular epistemologies through which plantation workers interpret labour, danger, uncertainty, and survival. Emerging directly from the material conditions of plantation work, these rituals provide culturally meaningful explanations where institutional systems of occupational safety have historically been absent. Consistent with Primiano's (1995) concept of vernacular religion and Geertz's (1983) notion of local knowledge, the study shows that knowledge is produced through lived experience, embodied in ritual practice, transmitted orally, and continually recreated through collective participation.

A central contribution of this chapter is its argument that labour creates religion. While much scholarship has examined how religion shapes society, this study asks how labour itself generates religious traditions. Plantation deities emerged not independently of workers' experiences but through the specific conditions of plantation labour. Each deity corresponds to a particular occupation and its associated risks. Rotha Muni developed in response to factory machinery, Kawathu Sami to pruning with curved knives, Kambi Muni to cable transport, and Kotte Muni to the dangers of early forest settlements. As plantation technology and working conditions changed, several of these deities declined or disappeared, demonstrating that religious traditions evolved alongside transformations in labour. Plantation folk religion therefore represents a dynamic intellectual response to changing material realities rather than a static survival of inherited beliefs.

The findings further suggest that plantation rituals constitute a vernacular philosophy of work. Rather than presenting abstract theological doctrines, they offer practical responses to questions concerning danger, uncertainty, protection, and survival. Workers interpreted unfamiliar industrial machinery not through engineering knowledge, to which they had little access, but through ritual practices that transformed fear and uncertainty into sacred meaning. Plantation communities therefore did not simply endure industrial modernity; they interpreted it philosophically through ritual, creating new religious practices that enabled them to understand unfamiliar technologies and hazardous working conditions.

The chapter also contributes to performance studies by demonstrating that ritual is a form of knowledge production. Schechner's (2003) concept of restored behaviour and Taylor's (2003) distinction between the archive and the

repertoire explain how plantation knowledge is preserved across generations. The annual repetition of Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami rituals shows that knowledge is transmitted not primarily through written texts but through embodied performance, oral tradition, and collective memory. Ritual therefore functions not merely as religious expression but as an epistemic practice through which plantation communities continually recreate their philosophy of work, danger, and collective responsibility. At the same time, ritual serves as a form of embodied pedagogy and psychological preparation, enabling workers to confront hazardous labour with confidence, resilience, and solidarity.

Perhaps the most significant finding concerns the gendered politics of ritual recognition. Although both men and women face serious occupational hazards, only male vulnerability becomes publicly recognized through protective deities, sacrificial rituals, and communal memory. Male occupational dangers, such as machinery accidents and pruning injuries, are sudden, visible, and associated with identifiable causes, making them more readily transformed into ritual events. Women's occupational risks—including prolonged exposure to heavy rain, leeches, insects, snake bites, steep slopes, chronic physical exhaustion, and the combined burden of productive and reproductive labour—are continuous and cumulative rather than exceptional. Consequently, they become normalized instead of ritualized.

This distinction suggests that the difference lies not in the severity of risk but in its symbolic visibility. Women's labour is represented through rituals such as Kolunthu Sami and Mattathu Sami, which emphasize productivity and cultivation rather than protection from occupational harm. The chapter therefore argues that plantation rituals create a gendered epistemic order in which male vulnerability becomes visible, sacred, and collectively remembered, while women's labour-related suffering remains comparatively invisible.

These findings extend broader debates in feminist philosophy and postcolonial theory by demonstrating that vernacular epistemologies are not politically neutral. Like other systems of knowledge, they are shaped by power relations that determine whose experiences become culturally recognized and whose suffering remains unmarked. The absence of protective rituals for women reflects not an absence of danger but an absence of symbolic recognition. Ritual traditions therefore preserve community knowledge while simultaneously reproducing gendered hierarchies of visibility and value.

Although this study focuses on plantation communities in Sri Lanka and South India, its implications extend beyond the plantation context. It contributes to debates in vernacular religion, labour anthropology, performance studies, folklore, and philosophy by demonstrating that philosophy is not produced exclusively through formal textual traditions. Plantation workers engage in philosophical reflection through embodied labour, ritual performance, oral tradition, and collective religious practice. These rituals constitute locally generated systems of reasoning through which communities explain danger, negotiate uncertainty, and cultivate collective responsibility.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that plantation rituals should be understood not as relics of a pre-modern past but as vernacular philosophies of industrial modernity. By transforming occupational danger into sacred protection, plantation communities created locally generated systems of knowledge that enabled survival under conditions of colonial exploitation and economic precarity. At the same time, these epistemologies are structured by labour, gender, and power, determining whose vulnerability becomes publicly recognized and whose remains

normalized. Plantation rituals therefore demonstrate not only how communities create knowledge but also how labour generates religion, how performance becomes philosophy, and how systems of knowledge simultaneously empower communities while reproducing social inequalities.

6. Conclusion

This chapter examined the folk rituals of Rotha Muni and Kawathu Sami among plantation communities in Sri Lanka and the repatriated Tamil community in the Nilgiris, South India. Moving beyond viewing these rituals as mere cultural traditions or popular religious practices, it analysed them as vernacular epistemologies emerging from the lived experiences of plantation labour. The findings demonstrate that these rituals provide meaningful ways for workers to interpret occupational risks, uncertainty, protection, resilience, and collective survival.

The chapter showed that plantation deities are closely connected to specific forms of labour and the dangers associated with them. Rather than being static traditions, these rituals have evolved alongside changing labour conditions and technologies, revealing a dynamic relationship between work, religion, and ritual. Ritual practices also function as forms of knowledge production, transmission, and preservation through embodied performance, oral traditions, and collective memory. However, the analysis revealed a gendered dimension of ritual recognition: while men's occupational risks are publicly remembered and ritualized, women's labour-related hardships often remain normalized and symbolically invisible.

This chapter contributes to debates in vernacular religion, labour anthropology, folklore, performance studies, and philosophy by demonstrating that philosophical knowledge is not limited to formal texts or institutional traditions. Plantation communities create locally grounded systems of knowledge through labour, ritual practice, and oral transmission. At the same time, these epistemologies are shaped by gender, power, and identity, sustaining communities while also reflecting existing inequalities.

Ultimately, the chapter argues that plantation rituals should be understood as living philosophies of labour rather than remnants of the past. More fundamentally, it demonstrates that religion does not merely shape labour; labour itself can generate religious traditions. Emerging from workers' encounters with danger, uncertainty, and exploitation, plantation rituals represent dynamic forms of knowledge through which marginalized communities interpret their world and negotiate everyday challenges.

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22) Note on Participant Codes

23) Participant data cited throughout the chapter was collected during fieldwork conducted across three plantation districts in Sri Lanka and India (Nilgiris- India, Nuwara Eliya and Badulla). Participant codes are as follows
24) O.H- Oral histories
25) A.I – Academic Interviews
26) R.L- Religious Leaders

Chapter 26: Designing the Invisible: Interface Design, Ecological Awareness, and the Environmental Materiality of Generative Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is reshaping contemporary digital society, yet the intuitive interfaces through which users access it obscure the energy-intensive data centers, water consumption, mineral extraction, and computing networks on which it depends. These environmental impacts are extensively documented within computer science and sustainability research, but they remain largely absent from users' everyday digital experience, and the role of interface design in shaping this invisibility has received little scholarly attention. Addressing this gap, this chapter investigates how interface design contributes to constructing the environmental invisibility of generative AI.

It argues that invisibility is not simply a consequence of technological complexity but a socio-technical phenomenon produced through visual language, interaction design, and communication strategies that naturalize the apparent immateriality of digital technologies. Methodologically, the chapter adopts a conceptual, interpretive, and critical approach, combining comparative semiotic analysis with a theoretical synthesis of interdisciplinary literature on sustainable HCI, critical design, and the environmental footprint of AI. Drawing on semiotics, perceptual psychology, Human-Computer Interaction, media studies, and critical design, it examines how minimalist interfaces, cloud metaphors, seamless interaction, and corporate sustainability narratives mediate users' understanding of AI infrastructures.

Conceptualizing interfaces as cultural and semiotic mediators rather than neutral functional layers, the chapter proposes environmental invisibility as an original analytical concept. The analysis shows that this invisibility operates through three interrelated dimensions, cognitive, semiotic, and communicational, through which interface design naturalizes the ecological costs of generative AI systems. It further explores how critical design, sustainable interaction design, and ecological interface design can introduce reflective transparency reconnecting digital experiences with their material realities. Beyond extending debates on responsible AI, the chapter argues that future digital interfaces should cultivate environmental literacy, ethical accountability, and ecological citizenship in the age of generative AI.

Keywords:*Generative Artificial Intelligence; Interface Design; Environmental Invisibility; Semiotics; Sustainable HCI; Critical Design; Ecological Interface Design*

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1. Introduction

The environmental question entered digital-technology analysis late, against a powerful counter-narrative. For three decades computing was described as dematerialisation, what Jasanoff (2015) terms a sociotechnical imaginary: a collectively held vision of a desirable technological order, co-produced by institutions, media and devices, orienting design, investment and use. Empirical work has contradicted it. The Shift Project (2019) estimated the digital sector's share of global greenhouse-gas emissions at about 4%; such figures vary with system boundaries and allocation methods, so the footprint is better read through sector-specific estimates than a fixed percentage. It remains substantial and grows as infrastructure expands, and the imaginary's persistence suggests the distance it maintains is not reducible to a deficit of information.

Generative AI is the most intense instance of this tension. Within roughly two months of release, ChatGPT reportedly reached about a hundred million monthly active users (partly on Similarweb estimates); by 2024 generative models were increasingly embedded in professional and knowledge work. ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Midjourney share an interaction mode defined by the absence of perceptible resistance: natural-language input, an uncluttered visual field, a near-immediate response. Their material base is documented in energy (Strubell et al., 2019; de Vries, 2023; IEA, 2024), in carbon at inference (Luccioni et al., 2024), in water on modelled estimates (Li et al., 2023) and in the extractive chain (Crawford, 2021). Figure 1 sets these magnitudes against what the interface makes perceptible during use.

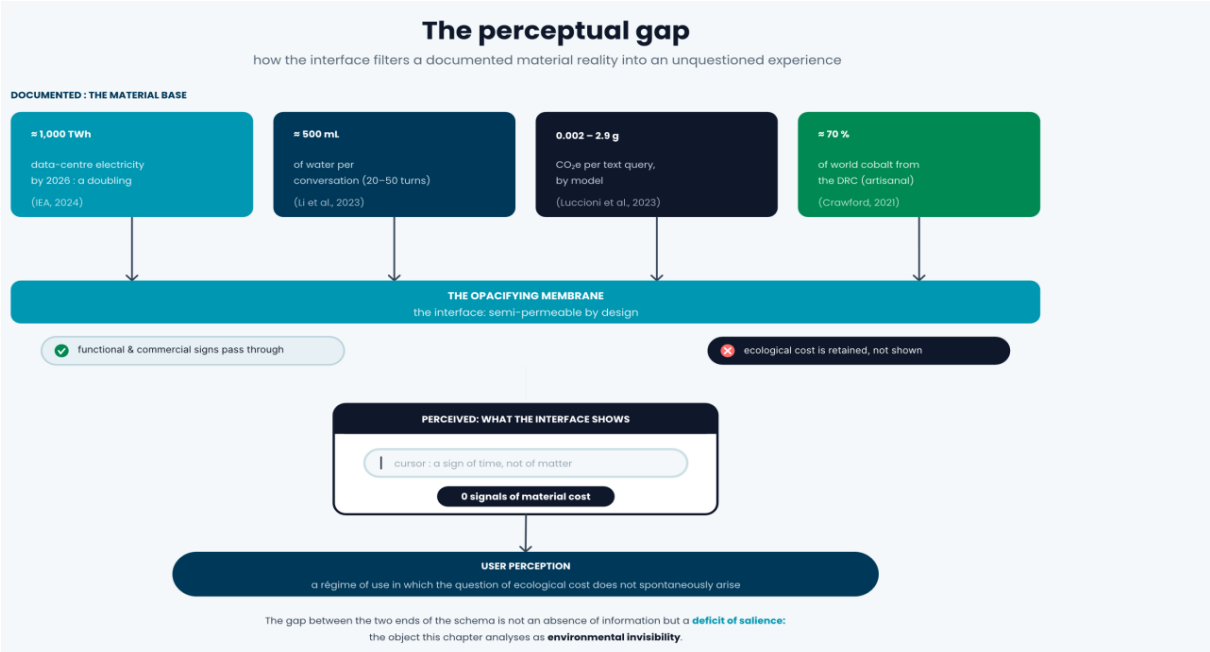


Figure 1: The perceptual gap between what generative AI interfaces present and what the literature documents. Source: Authors' Creation, 2026, after IEA (2024), Luccioni et al. (2024), Li et al. (2023) and Crawford (2021).

A structural paradox organises the experience of generative AI: interfaces configure fluidity, minimalism and apparent immateriality, while operation depends on macro-industrial infrastructures. The gap between the perception of use and the material reality of computation is this chapter's object, and it falls between two disconnected literatures. Computer-science work measures and optimises AI's footprint but barely interrogates the role of interfaces in perceiving it. Interaction design and HCI address experience through cognitive load (Sweller, 1988), usability (Norman, 2013) and seamlessness (Weiser,

1991), where the effacement of technical complexity is valorised as excellence and its consequences for environmental representation seldom examined. Emerging work in sustainable and critical design has begun to bridge the two (Blevis, 2007; DiSalvo, 2012; Dunne & Raby, 2013) but remains fragmentary. This chapter argues that interface design actively contributes to the environmental invisibility of generative AI, and explores how sustainable and critical design can help restore ecological awareness. Environmental invisibility is advanced as a proposed framework rather than an established concept.

1.1 Methodological Framework

The study is exploratory rather than confirmatory: it constructs an analytical framework for environmental invisibility rather than establishing causal effects on users' awareness. It seeks mechanisms of signification through situated analysis, interrogating the effects of power formal choices may produce without postulating deliberate intent. As the analysis relies on single-coder qualitative coding, the categorisations it produces are interpretive rather than statistically validated; this limitation is built into the coding procedure detailed below and is revisited in the discussion of study limits.

The corpus is tripartite. A corpus of occultation assembles devices from dominant industrial actors: a long-format institutional brand film on corporate environmental performance (2023), screenshots and sessions purposively selected to document recurrent interface configurations, the ChatGPT corpus including GPT-4o after May 2024, and the sustainability communications of Google and OpenAI (2022–2023); it is not a statistically representative sample. A corpus of revelation assembles devices designed to render infrastructure visible: Anatomy of an AI System (2018), the Website Carbon Calculator (launched 2018, observed 2023–2024) and Solar Protocol (2021–2024). A secondary corpus supplies the environmental orders of magnitude against which the first two are compared. Four criteria governed selection: sectoral representativeness, diversity of formats, public accessibility, and comparative pertinence.

The categories were not applied a priori. Three regimes were drawn from the literature, visibility (organisation of the perceptual field), materiality (representation or omission of physical infrastructure) and naturalisation (arbitrary conventions coming to appear self-evident), then completed by a fourth axis specific to critical design, the posture of the design (interpretive closure versus openness). Each axis carries observable indicators: visual hierarchy and salience; presence or absence of impact indicators; indexicality of signs; lexicon and narrative structure; presence or absence of perceptual friction. For each interface the material consisted of dated screen captures and use sessions (web versions, 2023–2024), coded by a single analyst, moving from an observation ("no impact indicator is displayed") to a category ("low salience of ecological cost"). Appendix A provides the complete grid, making the procedure inspectable and replicable rather than implying quantitative measurement.

Appendix A: Coding Grid and Analytical Criteria

Dimension	Observable indicator	Coding criterion	Illustrative example
Cognitive	Attentional salience	Whether environmental information is visually prominent, secondary or absent during ordinary interaction	No energy or carbon information displayed during the observed interaction
Cognitive	Perceptual friction	Whether the interface introduces a pause, warning, disclosure or other moment that	Response time is displayed, but no environmental

		interrupts seamless interaction	consequence is made perceptible
Cognitive	Processing fluency	Whether the interface minimises visual and interactional complexity in the presentation of system activity	Text-streaming and a simplified conversational layout
Semiotic	Material representation	Presence or absence of signs referring to data centres, energy, water, hardware, minerals or physical infrastructure	No visual representation of the computing infrastructure
Semiotic	Visual hierarchy	Relative prominence given to environmental information compared with functional or commercial information	Input field and generated response dominate the visual field
Semiotic	Metaphor of immateriality	Use of visual or verbal forms that frame computation as light, virtual, cloud-like or detached from physical infrastructure	"Cloud" framing without representation of physical infrastructure
Semiotic	Indexicality	Degree to which a sign is materially or causally connected to the environmental reality it represents	A dated carbon estimate linked to a specific digital service
Communicational	Environmental disclosure	Presence, absence or limited visibility of environmental information in institutional communication	Sustainability information is available outside the ordinary user interface
Communicational	Structural omission	Relevant environmental, material or labour dimensions are absent from the communicational frame	Energy is discussed without equivalent visibility of supply-chain impacts
Communicational	Technicisation	Degree to which specialised terminology makes environmental information difficult to interpret without expertise	Technical sustainability metrics presented without contextual explanation
Communicational	Interpretive closure	Whether communication presents environmental responsibility as resolved or leaves space for critical interpretation	Environmental critique is acknowledged but concluded within a reassuring corporate narrative

Coding procedure: Each item was examined with these indicators, moving from observable formal features to interpretive categories: "no environmental indicator is displayed" was coded as low environmental salience, not as evidence that users lack awareness. The coding concerns representational organisation, not users' psychological responses.

Interpretive status: Coded by a single analyst, the categories are theoretically informed qualitative interpretations rather than validated measurements; no inter-coder reliability coefficient is claimed.

Intensity is assessed qualitatively by inter-corpus comparison, on three principles. Immanence restricts analysis to effects of meaning produced

by observable formal choices rather than intentions: deliberate occlusion and incidental ergonomic effects have the same semiotic result. Systematicity requires convergence across levels and corpora. Modulation requires results formulated as tendencies. These principles are operationalised by triangulating interface semiotics, critical discourse analysis and design studies. Table 1 summarises the corpus.

Corpus	System/artefact	Version/period	Medium / device	Observation material	Source
Occultation	ChatGPT	Versions observed during 2023–2024, including GPT-4o from May 2024	Web interface	Dated screenshots and use sessions	OpenAI
Occultation	Gemini	Version observed during 2024	Web interface	Dated screenshots and use sessions	Google
Occultation	Midjourney	Versions observed during 2023–2024	Web / image-generation interface	Dated screenshots and use sessions	Midjourney
Occultation	Corporate environmental communication	2023	Institutional audiovisual communication	One long-format institutional film	Corporate source
Occultation	Sustainability / corporate communication	2022–2023	Reports and web materials	Publicly available documents	Corporate sources
Revelation	Anatomy of an AI System	2018	Critical visualisation	Published visual artefact	Crawford & Joler
Revelation	Website Carbon Calculator	Launched 2018; observed 2023–2024	Web interface	Public interface and impact indicator	Website Carbon
Revelation	Solar Protocol	2021–2024	Web / distributed infrastructure	Public project documentation and interface	Solar Protocol
Secondary	Environmental impact literature	2019–2024	Scientific/institutional publications	Published estimates and measurements	Academic/institutional sources

Table 1: Corpus composition and observation protocol. Source: Authors' Creation, 2026.

2. The Material Reality Behind the Illusion of Immaterial AI

2.1 Data Centres and Energy Consumption

Behind the cloud metaphor lies a global network of large industrial buildings consuming considerable electricity and water; as Hu (2015) shows, it extends a long history of material networks whose apparent lightness concealed a structural heaviness. Their distribution contradicts the metaphor's ubiquity: major concentrations lie in Northern Virginia, Ireland, Singapore and the Nordic regions, chosen partly for cooling-favourable climates. A query may traverse considerable network infrastructure before reaching a server, a materiality the interface's near-instantaneous temporality occludes. Training is punctual but intensive; inference is individually cheaper yet reproduced at massive scale, and as deployment scales inference can become a dominant component of operational energy demand, its share varying with architecture, hardware efficiency, workload, query volume and deployment scale (Luccioni et al., 2024). Generative AI's impact is thus structurally tied to the interface choices that determine the frequency and nature of use.

2.2 Water, Minerals and the Extractive Base

Crawford (2021) opens Atlas of AI with the lithium mines of Nevada, restoring to AI its material depth by tracing production back to the geological resources that make it possible. The processors animating these systems require dozens of materials, several classified as critical for their scarcity and geographical concentration: tantalum, gallium, germanium, indium and others. Cobalt illustrates the dependency: the Democratic Republic of the Congo accounted for an estimated 75% of global mined production in 2024, though its relation to specific AI systems is indirect (U.S. Geological Survey, 2025); Crawford (2021) documents the social and political conditions of that extraction. This reality appears in none of the communication spaces of the companies examined. Parikka (2015) proposes thinking of digital devices as geological formations, mineral accumulations over millions of years, a temporality radically different from the instantaneity the interface stages: deposits are not replenished on human timescales.

2.3 Why Users Never Perceive These Impacts

Star (1999) observes that infrastructure becomes perceptible at breakdown, remaining otherwise the imperceptible background of what matters to the user. Morton's (2013) hyperobject extends this: entities so distributed in time and space that their totality can never be directly perceived, a property generative AI's infrastructure shares. The perceptual distance is geographical (use separated from infrastructure), cognitive (layers of software abstraction) and social (the production chain's workers absent from where AI is represented). To these are added Mosco's (2004) myth of dematerialisation, naturalising what is historically constructed, and what may be termed asymmetric transparency: sustainability reports may rely heavily on scopes 1 and 2 while providing incomplete or difficult-to-evaluate information on scope 3, an appearance of transparency insufficient for rigorous evaluation of value-chain impacts (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2011).

Synthesis: The material base of generative AI is documented and tied to mass deployment, while mythological, systemic and perceptual mechanisms hold it outside ordinary perception. Whether interface design belongs among those mechanisms is the following section's question.

3. Interface Design as a Producer of Environmental Invisibility

3.1 Minimalism and the Myth of Immateriality

Minimalism, formulated by Rams (1995) as "less, but better", reduces visual elements, simplifies forms and restrains colour; in the UX literature it is associated with legibility, cognitive fluency and efficiency. Semiotically, it organises visibility: reducing signs performs a hierarchisation in which what remains acquires maximal salience while what is absent disappears from the representation. Kress and

van Leeuwen (2006) emphasise that composition is never neutral, distributing centre and margin by cultural convention; pushed to the extreme, minimalism concentrates all salience on the input and generated result. The claim is not that minimalism intends to occlude environmental cost, nor that reduced visual density demonstrably causes reduced ecological awareness, which semiotic analysis cannot establish, but that it minimises the representation of material cost within the interface. This concerns representational salience rather than user cognition: indicators are absent or marginal in the observed interfaces, which does not entail that users fail to think about environmental costs. Greimas and Courtés (1979) established that the absence of a sign is never an absence of meaning: the blank welcome page preceding the first input is therefore a meaning-producing device rather than visual rest. In the 2023–2024 web versions of ChatGPT, Gemini and Midjourney examined, none displayed an explicit energy or carbon indicator within the observed flows. Its regularity across three distinct visual idioms warrants treating it as structural rather than incidental.

3.2 Cloud Metaphors and Digital Dematerialisation

Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) shows that metaphors organise comprehension by projecting properties of a source domain onto another while leaving others aside. The cloud imports lightness, mobility and the absence of solid substance into distributed computing infrastructure, leaving aside the massive buildings, the energy, the heat, the geography of the sites; streaming, wireless and virtual extend the same field. Read through Peirce (1978), naming the cloud without representing or indexing it produces controlled indexicality: infrastructure is acknowledged linguistically without being made perceptually inspectable. In Barthes's (1957) terms these constructions feed myth, and generative AI multiplies them, intelligence, creativity, assistance, each importing connotations of human cognition; anthropomorphisation reinforces this, since a human first name activates schemas within which one does not, as a rule, interrogate an interlocutor's carbon footprint (Nass & Moon, 2000). For Manovich (2001), the interface is a cultural form organising access on logics of its own.

3.3 Seamless Interaction and Cognitive Transparency

Weiser's (1991) ubiquitous computing and Bolter and Grusin's (1999) transparent immediacy converge on suppressing perceptual friction. Sweller (1988) separates intrinsic from extraneous cognitive load, which design classically minimises; the question is what follows when what is minimised includes environmental impact. Davenport and Beck (2001) note that attention toward some elements is withdrawn from others. Reber, Schwarz and Winkielman (2004) showed that processing fluency makes stimuli feel more pleasant, truer and more credible; transposed to interfaces, fluency may reinforce perceived credibility independently of accuracy, and a credible system is less likely to be interrogated about its costs. Kahneman's (2011) fast/slow distinction and the availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) converge: a user who has never seen a data centre represented has no example through which to integrate that dimension, so the absence of information reinforces itself. Concretely, text-streaming mimics human writing while the blinking cursor works, in Peircean terms, as an index of elapsing time rather than mobilised matter, constructing system visibility as reassurance rather than infrastructural transparency (Norman, 2013).

3.4 Corporate Branding and Ecological Narratives

In the institutional register, environmental communication prolongs these mechanisms. Read through critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1998), it does not passively reflect states of affairs but constructs representations of them. Lyon and Maxwell (2011) distinguish registers of environmental

legitimation through which a firm accumulates what Bourdieu (1982) termed symbolic capital. The biophilic imaginary Wilson (1984) theorises can be activated by nature imagery regardless of relevance, and the same chromatic register traverses AI systems. The audiovisual corpus reveals a more sophisticated mechanism, analysable through Boltanski and Chiapello's (1999) récupération, by which criticism is integrated and converted into legitimation: the film examined does not deny ecological critique but stages it as a symbolic trial resolved within a closed narrative, naming Congolese cobalt without visual anchoring and without any actor of the extraction chain on screen. The real is named but not shown, and the material chain's erasure is doubled by that of the human chain: the annotation and moderation labour Gray and Suri (2019) call ghost work is absent from these systems' institutional representation and every commercial interface.

Synthesis: Across three registers, perceptual, metaphorical and discursive, the formal choices converge on one result: a régime of representation in which the material conditions of generative AI have no salient place. That convergence is what the next section conceptualises.

4. Environmental Invisibility: Toward a New Analytical Framework

4.1 Defining Environmental Invisibility

Environmental invisibility is a condition in which the material and ecological dimensions of a digital system are not made salient within ordinary user interaction, even though relevant information may exist elsewhere. It is not ignorance (the information exists, but lacks salience where pertinent), not necessarily deliberate (formal choices may produce this effect independent of intention, as the structural consequence of a frictionless-experience paradigm that has made effacement a design virtue), and not uniform (it operates through configurations varying by format and register). The formal surface producing this state is here termed the opacifying membrane: a semi-permeable design surface letting commercial and institutional information pass while retaining ecological cost, material dependencies and human labour chains. The membrane is not wholly opaque; a brand film may name cobalt, a corporate report may publish energy metrics; what is filtered is their capacity to produce critical friction. It lets the signs of the real through; it filters their implications.

4.2 Three Dimensions of Environmental Invisibility

Environmental invisibility operates through three interrelated dimensions, each corresponding to a distinct level of analysis and disciplinary toolkit. Table 2 summarises the model; Figure 2 represents it.

Dimension	Level of operation	Principal mechanisms	Theoretical tools	Characteristic representational tendency
Cognitive	Perception and attention	Reduction of extraneous load; attentional economy; processing fluency; availability and perceived authority	Sweller; Reber et al.; Kahneman; Star; Morton	The question of ecological cost does not spontaneously emerge in ordinary interaction
Semiotic	Signs and forms	Oriented minimalism;	Peirce; Barthes; Greimas &	The interface tends to present the system

		semiological silence; metaphors of immateriality; naturalisation; interactional fluidity	Courtés; Kress & van Leeuwen; Manovich	in a form from which materiality is largely absent
Communicational	Institutional discourse and branding	Semantic diversion; graphic illusion; structural omission; technicisation of discourse	Fairclough; van Dijk; Bourdieu; Boltanski & Chiapello; Lyon & Maxwell; TerraChoice	The information disclosed does not supply the means of its own evaluation

Table 2: The three dimensions of environmental invisibility. Source: Authors' Creation, 2026.

These dimensions are superimposed strata of one phenomenon, not alternative explanations; their value lies in their conjunction. Correspondingly, the opacifying membrane takes three configurations, narrative, perceptive and discursive, and the depth of occultation varies: sustainability reports name the infrastructure within a frame restricting critical access, the brand film names the real and neutralises it in one movement, while generative AI interfaces neither name nor represent it. This last case is not readily characterised as greenwashing: saying nothing about the environment, it provides little affordance for raising the question within the interaction, corresponding to the second sense of what Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) term agnotology.

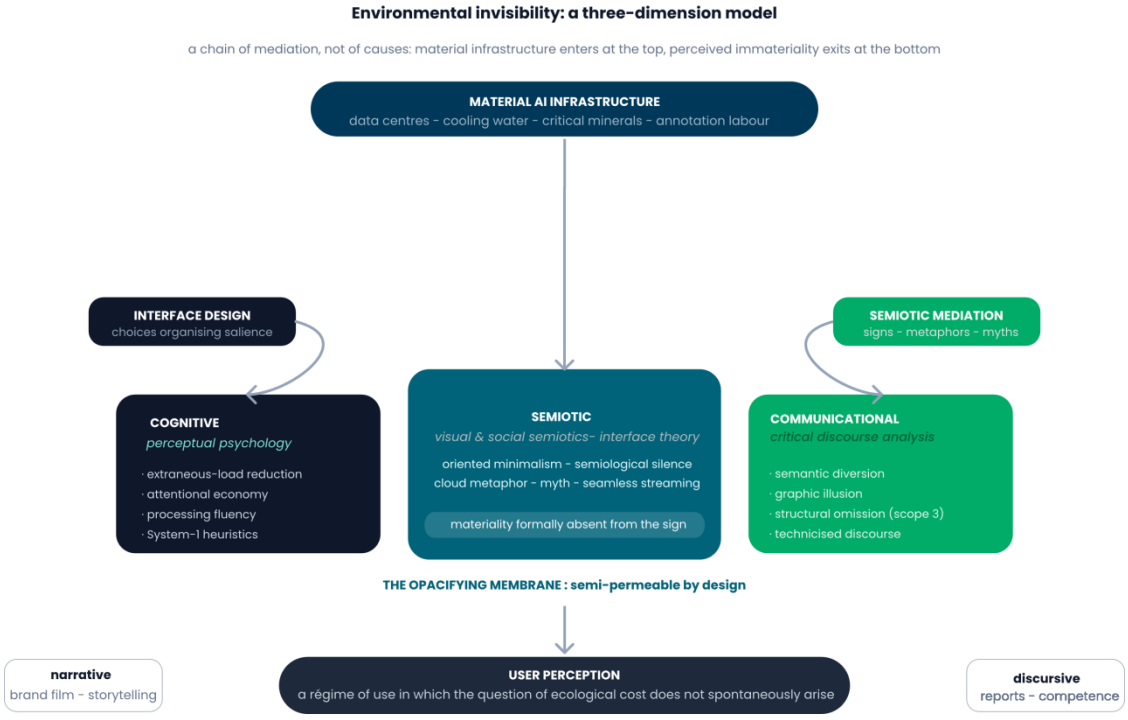


Figure 2: The three dimensions of environmental invisibility and the chain of mediation converting material infrastructure into perceived immateriality. Source: Authors' Creation, 2026.

4.3 Applying the Model

Table 3 applies the three dimensions to the corpus of occultation. Its entries are interpretive readings derived from the indicators of section 1.1, offered as semiotic analysis, not measurement.

Device	Cognitive invisibility	Semiotic invisibility	Communicational invisibility
ChatGPT	Fluidity of text-streaming; cursor as	Blank field of maximal salience; semiological	No environmental communication observed

	index of time; no processing effort made perceptible	silence; chromatics connoting neutrality	within the interface corpus; occultation by total omission.
Gemini	Same fluidity; the animated gradient absorbs the waiting period	Iridescence as aestheticised complexity, associating the system with light rather than industry	Indirect, through the parent firm's sustainability communication
Midjourney	Progress bar orients attention to duration, never to consumption	Dark interface, generative gallery; no representation of the computing chain	None within the interface
Brand film	Asymmetric shot durations; affect precedes proof; bokeh removes material context	Iconic signs of ecological reassurance; cobalt named without visual anchoring	Récupération: critique is staged and resolved within a closed narrative
Sustainability reports	Technicised lexicon raises the threshold of attention required	Visual codes of scientific reporting confer evidential authority	Structural omission of scope 3 and of ghost work; selective metrics

Table 3: Application of the three-dimensional model to the corpus of occultation. Source: Authors' Creation, 2026.

Synthesis: The table isolates a regularity no single case would establish: the communicational dimension is variable and sometimes absent, whereas the cognitive and semiotic dimensions run throughout. In the interfaces, invisibility is produced less by what is said about the environment than by the conditions under which nothing needs to be said.

5. From Invisible AI to Responsible Interface Design

5.1 Critical Design

The designer's responsibility for the ecological consequences of practice was formulated by Papanek (1971). Dunne and Raby (2013) distinguish affirmative design, reproducing the status quo, from critical design, problematising it through reflexive distance, a distinction structuring the corpora: the revelation projects are critical design, the commercial interfaces affirmative. Pater (2021) adds the political dimension: rendering the invisible visible can be an act of professional and civic responsibility. DiSalvo's (2012) adversarial design supplies the mechanism, perceptual resistances deliberately introduced to render visible what fluidity conceals. Where seamless design suppresses friction, critical friction reintroduces it. The opposition is axiological, not aesthetic: it concerns which realities design makes accessible to consciousness.

5.2 Sustainable HCI

Sustainable interaction design rests on a consequential premise: interface choices influence environmental consequences through their effects on computation, data transfer, device use, interaction frequency and system lifetime, for which designers may be held partly responsible (Blevis, 2007). It stands in tension with the seamless paradigm, arguing that friction and cost information may be not merely acceptable but desirable. Three levers recur: contextualised or modelled visualisation of energy and carbon impact; informative friction, introducing targeted attentional obstacles (Paulos & Canny, 2004); and data physicalisation, embodying abstract data in tangible forms.

5.3 Ecological Interface Design

Comparative analysis of the two corpora permits a grammar of revelation design in four traits, each inverting term for term a mechanism of occultation. Figure 3 sets out the correspondence.

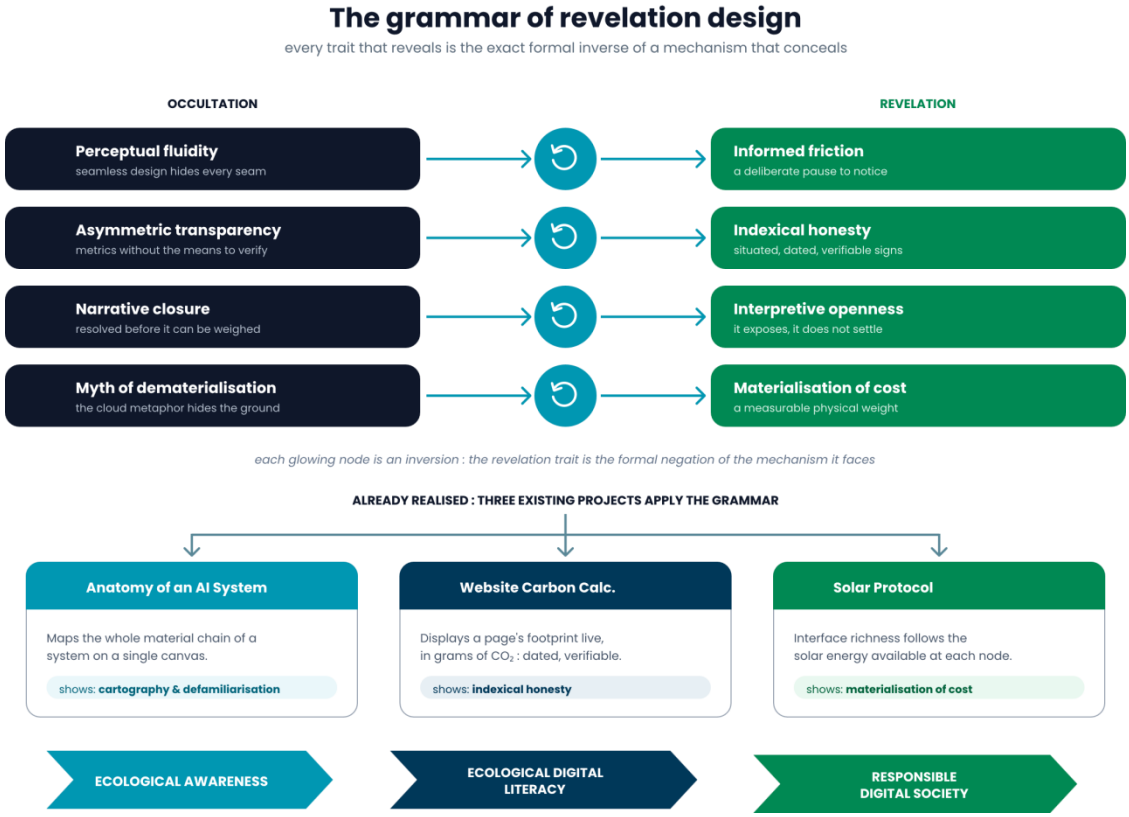


Figure 3: The grammar of revelation design: four term-for-term inversions of the mechanisms of occultation. Source: Authors' Creation, 2026, after Shklovsky (1917/1965), DiSalvo (2012) and Dunne & Raby (2013).

The revelation projects instantiate this grammar differently: Anatomy of an AI System through Shklovskiandefamiliarisation (1917/1965) in a stratified cartography; the Website Carbon Calculator through indexical measurement, a figure in grams of CO_2 situated, dated and verifiable; Solar Protocol by embodying constraint, energy becoming the parameter that determines interface richness rather than information beside content. Three principles follow. Informed friction: an impact indicator of appropriate salience creates non-intrusive moments of ethical interpellation. Indexical honesty (Peirce): representations of impact should be situated, dated, verifiable, and connected to their object rather than aggregated into decontextualised metrics. Interpretive openness: the projects expose without resolving, restoring deliberation. Operationally: per-query carbon indicators, energy dashboards, water-footprint displays, environmental labels, server visualisation, reflective friction. These resonate with the French RGESN (79 criteria in 2022, 78 in 2024) and the European AI Act's transparency requirements for general-purpose models, though not as a current general obligation to provide per-query indicators

5.4 Toward Ecological Digital Literacy

The model opens a pedagogical horizon. If environmental invisibility is produced formally, the capacity to perceive it is unevenly distributed: reading visual and interactional forms is a competence, and the mechanisms of occultation are most legible to those trained in design. Hence a difficulty of principle: where the salience of ecological cost depends on a literacy that ordinary use does not cultivate, the

interface reproduces the very invisibility it could contest, and the burden of awareness falls on a specialised minority. The revelation projects suggest the inverse. The Website Carbon Calculator makes the footprint legible through one salient indicator rather than interpretive expertise, implying that a well-designed sign can distribute awareness beyond the trained eye. Ecological digital literacy rests on two supports: training institutions that treat the environmental effects of formal choices as constitutive of design excellence, and interfaces conceived as sites where that literacy is acquired in ordinary use rather than presupposed.

Synthesis: A design of environmental visibility is formally realisable and its traits specifiable; whether it is generalisable under current industrial conditions is not established.

6. Discussion

The framework intersects four fields while occupying a position none fully covers. Against **sustainable HCI**, which treats the interface as an instrument of measurement and behavioural change, it treats it first as a semiotic mediator: before an interface can display a footprint, its formal language has already built a representation in which the footprint does or does not have a place, positioning environmental invisibility upstream of those interventions. Against **responsible AI**, focused on bias, explainability, accountability, and safety, it shows that disclosure is necessary but insufficient, since information can be published yet remain effectively invisible through technicisation, structural omission, and asymmetric transparency: responsibility is also a question of form. Against **green UX**, which optimises within an unchanged experiential paradigm, it interrogates that paradigm itself, the frictionless experience being one of the structural producers of invisibility. Against **digital ethics**, which formulates normative principles, it supplies a descriptive apparatus for identifying where they are formally defeated, the opacifying membrane exceeding intention-centred greenwashing frameworks to describe a formal phenomenon whose effects are independent of intent.

Three contributions follow. Conceptually, environmental invisibility and its three dimensions offer a vocabulary applicable wherever formal devices organise the perception of their own effects. Methodologically, the four-axis grid is a transferable instrument. Finally, the framework connects materiality studies (Crawford, Parikka, Star), which document the digital's physical reality, and critical design (Dunne & Raby, DiSalvo, Fry), which proposes practices of revelation, two literatures usually kept apart.

Three limits must be stated. The corpus is a photograph of a rapidly changing sector, the interfaces corresponding to 2023–2024 versions, and the actors analysed are predominantly North American; transferability to other cultural contexts is not assured. The analysis is single-coder, so its categorisations are argued interpretations rather than validated codings. More fundamentally, it describes potential effects of meaning produced by observable formal configurations but cannot demonstrate that these cause an absence of environmental consciousness. It therefore generates three hypotheses for future testing: that oriented minimalism reduces the salience of ecological cost, that fluidity reinforces perceived credibility, and that the interface orients environmental perception. Corroboration would require eye-tracking or controlled comparison of interfaces with and without impact indicators. A final asymmetry deserves emphasis: the devices of revelation address specialised audiences while those of occultation reach hundreds of millions of users. Formal feasibility is established; generalisation is not.

7. Conclusion

The blinking cursor of a generative AI interface is a sign that selects: it renders salient the imminence of a response while leaving outside representation the kilowatt-hours mobilised in distant data centres and the supply chain from cobalt extraction to semiconductor manufacture. Interface design is not a neutral layer: it organises what is salient and what remains background; it can thereby contribute

to environmental invisibility through the convergent cognitive, semiotic and communicational mechanisms articulated here; and it can equally support ecological awareness through the inverse choices the grammar of revelation design formalises: informed friction, indexical honesty, interpretive openness. These are claims about the organisation of environmental salience, not about a demonstrated causal effect on consciousness. Two clarifications delimit this conclusion. The analysis is not against generative AI: the potential of these systems for knowledge, assistance and research is real, and the question is not whether AI should be used but with what understanding of its conditions. Nor are the material conditions fixed: efficiency gains, renewable energy for data centres and an emerging computational sobriety form a plausible trajectory toward a lighter AI. Until then, interface design constitutes one important site through which the conditions of environmental knowledge and accountability can be reconsidered. Choosing to display or conceal a datum is not a purely aesthetic choice: it participates in constructing what users can know, and therefore decide, about the systems they use. Establishing the conditions under which interfaces support that knowledge rather than foreclose it constitutes a research programme, for which this chapter has sought to supply the analytical vocabulary.

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Chapter 27: The Role of Imagination in Blending Colonialism and Romanticism: The Western Man and the Indigenous Counterpart (Based on R. L. Spittel's The White Boy and Where the White Sambhur Roams)

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Abstract

This study explores the ideological intersection of the colonial project and romantic imagination in historical Sri Lanka through a critical analysis of Where the White Sambhur Roams (1934) and The White Boy (1956) by Dr. R. L. Spittel (1881–1969). While contemporary Western maritime fiction Eurocentrically heroized sailors discovering islands, Spittel departs from this tradition by crafting a distinct, localized Sri Lankan Romanticism. The central character, Hans Vanda Mayer—a Dutch youth—functions as a dual representative of 17th-century Western commercial expansion and the "civilized" observer confronting the native population. The primary objective is to evaluate how Spittel utilizes creative imagination to blend colonial dominance with romanticized depictions of the indigenous lifestyle, mapping the nuanced cultural clash between the Western man and his indigenous counterpart. Grounded in a post-colonial theoretical framework, this qualitative study employs Textual Analysis as its primary methodology. It utilizes Edward Said's seminal concept of 'Orientalism' (Orientalism, 1978) to deconstruct the "colonial gaze" and mechanisms of exoticization, while incorporating Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical treatise A Discourse on Inequality (1755) to theorize the romantic construction of the "Noble Savage." The research demonstrates that through a patronizing colonial gaze, Spittel romantically portrays the Veddas as pristine "noble savages" untouched by civilization. However, Said's Orientalist lens reveals that this romanticization simultaneously exoticizes them, constructing a dual identity that marginalizes the indigenous community as "The Other" to accommodate the colonial grand narrative. This paper concludes that romanticization in Spittel's works is a complex ideological project; it functions as an aesthetic mask that conceals structural subjugation, permanently altering the traditional lifeworld of the Vedda society.

Keywords: *Post-colonialism, Orientalism , Noble Savage , Sri Lankan Romanticism, R. L. Spittel, "The Other" Concept.*

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1. Introduction

The geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural landscape of seventeenth-century Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was fundamentally transformed by the complex and turbulent transition from indigenous monarchical authority to European maritime colonial domination. Following the initial Portuguese entry into the island's coastal trading networks in the early sixteenth century, the arrival and rapid institutionalization of the Dutch East India Company (*VereenigdeOostindische Compagnie* – VOC) in the seventeenth century marked a far more systematic, bureaucratized, and aggressive phase of European mercantilism (De Silva, 1981). The VOC sought not merely to occupy strategic maritime ports such as Galle, Colombo, and Jaffna, but to establish an absolute commercial monopoly over the lucrative trade in wild cinnamon, elephant exports, areca nuts, and pearls (De Silva, 1981). This Eurocentric commercial expansion necessitated a sophisticated administrative apparatus that increasingly categorized, mapped, and surveyed the island's geographical terrain and native populations. Colonial administrative accounts, logs, and early travelogues—such as those later compiled by James Cordiner (1807) and Philippus Baldaeus (1672)—filtered the island's multifaceted socio-political realities through an imperial lens, consistently reducing indigenous populations to passive subjects, tax-paying labor units, or uncivilized impediments to European commercial efficiency.

However, as highlighted in indigenous cultural scholarship and local historical studies, particularly the exhaustive research compiled by Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura (1991), the geographical and political reality of seventeenth-century Ceylon was far more fragmented and resilient than official VOC reports acknowledged. Beyond the narrow, fortified coastal belt governed by Dutch Governors, the vast, topographically forbidding interior of the island—most notably the Uva Bintenne, BintennaPattuwa, Wellassa, and the dense forest corridors stretching toward the Eastern seaboard—remained an autonomous, uncharted enclave of wild forests and rugged mountain ranges. This vast hinterland was the ancestral domain of Sri Lanka's indigenous hunter-gatherer population, the Vedda community (*Vanniyalaetto* or "forest dwellers"). Operating largely outside the direct administrative reach, tax burdens, and judicial jurisdiction of both European colonial regimes and, to a varying degree, the sovereign Kandyan Kingdom (*Kanda Uda Pas Rata*), the Veddas maintained an ancient, self-sustaining lifeworld deeply rooted in the forest ecosystem.

Historically recorded in Sri Lankan chronicles such as the *Mahavamsa* and *Culavamsa* as descendants of the aboriginal Yakkha and Nisada tribes, the Veddas of the Uva Bintenne region represented an ancient continuous human heritage. Primary European historical accounts that managed to penetrate the interior during this era, most notably English captive Robert Knox's seminal treatise *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* (1681/1965), document that the Veddas occupied a unique socio-political niche. They were neither fully subjugated vassals of the Kandyan Monarch nor isolated relics devoid of political awareness. Instead, they maintained a delicate, mutually beneficial feudal relationship with the Kandyan Crown, serving as expert forest scouts, archers during royal military mobilizations against foreign invaders, and providers of ritual forest tributes such as wild honey, venison, and elephant tusks. In return, Kandyan Kings officially recognized their territorial sovereignty over their ancestral hunting grounds (*Veddi Rata* or "Vedda Country"), allowing them to preserve their distinct clan structures (*varige*), animistic spiritual traditions, and customary forest laws without external interference.

The collision between Western commercial expansionism embodied by the VOC and the pristine, autonomous lifeworld of the interior Vedda clans created an intense cultural friction.

The seventeenth century thus serves as a critical historical stage where two radically opposed worldviews met: the Western capitalist paradigm driven by geographical mapping, extraction, and colonial subjugation, and the indigenous worldview governed by spiritual kinship with nature, territorial sanctity, and non-accumulative subsistence.

In the history of Sri Lankan English literature and ethnographic documentation, Dr. Richard Lionel Spittel (1881–1969) occupies a unique, highly influential, and complex position. A renowned surgeon by profession who served as the Senior Surgeon at the General Hospital, Colombo, Spittel's true lifelong obsession lay in the deep forests of the Uva and Eastern provinces, where he dedicated decades of his life to exploring uncharted wildernesses, treating tropical diseases among forest populations, and documenting the vanishing lifeways of the Vedda community (Uragoda, 2003). His extensive field research, personal friendships with Vedda clan leaders, and deep empathy for their socio-economic plight resulted in a monumental literary and ethnographic corpus, including non-fiction travelogues and scientific studies such as *Wild Ceylon* (1924), *Far Off Things* (1961), *Savage Sanctuary* (1943) and *Vanished Trails* (1948), alongside historical fiction novels such as *Where the White Sambhur Roams* (1934) and *The White Boy* (1956).

Spittel's creative and biographical work marks a profound departure from contemporary 19th and early 20th-century Western maritime and colonial travel fiction (Goonetileke, 1976). Standard Victorian and Edwardian colonial literature typified by imperial adventure novels systematically heroized European sailors, traders, and soldiers who conquered tropical islands, defeated "savage" natives, and established Western order over untamed wildernesses. In contrast, Spittel rejected crude imperial triumphism, choosing instead to craft a distinct, highly localized form of Sri Lankan Romanticism. His narratives fused meticulous physical ethnography, botanical and zoological accuracy, and intimate knowledge of Vedda dialect (*Vaddi Basa*) with imaginative historical storytelling. Spittel's literary project was driven by an urgent, passionate desire to record and preserve the memory of a culture he perceived to be on the brink of complete extinction due to modern agricultural expansion, deforestation, and state assimilation policies.

Spittel's literary legacy has had a lasting impact on Sri Lankan cultural consciousness. His works were subsequently translated, adapted, and preserved within Sinhala literary contexts by scholars and fiction writers, most notably by Jayaweera Wijayapala in *SuduVaddahaNoliyuu Katha* (2017), which sought to retell Spittel's narratives through a localized Sinhala narrative lens. Simultaneously, his representations of the Vedda community have been subjected to rigorous, critical academic deconstruction by Sri Lankan anthropologists and literary theorists, prominent among whom is Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura in his authoritative treatise *Uve Vaddi Jana Puranya* (1991). While celebrating Spittel's medical humanitarianism and empathetic record of Vedda folklore, contemporary scholars interrogate the complex ideological mechanisms beneath his creative imagination, investigating how his Western medical background and colonial heritage influenced his representation of the indigenous subject.

The primary literary mechanism around which Dr. R. L. Spittel constructs his two major historical novels, *Where the White Sambhur Roams* (1934) and *The White Boy* (1956), is the character of Hans Vanda Mayer. Hans is a young Dutch boy who, through a series of dramatic maritime and wilderness misfortunes, becomes marooned and isolated in the deep forests of seventeenth-century Ceylon. Functioning as the primary protagonist and narrative anchor, Hans occupies a complex, dual ideological position within the texts. On one hand, as a Dutch youth associated with the VOC era, he inherently represents Western

commercial expansion, European rationality, Christian background, and the "civilized" world. On the other hand, through his forced immersion in the Uva wilderness and his adoption by a Vedda clan, he is transformed into a romanticized, sympathetic observer who confronts the indigenous lifestyle firsthand.

While Spittel presents a deeply compassionate, highly detailed, and appreciative portrayal of the Vedda community—starkly contrasting with crude colonial stereotypes that framed indigenous peoples as subhuman or inherently evil—his narrative framework relies fundamentally on creative imagination to construct an idealized, pristine wilderness. The central problem addressed in this chapter is the complex ideological manner in which Spittel uses his creative imagination to blend colonial power structures with romanticized depictions of the indigenous counterpart. Despite his overt sympathy, Spittel's narrative operates through what post-colonial theory identifies as a patronizing "colonial gaze," which filters the native lifeworld through Western romantic categories.

The scope of this chapter encompasses a rigorous textual analysis of *Where the White Sambhur Roams* and *The White Boy*, cross-examined against historical primary sources (such as Robert Knox), colonial ethnographic studies (such as C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann), and critical native anthropological literature (specifically P. B. Meegaskumbura). Grounded in a synthesis of Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* (1978) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical concept of the "Noble Savage" (*A Discourse on Inequality*, 1755), this chapter evaluates how Spittel's localized Sri Lankan Romanticism constructs a dual identity for the Vedda: morally elevating them as uncorrupted forest dwellers while simultaneously exoticizing and marginalizing them as "The Other." The significance of this chapter lies in its contribution to post-colonial literary critique, Sri Lankan English literary history, and indigenous cultural anthropology. By deconstructing Spittel's narrative, the chapter demonstrates that romanticization in colonial literature is not a neutral or purely benevolent aesthetic choice; instead, it functions as an aesthetic mask—a subtle ideological mechanism that conceals structural subjugation, territorial displacement, and systemic erosion of self-identity experienced by the Vedda community under colonial regimes.

2. Literature Review

The literary, historical, and ethnographic representation of Ceylon's indigenous Vedda community across Western travelogues, administrative reports, classical Sinhala literature, and modern post-colonial scholarship reveals a complex evolution of ideological perspectives. To fully understand the nuance of Dr. R. L. Spittel's creative imagination, it is essential to map the pre-existing textual tradition regarding the Veddas and examine how Western colonial discourse and indigenous scholarship have historically constructed the native counterpart.

A foundational, indispensable primary source in the Western canon regarding seventeenth-century Ceylon is Robert Knox's *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon*, published in London in 1681 following his nineteen-year captivity in the Kandyan Kingdom. Knox provided European readers with one of the earliest, most detailed empirical accounts of the island's interior topography, monarchical administration, and forest populations. Knox's taxonomy divided the Veddas into two distinct socio-ecological categories: the "tame" (*heelæ*) Veddas who resided closer to agrarian Sinhala villages and rendering feudal services (*rajakariya*), and the "wild" (*kulæti*) or Ramba Veddas who lived deep within the impenetrable forest canopy, sleeping in caves or tree hollows and subsisting entirely through hunting and gathering. Knox's observations established that despite lacking formal municipal institutions, the Veddas possessed a highly structured, self-regulating society with strict territorial

boundaries (*inim*). Furthermore, Knox recorded the socio-economic practice of "silent barter" (*nihandavelenda*), proving that the Veddas maintained an economically rational, highly sophisticated barter system with external societies while fiercely protecting their territorial isolation and cultural privacy.

Following Knox, Portuguese and Dutch colonial chroniclers filtered indigenous realities through far more aggressive imperial frameworks. The Portuguese historian Fernão de Queyros (1686/1930) offered a deeply biased, Eurocentric interpretation, claiming that the Veddas were degenerated descendants of royal refugees who had degraded into "barbarous, lawless savages" devoid of true religion or moral capacity. During the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company (VOC), under Governors such as Rijklof van Goens (1675), attempted to subjugate these interior clans to exploit their archery skills for frontier defense and force them into timber extraction. Dutch administrative logs record continuous frustration with the Veddas' elusive forest guerrilla tactics and refusal to accept Dutch currency or legal authority, leading Dutch officials to categorize them as unmanageable, primitive obstructions to colonial economic order.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British colonial rule brought a shift toward scientific racism, physical anthropology, and evolutionary ethnography. The definitive British colonial ethnographic study was produced by C. G. Seligmann and B. Z. Seligmann in *The Veddas* (1911), which provided an empirical record of Vedda religion (specifically the cult of *Neaku Yaku* or ancestral spirits), ritual dances (*Kiri Koraha*), and clan lineages (*varige*). However, the Seligmanns categorized the Veddas through Victorian racial theory as a "dying race" or a "living fossil." Anthropologist Verrier Elwin (1950) similarly paralleled the Sri Lankan Veddas with the Proto-Australoid tribal communities of Central India (such as the Bondo, Gond, Baiga, and Santhal), asserting that they preserved pre-neolithic cultural traits. Archaeological research by Dr. S. U. Deraniyagala (1991) and others further established a biological and cultural lineage connecting contemporary Veddas to the prehistoric Balangoda Man (*Homo sapiens balangodensis*), dating back tens of thousands of years.

Despite this historical longevity, mainstream documentation categorized the Vedda community through shifting, external terminologies such as *Yakkha*, *Nisada*, *Milakka*, *Sabara*, *Pulinda*, *Kiratha*, and *Vanniyalaetto*. Classical Sinhala *Sandeshaya* poetry of the Kotte period frequently contained romanticized descriptions of Vedda women (*Mala-du katun*), praising their natural beauty while framing them as exotic figures outside Sinhala Buddhist society. In modern Sri Lankan literary critique, scholars like Regi Siriwardena (1987) and H. A. I. Goonetileke (1970, 1976) examined how European writers constructed Ceylon as a tropical oriental sanctuary. Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) stood as a rare realistic counterweight, stripping the jungle of romantic idealism and showing how colonial administrative structures crushed the peasantry.

Dr. R. L. Spittel adopted a literary trajectory that stood midway between Victorian romanticism and observational ethnography. Unlike Woolf's grim realism, Spittel chose to romanticize the wilderness as a sublime arena of moral purity. However, as Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura demonstrates in *Uve Vaddi Jana Puranya* (1991), framing the Vedda purely as a "noble savage" or vanishing specimen fails to grasp the internal worldview (*lokasvabhavaya*) and genuine self-identity (*svatmaparignnaya*) of the *Vanniyalaetto*, detaching them from their dynamic historical, economic, and ritual ties with Sri Lankan society.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

To critically examine how Spittel's narratives blend colonial realities with romantic imagination, this study constructs a comprehensive theoretical framework synthesizing Enlightenment philosophy, post-colonial literary critique, spatial analysis, and native anthropological formulations. A foundational pillar is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's treatise *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755), which theorizes that human beings in their original "state of nature" were naturally good, empathetic, free, and morally unpolluted by civilized institutions—forming the archetypal matrix of the "Noble Savage" (*Le Bon Sauvage*). Spittel utilizes this romantic archetype to construct characters like Kaira, Poromola, and Tikiri as pristine embodiments of the natural man living in absolute moral superiority to Western civilization. However, post-colonial theory exposes that Rousseauian romanticism temporally freezes the native in a timeless past, denying them dynamic historical agency and valuing them only as long as they remain in an uncultivated, pre-modern state of innocence.

This idealization intersects with Edward Said's seminal concept of *Orientalism* (1993), which deconstructs how Western literature produced and ruled the Orient by constructing it as the irrational, static, sensuous, and exotic "Other" in binary opposition to the rational, civilized Western "Self." Within Spittel's texts, this operates through the pervasive "colonial gaze" embodied by Hans Vanda Mayer, who continuously observes, maps, and documents the forest lifeworld, ensuring the Western protagonist remains the active, rational subject of knowledge while the native Vedda remains the passive, observed object of study. Interlinked with Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory (1988), the native voice is shown to be continuously mediated, translated, and overwritten through Western narrative oversight.

anthropological deconstructions by Professor Gananath Obeyesekere (*The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*, 1992; *Imagining Karma*, 2002) expose how Western writers project "European Mythmaking" onto native societies. Obeyesekere demonstrates that European observers invented a self-serving myth wherein Europeans were perceived by native populations as superior, mystical, or heroic figures—a dynamic mirrored in Hans Vanda Mayer's seamless transformation into a uniquely gifted "white Vedda." Crucially, Obeyesekere highlights the profound "ritual hybridity" and historical symbiosis that historically existed between the Veddas and Sinhala-Buddhist agrarian civilization (such as shared participation in regional deity cults of Kataragama and Pattini, and the *Kohomba Kankariya* ritual complex). Spittel's romantic insistence on depicting the Veddas as pristine, utterly isolated forest dwellers erases these complex historical ties and reduces their rich religious worldview to primitive, exotic animism (*Neaku Yaku*).

Spatial and subaltern theories further enrich this matrix through Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "Contact Zone" (1992) and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of "Hybridity" (1994). The Uva Bintenne wilderness functions as a contact zone where Hans adapts to forest life, creating a hybrid identity; yet Bhabha stresses that colonial hybridity is fundamentally ambivalent, as Hans's European identity ensures his ultimate transcendence and return, while his native companions remain structurally confined to the margins. Finally, this theoretical matrix is grounded by Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura's native critique, which warns that romanticizing the Vedda as a vanishing forest race acts as an aesthetic mask that conceals historical land alienation, state-sponsored displacement, and the systematic destruction of ancestral hunting grounds.

4. Methodology and Research Design

To execute this investigation with absolute academic rigor, a qualitative research design based on Critical Literary Methodology, Textual Analysis, and Close Reading was employed. The primary empirical corpus consists of Spittel's two major historical novels, *Where the White Sambhur Roams* (1934) and *The White Boy* (1956). These texts were systematically cross-examined against historical primary sources (Robert Knox, 1681), colonial ethnographic studies (C. G. and B. Z. Seligmann, 1911), and critical native anthropological literature (P. B. Meegaskumbura, 1991; Gananath Obeyesekere, 1992, 2002, 2004; Jayaweera Wijayapala, 2017).

The analytical procedure unfolded through a rigorous four-stage interpretive process:

1. **Systematic Textual Extraction:** Extracting key descriptions, dialogues, and interactions depicting Hans Vanda Mayer's wilderness survival, psychological adaptation, and interpersonal relationships with Vedda community members.
2. **Deconstruction of Romantic Tropes:** Applying Rousseau's Noble Savage theory and Obeyesekere's European Mythmaking model to evaluate how Spittel morally elevates Vedda characters while temporally freezing them in an unhistorical vacuum.
3. **Application of Orientalist Lens:** Utilizing Said's Orientalism to interrogate the colonial gaze embodied by Hans and map textual mechanisms of exoticization and othering.
4. **Integration of Native Anthropological Evidence:** Cross-referencing literary findings with Meegaskumbura's and Obeyesekere's evidence on native ritual hybridity and historical reality to demonstrate how romanticization functions as an aesthetic mask covering structural subjugation.

5. Analysis and Findings

5.1 The Construction of the "Noble Savage": Moral Elevation and Temporal Isolation

The textual examination of both *Where the White Sambhur Roams* and *The White Boy* reveals a deliberate, sustained deployment of the Rousseauian "Noble Savage" trope, portraying Vedda figures like Kaira and Poromola with absolute honesty, unshakeable loyalty, and intuitive environmental wisdom. For instance, when Hans is cast into the harsh wilderness, vulnerable, disoriented, and stripped of his European defenses, Kaira welcomes him without suspicion, demonstrating an innate human altruism that explicitly contrasts with the ruthless mercantilism of Dutch trading posts.

Spittel writes through Kaira's character to project a moral purity untouched by civilized greed: *"Simple children of the forest, knowing no law save that of the woods, bound by ties stronger than written charters."* However, this moral elevation is structurally tethered to temporal isolation. The narrative describes the Vedda lifeworld through metaphors of antiquity and stillness, creating a rigid binary where the native can retain his moral dignity only by remaining perpetually locked in a pre-modern state of nature, entirely outside the historical timeline of human progress.

5.2 The Colonial Gaze and Narrative Authority: Hans Vanda Mayer as the Rational Subject

Despite the intense romanticization of indigenous lifeways, the narrative structure strictly preserves the epistemological dominance of the Western protagonist. Hans functions as the primary cognitive lens through which the forest, fauna, and indigenous people

are observed, categorized, and interpreted. Operating through Edward Said's concept of the "colonial gaze," Hans observes animistic rituals, hunting protocols, and tracking techniques with a calculated, observational distance.

In *The White Boy*, Hans's internal monologues constantly measure forest phenomena against European scientific and rational frameworks, ensuring that Western rationality remains the supreme ordering principle. Native wisdom, while respected for its survival utility, is thereby reduced to an exoticized instrument serving the protagonist's coming-of-age trajectory. The native is looked *at*, while the European is the one who looks and understands.

5.3 Exoticization and Spatial Distance: The Construction of "The Other"

Spittel's representation further functions as an exoticization that constructs the Vedda as "The Other." Extended descriptions of animistic rituals, such as the *Neaku Yaku* spirit dances conducted around nocturnal fires, surround the Vedda with an intense aura of mysticism. Said's theoretical framework reveals that this mystical framing is not a neutral celebration of culture, but a discursive mechanism that places the native at a permanent conceptual distance.

Instead of presenting the Vedda as a contemporary political subject with legitimate rights to land, autonomy, and self-determination, the narrative transforms them into a nostalgic, exotic abstraction—a picturesque element of the landscape rather than a dynamic historical actor.

5.4 The "Contact Zone" and the Limits of Hybridity

Within the Uva forest contact zone, Hans undergoes radical cultural adaptation, discarding European footwear, learning the intricate nuances of *Vaddi Basa* (the Vedda dialect), and mastering tracking lore to eventually earn the status of a "white Vedda." However, applying Homi Bhabha's model of hybridity reveals that this cross-cultural merging is profoundly performative and asymmetrical.

Hans's core European identity remains intact to guarantee his ultimate transcendence and return to civilization, whereas his Vedda companions remain strictly confined within the boundaries of their primitive forest domain. Hybridity here is a one-way street: the European can sample and absorb native attributes to enrich his own identity, but the native cannot cross over into the structures of modern power.

5.5 Deconstructing European Mythmaking: Obeyesekere and Meegaskumbura on Native Reality

When cross-referenced against the critical insights of Gananath Obeyesekere and P. B. Meegaskumbura, Spittel's insistence on depicting the Vedda as an isolated, vanishing race is unmasked as an aesthetic mask. It effectively replaces the brutal historical realities of British colonial land legislation (such as the Waste Lands Ordinances), crown land expropriation, and forced forest clearances with a poignant, nostalgic fable. This allows the reader to mourn the passing of the "Noble Savage" on an emotional level, while remaining entirely insulated from confronting the institutional mechanisms of imperial subjugation that actually destroyed the Vedda lifeworld.

6. Discussion

The synthesis of textual findings, post-colonial theoretical frameworks, and native anthropological critiques demonstrates that Dr. R. L. Spittel's historical fiction occupies a deeply complex, contradictory space within the canon of Sri Lankan English literature. Spittel's creative project cannot be dismissed as a crude instrument of imperial propaganda, nor can it

be uncritically celebrated as a purely empathetic, objective preservation of indigenous heritage. Instead, his work represents a unique localized Sri Lankan Romanticism that operates simultaneously as an act of genuine human empathy and as an unwitting instrument of colonial ideology. By selecting the seventeenth-century Uva wilderness as the spatial backdrop for *Where the White Sambhur Roams* and *The White Boy*, Spittel created a narrative arena wherein the historical trauma of colonial expansion could be re-imagined through the lens of romantic adventure, personal redemption, and heroic cross-cultural brotherhood.

Central to this ideological synthesis is the narrative function of Hans Vanda Mayer as a mediator between Western civilization and the indigenous forest domain. Hans's journey among the Uva Veddas embodies a classic Western romantic quest for moral renewal and physical liberation through retreat into untamed nature. Stranded in an unfamiliar wilderness, stripped of the material apparatus of European society, Hans is forced to cast off the superficial layers of civilized identity and reconnect with the fundamental laws of survival. In this context, the Vedda community serves as his essential mentor and protector. Spittel imbues characters like Kaira and Poromola with a profound moral nobility that directly challenges the racial prejudices of the colonial era. Through their selfless acts of rescue, unwavering loyalty, and intuitive environmental mastery, the Veddas are positioned as moral superiors to the avaricious European traders and corrupt coastal officials who inhabit the margins of the story.

As Spittel writes in *Where the White Sambhur Roams*, depicting the stark moral contrast between the forest dwellers and the agents of mercantilism: *"In the hearts of these wild men beat a truth that the brick-walled cities of the West had long since forgotten; they asked for nothing from the earth save what sufficed for the day, holding life and fellowship above the greed of gold."* This moral inversion represents a significant departure from standard colonial literature, demonstrating Spittel's deep personal affection for the *Vanniyalaetto* and his desire to grant them human dignity within his imaginative universe.

the application of Edward Said's Orientalist critique reveals that this very process of moral elevation is inextricably bound to mechanisms of ideological subordination. By idealizing the Veddas as pristine "noble savages" untouched by the corrupting influences of modern civilization, Spittel inadvertently reproduces a core premise of colonial discourse: the fundamental, unbridgeable difference between the rational, historical Westerner and the timeless, intuitive native. The moral superiority granted to the Vedda is entirely dependent on his remaining primitive, static, and geographically confined to the forest floor. The narrative continuously reinforces the idea that the Vedda's nobility exists precisely because he lacks technological ambition, political organization, and historical consciousness. Consequently, the native subject is constructed as an entity of the past—a living fossil whose inevitable demise in the face of modern progress must be mourned, but cannot be prevented. This temporal freezing deprives the Vedda community of contemporary political agency, reducing their rich, evolving cultural history to a static museum piece preserved solely within the pages of Western creative literature.

This ideological compression becomes even more pronounced when examined through Professor Gananath Obeyesekere's critical insights on European mythmaking and native identity. Obeyesekere deconstructs the persistent European tendency to construct romantic myths around indigenous encounters, projecting Western desires and anxieties onto native populations. In Spittel's narrative, this mythmaking operates by isolating the Vedda from his historical, socio-religious reality. As Obeyesekere's anthropological research reveals,

the Veddas were never an isolated, static tribe living outside human history; they were deeply integrated into the ritual, religious, and political fabric of Sri Lankan society. Their participation in shared ritual practices, such as the veneration of local deities and royal ceremonies, established a dynamic state of "ritual hybridity" and mutual exchange between Veddas and the Sinhala agrarian population. Spittel's creative imagination, however, erases this shared historical and ritual space, reinventing the Vedda as an exotic, animistic forest dweller whose existence is completely severed from broader civilizational networks. By filtering the native subject through the prism of European mythmaking, Spittel substitutes a dynamic historical community with a romanticized, static archetype.

The post-colonial spatial dynamics operating within the text highlight the asymmetrical nature of the cross-cultural encounter in the Uva contact zone. While Hans Vanda Mayer successfully navigates both the civilized Western world and the wild forest domain, achieving a state of heroic hybridity, his Vedda companions are denied any comparable mobility. Hans absorbs the survival wisdom, tracking techniques, and environmental intimacy of the Veddas without forfeiting his intrinsic European identity or his ultimate destiny as a rational, historical subject. His immersion in the jungle is an empowering episode in his personal development, expanding his capacity for leadership and resilience. In contrast, the Veddas remain permanently enclosed within their forest habitat, unable to venture beyond the boundaries of their primitive existence. Their knowledge is treated as an instinctual, localized capacity rather than a dynamic, transferable intellectual system. Thus, despite the warm human bonds depicted between Hans and his native guardians, the narrative structure maintains a strict hierarchy where the Western protagonist remains the active, evolving hero, while the native subjects serve as the exotic backdrop and support system for his personal coming-of-age trajectory.

This structural asymmetry is further illuminated when Spittel's romanticized narratives are evaluated alongside Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura's native anthropological insights. Meegaskumbura's critique, reinforcing Obeyesekere's perspectives, exposes the profound ideological work performed by Spittel's "aesthetic mask." By recasting the historical decline of the Vedda community as a poignant, poetic twilight of an ancient forest race, Spittel's fiction obscures the concrete socio-historical causes of their marginalization. The destruction of the traditional Vedda lifeworld was not an abstract, natural process dictated by the inexorable march of time; it was the direct outcome of colonial state interventions, including predatory land laws, forest conservation policies designed for timber extraction, forced displacement, and the expansion of plantation agriculture that shattered the ecological and economic foundations of Vedda society. As Meegaskumbura (1991) notes regarding the tragic displacement of Uva's indigenous groups: *"The forest was not merely their home; it was their institutional charter, law, and sustenance, stripped away systematically by the legal fictions of crown land ordinances."* By filtering these brutal historical realities through a lens of romantic nostalgia, Spittel's creative imagination offers the reader an emotional substitute for political and moral accountability. The reader is invited to feel a deep, bittersweet sorrow for the "vanishing Vedda" while remaining entirely insulated from the systemic historical violence that caused their vanishing.

The analysis demonstrates that creative literature, even when animated by benign intentions and ethnographic empathy, can function as a potent vehicle for colonial ideology. Spittel's *Where the White Sambhur Roams* and *The White Boy* stand as remarkable artistic achievements that captured the popular imagination and preserved valuable

ethnographic detail regarding seventeenth-century Ceylon. Yet, beneath their adventurous plots and romantic imagery lies a complex discursive framework that exoticizes the indigenous subject, asserts the cognitive authority of the Western observer, and masks the structural violence of imperial expansion. By deconstructing these romanticized representations through a synthesis of post-colonial theory, Obeyesekere's deconstructions of European mythmaking, and native anthropological critiques, this study restores historical complexity to the representation of the Vedda community. It reveals that the ultimate power of colonial romanticism lies in its ability to transform historical subjugation into an aesthetic myth, ensuring that the indigenous counterpart remains forever shadowed by the romanticized gaze of the Western man.

7. Conclusion

The critical exploration of Spittel's historical narratives—specifically *Where the White Sambhur Roams* and *The White Boy* reveals the intricate, often paradoxical relationship between colonial discourse and romantic imagination in Western representations of indigenous communities. By contextualizing the seventeenth-century encounter between Western commercial expansion and the native lifeworld of Ceylon's interior, this study has deconstructed how Spittel constructs a localized form of Sri Lankan Romanticism that departs from crude imperial triumphism, yet remains inextricably tethered to the underlying power structures of empire.

Through the character of Hans Vanda Mayer, Spittel establishes an ideological bridge that allows the reader to enter the untamed world of the Uva Bintenne. While Hans undergoes a profound personal transformation—adopting forest survival lore, forming deep human bonds with his native companions, and earning the epithet of the "white Vedda"—the narrative continuously preserves his cognitive and moral authority. Examined through Edward Said's framework of *Orientalism* and the mechanics of the "colonial gaze," Hans functions as the primary rational subject who categorizes, observes, and records the forest terrain. The Vedda subjects, despite being elevated through Jean-Jacques Rousseau's archetype of the "Noble Savage," are systematically positioned as the passive objects of this gaze. Their moral purity, uncorrupted honesty, and environmental wisdom are celebrated, but this celebration comes at the cost of temporal freezing. The Vedda is rendered static, belonging to a timeless, pre-modern past whose demise is framed as an inevitable, tragic law of nature rather than the direct consequence of state-sponsored land alienation, colonial policies, and economic marginalization.

Integrating the critical anthropological insights of Professor Gananath Obeyesekere and Professor P. B. Meegaskumbura highlights how Spittel's romanticized vision operates as an "aesthetic mask." By isolating the *Vanniyalaetto* from their historical, socio-political, and ritual ties with broader Sri Lankan society—such as their long-standing participation in regional deity cults and feudal networks—Spittel substitutes a dynamic, interconnected indigenous community with an exotic, vanishing forest race. This European mythmaking allows the colonial and post-colonial readership to engage in nostalgic mourning for the "passing of the primitive," while insulating them from the historical realities of displacement and structural violence that eroded the traditional Vedda lifeworld.

In sum, Spittel's literary contribution remains an indispensable monument in Sri Lankan English literature, offering rich ethnographic detail and a genuinely empathetic attempt to document a declining way of life. However, a rigorous post-colonial analysis demonstrates that empathy alone does not neutralize colonial ideology. The creative imagination in Spittel's work successfully blends romantic idealism with colonial dominance, proving that

romanticization itself can serve as a subtle mechanism of subjugation. By turning the historical reality of the indigenous subject into an aesthetic myth, the text ensures that the Western observer remains the enduring master of the narrative, while the native counterpart remains perpetually shadowed within the romanticized wilderness.

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Chapter 28 : Post-Colonial Linguistic Evolution and Ideological Shifts: A Critical Study of Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva's Macro-Theoretical Framework and the Nationalist Discourse of his First-Generation Disciples

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Abstract:
This study examines the institutionalization of modern Sinhalese linguistics in the post-colonial Sri Lankan academic landscape, focusing on the structural framework established by Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva (1931–1980). By systematically introducing Western structural and descriptive linguistic models into local university curricula, Sugathapala de Silva transitioned the study of the Sinhalese language from traditional prescriptive grammar into an autonomous empirical science. However, this paper critically investigates a significant ideological paradigm shift wherein his prominent first-generation disciples, K.N.O. Dharmadasa (1938–present) and J.B. Disanayake (1937–Present), departed from this purely descriptive scientific methodology to align with the contemporary socio-political currents of nationalist discourse. Grounded in a qualitative research design, the study utilizes Edward Said's (1935–2003) Post-Colonial Theory from Orientalism (1978) to contextualize these intellectual transitions, while adopting Norman Fairclough's (1941–Present) Critical Discourse Analysis framework from Discourse and Social Change (1992) as the primary methodology to evaluate the core academic monographs of this academic progeny.The textual analysis reveals that while Sugathapala de Silva maintained a strictly objective, theoretical detachment in analyzing linguistic phenomena, his disciples adapted the discipline into an intermediate ideological space, functioning as semi-grammarians and semi-linguists. Dharmadasa operationalized linguistic theory to analyze ethno-nationalism and linguistic politics in Language, Religion, and Nationalism in New Nations (1992), whereas Disanayake synchronized structural linguistics with ethnolinguistics and folklore in Language and Culture (1984) to formulate a localized cultural nationalist discourse. The study concludes that while the predecessor isolated linguistic structure from ideological interventions, his first-generation disciples extended beyond those restrictive scientific parameters, repositioning linguistics as a strategic tool for socio-cultural and nationalistic reclamation in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *M.W. Sugathapala de Silva, Modern Sinhalese Linguistics, K.N.O. Dharmadasa, J.B. Disanayake, Edward Said, Norman Fairclough.*

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Introduction

The institutionalization of modern Sinhalese linguistics in the post-colonial Sri Lankan academic landscape represents a monumental and transformative paradigm shift from traditional prescriptive grammar to an autonomous, empirical science. Historically, Sri Lanka—known internationally as Ceylon prior to its formal political independence in 1948—underwent profound socio-political, economic, and structural transformations, particularly following the implementation of the Colebrooke-Cameron administrative and economic reforms in 1833. These sweeping reforms completely dismantled traditional feudal administrative structures, catalysing the emergence of a new capitalist bourgeois class, plantation labor forces in the central hill country, and a prominent petty-bourgeois stratum comprising merchants, clerks, teachers, journalists, writers, contractors, and small landowners. This newly created middle class played a pivotal role in constructing modern capitalist society, generating societal ideologies, and enhancing intellectual movements, particularly within the domains of language, literature, and journalism.

Within this historical and colonial crucible, the study of the Sinhala language transitioned through distinct historical phases: from ancient monastic philology to colonial-era Orientalist investigations, and subsequently into modern post-colonial academic institutionalization. The colonial enlightenment of Ceylon, re-established through the 1833 Colebrooke-Cameron recommendations, fostered a sustained preference for English and English-inspired literature that persisted until the restoration of independence in 1948. During this colonial period, Western academic personalities and local indigenous elites trained in Western epistemological methodologies attempted to read native literature and indigenous epistemology through their own external frameworks. A prominent early milestone of this intellectual encounter was James de Alwis's landmark translation and critical introduction to *The SidathSangarawa* (1852), which subjected Sinhalese literature to Western standards of criticism for the first time.

Following the colonial phase, the national and religious revivalist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—championed by national heroes like Anagarika Dharmapala—sought to re-establish indigenous Sinhalese culture, history, and Buddhism against the backdrop of colonial administrative and cultural hegemony. However, academic and linguistic studies remained largely bounded by traditional monastic training, etymological evaluations, and classical textual prescriptivism, where colloquial and spoken usages were heavily stigmatized as corrupted deviations.

A definitive structural break from this traditional orthodoxy occurred with the emergence of Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva (1931–1980). Sugathapala de Silva's acquisition of a PhD from London with his pioneering thesis, *"A Structural Analysis of the Vedda Language"* (1965), marked a watershed moment, introducing rigorous Western structural and descriptive linguistics to the University of Ceylon. By systematically introducing structural models into local university curricula, Sugathapala de Silva transitioned the study of the Sinhalese language into an autonomous empirical science, breaking away decisively from historical-comparative philology and etymological prescription.

However, the broader trajectory of Sinhalese linguistic discourse did not remain permanently confined to strict scientific objectivism. Prominent first-generation disciples of Sugathapala de Silva—specifically K.N.O. Dharmadasa (1938–present) and J.B. Disanayake (1937–present)—navigated an intermediate ideological space, departing from purely descriptive methodologies to align with contemporary socio-political currents of nationalist discourse. Grounded in a qualitative

research design, this study utilizes Edward Said's Post-Colonial Theory from *Orientalism* (1978) to contextualize these intellectual transitions, while adopting Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework from *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) to evaluate how these scholars repositioned linguistics as a strategic tool for cultural and nationalistic reclamation in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

Scholarship surrounding the historical evolution of the Sinhalese language, literature, and intellectual history spans multiple interdisciplinary boundaries, engaging deeply with colonial historiography, indigenous revivalism, and modern linguistic theory. G.C. Mendis (1893–1976), a preeminent twentieth-century historian, established that Sri Lanka's civilization was fundamentally shaped by two primary factors: the early Aryan settlements and Theravada Buddhism. Mendis observed that while Ceylon maintained early regional contacts with South Asian countries, direct political relations intensified primarily from the eleventh century onward due to specific developments in South India. Furthermore, exploring the differences between India and Ceylon, Mendis expressed that these divergences arose mainly from the distinct paths of development in the two areas. Complementing this historical perspective, C.E. Godakumbura (1907–1977) demonstrated that pre-modern Sinhalese literary discourse was inextricably linked with Pali and Sanskrit literature, serving principally as an instrument for the study of Buddhism within ancient monastic institutions. As Mendis noted, the broader socioeconomic and political background of Ceylon shared striking parallels with that of India, with both nations eventually gaining independence from British colonial rule in the fourth decade of the twentieth century.

The imposition of British colonial administration brought profound administrative and epistemological disruptions to native institutions. Under the British government, Ceylon embraced Western civilization more rapidly than it had under its well-known predecessors, the Portuguese and the Dutch. C.H.B. Reynolds examined how the implementation of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms in 1833 completely changed the country and accelerated English language education across Ceylon—drawing comparisons with Thomas Babington Macaulay's famous minute of 1834 in India—which consequently fostered a sustained preference for English and English-inspired literature that persisted until the restoration of Ceylonese independence in 1948. As a result of these Colebrooke-Cameron reforms, several new classes emerged in the era, including the plantation labor force founded in the hill country, the capitalist bourgeois class who invested in plantation industries, and a prominent petty-bourgeois class comprising merchants, clerks, teachers, journalists, writers, contractors, and small landowners who played major roles in constructing capitalist society and enhancing intellectual movements.

This aggressive colonial enlightenment provoked diverse indigenous intellectual responses across various strata of Ceylonese society. The initial phase of Western-oriented criticism directed at native literature was spearheaded by James de Alwis through his landmark English translation, introduction, notes, and appendices to *The SidathSangarawa* (1852). As Yasmine Gooneratne demonstrated in *English Literature in Ceylon 1815–1878* (1968), Alwis attempted to evaluate Sinhalese literature using eighteenth-century Western aesthetic standards—such as Pope's epigrammatic brevity and a suspicion of elaborate imagery—illuminating the complex intellectual dilemmas faced by Ceylonese translators who had to navigate dual, often conflicting, literary traditions. This marked the first period when the Sinhalese language and literature were examined under Western

standards by an indigenous elite with an open mind toward Western intellectual discourse.

The second major phase in the study of the Sinhalese language emerged through the enlightenment project of the nationalist movement in Ceylon. Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) stood out as the foremost national hero and a crucial revivalist of Buddhism during the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, acting against colonial administrative and cultural hegemony. As Gitanjali Surendran and Asanga Tilakaratne have analyzed, Dharmapala belonged to the first liberal and international phase of Buddhism, developing a global vision that enabled him to travel to the West and address international religious conferences. His global outlook facilitated the momentous arrival of figures like Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) to support the national and Buddhist school movements. Olcott devoted his energy to organizing and continuing the existing Buddhist school movement, while the monastic tradition sought to investigate traditional knowledge from oriental epistemology as a part of the national movement.

Concurrently, SandagomiCoperahewa—in works such as *Purifying the Sinhala Language* (2012)—observed how missionary education affected the Sinhala language, identifying two distinct linguistic traditions operating at the time: missionary linguistic work and traditional linguistic training rooted in monastic institutions. While the monastic tradition sought to investigate traditional knowledge from oriental epistemology, language study under colonial enlightenment was heavily tied to the resurrection of national thought and legacy starting in the Kandyan period (1597–1815). Wimal Dissanayake similarly described how the evolution of the Sinhalese language witnessed two major attempts at language purism—the first taking place during the eighteenth-century Kandyan period and the second occurring in the twentieth century.

The most influential character of that discourse in the first decades of the 20th century was Martin Wickramasinghe. As a scholar with world knowledge applied to study the Sinhala language, and as a creative writer, he introduced new colloquial idioms and foundational principles for Sinhala language discourse—partly as a pandit and partly as a creative writer. Examining the philological period of Sinhala with special attention to academic contributions made by Buddhist monks, Wickramasinghe focused on scholars like Venerable RatmalaneDhammarama (1853–1918) of the Vidyalankara monastic tradition, noting that while philological research at the time focused intensely on the grammar, language, and style of ancient prose and poetry, oriental scholars largely disregarded the practical usages of the living language. Ranjani Obeyesekere further emphasized that language, literature, and religion throughout Sri Lanka's history have been inextricably linked in the Sinhala mindset, rendering any attempt to dissociate literary values from political ones an almost impossible and futile task—a reality even more pronounced in twentieth-century literary history.

Dharmapala Weththasinghe demonstrated the nature of the early phase of the University of Ceylon regarding language and literary studies, noting that the Sinhala department focused heavily on examining texts for historical facts, comparative linguistic approaches, and rhetorical usages of pre-modern poetry. Similarly, K.N.O. Dharmadasa extensively documented how the Sinhala department at Peradeniya University was established and developed, noting that foundational figures like Professor D.E. Hettiaratchi served as vital mentors for young scholars. Memoirs by figures such as Sarath Amunugama illustrate the rigorous academic environment fostered by Hettiaratchi at Peradeniya. Furthermore, systematic historical studies carried out by local and European scholars sparked fierce academic

controversies, such as the debate over the origin of the Sinhalese language. While mainstream scholars like Wilhelm Geiger, Rambukwelle Siddhartha, and S.K. Chatterji maintained its Indo-Aryan origin, W.F. Gunawardhana argued for a Dravidian structure with Aryan vocabulary—a claim subsequently repudiated by later scholars including S.K. Chatterji, M.W. Sugathapala de Silva, and W.S. Karunatilake.

In alignment with René Wellek and Austin Warren's assertion that literature can be treated as a document in the history of ideas and philosophy, the Sinhalese intellectual past differs sharply from European models due to its profound religious orientation centered around Buddhist teachings. It was against this deeply traditional, philological, and purist background that Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva revolutionized the field. By introducing Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between synchronic and diachronic perspectives—as elucidated in works like *Basha Wimarshanaya* and *Wigrahathmaka Waag Widyawa*—Sugathapala de Silva treated Sinhalese as an autonomous structural linguistic phenomenon rather than a mere product of historical etymology. Consequently, subsequent scholars like J.B. Disanayake and K.N.O. Dharmadasa built upon this foundation while expanding into cultural studies, folklore, and ethno-nationalism.

Through these structural paradigms, modern Sinhalese scholarship transitioned from rigid monastic philology to empirical descriptive linguistics. Sugathapala de Silva demonstrated that living languages cannot be dictated solely by classical prescriptive standards; rather, spoken forms possess their own internal structural cohesion that demands objective scientific analysis. This shift laid the groundwork for first-generation university scholars to re-evaluate colloquial Sinhala and examine the intersection of language, society, and national identity in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The systematic investigation of post-colonial modern Sinhalese linguistic discourse, particularly focusing on the structural framework established by Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva (1931–1980) and the subsequent ideological shifts among his first-generation disciples, requires a robust, rigorous, and multifaceted methodological design. In academic inquiries concerning intellectual history, institutionalized linguistics, and socio-political discourse, empirical positivism alone proves insufficient because texts and linguistic theories do not operate in a social vacuum; rather, they are deeply embedded within relations of power, cultural identity formulation, and post-colonial national consciousness. Consequently, this study is grounded in a qualitative research design, utilizing textual analysis, historiographical critique, and critical discourse frameworks to interpret the intellectual transitions that characterized the post-colonial Sri Lankan academic landscape.

To contextualize these intellectual transitions and evaluate the underlying currents of post-colonial identity, the theoretical framework of this study is anchored primarily in Edward Said's (1935–2003) pioneering Post-Colonial Theory, as expounded in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). Said's post-colonial paradigm provides a critical lens through which to examine how indigenous epistemologies, native languages, and traditional cultures were historically interpreted, categorized, and reconstructed under the gaze of Western imperialism and colonial enlightenment projects. In the specific context of Sri Lanka—formerly known as Ceylon—colonial administrative and educational interventions, such as the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833, fundamentally restructured indigenous societies and created new elite strata whose intellectual orientations were shaped by Western forms of knowledge. Said's theoretical formulations enable this research to interrogate how local scholars, translators, and academics—

ranging from colonial-era figures like James de Alwis to post-colonial linguists—negotiated, internalized, or resisted Western intellectual hegemonic structures when dealing with native linguistic heritage. Furthermore, Said's framework assists in understanding how the recovery of indigenous language and culture in the post-independence era often became intertwined with nationalist assertions, cultural revivalism, and the construction of a distinct post-colonial national identity.

Complementing Said's post-colonial perspective, this study adopts Norman Fairclough's (1941–present) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, primarily drawn from his foundational work *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), as the core methodological apparatus to evaluate the primary academic monographs and theoretical texts produced by M.W. Sugathapala de Silva and his academic progeny. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse offers an exceptionally rigorous mechanism for textual evaluation, as it conceptualizes discourse simultaneously as:

1. **A spoken or written text:** The formal linguistic properties, vocabulary, grammar, and structural composition of academic writings.
2. **Discourse practice:** The processes of text production, distribution, and consumption within specific institutional and academic environments (such as university departments, academic societies, and publishing houses).
3. **Social practice:** The broader socio-political, cultural, and ideological relations of power within which discourse is embedded and which it actively helps to shape and sustain.

By applying Fairclough's CDA framework, this study moves beyond surface-level grammatical descriptions to scrutinize how linguistic texts function as active ideological spaces. Specifically, the methodology investigates the profound ideological paradigm shift wherein Professor Sugathapala de Silva maintained a strictly objective, theoretical detachment in analyzing linguistic phenomena through structural and descriptive models (such as in his analysis of the Vedda language and his introduction of Saussurean synchronic linguistics), whereas his prominent first-generation disciples—K.N.O. Dharmadasa and J.B. Disanayake—departed from pure scientific objectivism to align with contemporary socio-political currents of nationalist discourse.

Through this methodological lens, the core monographs under investigation are critically analyzed:

- K.N.O. Dharmadasa's *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (published by the University of Michigan Press in(1992) is examined to understand how linguistic theory and historical data were operationalized to analyze ethno-nationalism and linguistic politics in post-colonial societies.
- J.B. Disanayake's *aksharawinyasaprawesaya(2007), Niwaradisinhalaya (2012), Sinhala budusamaya(2017) , Sinhala weherawihara* is scrutinized to evaluate how structural linguistics was synchronized with ethnolinguistics and folklore to formulate a localized cultural nationalist discourse.

Furthermore, the research methodology incorporates rigorous textual sampling and comparative historiographical evaluation. By juxtaposing the writings of the predecessor against those of his disciples, this study maps the exact boundaries where objective scientific inquiry intersected with subjective nationalist engagement. Ultimately, the combination of Edward Said's Post-Colonial Theory and

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis provides an exhaustive, multi-layered framework capable of decoding how modern Sinhalese linguistics evolved from an imported Western empirical science into a strategic, indigenous instrument for socio-cultural and nationalistic reclamation in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Discussion

The historical trajectory of modern Sinhalese linguistic discourse reveals a profound, multi-layered tension between traditional prescriptivism, modern scientific empiricism, and post-colonial nationalist pragmatism. To fully comprehend the intellectual landscape in which Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva (1931–1980) operated, it is essential to interrogate the deeply entrenched normative traditions that preceded him. Prior to the institutionalization of structural linguistics in Sri Lankan universities, the study of the Sinhala language was overwhelmingly dominated by classical grammars derived from normative treatises such as the *SidathSangarawa*. Within this monastic and traditional educational paradigm, written classical texts were revered as the sole benchmark of linguistic purity, while everyday colloquial and spoken idioms were heavily stigmatized as corrupted and degraded deviations of the language.

This traditional epistemology fiercely resisted any modern attempts to reform language pedagogy or bridge the gap between written and spoken forms. As K.N.O. Dharmadasa meticulously documents in *LekhanayahaaBhashanaya* (1999/2021), when H.S. Perera published *Sinhala KiyaweemPotha* in 1934—making the pioneering attempt among Sinhalese scholars to introduce modern linguistic principles by advocating for the inclusion of spoken forms in school education—he faced vicious attacks from traditionalist quarters. Prominent critics aligned with MunidasaCumaratunga's purist movement, the *Hela Hawala*, vehemently denounced the book, claiming that introducing colloquial language into school curricula would reduce Sinhalese to the "language of laborers" and ultimately destroy the cultural integrity of the nation. This historical hostility underscores how tightly language was guarded as a moral and nationalist fortress, impervious to empirical scientific inquiry.

It was precisely against this rigid, purist, and prescriptive intellectual backdrop that Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva executed a radical epistemological break. Having pursued advanced linguistic training in the United Kingdom, culminating in his groundbreaking doctoral dissertation *"A Structural Analysis of the Vedda Language"* (1965), Sugathapala de Silva returned to Ceylon equipped with rigorous Western structural and descriptive methodologies. In seminal academic publications such as *Basha Wimarshanaya* (Examination of Language) and *Wigrahathmaka Waag Widyawa* (Descriptive Linguistics), he systematically introduced Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist principles to the Sinhalese academic readership. By elucidating the critical distinction between synchronic and diachronic perspectives, Sugathapala de Silva demonstrated that language must be analyzed as an autonomous, self-contained system of signs governed by internal structural rules, rather than evaluated through historical etymology or moralistic prescriptivism. His structural approach liberated Sinhalese linguistics from classical dogmatism, establishing it as an autonomous empirical science within the curriculum of the University of Ceylon.

Furthermore, Sugathapala de Silva's establishment of the linguistic society at Peradeniya University created a vital intellectual hub where young scholars could engage with modern linguistic theories without being constrained by traditional scholastic dogmas. By treating Sinhalese as a structural linguistic phenomenon from an objective standpoint, he

clearly deviated from historical linguistic influences that focused exclusively on etymology and the aesthetic evaluation of words and sentences. However, the discussion takes a critical and nuanced turn when examining the intellectual evolution of Sugathapala de Silva's prominent first-generation disciples, K.N.O. Dharmadasa (1938–present) and J.B. Disanayake (1937–present).

While Sugathapala de Silva maintained a strictly objective, theoretical detachment—isolating linguistic structures from ideological and political interventions—his disciples navigated an intermediate ideological space, functioning simultaneously as. This departure was not a regression into pre-scientific traditionalism, but rather a strategic response to the socio-political realities of post-independent Sri Lanka. In a newly sovereign nation-state grappling with ethnic tensions, identity politics, and cultural decolonization, language could not remain isolated in a clinical, laboratory-like scientific vacuum.

Applying Norman Fairclough's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, it becomes evident how these disciples repurposed linguistic theory to address urgent national imperatives. K.N.O. Dharmadasa operationalized linguistic and historical frameworks in his landmark study *Language, Religion, and Nationalism in New Nations* (1992) to investigate how language policies, religious assertions, and ethnic nationalisms intersected in post-colonial societies. Dharmadasa's work demonstrated how linguistic choices were weaponized in political struggles, moving far beyond descriptive phonology or syntax into the realm of sociology of language and political history. Moreover, Dharmadasa's extensive contributions to folklore, translations (such as his work on Leonard Woolf's *Beddegama*), and historical studies on figures like MunidasaCumaratunga reflect a profound engagement with national identity and cultural continuity.

Similarly, J.B. Disanayake built upon this structural foundation while pivoting toward cultural and pedagogical domains. Departing from Sugathapala de Silva's purely descriptive, isolated linguistic model, Disanayake synchronized structural concepts with ethnolinguistics, folklore, cultural studies, and the teaching of correct Sinhala grammar. Through his extensive studies on folk culture, traditional oral heritage, and prescriptively oriented pedagogical manuals for written Sinhala, he repositioned language as a living repository of national thought, cultural heritage, and historical identity. By actively engaging in grammar instruction and cultural preservation, Disanayake adapted the discipline toward a localized cultural nationalist discourse that appealed directly to public consciousness.

Consequently, this comprehensive discussion reveals a fascinating generational dialectic: while the master (Sugathapala de Silva) performed the crucial scientific surgery of decoupling language study from classical prescriptivism and establishing structural autonomy, the disciples (Dharmadasa and Disanayake) reintegrated linguistics into the socio-cultural and political arena, transforming it into an active instrument for post-colonial identity construction and nationalist discourse.

Findings and Analysing

The systematic textual and critical examination of post-colonial modern Sinhalese linguistic discourse yields several critical findings regarding the institutionalization of linguistics, the epistemological break executed by Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva, and the subsequent ideological realignment manifested by his first-generation disciples, K.N.O. Dharmadasa and J.B. Disanayake. Utilizing Norman Fairclough's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis alongside Edward Said's Post-Colonial Theory, the analytical findings are categorized and evaluated across distinct thematic dimensions that trace the evolution of

linguistic thought in post-independent Sri Lanka.

The primary and foundational finding of this study is that Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva successfully dismantled the traditional prescriptive monopoly that had governed Sinhalese language studies for centuries. Prior to his intervention, academic and monastic institutions treated classical written texts as the sole arbiters of linguistic correctness, completely marginalizing spoken and colloquial usages as corrupted forms. Through his rigorous doctoral research—exemplified by *A Structural Analysis of the Vedda Language* (1965)—and his foundational Sinhala monographs such as *Basha Wimarshanaya* and *Wigrahathmaka Waag Widyawa*, Sugathapala de Silva introduced empirical descriptive models encompassing phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semiotics.

From an analytical standpoint, Sugathapala de Silva's introduction of Ferdinand de Saussure's synchronic perspective represented a monumental epistemological rupture in local academia. By treating Sinhalese as an autonomous structural system of signs, he liberated linguistic analysis from historical-comparative etymology and moralistic gatekeeping. The analytical evaluation of his texts indicates an absolute commitment to theoretical detachment: paying his full attention to traditional Sinhala grammar, while keeping his role as a highly purified linguist. In works such as *Bhāṣā Viṣayaka Lipi*, Sugathapala de Silva made pioneering efforts in proposing a new Sinhala alphabet along with a refined phonetic and morphological system to re-evaluate the language through strict scientific parameters. Through this rigorous methodology, language was dissected as an objective scientific phenomenon operating under internal structural laws, entirely decoupled from political ideologies, contemporary social currents, or cultural revivalist agendas. This scientific detachment and structural approach formed the solid bedrock upon which modern academic linguistics was institutionalized within the University of Ceylon and Peradeniya University.

Despite the strict scientific objectivism established by their predecessor, the textual analysis of works produced by Sugathapala de Silva's prominent first-generation disciples—K.N.O. Dharmadasa and J.B. Disanayake—reveals a striking and deliberate ideological paradigm shift. Rather than remaining confined within the clinical boundaries of structuralism, these scholars transitioned into an intermediate intellectual space, adapting linguistic authority to engage directly with the socio-political realities of their time.

In examining K.N.O. Dharmadasa's scholarly contributions, particularly in his seminal monograph *Language, Religion, and Nationalism in New Nations* (1992), the analysis demonstrates how he operationalized linguistic and historical frameworks to investigate how language policies, religious assertions, and ethnic nationalisms intersected in post-colonial societies. The critical discourse analysis of Dharmadasa's writings reveals that he viewed language not merely as an autonomous structure of signs, but as a strategic political instrument through which ethnic identities and nationalisms were asserted or contested in newly sovereign states. Furthermore, his extensive scholarly inquiries into the career of MunidasaCumaratunga, folkloric traditions, and literary translations—such as his work on Leonard Woolf's *Beddegama*—highlight an active, conscious engagement with the socio-cultural reclamation and identity construction of the Sinhalese nation.

Similarly, the analysis of J.B. Disanayake's academic output illustrates a distinct methodological shift away from Sugathapala de Silva's purely descriptive model. Disanayake synchronized structural linguistics with ethnolinguistics, anthropology, folklore, cultural

studies, and the teaching of correct Sinhala grammar. Departing from the detached scientific isolation of his teacher, Disanayake recognized language as a living repository of thousands of years of human thought, cultural experience, and indigenous wisdom. Through his extensive research on traditional oral heritage, folk culture, and pedagogical manuals designed for Sinhala grammar instruction and prescriptively oriented usage, Disanayake sought to safeguard cultural preservation while instructing the public in proper grammatical forms. By blending structural concepts with broader cultural studies and grammar teaching, he formulated an accessible, localized cultural nationalist discourse that successfully bridged the gap between elite academic theory and popular public consciousness in post-independent Sri Lanka.

The findings further indicate that the institutionalization of linguistics in post-colonial Sri Lanka functioned as a crucial site of ideological reproduction and intellectual negotiation. While the British colonial administration under the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833 fostered an elite class oriented toward Western epistemology and English literature, the post-independence era witnessed an indigenous counter-movement where university departments became epicenters for cultural and linguistic nationalism. The establishment of the linguistic society at Peradeniya University under the influence of pioneers like D.E. Hettiaratchi and M.W. Sugathapala de Silva provided the vital institutional infrastructure necessary for these intellectual transitions to take root.

However, the analytical synthesis reveals an inherent dialectical tension within this institutional and intellectual space. While the scientific methodology introduced from the West (structuralism) was deployed to modernize the study of the Sinhala language, the ultimate teleology of that study among indigenous scholars was frequently re-aligned with native historical legacies, Buddhist intellectual heritage, and post-colonial nation-building imperatives. Consequently, the disciples transcended the restrictive scientific parameters set by their predecessor, strategically repositioning linguistics as an indispensable instrument for socio-cultural identity construction and nationalistic reclamation in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

This comprehensive study has investigated the complex, multi-layered institutionalization of modern Sinhalese linguistics within the post-colonial Sri Lankan academic landscape, tracing the profound intellectual evolution initiated by Professor M.W. Sugathapala de Silva (1931–1980) and subsequently transformed by his first-generation disciples, K.N.O. Dharmadasa and J.B. Disanayake. Grounded in a qualitative research design, the paper utilized Edward Said's Post-Colonial Theory from *Orientalism* (1978) to contextualize the historical and intellectual shifts, while employing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework from *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) to evaluate the core academic monographs produced by this intellectual lineage. Through rigorous textual and historiographical analysis, the research has mapped how the study of the Sinhalese language transitioned from ancient monastic philology and colonial Orientalist cataloging into an autonomous empirical science, and ultimately into a strategic instrument for post-colonial nationalist reclamation.

The historical inquiry demonstrated that prior to Sugathapala de Silva's intervention, Sinhalese linguistic discourse was heavily constrained by a traditional prescriptive monopoly rooted in classical grammar books such as the *SidathSangarawa*, where written classical texts were revered as absolute standards of purity and everyday colloquial usages were stigmatized as corrupted deviations. This traditional epistemology fiercely resisted early

modern reform attempts, as evidenced by the intense public hostility faced by H.S. Perera when he advocated for spoken-form integration in school pedagogy in 1934. It was against this rigid, purist intellectual fortress that Professor Sugathapala de Silva executed a radical epistemological break. Armed with rigorous Western structural and descriptive methodologies acquired through his doctoral research on the Vedda language, Sugathapala de Silva introduced Ferdinand de Saussure's synchronic perspectives to local academia, proving that language must be analyzed as an autonomous, self-contained system of signs governed by internal structural rules rather than etymological moralism.

However, the core analytical finding of this study reveals that the trajectory of Sinhalese linguistics did not remain permanently anchored to strict scientific objectivism. While Sugathapala de Silva maintained a strictly objective, theoretical detachment by isolating linguistic structures from ideological interference, his prominent first-generation disciples—K.N.O. Dharmadasa and J.B. Disanayake—transcended those restrictive scientific parameters to navigate an intermediate ideological space. Functioning simultaneously as semi-grammarians and semi-linguists, these scholars recognized that in a newly sovereign post-colonial nation-state grappling with ethnic tensions and cultural decolonization, language could not remain isolated in a clinical laboratory. K.N.O. Dharmadasa operationalized linguistic and historical frameworks to analyze the intricate intersections of language policies, religious assertions, and ethno-nationalism in works such as *Language, Religion, and Nationalism in New Nations* (1992). Simultaneously, J.B. Disanayake synchronized structural linguistics with ethnolinguistics, anthropology, and folklore in monographs like *Language and Culture* (1984), creating an accessible pedagogical and cultural framework that resonated with the public's yearning for identity reclamation.

In conclusion, this study establishes that the evolution of post-colonial Sinhalese linguistic discourse represents a fascinating generational dialectic between scientific modernization and nationalist pragmatism. While the predecessor (Sugathapala de Silva) performed the vital scientific operation of dismantling classical prescriptivism and establishing structural autonomy, the disciples (Dharmadasa and Disanayake) strategically reintegrated linguistics into the socio-cultural and political arena. By doing so, they transformed linguistics from an imported Western empirical science into an indispensable indigenous apparatus for socio-cultural identity construction, nationalist discourse, and historical reclamation in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

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Chapter 29: Literary Narratives and the Digital Space: The Changing modes of storytelling in the age of Social Media Culture

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally transformed literary narratives by reshaping traditional storytelling into interactive, multimodal, and participatory forms of digital expression. Although existing scholarship has examined digital literature, participatory culture, and transmedia storytelling, comparatively limited attention has been given to how multiple social media platforms collectively influence the creation, dissemination, and reception of literary narratives. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the changing modes of storytelling across Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube through a qualitative research design employing qualitative and comparative digital platform analysis. The study is theoretically informed by Henry Jenkins' concept of participatory culture and transmedia storytelling and N. Katherine Hayles' framework of digital literature and electronic textuality to examine the evolving relationship between narrative, technology, and audience participation. The analysis demonstrates that social media transforms readers from passive recipients into active participants who contribute to narrative production through comments, shared experiences, and user-generated content, thereby blurring conventional boundaries between authors and readers. It further reveals that multimedia integration, transmedia practices, and algorithm-driven visibility significantly influence the circulation, interpretation, and cultural impact of literary narratives while simultaneously raising concerns regarding authorship, authenticity, commercialization, and intellectual property rights. The study concludes that social media has fundamentally reconfigured literary production by fostering collaborative, dynamic, and platform-mediated forms of storytelling. By integrating participatory culture with digital literary theory, this paper contributes to contemporary literary scholarship by demonstrating that social media functions not merely as a medium of dissemination but as a transformative literary space that reshapes narrative form, reader engagement, and cultural production in the digital age.

Keywords: *Literary narratives; digital storytelling; digital literature; social media; participatory culture; transmedia storytelling.*

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Introduction

The dynamics between literary narratives and technology has continually been evolving and transforming over the past few decades. The mode of literary narrative dates back to oral traditions, followed by manuscripts. And with the invention of the printing machine, the print media culture came into existence and now it is the age of electronic media culture.

In the present digital age, under the influence and rise of social media culture, the literary narratives have considerably changed as a mode of storytelling. It has become more accessible to the readers, have incorporated the reader response theory at a major scale and also the reader author interaction has found a place. Thus, there is a significant shift in the literary practices, the storytelling now is more interactive, multimodal and participatory in nature. Popular Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X(formerly Twitter) have transformed beyond the mere communication networks into the digital space of visual storytelling, creative writing and literary experimentations along with archive of personal narratives.

The conventional literary models that were centred around the stable dynamic between the author, reader and the text in hardcopy format has completely been reshaped in the present digital age. The text existed as an object in the final form and the readers engaged in it to decipher the meaning through interpretation. However now this linear chain has been sidelined as readers are a part of the story that is evolving and gaining a final shape through the participatory culture. Social media allows participations, discussions, calls for adaptations and in these ways it contributes to a continued evolution. As Henry Jenkins observes, "contemporary media environments increasingly encourage participatory practices in which the audience do not simply consume cultural products but actively contribute to their creation and circulation" (Jenkins 3).

Thus, the emergence of social media storytelling culture has completely transformed the literary narratives. Jenkins' concept of participatory culture provides a framework for understanding this shift, as "it emphasizes the increasing role of audiences as contributors within contemporary media ecosystems" (Jenkins 2–3).

However, this transformation of literary narratives in digital space is also connected to broader developments in electronic literature. As N. Katherine Hayles argues that "digital literature should not be understood merely as printed literature transferred onto electronic devices; rather, it represents a distinct form of textual practice shaped by computational processes, interfaces, and technological conditions" (Hayles 3). Digital narratives function by an amalgamation of written language with images, in codes, along with sound, video, hyperlinks, and interactive features, thus creating a multimodal experience that is significantly different from the traditional print-based forms. Hayles emphasizes that "electronic literature exists through the relationship between language and computational processes, making digital texts fundamentally different from their print counterparts"(Hayles 3).

While light has been thrown on the workings of digital literature, electronic textuality, and participatory culture, but it remains largely unexplored as how social media platforms collectively reshape the literary storytelling practices. This study addresses this gap by exploring social media as an evolving digital literary space where narratives are continually produced, circulated, and transformed through technological interfaces and audience participation. The study also brings into notice the challenges that are intricately associated with the digital literary space, like questions of authentic authorship, intellectual property rights, commercialization, and algorithmic visibility.

This study implements a qualitative research methodology to examine the transformation of literary narratives within the digital space of contemporary social media environments. It does not attempt to measure user behaviour statistically; but rather focuses

on understanding how digital platforms reshape the literary narrative production, mass circulation, and reception.The scope of this study is interpretive rather than exhaustive. Thus, through this methodological framework, this research paper studies the social media platforms as an emerging digital literary space where along with technological innovation, the narrative creativity, and reader participation find a new expression of culture.

Social Media as a new evolving medium of Storytelling

Needless to mention that the emergence of social media platforms have significantly changed the literary narrative production landscape. The traditional publishing system that moved through the linear chain of authorship, creation, printed publication, circulation and readers' interpretation has been disrupted. Social media enables participatory culture, through real time interactions, and further inclusions. Thus, it functions not as a platform for mere circulation of narratives but plays an active role in how the narratives are created, perceived and understood. This transformation gives a new expression to the culture and it moves beyond the limitations of print media with wider accessibility and engagements. Hayles emphasizes that "electronic literature must be understood through the relationship between textual content and the technological systems through which it is produced and experienced" (Hayles 3). Thus, digital narratives are not simply traditional literary works transferred to digital platforms; but they are new cultural expressions of the existing form.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Reddit, Threads and Medium, to name a few have become literary spaces for writers, readers and publishers to connect with a global audience. These different platforms support different and varied forms of literary contents. From literary perspective it can be noted that Facebook has been a primary medium since early 2000s as a means of sharing literary contents like poems, writeups, short stories, book reviews, has certain reader groups and author communities as well. Instagram is a recent popular social media platform which has become a space of visual storytelling, micro-fiction, book photography, literary quotes, and poetry. X (formerly Twitter) supports micro fiction, literary discussions, writing prompts, literary discussions, author updates, YouTube has been a long running platform that supports audio visual storytelling, audio books, book reviews, author interviews, discussions, literature lectures. Reddit has certain writing communities, discussion forums, feedback and collaborative story telling space. Threads also supports discussions and sharing literary contents. TikTok also has book recommendations, poetry performances, storytelling forums. Medium has space for essays, articles, personal narratives and creative writing. LinkedIn also supports professional articles, leadership and publishing related content. In this way social media has made literary content more accessible but enabling writers to publish instantly via digital means, interact with the readers, receive feedback and build audience without going through the lengthy traditional publishing process. Social media has paved the way for the new form of storytelling like micro fiction, interactive storytelling and visual poetry. So, the creators can now tell extended stories across multiple episodes and seasons in a highly accessible digital format in their preferable platforms. Podcasts and author interviews, being live streamed and available in platforms are also means of literary expression. Besides that, Audiobooks also gained popularity, with platforms like Audible offering immersive storytelling experiences as a part of digitalization of literary content. Digital Zines and Independent Publishing has also come into existence, with Blogs, independent publishing platforms. Digital zines continued to flourish, allowing writers and creators to tell stories in various written formats. Online Magazines and Journals are also available and accessible now.

For instance, a short literary reflection posted on Instagram, gains circulation and additional meaning through visual design, audience comments, and subsequent adaptations. And the same literary expression can be posted in another social media platform as well, where it can gain new meanings and adaptations simultaneously. Thus, digital storytelling operates through networks of participatory interaction in contrast to isolated textual objects.This is the concept of transmedia storytelling. As Jenkins states that "transmedia storytelling involves the distribution of elements of a narrative across multiple media platforms, with each medium contributing distinctive aspects to the larger narrative structure" (Jenkins 97).

There also exists online literary communities. It further highlights how social media has expanded the possibilities of storytelling by means of participatory culture. The present trends of online posted creative writings or writeups in Facebook, digital micro-fiction in YouTube, serialized narratives, and video-based literary performances on Instagram, all represent the new forms of literary expression which are shaped by platform-specific conventions. These forms may not always correspond to traditional definitions of literary genres, yet they demonstrate how storytelling adapts to contemporary modes of communication. As Hayles states, "digital environments require scholars to reconsider the relationship between literature, technology, and material form" (Hayles 25).

In the context of digital environment Lev Manovich's analysis of new media can be mentioned, it highlights the significance of databases, interfaces, and computational systems in shaping digital cultural forms. He is of the opinion that "new media operates through principles of modularity, variability, and interaction rather than through the fixed structures associated with traditional media" (Manovich 30). He further says that, "computational systems increasingly shape cultural production by organizing how digital content is accessed and experienced" (Manovich 218).

Social media has transformed the individual participation from mere consumption toward participatory engagement. In social media storytelling the readers are active participants in the narrative development through comments, reshares, reposts, real time interactions, discussions and by enabling other features as offered by that particular platform. Jenkins says that "digital environments encourage audiences to become active contributors who create, share, and modify cultural content" (Jenkins 3).

In this context it can also be mentioned that in the digital era the process of storytelling is based on data, called data journalism and is related to commercialization as well. It provides insight through infographics, charts, and statistics, which helps in making even the complex stories more comprehensible. In marketing, brands use analytics to understand audience engagement and refine their storytelling strategies, to make the platform stand out.

In traditional literary culture, the reader was offered the completed text with limited interaction with the author, and limited interpretation mostly. However social media has drastically changed this relationship, breaking off the limitations, it allows the reader author interaction, often real time engagements, thus aids in development of the narratives. A digital story oftens evolve through the reader responses, making the audience participation an integral part of the narrative process itself.Especially the comment section of a social media post function as the evolving narrative, an extension of the original text. Readers may provide their opinions, perceptions, criticise, provide feedback, give alternative interpretations, provide suggestions, share related experiences, thus adding more meaning and form to the existing narrative. And in this way the boundaries between the original authorial text and audience responses are blurred, and it becomes increasingly fluid, and multidimensional. The digital narrative space

becomes a collaboration of constructive criticism involving multiple voices and perspectives. Digital platforms in this way also provides for spaces for literary practices and participations without publishing structures. Writers and readers are allowed to exchange and incorporate ideas and raise social awareness. This transformation reflects Jenkins' concept of collective intelligence, "where knowledge and meaning are produced through collaboration among participants rather than through a single authoritative source" (Jenkins 4).

That the literary narratives have considerably changed in forms of expression in the digital space is very well established now. Literary story telling through the various social media platforms also establishes the fact that digital literature is not defined and based on the presence and availability of technology, but it is built on the solid grounds of the changing dynamic between the text or content, author or creator and reader or audience. This has resulted in the formation of a new literary environment where the narratives are participatory in mode and multimodal in expression and it marks a remarkable development in the history of evolution of storytelling as a form of art.

The intricate Challenges

Although globally social media has expanded the arena of literary expression by advocating for participation, engagement, interaction, experimentation and obviously the accessibility, but that has also resulted into some critical challenges that need to be understood and addressed properly.

Digital literary practices exist within complex technological and commercial environments where questions of ownership, authenticity, visibility, and reading behaviour continue to shape the future of storytelling.

One of the key challenges is the concept of authorship in digital literary practices as in contrast to the traditional literary norms. Whereas in print culture the author is taken as the sole creator of a completed work, in digital literature the demarcations between the author and the reader is often blurred. Interactive texts, such as those found on platforms like Wattpad or Archive of Our Own, encourage participatory storytelling, where readers contribute to or even coauthor narratives. This participatory culture disrupts Roland Barthes' notion of "The Death of the Author", where the reader's interpretation is prioritized over the author's intent. In digital literature, the boundaries between creation and interpretation are increasingly intertwined, with readers assuming a more active role in the construction of meaning. Traditional literary theory operates on the assumption that texts are stable and finite objects. However, in digital literature, stable object in not found. Hypertext fiction, allows readers to choose different narrative paths, creating a text that is inherently open-ended and fragmented. Similarly, Hashtags are used as a form of collective storytelling. Katherine Hayles, a key figure in digital literary studies, argues that digital texts require a rethinking of "deep attention", the sustained focus typical of print literature, in favour of "hyper attention", a mode of reading better suited to the fragmented and non-linear nature of digital media (Hayles10).

Besides that, another crucial concern regarding digital narratives is the issue of copyright of intellectual property. The rapid and fast circulation of content over social media platforms make the literary work more accessible but also vulnerable to modifications, altercations, and unauthorized replications, thereby changing the actual meaning or significance at times. In contrast to the traditional publishing process of reprints and attributions, in social media the practice is through the features it provides like reposting, sharing, adaptation, remixing etc. and while these are significant part of the participatory culture but it also involves the dispute of creative ownership.

This collaborative feature of digital storytelling challenges the conventional literary authorship and authority. The creative extensions have made it complicated to

distinguish between original authorship and collective participation. Jenkins' concept of participatory culture highlights the creative potential of audience involvement, but it also raises important questions regarding "recognition, attribution, and ownership within collaborative digital environments" (Jenkins 3).

The factor of commercialization of content is another major concern within social media-based literary expression. The increasing importance of visibility and popularity may affect how literary value is perceived in digital spaces which mainly depends on the algorithmic driven data.

The creative authenticity is also a concern in digital storytelling. Social media also allows the digitally constructed identities to exist through anonymous accounts. And sometimes narrativesemerge from anonymous accounts, where real identity is unknown. Traditionally anonymity has always existed in the literary domain as it provides with the opportunities for creative and self-expression, but it also creates challenges when it comes to accountability and verification in this present age.

In the recent times there has been a significant rise in the use of automated and artificial intelligence related tools in writing, this increases further challenge in deciphering the originality of the content, the actual literary authorship and the real creative expressions.

Also. the availability of vast amount of varied and similar content creates a crowded space where individual stories often fail to stand out. Sometimes the content is also scattered across the various platforms and that can cause fragmentation and audience may become overwhelmed.

Social media platforms run on a specific algorithmic data driven strategy which makes the user an entity on the receiving end of rapid consumption of contents, mainly of short durations, in audio visual mode, with continuous streams of information and data, through the feature of scrolling. This fragmented mode of literary consumption leads to short attention span over time. This is in direct contrast to the traditional long form of literary reading from an actual book or from printed material. However, this fragmented reading form can be interpreted as a transforming means of literary engagement which is based on accessibility, availability and immediacy.

Social media platforms are competitive as well, and it supports the fast pace of digital storytelling. Platforms like TikTok or Instagram, has led to the rise of content designed to capture immediate attention, with features like reels and story posting, and these contents are at times at the expense of depth or nuance of the subject matter. It can be termed as attention economy of the digital space that has driven creators to focus on short-form, highly engaging content, at the cost of overlooking the complexity of longer narratives, to stay relevant in the commercial market.

Social media platforms also run on censorship and control, besides the fact that algorithms determine which stories get visibility and which are banned. This authority can lead to the silencing or downranking of certain narratives, particularly those that challenge mainstream ideas or policies. This feature of content moderation and censorship practices on social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube is in compliance with the country's guidelines but it also raises concerns about free expression of art.

Digital literary narrative operates within an intricate framework of technology and commercial environment which presents with both opportunities and limitations. Social media also expands the access and expression of literary narrative through the multimodal media and participatory culture, and it highlights both the transformative possibilities and recognises the challenges of its structural conditions.

Implications and Future Directions:

The literary narrative as a mode of story-telling in the Digital space is intricately based on the technological advances, as it works on the basis of the algorithmic data driven process. This integration of computerised data science into literary studies helps to

democratize the literary scholarship as it makes it globally accessible. On the other hand, some concerns remain regarding the balance between the quantitative and qualitative methods and on the fact of over dependence on the computational techniques and entirely based on the availability of internet connection, which might overlook the subjective aspect of literary studies as a genre.

It is presumed that the future research will most probably focus on improving the interpretability of data-driven methods and developing interdisciplinary frameworks that combine computational rigor with traditional literary analysis. Further it can also be said that meaningful collaborative efforts between computer scientists and literary scholars are crucial for advancing this new domain and in ensuring that the insights gained are both significantly meaningful and contextually grounded and are also ensured safe from misuses.

In this age of digitalization, literary narratives have established an electronic media culture of expression and it will be carried forward for the better.

Conclusion:

Thus, it can be said this new practice of electronic data-driven literary analysis represents a significant advancement in the domain of digital literary scholarship, offering new tools and perspectives for exploring texts. By implementing the power of data science, scholars can decode the hidden patterns, trace literary trends, and engage with texts in innovative and meaningful ways. As this domain continues to evolve, it holds the potential to deepen our understanding of literature and its myriad connections to human culture and society. The digital transformation of literature has far-reaching implications for interpretive practices and challenges traditional approaches to literary analysis and criticism. As literature increasingly incorporates digital technologies and multimodal forms of storytelling, readers and scholars must reconsider foundational concepts such as authorship, textual boundaries, and the role of the reader. This process of new outlook, includes computational analysis and distant reading, offers a promising arenafor studying digital literature, but they also raise important questions about the balance between quantitative and qualitative approaches to literary scholarship.

Over the recent past social media has massively transformed the process of creation, circulation and interpretation of literary narratives. The popular platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc have provided with space for storytelling, one in which literature in collaboration with technological features find a new form of multimedia expression. Thus, these social media platforms have significantly transformed and upgraded themselves from a mere channel of distributing content to becoming a platform of real time engagement and interactive space where ideas are exchanged, new innovative ideas are created, shared and a whole literary narrative is produced and distributed.

This paper, driving from theoretical perspectives of Henry Jenkins' participatory culture and transmedia storytelling and N. Katherine Hayles' concept of electronic literature and digital textuality, demonstrates that digital storytelling has successfully represented a significant transformation in literary practice, already, and it is an ongoing process, still evolving and gaining new significance. This research study also put forth the critical concerns of digital literary arena, like issues related to authorship, censorship, copyright, commercialization and algorithmic visibility. It also talks about the process of fragmented reading and data consuming culture, which are a result of the technological advancements, and it questions the new cultural practice and its value.

However most significantly social media represents an evolving and transformative form of digital literature that expands the boundaries of traditional storytelling. The presentday digital narrative is no longer defined only by the relationship between author and text; it provides equal opportunities for all. It engages through the

process of interactive engagements of the content, the creators, readers, audiences, across several platforms, with the aid of technological systems.

In this way social media has expanded the role of readers by allowing them to participate in the narrative creation through responses, interpretations, and creative contributions. The digital platforms have transformed texts into dynamic and multimodal forms that exist through interaction among language, technology, and audiences.

The future of literary studies will require a more interdisciplinary and flexible approach, one that can accommodate the complexities of digital storytelling while remaining attentive to the interpretive richness that has always defined the field. As digital literature continues to evolve, it will undoubtedly reshape not only the way we read but also the way we interpret and analyse literary texts.

Thus, this study by exploring social media platforms as a space of literary narrative, contributes to the ongoing dialogue in digital literary studiesby showcasing that the mode of storytelling in the present day culture is all the more collaborative and interactive in form, and it is a continuously evolving processshaped by the possibilities and limitations of digital. It also contributes to the existing digital literary scholarship by highlighting new possibilities and arena of research studies the amalgamation of the two distinct genres of literary narratives and the technological advances , thereby opening up new multimodal expressions of culture, and simultaneously democratizing the digital literary genre.

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Chapter 30: A Tapestry of Blended Identities beyond Stuart Hall: Reading Culture in Select Postcolonial Indian Literature

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Abstract

Hall's theory demonstrates cultural identity creation through cultural memory, diaspora, and migration as it is an essential feature of human reality that moulds an individual's understanding of acceptance, principles and social engagements in postcolonial literary studies. Colonialism has transformed the cultural consciousness along with economic and political structures. Previous research has relied on Hall's framework for analysing identity creation in the above areas but identity formation against certain human and social factors in postcolonial indian context needs scrutiny. Hall's structure requires to be examined along with selected postcolonial outlooks to fill the gap in understanding identity creation. The objective of the study is to make a comparative analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things to explore how identity is also connected to other aspects of human and social reality in order to extend Hall's framework. The paper employed qualitative, comparative thematic analysis to collect data which are analyzed through the lens of Hall's Cultural Identity theory and postcolonial approaches of Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Spivak's idea of structural marginalization, Fanon's psychological repercussion of oppressions and Said's idea on the relationship between power and representation. The findings revealed that identity is also connected to caste, psychological trauma, family relationships, established power, patriarchy, and gender roles which limited Hall's theory. The findings suggested that Hall's theory continues to be the foundation for exploring cultural identity; yet, it becomes more enriching when complemented with postcolonial approaches in understanding complex identity formation. The study adds a dimension to the scholarship of Hall's Cultural Identity theory in analysing human and social realities of identity creation by integrating postcolonial literary studies. Hall's theory accomplishes substantial analytical power when employed with complementary theories.

Keywords: *Cultural identity, Stuart Hall, Postcolonial approaches, Cultural consciousness, Caste.*

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Introduction

Identity has secured a place of its own in the discipline of postcolonial literature. Identity's encounter with colonialism has reshaped the political, cultural, economic, social and psychological truths of societies under colonialism. Colonialism is not only responsible for upholding domination pertaining to political events but it has also transformed education, religion, language, social establishments and cultural awareness. Even after gaining independence, colonies proceeded to encounter the consequences of colonial principles through social hierarchy, cultural disputes, racial turmoil, migration and inherited strategy of power. As a result, postcolonial authors have persistently excavated questions related to belongingness, hybridity, nationality, displacement, caste, selfhood and gender. These challenges have proven identity as one of the major rational divisions in postcolonial studies.

Stuart Hall's theory on identity holds a significant place within identity theories. Hall denies the archaic conjecture that identity is stable and 'transcendental spirit' (224). He argues that, identity proceeds to construct through culture, history, representation and collective memory. In Hall's opinion, identity is not only about in 'being' but also about 'becoming' (225). People are drawn to historical encounters and cultural customs, yet they proceed to rebuild their identities in reaction to changing conditions of society and history. Identity therefore remains to be dynamic, fluid, and incomplete rather than being fixed or eternal.

In Diaspora literature, Hall's theory has become a cornerstone because of the phenomena of migration. Migration establishes critical negotiations between home culture and host culture. Diaspora people often go through varied identities synchronously, stabilising inherited beliefs with new cultural spaces. Such episodes highlight that identity cannot be categorised as an individual cultural origin but rather as an identity that blends through continuous dialogues between the past and the present. Hall poses a challenge to the fundamental notions of identity and accentuates cultural transition to cultural virtuousness.

The juxtaposition of Roy and Lahiri offers a crucial prospect to study both the strengths and the weaknesses of Hall's Cultural Identity Theory. His structure defines negotiations of culture in diasporic contexts in *The Namesake*. However, the same structure when applied to *The God of Small Things*, few weaknesses become prominent. Hall accepted the creation of historical identity but failed to provide attention to rigid social establishments such as caste, hierarchy, and gender. Roy's work showcases that identity is often enforced by established power rather cultural negotiations. As a result, Hall's theory needs engagement with more extensive perspectives around postcolonial studies which have the potential to explain oppression based on structure.

The paper applies as its major analytical framework, Hall's Cultural Identity theory while proposing Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon only when Hall's concept lacks sufficiency. Spivak's concept of the subaltern shows how marginalized subjects are deprived from the chance of representing themselves within the area of dominant social culture. Bhabha idea of hybridity defines identities created within multicultural environments more directly than Hall's talks on negotiations through culture. Said exhibits how representation performs itself as a tool of cultural power and Fanon discusses the psychological outcomes of domination under colonialism. Collectively these concepts throw lights on different aspects of identity that Hall has defined to a partial extent.

Objectives

1) To investigate the portrayal of cultural identity in *The Namesake* and *The God of Small Things* by the application of Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory.
2) To make a comparative analysis of the formation of identity in the selected novels within the ambit of postcolonial indian contexts.

3) To assess how diaspora, memory, migration, trauma, history, caste, gender and family add to identity formation.
4) To examine the illustrative tenacity of Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory in illuminating post colonial identity.
5) To recognize the theoretical weaknesses and possible extension of Hall's structure when examining patriarchy, caste, inequality in society and psychological trauma.
6) To express how selected postcolonial concepts supplement Hall's framework in elaborating intricacies of representations of identity in both the novels.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesised that Hall's theory explains the evolving dynamic cultural identities in both the novels but integration of postcolonial identities makes Hall's theory more effective in understanding intricate identity formation in post colonial indian contexts.

Methodology

The study undertakes qualitative research to assess literary representation of identity formation. The primary sources are Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). These novels have been chosen because they both inspect identity within postcolonial indian contexts against human and social realities. The conflicting concerns related to themes proved a strong foundation for comparative reading. The secondary sources are the works centering on Hall's Cultural Identity Theory and postcolonial theories along with scholarly works such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reviews.

The paper uses comparative thematic analysis as its major method of textual interpretation. The themes are identified and then compared with the novels. The themes are interpreted through Hall's theory and when proved insufficient against social and human realities, selected postcolonial theories are initiated to explore the limitations of Hall's framework.

Comparative Analysis

Negotiating the Self: Identity and Naming

In postcolonial literature, identity is often portrayed through names. Names indicate lineage, religion, memory, and language. Hall said that identity is created through representation rather than essentialist natural existence. Both the novels show that naming is on no account an act of neutrality; rather it mirrors collective historical memory, social identity and expectations related to culture. Names are also shaped by ingrained power, family, social hierarchy and caste.

Gogol's Name as a Cultural Representation

The Namesake represents the identity conflict that emerges from Gogol's disapproval of his name. Gogol was named by his father, Ashoke for his personal choice and it does not conform to any Bengali traditions. When he was a child, Gogol accepted his name but once he hits adolescences, his name becomes a source of discomfort. Gogol believes that his rare name dissociates him from his American schoolmates and persistently reminds him of his unfamiliarity.

Hall's theory defines this issue through representation as Gogol rejected the cultural identity connected to it. His name indicates his family's history of immigration, community tradition and memory. His effort to replace his name with Nikhil mirrors an attempt to reconstruct his cultural identity as opposed to simply adopting a name. Hall's definition is persuasive and fulfills the concept of becoming from just a being. However, Hall fails to explain that why even after replacing his name legally, his new name continues to shape him. Gogol gradually discovers that identity continues to be shaped by personal memory, family history and emotional attachment. After the death of Ashoke, Gogol reconnects with the cultural meaning in his previous name and exhibited that identity is not a product of representation alone. The internal conflict in Gogol displays how diasporic identity is not inherited but rather constructed through cultural tensions,

lived experiences and self-reflexive probe (Wulandari et al. 375).

Bhabha's concept of hybridity can be applied to fully explain the issue at hand. Gogol finally rests at a hybrid point between Bengali and American culture. His identity becomes a coming together of both the traditions and he neither becomes completely American nor entirely an Indian. Thus, Hall theory explains Gogol's earlier rejection of his inherited Bengali identity and Bhabha's concept to understand the state of hybrid identity of the name "Gogol" when he starts "to read the book he had once forsaken" (290). Gogol's name shows that neutrality does not rely on a dominant single cultural identity.

Estha and Rahel: Identity beyond Individual Names

Lahiri's novel, *The God of Small Things* does not place identity at the centre, focusing on subject's disapproval with a name. Rather, Roy creates identity centering on family history, relationships, and memory. Estha and Rahel are portrayed as twins repeatedly to show that their identities intersect in spite of their different personalities. An attempt has been made to explain the relationship with the help of Hall's theory by using common cultural memory. The twins' identities develop conjointly rather than separately. However, when Roy shows that trauma disrupts this common identity, experiences pertaining to psychology becomes equally essential ascertaining how the twins evolve as adults. Sophie Mol's death and later family tragedy make Estha and Rahel go through psychological disintegration when Rahel says that they "are no longer what they were" (3), in other ways "Me" or "Us" (2). The twins share same memories but their responses differ in terms of suffering. Fanon's evaluation of psychological subjugation furnishes a significant complement as it realizes that historical brutality bring about emotional repercussions that transform identity beyond cultural account alone. On one hand there is environment and on the other the individual's personal way it reacts to influences (Fanon, *Black Skin* 62) as seen in Estha and Rahel's case. Hall's stress on history and culture is relevant and psychological trauma too becomes an integral feature of identity.

Family Naming and Collective Identity

In *The Namesake*, naming also mirrors as an integrated feature of cultural identity. Bengali community has customs that separates personal names and official names of an individual. Hall's theory explains this customs as identity is produced socially as well as relationally. The Ganguli family exhibits that identity develops within the traditions of a given culture than an individual in isolation. Gogol rejected these customs as he thought these made him different and socially excluded. However, Gogol understands as he matured and realized that family history is a constituent part of his identity. Hall's collective memory elucidated that even after migration; traditions inherited continue to have an effect on subjects. The family recreated Bengali customs, festivals, listened to Bengali songs, training Bengali language to Gogol in the US, preserving continuity of cultural essences across generations. However, conflict arises when adequate consideration to emotional legacy is not provided. The fact that Gogol's realization and acceptance of his family and historical identity is not only of the result of cultural discussions but also from affection, grief, memory following Ashoke's death which "he has salvaged it by chance" (291). Through mourning and reconnecting with his mother and other migrant Bengali communities, Gogol sets about to reinterpret the meaning of his name and the sacrifices made by his parents (Wulanderi et al. 378). Emotional legacy which has been made active after Ashoke's death becomes an important cultural representation in modifying identity in Gogol adding dimension to Hall's theory.

Velutha's Social Identity

Hall propounds that identity is negotiated historically and produced culturally. Despite Velutha being benevolent, skilled and mentally sharp, his identity is made through caste driven society identification. His

education, occupation and achievements fall short to modify his position in the society. Yadav and Bhatt stated that Velutha represents social and political disturbances which are closely related to hegemony, hybridity, caste, colonialism, and identity issues in society (4287). Here, Hall's idea convincingly explains that identity emerges through structured history. Tension is evoked when Roy shows that Velutha's identity is enforced through the prevalent caste system before he had the chance to negotiate it. Spivak's concept of the subaltern can be addressed here to discuss Veluitha's social identity. Velutha is not only different culturally but his position that he occupies in the social structure makes it impossible for him to create a meaningful representation as he is a "paravan" (73), and was one of the 'Rice-Christians' (74). His voice is repeatedly covered up by dominant establishments, explaining that identity may be realised by uneven power relations instead of cultural differences meted out through negotiations. Thus, Hall explains the production of identity through history and Spivak explains Velutha's social identity through structured practices because of marginalization. The combination of both illuminates Velutha's identity in the realm of social reality.

Comparative reading

The comparison between Velutha, and Gogol unveil the basic difference between the two works. Gogol owns the possibility of discussing his identity in spite of encountering cultural obstacles. He changes his name, had the liberty to choose relationships, academics, occupation and slowly reformulates his comprehensions of his family heritage. Velutha on the other hand possesses no liberty. His identity is preconceived by caste structure, irrespective of his capabilities and ambitions. Hall's theory explores Gogol's developing cultural identity as migration enables continuous negotiations between cultures and Velutha's episodes show that identity is enforced by established power that limits personal choice. When the concepts of Bhabha, Fanon and Spivak are shown to operate within the ambit of Hall's theory, the study of Gogol and Velutha's character becomes more enriching.

Memory, Family and Cultural Identity

Family performs as one of the most effectual establishments in modifying cultural identity in both the novels supporting hall's idea of cultural identification trough history memory and traditions. The novels reveal family as an institution of control, power, trauma and social body of regulation.

Ashima: Guardian of Cultural Memory

In Lahiri's novel, Ashima plays an important role in preserving Bengali tradition within the household in The U.S. She cooks traditional cuisines, celebrates Bengali festivals, trains her children of their cultural importance and maintains a close bond with relatives in India. These pursuits embody more than domestic practices; they serve as cultural practices. Through these practices memories are preserved across generations. Ashima's practices illuminate Hall's theory of identity formation through collective memory as she deliberately reproduces pieces of Bengali culture within the host culture. Despite the fact that migration has separated the family from the native country, cultural routines nourish the historical progression.

Hall's theory fruitfully explains Ashima's position as her identity is seen to develop through both transformation and continuity. However, the emotional efforts engaged in safeguarding culture also deserve attention. Ashima's role spreads beyond just cultural representation. It encompasses solitariness, sacrifice and maternal and wifely obligations. During her stay in maternity hospital, Ashima was asked not to eat chicken. Ashima would have refrained from eating the American chicken with skin as Bengalis eat chicken with skin off (5). She even battled cultural void when her son had to be discharged with a name in the birth certificate from the hospital. Ashima cites examples of her cousins whose names were registered at the age of six-seven. In India, feeding and blessing the

child were the first things are the done than registering names (25). Her reshaping of identity is not only because of cultural negotiations but also because of her emotional fortitude. Becoming a mother in a foreign land came with a lot of challenges. Ashima had to manage all, taking care of her child, household chores. While in India, she would have been lucky to get help from her in laws, mother and aunts. Motherhood provided her with the courage to go out in this alien land alone with Gogol to buy grocery, visit parks and meet strangers. Manzoor says that Lahiri deters from totalizing Ashima's identity and creates other spaces of importance from the angle of subaltern (236). Migration thus becomes an experience from both a psychological and cultural perspective. Ashima's subaltern position gave way to emotional fortitude that sanctified mother's and wife's duties as relevant in the study of identity formation in postcolonial indian context. The effort of the marginalized is to be credited which is in alignment with Spivak's thought.

The Ipe Family and Fragmented Identity

Family relationships are based on social expectations, authority, secrets and unsolved traumas. In fact, the family often created social inequality rather than creating a stable environment. Hall's theory demonstrates that the family members of Ipe family possess shared memories, historical structures and cultural traditions. Yet, these common experiences could not give rise unity as the family is disordered by brutality, conflicts, reticence and silence. Roy illustrates that collective common memory can give rise to suffering rather than belongingness. Estha was "Returned "(9), and "re-Returned" (9), Ammu's death at Thirty-one, Velutha's murder and Sophie Mol's drowning all contributed to the sufferings that the twins inherited and reacted individually. Fanon's concept on psychological oppression is seen operating in the twins- Estha and Rahel who inherited family traditions along with emotional trauma that remain unhealed till adulthood. The twins were separated and Estha says: "their lives have a size and a shape now. Estha has his and Rahel hers" (3). Attention to the psychological outcomes of carrying such emotional traumas is relevant when studying identity creation. Roy's novel put forward the idea that sore memories can disrupt identity in lieu of intensifying collective acceptance. Such an angle provides a scope for studying Hall's theory with a new outlook thereby creating paths for new discoveries in the field of cultural identity theory.

Silence as Cultural Inheritance

In *The God of Small Things*, silence becomes one of the defining positions of cultural inheritance. Fanon's conception of psychological suppression becomes relevant here as silence mirrors emotional wounds rather than merely to signify cultural difference. Silence becomes a practice of family inheritance after Sophie Moll's death and Velutha's murder, Estha becomes silent, withdrawing himself from speech. Rahel struggles silently to reshape the broken memories. Habib & Hossain said that Estha's "muteness becomes a metaphor for postcolonial estrangement, where speech is dangerous and memory unbearable" (196). Baby Kochamma says, Estha "lost his mind... doesn't recognize people any more" (21). Roy interprets that identity may also be constructed through silence. Estha and Rahel are given the peripheral position in the household and in the society at large as they are born of a Bengali father. After Ammu's divorce they began living in the Ipe family but they were not considered part of the family. During Sophie Mol's funeral, the twins and Ammu "were made to stand separately...nobody would look at them" (5). Their marginalized position made them inherit silence which later affected the psyche of Estha, Rahel and Ammu. The integration of Fanon and Spivak concepts proves worthy of discussion in the determination of identity formation. As Tafoya and Vecchio stated that the power of unsettled grief involves manifestations and signs that affect every side of an individual's life (56). Hall demonstrates identity with the help of representation and language but unspoken thoughts also reshape

family history and relationships as proficiently as spoken narratives.

Comparative reading

The novels explain that family is important in identity creations, but they show its impact differently. In *The Namesake*, family is shown to safeguard cultural progression despite frontier displacement. Identity is strengthened by memory by connecting generations through common customs and historical narratives. Hall's theory explores this phenomenon successfully as cultural identity evolves through continued historical legacy and collective memory by acknowledging subaltern's emotional resilience. In *The God of Small Things,* family becomes a ground of dispute, inherited trauma and suppression. Silence has taken over communication, and emotional wound has become an important ingredient of selfhood. The synthesis of Fanon, Spivak in analysing memory and family relationships in creating cultural identity further enhances the study of Hall's identity theory.

Patriarchy and Gender: Identity beyond Cultural Negotiation

Hall explains how culture created gender identities but regulation of patriarchal institutions in women's life needs justifications. The novels show women negotiating in different ways in relation to identities in patriarchal set-up.

Ashima and Negotiated Womanhood

Initially Ashima seems to follow the traditional module of a Bengali wife. After her marriage to Ashoke, she immigrated to The US, where she came across solitariness, emotional vagueness and cultural displacement. She chooses to reconstruct her identity by not renouncing the host's culture but by integrating both her Bengali culture into American society. Hall's idea of identity as becoming is relevant here as her identity shapes through migration, motherhood, social interaction, and employment. Her identity reflects Hall's idea that identity is not fixed, it keeps evolving with experience. However, attention to the gendered obligations that reconstructs Ashima's transformation is relevant. These gendered roles motivated Bhabha's hybridity which explains that these obligations emerge from patriarchal expectations and not merely from cultural discourse. A huge part of her identity is shaped by domestic chores, as caregiver and the expectations that she will hold on to her Bengali traditions and imbibe the same to her children. Ashima prepares both Bengali dishes such as like dal, rice, lamb curry, biryani, and American cuisines like sandwiches, hamburgers, cooks turkey etc. she even celebrates Christmas and Durga pujo which exemplifies a hybrid identity motivated by gender roles.. Thus, gender roles also influence cultural process.

Moushumi and Individual Agency

Another definition of female identity can be seen in the character of Mouchumi in *The Namesake*. She is represented as highly educated and professionally commendable who desires autonomy past convention expectations connected to family matters and marriage. Mouchumi's character reflects that cultural identify is influenced by personal enterprise and intellectual freedom and not merely by one's ethnicities. Hall's concept of identity being fluid is relevant in Mouchumi as she negotiates between American culture, Bengali culture and modern social spaces without completely identifying with one community. Her discontentment in marriage appears to be a discourse on autonomy, individual fulfillment and gender that shape her decision to publish her articles as 'Moushumi Mazoomdar' (227), which is not solely a matter of cultural negotiations alone. Hall's theory and individual agency integrate in the evolution of Mouchumi's hybrid character.

Baby Kochamma and embodiment of Power

The character of Baby Kochamma represents a complicated perspective on gender. She does not completely express her resistance to patriarchal expectations. She absorbs the controlling and demanding social norms and cooperates in upholding the prevailing hierarchies when she returned Estha to his father and suggesting attempted rape case on Velutha. Hall's theory reveals that identity is

shaped by historical experiences, and Roy shows that identity may be shaped by becoming a part of established power. Baby Kochamma's actions can be completely comprehended by taking into account her conscious choices such as enforcing caste and gender ideologies when she says that Velutha, "will be our Nemesis" (184), which is not solely through cultural identity. Thus, this character demonstrates that identity evolves both from historical subjugation to power and also by taking part in power.

Ammu and the Intersection of Caste and Gender

Ammu's identity is moulded concurrently by the expectation from patriarchal set-up and caste ideology. Society criticizes her because of her personal behaviour that does not match with the gender roles of patriarchal expectations. More than that, she suffers censure because she violated the established boundaries regulating caste system in the social structure by falling in love with Velutha. Habib and Hossain stated that "Ammu's love is judged because of caste and gender rules" (195). Hall's theory reveals that her identity is produced by society but the converging systems of oppressions was not discussed. Ammu stated that "her life has been lived... made a mistake... married the wrong man" (38). Her education was stopped as her father thought it was unnecessary expense but Chacko was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford (38). She was even denied church funeral (162), for breaking social rules. Roy shows that caste ideology and patriarchal expectations augment each other, thereby making identity inalienable from established authority.

Comparative reading

Both the novels demonstrate women negotiating intricate social expectations. Their negotiation differs as to the availability of agency provided to them. Ashima slowly obtain a considerable independence without entirely letting go her cultural attachments. Her identity develops through negotiations and adjustments, displaying Hall's theory of cultural transformation and Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Ammu's context differs drastically. In spite of her emotional grit and fortitude, patriarchal machinery limited her choices. Mouchumi's character is defined by the tension that exists between individual liberty and patriarchal expectations and Baby Kochamma's identity is the result upholding patriarchy despite being a victim of patriarchy. This comparison signifies that Hall's explanation of developing cultural identity is not sufficient enough in understanding gendered oppression through structured power.

Trauma, Memory, and Psychological Identity

Both the novels contributed towards the representation of psychological identity. Hall emphasised collective memory while the novels also claimed that psychological trauma can also transform identity.

Estha and Traumatic Silence

One of the defining characters expressing psychological complexity is Estha from *The God of Small Things*. Trauma incurred during childhood shaped his matured identity. Habib and Hossain stated that "Estha's silence is not just a response to fear it is a lifelong condition shaped by betrayal, guilt, and caste violence" (196). This trauma resulted in him by withdrawing himself from society, becoming silent and seeking emotional isolation. Roy writes that "Estha had always been a quiet child. But now he had stopped talking altogether" (12). Here, Hall's idea on representation needs a complimentary understanding. Estha's identity is revealed with the help of silence and not with the support of speech. Estha's identity as fluid shows psychological perspectives and understanding of historical brutality which Fanon deals in and is apt complementing Hall's theory by illuminating how emotional trauma can reshape identity. Trauma is seen to disrupt the normal process of engagement, communication and memory output. Thus, Estha's identity has been expressed through absence rather than voicing up pent up emotions.

Gogol after Ashoke's Death

Ashoke's death is a major turning point in Gogol's regarding his formation of identity. Initially Gogol distanced himself from his

Bengali culture. After his father's death, Gogol begins to reconstruct his family history, cultural inheritance and his name. Hall's framework displays this transformation as identity is continuously reshaped with the changing historical experiences. Gogol's perspective changes as he begins to examine the pertinence of family history. Gogol's changing of himself occurs because of bereavement and not merely on the basis of his cultural consciousness. Gogol's enlightenment of his identity and the remembrance of his father's train accident memory moved him to tears which acted on him towards his acceptance of his real identity (Fareeha et al. 735). This transformation changes his emotional connection with the past. Gogol's identity expresses cultural consciousness along with psychological trauma which is a part of human reality.

Rahel's Fragmented Memory

Roy makes an attempt to distinguish between traumatic memory and collective remembrance. Traumatic memory withstands coherence making identity insufficient and unsteady. The brutality of separating the twins, Ammu's divorce, society's discrimination, Velutha's murder and Ammu's death violated the sanctity of the mind as Fanon says that violence in the home is violence in the mind of the native (Wretched 30). As a result, Trauma as violence comes to light as indispensible aspect of postcolonial identity that broadens beyond the major theoretical discussions of Hall. Rahel's identity is not constructed by historical experiences rather it is produced by fragmented memory. Roy reflected this fragmentation through the narrative structure which features repeatedly moving to and fro between past and present. Hall's focus on historical significance through the evolution of Rahel is also understood in amalgamation of Fanon.

Comparative reading

Lahiri and Roy portray that memory is important for identity formation. The former shows that cultural continuity is the result of memory and the later displays memory as a ground for psychological fragmentation. This difference in memory interpretation reveals another grey area of Hall's theory. Collective memory demonstrates varied facets of identity formation. However, traumatic memory requires psychological and postcolonial outlook for better understanding of situations.

Colonial Legacy and Representation

Colonialism is a powerful force in identity creation as it reconstructs language, culture, education and representations. Thus, both Roy and Lahiri reveal that colonial history is a cultural reality.

English Language and Cultural Esteem

In Roy's novel, the role of English is more than a means of communication. It stands for higher education, social standing and prestige and colonial power. The characters voluntarily control language because the English language is a relic which is inherited culturally from the colonial regime. Hall's theory fruitfully explains this experience through representation. Identities are produced by languages which places subjects within a given cultural and social framework. Said's discussion on cultural representation explains more lucidly how hierarchies of knowledge are institutionalized through colonial discourses. This hierarchy continued to survive even after political independence. Articulating in English becomes a matter of pride which is connected to polish civilization and nobility as Sophie Mol reminded Baby Kochamma of Ariel in *The Tempest* (144), while the indigenous languages are relocated to subordinate position as Baby Kochamma is seen levying a fine for speaking in Malayalam (36).

Chacko and Colonial Education

Chacko's higher education in England demonstrates another feature of colonial impact. Chacko's experiences in England furnish him with academic reputation within his family. Yet, these experiences also expose the incongruity of colonial education. Chacko returned to his homeland after imbibing the cultural values and ideas through British institutions. Hall's idea of cultural identity illustrates Chacko's circumstances as he was moulded by various historical influences. His

identity mirrors the continued exchange between colonial legacy and postcolonial existence. Thus, his identity is neither Indian nor western. Nonetheless, his social power has also derived from patriarchy and class privilege. Hall's and Bhabha together show that identity is produced through uneven distribution of established power and cultural negotiation. Idiolects such as "Reading Aloud voice" (145), and "Sophiekins" (147), express Roy's portrayal of Chacko who is fascinated with English culture. Thus, Chacko is seen negotiating his hybrid identity which explained his position against the colonial legacy of English language. Aslam, et al. draws attention to Bhabha's hybridity which believes that societies and people are created between dual identities, and remain incomplete and loose because of colonialism (2).

Gogol and the American Ideals

In *The Namesake* displays the impact of colonialism indirectly through migration and globalization in contrast to *The God of Small Things*. Gogol was born and brought up in an American space and this space encouraged personal liberty and individual attainment. Despite this, Ganguli family concurrently safeguarded Bengali culture ingrained in a dissimilar historical episode. Hall's theory explains Gogol's discourse between these cultural frameworks. He ceaselessly rebuilds his identity as he shuffles between his native family culture and contemporary American culture. His encounters illustrates that postcolonial identity expand beyond frontiers and develop multinational exchange. According to Shabanirad & Marandi, Said examined the representation of the orient in the western text and found that the representation were imaginative (23). Gogol's identity may be seen as a migrant trying to fit in American culture from western concept but what Lahiri attempted to suggest that identity is reconstructed by economic mobility, professional triumphs, and shifting family kinships beyond Hall's perspective. Gogol's identity is not based on imagination but truths about his self and negotiations. These aspects signify that cultural identity interconnects with expansive social frameworks where Gogol is seen negotiating between his native and American ideals.

Comparative reading

Both the works express that colonial history continues to impact identity, yet in separate ways. In *The Namesake*, migration, education and frontier mobility is shaped by colonial history. Identity develops through experiences between Indian and American cultural negotiations. In Roy's novel, colonial influence functions within social institutions, language, education and class consciousness. She displays colonialism as tolerating cultural presence implanted within postcolonial society. The comparative reading suggests that colonial history communicates with gender, class, caste and authority in operation far beyond Hall's framework. Integration of such human and social realities while studying Hall's model can generate interesting truths of identity formation.

Findings

A comparative analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Arundhati Roy's The *God of Small Things* provided many significant findings centering Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory. Hall's theory convincingly demonstrated identity as a process of dynamism rather than a process of fixation. Subjects from both the novels regularly negotiated the changing cultural and historical contexts. Such evidence confirmed Hall's comparison of identity between 'being' and' becoming'.

Hall furnished an influential structure for comprehending the phenomena of diaspora and migration. The encounters of Ashoke, Gogol and Ashima lucidly portrayed that identity related to diaspora developed through dialogues between native traditions and host traditions rather than through full assimilation.

Hall's stressed on representations effectively demonstrated the symbolic importance of names, family cultures, collective cultural memory and language. In both the novels, identity is shaped by the attached

meanings to cultural routines rather than by inheritance driven by biology.

The paper under study illuminates that Hall's structure becomes less effective when identity is resolved by unbending established structures. Roy's portrayal of caste system illustrated that some identities are enforced through structures of social power and authority prior to the individual possessing chances for negotiations.

Patriarchal power remarkably influenced identity formation in both the novels: in the lives of Ashima, Ammu, Baby Kochamma and Moushumi. While Hall has recognized that identity is produced by society. Yet, when integrated with postcolonial perspectives, more effective demonstration of the institutional procedures is witnessed where gender discriminations are endorsed.

Another limitation that emerged within the application of Hall's theory is psychological trauma. Rahel's fragmented memory, Estha's withdrawal and silence, and Gogol's transformation after his father's death signify that emotional episodes reshaped identity along with the processes of culture.

The comparative analysis illustrated that Hall's Cultural Identity Theory is crucial for postcolonial literary criticism. Hall's theory accomplishes substantial analytical power when employed with complementary theories. Hall's theory of Cultural Identity Theory is enriched by Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Spivak's idea of structural marginalization, Fanon's psychological repercussion of oppressions and Said's idea on the relationship between power and representation.

Conclusion

The paper has looked into the matter of representations of cultural identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Roy's *The God of Small Things* through the application of Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity theory. The comparative analysis of the novels exhibits that Hall's theory continues on providing one of the major powerful frameworks for understanding postcolonial indian identity owing to the fact that it renounces essentialist conception of culture. The theory conceives identity as a continuous cultural and historical exercise. Hall's concept of 'being' and 'becoming' of identity; cultural memory, diaspora, and representation denotes the encounters of the characters negotiating varied cultural relationships. These concepts are centrally valuable in expounding *The Namesake*, where, family memory, migration and multinational episodes mould the emerging identities of the Ganguli family.

Nonetheless, the inquiry also reveals noteworthy limitations when Hall's theory is applied to *The Namesake* and *The God of Small Things.* Lahiri showed that identity is reconstructed by personal history, emotional legacy, gendered obligations, economic mobility and individual fulfillment while *Roy* exhibited that identity is determined by patriarchy, caste, established authority and psychological trauma. These aspects involved leads to inequality of structure and subject's non-agency. Discussion on cultural negotiations alone cannot completely explain these dimensions of identity.

The study argues that rather than renouncing Hall's theory, his framework ought to be comprehended as a foundation than an all-encompassing attempt. When accompanied by Spivak's concept of subaltern, Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Said's idea on representation and Fanon's discussion on colonial psychological oppression, Hall's discussion on cultural identity becomes exhaustive and enriching.

Finally, the novels showed that postcolonial identity is concurrently inherited, negotiated, enforced, resisted and transformed. Identity evolves from historical trauma, family affiliations, gendered experiences, established structures, and uneven structures of power. The comparative analysis thus, establishes the continuous applicability of Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity theory while denoting the need for multilayered approaches for deciphering the intricacies of identity in postcolonial indian fiction.

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Chapter 31: Role Of Green Belt In Reducing Industrial Pollution In India

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Abstract

The green belt development near industrial region influence to minimize the pollution load generated in production. It acts as an important role in conservation and protection of environment and echo system. The green plants are more capable of absorbing air pollutants and forming a sinks for pollutants and, effectively reduces the concentration of air pollution and noise pollution in industries. Apart from functioning as a pollutant sink, the green belt act as a habitat for birds and animals creating a living environment. The concept of green belt development policy is an internationally recognizable approach by the whole nations to prevent the global emission. Throughout the India, the problem of industrial emission is high with millions of people inhale poisonous air with a lot of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, Sulphur dioxide etc. This will gradually affect the population causing major chronic diseases like asthma, cancer, heart attack.The Industrial pollutioncontinuously results in deteriorate India's air quality, water quality and soil quality.Apart from rapid industrialization and urbanization, the emergence of industrial units in India is without a corresponding growth in civic amenities and pollution control mechanisms. So the environmental protection considered as an important domain for every industrial units in India.The green belt policyenable a protective layer for environment from pollution, create an ecological balance in the industrial region, reduce temperatures, and achieve economic benefits. This study examines the significance greenbeltdevelopment policy in reduction industrial pollution in India and also attempt to study the current stage of Industrial pollution in India.

Keywords: *Greenbelt, Industrial Pollution,Abatement of pollution, Environment, Policies*

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1.Introduction

The emergence of Industrialization limit the labour force with rapid technological development substantially increase the level of pollution in manufacturing sector. As the industries are continuously expand to meet the demand of population effects on deteriorating the environment. When the industries bothbrings economic prospects and environmental consequences to the society. The industrial emission comes from different forms; air, water, soil and noise pollution are contaminate the environment. In earlier faces, the factories that produced smoke as the main pollutants of environment, after the industrial revolution, huge manufacturing units emit toxic gases to the living environment started taking industrial pollution as more importance. As per the environmentalist views, industrial revolution that gave birth to environmental pollution.

The effects of industrial pollution are farreaching and liable to affect the ecosystem for many years to come. Most of the industries dumped their harmful chemical waste directly into the rivers and ocean.As a result, many of our water sources have a high amount of industrial waste, which seriously impacts the health of our living organisms (Edward & Laws, 2000).The pollutants in industrial waste streams make water unfit for human consumption. The water contains toxic substances that can cause diseases and aquatic life to die (Avantika, 2021). The Smoke and greenhouse gases are being released by industries into the air which causes an increase in global warming results, melting of glaciers, extinction of polar bears, floods, tsunamis, hurricanesetc. (Elsharkawy, 2020).

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), estimated that industrial pollution is responsible for almost 50% of the pollution worldwide. There are various wide range of health effects as well as serious ecological consequences of industrial pollution to the atmosphere. Since the Industrial Revolution, mostly from the burning of fossil fuels for energy, agriculture, industrial processes, and transportation, the Carbon dioxide is a major greenhouse gas increasing in the atmosphere faster than at any time measured in the past, having grown by about 35% since 1850 (Committee on Ecological Impacts of Climate Change, 2008). Controlling the pollution is one of common problem for industries. The greenbelt helps to restrict the spread of air pollution around industrial surrounding. The scientists recommend on growing green vegetation in and around the industrial area reduce the air pollution (Abbasi, Abbas, & Khan, 2000).It is found that adopting greenbelt mitigation strategy to control the industrial pollution is a best remedy for future wellbeing. It also act as an invisible boarder between the residents living near industrial region. The effectiveness of Greenbelt mitigation strategy create a future intervention for policy makers in environmental protection. However, the ongoing failures in industrial pollution mitigation, this study provide a brief outlook on, role of green belt to reduce the industrial pollution in India.

2. INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION IN INDIA

India is one of the top nation where industrialization with economic growth in a rapid phase. The fast moving industrialization creates large quantities of toxic chemical to the environment. The air pollution levels in India are among the highest in the world. There are 1.4 billion people are exposed to unhealthy levels of ambient air pollutant of PM 2.5. These pollutantsare small particulates with a diameter of less than 2.5 microns with one-thirtieth width of a human hair. The exposure to PM 2.5 can cause illnesses such as lung cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, stroke, and heart disease (World Bank, 2026). As per the information State Pollution Control Boards/Pollution Control Committees (SPCBs/PCCs) there are total 5,26,691 industrial operational units (having pollution potential) in the country which includes Red, Orange and Green categories. The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has developed

standards for regulating emissions from various industries and this emission standards for all the polluting industries including thermal power stations, iron and steel plants, cement plants, fertilizer plants, oil refineries, pulp and paper, petrochemicals, sugar, distilleries and tanneries have been prescribed form. The States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and West Bengal has the highest concentration of Sulphur dioxide and oxides of Nitrogen and other industrial estates in Delhi, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are also becoming critical in emission rate (Ministry of Statistics India, 2015). The report of Central pollution Control Board (CPCB), hazardous waste generation from the period of 2018-19 to 2022-23 is increased by8639229 units to 15657712 units.

One-fourth of total India's Green House Gas emissions contributed by Industries, as millions of people in India inhale poisonous air with a lot of particulate matter, Carbon monoxide, Sulphur dioxide, fluoride and greenhouse gases (Sharma, Chauhan, & et.al, 2022).More than 500 million liters of wastewater from industrial sources are dumped directly into the river Ganga. In many places, this wastewater entering the rivers is completely raw and untreated (Ganga Action Parivar, 2010). In 2013, CPCB estimates show that 764 industries in the main stem of river Ganga (and its two tributaries, Kali andRamganga) discharge 500 MLD of effluents (Narain, 2014). Many of the untreated industrial wastewater contaminates the mainstream rivers such as the Yamuna, Ganga, Sabarmati and Jojari. The untreated wastewater coming from textile and tannery industries that release dyes, salts and hard-to-treat chemicals (World Economic Forum, 2025).

The developing nation like India now faces asignificant challenges in managing industrial and hazardous waste, driven by its booming industrial sector, rapid urbanization, and population growth. With an estimated 62 million metric tonnes of industrial waste generated annually, including 7.9 million tonnes of hazardous waste (CPCB 2020).India's industrial landscape, encompassing sectors like mining, manufacturing, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and electronics, generates substantial waste. Hazardous waste, including heavy metals, chemical residues, and electronic waste (e-waste), accounts for 7.9 million tonnes annually, with major contributions from industrial hubs in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. The CPCB (2021) reports finds that, only 43% of hazardous waste is treated scientifically, with illegal dumping and informal recycling prevalent, particularly among small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The48 Common Hazardous Waste Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facilities (TSDFs) are insufficient, especially in eastern and northeastern states like Bihar and Assam (CSIR NEERI, 2026).

The industrial pollution of India is due to the fact that, the industrial units are located in densely populated areas and there is a lack of technological development for waste treatment.In fact, the release of chemicals into the air, water and soil has not only seriously degraded the environmental quality of the resident area but has also resulted in the destruction of ecosystem including flora and fauna.

Table 1. State wise complaints registered for Industrial pollution

State	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Andhra Pradesh	08	27	24
Andaman Nicobar Island	03	03	01
Arunachal Pradesh	00	00	00
Assam	05	20	17
Bihar	20	25	25
Delhi	34	96	56

Goa	03	02	03
Gujarat	35	86	68
Haryana	13	15	15
Himachal Pradesh	05	06	10
Jammu & Kashmir	01	09	08
Jharkhand	11	31	16
Kerala	14	32	19
Karnataka	18	54	28
Madhya Pradesh	07	09	19
Maharashtra	18	74	61
Meghalaya	00	00	02
Mizoram	00	00	00
Nagaland	00	01	03
Rajasthan	20	19	29
Sikkim	00	00	00
Punjab	22	37	31
Tamil Nadu	15	33	19
Telangana	14	38	21
Tripura	00	00	02
Uttar Pradesh	49	15	87
Uttarakhand	25	12	25
West Bengal	30	31	38
Chandigarh	02	03	03
Chhattisgarh	13	34	26
Total	**385**	**712**	**656**

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Government of India

The dataset of above table shows that, Gujarat, Delhi, and Maharashtra state record top registered complaint of industrial emission in three periods.The states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim reported zero complaints throughout the year. Overall, there is fluctuating the number of complaint in three periods.

2.1 Challenges of Industrial Waste Management in India:

1. India hadlacks of the capacity to handle hazardous waste volume. The States like Odishaand the Northeast have minimal access of waste management and, forcingunregulated disposal.
2. The weak regulatory laws of government mainly, the EnvironmentProtection Act, 1986, and Hazardous WasteRules, 2016, enforcement is inconsistent dueto bureaucratic inefficiencies.
3. The most public misconception that, large corporations are the primarywaste generators, while ignoring Small Medium Enterprises.
4. Urban industrial hubslike Maharashtra and Gujarat have betterinfrastructure, while rural areas rely on opendumping or burning, polluting air and watersources like the Ganga.
5. Indiahave lacks integrated waste managementstrategies.

3. EMERGENCE OF GREEN BELT

In order to mitigate and minimize the environmental impacts, arising due to industrial pollution especially, air pollution, noise pollution, soil erosion; the Greenbelt development around the surrounding of industrial site can provides the best mitigation option. The green canopy not only absorbs the pollutants but also improves the aesthetic environment.The concept of Green Belt was initially suggested in the late 19th century. In 1898, Ebenezer Howard proposed an idea of Garden Cities. These garden cities were intended to be planned and self-contained communities surrounded by greenbelts. These green belts contain carefully balanced areas of residences, industry, and agriculture. In the 1930s, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) campaigned for a clear barrier of undeveloped land against ribbon development and urban sprawl. As a result of these campaigns and other local initiatives, the first Green Belts were designated in London and Sheffield (A report by Natural England and theCampaign to Protect Rural England, 2010).

Table 2. Key Dates of Green Belt Development

1898	Garden City movement
1926	Formation of Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
1935	First Green Belt proposed in an official planning policy by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee
1938	Sheffield Green Belt designated by local government & Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act
1955	Green Belt policy for England was set out in Ministry of Housing and Local Government
1959	Metropolitan Green Belt fully designated in local plans

Source: Report of Natural England and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)

The green belt in America meant a wide band of rural land or open space separating or interrupting urban development.In Kenya, greenbelt movement has been started through an agro-forestry project founded and run by women's association. This movement started and organized by Professor WangariMaathi. In recent times, all developed and developing nations taking up a Green Structure Planning and creating new green area for the future generation. During 7th century, Muhammad established a green belt around Medina. He did this by prohibiting any further removal of trees in a 12-mile long strip around the city.

4. OBJECTIVES OF GREENBELT DEVELOPMENT

The Green Belt areas refer to those areas where there are planned open spaces, where no forms of development activities take place like as building of houses, factories, plants etc. It is beneficial to conservation of biodiversity, retention of soil moisture, recharge of ground water and maintaining pleasant micro climate of the region. In addition, vegetation cover can also absorb pollutants from the environment and helps in effective pollution control (Jindal Steel and Power Limited, 2025).

1. The green belt development in industrial area abate pollution due to different activities during construction and operational phase on the surround environment.
2. The greenbelt helps to reduce the effect of Air pollution, Noise pollution, Soil erosion and act as a wind barrier, increase the water holding capacity of soil, reduce the surface water run-off, providing shelter to animals and ultimately improve the biodiversity of the area.
3. Green belt acts as a dust suppressor and arrest particulate matter from the surrounding air.

4. Greenbelt absorbs different gaseous pollutants from air such as Carbon dioxide (CO2), Sulphur Oxide (SO2), etc.

5. DESIGNING GREEN BELT

There are two kind of approaches are considered during development of Green belt for attenuation of pollutants. These are; Source based approach and receptor-based approach. In source-based approach, the green belt development plan is developed after considering a source of pollution such as around an industrial facility. In case of receptor-based approach, green belts are generally developed around a receptor which need to be protected from pollutant.

According to thenew guideline of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFC), that in Industrial Estates a minimum of 10% of the area of the industrial estate shall be designated as common green area and, the red category and orange category Industrial units within the Estate shall develop 15% and 10% of the area of their premises as green belt/green cover respectively. Further, for individual industrial units outside the Industrial Estates, red and orange category industries are required to develop 25% and 20% green belt/green cover in their respective premises which may be reduced by 5% each if they are not predominantly air polluting industries. For green and white industries, it has been directed that development of green belt/green cover is optional with no mandatory requirement, except for green category industries with air pollution score ≥25, in which case such industries shall develop 10% green belt/green cover within their respective premises. A minimum of 40% green belt shall be developed in red and orange category units located in Critically Polluted Areas (CPA) and Severely Polluted Areas (SPA), in accordance with the mechanism for environmental management of critically and severely polluted areas (Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, 2025)

Table 3. Norms for Greenbelt development

Category	Minimum green belt requirement
Red	15%
Orange	10%
Green	Optional with no mandatory requirement
White	

The specifications have been given by the government authorities for designing green belt that, about 33% of the total site area is generally considered ideal for development of a green belt. The guideline shows that, local species need to be planted and plantations should be done in rows. Each row should alternate the previous one to prevent grazing and pollution dispersion. Plants should be grown with a spacing of 2 meters by 3 meters. Trees should be planted along the boundary in an arrangement in 2 to 10 rows each having a width of 2 to3 meter. The green belt should consist of tall, evergreen trees planted along the boundary. The tree needs to be planted in a specific order with shorter trees (height less than 10 m) in the inner rows of the green belt, while tall trees (height more than 10 m) should be planted in the outer row. An additional row of avenue plantations can be done on either side of roads maintaining a distance of 10 meters between trees (Dhir, 2025).

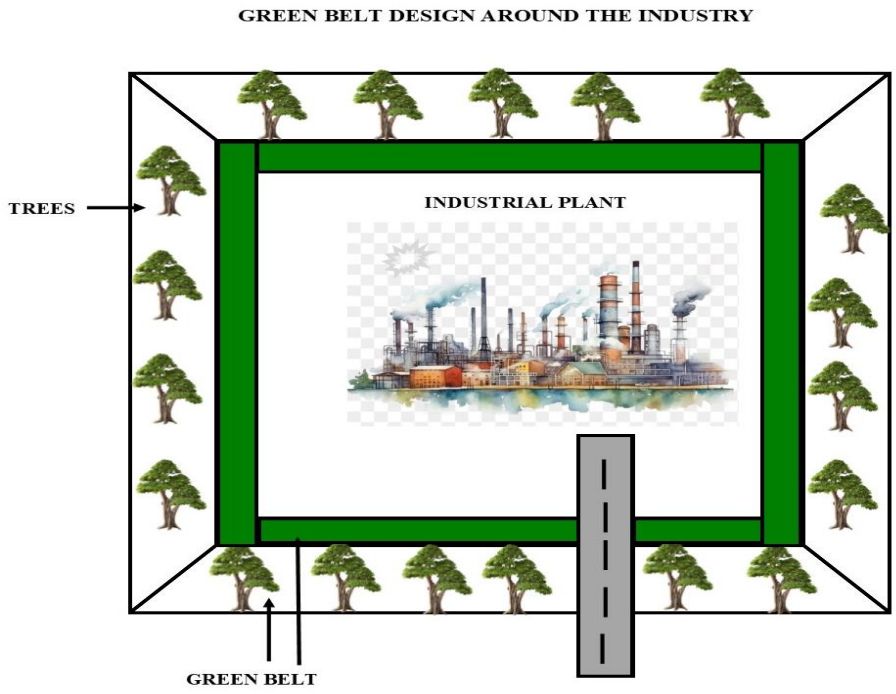


Figure 1. Structure of green belt design in Industries

5.1 Selection of Plants for Greenbelt:

1. The tree must be tolerant to all the pollutants present in the area.
2. The tree should be able to grow and thrive on soil of the areas, be evergreen, in habitat, having minimum of leaf fall.
3. The tree must be tall in peripheral curtain plantation and with large andspreading canopy in the primary and secondary attenuation zones.
4. The tree should possess extensive foliar area to provide maximum impingesurface for continued efficient adsorption and absorption of pollutants.
5. The tree should be fast growing and indigenous.
6. The tree should maintain ecological, land and hydrological balance of theregion.

Table 4.List of plant species for the better Green Belt development in and around the industrial region.

Trees	Shrubs	Herbs	Grass
Acacia catechu	*Caesalpiniapulcherrima*	*Lantana camara*	*Cynodondactylon*
Acacia nilotica	*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*	*Tecomastans*	*Cymbopogon-citratus*
Albizialebbeck	*RicinusCommunis*	*Vernoniaaugustifolia*	*Saccharum-*
Albiziaamara	*Thevetiaperuviana*	*Baugainvilleaspectabilis*	*spontaneum*
Azadirachtaindica	*Neriumindicum*	*Crotalaria burhia*	*Cymbopogonfulvus*
Alstoniascholaris	*Acacia leucophloea*	*Medicago sativa*	*Heteropogon-*
Achrassapota	*Bougainvillea spectabilis*	*Phaseolus mungo*	*contortus*

Aegle marmelos *Annona reticulate* *Bauhinia purpurea* *Psidiumguayava* *Prosopiscinerari* *Terminalia arjuna* *Butea superba* *Emblica* *Saracaasoka* *Syzygiumcuminii* *Mangiferaindica* *Ficusreligiosa* *Delonixregia* *Pongamiapinnata* *Terminalia catappa* *Bauhinia acuminata* *Ficusbenghalen* *Mangiferaindica*	*Tecomasatan*	*Desmodiumtriflorum* *Nymphoidesindicum*	*Bothriochloa-intermedia* *Brachiariamutica* *Eragrostis-cynosuroides*

Source:CPCB, Guideline for green belt development. March 2000.

6. ROLE OF GREEN BELT IN POLLUTION REDUCTION

With the increasing concern for environment in general, and to mitigate atmospheric pollution caused by industries in particular, green belts are often recommended as an environment management strategy. Theidea green belt formationis a protective layer of environment from degradation, create an ecological balance in the region, reduce temperatures, and achieve economic benefits to the society.A wide vegetative of green belt can reduce the falling dust. Phenotypic characteristics such as leaf arrangement on branches, leaf form and size, surface characteristics, and presence and absence of surface coating, and the deposition of waxy substances are important factors on which the phytofiltration process to trap dust from the surrounding air. This reduces the air pollution, improving air quality, and promoting a healthy environment (Chaudhry & Tewari, 2011). The green belt act as sinks for gaseous pollutants and also intercept tones of dust and serve as acoustic screens on busy highways and noisy factory areas.There are several plants have the capacity to collect the dustsuspended in the atmosphere and dilute the concentration of toxic and harmful gases like SO2, CO2, etc. The trees have the ability remove air pollutants like hydrogen fluoride, SO2, and some compounds of photochemical reactions and collect heavy metals like mercury (Hg) and lead (Pb) from the air (Hill, 1971).

The country like India, the development of green belt is mandatory for industrial zones.In COP 26 climate change submit at Glasgow, India announces for reduction of about one billion tons of the total projected carbon emission by 2030 and assumed to achieve the target of net zero emissions by 2070, to save the Earth from the effects of global warming. To achieve this goal, India strengthening the environmental laws in the form of development of Green Belt during the establishment of infrastructure and industrial projects (Kasture, Sahasrabuddhe, & Rastogi, 2025).The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) in India has taken several policy initiatives and promoted integration of environmental concerns in developmental projects. One of such initiative is the notification on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of developmental projects issued in 1994 and further revised notification in year 2006 under the provisions of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 EIA Guidance Manual for building, construction, townships and area development projects proactively talks about the importance of greenbelts.Greenbelts in India refers to a buffer zone created beyond which industrial activity may not be carried on. The buffer zones are typically established around the periphery of industrial zones to create a protective barrier between industrial operations and surrounding communities. However, when these buffer zones are poorly planned, they fail to prevent harmful pollutants from reaching residential areas (Terracon Ecotech, 2026). This concept has developed through a long line of cases and today, greenbelts are present not only for the purpose of protecting sensitive areas to maintain ecological balance but are also be found in urban areas so as to act as a sink for the harmful gases released by vehicles and industries operating in the city area.The rationale for the revised green belt/green cover norms is that industries with higher pollution potential such as red category industries and orange category industries need to develop more percentage of green belt in order to mitigate the pollution that emerges from the industrial activity.

The study (Rao, Gavane, Ankam, Ansari, & Pandit, 2004) Observed, major pollutants from petroleum re-finerysuch as Sulphur dioxide (SO2) and hydrocarbons (HC) reduces by 39% across the green belt. The Nitrogen dioxide (NOx) shows 40% reduction in ambient concentration across the green belt.Suspended particulate matter (SPM) shows 37% reduction in ambient quality and noise levels show a reduction of 33%. The wastewater coming from different process units of refinery is treated in an effluent treatment plant. The treated water is

recycled in cooling tower make up water, used in green belt and disposed through Effluent Channel Project Line (ECPL). This treated water used in green belt is 45% of the treated water in effluent treatment plant. The sludge generated is used as manure in the green belt. This study finds that, air pollutants are most effectively reduced with an overall efficiency of about 63% and noise levels are also reduced to about 33%. The performance of the green belt for reducing/managing the waste generated in the refinery is more than 60%.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper present the role of green belt in reducing industrial emission in India. The development of greenbelt is a best mitigation of air and noisepollution, It also benefits like addition to aesthetic value, climatic amelioration, biomass generation. They serve as biological filter reducing air borne pollutant from the environment. The greenbelt composed of trees, shrubs, and other plants strategically planted to filter pollutants from the environment. Economically, greenbelt act as a cost-effective sustainable pollution strategy for carbon sequestration, public health improve and property value rise near industrial region. The regulatory framework of Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFC) to protect the environment from harmful gases, the greenbelt development made a strong foundation. As Per Ministry ofEnvironment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFC)greenbelt is to be provided all along the boundary by planting tall, evergreen trees and the total green area including landscaping area is about 33% of the project area. There will be block plantationsto be done within the project site. The industries consider vertical green beltsformation for setting pollution reduction is more feasible. The adoption of vertical green belts could enhance compliance with air and noise pollution reduction requirements, improve the aesthetic quality of industrial zones, and promote the efficient use of space in densely populated urban areas.The study figure out that, green belt become a key component of industrial pollution reduction near future.

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Chapter 32: Unravelling Digital Literacy within the Social Media Public Sphere: Political Engagement during Sri Lanka's Aragalaya Protest Movement

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Abstract

This chapter reconsiders the relationship between the digital public sphere and digital literacy through the lens of Sri Lanka's Aragalaya protest movement. Building upon Habermas' public sphere theory and contemporary scholarship on digital public spheres, it argues that while social media platforms have expanded opportunities for political communication, citizen expression, and collective mobilization, their democratic potential cannot be understood solely through increased participation. Instead, digital public spheres are shaped by complex interactions among platform governance, algorithms, misinformation, emotional communication, unequal digital capabilities, and existing social power relations.Using Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement as an illustrative case, the chapter adopts a qualitative approach combining a review of relevant literature with thematic analysis of selected Facebook content. The analysis demonstrates that Facebook functioned as an important space for political expression, alternative communication, citizen identity construction, emotional engagement, collective mobilization, and competing political narratives. However, the findings also reveal that political participation within digital environments is frequently driven by emotional and symbolic communication rather than rational-critical deliberation, creating challenges for informed democratic engagement.Drawing on these findings, the chapter proposes a conceptual framework that redefines digital literacy as a democratic competency rather than merely a set of technical skills. The framework positions digital literacy as a continuous process through which citizens encounter, understand, critically evaluate, interpret, and responsibly respond to political information within complex digital environments. By integrating digital literacy with digital public sphere scholarship, the chapter contributes a conceptual perspective for understanding how critical digital literacy can strengthen democratic participation and responsible digital citizenship in contemporary social media environments.

Keywords: *Digital literacy; Digital public sphere; Social media; Political engagement; Democratic participation; Responsible digital citizenship; Aragalaya.*

How to Cite this Chapter:

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1.Introduction

Freedom of expression is a fundamental element of democratic societies, enabling citizens to exchange ideas, debate matters of common concern, and participate in collective decision-making. However, meaningful democratic participation depends not only on opportunities for expression but also on citizens' ability to critically understand, evaluate, and engage with the information environments that shape public discourse. In this context, the concept of the public sphere provides an important theoretical foundation for examining how citizens communicate, construct meanings, and participate in democratic processes.Habermas (1991) conceptualized the public sphere as a communicative space where private individuals engage in discussion on matters of common interest and develop public opinion through rational-critical communication. However, the transformation of communication technologies has reshaped the conditions of public participation. Social media platforms have created new spaces for political expression, information exchange, and collective mobilization, while simultaneously introducing challenges related to algorithms, misinformation, unequal visibility, emotional communication, and power relations. Therefore, understanding contemporary digital public spheres requires attention not only to technological access but also to citizens' critical capacities to interpret and engage with digital information.

Aragalaya as a Digitally Mediated Political Movement

The Aragalaya ("the struggle") movement emerged in Sri Lanka in 2022 during a period of severe economic and political crisis characterized by shortages, rising living costs, and widespread public dissatisfaction with government responses. Unlike conventional political movements organized through formal institutions and leadership structures, Aragalaya developed through decentralized networks of citizens, social groups, and digital communities demanding political accountability and systemic change ("A Brief Analysis of the Aragalaya",Kenny,2023).

Social media, particularly Facebook, played a significant role in facilitating political communication and collective mobilization during the movement. The platform enabled citizens to circulate information, express political opinions, coordinate activities, and challenge dominant narratives beyond the limitations of traditional media. Thus, Aragalaya provides an important context for examining how social media operates as a digital public sphere (Ukwatta,2015). Nevertheless, the democratic significance of social media cannot be understood solely through increased participation. Digital communication during Aragalaya was also shaped by anonymous identities, emotional narratives, misinformation, competing interpretations, and unequal patterns of visibility. These conditions raise questions regarding whether participation alone can produce meaningful democratic engagement. Rather, effective participation requires citizens' ability to critically evaluate information, recognize competing narratives, and engage responsibly within digital environments.

Accordingly, this chapter examines Facebook communication during Aragalaya to explore how political expression, mobilization, civic identities, emotional narratives, and competing meanings were constructed within the digital public sphere. It argues that the democratic potential of social media depends not only on opportunities for participation but also on citizens' capacity for critical digital engagement.

Rethinking the Digital Public Sphere: The Need for a Digital Literacy Perspective

The emergence of social media has expanded the possibilities of public communication by enabling citizens to participate beyond traditional institutional and physical spaces. Digital platforms provide opportunities for political discussion, alternative communication, and collective action. However, digital public

spheres cannot be understood as direct extensions of Habermas' ideal model, as online communication is influenced by technological, economic, and social structures.Algorithmic systems, platform governance, commercial interests, misinformation, social inequalities, and unequal digital capabilities shape how information is produced, circulated, and interpreted. Therefore, the democratic value of digital platforms depends not only on access to communication technologies but also on citizens' ability to critically engage with information.Existing scholarship has examined the democratic opportunities and limitations of social media, particularly regarding participation and mobilization. However, less attention has been given to how users interpret emotional communication, symbolic representations, competing narratives, and politically contested information within digital public spheres. Similarly, while digital literacy research has often focused on technical skills and information management, its role as a democratic competency remains underexplored.This gap is particularly important during periods of political transformation, where social media becomes a major arena for public debate and collective action. The Aragalaya movement demonstrates how digital platforms can facilitate political participation while simultaneously producing challenges related to misinformation, emotional influence, and conflicting narratives.Therefore, this chapter argues that the democratic quality of the digital public sphere depends on citizens' capacity to critically encounter, understand, evaluate, and respond to digital information. By examining Facebook communication during Aragalaya, this chapter contributes to digital public sphere scholarship by positioning critical digital literacy as an essential condition for transforming digital participation into informed and responsible civic engagement.

Methodological Overview

This chapter adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine Facebook as a digital public sphere during Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement. Publicly available Facebook content was purposively selected to explore political narratives, citizen expressions, symbolic communication, and forms of participation within digital environments.The data were analyzed through an inductive and deductive thematic approach, where emerging patterns were interpreted through Habermas' public sphere theory, digital public sphere scholarship, and critical digital literacy perspectives. Ethical considerations were maintained by focusing only on publicly available content and avoiding private individual information.

2.1 Conceptualizing the Public Sphere: From Habermasian Theory to Digital Public Communication

The concept of the public sphere was systematically developed by Habermas (1991) as a democratic communicative space where private individuals engage in discussion on matters of common concern and contribute to the formation of public opinion through rational-critical communication. Emerging within eighteenth-century European civil society, the bourgeois public sphere was associated with the expansion of print culture, coffee houses, salons, and other spaces where citizens exchanged ideas, questioned political authority, and participated in debates concerning social and political issues. Habermas argued that democratic legitimacy is produced through communicative processes in which citizens freely participate, critically examine public matters, and influence political decision-making through the force of the better argument.Within this framework, the public sphere functions as an intermediary space between civil society and the state, enabling citizens to communicate collective concerns and hold political authority accountable. Open discussion, freedom of expression, equality among participants, and reasoned engagement are considered essential conditions for the development of democratic public opinion. Thus, the public sphere represents a fundamental mechanism through which citizens

participate in democratic governance and negotiate shared social meanings.

However, Habermas' conception has been widely criticized for its normative assumptions and limited recognition of social inequalities within public communication. Scholars argue that the bourgeois public sphere privileged educated, property-owning men while excluding women, working-class communities, and marginalized groups from equal participation (Fraser, 1990; Negt& Kluge, 1993; Lunt & Livingstone, 2013). Furthermore, critics highlight that the emphasis on rational-verbal communication provides insufficient attention to emotional expression, symbolic communication, visual representation, and culturally diverse forms of participation (Avritzer& Costa, 2004). These critiques demonstrate that public communication is not shaped only by rational exchange but also by power relations, social inequalities, and different modes of meaning-making (Habermas, 1991; Parsons & Neto, 2015).Responding to these limitations, Habermas later acknowledged the significance of multiple publics, social movements, conflict, and power relations within democratic communication (Habermas, 1997, 2002, 2008). Contemporary interpretations therefore view the public sphere not as a single space of consensus but as a dynamic arena where competing interests, alternative narratives, and diverse forms of participation interact within particular political, economic, and cultural contexts (Melo, 2015; Perlatto, 2015).

The emergence of digital communication technologies has further transformed understandings of the public sphere. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have expanded opportunities for citizens to produce, circulate, and engage with political information beyond traditional media institutions. However, digital public spheres are not simply extensions of Habermas' ideal model, as participation is influenced by algorithmic systems, platform governance, commercial interests, misinformation, unequal visibility, and differences in users' digital capabilities (Fuchs, 2014; Schäfer, 2016; Reviglio& Raimondo Anselmino, 2018; Staab & Thiel, 2022). Therefore, examining contemporary public communication requires attention not only to opportunities for participation but also to the critical capacities through which citizens interpret and engage with digital information.

2.2 Digital Public Sphere: Social Media, Participation, and Platform Power

The emergence of social media has significantly transformed public communication by creating new spaces for political expression, information exchange, and citizen participation. Unlike traditional public spheres that were often connected to physical locations and institutional structures, digital platforms enable individuals to participate in political discussions across geographical boundaries through everyday communication practices. Consequently, social media has increasingly been conceptualized as a contemporary digital public sphere that expands opportunities for citizens to produce, circulate, and respond to public information.Schäfer (2016) argues that digital platforms broaden political participation by allowing diverse actors to express opinions, share experiences, and influence public discussions beyond conventional media institutions. Similarly, Çela (2015) suggests that social media can be understood as a new form of public sphere because it facilitates citizen communication and interaction. However, such platforms should not be considered inherently democratic spaces; rather, they provide environments where participation is continuously shaped by power relations, technological structures, and social inequalities.

Although social media creates possibilities for greater visibility and participation, digital communication is not equally accessible or influential for all users. Visibility within online spaces is shaped by algorithmic systems, platform governance, commercial interests, and network structures that determine which

information receives attention and circulation. Staab and Thiel (2022) emphasize that digital platforms operate within commercial systems where data collection, surveillance practices, and corporate interests influence communication processes. Similarly, Reviglio and Raimondo Anselmino (2018) argue that social media participation is mediated by algorithms, data ownership, and political-economic structures, challenging the assumption that digital platforms automatically enhance democratic communication.From a political economy perspective, Fuchs (2014) highlights the contradictory nature of social media. While digital platforms provide opportunities for alternative communication, collective action, and citizen expression, they also function within commercial environments where inequalities and forms of control may be reproduced. Therefore, digital public spheres represent both empowering spaces for political participation and structured environments influenced by broader technological and economic forces.

Kasmani (2024) further demonstrates that social media enables participation among individuals from diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. However, increased participation does not necessarily lead to meaningful democratic engagement, as online communication may become fragmented, emotionally driven, or shaped by platform-specific conditions. Thus, the democratic significance of digital public spheres depends not merely on access to communication technologies but also on citizens' ability to critically understand, evaluate, and respond to information.Accordingly, contemporary digital public spheres should be understood as complex communicative environments where democratic possibilities coexist with structural limitations. Social media may expand opportunities for political expression and collective action, but meaningful participation requires critical engagement with the information environments in which citizens communicate. This highlights the importance of digital literacy as a democratic competency necessary for navigating contemporary digital public communication spaces.

2.3 Digital Literacy as a Condition for Meaningful Democratic Participation

The challenges associated with contemporary digital public spheres demonstrate that participation alone does not necessarily result in meaningful democratic engagement. Although social media has expanded opportunities for citizens to encounter, produce, and circulate political information, digital environments are also characterized by misinformation, fragmented communication, emotional reactions, and competing narratives. Therefore, the democratic value of digital participation depends not only on access to communication technologies but also on citizens' ability to critically engage with information.Schäfer (2016) argues that digital platforms do not automatically create conditions for rational democratic deliberation, as online communication can facilitate selective interpretations, misinformation, and emotionally driven interactions. Similarly, Murphy and Costa (2026) highlight that social media's role as an emerging public sphere is challenged by declining standards of public debate, fragmented discussions, and unreliable information environments. These challenges indicate that citizens require competencies beyond basic technological skills to participate effectively within digitally mediated public spaces. In this context, digital literacy has become an essential concept for understanding democratic participation in contemporary communication environments. Rather than being limited to technical abilities, digital literacy involves the capacity to access, understand, evaluate, create, and responsibly engage with digital information. Pangrazio et al. (2020) argue that digital literacy should be understood through cultural, social, and critical dimensions, emphasizing that users must recognize how information is produced, represented, and interpreted within digital societies.

Similarly, Isnaini et al. (2025) identify digital literacy as involving technical competence, critical thinking, visual literacy, social awareness, and adaptive capabilities that enable individuals to evaluate information sources and respond to misinformation. Jian et al. (2025) further demonstrate that purposeful engagement with social media can strengthen users' ability to critically interact with digital environments and develop more reflective forms of participation.However, within the context of the digital public sphere, digital literacy extends beyond information verification alone. Political communication on social media involves emotions, identities, symbolic representations, competing narratives, and power relations. Therefore, citizens require the ability to interpret different forms of communication, understand social and political contexts, recognize persuasive strategies, and reflect on the consequences of digital participation.Accordingly, this chapter conceptualizes digital literacy as a democratic competency that connects information exposure with meaningful civic engagement. It enables citizens to move beyond passive consumption or immediate emotional reactions towards critical interpretation, reflective participation, and responsible digital citizenship.

2.4 Social Media, Political Mobilization, and the Aragalaya Movement in Sri Lanka

The relationship between social media and political mobilization has become increasingly significant in understanding contemporary social movements. Digital platforms have transformed how citizens communicate, organize collective action, and participate in political processes by enabling rapid information circulation, networked interaction, and alternative forms of political expression. Within this context, Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement provides an important case for examining how social media operated as a digital public sphere during a period of major political and economic transformation.

Aragalaya, meaning "the struggle," emerged in 2022 amid Sri Lanka's severe economic crisis, including shortages of essential goods, increasing living costs, and widespread public dissatisfaction with government responses. Unlike conventional political movements organized through formal leadership structures, Aragalaya developed through decentralized networks of citizens, activist groups, and online communities connected through digital communication platforms. The movement represented a shift towards networked forms of political participation, where ordinary citizens became active contributors to political communication and public expression.

Weerasinghe and Chandrasiri (2024) argue that Aragalaya developed within a context of declining trust in political institutions and growing demands for accountability and systemic change. Social media played an important role in facilitating information exchange, coordinating activities, and encouraging public participation. Similarly, Rathnayaka and Abeykoon (2023) highlight Facebook's significance during the Galle Face protest by demonstrating how the platform provided an alternative communication space through which citizens could share protest information, document events, express political opinions, and challenge dominant narratives presented through mainstream media.Kumarasinghe (2025) further suggests that Aragalaya should be understood not merely as a protest event but as an evolving social and political process that transformed relationships between citizens and the state. Through digital networks, individuals constructed new forms of political identity and participation beyond traditional institutional structures.

However, existing research has largely focused on the empowering dimensions of social media during Aragalaya, particularly its role in mobilization, activism, and citizen participation. Less attention has been given to how political information was interpreted, evaluated, and negotiated by citizens within the digital

environment. Facebook communication during the movement involved not only mobilization messages but also emotional narratives, symbolic representations, misinformation, anonymous identities, competing viewpoints, and unequal patterns of visibility.Therefore, Aragalaya provides a valuable context for examining the digital public sphere beyond the question of whether social media enables participation. Instead, it allows investigation into how citizens encounter, interpret, evaluate, and respond to political communication within digitally mediated public spaces, highlighting the importance of critical digital literacy in shaping meaningful democratic engagement.

2.5 Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

Existing literature demonstrates that social media has become an important space for political communication, public expression, and collective action. Previous studies on digital public spheres have highlighted the capacity of online platforms to expand participation, facilitate mobilization, and provide alternative channels for political communication. However, these studies have paid comparatively less attention to the conditions that determine whether digital participation contributes to meaningful democratic engagement.Although scholars have examined challenges such as misinformation, algorithmic influence, platform governance, unequal visibility, and power relations within digital communication environments, limited attention has been given to how citizens critically engage with political information and construct meanings within these spaces. In particular, further research is needed to understand how individuals encounter, interpret, evaluate, and respond to digital political content during periods of social and political transformation.

Similarly, research on Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement has primarily examined the role of social media in mobilization, political activism, and citizen participation. While these studies provide important insights into the democratic possibilities of digital platforms, less attention has been given to the processes through which Facebook content shaped public understanding, influenced interpretations, and contributed to the construction of political identities and competing narratives.Therefore, this chapter contributes to digital public sphere scholarship by examining social media participation through a critical digital literacy perspective. By analyzing Facebook communication during the Aragalaya movement, the study moves beyond viewing social media merely as a tool for mobilization and explores how political information was produced, represented, interpreted, and contested within a digitally mediated environment.

Furthermore, the chapter contributes conceptually by positioning digital literacy as a democratic competency rather than a technical skill. It proposes that meaningful participation within digital public spheres requires citizens to develop capacities for information understanding, critical evaluation, contextual interpretation, reflective engagement, and responsible digital citizenship.

Findings from Facebook Content Analysis

The Facebook content analysis explored how political communication, public expression, and information circulation occurred during Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement. The analysis focused on selected Facebook posts related to the protest, examining how political issues were represented, how citizens engaged with digital content, and how different narratives were constructed and circulated within the online environment. The findings demonstrate that Facebook operated not only as a platform for sharing information but also as a complex digital public space where citizens expressed opinions, mobilized collective action, negotiated meanings, and contested political narratives.The analysis identified several interconnected themes reflecting the relationship between social media, political participation, and digital literacy. These themes

illustrate both the democratic possibilities of social media and the challenges associated with information evaluation, emotional communication, misinformation, and unequal participation within digital public spheres.

3.1 Facebook as a Digital Public Sphere: Political Expression, Mobilization, and Civic Identity

The findings demonstrate that Facebook functioned as an important digital public sphere during Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement by enabling citizens to express political opinions, circulate alternative narratives, and participate in collective communication. Unlike traditional media structures, where access to public communication is often controlled by institutional actors, Facebook allowed ordinary citizens to produce, share, and negotiate political meanings related to economic hardship, corruption, governance failures, and demands for systemic change. In this sense, Facebook expanded opportunities for citizens to engage with matters of common concern, reflecting the communicative potential of the public sphere in contemporary digital environments (Habermas,1991; Schäfer, 2016).Beyond political expression, Facebook played a significant role in transforming individual grievances into collective mobilization. The findings indicate that protest updates, mobilization messages, visual representations, and personal narratives contributed to the construction of shared meanings and encouraged citizens to perceive participation as a form of civic responsibility. This reflects the networked nature of contemporary social movements, where digital platforms enable citizens to coordinate action, build collective identities, and participate beyond traditional political institutions (Kasmani, 2024; Rathnayaka & Abeykoon, 2023; Weerasinghe & Chandrasiri, 2024).

Furthermore, Facebook contributed to the construction of civic identities by allowing individuals to publicly represent themselves as politically engaged citizens. Narratives of sacrifice, commitment, and participation transformed personal experiences into collective expressions of resistance and social responsibility. Such digital self-representations demonstrate that contemporary public spheres are not only spaces for political discussion but also environments where citizens construct and negotiate their identities through communication practices (Schäfer, 2016).However, the findings also reveal that Facebook did not represent an ideal public sphere based solely on equal participation and rational-critical deliberation. Digital engagement was shaped by unequal visibility, platform structures, emotional communication, and differences in users' digital capabilities. Similar to critiques of Habermas' original conception of the bourgeois public sphere, where participation was influenced by social inequalities, contemporary digital participation is also affected by technological and social conditions that determine whose voices gain attention and influence (Fraser, 1990; Fuchs, 2014; Staab & Thiel, 2022).

Therefore, the Aragalaya case demonstrates that Facebook operated as both an empowering communication space and a complex digital environment. While it expanded opportunities for political expression, mobilization, and civic participation, meaningful democratic engagement depended not only on access to digital platforms but also on citizens' ability to critically interpret, evaluate, and responsibly engage with political information.

3.2 Emotional and Symbolic Communication in Digital Political Participation

The findings demonstrate that political communication during Aragalaya was constructed not only through information exchange and rational argumentation but also through emotional narratives, visual symbols, and personal experiences. Facebook posts frequently represented political concerns through images of protesters, families, children, and individual acts of sacrifice, transforming personal experiences of hardship into collective

expressions of frustration, hope, and solidarity. These findings suggest that contemporary digital public spheres extend beyond traditional forms of verbal deliberation by incorporating symbolic and emotional forms of communication (Rathnayaka & Abeykoon, 2023; Weerasinghe & Chandrasiri, 2024).Emotional communication played an important role in strengthening collective identity and encouraging participation. Feelings of anger, disappointment, responsibility, and hope contributed to citizens' understanding of the movement and motivated involvement in collective action. However, emotional engagement also created tensions with Habermas' emphasis on rational-critical communication. Although emotions can support democratic participation by creating empathy and solidarity, emotionally powerful content may sometimes limit deeper reflection on policy alternatives, institutional reforms, and long-term political solutions (Habermas,1991).

The findings further indicate that visual and symbolic communication shaped how citizens interpreted political events within the digital environment. Photographs, personal stories, and symbolic representations influenced public understanding by giving meaning to individual experiences and connecting them with broader social concerns. Nevertheless, such communication practices also raise questions regarding authenticity, credibility, and interpretation, particularly within digital spaces where information circulates rapidly and visibility is influenced by platform structures and network dynamics (Fuchs, 2014; Reviglio& Raimondo Anselmino, 2018).

Consequently, emotional and symbolic communication should not be viewed as a limitation of digital public spheres but as an important dimension of contemporary political participation. However, democratic engagement requires citizens to move beyond immediate emotional responses towards critical interpretation, contextual understanding, and informed judgement. This highlights the importance of digital literacy as a competency that enables citizens to evaluate and engage with diverse forms of digital political communication responsibly (Pangrazio et al., 2020; Isnaini et al., 2025).

3.3 Contestation, Power, and Inequality within the Digital Public Sphere

The findings demonstrate that Facebook operated as a contested digital public sphere where diverse interpretations, political positions, and competing narratives interacted during the Aragalaya movement. Rather than functioning as a unified space of consensus, Facebook reflected ongoing negotiations over political meanings, legitimacy, and public representation. This finding challenges the assumption that increased digital participation automatically produces democratic agreement, highlighting that contemporary public spheres are shaped by disagreement, conflict, and multiple forms of participation (Habermas, 1997, 2008; Fraser, 1990).

The analysis reveals that the same events and forms of participation were interpreted differently by different groups of users. For example, some users viewed personal photographs and public displays of participation as expressions of civic involvement, while others criticized such representations as forms of self-promotion that weakened the seriousness of the movement. Similarly, some narratives supported Aragalaya as a legitimate struggle for political transformation, whereas others questioned aspects of the movement, raised concerns about misinformation, or challenged the motivations of certain actors. These differences demonstrate that digital public spheres function as spaces of negotiation where meanings are continuously produced and contested.Such findings align with the argument that democratic communication involves multiple publics rather than a single dominant public sphere. Fraser (1990) and Avritzer and Costa (2004) emphasize that alternative voices and counter-publics are essential for understanding how marginalized or competing perspectives enter public communication. In the context of Aragalaya, Facebook provided opportunities for diverse citizens to participate in political discussions; however, participation remained

influenced by unequal visibility, social position, network influence, and technological conditions.Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that digital platforms are not neutral spaces of communication. The circulation and visibility of political messages were shaped by platform structures, algorithmic processes, commercial interests, and users' digital capabilities (Fuchs, 2014; Reviglio& Raimondo Anselmino, 2018; Staab & Thiel, 2022). Although social media expanded opportunities for alternative narratives, it also created conditions where emotionally appealing or strategically constructed messages could gain greater attention than evidence-based discussions.

Therefore, the Aragalaya case illustrates that the digital public sphere should be understood as an arena where empowerment and inequality coexist. The democratic value of online participation depends not only on the existence of diverse voices but also on citizens' ability to critically evaluate competing narratives, recognize power relations, and engage constructively with disagreement. This reinforces the importance of digital literacy as a democratic capacity within contemporary communication environments.

3.4 Digital Literacy as a Condition for Responsible Digital Citizenship

The findings demonstrate that social media transformed citizens from passive audiences into active participants by enabling political expression, information sharing, mobilization, and public engagement during the Aragalaya movement. However, the findings also reveal that meaningful democratic participation requires more than the ability to access platforms or produce digital content. It requires citizens to critically understand, evaluate, and responsibly engage with information within complex digital environments.

During Aragalaya, Facebook users became both producers and interpreters of political information. The circulation of protest updates, competing narratives, symbolic messages, and claims regarding misinformation demonstrates that citizens increasingly participated in processes of information creation and evaluation. However, such participation also required the ability to assess credibility, identify misleading information, recognize contextual differences, and understand the intentions behind digital messages (Fuchs, 2014; Staab & Thiel, 2022).

The findings further highlight that digital citizenship involves diverse forms of participation, including visible activism, observation, discussion, and even non-participation. While highly visible online engagement often represents dominant narratives of political involvement, less visible forms of participation and exclusion also influence whose voices become represented within digital public spheres. Therefore, democratic communication requires attention not only to active participation but also to the conditions that shape inclusion, representation, and access.Accordingly, digital literacy should be understood beyond technical skills. It represents a broader democratic competency involving critical evaluation, contextual understanding, ethical communication, recognition of multiple perspectives, and responsible participation (Pangrazio et al., 2020; Isnaini et al., 2025; Wendt et al., 2023). In this sense, digital literacy provides the foundation for transforming digital participation into meaningful democratic citizenship.The Aragalaya movement demonstrates that social media can create important opportunities for political engagement, but technological access alone cannot guarantee a democratic public sphere. The quality of digital participation depends on citizens' critical capacities as well as broader structural conditions, including platform governance, misinformation, political power relations, and social inequalities. Therefore, strengthening digital public spheres requires not only empowering individuals with digital literacy competencies but also developing wider educational and institutional approaches that support informed, inclusive, and responsible democratic communication.

5. Conceptual Framework: Critical Digital Literacy within the Digital Public Sphere

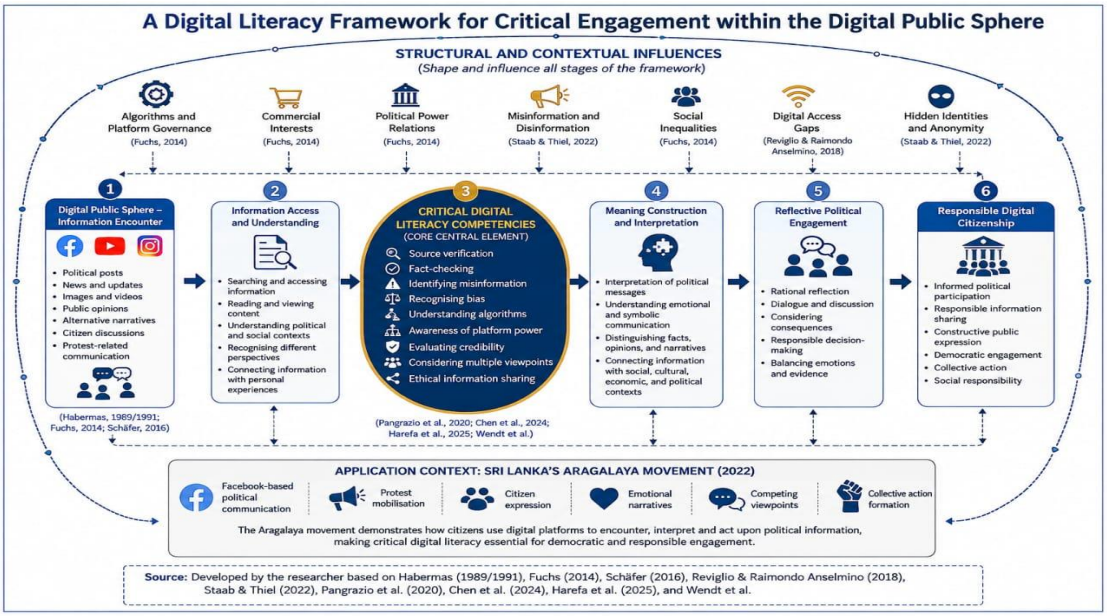


Figure X: A Digital Literacy Framework for Critical Engagement within the Digital Public Sphere

Source: Developed by the researcher based on Habermas (1991), Fuchs (2014), Schäfer (2016), Reviglio and Raimondo Anselmino (2018), Staab and Thiel (2022), Pangrazio et al. (2020), Chen et al. (2024), Harefa et al. (2025), and Wendt et al.

This chapter proposes a conceptual framework explaining how citizens encounter, interpret, evaluate, and respond to political information within contemporary digital public spheres. The framework integrates Habermas' (1991) public sphere theory with contemporary perspectives on digital public communication and critical digital literacy. While Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as a space for citizen discussion and the formation of public opinion through rational-critical communication, social media has transformed the conditions of political engagement. Digital platforms expand opportunities for expression, information exchange, and mobilization; however, they are also shaped by algorithms, platform governance, commercial interests, misinformation, unequal visibility, and power relations (Fuchs, 2014; Schäfer, 2016; Reviglio& Raimondo Anselmino, 2018; Staab & Thiel, 2022).

The framework positions the digital public sphere as the initial space where citizens encounter diverse political information, including news, opinions, protest narratives, and symbolic expressions. However, exposure alone does not guarantee meaningful participation. Citizens require the ability to understand contexts, evaluate information credibility, recognize bias, and interpret competing narratives. Therefore, critical digital literacy functions as the central competency connecting information encounter with democratic engagement. Rather than focusing only on technical skills, critical digital literacy involves source evaluation, misinformation recognition, awareness of algorithmic influence, understanding of power relations, and ethical participation (Pangrazio et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2024; Harefa et al., 2025).The framework further demonstrates that digital engagement involves processes of meaning construction and reflection. Political communication within social media environments is shaped not only by factual information but also by emotions, symbols, visual narratives, and personal experiences. The Aragalaya movement illustrates how Facebook content constructed meanings related to citizenship, sacrifice, collective identity, and political responsibility. Consequently, citizens must critically interpret emotional and symbolic communication while distinguishing between information, opinion, and persuasive narratives.The framework progresses from information encounter to critical evaluation, meaning construction, reflective political engagement, and responsible digital citizenship. While social media can facilitate mobilization and collective action, meaningful democratic participation requires citizens to move beyond immediate reactions towards informed reflection, evidence-based discussion, and ethical communication. Responsible digital citizenship therefore represents the outcome of critically informed engagement, involving responsible information sharing, respectful dialogue, and active participation in democratic processes.

The framework is also influenced by broader structural conditions, including platform ownership, algorithms, misinformation, political power relations, social inequalities, and unequal digital capabilities. Applied to Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement, the framework demonstrates that social media functions simultaneously as a space of democratic possibility and structural limitation. Its contribution lies in shifting attention from whether digital platforms are inherently democratic towards understanding how citizens' critical capacities determine the quality of digital participation and democratic citizenship.

6. Discussion

6.1 Reconsidering Social Media as a Digital Public Sphere

The findings demonstrate that Facebook operated as a significant digital public sphere during Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement by expanding opportunities for political expression, information exchange, alternative narrative formation, and citizen participation. Similar to Habermas' conception of the public sphere, Facebook enabled ordinary citizens to

move beyond the role of passive information receivers and become active contributors to political discourse. Through online discussions, political criticism, protest-related communication, and collective expression, social media facilitated new forms of civic engagement and transformed the relationship between citizens and political communication.However, the findings also reveal that the digital public sphere extends beyond the ideal conditions of Habermas' rational-critical model. While social media created opportunities for broader participation, online communication during Aragalaya was simultaneously shaped by algorithmic visibility, platform structures, misinformation, unequal power relations, and differences in users' digital capabilities. Therefore, digital access alone does not ensure democratic inclusion or meaningful deliberation. Instead, participation within digital spaces is influenced by the social, technological, and political conditions that determine whose voices become visible and how information is interpreted.

Importantly, the findings indicate that inequality within the digital public sphere is not limited to access disparities but also reflects differences in citizens' digital literacy competencies. Effective participation requires more than the ability to use digital platforms; it involves evaluating information credibility, recognizing diverse perspectives, understanding contextual meanings, and engaging responsibly with others. Consequently, individuals with limited digital literacy may remain disadvantaged within online political discussions, leading to the exclusion or underrepresentation of certain experiences and viewpoints.

Furthermore, although social media provides opportunities for diverse participation, the findings highlight that online engagement is also shaped by identity, social position, and patterns of interaction. Experiences of harassment, personal attacks, and hostile communication may restrict meaningful participation by discouraging open dialogue. These challenges should therefore be understood not simply as individual behavioural issues but as broader concerns related to ethical digital practices, communication norms, and responsible citizenship. Overall, the findings suggest that the democratic potential of the digital public sphere depends not merely on expanding access to communication technologies, but on developing citizens' capacity for critical, ethical, and informed engagement within complex digital environments.

6.2 The Transformation of Political Communication: From Rational Debate to Emotional and Symbolic Engagement

The findings demonstrate that political communication during the Aragalaya movement was shaped not only by rational argumentation and information exchange but also by emotional experiences, visual narratives, personal testimonies, and symbolic expressions. Photographs of protesters, narratives of sacrifice, and representations of families and children created emotional connections between individuals and the broader movement. These findings extend traditional understandings of political participation by illustrating that public meaning is constructed not only through verbal deliberation but also through affective and symbolic forms of communication.However, the findings also reveal tensions between emotional mobilization and rational-critical engagement within digital public spaces. Although concerns regarding economic crisis, corruption, and governance failures were central to Aragalaya, some online discussions were primarily driven by anger, frustration, and opposition towards political actors rather than sustained engagement with institutional reforms, policy alternatives, or long-term solutions. This highlights a key challenge of contemporary digital public spheres, where emotionally compelling content may increase visibility and mobilization while simultaneously limiting opportunities for deeper democratic reflection.

Nevertheless, emotional communication should not be considered incompatible with

democratic participation. Emotions can generate solidarity, empathy, collective identity, and motivation for political action. The issue lies not in the presence of emotions but in the absence of critical reflection that enables citizens to evaluate information, consider alternative perspectives, and assess the broader consequences of political claims. Therefore, meaningful democratic engagement requires an interaction between emotional expression and critical evaluation, where affective communication is complemented by evidence-based discussion and informed judgement.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that social media enabled citizens to construct and perform civic identities through personal narratives, images, and representations of participation. These digital self-representations strengthened collective belonging and contributed to the symbolic construction of the movement. However, they also raise important questions regarding whether online visibility and recognition may sometimes become prioritized over deeper political understanding, institutional transformation, and collective problem-solving. Consequently, the transformation of political communication within digital public spheres requires attention not only to how citizens express political identities but also to how such expressions contribute to informed, reflective, and sustainable democratic engagement.

6.3 Digital Literacy as a Condition for Meaningful Democratic Participation

The findings demonstrate that social media can significantly expand opportunities for political participation; however, participation alone does not necessarily produce meaningful democratic engagement. During the Aragalaya movement, Facebook enabled citizens to share protest-related information, encourage public involvement, and create collective awareness regarding political issues. Nevertheless, much of the communication focused on mobilization, visibility, and immediate participation rather than deeper political education, policy-oriented discussions, or informed democratic decision-making.

This finding highlights the importance of understanding digital literacy as a fundamental condition for meaningful participation within contemporary digital public spheres. In digitally mediated political environments, citizens require more than the ability to access and share information. They must possess critical competencies that enable them to evaluate information sources, identify misinformation and manipulated content, recognize political biases and hidden interests, understand competing narratives, and assess the broader consequences of digital communication.The analysis suggests that the central challenge of the digital public sphere is not merely whether citizens have opportunities to participate, but whether they possess the capacity to critically engage with the information environment in which participation occurs. Without such competencies, digital platforms may facilitate rapid mobilization while limiting opportunities for reflection, encouraging the circulation of emotional responses, unverified information, and simplified political narratives.

Therefore, digital literacy should be understood not only as a technological skill but as a democratic competency that shapes the quality of public participation. The democratic potential of social media depends on citizens' ability to move beyond information consumption and emotional reaction towards critical interpretation, responsible communication, and informed civic engagement.

6.4 From Digital Participation to Responsible Digital Citizenship

The Aragalaya movement demonstrates how social media enabled citizens to move beyond passive consumption of political information towards active forms of participation through opinion expression, experience sharing, collective mobilization, and challenges to existing power structures. However, the findings suggest that meaningful democratic engagement

requires moving beyond immediate participation and emotional responses towards more informed, reflective, and responsible forms of digital citizenship.The findings further emphasize the importance of recognizing diverse forms of participation within digital public spheres. Although visible online activism often dominates representations of political engagement, democratic communication also includes citizens who remained silent, observed discussions, or chose not to participate directly. These less visible forms of engagement are significant because public spheres are shaped not only by expressed voices but also by patterns of absence, exclusion, and unequal representation that influence whose perspectives become visible in digital spaces.

Therefore, responsible digital citizenship requires more than expanding opportunities for online expression. It involves developing communication environments that support respectful dialogue, evidence-based discussion, ethical information sharing, and critical engagement with diverse perspectives. The democratic future of digital public spheres depends not only on increasing participation but also on strengthening citizens' capacity to navigate complex information environments and contribute meaningfully to democratic processes.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the role of social media as a contemporary digital public sphere through an analysis of Facebook-based political communication during Sri Lanka's Aragalaya movement. The findings demonstrate that social media created new possibilities for political expression, information exchange, civic identity formation, and collective action. At the same time, the study reveals that digital public spheres are more complex than traditional conceptions of public communication, as online participation is shaped by algorithmic structures, misinformation, unequal visibility, emotional communication, and broader social and political power relations.Accordingly, this chapter argues that the democratic value of social media should not be assessed solely through increased participation or the expansion of citizen voices. Instead, attention must be directed towards the quality, critical awareness, and responsibility of digital engagement. The Aragalaya movement illustrates the potential of Facebook as a space for political expression, mobilization, and public interaction during a period of significant economic and political crisis. However, it also demonstrates that participation alone does not automatically produce a meaningful democratic public sphere.

The primary contribution of this chapter lies in connecting digital public sphere scholarship with critical digital literacy. While previous research has examined the opportunities and limitations of social media for democratic communication, this chapter highlights the importance of examining how citizens encounter, interpret, evaluate, and respond to political information within digital environments. Thus, digital literacy is conceptualized not merely as technical competence but as a democratic capability involving source evaluation, contextual understanding, recognition of competing narratives, critical reflection, and responsible participation.

Based on the empirical findings, this chapter proposes a conceptual framework for critical engagement within the digital public sphere, illustrating how citizens can move from information encounter towards informed interpretation, reflective political engagement, and responsible digital citizenship. However, the framework also recognizes that digital participation is influenced by wider structural conditions, including platform governance, commercial interests, political power relations, misinformation, and social inequalities. Therefore, strengthening democratic digital spaces requires not only enhancing individual digital literacy competencies but also implementing broader educational,

institutional, and societal initiatives that support critical and responsible participation.

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Chapter 33: Indigenous Practices of Tribal Women for Health and Wellbeing: Evidence from West Bengal

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Abstract:
A popular trend by humans who love to showcase themselves as modern in every facet of life has become prevalent. The distinctive practices followed from the utmost interior to a city has been grossly neglected. Humans either are confined to follow or abandon the practices in the name of modernity or development. In this context, tribal communities of India particularly in West Bengal, continue to conserve and preserve their distinctive practices in order to sustain themselves for their survival. In the 21st century, where technology has engulfed all the sectors the tribal people who are dwell in the interior region, especially women are still habituated to follow indigenous practices for better health and wellbeing to prevent themselves from the occurrence of any fatal disease. Even for any minor ailments where majority of people seek medical treatment the tribal women tend to align with natural remedies. They still believe and follow the practices laid down by the ancestors. This paper tried to explore and investigate the methods that tribal women used to keep them away from diseases and look for any severe indigenous techniques used to combat various fatal diseases like fever (malaria, dengue, typhoid) and cold during COVID-19 for their sound health and well-being. In this study, qualitative method has been opted and a structured interview technique was constructed as a technique for collecting the data. Data were gathered from 53 tribal women across various districts of West Bengal.

Key Words: *Indigenous Practices, Indigenous Knowledge, Technology, Tribal Women, Well- Being COVID-19.*

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Introduction:

A good health is considered to be one of the greatest wealth. Since ancient times, people have been conscious of their health. The amazing advances in science and technology over the years have led to a change in the methods that people try to maintain for their health (Gracia, 2000). Over time, individuals achieving financial stability are availing advanced methods to maintain good health or accessing high quality medical facility. But even in the modern age, there are some people who rely their faith and trust on indigenous ways for maintaining their sound health and wellbeing. In ancient India, people mainly used roots, branches, and leaves and various extracts from nature to cure various diseases. Different parts of the Vedas mention different trees and their beneficiary properties. For example, there are 67 types of medicinal plants in Rig Veda, 81 types in Yajur Veda, and 290 types of medicinal plants in Atharva Veda (Adhikari& Paul, 2017). Ayurvedic medicine was widely practiced and quite popular among the traditional medicines in ancient India. Today people across nations apart from India still trust in Ayurvedic medicine. Apart from Ayurvedic medicine, Siddha, Unani, Homeopathy, Naturopathy etc. were practiced in ancient India (Jaiswal&Williams, 2016).

India is a country holding a rich value in ancient traditions and culture where people consider tradition and culture as one of the goals of life to hold and maintain. (Bhattacharja & Bhattacharja, 2018). West Bengal is the eastern state of India, where we observe the gathering of different caste-religion-colour (Sharma&Bera, 2018). Every district of this state is inhabited by some Scheduled Tribes along with other tribal communities. These tribes are the primitive people of West Bengal. According to the 2011 census, 5.8% (52.96 lakhs) of the total population of West Bengal belong to Scheduled Tribes. They have their own literature, culture, language, religion. They exist in their own world by being alienated from the so called modern people of today.

The World Health Organization (WHO) was established in 1948 to cater to the health of people around the world. At present, it is possible to deliver corona vaccine, polio etc. to various poor children in its activities (WHO, 2023). Also, various schemes or programs related to health have been taken by the Government of India, such as Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram (JSSK), Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakaram (RKSK), National Leprosy Eradication Program (NLEP), National AIDS Control Program (NACP) etc. (PIB Delhi, 2019). The primary objective of these programs is to provide holistic health services to people from birth to death by keeping them away from diseases. Tribal Sub-Scheme (TSS) has been formed at the state level to take care of the health of Scheduled Tribes only (PIB Delhi, 2019).

Apart from the government aids, the incredible progress of medicine in modern India has gradually led people to cure their ailments with modern equipment and medicine (Yuan et al, 2016). Moreover, modern treatment nowadays refers to the treatment by Allopathic medicine, which only the privileged people can make use of. Also, high skilled and quality doctors are quite reluctant to go to villages and most of the modern hospitals are located in urban areas, leaving the poor people of the villages unable to benefit (Vedavathy, 2001). Due to their economic weaknesses, they cannot move to urban areas and henceforth avail the facility. This category of people also includes the Scheduled Tribe. About 50.1 percent of the Tribals in West Bengal live below the poverty line (Biswas&Pal, 2020). So, it has become difficult for them to get access to modern treatment and amenities. Since women have the ability to bear children, it is common for women to have more physical problems than men. According to the 2011 census, 2646979 of the total scheduled tribe people in West Bengal are women (Mal&Khatun, 2022). A woman's role in the progress of a family is unparalleled and the worthiest of all. A woman has to bear the primary responsibilities of the family (Chauhan et al, 2022). Along with

solving their own multiple problems, they provide primary treatment to all the family members (Goodwin et al, 2005). In doing this primary treatment, women used various ancient medicines. Especially the women of schedule tribe, who once dwelled in the forest, have more knowledge regarding medicines. They are still treating various diseases by using the roots, leaves and branches of different types of plants. At times some specific gods and goddesses are worshipped in hope to get rid of certain complex diseases. They do not have the descriptive knowledge of the Vedas with regard to the medicines and neither their specific explanation. Still, they rely their on faith on by following the footsteps of their ancestors. They are freed from today's expensive allopathic medicines and are getting cured from more complicated and multifaceted illness by just following natural medications.

In the diversified Indian culture people are trying to cope with any situation in their own styles. In this context, as we know that tribal people have their own distinctive culture and heritage, so they used to combat their health and wellbeing in their unique styles. Tribal women's Indigenous practices are crucial for maintaining heritage, assuring sustainable living, and nurturing community well-being. Basically, they always chose to live separately in some interior parts of West Bengal they still live with indigenous practices. To cater to various health issues, they inclined themselves onto some traditional techniques which lead them to get rid from various diseases. Because indigenous practices are less harmful, and it does not disrupt their normal bodily system. It goes favourable with our body system. From early morning to evening and by sleeping early they followed their unique lifestyles like- early arising, eating at home grown vegetables, timely food intake, using various plants for medicines, using salt for first-aid treatment. When we heard about this practice, people found it quite amusing but when observed deeply then we conclude that it highlights their unique way of their lifestyle and although the methods they opted are ancient but at present time if we want to live peacefully then majority of people should have to make use of this indigenous practices. Because these methods didn't jeopardize our bio-diversity system, rather it promotes sustainable development. In the fast paced modern life and amongst the busy schedule, people are moving and growing rapidly, but somehow, in some native part of our state some people especially the tribal women are still trying to cope up with their struggling life in indigenous and sustainable ways.

Related Works:

Agarwal (2013) revealed that in comparison to no tribal women, tribal women are lagging behind in the fields like illiteracy, age of bearing child, timely vaccination, number of children, underweight, nutritional food etc. **Jose et al. (2014)** tried to investigate the elements influencing Kerala's tribal women's increased access to maternal care services and found that 85% tribal women fully availed the facilities and low level of education and transport facilities are the key factors for under -utilization. According to **Sonwane's (2015)** analysis, tribal women in Maharashtra bear a disproportionate burden of chronic sickness, disability, and other health concerns; nonetheless, their low income prevents them from seeking medical assistance. According to **Naidu et al. (2016)** non-PTGs and women who had debt had a considerably higher prevalence of hypertension than other groups. HTN prevalence was higher than the national prevalence indicator. **Nayak and Sreegiri (2017)** noticed that one fifth of the participants in this study were at danger of developing new nutritional deficiencies. Women's nutritional status is influenced by families' consistent annual income and debt-free condition. **Sinha et al. (2018)** investigated that Women's average height is 155.86 ± 5.88 cm, and their average weight is 50.48 ± 7.83 kg. 19.6% of women reported having pallor, while 17.75% of those women had a BMI under 18.5. According to **Sarmah and Dutta (2019)**, Tangsa women typically choose using traditional healing methods to treat a wide range of common illnesses. **Chandana and**

Kumar (2020) found that majority percentages of women have chronic illness, general health issues, faced transport hindrances, etc. ASHA's played a significant role in promoting health awareness. **Prema et al. (2021)** tried to investigate the health status of Indian tribal women. In addition, it has been argued how States are required by international law to protect the health of tribal (indigenous) women in accordance with their right to health. **Raju and Asha (2022)** revealed that Tribal women's health awareness is not considerably impacted by their age. Tribal women's understanding of their health is not much impacted by their birth order. **Sharma (2023)** found that the lack of proper health facilities for women in tribal areas causes a wide range of nutritional and reproductive health problems for the women of Hesalpidi village, Jharkhand. In 2024, **Ivy et al.,** in a study on the health of tribal people, highlighted that this is a phase of looking at the health of tribal people in India as a unique country in the world. They are particularly affected by communicable diseases like NCD and MCH. The reasons for their poor health are socio-economic, behavioural, and lack of health information. T, S. R. & Dinesh, A. In a recent **(2025)** study of tribal elderly women in Malyali region, they noted that 60% of women above 70 years used herbal medicine for their problems. Although no effect of traditional education on their traditional knowledge was observed, these uneducated tribal women had more knowledge about herbal medicine than other educated women.

An endeavour is made in these articles to review the numerous tribal women health and wellbeing research articles produced between 2013 and 2025 in India. It is observed that very few studies are being carried out in West Bengal as well as in India. We can never minimise the role of indigenous peoples for our ecosystem. These tribes still continue to uphold the indigenous practices passed down by their ancestors. We can see that no studies have been conducted in West Bengal on tribal women health and wellbeing. That is why the present researchers have chosen this tropic to know the Indigenous Practices of Tribal Women for Health and Wellbeing of West Bengal. It is expected that this study will uncover new direction and is also expected it helps to make this work more valuable and prolific in the field of educational context as well as society.

Objectives:

The salient objectives of this study are as follows-

1. To know the various practices to keep Tribal Women free from diseases.
2. To find out the remedies that Tribal Women adapt to keep away from fever and cold.
3. To investigate the practices that Tribal Women adapt to keep hygienically sound.
4. To seek the indigenous practices that Tribal Women used during COVID-19 for sound healthy lifestyle.

Research Questions:

Research Questions are formulated according to the objectives of this study. These are given below-

1. What are the various practices those keep Tribal Women free from diseases?
2. What are the remedies that Tribal Women adapt to keep them away from fever and cold?
3. What are the practices that Tribal Women adapt to keep up their hygiene sound?
4. What are the indigenous practices that Tribal Women used during COVID-19 for sound healthy lifestyle?

Method:

This study discusses the various indigenous practices of tribal women for healthy and well living in West Bengal. So, the researchers have taken the help of qualitative research method. Interview technique was used for data collection.

Sampling Justification:

All the tribal women of West Bengal are target population. Among these, a total number of 53 women from 16 different districts of West

Bengal comprises as a representative sample. A purposive sampling technique was employed by the researchers.

Ethical Clearance:

As a researcher, we should always care about the ethical norms or cord of conduct. So in this paper also the researchers were strictly maintained ethical standards. All the Participations were voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time. Data were kept strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Instrument:

For collecting the data from tribal women of West Bengal a structured interview technique has been followed. This tool consists of 22 items regarding indigenous practices of tribal women. Tool was validated with the help of two experts' opinion.

Data Collection:

Data was collected from a total of 53 women from 16 different districts of West Bengal. In addition, the interviewees have been given the opportunity to express their own opinions. The data were collected various districts of West Bengal as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Interviewers from different districts of West Bengal

Sl. No.	Name of District	Number of Interviewee	Number of Interviewee
1	Purulia	In1, In2,In3,In4,In5,In6,In7,In8	8
2	Bankura	In9, In10,In11,In12,In13	5
3	Jharagram	In14, In15, In16, In17, In18	5
4	PaschimMedinipur	In19, In20, In21, In22, In23	5
5	PurbaMedinipur	In24, In25	2
6	North 24 Parganas	In26, In27	2
7	South 24 Parganas	In28, In29, In30	3
8	North Dinajpur	In31, In32	2
9	South Dinajpur	In33	1
10	Kolkata	In34, In35, In36, In37, In38	5
11	Howrah	In39, In40, In41	3
12	Nadia	In42, In43	2
13	Murshidabad	In44, In45	2
14	Jalpaiguri	In46, In47	2
15	Paschim Bardhaman	In48, In49	2
16	Birbhum	In50, In51, In52, In53	4
Total			**53**

Source: Author's compilation based on field survey (Author's creation)

Analysis and Discussion:

Data were analysed according to research question. In this study the authors constructed an interview technique with 22 items. In this analysis portion, all 22 items are merged into 4 main research questions. These 4 research questions covered all the items of interview taken form tribal women of West Bengal regarding their health and wellbeing.

Research Question 1: What are the various practices those keep Tribal Women free from diseases?

Tribal women in all parts of West Bengal adopt certain methods to keep themselves and their family members free from various diseases. Following are various ways or practices of keeping themselves disease free based on the opinion of tribal women of different districts -

- **Daily Exercise:**

According to In.1(Purulia) and In.9 of Bankura said that they hit the bed early and wake up early. We washed our teeth with Neem branch, eat panta rice (stale rice) as breakfast. Doing our housework all day long and also help others, working in the farm promotes physical exercise.In.19 of Paschim Medinipur and In.24 of Purba Medinipur said that physical exercise is done throughout the day by hardworking. In terms of exercise, In.26 of North 24 Parganas and In.31 of North Dinajpur said that no exercise is done according to daily rules. Physical exercise is done through daily work. We see a completely different picture in the case of urban regions. In.34 of Kolkata and In.39 of Howrah say that they exercised regularly and even attend yoga classes for sound mental health. From morning to evening all the work is done accordingly. Walking and various exercises are done in the morning and in the evening.In.42 of Nadia, In.44 of Murshidabad, In.46 of Jalpaiguri and other tribal women have similar views. Poor families exercise from morning to evening despite doing bone breaking work to earn their daily food. There is no separate time and opportunity for physical exercise.

- **Nutritious food:**

According to the respondents from the majority districts, they are suffering from malnutrition. Because most of the tribal families living below the poverty line. According to In.45 (Murshidabad), they cannot afford fish and meat weekly.In.29 from South 24 Pargana also provides almost same data. They supposed to eat fish that are available on canals or rivers. Women in these regions do not get the proper nutrition that is a required need of human for their survival. On the other hand, tribal women of western districts said that they eat rat's meat and meat of various birds. They also embarked that on many occasions they eat till they are satisfied. Home-bred cows, goats or sheep's milk are consumed by children and other family members. Tribal women in urban areas like Kolkata, Howrah and some parts of Hooghly said that nutritious food is consciously consumed. Have a weekly fish, meat, eggs and vegetarian meals. As they are relatively economically sound, so they can easily afford nutritious food.

Research Question 2: What are the remedies that Tribal Women adapt to keep free from fever and cold?

Human life invariably involves some physical problems. Tribal women follow different practices to get overcome from these. These are discussed below-

- **Dengue & Malaria fever:** 95% (48 women) respondents from East and West Medinipur, two Dinajpurs, Nadia, Hooghly, two Parganas and Paschim Bardhaman said initially they eat papaya fruit along by mixing turmeric and cloves with onions and feed them to the patient. Interestingly, respondents said that dengue is not so much fatal fever on rural areas, like some part of Purulia, Bankura and Jhargram districts where malaria is quite common. However, tribal women in urban areas such as Kolkata and Howrah said that they directly contact with health centres when they find early symptoms of dengue and malaria. According to 70% (almost 36) of respondents of West Bengal, they keep dengue patients under certain rules, such as not allowing them to associate with others, applying neem oil before sleeping, etc. If dengue persist they contact in their local health centre.
- **Conjunctivitis (Joy Bangla):** Working in wet fields and bathing in the water of the pond or river during the rainy season results in conjunctivitis. 80% (41) respondents of Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum, Jhargram, Murshidabad, Nadia, North and South 24 pargana's said that they kept conjunctivitis patients away from other people. They used to soak Tulsi leaves overnight and wash their eyes with that water in the morning. They also washed their eyes with salt mixed

water and honey. Urban tribal women have a different opinion. They use rose water and eye drop for quick recovery. Otherwise, they visit the eye specialists.

- **Cold and Cough:** As it is a very common disease so 100% respondents (53 women) of all districts gave similar answer. They said that they used to eat raw turmeric; also gargle with hot salt water, heat home-made ghee mixed with garlic, boil Tulsi leaves and ginger and consume the water. The tribes of Kolkata and Howrah said that they also do same home remedies; along with they consume honey and lemon juice in hot water. If it is increased, then both urban and rural women consult a doctor.
- **Jaundice:** Tribal women covering all over the state initially rely on Ayurvedic medicine for jaundice. As per instructions, the patient has to undergo strict observation for 30 days. Women consume spinach juice, boiled papaya, carrots and also consume sugarcane and tomato juice. Urban tribal women do not resort to any home remedies for jaundice, they directly consult a doctor.
- **Upset Stomach:** All the respondents from West Bengal (53 women) mentioned, for this disease initially they used a drink (with salt and sugar), ORS, curd and banana diet in this regard. If these remedies are not effective, then they take medications. But they also embarked that 2 or 3 decades back, they didn't used any kind of medicines for upset stomach, they fully relied on home remedies.
- **Snake bites:** Very few respondents said that they often suffer from snake bites for spending most of their time in forests and fields. Women of all regions said that after a snake bite, the affected area is tied up. According to interviewees of Purulia, neem leaves are fed to the patient to confirm whether the snake was venomous or not. Few years' back patients are directly brought to Ojha(healer) for treatment, as it was not scientifically proven treatment, so several patients died due to snake bite. By creating awareness, nowadays patients are taken to local health centre. Women from Bankura and Jhargram say that they pinch the patient's body, if they can't feel the pain then they are taken to a health centre. Tribals of all other regions especially the northern districts said to be taken to hospital.
- **Blood Pressure and Sugar:** With the advancement of science and technology, people are engaging more in comfort and involve themselves less in physical activity. Due to this inactivity the blood pressure and sugar patients are found maximum in families. A different picture has been found in the indigenous tribal communities. According to them neither blood pressure nor could sugar touched them. The reason for that must be hard work throughout day and night.15% respondents (8 women) from West Bengal said that they are suffering from sugar and blood pressure. According to them, frequently they eat bitter gourd, Neem leaves and Aloe Vera to control blood pressure and sugar. If it is not cured by home remedies then directly consult the doctor.

Research Question 3: What are the practices that Tribal Women adapt to keep their hygiene sound?

The tribal women of West Bengal are less familiar with modern medical systems; the strategies they use to solve these problems are discussed below-

- **During Menstruation & Irregular Menstruation:** almost 85% (43) of tribal women (especially older) are not aware about the usage of pads, rather they use

clean clothes and refrain from heavy work during menstruation. Women from two Dinajpurs and 24 Parganas reported consuming large quantities of pumpkin and watermelon for avoiding menstruation pain in addition to the above methods. Women in other districts also follow the same method. Urban women and tribal young girls use pads instead of cloths. Irregular menstruation is common in rural tribal and urban areas too. In rural area, younger girls seek advice from experienced women in the family or neighbourhood, while women of urban area said that they wait for few months if the issue persist then they go for doctor's consultation.

- **White discharge:** Due to lack of awareness women are reluctant to go to the doctor for these issues. According to the respondents, initially they depend on Ayurvedic medicine, along with this they eat rice starch, water soaked in coriander leaves, chickpea curry, tomato curry, Tulsi leaves, etc. But if this issue persists for a long time then they go to the nearest urban area for lady doctors. Most tribal women in urban areas prefer home remedies as well as doctor's advice.
- **Vaccines during pregnancy:** Most women in urban areas say that they are well vaccinated during pregnancy and make hospital visits when required. Also, they eat a lot of nutritious food during pregnancy. 80% (42 women) of rural women said that Nurses (ASHA workers) of rural hospitals provide the prescribed vaccines as per the requirements. They have no idea about the period as to when the vaccine should be taken. They follow the instructions given by ASHA workers.
- **During Childbirth:** Majority respondents said that pregnant ladies rely on experts' lady of villages called Dai (accoucheur). Women in other districts say that some families still depend on Dai, but now most families go to the hospital during childbirth with the help of ASHA workers. 100% (53 women) of urban women reported visiting the hospital.

Research Question 4: What are the indigenous practices that Tribal Women used during COVID-19 for sound healthy lifestyle?

Women from the western districts said that the Corona panic was dire at first. Efforts were made to comply with all government restrictions as much as possible. But, in the early days, there was lack of modern masks, so the face was covered with leaves of different plants or Sarees. In the initial time for sanitizing themselves, they used soil or sands and water to wash their hands. Those who infected as it was accommodated on trees or in closed schools. Only a very small number of people would maintain distancing or maintained social exclusion. Also, social distance was maintained while fetching water from tube well or well, collecting wood from forest etc. Tribal women of eastern districts say that various NGOs provided them with masks, sanitizers and food. It was tried to maintain social distance as much as possible. Except for the urban districts, the conditions and means of the rest of the districts were more or less similar. Due to the high population density in the urban areas, the panic was also high and the number of corona infected patients were also high. However, according to the opinion of the tribal women of these places, they have consciously spent the Corona period from first to last time. Masks and sanitizers were bought more than once. Social activities were completely shut down and most of the time was spent at home by maintaining distance from everyone. Apart from all of this, 100% respondents (53 women) said that in early days of COVID, all women are very much worried about their future, economy, social conditions etc, which indicated that their mental condition was not sound in early days, but after few days as condition was becoming better, they recovered from it.

Conclusion:

The present study is conducted on the health and wellbeing of tribal women through indigenous practices in West Bengal. Findings revealed that majority of tribal women are still relying on various indigenous practices for their health. As the shattering pandemic has shaken the whole World, so they also had fallen onto the clutches of depression. But strangely, they showed the entire World that they can confront the pandemic by their unique styles, like- using leaf mask or sari, using trees as quarantine place, soil or water as their hand sanitizers. But, the most notable thing is that maximum respondents said that younger women members are not completely depended on indigenous practices for cold or fever, or snake biting, jaundice, or their menstrual problems etc. Where, old women still keep their ancestral practices alive. But new generation's women are quite responsive about their health and wellbeing. It may be due to the light of education, development and usage of digital technologies and various awareness programs. Apparently, we all are thinking that in the age of modernisation, indigenous practices are overrated method but if we deeply look into it then we can truly understand that these practices will never jeopardizing the ecosystem and sustainable livelihoods rather it promotes sustainable living. Hence, it is expected that not only in West Bengal but also worldwide should appreciate and welcome indigenous practices.

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Chapter 34: Machine learning and Internet of Things based monitoring of the blood glucose level and early stage identification and early treatment of diabetes mellitus

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Abstract

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic condition characterised by the progressive deterioration of the body's immune system and essential organs. According to a recent survey, it has become the second driving reason for death in undeveloped countries, and it will reach nearly 642 million diabetic cases worldwide by 2040. However, the management of certain life-threatening illnesses imposes a substantial financial strain. Diabetes mellitus has become a significant concern for both the healthcare industry and the economic sectors of the nation in the current day. There is no doubt that this is a severe issue; researchers and health professionals are searching for methods for the early prediction and early medication for diabetic mellitus. In this research work, we have considered three Type-2 diabetes patients for 100-day clinical trial sets, which include a few crucial parameters responsible for diabetes like Glucose level, Blood Pressure (Systolic, Diastolic), weight, BMI and Calories burned and also consider the geographical condition. This study aims to continue monitoring the person's glucose level using a multi-linear regression machine learning algorithm and give early stage identification and early medication for diabetes mellitus. The proposed algorithm is used to continue monitoring blood glucose levels with an accuracy of 97% and Internet of Things (IoT) usedto transfer early stage identification of diabetes mellitusparameter to doctor for early medication and diet to impact the social common problem. Thus, the algorithm and IoT will be incredibly beneficial to a large extent of today's community.

Keywords: - *Machine learning, Blood Glucose level, Monitoring, Prediction, Clinical Trial, Internet of things.*

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Introduction

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic disorder and commonly referred to as diabetes by community people [1]. It is a state where the body has an unbalanced blood glucose level, commonly known as blood sugar [2]. Presently, in the world at situation where sugar powder kills more people than gunpowder. Diabetes mellitus is a highly perilous medical condition due to its propensity to exacerbate the development of other potentially fatal ailments, i.e. kidney failure, heart attack, nerve damage, renal issues, hyperglycaemia and pre mature death[3] [4].It is generally divided into three types. Type-1 diabetes is mainly found in children at a young age. In this immune system, the body attacks the pancreas, destroys the internal body parts and stops making insulin [5]. The only solution is to give regular insulin doses, with a healthy diet and regular health check-ups is very necessary. In type-2 diabetes, the body resists the production of insulin or produces less amount of insulin [6]. It is generally found in 20 to 70 age group people. The only way to control is by changing lifestyle, i.e. regular exercise, healthy diet and regular health check-ups. The third type is gestational diabetes. It is usually found in pregnancy in women. The blood sugar level in pregnancy is high because the placenta resists glucose absorption [7]. It may cause complication for the baby after birth and also causes death. The only solution is to have regular health check-ups and a healthy diet.

People's lifestyles are changing rapidly and do not focus on personal health. People have too much work stress, eating unhealthy fast food, smoking, drinking alcohol, eating habits, harmful substances in the food, pollution, etc., leading to diabetes mellitus [8]. Based on a survey conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), in 2017, has been determined that around 462 million persons worldwide are affected with type-2 diabetes. Furthermore, the prevalence of diabetes mellitus has been identified as a significant contributor to 1 million fatalities globally [9]. Medical science proves there is no permanent cure for diabetes mellitus, and it can only control by early detection, early and proper treatment. To control diabetes mellitus, people must monitor their blood glucose levels regularly and consult a doctor to diagnose the disease. Currently, no efficient dataset or algorithm is available to continue monitoring glucose levels using Blood Pressure and BMI. Regular monitoring of the glucose level gives early stage identification of diabetes mellitus.

In this paper, we have taken three Type-2 diabetespatient for a 100-day clinical experiment work and noted a few crucial parameters responsible for diabetes, i.e. glucose level, blood pressure, weight, BMI and calories burned. Each participant in the clinical trial carries out their regular occupational duties while adhering to the prescribed experimental protocols for the duration of 100 days. Patient 1 has no clinical condition and follows the usual regular routines. Patient 2 exercises regularly every morning to burn calories greater than 1500 cal and follows the regular diet plan. Patient 3 exercises regularly every morning to burn calories greater than 1500 cal and follows a non-diabetic diet with fewer carbohydrates, no sugar, no fatty products, low calories, etc. In modern days, machine learning has been successfully applied in the healthcare industry, and hence, we used to analyse the relationship between blood glucose level, blood pressure and BMI. The Internet of Things used for collection of patient parameter and deposited on the cloud and based on past and present data machine learning algorithm is give the best-fit model. It will help the patient monitor their blood glucose level and past activity and take corrective action. When machine learning model predict the uncertain change of blood glucose level of patient based on present parameters and immediately inform to doctor for further analysis of machine learning graph and prescribe early diet and medication. It is also giving early warning to non-diabetic persons if their blood glucose level is near the pre-diabetic range.

Author Contribution

- To collect the three Type-2 diabetes patients' 100-days clinical trial data.
- The proposed model monitors the glucose level using blood pressure and BMI.
- The proposed model early predicts the diabetic level of a non-diabetic person.
- IoT based patient parameter collected and store in cloudand diabetes level triggered data sent to doctor for further analysis and prescription of medication.

1. Related Work

Diabetes mellitus is a rapidly growing epidemic, which leads to an increased mortality rate and healthcare care cases globally. Therefore, researchers and healthcare professionals globally are engaged in extensive studies for effectively managing and preventing diabetes mellitus.Kirwan et al. [10] focus on regular exercise to maintain health conditions. Regular exercise like aerobic, resistance or mixed exercise helps to reduce the glucose level and help to improve blood circulation and avoid diabetic risk. Yang et al. [11]presented physical therapy to increase lipid hydrolysis oxidation to improve diabetes. They found cytokines which are related to diabetes and energy transfer organs, and this is still an understudy. Sato [12]describes a thorough survey on the importance of exercise prescriptions for Japanese diabetes patients. He recommended avoiding prolonged sitting and engaging in physical movement every half an hour. Lydi et al. [13] collected data based on an internet survey and found that diabetic patients have no diet plan, exercise and lack of sleep. It is observed that diabetic patients have poor quality sleep and insomnia, and will elevate their glucose levels. Kar et al. [14] experimented on the mice for 20 weeks with fatty food, non-fatty food and exercise. It is found that fatty food rapidly increases the weight of the body, and overweight is one of the causes of diabetes. Kim et al. [15] presented a compressive analysis of impact of various exercises regimens on enhancing the metabolic function of young individuals diagnosed with diabetes. The exercise will increase the antioxidant hydrogen sulphide level and avoid diseases like diabetes, cardiac attack, BP etc. However, regular exercise and proper diet are the first preventive actions for diabetes mellitus. The above research work is conducted based on the single instances of the patient or animal. This recorded data will give inaccurate results. Therefore, our dataset was continuously recorded patient clinical trial data for 100-days and observed closely to improve glucose levels.

2. Clinical trial data set collection

In this research experiment, we have three diabetic patients aged 32 to 36 from Chandrapur, Maharastra state, India. In this experiment, patient 1 was not exercising and was not recommended any non-diabetic food (Regular food taken by the patient). Patient 2 was doing regular 30-40 min exercise to burn calories more than 1500 Cal, measured by Fit Bit smartwatch and not recommended any non-diabetic food (Regular food taken by the patient). Patient 3 was doing regular 30-40 min exercise to burn calories more than 1500 Cal, measured by the Fitbit smartwatch, and also given non-diabetic food for a trial period (Given less carbohydrate food, no fatty food, no sugar, no salty products etc.). Table 1 shows the 100-day recommended routines for the clinical trial.During this experimental trial period, the patient took one morning and evening breakfast, one lunch, one dinner and other than this, any food is prohibited. These three patients followed the above routines for 100 days, from 1 August2023 to 10 October 2023. These three patients' clinical test data was recorded for the 100 days, like glucose level, blood pressure, weight, BMI and calories burned, which is not only responsible for diabetes mellitus but also many more diseases.

This clinical sample was taken by "Alurwar Diagnostic Centre" Chandrapur and verified by "Dr Kranti Krishna Dhali" (MBBS, MS)Medical Officer, Primary Health Centre Easgaon. This recorded trial data is stored in a CSV file for the experimental work in Patient1.csv, Patient2.csv and Patient3.csv. Fig. 1,2 and 3 shows the clinical trial data of the first ten rows of the respective patient. The stored clinical data are the primary parameter of a person, which is commonly measured in health check-up routines and predicts the health condition.

PATIENT	EXERCISE	NON-DIABETIC DIET
Patient 1	No	No
Patient 2	Yes	No
Patient 3	Yes	Yes

Table 1:- Clinical routines recommended for patient

Day	Time	Glucose level	Systolic	Diastolic	Weight (Kg)	Height (Feet)	BMI	BurnCalories
1	08:00	160	130	79	70.0	5.3	27.3	0
2	08:00	161	131	80	70.1	5.3	27.4	0
3	08:00	191	131	81	70.0	5.3	27.3	0
4	08:00	190	132	82	70.2	5.3	27.4	0
5	08:00	155	129	76	70.2	5.3	27.4	0
6	08:00	170	130	80	70.1	5.3	27.4	0
7	08:00	196	130	81	70.2	5.3	27.4	0
8	08:00	168	130	80	70.3	5.3	27.5	0
9	08:00	180	131	81	70.3	5.3	27.5	0
10	08:00	156	129	76	70.2	5.3	27.4	0

Figure 1- Clinical data of first 10 rows of patient 1

Day	Time	Glucose level	Systolic	Diastolic	Weight (Kg)	Height (Feet)	BMI	BurnCalories
1	08:10	158	128	76	68.1	5.4	25.7	135.0
2	08:09	160	130	77	68.0	5.4	25.7	138.0
3	08:10	160	129	77	68.0	5.4	25.7	140.0
4	08:10	161	130	78	68.0	5.4	25.7	138.2
5	08:08	160	128	76	67.8	5.4	25.7	141.0
6	08:10	160	128	76	67.8	5.4	25.7	150.1
7	08:10	161	129	77	67.9	5.4	25.7	148.0
8	08:10	160	129	78	67.8	5.4	25.7	151.0
9	08:10	159	130	78	67.8	5.4	25.7	155.0
10	08:10	158	129	75	67.7	5.4	25.6	156.0

Figure 2- Clinical data of first 10 rows of patient 2

Day	Time	Glucose level	Systolic	Diastolic	Weight (Kg)	Height (Feet)	BMI	Exerice (Burn Calories)
1	08:20	161	130	78	67.3	5.2	27.1	1330
2	08:20	161	130	78	67.2	5.2	27.1	1320
3	08:20	162	131	78	67.0	5.2	27.0	1350
4	08:20	161	130	77	67.0	5.2	27.0	1330
5	08:20	160	128	76	66.8	5.2	26.9	1400
6	08:20	160	128	76	66.8	5.2	26.9	1450
7	08:20	161	128	76	66.8	5.2	26.9	1400
8	08:20	160	129	77	66.6	5.2	26.9	1500
9	08:20	160	128	76	66.5	5.2	26.8	1450
10	08:20	160	125	73	66.4	5.2	26.8	1460

Figure 3- Clinical data of first 10 rows of patient 3

3. Proposed Blood Glucose Monitoring and early prediction of diabetes mellitusmodel

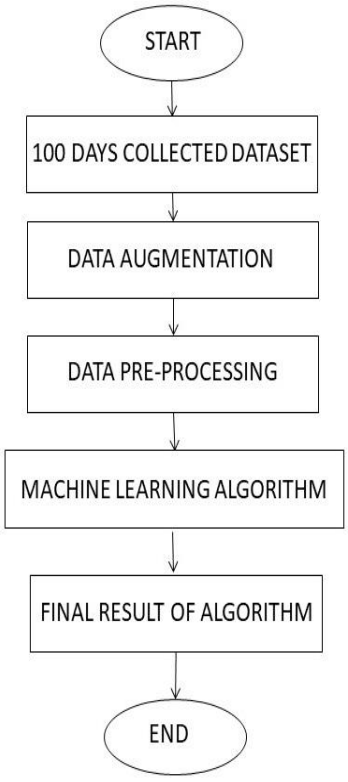


Figure 4: - Linear Regression ML flow chart

The figure 4 flow chart proposed precise and continuous blood glucose monitoring and prediction method has used various steps during analysis of the dataset i.e. data augmentation, data pre-processing and multi-linear regression machine learning algorithm. We implemented a multi-linear regression machine learning algorithm on the dataset for continues monitoring the blood glucose level and early stage identification of diabetes mellitus. We optimised the linear regression algorithm for its outstanding performance in real-life applications, particularly in the healthcare industry. The

implementation detail proposed model is as follows.

3.1 Data Augmentation

It is a process of creating new large dataset from existing dataset by small random variation in the numerical value and it helps in advance the performance and robustness of proposed machine learning model.

3.2 Data Pre-Processing

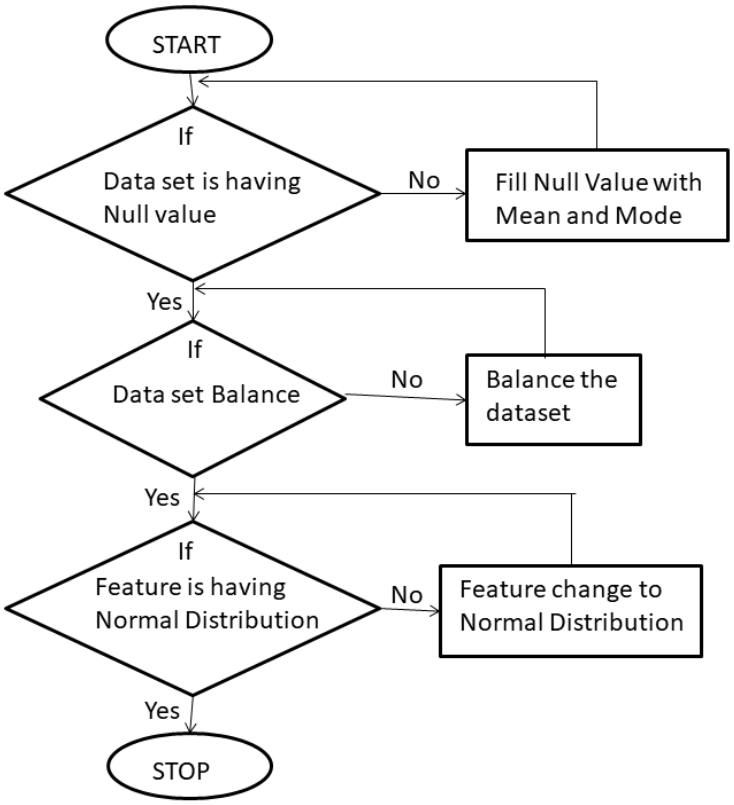


Fig 5- Flowchart for data pre-processing method

As show in figure 5, during the data collection process, generally many sample feature values were missed or row duplicates because of the repetition of the job and use the same dataset the machine learning algorithm can't make any appropriate model with this missing or make a biased model with duplicate values. To solve the above problem, we need to data pre-process before training the model.

1. Check the missing value

In this method we check the dataset is having null and zero value either we can delete the complete row of the dataset or use data imputation method addressing the missing value probably feature class mean or median is used.

2. Balance and unbalance data set

If the dataset contains the repetition same row or inequality of the dataset, unbalance in the classification of the data. To solve the above- unbalanced problem, we used Random sampling and oversampling techniques. In our clinical dataset do not contain imbalance of data.

3. Normalization of features

In the data set contain several feature column and all are different scale. To make a good ML model and to get more accuracy we need to do all the features in same scale is called normalization. The generally used two techniques called z-score

and min-max technique. In this work we used z-score technique.

3.3Linear Regression algorithm

Linear regression is a mathematical model applied to each patient's diabetes trial dataset. This algorithm models a relationship between the dependent variable, glucose level and three independent variables: systolic pressure, diastolic pressure and BMI. We have seen from the patient 3, 100-day clinical trial dataset featuresthat blood glucose is positively correlated with systolic pressure, diastolic pressure and BMI. We use a simplified hypothesis function, as shown in equation (1), and root mean squared error function, as shown in equation (2), for multiple linear regression models. The objective is to minimise the root mean squared error by choosing the suitable weight ($\alpha^T X$) parameter. The given hypothesis function, we can predict the future glucose value for diabetic and non-diabetic persons.

$$h_\alpha(X) = \alpha^T X \quad (1)$$
$$= \alpha_0 x_0 + \alpha_1 x_1 + --- + \alpha_N x_N$$

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N} square((h_\alpha(X^i) - Y^i))} \quad (2)$$

The RMSE shows the difference between the actual value and the predicted value, and it will give the overall correctness of the prediction. The proposed algorithm is used to continue monitoring the blood glucose level and predict the diabetes mellitus.

4. Result Analysis

The proposed algorithm is to manage the glucose level in the body by continuing exercise and using a non-diabetic diet.

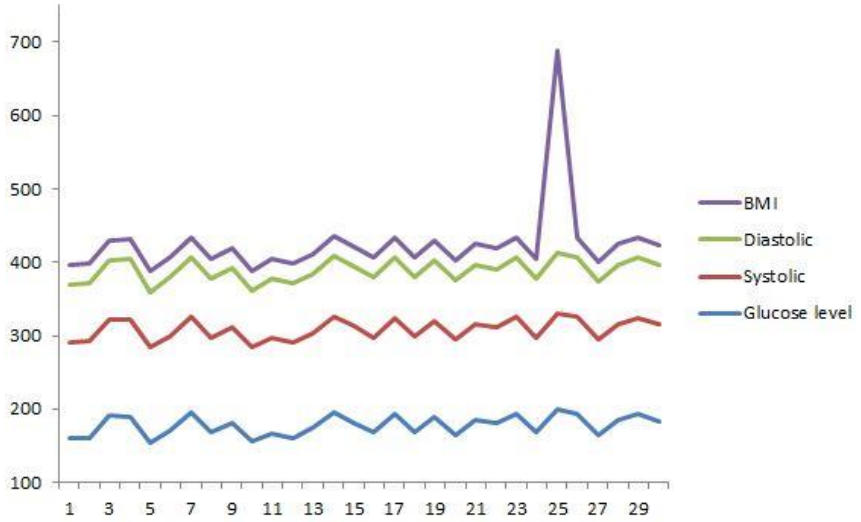


Figure 6- Patient 1 all data representation in graph

Fig.6 shows patient 1, all the 100 days of recorded data in the graph. It is observed that patient 1 has no improvement in glucose level, and he also has high blood pressure and BMI. This patient has more possibility of heart strokes, nerve damage, eye blindness, etc.

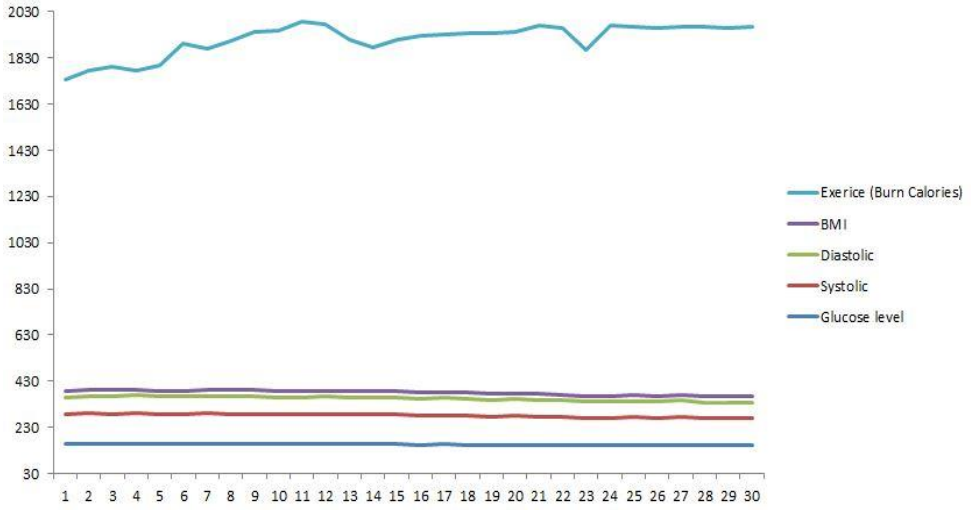


Figure 7- Patient 2 all data representation in graph

Fig.7 shows patient 2 all 100 days of recorded data in the graph and observes some parameter variation with respective time. In this, patient 2 was doing regular exercise to burn calories, reducing fat mass and fatty acid in the body; due to this improvement of insulin level, glucose digestion and in the pancreas enhanced beta-cell. In this figure,it was observed that the blood pressure (systolic, diastolic), BMI and glucose levels are positively correlated. It is observed that patient 2 has improved his blood glucose level from the 13th day of the trial and continues to improve during the trial. Improving a patient's health condition needs time and is slow, but improvement continues in progress. So, it was confirmed that regular exercise will help to reduce glucose levels, blood pressure and BMI, which are essential parameters of the body.

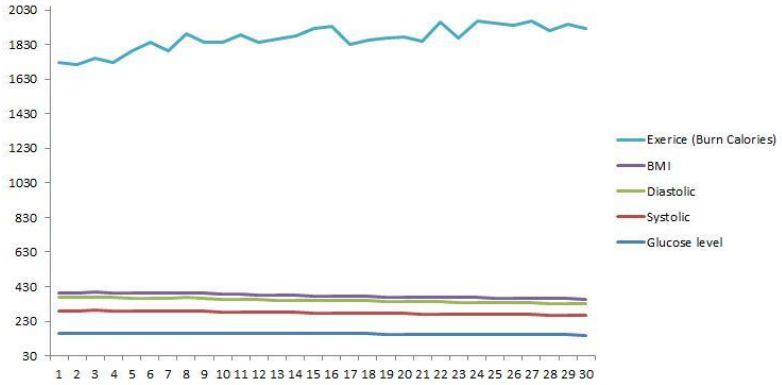


Figure 8- Patient 3 all data representation in graph

From fig.7, we have observed that the patient improved his physical condition and glucose level by doing regular exercise. Fig.8 shows patient 3 all the 100 days of recorded data in the graph and found that clinical recoded data improved with respective time. Patient 3 was doing regular exercise for 30-40 minutes to burn the calories, fat mass, fatty acid, etc. and also taking non-diabetic food like less carbohydrate, no fatty product, no sugar, less salt, etc. It is observed that patient 3 has faster improvement in the health condition (blood pressure and BMI) and glucose level. Patient 3 has improved blood glucose level, blood pressure and BMI from the 10th day of clinical trial. From the graph, it is clear that the blood pressure (systolic, diastolic), glucose level and BMI are positively correlated, and calories burned are negatively correlated with all other parameters. Patient 3 has faster improvement than patient 2, and improvement continues during the trial. So it is confirmed that regular exercise and a healthy diet (non-diabetic food) will help to improve glucose level, blood

pressure and BMI, which is an essential parameter of the body.

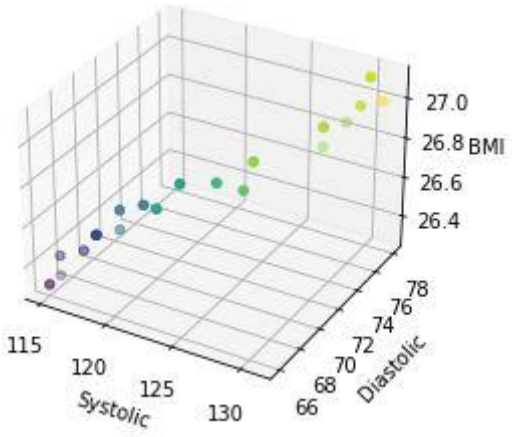


Figure 9 – Glucose level distribution about systolic, diastolic and BMI features.

From fig.9 it is clear that the diabetes cause feature like glucose level, systolic pressure, diastolic pressure and BMI are positively correlated and improvement of patient 3 is faster as compare to other 2 patient. The performance measures the proposed linear regression algorithm performed on patient 3 clinical test set used for early stage identification of diabetes mellitus by using the root mean square error, correlation coefficient and accuracy, as shown in Table 2.

Performance metrics	Value
Correlation coefficient	+1
RMSE	1.91 %
Accuracy	97.00 %

Table 2- Performance measure of the algorithm

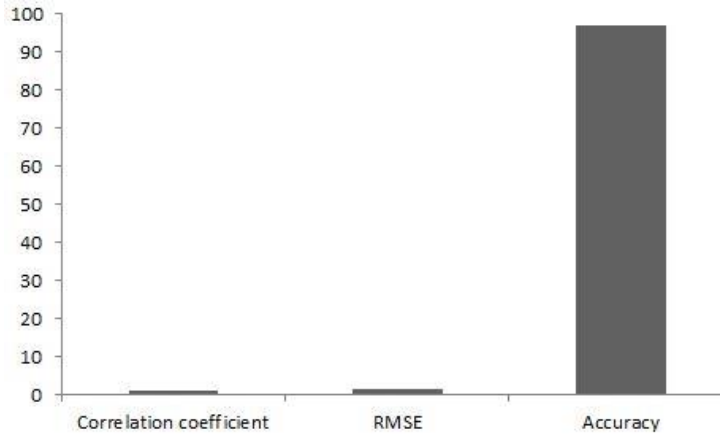


Figure 8- Performance parameter of the proposed algorithm

Several researchers have also been made in the literature for diabetes prediction due to its importance in real life. For this, we have chosen 100 days clinical trial diabetes dataset and proposed a multi-linear regression algorithm for early stage identification of diabetes mellitus; as shown in Figure 8 and Table 2, the proposed method performed very well with an accuracy of 97%.

5. Internet of Things used for blood glucose level monitoring system for Healthcare.

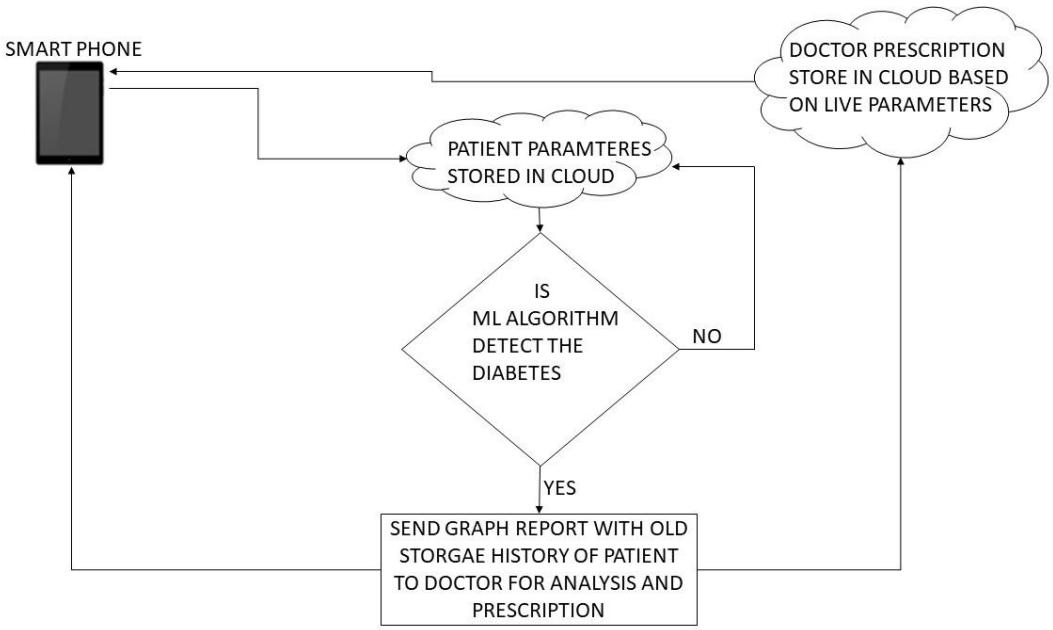


Figure 9: Proposed hypothetical architecture of blood glucose monitoring system

Input to mobile application	Suggestion from model/Doctor
Weight	Blood Glucose Level
Systolic Pressure	Exercise
Diastolic Pressure	Diet Plan
BMI (Internal calculation)	Medicine
Calories Burn	
Age	

Table 3: Interactive input and output of mobile application

The figure 9 proposed architecture of Internet of Things for continues blood glucose level monitoring system for diabetic and non-diabetic persons. The mobile application can takein regular interval all doctor recommended parameters shown in table 3, and send to cloud for storage of data and perform machine learning operation on the stored data. The Person can monitor machine learning model output continuously for control and manage their glucose level in a better way at remote location. In this mobile application the person data collected from the Bluetooth based sensor like weight, systolic pressure, diastolic pressure, burn calories and calculated BMI. All this raw data are stored in the cloud for further processing. The server real time analysis and pre-processing techniques are performed to extract some valuable information. Based on the information rule-based procedure will be applied for the prediction of future change of blood glucose level. The analysis data and predicted blood glucose level sent to the remote station doctor desktop application and doctor will sent some suggestion about diet plan, exercise and medicine. The doctor suggestions will store in the cloud database with present physical condition of person for future automatic recommendation to other persons. The blood glucose level and doctor prescription sent to the person mobile application. This stored data will available in public domain for further analysis and find crucial treatment for improvement of the diabetes. In the end, the person will know about the health condition and risk prediction of diabetes based on the data transferred by their application and stored data from history about the person to know about the progress of health condition.

Conclusion

Diabetes mellitus is a deadly disease most commonly found in adults nowadays.It is observed from figure 8 of patient 3 clinical trial stored data that regular exercise and a non-diabeticdiet help to early improve the blood glucose level, blood pressure and BMI. Regular exercise and a non-diabetic diet also have many benefits like maintaining good health conditions, fast neuron firing, increasing the energy of the body etc. The Internet of Things used for monitor the patient condition and also record the parameters and prescribe the medication for early treatment of diabetes mellitus. The main aim of this study is to propose a model to continue monitoring the blood glucose level and early stage identification and early doctor prescription of medication for diabetes mellitus.The person does not have to go every time for the clinical test, and this test is costly. The persona can take all parameters in their home and analyse the output result using the proposed ML model and IoT based technology. If the non-diabetic person detects diabetes, then the person will go for a higher test for further confirmation of the level of diabetes and take a doctor consultantfor diagnosis of the disease.The proposed algorithm outperformed with an accuracy of 97% on the diabetic person and take the doctor consultant using proposed mobile application.

In future work, we plan to conduct clinical trials on different age groups and for long duration of patients to generalise the mode. The algorithm's performance can be enhanced by using a large trial dataset.

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Chapter 35: The Basel Mission Presence in Bakundu 1897-1961; The Untold Story on the Destruction of Indigenous Religion

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Abstract

This article interrogates the impact of Basel Mission activities on indigenous traditional religion in Bakundu, South West Cameroon, between 1897 and 1961. While dominant missionary historiography emphasizes evangelization, education, and social reform, this study argues that the Basel Mission systematically contributed to the destruction of Bakundu traditional religion, which functioned as an integrated framework for governance, morality, social cohesion, and cultural identity. Drawing on archival records from the National Archives Buea and oral interviews with traditional authorities and elders, the research traces the Mission's expansion from its 1897 station at Bombe under German colonial rule through the British mandate and trusteeship periods. Missionaries condemned indigenous practices as "pagan" and "uncivilized", establishing schools that taught Bakundu children to reject ancestral beliefs and cultural institutions. Converts and locally trained pastors actively discouraged initiation rites, ancestral ceremonies, and the authority of secret societies such as Nganya and Malle, which were central to traditional justice and spirituality. With colonial administrative backing, missionaries destroyed sacred objects like the etana and erected churches near indigenous shrines, symbolizing Christian dominance. By 1961, these activities had precipitated a marked decline in traditional religion. A generational crisis emerged as youths who attended Mission schools embraced Christianity, leading to the disappearance of rituals, the weakening of spiritual institutions, and the erosion of social cohesion previously maintained by religious structures. The study concludes that the destruction of indigenous religion was not an incidental outcome but a deliberate objective rooted in Mission's theological ideological convictions. Understanding this history is essential for contemporary debates on identity, culture, and religion in Cameroon.

Keywords: *Basel Mission, Bakundu, indigenous religion, Colonialism, cultural transformation*

How to Cite this Chapter:

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Introduction

The encounter between Christianity and African traditional religions during the colonial period represents one of the most significant cultural transformations in African history. In Cameroon, the Basel Mission emerged as one of the most influential missionary societies, particularly in the coastal and south western regions. Its expansion into Bakundu coincided with the German colonial rule and continued under British administration, shaping religious and social life for decades.

Missionary accounts often emphasise the success of evangelization, education and social reform. However, these narratives frequently obscure the destructive impact of missionary activities on indigenous religious systems. In Bakundu, traditional religion was not merely a belief system but a comprehensive framework encompassing governance, morality, social relations, and identity. This article therefore interrogates the impact of the Basel Mission activities in Bakundu between 1897 and 1961, asking to what extent Basel missionary activities contribute to the destruction of indigenous traditional religion.

The Bakundu clan is situated in the South West Region of Cameroon with thirty-six villages occupying settlements in the Mbonge, Konye and Kumba I subdivisions. They are descendants of Ngoe who is the same ancestor of neighbouring clans like the Bakossi, Bafaw, Mbo, Mbonge amongst others. Bakundu is a coatal Bantu speaking stock and one of the clans that make up the Oroko ethnic group. Their environment is characterized by luxuriant forests and rivers. The main hydrographic networks in the Meme Division which are the Rivers Mungo and Meme run through many Bakundu villages. Besides the two main rivers in the region, there are other small rivers all over the land. This makes their religion to be connected with forest and marine activities.

Indigenous traditional religion in pre-colonial Bakundu

Before the coming of the Europeans to Bakundu,Traditional religion was expressed in cosmology and belief systems, social and political functions, as well as moral and ethical systems. This is because traditional religion in pre-colonial Bakundu involves the totality of the life of the people, it determines the spontaneous and their subconscious reactions as well as their interpretation of reality. It also refers to a specifically Bakundu way of responding to, and manifesting belief in the absolute. Its major beliefs and tenets are expressed more in recognizable, often unwritten rituals.

Cosmology and belief systems

Worship prayer and sacrifice are the three different forms of manifesting belief as well as expressing religious convictions or feelings. They are all ways to commune with the Divine; a covenant relationship between the supreme being (God) and humanity. The Bakundu had the conviction that there is a supreme being who has to be respected, venerated, adored and revered. This supreme being was called*tata obase*who is also the God of their ancestors. This God was conceived both as transcendent and familiar, he is therefore visualized as awe-inspiring yet attractive. The god of our ancestors is venerated and worshipped in Bakundu like other peoples of Africa. He is given different names most of which are descriptions of his attributes. African peoples approach God according to the ideas they have about him. They think of him as God of the ancestors, God the moulder, God the provider to all, the one who governs and sustains the universe, a real father and friend to everyone; omnipotent, omniscient, merciful and benevolent- a God who is an embodiment of every good thing. (Mbiti, 1991: 53). This almighty God is in the earth, the skies, and everywhere. Nothing can escape his notice. He gives power to the ancestors who live with him and inform him about individual family problems. So, he is more often worshipped through the veneration of the ancestors and by performing concrete external

acts shown through anatural religious cult which is both absolute and relative.

Veneration of ancestors

The ancestors (*melimo*) are those who are believed to have gone to the world beyond and are now spirits who communicate directly with the supreme being. The ancestors are seen, understood and venerated only in respect with their unique relationship with God the creator of the universe. In Bakundu villages, special masks are kept in the *etana*representing and reminding the people about their ancestors. When people pass near the *etana* they show signs of reverence. Contacts with the ancestors are maintained through offerings, sacrifices and other rituals. When these ritual duties are neglected, it is purported the divinity will call them to attention by causing illness or misfortune. These ancestors are the ones who act as intermediaries between the people and God. They are termed as the living-dead (Mbuy, 2012:105) because though dead, they still intervene in the activities of the living.The ancestors were consulted because they were considered to be the custodians of the tradition that they handed to their progeny and continue to supervise. This is because human life in Africans in general and Bakundu in particular was a natural intercourse between the physical and the spiritual; a symbiotic existence between the living and the living-dead who are the ancestors. As Mbiti puts it, the faith of our ancestors dominate the thinking of African peoples that it shapes culture, socio-political and economic organisations-the whole way of life. (Mbiti, 1975:9).

Spiritual intermediaries

Contact with the divinities was not always direct so there was the need for intermediaries between the human and divine realms. These mediators ranges from simple servant at a family altar to head of lineages, family heads, diviners and village head (*mowele mboka*) among them, the Mowele mboka was the highest because he acted on behalf of the whole village. He maintained ancestor cults, acted as priest for the community responsible for sacrifices offered to the spirits of sacred sites or ancestors. The *mowele mboka* in precolonial Bakundu acting as a chief priest is seen when a new baby was born into any family of the village, to save the child from any harm. As Vincent B. Khapoya puts it, "the birth of a baby affirms the continuity of the community and provides hope for the future". (Khapoya, 1998:45). The *mowele mboka* in this case would place the *njongolo*(a special stick that is believed to possess mystical powers and was held only by the *mowele mboka* or the person he was to initiate in a secret society) at the front of the house where the baby was born and pronounced the following words; "this new baby is not only a member of this house and family. The child belongs to the entire village. Any person touching or trying to harm this child must have touched the whole village and will carry the whole village on his back." (Lenya, 2019).The *njongolo* would remain in front of the house in question for three days. On the day of taking, it away, the whole village would assemble and the baby would be brought out. A small "grave" would be dug and the baby put into it which will later be covered with thatch. The *mowele mboka* would then invoke the spirit of the ancestors through a traditional speech called *ikando* to assist the family in bringing up the child, in making sure the child survived and in detecting any person or group of persons who would try to harm the baby through witchcraft. After the pronouncements, the *mowele mboka* personally removed the child from the "grave" and hands him or her to the family head to look after. (Lenya, 2019).

Sacred rituals and festivals

Religiosity in traditional Bakundu was also manifested through sacred rituals and festivals. Festivals like *dinwangi* when a new baby was born into a family was common in Bakundu to show their appreciation to *Obase* for the gift of a child into the family. The *dinwangi* was a feast of plantains, beef and palm oil with enough pepper prepared for all present. (Carr, 1922:65). The preparation of the *dinwangi* started as soon as the

woman was aware of her pregnancy. The husband kept aside one or two tins of palm oil, four to six legs of beef, a bag of salt, a fathom of cloth, a handkerchief and reserved about ten bunches of plantains in the farm. The pregnant woman on her part prepared cam wood powder and a store of firewood. She also kept aside dried fish. The mother of the woman collected pepper and as much beef as she could to add to the feast. That day the nursing mother was decorated with cam-wood powder (*yowah)* and white clay called *pembe* together with some other traditional regalia known as *besseba* or *so'o* all around her to present her more beautiful. In front of the house of the new born, the men beat the drums while the women danced. The centre of attraction was on the nursing mother who was accompanied by her friends, two or three identically decorated for that purpose. (Balemba,2020). There were other sacred rituals and festivals like at the death of a *mowele mboka*, initiation into secret societies through which the people showed their attachment to God.

Social and political functions

Religion in precolonial Bakundu was also evident in social and political functions. Traditional religion was at the center in precolonial Bakundu governance. Traditional governance in pre-colonial Bakundu was in the hands of three main institutions; the *mowele mboka* (village head), the traditional council (*janea ra mboka*), and the secret societies (*bekali*). The *mowele mboka* was the custodian of the culture, peace and tradition of the people. This oath was taken on the day of enthroning before the whole village in the presence of other village heads, leaders of the different secret societies as well. Before the enthroning ceremony, the *mowele mboka* had passed through many rituals to fortify him so as to better govern his village. They *mowele mboka* was usually a member in all secret societies in the land, head of the village traditional council (*janea ra mboka*) as well. At the time he took over office as village head, he also took the office of high priest of the village as he was the one to act as the link between the living and the living dead. He was the highest in the rungs of the traditional authority, having numerous political functions and royal prerogatives which included among others guaranteeing the socio-cultural wellbeing of the community, the settlement and the imposition of traditional injunction orders.(Nakomo,2020).He propitiated the spirits of the land by offering sacrifices to the gods and ancestors. The sacrifices he offered and the rituals he performed were believed to nourish the people's relations with the gods and assured continuity. (Sakwe,2019).

Since the Bakundu traditional authority system was decentralized, there was also the traditional council that took part in governance. This council was made up of the various family heads of the polity. They acted as the legislative arm of governance of the village. Their meeting house was the *etana* (a traditional and mystical house built at the centre of the village). This house was the centre of peace and a protecting force for the village. It was in this house that the gongs of the various juju societies were kept. This house also acted as the highest shrine of the village as most of the sacrifices and rituals took place there.

The secret societies were the other arm of pre-colonial Bakundu governance. They acted as the judicial arm because "in the days before European occupation, the judicial system was controlled by the Juju clubs, or in certain cases by decisions of the whole village." (Carr,1922:31). The colonial administrator goes further by stating that "the settling of civil disputes of a trivial nature was probably done in the village by the village elders but anything of serious nature was done by the juju societies". (Garson, 1932:28). The secret societies that were very active in Bakundu included the *Nganya*, the *Malle, Mudimi*, *Nyakpe*, *Bolemba*, *Basongo*, *Dior*, *NgoaMaloba* amongst others.Secret societies were purportedly linked to various spirits which gave them a double nature. Members of these clubs were both humans but also had other souls in animals in the forests or in the rivers, depending on the type of secret society to which one belonged. For

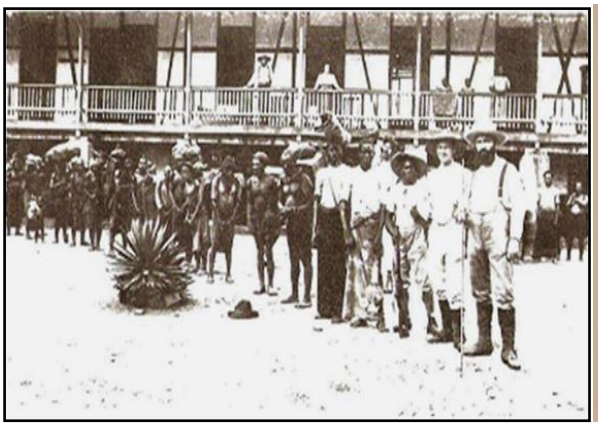
example, members of the *malle* society were said to have "bush souls" in elephants, the Ngoa Maloba having theirs in red river hog also known as bush pigs.

It is for the afore reason that in their apparel and dance they would always want to present things in resemblance to the animals in which they were attributed with.This credited them with the name *Neyo o Mariba, Neyo o Mokondo* literally meaning "I live in water as well as on land". They were instruments of peace and order in the polity.They meted out punishment for violation of social rules while at the same time deflecting any resentment that might come from the people to the supernatural as represented by the masks that they wore. (Khapoya, 1998:44). These societies were out to maintain morality and decency especially in the manner in which they treated cases of theft and adultery. The severe manner through which these secret societies dealt with stealing, made Carr in his report to conclude by saying "with such drastic measures, it is not surprising that it was often said stealing was practically unknown among the Bakundu."(Carr,1922:31).

Arrival of the Basel mission in Bakundu

When Cameroon became a German protectorate in 1884, the English Baptist missionaries finding it difficult to work with the German colonial authorities, decided to leave the territory in 1886 in favour of the Basel mission. From the coast of Cameroon, the Basel mission decided to move into the hinterland and by 1897 the Basel mission was in Bakundu area coming from Douala passing through the Mungo River and established a station at Bombe under the leadership of Rev. P. scheibler.(Garson,1932:84). Carr supports this when he says "during German occupation Bombe (Bakundu) was a big centre of the Basle Mission...from this centre were sent out native teachers, and preachers who opened small schools, and missions in numerous villages of Mbonge, Bakundu and other tribes". (Carr,1922:49).The Basel mission was a Christian mission with headquarters in Basel, Switzerland and a branch was established at Stuttgart in order to give it a German character. This made the Basel Mission to have a German connection. (Eyongetah et al, 1987:51).

The Basel Mission Station at BombeRev. P. Scheibler





Source: Nyansako Ni-Nku, *The Pioneers, A Centenary Picture Book,* 1886-1986, Yaounde, Buma Kor Publishers, 1986, p. xv

The missionary society engaged in evangelisation thus spreading the "good news" and the Christian doctrine in the area and contributed in other social services. This period saw the westernisation of social customs which came through the introduction of formal education, Christianisation and modernisation of cultural values such as birth, marriage, death celebrations and the transformationof architectural patterns.The Basel mission extended her activities to all Bakunduland from their station in Bombe and Reverend Nathaniel Lauffer was its first resident

missionary. It was from the Basel mission station in Bombe that the missionary society spread its activities to the rest of Bakunduland and neighbouring clans like Balong, Bafaw, Ekombe and Mbonge.(Garson, 1932:84).

The friendly nature of the Bakundu was manifested in the warm welcome they gave the Basel missionaries. Their relations started deteriorating when the missionaries started preaching and having disdain for everything traditional. This arose anti-Christian sentiments especially from the traditionalists. Moreover, the missions in most cases built their Churches near the *etana* of each village which is a secret house of the Bakundu of which they hold a sacred esteem. The missionaries went as far as destroying them in some villages like Kake, Bombe among others. This action was seen as a serious threat to their ancestral worship which made pro traditionalists to see them leave their land.(Ndome,2019).

The *etana* of Itoki Bakundu



Source: Authors collection, November 2009.

Though these efforts were abortive, it nevertheless affected the Christian missionaries' effort to convert the people. The destruction of the *etana* which was the epitome of the people's tradition too had a negative effect on the Bakundu traditional authority system as it proved the victory of Christianity over tradition.

After colonial rule was well established, the missionaries and the colonial authorities forged a very close working relationship. (Khapoya, 1998:114). This was because the missionaries used the Bible and the gospel to pacify the indigenes while laying the groundwork for the colonial authorities to easily consolidate their administration. They thus worked hand in gloves to prohibit traditional practices. Everything traditional were termed evil, demonic uncivilised and primitive like idol worship, polygamy, traditional post mortem among others. (Ndome, 2019). This is because missionary activities were well-meaning, but they had little understanding of the cultures they were entering. Their intent was to bring Christianity to a continent and a people they believed to have no true religion. They meant to stamp out African religious practices they saw as superstition and ignorance. Most of the Bakundu villages notably Mbu, Itoki, Ibemi, Kake had open confrontations with the missionaries during *modimi* and *malle*traditional dance celebrations. They tried to send the missionaries out of their villages but their efforts proved futile because the missionaries were supported by the administration.In 1898 just one year after the establishment of the missionary station in Bombe, the village head of and most of his subjects assembled all their juju objects and called on the Basel missionary Lauffer who was the resident missionary to burn them and they

promised to be Christians. Other juju objects were sold out whenever the natives had the opportunity to do so. It is said that at that moment, twenty-four men registered as catechumens. (Itoe,2019). This action by the village head of Bombe was a blow to the traditional authority system as he made an out show of the victory of Christianity over the Bakundu traditional beliefs, institutions and religion. By the end of that year, the Bombe station and its outstations had 130 Christians and 174 catechumens following the table below.

Number of Converts in Bakundu in 1898

Village	Number of Christians	Number of catechumens
Bombe	20	24
Kake	17	21
Bole	13	20
Boa	09	16
Banga	16	23
Ndifo	06	17
Konye	14	14
Mbakwa	17	13
Ibemi	05	11
Itoki	07	10
Mbu	06	05

Source: Nyansako ni-Nku, *The Pioneers, A Centenary Picture Book, 1886-1986*, p.34

From the table, one realises the evangelization strides made by the mission in recruiting many converts in some Bakundu villages. These converts joined forces with the missionaries in discrediting everything that had to do with the Bakundu traditionand religion especially the juju societies which were the backbone of the traditional authority system.

The Basel mission's activities during the British colonial era

After the First World War that ended in 1918, the British took over control of part of German Cameroon where Bakundu is located. With the arrival of the British, the Basel mission which had a German connection did not find it difficult to work with the colonial administration. There was therefore a symbiotic relationship between them. This British colonial administration encouraged missionary activities in her Cameroonian territory as she stated that "no formalities of any kind are required in order to open a church, chapel or school." (Epah, 2007:126). This relationship is analysed by Rodney when he states that "The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers... missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light."(Rodney, 1982:121).

The fight against the religion of the Bakundu was strengthened with the good relationship that the missionaries created with the administration. The missionaries backed by the administration condemned the traditional beliefs of the people while encouraging conversion to Christianity. There was a coordinated effort by most of the early Europeans (economists, politicians and missionaries) to destroy, or at least minimize, the impact of African Traditional religion on the people. (Mbuy,2012:13). The Bakundu people who were so inclined to juju societies saw the preaching of the missionaries as a deviation from their traditional beliefs which led to some resistances. These missionaries who operated in Bakundu did not understand the manner in which the people expressed their religiosity, inaccurately referred to the faith of our ancestors as paganism which had to be fought, conquered

and suppressed. Since the missionaries were backed by the colonial administration, they did terrible things like the burning of the *etana,* destroyed their art like the carved wooden figure associated with the *kori* and *basongo* societies among others. As Garson puts it, "the Bakundu like the surrounding tribes probably had little organisation that was not closely interwoven with the juju societies." (Garson, 1932:85).Thus, the destruction of traditional edifices was like taking away their identity which was not welcomed by some traditional adherents but they could not resist the missionaries who were backed by the colonial administration.

Basel mission involvement in education

Before the coming of the Europeans to Bakundu, the education that was practiced is what is termed "informal" while the Europeans on their part came with "formal education" with the creation of learning institutions. Education was left in the hands of voluntary agencies like missionary societies (Esseiben,1976:22) and in Bakundu, education was in a greater part in the hands of the Basel mission. This mission was the main agency that established educational institutions at varying capacities in Bakunduland. This was because they were the first missionary body to have established in the area and they were backed by the colonial administration. This mission opened their first school at their station in Bombe of which the architects were Reverends Lauffer and Scheibler. (Carr, 1922:49).

Keller writing on the history of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon states that the Basel mission began with vernacular schools and before the First World War, seventeen of these vernacular schools already existed in Bakundu.(Keller,1969:43). The popularity that these schools got at its inception gained it the name *volkschulen* (schools for everybody).The curriculum of these schools was health knowledge, religious knowledge, history, geography and German language. Each of the vernacular schools were placed under a missionary assisted by a catechist. In Bakundu, the Duala language was used as a medium of instruction while Mungaka was used in the grassfield region. *Lokundu* which is the Bakundu language was not used because when the Germans wanted to develop the language, sese Nambiri of Banga told them that *lokundu* was the same as Duala.(Itoe,2019). Though these languages have a lot of similarities, Nambiri fears were that if the Germans understood *lokundu*, they might uncover all the secrets of the Bakundu people. The villages of Itoki, Mbu, Ibemi, Supe, Bombe, Banga, Kake were among those hosting the vernacular schools. These schools had nothing in their curricular on Bakundu tradition. This led to a way in degrading the Bakundu tradition and religion. The fact that these schools were in most cases under the Basel mission goes a long way to show how the motives of the schools were to discredit the Bakundu traditional culture and beliefs.

Rev. Lauffer in 1902 started a boy's boarding school in Bombe and he was assisted by Scheibler and Gruele as teachers. The training at this school lasted for two years and the curriculum was the same as in the vernacular schools and only sport was the additional subject. The administration in order to make the students self-sufficient in food established a garden around the school for the students to cultivate. It should be noted that the school sold some of her products from this garden to the African fruit company an activity that fetched additional revenue for the school. The Bakundu children who were among the first enrolment included; from Bombe Itie Mukwelle and Itoe Nanyinga, while Masue Ndoh came from Marumba, Maloba Nangia from Banga, Ngoe Nobiko from Kake while others came from neighbouring clans.(Nyassako,1986:34). These young men came to regard themselves as more upgraded Bakundu people who had no respect for traditional institutions because they have become semi-Germans (Europeans) due to the education they received.

The Basel mission school inspector Dinkelacker published many books that were adapted to the

official program drafted in 1910. Inspite the many financial problems faced by the Basel mission to run their schools, education in Bakundu was free during the German era. By 1914, nearly every Bakundu village hosted a Basel mission school and their impact on the people and the tradition cannot be overlooked. When the British took over their section of Cameroon from the Germans, their educational policy was not very different from that of the Germans which were geared at training clerks to work for the administration, business, plantations and security service.(Ngoh, 1996:174)

Practical lesson in the Boys school at Bombe Mission Station



Source: Nyansako Ni-Nku, *The Pioneers, A Centenary Picture Book,* 1886-1986, Yaounde, Buma Kor Publishers, 1986, p.ii.

As far as the Bakundu was concerned, before the arrival of the British to the area, the BaselMission which operated under the German era had done a great deal in the domain of formal education.

This thus helped the British administration to easily continue with the implementation of western education though there was the language problem as very few people understood the English language. The British felt that the Western Christian missionaries, who had been experienced pioneers in educating Africans, would be valuable partners for the establishment of British colonial formal schools on the Cameroon landscape. The British colonial administration opened Native Authority Schools but as far as Bakundu is concerned, only two of these schools were opened one in Kombone and the other in Kurume. The other thirty-four Bakundu villages were served by the Basel Mission schools.

Most of the schools in Bakundu as seen were in the hands of the Basel Missionaries which were staffed and run by them but subsidised in varying degrees by the colonial government whose interest in missionary education simply was to ensure that enough Bakundu children were educated to meet the limited need for semiskilled workers in colonial bureaucracies as opined by Elijah Okon when he states that "colonial policy made it that Africans received only limited education, which would enable them only to read the Bible, take orders efficiently from the white masters and missionaries, and function, at best, as interpreters, messengers and clerks in the colonial bureaucracy."(Okon,2014:25)

Social reorganization and cultural suppression

The activities of the Basel mission in Bakundu contributed largely to social reorganization and the suppression of the traditional religion of the people by suppressing their cultural identity in all its forms. As Bakundu children attended the schools set up by the missionaries they were taught that European presence in Bakundu was to uplift them from a state of barbarism thereby making those who attended these schools to look low on their traditional forms of life and practices which in turn had a negative bearing on the traditional religion. This has been corroborated by this writer when he states that; "The destruction of African culture and values through the imposition of alien religions and the relentless attack on African values mounted by mission schools contributed to a mentality of ennui and dependency and to the loss of confidence in themselves, their institutions and their heritage." (Khapoya,1998:144)Their goal was to give the Bakundu people like other Africans a new identity as they went as far as requiring them to use new Christian names. As asserted by this writer when he says;

> Instead of being the word of God, the Bible became a satanic tool that enhanced the plunderage and defecation of Africa. Through Christianity and later Islam, all African ways of life were condemned to purgatory. They were completely destroyed so as to end up producing the current seed of Africans who abuse and deny their own ways of life. African cultures and ways of life were demonised and deemed uncouth while European ones were glorified, spread and superimposed on unsuspecting Africans... the venom Christianity injected into many Africans is still working so as to make them believe that abandoning, demonising and negating their ways of life is civilization.(Mhango,2018:21-22)

Opoku corroborates this when he states that;

> Armed with the conviction of possessing the only truth, missionaries condemned all that was 'pagan'. They preached against all kinds of traditional practices - the pouring of libation, holding state offices, drumming and dancing, traditional ceremonies of the rites of passage, such as outdooring, girls' puberty rites and customs associated with deaths and burials. They also denied the existence of gods and witches and other supernatural powers which Africans believed in. On the whole, becoming a Christian meant, to a large extent, ceasing to be an African and using European culture as a point of reference. Thus Christianity had a disintegrating effect on African culture. (Opoku,1985:526).

As a result of this, many Bakundu children who attended these schools joined forces with the missionaries to destroy the Bakundu religion by becoming catechists and pastors as seen from table 2 below.

Table 2: Bakundu youths who became Pastors from 1931-1950

Name	Village of origin	Mission
Pastor Dikonge	Banga	Basel
Pastor Dossah E. Sakwe	Banga	Basel
Pastor Ekweni Modika	Bombe	Basel
Pastor Lobe Ekwalle	Bombe	Basel

Pastor Mosina	Supe	Basel
Pastor Mukwelle Peter	Mbu	Basel
Pastor Ndoh	Marimba	Basel
Pastor Nganda Nakomo	Mbu	Basel
Pastor Njemo	Ibemi	Basel
Pastor Sakwe Emmanuel	Ibemi	Basel

Source: Adapted from Martin Atinda's, Bakundu under Colonial Rule 1897-1961, postgraduate diploma, University of Yaounde, 2005, p.75.

With these youths joining forces with the missionaries, many key cultural practices like, initiation rites, ancestral ceremonies, and traditional festivals were discouraged or banned because they saw them as incompatible with Christianity. The Christian teachings presented the Bakundu culture, tradition and everything Bakundu as paganic, uncivilized, satanic which led the Bakundu to lost confidence in their culture, adopted European values thereby creating an identity crisis.This worked negatively to the vulgarization of the Bakundu traditional religion. The juju societies who were the back bone of the traditional authority system saw their activities and powers destroyed thereby creating local administration problems and the increase in civil and criminal cases. With the powers of the secret societies weakened, the people were encouraged to look down on them and when there were litigations, they were advised to take them to the European courts where it was the force of argument that prevailed to determine the culprit. This was in contrast with the era before the arrival of Christianity where secret societies were in charge of the judiciary and they depended more on their religion to dispense justice.

Also, the propagation of Christianity in Bakundu led to a situation of religious duality. Here many converts practiced Christianity in the open but in moments of crisis they instinctively turned to the religion of their ancestors. Hence many lived what can now be referred to as a "double-life existence." (Mbuy, 2012:13).

Long term consequences for the Bakundu society

The activities of the Basel mission in Bakundu from 1897 has had far reaching consequences for the Bakundu traditional religion.By 1961 when the country had its independence from the colonial power, traditional religion in Bakundu had significantly declined. There was the loss of practitioners in all the Bakundu villages. The attractiveness of the schools during the colonial period led to many Bakundu youths enrolling in them which in another way was converting to Christianity because the schools were run by the Basel mission. This created a generational crisis as the old could not pass over the religion to the next generation who had embraced Christianity and looked with negativity the Bakundu traditional religion. This led to the disappearance of rituals as there were handed over to the next generation. With all these, there was the weakening of spiritual institutions who had lost all their powers due to the destruction of their artefacts by those who embraced the new religion.

Another long-term consequence of the activities of the Basel Mission's activities on Bakundu religion was cultural dislocation. The erosion of traditional religion led to breakdown in social cohesion that characterized the pre-colonial Bakundu society. Before the coming of the Basel mission that coincided with European colonization, Bakundu practiced her traditional religion and there was social cohesion as the people were aware of certain issues and their consequences but the coming of Christianity that was spearheaded by the Basel mission leading to the erosion of traditional religion, confusion took over the society leading to dislocation in all spheres of Bakundu life. The traditional authority system was dislocated with its main fabric destroyed giving way to many calamities in the society. This to a great extend has led to the loss of cultural identity as their religion had been destroyed and decided to embrace foreign religion.

Conclusion

The Basel Mission's activities in Bakundu from 1897 to 1961 profoundly transformed the religious and cultural landscape of the area. While the Mission introduced Christianity and Western education, its work systematically undermined indigenous traditional religion, which had served as the foundation for governance, morality, and social cohesion. Through mission schools, the training of local converts, and the condemnation of ancestral ceremonies, and secret societies, the Mission deliberately targeted the institutions and practices central to Bakundu spirituality. Backed by German and British colonial

administrations, missionaries destroyed sacred objects and reoriented communal life around Christian norms, producing a generational crisis as youths rejected ancestral beliefs.

By 1961, traditional religion in Bakundu had significantly declined, with rituals disappearing, spiritual institutions weakened, and social cohesion eroded. This destruction was rooted in the Mission's theological conviction that indigenous religion was "pagan" and had to be suppressed. Yet, elements of traditional cosmology and practice persist in syncretic forms and collective memory. Understanding this history challenges triumphalist missionary narratives and highlights the complex legacy of colonial religious encounter- one marked by cultural dislocation, identity crisis, and enduring questions of resilience and adaptation in contemporary Bakundu society.

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3) Lenya, Edward, 76 years old, traditional council head of Nake Bakoko and farmer, interviewed on the 10th of October 2019.
4) Nakomo, Nekena, 82 years old, chief of Mbu Bakundu and retired public health technician, interviewed on the 15th of June 2020.
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6) Sakwe, victor, 70 years old, chief of Kombone Bakundu and retired educationist, interviewed on the 12th of September 2019.

Chapter 36: Assessing Ethnomedicinal Knowledge and Its Socio-Cultural Importance: A Case Study of the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Ethnomedicinal knowledge reveals an important component of traditional healthcare, cultural identity, and community-based environmental knowledge. However, increasing modernization, changing lifestyles, and weakening intergenerational transmission have created challenges for the continuity of traditional medicinal knowledge. This study assessed ethnomedicinal knowledge and its socio-cultural importance among local communities in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) of Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka. A semi-structured questionnaire survey was carried out, selecting 75 respondents; face-to-face interviews, key-informant interviews, field observations, and transect walks were used as data collection methods.The qualitative datawereanalyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were examined using frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and the Relative Importance Index (RII). The findings identified 25 medicinal plant species used by the local communities for the treatment and management of various health conditions. Aloe vera (L.) Burm. fwas the most frequently reported plant, identified by 81.3% of respondents, followed by Zingiber officinale (77.3%), Curcuma longa (74.7%), and Centella asiatica (70.7%). Leaves represented the most frequently used plant part (42.7%), while decoction or boiling was the most common preparation method (38.7%). Digestive disorders were the most frequently reported health condition treated using medicinal plants (69.3%). The RII analysis further confirmed the high perceived importance of Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f (0.87), Zingiber officinale (0.84), and Curcuma longa (0.82). The study also demonstrated that ethnomedicinal knowledge has substantial socio-cultural significance, contributing to everyday healthcare, cultural identity, intergenerational learning, social interaction, and community continuity. Family-based transmission recorded the highest RII (0.848), followed by the role of elderly knowledge holders (0.834), modernization and changing lifestyles (0.818), youth interest (0.806), and medicinal plant availability (0.792). The findings indicate that although ethnomedicinal knowledge remains an important cultural and healthcare resource in Kuruwita, its continuity is increasingly influenced by modernization, declining youth interest, changing family structures, and reduced interaction between generations. Strengthening intergenerational knowledge transmission, documenting traditional knowledge with community participation, conserving medicinal plant resources, and promoting youth engagement are therefore essential for safeguarding this valuable component of local biocultural heritage.

Keywords: *Ethnomedicine; medicinal plants; traditional knowledge; socio-cultural importance; intergenerational transmission; Kuruwita DSD;*

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1. Introduction

Ethnomedicine is generally considered one of the oldest and most sustained forms of health knowledge in humanity (Wang et al., 2009) and can be defined as the body of knowledge, beliefs, and practices that are generated by communities relative to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of illness based on biological or cultural resources surrounding them. Much before the advent of formulated biomedical science, humans drew upon an intimate situational awareness of indigenous flora and fauna, geography, mineral resources (water & soil) and ritualistic practices within their immediate habitats for health maintenance beyond the presence of disease. Such a system of knowledge does not emerge alone from culture, but finds itself inherently entangled in the cosmology, social structure, language and belief systems prevailing in the communities, thereby making ethnomedicine as much of a socio-cultural phenomenon as it is one for therapy.

The importance of traditional medicine in modern society is more than historical or symbolic. Traditional, complementary and integrative medicine is still very much the cornerstone of healthcare delivery in many areas globally (World Health Organization, 2023.), with member states providing estimates indicating forty to ninety percent using some form of traditional medicine and over eighty percent of the population in well over one hundred and seventy of the WHO's one hundred and ninety-four member states relying upon traditional medicine with varying degrees. Through the 1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata and subsequently in the 2018 Declaration of Astana, traditional medicine has been explicitly recognized as being part of one Health System at the primary health care level. As an essential complement to universal health coverage, this acknowledgement expanded further with the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034 (World Health Organization, 2025) which aims are referred to strengthen the evidence base; ensure SAFE regulation and provide systematic support for integration into national health systems; These global policy developments further reinforce the idea that ethnomedicinal knowledge is not solely a remnant practice to be supplanted by biomedicine, but an ongoing resource for sustaining and addressing community health needs, especially in regions with limited or unaffordable access to formal healthcare services, and/or those unfamiliar with its underlying cultural practices.

Sri Lanka is indeed unique in the context of this global landscape of traditional medicine. The island nation has maintained an unbroken line of traditional healing for over two thousand years using four major systems of traditional medicine, namely Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and the indigenous Deshiya Chikitsa system, in which the first and last are typically based primarily on plants/herbs to treat disease (Napagoda et al., 2018). Sri Lanka is home to over three thousand plant species, a significant percentage of which have been recorded to be used in indigenous medicine (Napagoda et al., 2019), supporting this rich medico-cultural heritage. More importantly, the tradition of traditional medicine in Sri Lanka is not homogeneous across the island; however, different regions historically developed their own distinct strains of Deshiya Chikitsa associated with specific lineages of traditional practitioners, plant species available locally and those considered important for local disease categories (Napagoda et al., 2018). Such regional diversity precludes the assumption that a single ethnobotanical or ethnomedicinal inventory, no matter how thorough, represents the totality of indigenous medical knowledge possessed nationally.

Increasingly also, much ethnobotanical research has identified this regional diversity through systematic field surveys based on administrative divisions (districts) throughout the island of Sri Lanka. Research carried out in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, Gampaha

District reported forty-three medicinal plants belonging to twenty-eight familiesthat regional people used for treating inflammatory diseases like fever, cough, asthma, and arthritis, with above half of those interviewed stating the use of these remedies (Napagoda et al., 2018). A similar survey in Polonnaruwa District of North Central Province, where sixty-four medicinal plant species were documented with forty-two families, once again more than fifty percent of informants use herbal remedies for common ailments (Napagoda et al., 2019). Similarly, an ethnopharmacological survey of traditional and Ayurvedic practitioners from Asia surveyed nationwide, followed by analysis, revealed one hundred and thirty-three plant species that were primarily used for cosmetic applications (skin, hair and oral care), indicating the wide range of ethnomedicinal knowledge beyond treating disease alone with a focus on everyday well-being and modifying bodily care practices within (Gamage et al., 2021). Together, these studies illustrate the depth of indigenous plant-based knowledge that remains among Sri Lankan communities and also highlight that locally relevant ethnobotanical documentation (including what species are used for what illness and with which connotations) is valuable, as medicinal plants can significantly differ across local divisions.

However, the ethnomedicinal documentation of Sri Lanka still contains vast gaps despite this growing literature. As previously observed (Napagoda et al., 2019), despite the island having a vast reserve of indigenous medicinal knowledge, comprehensive systematic studies compiling this ethnoflora with their associated traditional uses have not been conducted for most of the divisions of government in the country and supporting scientific validation hasn't progressed beyond early steps for many claims in practice. The majority of the available scholarship has focused on certain districts in the Western, North Central and Northern provinces, with relatively little work done at all in many other less-observed areas including several divisions of Sabaragamuwa Province. This gap is significant, as Kuruwita belongs to a bio-diverse agro-ecological zone at the foot hills of the central highlands in an environmental context that would presumably sustain a plant based ethnomedicinal repertoire distinct by degree from those previously documented in Sri Lanka's drier or more urbanised sections. The entirety of Sri Lanka's ethnomedicinal heritage cannot be captured unless such field-based research is done in these localities, and a community like that of Kuruwita can languish away with knowledge unrecorded and eventually forever lost.

The risk of loss is not just theoretical – it has been well documented in the international literature on indigenous and traditional knowledge systems. In a previously published global review of the local and indigenous ecological knowledge included by numerous case studies in the literature, seventy-seven percent of the reviewed studies reported ongoing loss practically resulted from three main drivers:globalization, modernization and market integration; 63% of those mapping ethnobotanical and medicinal knowledge reports its particularly affected compared to other categories of indigenous knowledge (Aswani et al., 2018). Complementary research on indigenous communities in India has likewise found that loss of ethnomedicinal knowledge is driven either by external forces of acculturation and an increase in formal healthcare infrastructures, or internal socio-cultural constraints such as decline of motivation among younger generations to learn, practice or be involved with inherited healing knowledge (Kodirekkala, 2024). East African studies have also shown that the traditional medicinal knowledge passed down from practitioners sitting by the fire with pupils has become increasingly interrupted in a context of rural-to-urban migration, urbanization and declining availability of wild plant resources (Ouma, 2022). Despite having some of the oldest ethnobotanical traditions, recent surveys in parts of Europe have shown a drastic reduction in traditional plant knowledge and an

apparent failure of traditional knowledge transfer from one generation to another, thus indicating that the erosion of ethnomedicinal knowledge potential for loss is indeed a global phenomenon rather than restricted to any particular region or culture (Milani et al., 2025).

These global patterns of knowledge erosion are particularly acute among rural Sri Lankan communities, such as the inhabitants of those residing within the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division, where changing socio-economics and improved access to biomedical healthcare facilities together with a high level of outward migration by younger members seeking employment opportunities and formal education away from home, combined with the natural decline in inter-generational use of oral transmission habits between elders and youth may be quietly dissipating an unknowable body of ethnomedicinal knowledge that has never been formally recorded. Loss of knowledge that is only held by smaller groups, frequently consisting of older, more traditional practitioners/ healers and wise elder members, is not easily recovered; it poses an irreversible loss of not only some functional therapeutic modalities available to the community but also a key component in local cultural identification and heritage. Ethnomedicinal knowledge is, after all, inextricably linked to the socio-cultural matrix of the communities who practice it; rooted within kinship structures and religious beliefs, oral traditions and collective identity, its effacement implies an anthropological loss as much as a medical one.

Against this backdrop, the current study aims to systematically synthesise and evaluate ethnomedicinal information held by local personnel in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division concerning its respective socio-cultural importance and contextual significance in relation to the current context.

Main Objective

Assessing Ethnomedicinal Knowledge and Its Socio-Cultural Importance: A Case Study of the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division, Sri Lanka

Specific objectives

To examine the socio-cultural importance of ethnomedicinal knowledge in daily lives.

To examine the factors influencing the continuity of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge among the local communities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept and Definition of Ethnomedicine and Traditional Medicine

Ethnomedicine is a word that describes the body of knowledge, beliefs and practices which communities acquire and transmit to maintain health or treat illness, based on the use of animal, mineral and plant resources locally available. According to the World Health Organization (2023.), Experience in traditional medicine is the collective nomenclature of knowledge, skills and practices based on theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures for the well-being of individuals as well as in the prevention diagnosis, treatment of physical and mental disorders. This definition does not place ethnomedicine simply as a group of cures; rather it positions it as an inseparable portion of common cognition that represents the sincere of a peoples' cosmos view, their environment and the cultural organization of such. A significant proportion of WHO member states still report the use of herbal medicine and other indigenous traditional medical systems as part of their national health landscape (World Health Organization, 2023.) and traditional medicine remains at the core or primary healthcare in many developing areas. Scholars have long argued that ethnomedicinal systems are dynamic–not static; they continually reframed through ecological change, migration, religious belief, and contact with biomedicine

making them increasingly deserving of socio-cultural as well as botanical scrutiny.

2.2 Global Perspectives on Ethnobotanical and Ethnomedicinal Research

Ethnobotanical literature has accumulated to describe plant-based remedies for many rural and indigenous populations in countries throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. Such studies typically employ semi-structured interviews, key-informant discussions as well as quantitative indices (e.g. relative frequency of citation, use value or informant consensus factor) to assess the significance of specific species within the therapeutic repertoire of a community (see Napagoda et al., 2018). This latter literature goes beyond simply cataloguing the use of plants as medicine to increasingly consider ethnomedicinal knowledge as a type of cultural capital that is differentially possessed, actively negotiated, and susceptible to disturbances such as market integration, deforestation or formal education systems not strategically designed with indigenous content. Scholarship on traditional ecological knowledge has similarly contended that indigenous knowledge systems are based on a relational ontology of nature, in which plants, land, and humans are seen as interconnected rather than independent or discrete objects (Robinson et al., 2021). This relational framing elucidates why the loss of land access or biodiversity so frequently occurs in concert with an accompanying decline in ethnomedicinal practice; the practical, oral transfer and conservation of such knowledge is attuned to sustained presence within local ecological space.

2.3 Ethnomedicinal Knowledge in the Sri Lankan Context

For example, Sri Lanka has a unique and long documented tradition of indigenous medicine that has existed for over two thousand years in the form of Ayurveda, Deshiya Chikitsa (indigenous medicine) and Unani practice as well as a diverse flora with over three thousand species plants some which are used medicinally (Gamage et al., 2021). Very few formulae for remedies, practice principles (e.g., aetiopathogenesis) or associated treatment regimens were preserved as published enteries and continue to be passed orally among AYURVEDIC AND TRADITIONAL practitioners solely; instead, they are recorded primarily in spoken instruction or on ola-leaf manuscripts (Gamage et al., 2021), thus leaving much of this knowledge vault scientifically unvalidated. In response to this need, a substantial number of ethnobotanical surveys have been conducted at the level of districts throughout the country. Napagoda et al. (2018) documented forty-three medicinal plant species for the management of inflammatory ailments (fever, cough, and pain in joints) after interviewing several hundreds of residents from Gampaha Districts, Sri Lanka and determined relative frequency of citation and family importance values to rank the culturally salient species. Similarly, a survey performed in the Polonnaruwa District of North Central Province listed sixty-four medicinal plant species within forty-two families with over half of surveyed residents reporting current use of herbal medicine; highlighting the relevancy of home remedy-based treatment even in proximity to conventional health facilities (Napagoda et al., 2019). Other studies conducted in Sri Lanka corroborated such documentation not only focusing anti-diabetic, but also extend this coverage into cosmetic and dermatological applications (Gamage et al., 2021), proving that the Sri Lankan ethnomedicinal knowledge stretch the application dimension not only to the therapeutic level but allant is pervasive among other daily applicatory domains of skin, hair and mouth care. Collectively, these studies show that Sri Lanka has a rich ethnomedicinal heritage but documentation across administrative divisions is imbalance, with certain districts including those within the Sabaragamuwa Province (a bio-region in the south-central region) remained relatively

underworked as far as published ethnobotanical literature goes.

2.4 Socio-Cultural Significance of Ethnomedicinal Knowledge

Aside from its medicinal role, ethnomedicinal knowledge has considerable socio-culture importance. It is often situated in larger systems of ritual, religious belief and community identity that caring for or administering a remedy can simultaneously re-strengthen not only kinship duties but other spiritual cosmologies and position within the broader community (Kodirekkala, 2024). This also serves as a social boundary marker and focal point for authority since such knowledge is frequently limited to specific families, healer lineages or age groups; those identified as knowledgeable herbalists or traditional healers typically fulfill high status roles within the local social order. Moreover, traditional medicine still provides rural households with culturally relevant, geographically accessible, and cheaper than biomedical care in most places and this commonality perpetuates its role even where modern health services are on offer (World Health Organization, 2023.). Also, ethnomedicinal knowledge is inextricably linked with local ecological literacies: its continued utility demands not only knowledge of identification, seasonal collection and preparation of remedies but also long-term practice in accessing them from the surrounding landscape (Robinson et al., 2021).

2.5 Intergenerational Transmission and the Erosion of Traditional Knowledge

One persistent theme in the international literature is how easily ethnomedicinal knowledge may be lost across generations. Active transfer of traditional ecological knowledge is usually by oral teaching from older to younger community members (and not formal education), combined with directly copying adult examples, and depends on proximity and a desire for learning from elders (Ruddle, 1993). Other scholarship has identified a range of external drivers of knowledge decline, including market integration, cultural homogenization, globalization and disappearance of biological resources upon which traditional remedies depend (Voeks & Leony 2004). Assessment of knowledge retention critiques implies that external pressures need not be the only explanation for the patterns observed in losses of knowledge, but rather that more sociocultural explanations are needed: internal cultural restraints (for example, intentional restriction to certain kin or gender or age groups; loss of prestige associated with traditional healing relative to biomedicine) can operate independently(or act to accelerate erosion when there is little to no major disruption from outside the community) (Kodirekkala 2024). This erosion has been linked to both reduced use of medicinal plant expertise passed down through generations among older community members and dilution of herbal knowledge among younger generations (Vandebroek & Balick, 2012, cited in Kodirekkala, 2024). Our findings imply that any evaluation of ethnomedicinal knowledge in a particular locale needs to consider not only whether such knowledge currently exists but also the social mechanisms (formal or informal) through which it is being maintained or allowed to slip.

2.6 Gender, Age, and the Distribution of Ethnomedicinal Knowledge

There were some other literaturewhich explored how ethnomedicinal knowledge is gendered and age specific within communities. Evidence from comparative ethnobotanical studies suggests that men and women often hold different, only partially overlapping bodies of plant knowledge, reflecting a gendered division in labour and varying patterns of engagement with household, farm, and forest environments (Müller et al., 2015). Across contexts, women have been identified as important holders of knowledge ofchildcare, food and household remedies, while men are

more frequently associated with knowledge associated with forest-related, veterinary or ritual treatments; again, the direction of this pattern is variable and cultural dependent (Müller et al., 2015). Age proved to be a more consistent predictor of ethnomedical knowledge than gender (in other words, older community members generally report greater familiarity with Salvia species and their preparation), likely because the sustained lifelong involvement in local healing practices rather than age per se builds such expertise (Muller et al. 2015). In sum, this literature shows ethnomedicinal knowledge is unevenly distributed throughout a community suggesting that to adequately capture the complex reality of who holds, uses and transmits ethnomedicinal knowledge any socio-cultural assessment should disaggregate results by key demographic measures such as age distinctions for gender, occupation and educational background.

2.7 Research Gap and Justification for the Present Study

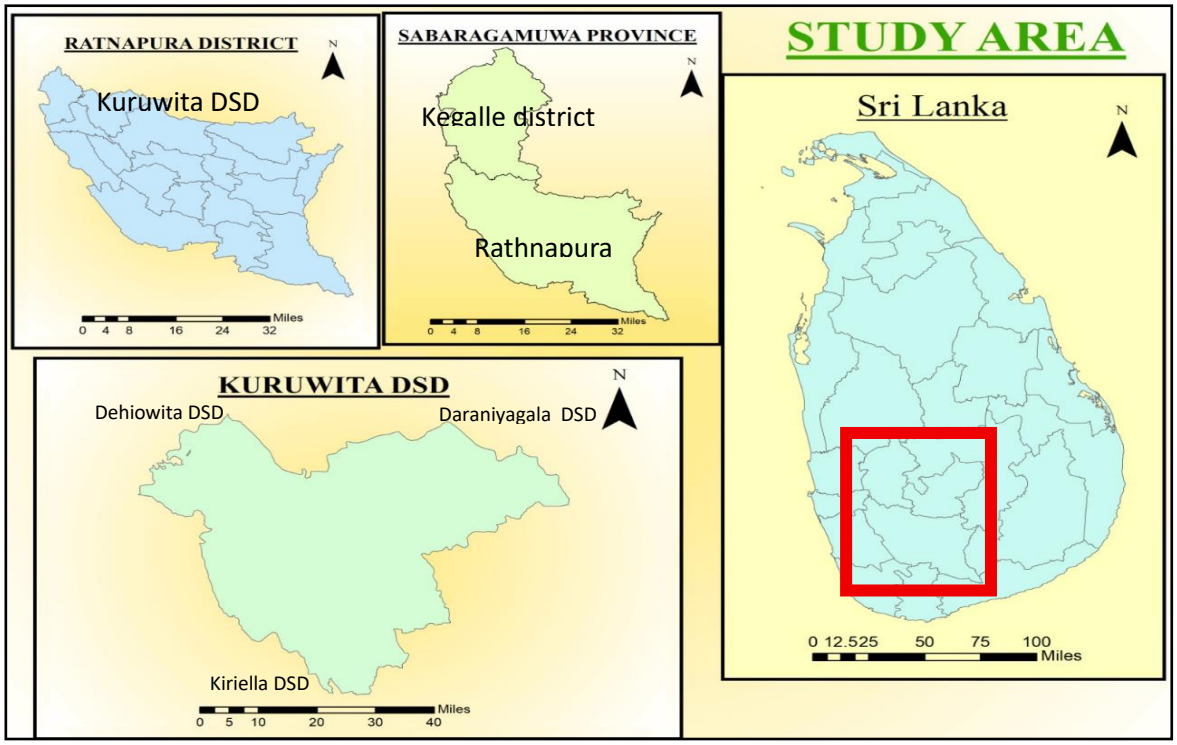
While much ethnobotanical and ethnomedicinal research has been conducted in parts of Sri Lanka, particularly the districts of Gampaha (Bopage et al., 2020; De Silva &Moonasinghe, 2016), Polonnaruwa (Minde et al., 2017) and Galle (Weerakoon et al., 2019), most published studies have largely focused on the botanical inventory of medicinal species (& their pharmacological validation) meanwhile very little detail has been given to socio-cultural processes that maintain, shift or diminish this knowledge at a specific Divisional Secretariat Division level (Gamage et al., 2021; Napagoda et al. Even in this context, engagement with the literature on commonalities of knowledge transmission and demographic differences in ethnomedicinal expertise is relatively rare especially where rural communities of Sri Lanka like those from the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division in Ratnapura District that are commonly associated with forest-adjacent livelihoods, but largely absent from published ethnobotanical data (Napagoda et al., 2019) are concerned. This discrepancy highlights the necessity of a study that is locally grounded and not only shows the diversity of ethnomedicinal knowledge found in Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division but also elaborates on socio-cultural processes inter-generational transmission, gender- and age-based distribution of knowledge, effects of modernization by which this knowledge is perpetuated or threatened with extinction. This gap has been addressed by the present study.

3. Methodology

Study area

The study area is the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) of Ratnapura District, Sabaragamuwa Province of Sri Lanka. (Figure 01)Considering the absolute location of the study area, it is located between 6° 41' - 6° 52' North latitude and 80° 15' - 80° 28' East longitude Geographically Kuruwita DSD is bounded on north, south, east and west by Deraniyagala and Dehiowita DSDs of Kegalle District, Kiriella DSD, Ratnapura DSD and the Kiriella and Eheliyagoda DSDs respectively. It is characterized by rural communities – closely integrated with the surrounding natural environment and its resources. The aforementioned geographical and socio-cultural combinations permit the Kuruwita DSD to serve as a locus for research exploring the sociocultural significance of ethnomedicinal knowledge. Specifically, the site serves as a suitable context for studying traditional knowledge in terms of the key characteristics of medicinal plants including their uses, preparation modalities, and transmission patterns of ethnomedicinal knowledge from one generation to another. Hence, the study area exemplified a nexus between traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge and associated cultural diversity, community welfare and conservation of local biological riches.

Figure 01 : Map of study area



Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire survey, and face-to-face interviews were carried outwith purposively and randomly selected respondents, including traditional healers (Vedamahattayas), elderly community members, herbal medicine practitioners, and households with generational knowledge of indigenous medicine. Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals identified through snowball sampling to access knowledgeable practitioners. In the questionnaire survey covered data on plant species used, local names, plant parts utilized, methods of preparation and administration, ailments treated, dosage, and any associated cultural or ritual practices. In addition, field surveys and transect walks were carried out across selected Grama Niladhari divisions within the study area to physically observe and collect voucher specimens of the medicinal plants mentioned by respondents, which were later identified and authenticated with the help of a qualified botanist. Direct observation was also employed to document the preparation and administration processes where possible. Secondary data were obtained from relevant literature, government reports, previous ethnobotanical studies, and records maintained by local Ayurvedic institutions to supplement and validate the primary findings. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and confidentiality of personal information was maintained throughout the study.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess ethnomedicinal knowledge and its socio-cultural importance in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division. Qualitative data obtained through interviews and discussions with community members and traditional knowledge holders were analyzed using **thematic analysis,** while quantitative responses were analyzed using the **Relative Importance Index (RII)** to identify and rank the most

important ethnomedicinal practices, medicinal plant uses, and socio-cultural aspects.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data. The interview responses were carefully reviewed and coded according to the information provided by the respondents. Similar codes were grouped into broader themes representing major aspects of ethnomedicinal knowledge and its socio-cultural importance.

The analysis focused on themes such as **medicinal plant knowledge, treatment practices, preparation and administration methods, transmission of traditional knowledge, cultural beliefs and practices, household healthcare, and the importance of ethnomedicine to community livelihoods.** The identified themes were compared across respondents to identify common practices, differences in knowledge, and factors influencing the continuation or decline of ethnomedicinal knowledge. Relevant quotations and respondent observations were used to support the interpretation of major themes.

Relative Importance Index (RII)

The **Relative Importance Index (RII)** was used to quantitatively rank the perceived importance of selected ethnomedicinal practices and socio-cultural factors based on respondents' ratings. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of each identified factor using a Likert-type scale. The responses were assigned numerical values according to the selected scale.

The RII was calculated using the following formula:

$$RII = \Sigma W / (A \times N)$$

- **ΣW** = the total score obtained from all respondents for a particular item
- **A** = the highest possible rating on the Likert scale
- **N** = the total number of respondents

when a five-point Likert scale was used, the ratings ranged from **1 (least important) to 5 (most important).** The calculated RII values ranged from**0 to 1,** with a higher RII value indicating a greater perceived importance of the respective ethnomedicinal practice or socio-cultural factor. The items were ranked according to their RII values, allowing the most important ethnomedicinal practices and socio-cultural factors to be identified.

The results of the thematic analysis and RII were interpreted together to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethnomedicinal knowledge of the community and its socio-cultural significance. The qualitative findings provided detailed information about the cultural meanings, practices, and transmission of ethnomedicinal knowledge, while the RII provided a quantitative basis for comparing and ranking the relative importance of the identified factors.

4. Results

Commonly Used Medicinal Plants and Traditional Treatment Methods

The findings revealed that ethnomedicinal knowledge remains an important component of household healthcare practices among the local communities in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division. A total of **75 respondents** participated in the study, and the respondents identified **25 medicinal plant species** belonging to different plant families. The findings demonstrated that medicinal plants were commonly used to manage a range of health conditions, particularly minor and frequently occurring illnesses. The knowledge reported by respondents included information on medicinal plant identification, plant parts used, preparation methods, administration, and specific health conditions treated.

The frequency analysis indicated considerable variation in the use of individual medicinal plants. **Aloe vera (Aloe vera)** was the most frequently reported medicinal plant, mentioned by **61 respondents (81.3%).** This was followed by **Ginger (Zingiber officinale),** reported by **58 respondents (77.3%),** and **Turmeric (Curcuma longa),** reported by **56 respondents (74.7%).Gotukola (Centella asiatica)** was identified by **53 respondents (70.7%),** while **Kohomba(Azadirachta indica)** were reported by **49 (65.3%)** and **47 (62.7%)** respondents, respectively. Other commonly mentioned plants included **Polpala (Aerva lanata), Katuwelbatu (Solanum virginianum), Paspanguwa-related medicinal plants,** and**Venivel (Cosciniumfenestratum).**

The relatively high frequency of these medicinal plants indicates their widespread recognition and use within the study communities. The results suggest that plants that are easily accessible around households and home gardens are more commonly incorporated into traditional healthcare practices. In particular, Aloe vera, ginger, turmeric, and Gotukola were frequently mentioned because of their availability and their multiple traditional applications.

Table 1. Commonly used medicinal plants reported by respondents

Rank	Medicinal Plant	Scientific Name	Respondents (n=75)	Percentage (%)
1	Aloe vera	*Aloe vera*	61	81.3
2	Ginger	*Zingiber officinale*	58	77.3
3	Turmeric	*Curcuma longa*	56	74.7
4	Gotukola	*Centella asiatica*	53	70.7
5	Pawpaw	*Carica papaya*	49	65.3
6	Kohomba	*Azadirachta indica*	47	62.7
7	Polpala	*Aerva lanata*	44	58.7
8	Venivel	*Cosciniumfenestratum*	41	54.7
9	Katuwelbatu	*Solanum virginianum*	38	50.7
10	Iramusu	*Hemidesmus indicus*	35	46.7

Source: Field survey 2026

The analysis of plant parts used for medicinal purposes showed that **leaves were the mostfrequently used plant part**, reported in **42.7%** of the recorded uses. This was followed by roots **(20.0%),** bark **(12.0%),** fruits **(10.7%),** seeds **(8.0%),** and flowers **(6.6%).** The frequent use of leaves may be associated with their easy accessibility and the possibility of harvesting them without completely destroying the plant. However, the relatively high use of roots and bark indicates the importance of considering sustainable harvesting practices when conserving medicinal plant resources.

Table 2. Plant parts used for traditional medicinal preparations

Rank	Plant Part	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Leaves	32	42.7
2	Roots	15	20.0
3	Bark	9	12.0
4	Fruits	8	10.7

5	Seeds	6	8.0
6	Flowers	5	6.6
Total		**75**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Several traditional methods were reported for preparing medicinal remedies. **Decoction/boiling**was the most frequently identified preparation method, reported by **29 respondents (38.7%).** This was followed by **pounding or crushing (16 respondents, 21.3%), fresh juice extraction (12 respondents, 16.0%), direct consumption (9 respondents, 12.0%)**, and **external application as a paste or poultice (6 respondents, 8.0%).** Other methods accounted for **3 respondents (4.0%).**

Table 3. Traditional methods of medicinal plant preparation

Rank	Preparation Method	Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Decoction/Boiling	29	38.7
2	Pounding/Crushing	16	21.3
3	Fresh Juice Extraction	12	16.0
4	Direct Consumption	9	12.0
5	Paste/Poultice	6	8.0
6	Other Methods	3	4.0
Total		**75**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey 2026

The results further indicated that medicinal plants were used to treat a variety of common health conditions. **Digestive disorders** represented the most frequently reported category, with **52respondents (69.3%)** indicating the use of medicinal plants for such conditions. This was followed by **fever and common illnesses (49 respondents, 65.3%), respiratory problems (46respondents, 61.3%), skin-related conditions (39 respondents, 52.0%)**, and **wounds and minor injuries (34 respondents, 45.3%).** Medicinal plants were also reported for headaches, body pains, urinary problems, and other minor health conditions.

Table 4. Major health conditions treated using medicinal plants

Rank	Health Condition	Respondents (n=75)	Percentage (%)
1	Digestive Disorders	52	69.3
2	Fever/Common Illnesses	49	65.3
3	Respiratory Problems	46	61.3
4	Skin Conditions	39	52.0
5	Wounds/Minor Injuries	34	45.3
6	Headache/Body Pain	31	41.3
7	Urinary Problems	24	32.0

Source: Field survey 2026

The **Relative Importance Index (RII)** was used to rank the perceived importance of the commonly used medicinal plants. The results demonstrated differences in the relative importance of individual plants. **Aloe vera recorded the highest RII value of 0.87**, indicating a high level of perceived importance among respondents. **Ginger recorded an RII of 0.84,** while **Turmeric recorded 0.82.**Gotukola and Kohomba also recorded relatively high RII values of **0.79 and 0.76,** respectively.

Table *5*. Relative Importance Index of commonly used medicinal plants

Rank	Local name	Scientific name	RII	Level of Importance
1	Aloe vera	*Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f*	0.87	Very High
2	Ginger	*Zingiber officinale*	0.84	Very High
3	Turmeric	*Curcuma longa*	0.82	Very High
4	Gotukola	*Centella asiatica*	0.79	High
5	Papaya	*Carica papaya*	0.77	High
6	Kohomba	*Azadirachta indica*	0.76	High
7	Polpala	*Aerva lanata*	0.71	High
8	Venivel	*Cosciniumfenestratum*	0.68	Moderate
9	Katuwelbatu	*Solanum virginianum*	0.64	Moderate
10	Iramusu	*Hemidesmus indicus*	0.61	Moderate

Source: Field survey 2026

The RII ranking corresponds broadly with the frequency of plant use identified through the descriptive analysis. *Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f*, *Zingiber officinale*, and *Curcuma longa*, which were among the most frequently mentioned plants, also recorded the highest RII values. This indicates that these plants were not only widely known but were also perceived as particularly important by the respondents. Conversely, *Solanum virginianum* and *Solanum virginianum* recorded comparatively lower RII values, suggesting a more limited perceived importance within the sampled population.

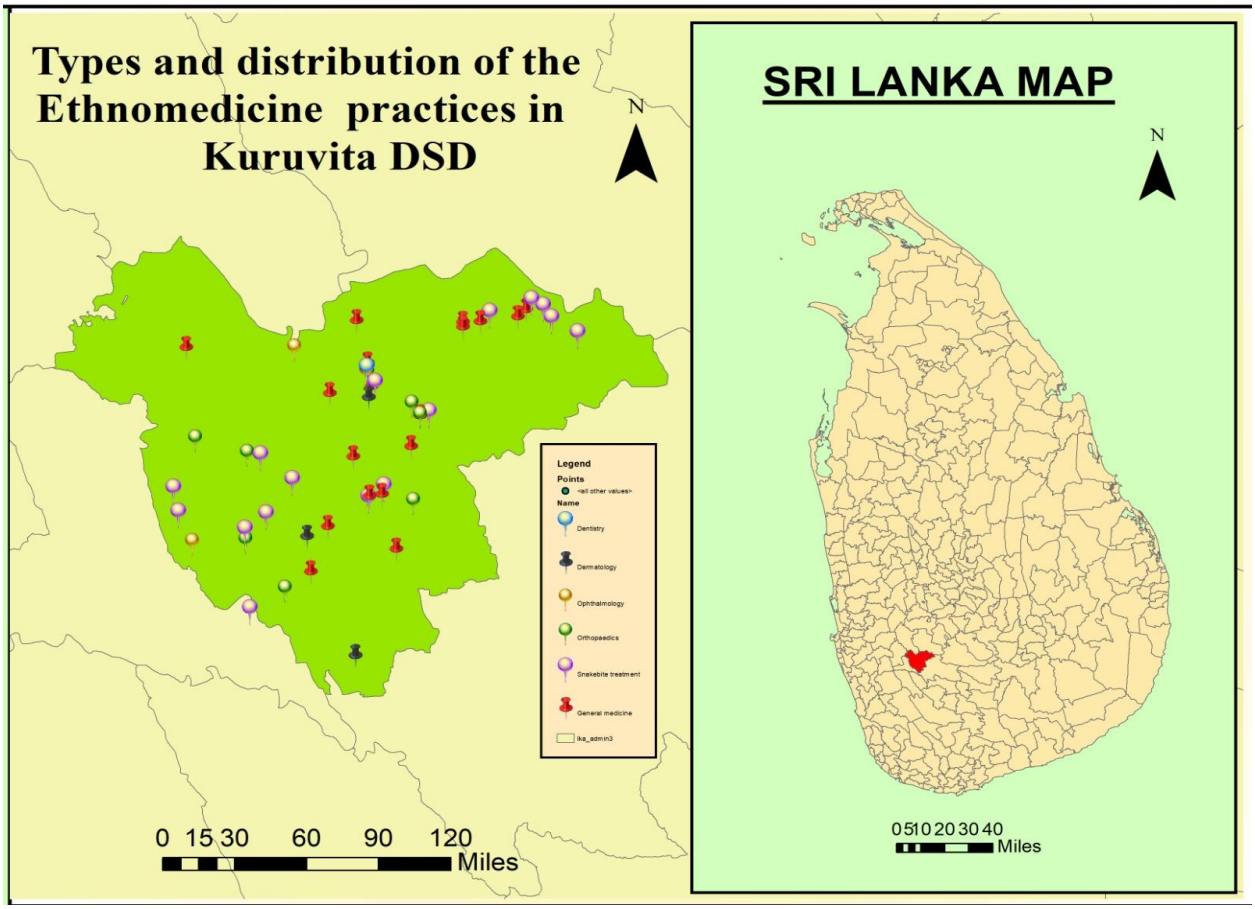
The findings also revealed that ethnomedicinal knowledge was mainly acquired through informal social and family-based transmission. **54 respondents (72.0%)** stated that they learned medicinal plant knowledge from parents or grandparents, while **11 respondents (14.7%)** identified community elders as their main source of knowledge. A further **6 respondents (8.0%)** reported learning from traditional practitioners, while **4 respondents (5.3%)**indicated other sources. These findings highlight the importance of intergenerational transmission in maintaining ethnomedicinal knowledge.

The results showed some differences between age groups. Respondents above **50 years** generally reported a greater number of medicinal plants and treatment methods than younger respondents. Among the respondents aged above 50 years, **68.0%** reported knowledge of more than five medicinal plants, compared with **42.0%** among respondents below 40 years. This difference suggests that traditional medicinal knowledge may be more strongly retained among older members of the community.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the communities in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division possess a considerable body of knowledge concerning medicinal plants and traditional treatment methods. The identification of **25 medicinal plant species** and the range of preparation and administration techniques demonstrate the diversity of local ethnomedicinal practices. *Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f*, *Zingiber officinale*, *Curcuma longa*, *Centella asiatica*, and *Carica papaya* were among the most commonly reported plants, while decoction was the most frequently reported preparation method. The RII results further confirmed the importance of these plants, with *Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f*, *Zingiber officinale*, and *Curcuma longa*receiving the highest relative importance scores.

The results therefore indicate that ethnomedicinal practices continue to play a significant role in managing common health conditions within the study communities. At the same time, the concentration of knowledge among older respondents and the strong dependence on family-based transmission indicate the importance of documenting and preserving this knowledge. These findings provide an important basis for examining the broader **socio-cultural importance of ethnomedicinal knowledge** and the factors influencing its continuation within the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division.

Figure 02 : Types and distribution of the ethnomedicine practices in Kuruvita DSD



Source: Prepared by authors, 2026

Socio-Cultural Importance of Ethnomedicinal Knowledge

The second objective of the study was to examine the socio-cultural importance of ethnomedicinal knowledge in the daily lives and cultural practices of the local community in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD). Qualitative data obtained through interviews and discussions with community members were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved familiarization with the interview responses, identification of meaningful statements, coding of recurring ideas, grouping of related codes, and development of major themes. The analysis identified five major themes: (1) ethnomedicine as an integral component of everyday healthcare, (2) transmission of traditional knowledge across generations, (3) cultural identity and community continuity, (4) social relationships and collective practices, and (5) changing attitudes and challenges to knowledge preservation.

Ethnomedicine as an Integral Component of Everyday Healthcare

The findings revealed that ethnomedicinal knowledge remained an important component of everyday healthcare practices among community members. Participants described the use of medicinal plants and traditional remedies not only as a treatment for illness but also as a familiar and accessible health practice embedded within household routines. Minor health problems such as coughs, colds, stomach disorders, wounds, headaches, fever, and body pains were frequently associated with the use of locally available medicinal plants and traditional preparations.

The thematic analysis indicated that respondents viewed ethnomedicine as particularly valuable because it was locally accessible, familiar, relatively inexpensive, and based on knowledge accumulated through previous generations. Approximately 72% (n=54) of respondents indicated that traditional medicinal practices continued to be used within their households, particularly for common illnesses and minor health conditions. A further **64% (n=48)** stated that they preferred traditional remedies for certain common ailments before seeking external medical treatment.

Participants also emphasized that ethnomedicinal practices were closely connected with their knowledge of the surrounding natural environment. The identification of useful plants, knowledge of the parts used, methods of preparation, and appropriate times for collection were considered important practical skills. Therefore, ethnomedicine was not viewed merely as a collection of medicinal recipes but as a form of place-based environmental knowledge that influenced everyday interactions between people and their natural surroundings.

Intergenerational Transmission of Ethnomedicinal Knowledge

A second major theme emerging from the analysis was the transmission of ethnomedicinal knowledge between generations. Participants frequently explained that knowledge concerning medicinal plants and traditional treatments had been learned from parents, grandparents, and other older members of the community. This indicates that ethnomedicinal knowledge functions as an important form of informal cultural education.

Approximately 68% (n=51) of respondents reported that they had acquired at least some knowledge of medicinal plants from older family members. In particular,elderly community members were identified as important knowledge holders. They were described as having greater knowledge regarding plant identification, medicinal applications, preparation methods, and traditional treatment practices.

The transmission of knowledge generally occurred through observation, participation, oral communication, and practical experience rather than through formal education. Children and younger family members learned by accompanying older people when collecting plants, observing preparation methods, and listening to explanations concerning the medicinal properties of particular plants. One important feature of this process was that knowledge was often transferred through actual practice. Consequently, ethnomedicinal knowledge was reproduced as part of everyday family life rather than as a separate educational activity.

However, the analysis also identified concerns regarding the continuity of this intergenerational transmission. Some respondents stated that younger generations were increasingly interested in modern healthcare systems and were less willing to learn traditional practices. This suggests that changes in lifestyle, education, employment patterns, and access to modern healthcare may influence the continuity of traditional medicinal knowledge.

Ethnomedicine, Cultural Identity and Community Continuity

The third theme concerned the relationship between ethnomedicinal knowledge and cultural identity. Respondents considered traditional medicine to be an important element of their cultural heritage and collective identity. The knowledge associated with medicinal plants was described as something inherited from previous generations and therefore represented a connection between the present community and its cultural past.

Approximately 76% (n=57) of respondents indicated that traditional medicinal knowledge was an important part of their cultural heritage. Many participants emphasized that maintaining knowledge of medicinal plants was important not only because of its health benefits but also because it represented the community's traditional way of life. Thus, ethnomedicine had both practical and symbolic significance.

The findings further suggested that traditional medicinal practices contributed to a sense of continuity within the community. The continued use of particular plants, preparation techniques, and treatment practices allowed cultural knowledge to remain relevant in contemporary community life. In this context, ethnomedicinal knowledge can be interpreted as a component of intangible cultural heritage, connecting generations through shared knowledge and practices.

The analysis also showed that the cultural importance of ethnomedicine extended beyond individual households. Traditional knowledge was recognized as a collective resource that belonged to the wider community. Older people, traditional practitioners, and experienced family members were particularly respected because of their specialized knowledge. Therefore, the preservation of ethnomedicinal knowledge was associated with the preservation of community history and cultural identity.

Social Relationships and Collective Cultural Practices

The fourth theme identified through thematic analysis was the contribution of ethnomedicine to social relationships and community interaction. The collection and preparation of medicinal plants were not always individual activities. Participants described situations in which knowledge was exchanged among family members, neighbors, and other community members.

Approximately 61% (n=46) of respondents stated that they had learned about medicinal plants or traditional remedies through interactions with people outside their immediate household. This indicates that ethnomedicinal knowledge circulated through

informal social networks. Community members shared information concerning the identification of medicinal plants, their uses, preparation methods, and experiences regarding their effectiveness.

Such knowledge-sharing practices strengthened social relationships by creating opportunities for interaction between generations and households. In particular, older community members played an important role as cultural knowledge holders and informal educators. Their knowledge provided a basis for interaction with younger people and helped maintain connections between different generations.

The preparation and use of traditional remedies could also involve collective participation. For example, family members might collect medicinal plants together, prepare remedies, and discuss their appropriate uses. These practices demonstrate that ethnomedicine was embedded within broader patterns of social interaction rather than being limited to individual treatment decisions.

Changing Attitudes and Challenges to Knowledge Preservation

Although ethnomedicinal knowledge remained socially and culturally important, the analysis revealed several challenges affecting its continuity. The most frequently identified concern was the declining interest of younger generations. Approximately 58% (n=44) of respondents expressed concern that young people were less interested in learning traditional medicinal practices compared with previous generations.

Participants associated this decline with increasing access to modern healthcare facilities, changes in lifestyles, formal education, employment outside the community, and changing perceptions regarding traditional medicine. Some respondents also indicated that the gradual loss of natural habitats could reduce access to medicinal plants and thereby weaken opportunities for practical knowledge transmission.

Another important concern was the possibility that ethnomedicinal knowledge could disappear when elderly knowledge holders die without passing their knowledge to younger generations. This highlights the importance of documenting traditional knowledge while respecting community ownership and cultural values.

Overall, the thematic analysis demonstrated that ethnomedicinal knowledge had significance extending beyond its therapeutic function. It formed part of everyday life, facilitated intergenerational learning, reinforced cultural identity, strengthened social relationships, and maintained connections between the community and its natural environment. At the same time, the findings revealed that modernization and changing generational attitudes could threaten the continuity of this knowledge.

Factors Influencing the Preservation, Transmission and Continuity of Traditional Ethnomedicinal Knowledge

The second objective of the study was to examine the factors influencing the preservation, transmission, and continuity of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge among the local communities in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division. The analysis focused on the social, cultural, educational, economic, and environmental factors that contribute to the maintenance or decline of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge. Data obtained from household respondents were analysed using descriptive and quantitative statistical techniques. Frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and Relative Importance Index (RII) values were used to identify and rank the major factors influencing the continuity of ethnomedicinal knowledge.

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' perceptions regarding selected factors, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree." The mean score was calculated for each factor to determine the overall level of agreement among respondents. In addition, the Relative Importance Index was calculated using the following formula:

$$RII = \Sigma W / (A \times N)$$

where **ΣW** represents the total score obtained for each factor, **A** represents the highest possible weighting (5), and **N** represents the total number of respondents. The **RII** values ranged from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a greater perceived influence on the preservation and continuity of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge.

Major Factors Influencing the Continuity of Ethnomedicinal Knowledge

The findings indicated that the transmission of ethnomedicinal knowledge within families was the most important factor contributing to the continuity of traditional knowledge. Approximately 84.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that knowledge passed from parents and grandparents to younger generations played a significant role in maintaining traditional medicinal practices. The factor recorded a high mean score of 4.24 and an **RII** value of 0.848, indicating a very high level of importance.

The presence and involvement of elderly community members also emerged as an important factor. Around 81.3% of respondents indicated that elders were the main custodians and transmitters of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge. The corresponding mean score was 4.17, while the **RII** value was 0.834. Respondents explained that older people possessed extensive knowledge regarding medicinal plants, preparation techniques, dosage, treatment methods, and the identification of plants used for specific illnesses. Therefore, the loss of elderly knowledge holders was perceived as a major threat to the continuity of traditional ethnomedicine.

The level of interest among younger generations was another important factor. Approximately 76.0% of respondents agreed that the willingness of young people to learn traditional medicinal practices influenced the continuity of ethnomedicinal knowledge. This factor obtained a mean score of 4.03 and an **RII** value of 0.806. However, respondents also indicated that younger people were increasingly attracted to modern lifestyles, formal employment, and modern medical practices. Consequently, opportunities for younger generations to acquire traditional medicinal knowledge through direct interaction with elders were gradually decreasing.

The availability of medicinal plants in the local environment was also identified as an important factor. Approximately 74.7% of respondents considered access to medicinal plants essential for maintaining traditional ethnomedicinal practices. The factor recorded a mean score of 3.96 and an **RII** value of 0.792. Respondents stated that changes in land use, vegetation loss, habitat disturbance, and reduced access to natural resources could limit the availability of important medicinal plants. Therefore, environmental conservation was closely associated with the preservation of ethnomedicinal knowledge.

Traditional healers and knowledgeable community members also played an important role in maintaining ethnomedicinal practices. About 72.0% of respondents agreed that the presence of traditional practitioners contributed to the preservation of local medicinal knowledge. The mean score was 3.88, with an **RII** value of 0.776. Traditional practitioners were identified as important sources of practical knowledge because they continued to apply

traditional treatment methods and medicinal plant preparations within the community.

Influence of Modernization and Formal Education

Modernization was identified as one of the major factors influencing the decline and transformation of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge. Approximately 78.7% of respondents agreed that modernization and changing lifestyles negatively affected the transmission of traditional knowledge. This factor recorded a mean score of 4.09 and an RII value of 0.818.

Respondents particularly highlighted the increasing dependence on Western biomedical services, pharmaceuticals, and modern healthcare facilities. The availability of hospitals, pharmacies, and commercially produced medicines reduced the community's dependence on traditional remedies for some common illnesses. As a result, traditional medicinal practices were increasingly used as complementary or alternative treatments rather than as the primary form of healthcare.

Formal education was also perceived as having both positive and negative influences on ethnomedicinal knowledge. Approximately 66.7% of respondents agreed that formal education and changing educational aspirations reduced the time available for young people to learn traditional medicinal practices from elders. The mean score for this factor was 3.71, with an RII value of 0.742. However, respondents also recognized that education could contribute positively to the documentation, scientific evaluation, and conservation of traditional knowledge when ethnomedicine was incorporated into educational and community awareness programmes.

Changing Family Structure and Intergenerational Transmission

Intergenerational transmission was particularly important in explaining the continuity of ethnomedicinal knowledge. The findings showed that approximately 80.0% of respondents had acquired at least some traditional medicinal knowledge from parents, grandparents, or other older relatives. Among these respondents, knowledge was primarily transmitted through observation, oral instruction, practical demonstrations, and participation in the collection and preparation of medicinal plants.

Approximately 69.3% of respondents agreed that changes in family structure and reduced interaction between younger and older generations had weakened the traditional knowledge transmission process. This factor recorded a mean score of 3.67 and an RII value of 0.734. Respondents indicated that traditional knowledge was generally not transmitted through formal written systems but through everyday social interaction. Consequently, reduced intergenerational interaction could result in the gradual loss of knowledge.

The findings further indicated that practical participation was more important than verbal instruction alone. Respondents who had personally participated in collecting, preparing, or administering medicinal plants demonstrated greater familiarity with traditional treatment practices. This suggests that experiential learning was an important mechanism through which ethnomedicinal knowledge was maintained within the community.

Documentation and Community-Based Knowledge Preservation

Documentation emerged as another factor influencing the long-term preservation of ethnomedicinal knowledge. Approximately 70.7% of respondents agreed that traditional medicinal knowledge should be systematically documented to prevent its loss. The factor

recorded a mean score of 3.82 and an RII value of 0.764.

Respondents emphasized that documentation could include the local names of medicinal plants, plant parts used, preparation methods, diseases treated, methods of administration, and knowledge holders. However, respondents also indicated that documentation should be conducted with the participation and consent of knowledge-holding community members. This was considered important because ethnomedicinal knowledge represents not only practical healthcare information but also a component of local cultural heritage.

Community-based awareness programmes were also considered useful for strengthening the continuity of traditional knowledge. Approximately 68.0% of respondents agreed that awareness programmes involving elders, traditional practitioners, schools, and community organizations could encourage younger generations to appreciate traditional ethnomedicinal practices. The mean score was 3.74 and the RII value was 0.748.

4.3.5 Ranking of Factors Based on Relative Importance Index

The quantitative analysis demonstrated differences in the perceived importance of the factors influencing the preservation and continuity of ethnomedicinal knowledge. Family-based transmission received the highest RII value (0.848), followed by the role of elders (0.834), youth interest (0.806), modernization and changing lifestyles (0.818), and medicinal plant availability (0.792). These findings demonstrate that both social and environmental conditions contribute to the sustainability of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge.

Table no 06 : Factors influencing ethnomedicinal knowledge

Rank	Factor influencing ethnomedicinal knowledge	Mean Score	RII	Level of Influence
1	Family-based transmission	4.24	0.848	Very High
2	Role of elderly knowledge holders	4.17	0.834	Very High
3	Modernization and changing lifestyles	4.09	0.818	Very High
4	Youth interest in traditional knowledge	4.03	0.806	Very High
5	Availability of medicinal plants	3.96	0.792	High
6	Role of traditional healers	3.88	0.776	High
7	Documentation of traditional knowledge	3.82	0.764	High
8	Community awareness programmes	3.74	0.748	High
9	Formal education and changing educational aspirations	3.71	0.742	High
10	Changes in family structure/intergenerational	3.67	0.734	High

	interaction			

Source: Field survey 2026

Overall, the results demonstrate that the continuity of traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge is strongly associated with intergenerational transmission, the presence of knowledgeable elders, youth participation, and continued access to medicinal plants. At the same time, modernization, changing lifestyles, formal education, and changing family structures represent important pressures affecting the transmission of traditional knowledge. The findings therefore indicate that the preservation of ethnomedicinal knowledge cannot be considered solely as the conservation of medicinal plants; rather, it requires the simultaneous preservation of the social and cultural mechanisms through which knowledge is transmitted.

The results further suggest that ethnomedicinal knowledge remains an important component of the cultural heritage of local communities in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division. However, its long-term continuity depends on whether younger generations continue to interact with knowledge holders and participate in traditional practices. Strengthening intergenerational learning, documenting community knowledge with appropriate ethical safeguards, conserving medicinal plant resources, and increasing youth participation can therefore contribute to maintaining traditional ethnomedicinal knowledge for future generations.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that ethnomedicinal knowledge remains an important component of household healthcare, cultural identity, and traditional ecological knowledge among local communities in the Kuruwita Divisional Secretariat Division of Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka. Based on the responses of 75 participants, the study documented a diverse body of knowledge concerning medicinal plants, their therapeutic applications, preparation methods, and traditional modes of transmission. The identification of 25 medicinal plant species indicates that local communities continue to maintain considerable knowledge of plant-based healthcare practices. *Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f*, *Zingiber officinale*, *Curcuma longa*, *Centella asiatica*, *Carica papaya*, and *Azadirachta indica* were among the most commonly reported medicinal plants, demonstrating their continuing relevance within household healthcare practices. Aloe vera recorded the highest frequency of use (81.3%) and the highest Relative Importance Index (0.87), followed by ginger (77.3%; RII = 0.84) and turmeric (74.7%; RII = 0.82). These findings indicate that commonly available medicinal plants continue to hold considerable practical value within the community.

The study further revealed that ethnomedicinal practices are diverse in terms of plant parts, preparation techniques, and therapeutic applications. Leaves were the most frequently utilized plant part, accounting for 42.7% of reported uses, while decoction or boiling was the predominant preparation method (38.7%). Digestive disorders were the most frequently reported health condition treated using medicinal plants, followed by fever and common illnesses, respiratory problems, skin conditions, and minor wounds. These findings demonstrate that ethnomedicine continues to contribute particularly to the management of common and relatively minor health conditions within households.

Beyond its therapeutic function, ethnomedicinal knowledge possesses considerable socio-cultural significance. The findings demonstrate that traditional medicinal knowledge is embedded within everyday community life and is closely associated with

cultural identity, family relationships, environmental knowledge, and social interaction. A substantial proportion of respondents reported that ethnomedicine remained part of their household healthcare practices, while 76.0% identified traditional medicinal knowledge as an important component of their cultural heritage. The transmission of knowledge through parents, grandparents, elders, and other knowledgeable community members further demonstrates that ethnomedicine functions as an informal system of cultural education. Knowledge is primarily transferred through observation, oral communication, practical demonstrations, and participation in the collection and preparation of medicinal plants.

The findings concerning the preservation and continuity of ethnomedicinal knowledge indicate that social and cultural mechanisms are particularly important. Family-based transmission recorded the highest RII (0.848), followed by the role of elderly knowledge holders (0.834). These results demonstrate that elders and family structures play a central role in maintaining and transmitting traditional medicinal knowledge. Youth interest also recorded a relatively high RII of 0.806, indicating that the willingness of younger generations to learn and participate in traditional practices is an important determinant of continuity. At the same time, modernization and changing lifestyles recorded a very high RII of 0.818, highlighting the contradictory influence of contemporary social change. Improved access to biomedical healthcare, formal education, employment opportunities outside the community, and changing lifestyles may reduce opportunities for younger generations to engage with traditional knowledge systems.

Environmental factors are also closely connected with the continuity of ethnomedicine. The availability of medicinal plants recorded an RII of 0.792, demonstrating that continued access to biological resources is an important condition for maintaining traditional medicinal practices. Consequently, the preservation of ethnomedicinal knowledge cannot be separated from the conservation of the local environment and medicinal plant resources. Loss of plant habitats or reduced access to important species may not only affect biodiversity but may also weaken the practical basis through which traditional knowledge is learned and reproduced.

Overall, the study concludes that ethnomedicinal knowledge in Kuruwita DSD represents more than a collection of traditional remedies. It constitutes a dynamic component of local biocultural heritage that connects healthcare practices, cultural identity, social relationships, intergenerational learning, and knowledge of the natural environment. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that this knowledge is vulnerable to gradual erosion, particularly because of declining youth interest, modernization, changing family structures, and reduced opportunities for intergenerational interaction. The concentration of specialized knowledge among older community members further increases the risk of knowledge loss if appropriate transmission mechanisms are not strengthened.

Therefore, the long-term preservation of ethnomedicinal knowledge requires an integrated, community-centred approach. Systematic documentation of medicinal plants and associated traditional practices should be undertaken with the informed participation and consent of knowledge-holding communities. Intergenerational learning programmes involving elders, traditional practitioners, families, schools, and community organizations could provide opportunities for younger generations to engage with traditional knowledge through practical experience. At the same time, conservation of medicinal plant resources and their natural habitats should be incorporated into knowledge-preservation strategies. Community awareness programmes and appropriate educational initiatives could

further enhance recognition of ethnomedicine as an element of cultural heritage while encouraging responsible and sustainable use.

In conclusion, the Kuruwita DSD retains a valuable and diverse ethnomedicinal knowledge system with continuing healthcare and socio-cultural relevance. Protecting this knowledge requires simultaneous attention to the people who hold and transmit it, the cultural practices through which it is maintained, and the biological resources on which it depends. The findings provide a useful baseline for future ethnobotanical, socio-cultural, and conservation-oriented research and highlight the importance of safeguarding local ethnomedicinal knowledge as part of Sri Lanka's wider cultural and biological heritage.

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Chapter 37: Law, Gender, and Reproductive Justice in Post-Independence India

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Abstract

This chapter examines the evolution, impact and limitations of reproductive laws in post-independence India through a socio-legal and feminist perspective. Adopting a qualitative, doctrinal and analytical research design, it analyses constitutional provisions, legislative enactments, judicial decisions, policy documents and interdisciplinary literature to explore the relationship between law, gender and reproductive justice. Drawing upon the theoretical contributions of Rosalind Petchesky and Loretta Ross, the chapter argues that reproductive rights extend beyond formal legal recognition and require supportive social, economic and political conditions for their meaningful realisation.The chapter critically evaluates key legislations, including the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, to examine their implications for women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. While these legal reforms have significantly expanded constitutional protections, their effectiveness remains constrained by persistent structural inequalities rooted in patriarchy, caste, class, poverty and unequal access to healthcare. The analysis highlights the continuing gap between constitutional ideals and women's lived experiences, reflected in issues such as child marriage, workplace discrimination, barriers to safe abortion, gender-based violence and unequal access to reproductive healthcare.The chapter concludes that reproductive justice in India cannot be achieved through legal reform alone. Rather, it requires an intersectional and rights-based approach that addresses the structural conditions shaping women's reproductive choices and autonomy. Sustainable progress towards reproductive justice therefore depends on combining progressive legal frameworks with broader social transformation, gender equality and equitable access to healthcare and social support.

Keywords: *Reproductive Justice, Gender, Feminism, Women's Rights, Reproductive Laws, Socio-Legal Studies*

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Introduction

Reproductive health extends beyond biological well-being to encompass physical, mental and sexual health, as well as the right to make informed and autonomous reproductive decisions. It includes access to contraception, menstrual hygiene, safe maternal healthcare and reproductive health information. However, structural inequalities based on gender, caste, class and poverty often restrict women's reproductive autonomy, particularly in developing countries such as India. Despite improvements in healthcare infrastructure, challenges including maternal mortality, unsafe abortion, inadequate access to contraception and gender-based violence continue to undermine reproductive health. Feminist movements since the 1970s in the west and in the global south have increasingly framed reproductive health as an issue of rights and social justice, emphasising that meaningful reproductive freedom requires addressing broader structures of inequality rather than healthcare access alone (Petchesky, 1998; Luna & Luker, 2013).

The current chaptercritically evaluates the content and evolution of legislative measures in India since independence, impacts and shortcomings of laws within the above perspective.It also includes suggestions on what more can be done in the realm of reproductive health care and reproductive rights in the future.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist scholarship approaches reproductive rights as an essential component of human dignity, bodily integrity, and gender equality. Within the feminist discourse, the ability to make independent decisions regarding contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion is closely connected to women's autonomy and freedom.The feminist discourse also emphasises marginalised and disadvantaged communities' access to health care.

The current chapter tries to understand reproductive health legislation in independent India in the realm of reproductive and social justice. The legislations after independence began to target gender -based violence, oppression and inequality in India. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the evolution of reproductive health laws in India using reproductive justice frameworks of feminist discourse and their limitations. Theorist Rosalind Petcheskyconsiders reproductive rights as inseparable from broader socio-economic conditions. Petchesky's work highlights the limitations of understanding reproductive rights solely through formal legal recognition. In her book 'Global Prescriptions: Gendering Health and Human Rights', she mentions that the global south took a broader and more active role in the global women's and she cites the rise of anti- feminist conservative movements, impact of capitalism and the HIV pandemic as some of the factors that has given the women's health movement an international character. (Petchesky, 2003). She argues that legal guarantees become meaningful only when women possess actual access to healthcare services, education, economic resources, and social support. According to this perspective, reproductive freedom is deeply influenced by material and structural conditions and is not an individual choice alone. A woman may legally possess certain reproductive rights, yet poverty, social stigma, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and gender inequality may prevent her from

exercising those legal rights in practice.This framework is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where reproductive experiences differ significantly across caste, class, rural-urban, and regional divisions. The gap between constitutional promises and lived realities demonstrates that reproductive justice requires both legal reform and social transformation.

Complementing this, Loretta Ross advances the framework of reproductive justice, Twelve black women in the year 1994 coined the term reproductive justice to demonstrate how our experiences of oppression in society can be common and shared to promote a political movement which aimed to transform lives(Ross, 2017).It extends beyond legal rights to include the right to have children, not have children, and to raise them in safe and supportive environments.Ross broadened the discussion on reproductive rights through the concept of reproductive justice, which connects reproductive freedom with social justice and human rights. This framework moves beyond the narrow question of legal access to abortion and instead focuses on the conditions under which individuals are able to make meaningful reproductive choices.The framework also acknowledges that social inequalities often shape reproductive outcomes. Factors such as poverty, caste discrimination, inadequate healthcare, domestic violence, and social exclusion can restrict reproductive decision-making even when legal protections formally exist. Thus, reproductive justice demands structural change alongside legal recognition of rights.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, doctrinal, and analytical research design to examine the evolution of reproductive rights and reproductive justice in post-independence India. It is based on the analysis of constitutional provisions, legislative enactments, judicial pronouncements, government policy documents, and interdisciplinary scholarly literature. The study employs doctrinal legal research to critically examine key legislations, including the Hindu Marriage Act, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, the Maternity Benefit Act, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. The analysis is guided by the feminist frameworks of Rosalind Petchesky and Loretta Ross to evaluate the relationship between law, gender, reproductive autonomy, and reproductive justice within the Indian socio-legal context.

Hindu Marriage Act of 1955

In ancient India, marriage was treated as a religious sacrament. The union between a man and a woman in presence of God of fire, who are tied to each other for seven lives. The scriptures prohibited not just breaking of the union but also infidelity. Fire was considered an 'eternal witness' during 'Vivaha' ceremonies to make the union permanent. (Pandey, 1987)A Hindu woman's 'Dharma' was to serve her husband and procreate with him to provide him a son.With the prohibition of Sati (burning of the Hindu widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), the enactment of widow remarriage, British colonial rulers set the path for an evolving legislation relating to marriage, transforming from a sacrament to contract. The 'modernised' version of Hindu marriage law was in the form of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. As Patricia Oberoi points out that the aim of the law was to modernise the institution of marriage and free it from the shackles of religion. She noted that the religious importance of the marital union did not, however fade away abruptly(Patricia Oberoi, 1995).Hindu

Marriage Actwas amended in 1964 and 1976 with the introduction of Special Marriage Act in which legal separation and divorce became easier than before. It also introduced non- religious, inter-caste and inter-faith marriages. Having said that, it is also to be noted that marital separation, inter faith unions continue to be treated as a taboo and viewed with scepticism, suspicion and animosity(Patricia Oberoi, 1995).The idea of caste purity and pollution in Hindu society is a major driving force behind such hatred. It is interesting to observe that Judiciary sometimes holds a conservative view about marriage. For instance, if we look at*Dastane vs Dastane* in 1974, Justice Vaidya observed:

'Marriage is still assumed to be a basic, vital institution not only for the physical, mental, spiritual and physical comfort of the spouses but for the maintenance, protection and education of the progeny.' Marriage as a sacramental process ensures that women are moved from one household to another as 'gifts' and it becomes a 'sacred' act to gift one's daughter to an eligible man in the form of '*Kanyadan'*.The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 marked a shift from the sacramental conception of marriage towards a legal institution by recognising divorce, consent and minimum age requirements, thereby strengthening women's reproductive rights (Oberoi, 1995). However, the Act continues to reinforce patriarchal norms by institutionalising gendered domestic roles and treating consummation of marriage as an essential obligation, thereby limiting women's bodily autonomy and reproductive justice (Oberoi, 1995).Penetrative sex becomes an inviolable clause of the marital contract. In a patriarchal society like India where women have very little agency in all aspects of their lives, and marital rape is not legally recognised, forced sexual intercourse may become a norm in marriages.The stigma, shame, and family's honour become important deterrents to a woman taking a legal step against her spouse for sexual abuse and violation of bodily autonomy in a marriage. Article 375 of the former IPC(Now section 63 ofBharatiyaNyaya Sanhita) states that sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of sixteen years is rape, but intercourse of a man with his wedded partner who is older than fifteen years of age does not count as rape. Here the legal loophole enables abusive men to sexually violate their wives with impunity.Such legal reasoning transforms marriage into a site where reproductive coercion may occur without legal accountabilityLoretta Ross asserted that legal provisions aiming at reproductive justice alone are largely ineffective unlessstructural rearrangement is done.From Petchesky's perspective, reproductive rights necessarily include bodily autonomy and freedom from coercive sexuality. Similarly, Ross's reproductive justice framework emphasises that genuine reproductive freedom cannot exist where women are denied control over sexual relations within marriage. Consequently, the marital rape exception exposes the limitations of legal reform in achieving substantive reproductive justice. Hindu marriage act prohibits child marriage but the Unicef reported that 'One in three of the world's child brides live in India'.Young girls are getting married early.More than half of the girls and women in India who were married off in childhood live in five states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (UNICEF, 2023). NFHS data shows that even in 2026 around 20.1 % of young girls below the age of 18 are married off. Such incidents point to the gender hierarchy and structural inequality in society in which women are dehumanised, abused, subjected to discriminations, and treated as second class citizens. The persistence of child marriage despite statutory prohibition demonstrates the limits of legal reform when structural inequalities remain intact.Loretta Ross argues that reproductive justice requires transformation of these intersecting

structures rather than reliance upon legal prohibition alone.

Recent Supreme Court judgments have adopted a more egalitarian interpretation of marriage by affirming that wives cannot be treated as domestic servants and are under no legal obligation to care for their in-laws. These decisions reflect a gradual shift towards a partnership-based model of marriage grounded in gender equality. However, drawing on Petchesky (1995) and Ross (2017), legal reform alone is insufficient to achieve reproductive justice. Although the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 modernised family law through provisions on divorce, consent and legal separation, substantive reproductive justice requires broader structural transformation to dismantle patriarchal norms that continue to shape women's reproductive autonomy

Maternity Benefits Act of 1961

Reproductive justice extends beyond the right to bear children and includes the right to parent children under conditions of dignity, equality and economic security (Ross, 2017). Women's unpaid domestic and caregiving labour has historically sustained both families and the economy while remaining largely unrecognised. Although increasing female participation in the paid workforce has led to legal protections such as maternity benefits, women continue to face structural barriers in employment and caregiving responsibilities, limiting the realisation of substantive reproductive justice (Rudman, 2008; Avasthi& Shrivastava, 2001). Despite increasing participation in the paid workforce, women continue to bear primary responsibility for childcare, often at the expense of career advancement (Ferree, 1987). The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961recognised motherhood as a social responsibility by providing paid maternity leave to protect women's health and promote their continued participation in the workforce (Singh & Biswas, 2023). The act states that all working mothers employed in plantations, factories, and mines are entitled to twelve weeks of maternity leave and six weeks for women working in other sectors. The law also included a provision of nursing breaks for female employees who need to breast feed. As years progressed, the law also evolved and included more sectors of employment.With the recent amendment in 2017, the maternity leave benefit was extended to twenty-six weeks, and any work establishments with more than ten employees, were made legally obligated to let the women employees have access to maternity benefits (Singh & Biswas, 2023). The act also has a provision for penalties for non-conforming employers who refuse to allow women workers maternity benefits with a fine up to 5000 rupees. This is indeed a significant step towards eliminating gender-based discrimination and fostering equity in society. Women in paid workforce deserve to be treated equally. The state has the responsibility to ensure equality and welfare of all women. In a deeply caste ridden, classist male dominated society like India, women face different forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence on a daily basis. Although the Maternity Benefit Act represents a significant milestone in recognising motherhood as a social responsibility rather than an individual burden, its underlying philosophy remains limited. The legislation seeks to protect women during pregnancy and childbirth, yet it largely conceptualises childcare as an exclusively maternal responsibility. Consequently, the law promotes maternal welfare without fundamentally challenging patriarchal assumptions regarding the gendered distribution of caregiving responsibilities.

Despite all the positive aspects of this law in the sphere of reproductive rights, some serious issues remain unresolved.This law does not recognise women who are self - employed or in unorganised sector. The exclusion of women employed in the informal economy reveals the class bias

embedded within maternity legislation.Reproductive justice requires attention to intersectionality. Dalit, Adivasi and economically marginalised women frequently occupy insecure forms of employment where maternity protections remain largely unenforceable. The unequal distribution of reproductive rights therefore reflects broader structures of social inequality rather than individual choice. This demonstrates Ross's argument that reproductive injustice disproportionately affects women situated at the intersections of gender, class and caste. Consequently, legal equality does not necessarily translate into substantive reproductive justice.The act also does not make it mandatory for establishments to provide creches and day care for young children in workplaces which will enable the mothers to keep their children in a safe and secure environment while at work.This is not just a social issue but a structural one. Aon 2024 study found that 75% of working mothers who experienced setbacks in career after child birth and 40% of these women experienced workplace bias in the form of pay cuts, altered roles and position. The Ashoka University reportstated that in 2025 73 % of women in India stopped working after child birth. 'Only about one in four keeps her career going'.Therefore, this is not just a social issue but also a structural one. The act reinforces and reinstates the traditional gender-based division of labour where women are the primary caregivers while men cleverly evade the responsibility of child care and head back to work to progress in their careers unhindered.Gender based division of labour is a systemic issue that places women in a position of disadvantage because of their procreative power. The act made no provision for paternity leaves, thereby excluding men from the sphere of childcare responsibility. Rather than redistributing reproductive labour between parents, the legislation institutionalises gendered caregiving responsibilities. Feminist scholarship has consistently argued that genuine gender equality requires the social recognition of care work as a shared parental responsibility. Reproductive justice is not achieved through reinforcements of patriarchal gender-based discriminatory social practices but through inclusive and egalitarian policies. We need to evaluate legislation critically in order to understand its broad implication in society. Laws are not free from systemic biases and prevailing notions and often become their reflections. From Loretta Ross's perspective, reproductive justice requires not only the legal right to bear children but also the material conditions necessary to raise them safely and with dignity. Consequently, maternity leave alone cannot guarantee reproductive justice if affordable childcare, workplace flexibility, income security and shared parental responsibilities remain absent. The legislation therefore advances reproductive rights but falls short of achieving reproductive justice because it leaves intact the structural inequalities that shape women's reproductive experiences.The question remains regarding who can ensure equity and justice for already marginalised women. Private establishments and organisations very often deny maternity leave to female employees and they are forced to resign. Very often during hiring process, female candidates face stereotypical and misogynistic questions regarding their decision to get married and planning of pregnancy which are never asked to male candidates as companies tries to understand how long they can retain the productivity of the potential employee. These discriminatory hiring policies are not often reported.Rosalind Petchesky argues that reproductive rights must be understood as positive social rights rather than merely legal entitlements. Women's reproductive autonomy depends upon the availability of supportive social institutions, healthcare, employment protection and economic

security. The Maternity Benefit Act undoubtedly represents one of India's most progressive labour legislations concerning women's reproductive rights. Nevertheless, its contribution to reproductive justice remains partial. While the Act recognises pregnancy and childbirth as deserving of legal protection, it continues to reproduce traditional assumptions regarding motherhood, caregiving and domestic labour. Consistent with the arguments advanced by Rosalind Petchesky and Loretta Ross, this analysis suggests that reproductive justice requires comprehensive social transformation, including equitable labour policies, shared caregiving responsibilities, workplace accountability and universal social protection rather than maternity benefits alone.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971

Abortion remains one of the most contested issues in reproductive rights, reflecting the tension between pro-choiceandpro-life perspectives. While the pro-choice movement advocates women's reproductive autonomy, pro-life groups oppose abortion on moral and religious grounds (Finer & Fine, 2013). In India, access to safe abortion continues to be shaped by social stigma, unequal healthcare access and gender inequality, often compelling women to resort to unsafe procedures. The enactment of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 marked a significant shift by legally permitting abortion under specified conditions and recognising women's health and well-being as legitimate grounds for termination of pregnancy (Pai & Chandra, 2023). The Act therefore represents an important step towards protecting reproductive rights, although access to safe abortion continues to remain uneven in practice.The act, however, does not allow women to terminate the pregnancy if they simply don't wish to have a child. When we talk about reproductive rights we bring into discussion the ability and freedom that women should enjoy in matters of reproduction that also includes bodily autonomy and agency. Denying this freedom to women amounts to violation of fundamental human rights. In order to understand the tone and context of this law, we need to consider the broader socio-cultural understanding of women's position in Indian society. It is not just a subservient position that women occupy in Indian society but also the belief and attitudes surrounding child bearing. It is a widely held belief that women seek fulfilment in their lives in getting married and bearing a child. The compulsive motherhood influenced the formulation of abortion laws(Erdman and Cook 2020). In reality, the Act has not considered either of them, as unwillingness to continue pregnancy is not a permitted ground for MTP act. The MTP act has been counterproductive and posed huge risks to the reproductive health of women and also compromised the reproductive rights. However, the aspect of a judgement by a registered medical practitioner to conclusively determine a contraceptive failure causing grave mental harm to the woman, to go ahead with an abortion, remains highly subjective and tricky. A subjective decision may not always favour women's interests. Hence, when an unwanted pregnancy is to be terminated, then women will have to resort to the claim that contraception methods failed, subjecting it to the assessment by a registered medical practitioner, which in turn creates a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety, thereby harming the mental health of the women (Pai and Chandra, 2023). The implication of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 about its use as a family planning method and women's bodily autonomy is that MTP left no space for the consideration of bodily autonomy of the women in the case if a woman desired an abortion on the ground of her unwillingness to have a child. (Pai and. Chandra, 2023). It leaves enough room for gender- based

discrimination, gender bias and patriarchal values that might shape the doctor's judgement related to abortion. Even though the MTP Act has significantly lowered pregnancy related deaths but challenges persist with an increase in unsafe abortions due to accessibility issues and limited awareness among the masses. The later amendments have tried to understand abortion with compassion and upholding respect for women (Mishra, 2025). Despite the legalisation of abortion, access to safe abortion in India continues to be constrained by social stigma, patriarchal norms and unequal access to healthcare, particularly for unmarried, poor and marginalised women (Mishra, 2025). These structural inequalities often compel women to resort to unsafe abortion practices, contributing significantly to maternal mortality. According to the United Nations Population Fund (2022), approximately 67% of abortions in India areunsafe, making unsafe abortion one of the leading causes of maternal deaths. This demonstrates that legal recognition alone is insufficient without equitable access to safe and affordable reproductive healthcare (UNFPA, 2022)

Although the Medical Termination of Pregnancy **Act** expanded access to abortion, women's reproductive choices continue to be mediated by medical authority through the requirement of approval by registered medical practitioners. Drawing on Petchesky (1995), legal recognition alone does not ensure reproductive autonomy without supportive social and institutional conditions. Similarly, Ross (2017) argues that reproductive justice requires equitable access to reproductive healthcare free from barriers of caste, class, poverty and social stigma. Thus, while the Act advances reproductive rights, structural inequalities continue to limit women's ability to exercise reproductive choice safely and with dignity.

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006

Child marriage remains a major barrier to reproductive justice in India as it denies girls the ability to make informed and autonomous reproductive choices. Despite legal prohibition, the practice persists due to entrenched patriarchy, poverty, caste inequalities and gender discrimination, reflecting broader structural barriers rather than merely a violation of law.According to the National Population Policy, "over 50% of girls marry below the age of 18, resulting in a typical reproductive pattern of 'too early, too frequent, too many" (National Commission on Population 2000). Child marriage is largely practised by uneducated, poor and rural women (Paul 2020). India had along tradition of marrying off very young girls just after attaining puberty.It is a systemic and structural issue that qualify women as commodities that can be replaced by change of ownership. In a culture where marriage is an infallible institution which is also considered compulsory for everyone, the tradition of child marriage finds its ground and legitimacy.Poor girls are the most vulnerable, and they are forced into marriages very early all over India. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by India in 1993, states in article 16 (2) that marriage of a child has no validity and legislative measures are important to regulate marriage that also includes making official marriage registration involving consenting adults, compulsory.Various other international conventions that laid the foundation of the child marriage prohibition law in India include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 10 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). These deal with the rights and protection of children as

human rights, the age of marriage, the importance of consent, the rights and liberty of women. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 strengthened legal protections by declaring child marriages voidable in specified circumstances, prescribing penalties for those facilitating child marriage, and addressing related offences such as trafficking of minor girls. The Act marked a significant shift towards recognising child marriage as a violation of girls' rights and reproductive health. However, its effectiveness remains limited by persistent poverty, patriarchy, caste inequalities and inadequate educational opportunities. Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy continue to undermine girls' health, education and reproductive autonomy. Moreover, inconsistencies between child marriage laws and the former Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, which earlier recognised a lower age of consent in certain circumstances, exposed gaps in the legal framework governing child protection and reproductive rights.

> These inconsistencies reveal the fragmented nature of India's legal framework governing marriage and sexuality. Judicial reliance on the colonial-era *Guardian and Wards Act* in cases involving adolescent relationships reinforces patriarchal notions of guardianship by denying young women the capacity to exercise independent choice. Such interpretations privilege parental control over girls' autonomy and reflect the continued legal regulation of female sexuality. Consequently, these contradictions undermine reproductive autonomy and demonstrate that legal reform alone is insufficient without a consistent rights-based approach that recognises women's agency and bodily autonomy while simultaneously reflecting broader patriarchal assumptions concerning female sexuality. Rather than adopting a coherent rights-based approach, different legal provisions have often regulated girls' bodies through conflicting standards of consent, marriage and sexual autonomy Although this law aims to protect the rights and dignity of children especially girls, it also addresses the issues of sexual and reproductive health.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act should be viewed not merely as a legal prohibition but as an effort to challenge patriarchal structures that regulate female sexuality and reproduction. Drawing on Loretta Ross's concept of reproductive justice, the practice reflects broader structural inequalities rooted in gender discrimination, poverty and social exclusion, demonstrating that legal prohibition alone is insufficient without wider social transformation.

Drawing on Petchesky's framework, reproductive freedom requires not only legal recognition but also the social and economic conditions necessary for meaningful choice (Petchesky, 1995). Although the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 represents an important legal intervention, its effectiveness remains constrained by persistent inequalities based on gender, caste, poverty and limited educational opportunities. Similarly, Ross (2017) argues that reproductive justice cannot be achieved through legal prohibition alone but requires broader structural transformation. Thus, while the Act advances girls' reproductive rights, it falls short of ensuring substantive reproductive justice.

Reproductive Autonomy and Justice

The concept of reproductive autonomy extends beyond the legal recognition of individual choice and must be understood within the broader social, political and economic conditions that enable or constrain that choice. Rosalind Petchesky argues that reproductive rights are meaningful only when individuals

possess the material resources, healthcare, education and freedom from coercion necessary to exercise genuine reproductive decision-making. Consequently, reproductive autonomy cannot be reduced to the mere existence of constitutional guarantees or statutory protections. Rather, it requires substantive equality that enables individuals, particularly women, to exercise control over their bodies free from violence, discrimination and structural disadvantage.

From this perspective, Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, has progressively been interpreted by the judiciary to include reproductive choice, bodily integrity and informed consent. Judicial recognition of these rights represents an important constitutional development. However, Petchesky reminds us that legal recognition alone does not automatically translate into reproductive freedom. Women belonging to economically disadvantaged, rural, Dalit, Adivasi and other marginalised communities frequently remain unable to exercise theseconstitutionally recognised rights because of unequal access to healthcare, education, financial resources and legal remedies.

Loretta Ross's theory of reproductive justice further broadens this understanding by locating reproductive rights within structures of social inequality. Ross argues that reproductive justice encompasses not only the right to have children and the right not to have children but also the right to raise children in safe, healthy and supportive environments.

The judicial decisions discussed above illustrate a gradual shift in Indian constitutional jurisprudence from a population-control approach towards a rights-based understanding of reproductive health. In *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration*, the Supreme Court affirmed that reproductive choices constitute an essential component of personal liberty and dignity under Article 21. Similarly, *Devika Biswas v. Union of India* recognised that informed consent and freedom from coercive sterilisation are indispensable components of reproductive healthcare. These decisions resonate strongly with Petchesky's argument that reproductive autonomy requires respect for bodily integrity and informed decision-making rather than state control over reproduction.Ross's reproductive justice framework suggests that meaningful reproductive freedom cannot be achieved solely through favourable judicial decisions unless these structural barriers are simultaneously dismantled. Consequently, the gap between constitutional rights and lived realities continues to characterise reproductive governance in India.Consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Rosalind Petchesky and Loretta Ross, the advancement of reproductive justice therefore depends upon integrating legal reform with wider structural transformation capable of addressing the intersecting inequalities that continue to shape women's reproductive lives.

Gender-based violence, forced marriage, coercive sterilisation and unequal access to reproductive healthcare continue to undermine women's ability to exercise meaningful reproductive choice (CEDAW Committee, 2015). Consequently, judicial intervention has played an important role in advancing reproductive rights and gender justice in India.Landmark decisions such as *Jennifer A. v. ESIC College of Nursing* and *Vandana Kandari v. University of Delhi* recognised the reproductive rights of pregnant students by holding that denial of reasonable academic concessions violated constitutional principles of equality and dignity. In *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration* (2009), the Supreme Court affirmed that reproductive choice forms an essential part of personal liberty and bodily autonomy under Article 21. Similarly, in *Devika Biswas v. Union of India* (2016), the Court emphasised informed consent and condemned coercive sterilisation

practices, recognising reproductive healthcare as an integral aspect of the right to life.

Drawing upon the perspectives of Rosalind Petchesky and Loretta Ross, these judicial developments demonstrate a gradual shift towards a rights-based understanding of reproductive autonomy. However, legal recognition alone cannot ensure reproductive justice. Persistent inequalities arising from patriarchy, caste, class and unequal access to healthcare continue to restrict women's reproductive freedom, highlighting the need for broader structural and institutional reforms alongside constitutional protections.

Future of Reproductive Rights: What more can be done?

Although India has made significant constitutional, legislative and judicial progress in protecting reproductive rights, achieving reproductive justice requires addressing the structural inequalities that continue to constrain women's reproductive autonomy. Drawing upon Rosalind Petchesky's conception of reproductive rights and Loretta Ross's framework of reproductive justice, future reforms must extend beyond legal recognition to include equitable access to reproductive healthcare, comprehensive sexuality education, contraception, safe abortion services, maternal healthcare, and gender-sensitive workplace policies. Greater investment in women's health research, the use of digital technologies to improve healthcare access, stronger implementation of existing laws, and sustained efforts to eliminate patriarchal norms, caste and class inequalities are equally essential. An intersectional, rights-based approach that combines legal reform with broader social, economic and institutional transformation is necessary to ensure substantive reproductive justice and meaningful reproductive autonomy for all women in India.

Conclusion

Reproductive rights are fundamental human rights that are essential to women's dignity, bodily autonomy and equality. Since Independence, India has made significant constitutional, legislative and judicial advances in protecting these rights through enactments such as the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, the Maternity Benefit Act and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, along with progressive judicial interventions. However, this chapter argues that the expansion of formal legal rights has not automatically translated into reproductive justice. Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of Rosalind Petchesky and Loretta Ross, it demonstrates that meaningful reproductive autonomy depends not only on legal recognition but also on addressing structural inequalities rooted in patriarchy, caste, class, economic deprivation and unequal access to healthcare. Therefore, achieving reproductive justice in India requires an intersectional approach that combines effective legal implementation with broader social, economic and institutional transformation to ensure that all women can exercise their reproductive rights freely and with dignity.

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Chapter 38: The Role of Language in Promoting Peace and Reducing Conflict in Society

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Abstract

Language plays a central role in human society because it is the main tool used for communication, expression and social interaction. It influences relationships, education, politics, media, law and conflict resolution. Language can promote peace by creating understanding, trust, respect and cooperation among individuals and communities. At the same time, harmful language such as hate speech, discrimination, misinformation, cyberbullying and offensive communication can create fear, anger, social division and conflict. In multicultural and multilingual societies, language becomes even more important because communication barriers and unequal language access can lead to exclusion and social tension.This study examines the role of language in promoting peace and reducing conflict in society. The main purpose of the study is to identify how language contributes to peacebuilding through respectful communication, dialogue, inclusive language and education, while also analyzing how harmful language creates conflict and social instability. The study further explores practical strategies for using language as a tool for conflict resolution, social inclusion and peaceful coexistence.The research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design and mainly depends on secondary data collection. Information was gathered from books, academic journals, research articles, government reports, policy documents, newspapers and reliable online sources related to linguistics, peace studies, communication and conflict resolution. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify major patterns and repeated issues connected to language, peace and conflict.The findings show that respectful communication, inclusive language, multilingual support and responsible media practices strengthen peace and social harmony. However, hate speech, cyberbullying, language discrimination and misinformation remain major challenges. The study concludes that education, fair language policies, ethical communication and public awareness are essential for building a more peaceful, respectful and inclusive society.

Keywords: *Language, Peace, Conflict, Communication, Social Harmony*

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Introduction

Language is one of the most powerful tools in human society. It is the main way people communicate their thoughts, feelings, ideas, beliefs and emotions. Through language, people build relationships, solve problems, share knowledge and create understanding with others. Language is not only used for daily conversation but also plays an important role in education, politics, law, media, religion and international relations. Because of this, language has a strong influence on peace and conflict in society.Peace is not only the absence of violence or war; it also includes respect, understanding, equality, justice and positive relationships between individuals and communities. In many situations, conflict begins because of misunderstanding, poor communication, discrimination, or harmful speech. Words can either heal people or hurt them. Respectful and inclusive language can build trust and cooperation, while hate speech, insults, discrimination and false communication can create anger, fear and division.

In multicultural and multilingual societies, language becomes even more important. People from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds often speak different languages and have different ways of expressing themselves. If communication is weak or one group feels ignored because of language barriers, social tension may increase. For example, in schools, workplaces and government institutions, unequal language use can make some groups feel excluded. This can lead to frustration, discrimination and even social conflict.Language also plays a major role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Dialogue, negotiation, mediation and counseling all depend on effective communication. Leaders, teachers, journalists and community members use language to solve disputes, spread awareness and promote social harmony. For example, peace talks between communities or countries require careful and respectful language to reduce tension and build trust. Media language is also powerful because news reports and social media messages can either promote peace or increase conflict depending on how information is presented.

Another important area is the influence of language in education. Schools teach not only grammar and vocabulary but also values such as respect, tolerance and understanding. Language education helps students learn how to communicate peacefully and accept diversity. Teaching inclusive and non-discriminatory language can reduce bullying, prejudice and social division from an early age.At the same time, language can also be misused. Hate speech, political propaganda, online harassment and false information can spread quickly and create serious social problems. Social media has made this issue even more visible, where harmful language can influence large groups of people in a short time. In many cases, conflicts grow stronger because of irresponsible communication rather than physical actions alone.This study focuses on the role of language in promoting peace and reducing conflict in society. It aims to examine how language can support peaceful relationships, improve understanding and reduce social tension, while also identifying how harmful language creates conflict and division. Understanding this relationship is important for building a more respectful, fair and peaceful society where communication becomes a tool for unity rather than conflict.

Research Problem

Language plays a central role in human life because it is the main tool people use to communicate, express emotions, share ideas and build relationships. In every society, language influences education, politics, law, media, religion and social interaction. It helps people understand each other and solve problems peacefully. Effective communication can build trust, respect and cooperation among individuals and communities. Because of this,

language has a strong connection with peace and social harmony.However, language can also become a source of conflict when it is used negatively. Misunderstandings, offensive words, hate speech, discrimination, false information and poor communication often create tension between individuals and social groups. In multicultural and multilingual societies, language barriers may lead to exclusion, inequality and mistrust. When people feel ignored or disrespected because of their language, identity, or way of expression, social conflict can increase. For example, discrimination in schools, workplaces, or public institutions because of language differences can create frustration and division.Social media has made this issue more serious because harmful language can spread very quickly. Online hate speech, cyberbullying, political propaganda and false news can create fear, anger and social unrest. In many cases, conflicts grow not because of physical violence first, but because of harmful communication and irresponsible use of language. At the same time, peaceful dialogue, mediation and respectful communication can reduce tension and support conflict resolution.

Another major issue is the lack of awareness about the importance of language in peacebuilding. Many people focus only on physical conflict and ignore how words and communication patterns create long-term social problems. Schools, media, leaders and communities may not always give enough attention to peaceful communication, inclusive language and respectful dialogue. Without proper understanding, language can become a hidden cause of discrimination and violence.Therefore, the main research problem of this study is to understand how language influences peace and conflict in society. The study seeks to examine both the positive role of language in promoting peace and the negative effects of harmful communication that create social tension and division. It also aims to identify practical strategies for using language as a tool for peacebuilding, social inclusion and conflict resolution in modern society.The first objective of this study is to identify the major ways language contributes to promoting peace and social harmony in society. This includes examining how respectful communication, dialogue, negotiation, education and inclusive language help build trust, understanding and cooperation among different social groups.The second objective is to examine how harmful language creates conflict and social division. This includes studying issues such as hate speech, discrimination, misinformation, offensive communication, cyberbullying and language barriers in multicultural societies. This objective helps explain how negative use of language can damage relationships and increase tension.The third objective is to explore practical strategies for using language as a tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This includes analyzing the role of schools, media, governments and community leaders in promoting peaceful communication, language equality and social inclusion. The purpose is to identify effective ways to create a more respectful and peaceful society through responsible language use.

Literature Review

- **Introduction to Language and Society**

Language is one of the most important parts of human society because it allows people to communicate, express feelings, share knowledge and build relationships. It is not only a tool for speaking but also a way of shaping identity, culture and social interaction. Every society depends on language for education, law, politics, religion, business and daily communication. Through language, people understand each other and create social connections.Researchers explain that language reflects social values and power structures. The way people speak, the words they choose and the languages they use can show equality or inequality in society. For example, people from minority language groups may feel excluded if their language is not respected in schools or

government institutions. This shows that language is closely connected to social justice and peace.In multicultural societies, language becomes even more important because people from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds must communicate and live together peacefully. Strong communication supports unity, while poor communication can create misunderstanding and conflict. Therefore, language is not only a linguistic issue but also a social and peacebuilding issue.

- **The Concept of Peace and Peacebuilding**

Peace is often understood as the absence of war or violence, but peace studies explain that true peace is much broader. It includes justice, equality, respect, human rights and positive relationships among people. Peace means living in a society where people feel safe, valued and included regardless of their background.Peacebuilding refers to the process of creating long-term harmony by reducing the causes of conflict and strengthening social understanding. It includes dialogue, education, mediation, negotiation and cooperation between individuals and communities. Language plays a major role in peacebuilding because all these processes depend on communication.Scholars explain that peaceful communication helps people listen to each other, solve problems and reduce social tension. For example, community discussions, peace talks and counseling sessions all require respectful and careful language. Without effective communication, even small disagreements can grow into serious conflicts.

- **Language as a Tool for Peace**

Language can be a powerful tool for promoting peace when it is used respectfully and responsibly. Positive communication helps people understand different opinions, build trust and solve conflicts peacefully. Dialogue and negotiation are important examples where language helps reduce tension and create agreement.Inclusive language is also important for peace. This means using words that respect all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or social class. For example, avoiding discriminatory words in schools and workplaces creates a safer and more respectful environment. Language that promotes equality helps reduce prejudice and social division.Education also supports peaceful language use. Schools teach students how to communicate with respect, listen to others and solve disagreements without violence. Language education helps children learn tolerance and acceptance from an early age. Researchers believe that peaceful communication skills should be part of both formal and informal education systems.

- **Harmful Language and Social Conflict**

While language can promote peace, it can also create serious conflict when used negatively. Hate speech, insults, discrimination, threats and false communication can damage relationships and create fear and anger. Harmful language often targets specific groups based on religion, ethnicity, gender, or political identity.Hate speech is one of the most serious examples of harmful language. It spreads hostility and can lead to violence and discrimination. For example, political speeches or social media messages that attack minority groups can create social division and public unrest. In many conflicts, violence begins with words before physical actions take place.Cyberbullying and online harassment are also growing problems in digital society. Social media allows harmful language to spread quickly to large audiences. Young people especially face emotional and mental stress because of online insults and bullying. Researchers explain that digital communication must also follow ethical and peaceful standards.

- **Language Barriers and Social Exclusion**

Language barriers occur when people cannot communicate effectively because they speak different languages or have limited understanding of the dominant language in society. This often creates exclusion in education, employment, healthcare and legal systems. People may feel ignored, powerless, or discriminated against because of language differences.In multilingual countries, minority language speakers may struggle to access government services or quality education if their language is not recognized. This creates inequality and social frustration. For example, students who cannot learn in their first language may perform poorly in school and feel disconnected from society.Researchers show that language equality is important for peace and justice. Governments should support multilingual education, translation services and equal language rights. Respecting language diversity helps people feel included and strengthens social harmony.

- **Role of Media and Social Media in Peace Communication**

Media has a strong influence on how people think, feel and respond to social issues. News reports, television programs, newspapers and social media shape public opinion through language. Media can either promote peace by spreading truth and understanding or create conflict by spreading fear, false information and hate.Responsible journalism uses careful and balanced language to avoid increasing tension. For example, during political or ethnic conflict, the way media reports events can either calm people or create panic. Fair reporting supports trust and peaceful problem-solving.Social media is even more powerful because information spreads very quickly. Positive campaigns for awareness, education and peacebuilding can reach large audiences. At the same time, fake news, hate speech and online arguments can also spread rapidly. Researchers highlight the need for digital responsibility and ethical communication in online spaces.

- **Government Policies and Language for Peace**

Governments play an important role in promoting peaceful language use through laws, education and public policies. Laws against hate speech, discrimination and harmful communication help protect social peace. Language rights policies also ensure that minority groups are respected and included.Public institutions such as schools, courts and hospitals should provide equal language access so that all citizens can participate fully in society. Language discrimination weakens trust in government and creates social tension. Fair policies help build inclusion and justice.Leaders also influence peace through the language they use. Political speeches, public messages and national communication can either unite people or divide them. Responsible leadership requires respectful and honest communication that promotes peace rather than conflict.The literature shows that language has a strong influence on peace and conflict in society. It can build trust, support dialogue and strengthen social harmony when used respectfully. At the same time, harmful language such as hate speech, discrimination, misinformation and exclusion can create serious social conflict and division.Language is therefore not only a communication tool but also a powerful instrument for peacebuilding and social justice. Education, media responsibility, government policies and public awareness are essential for promoting peaceful communication. Understanding the relationship between language and peace is important for creating a more inclusive, respectful and peaceful society for all people.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine the role of language in promoting peace and reducing conflict in society. A qualitative method is suitable for this research because it helps the researcher understand

social issues in depth by focusing on human communication, social behavior, cultural understanding and the meaning behind conflict and peace rather than only using numbers and statistics. Since language and peace are closely connected to human interaction, emotions and social relationships, qualitative research provides a better understanding of how communication influences harmony and conflict in society.The research mainly depends on secondary data collection. Secondary data means information that has already been collected and published by other researchers, institutions and organizations. The sources used in this study include books, academic journals, research articles, government reports, policy documents, conference papers, newspapers and reliable online publications related to linguistics, peace studies, conflict resolution, communication, hate speech and social inclusion. Reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, the United Nations and human rights institutions are also used to provide strong background knowledge and reliable evidence.

A descriptive research design is used in this study to explain how language influences peace and conflict in society. Descriptive research helps the researcher clearly present how respectful communication, dialogue, inclusive language and multilingual understanding support peacebuilding, while also explaining how hate speech, discrimination, misinformation and language barriers create social tension and conflict. This design allows the study to describe real social conditions and understand both the positive and negative effects of language in modern society.The sampling method used in this research is purposive sampling. This means the researcher selects specific information sources that are directly relevant to the research topic and useful for answering the research questions. For example, studies related to peace communication, language discrimination, media language, multilingual education, social inclusion and conflict resolution are selected because they provide meaningful evidence for understanding the issue. The focus is on collecting high-quality and relevant information rather than a large amount of unrelated data.Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis. In this method, the researcher carefully reads and examines the collected information to identify common themes, repeated ideas and major patterns. Themes such as peaceful communication, hate speech, language barriers, inclusive language, media influence and policy solutions are grouped and analyzed to understand how they are connected to peace and conflict in society. This helps organize the findings clearly and allows the researcher to explain the issue in a logical and academic way.

Ethical considerations are also important in this study. Since the research uses published secondary data, proper attention is given to honesty, accuracy and correct citation of all sources. The researcher avoids plagiarism by giving full credit to original authors and institutions. Only reliable and trustworthy information is selected to maintain the quality and credibility of the study. Respect for academic integrity and responsible use of information is necessary to ensure professional and ethical research.This methodology helps the study achieve its main goal of understanding how language can be used as a tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. By using qualitative analysis and reliable secondary sources, the research provides a strong foundation for discussing social communication problems and recommending practical solutions for building a more respectful, fair and peaceful society.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study is carried out using thematic analysis, which is a qualitative method used to identify, examine and interpret common patterns and themes within the collected information. Since this research focuses on the role of language in promoting

peace and reducing conflict in society, thematic analysis is suitable because it helps the researcher understand complex social issues in a deeper and more meaningful way rather than depending only on numerical data. It allows the study to explore communication patterns, social behavior, language use and the impact of words on peace and conflict.The first step in data analysis is collecting and reviewing secondary data from books, academic journals, research articles, government publications, policy reports, conference papers, newspapers and reliable online sources related to linguistics, peace studies, communication, conflict resolution, hate speech and social inclusion. These sources provide important information about respectful communication, dialogue, discrimination, language barriers, hate speech, misinformation and the role of education and media in peacebuilding. The researcher carefully reads and examines these materials to gain a full understanding of the research topic.

The second step is organizing the collected information into major themes and sub-themes. For example, dialogue, negotiation and respectful communication are grouped under peaceful communication, while hate speech, insults, cyberbullying and misinformation are grouped under harmful language and conflict. Language discrimination, multilingual challenges and exclusion of minority language groups are grouped under language barriers and social inequality. Media influence, educational communication and policy support are grouped under peacebuilding strategies. This thematic grouping helps the researcher clearly understand how different language issues are connected to peace and conflict.The third step involves interpreting the findings by comparing different studies and identifying repeated problems, common solutions and major arguments presented by previous researchers. This helps the researcher understand how language can either reduce conflict or create social division depending on how it is used. It also helps identify which educational methods, media practices and government policies are most effective in promoting peaceful communication and social harmony.

Findings of the Study

The findings of this study show that language plays a powerful role in both promoting peace and creating conflict in society. Language is not only a tool for communication but also an important part of social relationships, identity, power and human understanding. The way people speak, write and communicate with others can either build trust and cooperation or create misunderstanding, discrimination and social division. The study confirms that peaceful communication supports harmony, while harmful language increases tension and conflict.One major finding is that respectful communication helps promote peace and social harmony. Dialogue, active listening, polite language and mutual understanding improve relationships between individuals and communities. When people are given the chance to express their opinions and feel heard, conflicts can be solved more peacefully. For example, in schools, workplaces and community discussions, respectful communication helps reduce misunderstandings and creates a more supportive environment. Peace talks, mediation and counseling also depend strongly on careful and respectful use of language.

Another important finding is that inclusive language supports equality and reduces discrimination. Inclusive language means using words that respect all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or social background. The study found that when institutions such as schools, workplaces and government offices use fair and non-discriminatory language, people feel more accepted and valued. This strengthens social trust and reduces feelings of exclusion. For example, using respectful language toward minority groups helps build a sense of belonging and social inclusion.The study also found that hate speech and harmful

communication are major causes of conflict. Offensive words, insults, threats, discrimination and false accusations create anger, fear and social division. Hate speech targeting ethnic, religious, or political groups can lead to serious public tension and even violence. In many situations, conflict begins with harmful words before physical violence takes place. Political speeches, public discussions and social media messages that spread hostility can damage peace and weaken social unity.

Cyberbullying and online harassment were identified as serious modern challenges. Social media allows harmful language to spread very quickly to large numbers of people. Young people especially face emotional stress, depression and fear because of online insults and bullying. The study found that digital communication can easily become a source of conflict when users act irresponsibly. False news and misinformation shared online also increase public confusion and mistrust, especially during political, social, or health-related crises.Another key finding is that language barriers create social exclusion and inequality. In multilingual societies, people who do not speak the dominant language may face difficulties in education, employment, healthcare and legal systems. Minority language groups often feel ignored or disadvantaged when their language is not respected in public institutions. This creates frustration and weakens social peace. The study found that equal language access and multilingual support are important for promoting justice and inclusion.The role of education was also identified as highly important in peacebuilding. Schools do not only teach grammar and vocabulary but also shape attitudes and social values. Language education that promotes respect, tolerance and peaceful communication helps students develop positive social behavior from an early age. Teachers play an important role in guiding students to use words responsibly and solve disagreements without violence. Education helps prevent prejudice and supports long-term social harmony.

Media and journalism were found to have a strong influence on peace and conflict. News reports, television programs and social media messages shape public opinion through language. Responsible media can promote understanding, truth and peaceful dialogue, while biased reporting, sensational language and false information can create fear and division. During social or political conflict, the words used by media are often powerful enough to calm or worsen public tension.Government policies and leadership were also identified as important factors. Laws against hate speech, discrimination and harmful public communication help protect peace. Leaders who use respectful and honest language can unite people and reduce conflict, while irresponsible political language can divide society. Public institutions must ensure language equality and fair communication to strengthen trust and justice.

Finally, the study found that peacebuilding through language requires both individual responsibility and institutional support. Families, schools, media, governments and communities all have a role in promoting respectful communication and reducing harmful speech. Peaceful society is not created only by laws but also by daily communication habits and shared human values such as respect, empathy and fairness.Overall, the findings confirm that language is a powerful force that can either support peace or create conflict depending on how it is used. Responsible communication, inclusive language, multilingual respect and ethical media practices are essential for building a fair, respectful and peaceful society. These findings strongly support the need to treat language as an important part of peacebuilding and social development.

. Significance of the Study

This study is important because it helps explain how language influences peace and conflict in society. Language is a powerful tool that people use every day to communicate, express

emotions, share ideas and build relationships. The way language is used can create understanding, trust and cooperation, or it can cause misunderstanding, discrimination and social division. Therefore, studying the connection between language and peace is necessary for understanding how societies can become more harmonious and inclusive.The study is significant because it highlights the positive role of language in promoting peace through respectful communication, dialogue, negotiation, education and inclusive language use. It shows how peaceful communication can reduce misunderstandings, solve disputes and strengthen social relationships among people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. This is especially important in multicultural and multilingual societies where language barriers can easily create tension if not managed properly.At the same time, the research is valuable because it examines how harmful language such as hate speech, discrimination, misinformation, cyberbullying and offensive communication can create conflict and social unrest. Understanding these negative effects helps governments, educators, media professionals and community leaders develop better strategies to prevent violence and promote peaceful coexistence. The study shows that many conflicts begin with words before they become physical problems, making language an important area for conflict prevention.

This research is also useful for policymakers and public institutions because it provides knowledge for creating fair language policies, laws against hate speech and equal language access in education, healthcare and public services. It supports the idea that language rights are part of social justice and human dignity. Schools and universities can also use this knowledge to improve language education by teaching students respect, tolerance and responsible communication from an early age.In addition, the study contributes to both linguistic studies and peace studies by connecting language with social harmony and conflict resolution. It provides academic value for students and future researchers who want to study communication, social justice, multilingualism and peacebuilding. It encourages further research on how language can be used as a practical tool for building safer and more peaceful communities.Finally, this study helps raise public awareness about the importance of using words responsibly. It reminds people that peace is not only built through laws and policies but also through everyday conversations, respect for others and ethical communication. By promoting understanding, inclusion and peaceful dialogue, language can become a strong foundation for creating a fair, respectful and peaceful society.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are very important in this study because they help maintain honesty, fairness and academic integrity throughout the research process. Since this study focuses on the role of language in promoting peace and reducing conflict in society, it is necessary to handle information carefully and responsibly. Ethical research ensures that the study is reliable, respectful and useful for understanding sensitive social issues such as hate speech, discrimination, language barriers and social conflict.

This research mainly uses secondary data such as books, academic journals, research articles, government reports, policy documents, newspapers and reliable online sources. Therefore, proper citation and referencing are necessary to give full credit to the original authors and institutions. The researcher avoids plagiarism by clearly acknowledging all sources used in the study. Academic honesty is essential to maintain the quality and credibility of the research.The researcher also ensures that only reliable, accurate and relevant information is selected for analysis. False or biased information can create misunderstanding,

especially when discussing issues related to language discrimination, hate speech and conflict. Care is taken to avoid harmful language, unfair judgments, or discrimination while explaining sensitive topics related to ethnicity, religion, culture, gender and minority groups.

Respect for diversity is another important ethical principle in this study. Since language is closely connected to identity and culture, the research avoids disrespectful assumptions about different language groups or communities. All individuals and social groups are treated fairly and equally in the discussion. The study promotes inclusion, equality and social justice rather than prejudice or exclusion.Objectivity is also important in this research. The researcher remains neutral and avoids personal bias while analyzing the positive and negative effects of language in society. The findings and conclusions are based on evidence and academic sources rather than personal opinions. This helps ensure that the research remains balanced, professional and trustworthy.Finally, the study aims to support peacebuilding and social harmony rather than create division. The purpose of the research is to encourage respectful communication and understanding among people. Ethical responsibility is important because language itself can influence peace and conflict and the research must reflect the same values of respect, fairness and peaceful communication that it promotes.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to strengthen the positive role of language in promoting peace and reducing conflict in society. These recommendations focus on improving communication, reducing harmful language, supporting inclusion and creating a more respectful and peaceful social environment.The first recommendation is to promote respectful and inclusive communication in all areas of society. Schools, workplaces, government institutions and communities should encourage the use of polite, fair and non-discriminatory language. People should be taught the importance of listening carefully, speaking respectfully and understanding different opinions. Inclusive language helps people feel valued and accepted regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, or social background, which supports social harmony and peace.

The second recommendation is to strengthen education on peaceful communication and language responsibility. Schools and universities should include lessons on communication ethics, conflict resolution, tolerance and respect for diversity as part of language education. Students should learn from an early age how words can either build peace or create conflict. Teachers play an important role in guiding students to solve disagreements through dialogue instead of harmful speech or violence.Another important recommendation is to take stronger action against hate speech, cyberbullying and harmful online communication. Governments should create and properly enforce laws against hate speech, discrimination, online harassment and the spread of false information. Social media platforms should also take responsibility for monitoring harmful content and promoting safer digital communication. Public awareness campaigns can help people understand the dangers of irresponsible language use online.

The study also recommends reducing language barriers and supporting multilingual inclusion. Governments and public institutions should ensure equal language access in education, healthcare, legal services and public administration. Minority language groups should be respected and provided with opportunities to participate fully in society. Translation services, multilingual education and fair language policies can reduce exclusion and strengthen social justice.Media organizations should also be encouraged to use responsible and balanced language. Journalists and

broadcasters must avoid spreading false information, sensational reporting, or language that increases fear and division. Instead, media should promote truth, understanding and peaceful dialogue, especially during times of social or political tension. Responsible journalism is an important part of peacebuilding.Political leaders and public figures must use language carefully because their words strongly influence society. Leaders should avoid speeches that create hatred, discrimination, or division among people. Instead, they should use language that promotes unity, respect and peaceful problem-solving. Responsible leadership helps build trust and reduces social conflict.Finally, future research should continue to study the relationship between language and peace in different cultural and social contexts. Language use changes over time, especially with the growth of digital communication and social media. More research can help identify new challenges and better solutions for peaceful communication in modern society.

In conclusion, language should be treated as a powerful tool for peacebuilding rather than conflict creation. Through respectful communication, education, fair policies and responsible leadership, societies can reduce division and build stronger relationships among people. These recommendations support the creation of a safer, fairer and more peaceful society where words are used to unite rather than divide.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that may affect the depth and scope of the research findings. Understanding these limitations is important because it helps explain the boundaries of the study and provides direction for future research. Although the study provides useful knowledge about the role of language in promoting peace and reducing conflict in society, certain challenges were present during the research process.The first limitation is that the study mainly depends on secondary data. The research is based on books, academic journals, research articles, government reports, policy documents, newspapers and reliable online sources rather than primary data collected directly through interviews, surveys, or field observations. While secondary data provides strong background knowledge, it may not fully reflect the real-life experiences of individuals who face language discrimination, hate speech, cyberbullying, or communication barriers in daily life. Primary data could provide deeper practical understanding.

The second limitation is the broad nature of the topic. Language, peace and conflict are very wide areas that include many issues such as multilingualism, hate speech, education, media communication, language rights, social inclusion and conflict resolution. Due to time and resource limitations, the study could not examine every aspect in full detail. Instead, it focused mainly on major issues related to language use and peacebuilding in society.Another limitation is that language and communication patterns change over time, especially with the rapid growth of social media and digital communication. New forms of online communication, cyberbullying and misinformation continue to develop quickly. This makes it difficult for the study to remain fully updated with the latest language trends and digital communication challenges.

The study also faces limitations related to differences between countries and societies. Language use, cultural values, government policies and social attitudes are different in each country. Therefore, some findings and recommendations may not apply equally to all cultural or political contexts. Local studies are needed for more specific understanding and practical solutions.

Researcher bias can also be considered a limitation in qualitative studies. Since thematic analysis involves interpretation of collected

information, personal understanding may influence how data is selected and explained. Although efforts were made to remain objective and use reliable sources, complete removal of subjective judgment is difficult in social research.Finally, limited time and financial resources reduced the possibility of conducting a larger field-based investigation. A broader study involving interviews with teachers, students, media professionals, community leaders and people affected by language conflict would require more time and support. Because of these limitations, the research mainly focuses on theoretical understanding and policy discussion rather than large-scale field evidence.Despite these limitations, the study still provides valuable insights into how language affects peace and conflict in society. It offers useful understanding of the risks, opportunities and solutions for building a more respectful, fair and peaceful social environment through responsible communication.

Conclusion

Language is one of the most powerful tools in human society because it shapes communication, relationships, understanding and social harmony. This study shows that language is not only a method of sharing ideas but also an important factor in promoting peace and reducing conflict. The way people speak, write and communicate with others can either create trust, respect and cooperation or cause misunderstanding, discrimination and division. Therefore, language has a direct connection with peacebuilding and social stability.The study found that respectful communication, dialogue, inclusive language and multilingual understanding play a major role in building peaceful relationships in society. When people are treated with dignity and given equal opportunities to express themselves, trust and cooperation become stronger. Language used in education, media, workplaces and public institutions can help reduce social tension and support equality. Peaceful communication allows people to solve problems through discussion rather than conflict.At the same time, the study also found that harmful language such as hate speech, cyberbullying, discrimination, misinformation and offensive communication creates serious social problems. These negative forms of communication increase anger, fear, exclusion and mistrust among individuals and groups. In many cases, conflicts begin with words before they become physical violence. Social media has made this issue more serious because harmful messages can spread quickly and influence large numbers of people.The research further highlights that language barriers and unequal language access create social exclusion, especially in multilingual societies. People who are unable to use the dominant language often face difficulties in education, healthcare, employment and legal systems. This creates inequality and weakens social peace. Fair language policies and multilingual support are therefore necessary for justice and inclusion.The study concludes that language should be recognized as a powerful tool for peacebuilding. Governments, schools, media organizations and community leaders all have a responsibility to promote respectful communication and prevent harmful language use. Education on peaceful dialogue, strong policies against hate speech, responsible media reporting and equal language rights are important steps toward reducing conflict.peace is not built only through laws and political decisions but also through everyday words and human interaction. When language is used with respect, honesty and empathy, it becomes a foundation for unity and social harmony. A peaceful society can be created when communication is based on fairness, inclusion and mutual understanding. Therefore, responsible language use is essential for building a safer, more just and more peaceful world.

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Chapter 39: Ghosted, Blocked, and Orbiting: How Digital Architecture Normalizes Relational Trauma among Youth

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Abstract

Digital communication platforms have shifted from mere tools for connection into the primary architects of modern youth relationships. This interdisciplinary study explores how features like read receipts, Snap scores, and the ease of ghosting or blocking have normalized a culture of "relational disposability." By lowering the friction required to disconnect, these platforms encourage young people to view interpersonal connections as fleeting, interchangeable, and easily abandoned. Consequently, vanishing from someone's digital life without explanation has transitioned from a rude outlier behavior into a standard, socially accepted norm. This shift carries profound psychological consequences for adolescents, a demographic uniquely sensitive to peer acceptance and attachment security. By synthesizing sociological perspectives on platform design with psychological research on rejection, this paper examines the rise of digital relational trauma. The analysis focuses on three central dynamics: the heavy cumulative toll of daily micro-rejections, such as being left on "read"; the emotional ambiguity of "orbiting," where individuals disengage but continue to silently surveil their peers; and the resulting surge in social paranoia and hyper-vigilance. Crucially, the neuropsychological pain triggered by these digital rejections closely parallels physical pain, deeply undermining a young person's capacity to trust others, form stable attachments, and build genuine emotional resilience. Ultimately, this research argues that platform architecture does not simply host interactions; it actively structures behavior in ways that routinize emotional harm. By reducing human bonds to easily severable data points, digital spaces foster chronic uncertainty. The findings underscore a critical gap in current educational frameworks, advocating for a reimagined model of digital literacy. Rather than focusing solely on technical skills, future initiatives must prioritize socio-emotional well-being, helping today's youth safely navigate and reclaim meaningful connections in a hyper-connected yet isolating world.

Keywords:*Digital relational trauma, Platform architecture, Relational disposability, Attachment anxiety, Micro-rejections, Adolescent hyper-vigilance*

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1. Introduction: Digital relational trauma is defined here as the psychological injury and somatic dysregulation resulting from sudden, unexplained cessation of communication within technologically mediated environments. As digital platforms become primary sites of identity formation and interpersonal development among youth, their affordances actively facilitate the normalization of social ostracism. Visibility cues such as read receipts and last-seen statuses provide what Campaioli et al. describe as technological proof of intent, transforming passive silence into a perceivable signal of rejection (Schneider et al., 2017). By integrating Williams' temporal need-threat model with attachment theory and recent neuropsychological data, this essay shows that digital exclusion is not simply a social inconvenience but a biologically legible event (Williams et al., 2000), (MacDonald & Leary, 2005).

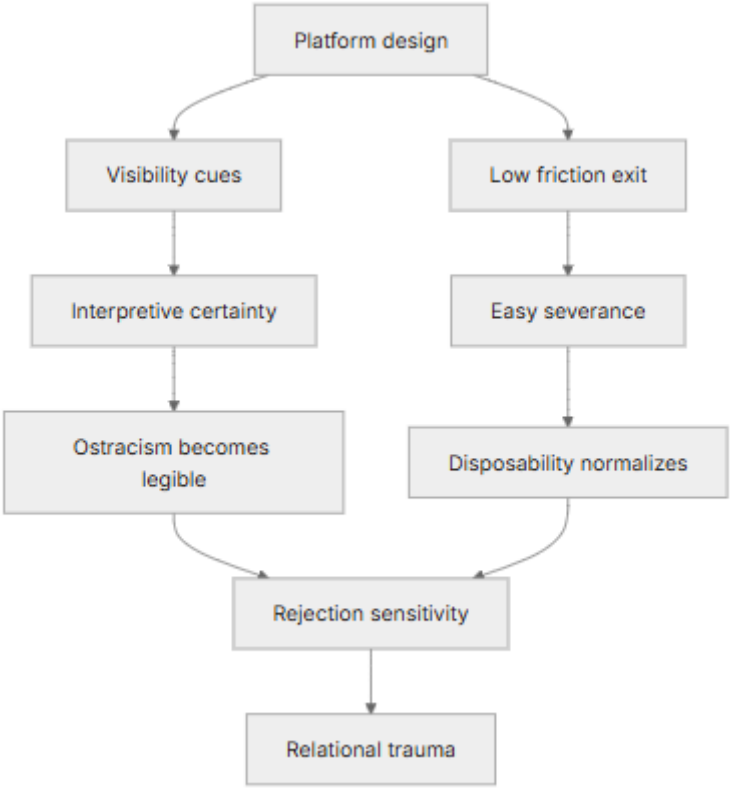
The theoretical claim advanced here is not that all digital withdrawal is pathological. Rather, the argument is that platform architectures make abrupt severance exceptionally easy, highly visible, and algorithmically reinforced. The result is a communicative ecology in which ending contact becomes frictionless, while explaining one's departure becomes comparatively costly. This asymmetry matters because it shifts the moral burden of closure onto the rejected person, who must infer intention from silence, activity markers, and partial traces. In this sense, the "architecture of silence" converts ambiguity into evidence and evidence into injury.

The Virtualization of Connection and Relational Disposability:

Contemporary intimacy increasingly resembles a regime of relational tourism, in which users move between contacts, prospects, and micro-bonds with limited expectation of durability. Quiroz's account of satellite dating and assisted serendipity remains useful here because it captures how apps promote encounter without demanding sustained obligation (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017). In such environments, the screen functions as a gate feature: it allows users to filter, monitor, and discard others on the basis of metadata, availability indicators, and curated visibility rather than sustained embodied knowledge. This structure encourages relational disposability; whereby emotional investment is subordinated to interface convenience.

Platform economies intensify this tendency. Social media and dating applications are designed to maximize retention, engagement, and monetizable attention. Features that make rejection effortless may therefore serve a commercial logic even when they erode interpersonal trust. From a sociological perspective, disposability is not an accidental byproduct but a design-compatible outcome. The lower the friction involved in disengagement, the more readily users can cycle through social options, maintain perpetual availability, and remain captive to platform infrastructures. The "freedom" to disappear is therefore intertwined with the economic imperative to keep users searching, comparing, and returning.

Digital relational dissolution is often driven by three overlapping dynamics. First, convenience renders ghosting an apparently efficient alternative to emotionally laborious conversation. Second, attraction and selection within abundant digital marketplaces encourage continual comparison and "upgrade" behavior. Third, safety concerns make digital withdrawal a necessary protective strategy, particularly for women and other vulnerable users facing harassment or coercion (LeFebvre et al., 2019). As mentioned in **Figure 1** these drivers complicate simplistic moral condemnation. At the same time, they do not eliminate the harm produced when silence is weaponized, ambiguity is prolonged, or blocking is deployed as unilateral social erasure.



Source: Author's Creation (**Figure 1**)

The remainder of the essay proceeds from the architectural production of visibility to the embodied consequences of attachment disruption, then to the neuropsychology of social pair and finally to orbiting, blocking, and design ethics. This sequence is essential: awareness cues first transform silence into meaning; attachment theory explains why that meaning is experienced as injury; neuroscience clarifies why the injury is somatic rather than merely cognitive; and the ethics of design emerge once these mechanisms are recognized as structurally produced rather than individually idiosyncratic.

3. The Architecture of Silence: Awareness Cues and Gamification:

Platform affordances—the specific functions made possible by an interface's design—are the primary catalysts for digital relational distress.

Digital Affordance	Psychological Impact
Read Receipts	Provides "technological proof of intent"; transforms silence into active ostracism.
Last Seen Status	Facilitates social surveillance; triggers hyper vigilance and compulsive checking.
Public Activity Feeds	Drives "social surveillance"; reveals the intentionality of silence when the ghoster is active elsewhere.
Gamified Continuity (e.g., Snapstreaks)	Heightens social pressure to respond; increases sensitivity to "interrupted" connection.

1) **Awareness Cues:** Technological features designed to facilitate "ambient awareness" often act as instruments of ostracism. The "read receipt" (e.g., What Sapp's "Double Blue Ticks") serves as technological proof of intentional ignoring. For the recipient, these cues remove the benefit of the doubt, providing empirical evidence that a

message was "visualized" but consciously disregarded.

2) **Gamification:** The gamification of social continuity, such as "Snap streaks" on Snap chat, creates an intense social pressure to respond within a rigid timeframe (Thomas & Dubar, 2021). These features incentivize hyper-visibility, meaning that any rupture in the gamified continuity is experienced not as a lapse in time, but as a deliberate relational injury.

3) **Digital Affordances vs. Psychological Impact: 4. Theoretical Framework: Attachment Styles in the Digital Ecosystem:** Attachment theory provides the essential clinical framework for understanding how digital silence disrupts nervous system regulation.

1) **Avoidant Attachment:** Digital platforms provide a haven for avoidant strategies. Ghosting serves as a "modern-day manifestation" of withdrawal (Powell et al., 2021), allowing the initiator to maintain power and distance while bypassing the vulnerability of a direct termination.
2) **Anxious Attachment:** For those with anxious attachment, digital silence triggers intense rumination and "self-blame" (Ganguly, 2024). These individuals often interpret ambiguous loss as a direct indictment of their worth, leading to hyper vigilance and a recursive loop of phone-checking.
3) **Rejection Sensitivity (RS) and the Indian Youth Context**: While RS typically predicts a decline in self-esteem, recent data on Indian youth presents an "unexpected outcome" (Kaur, 2025). In this collectivist context, a weak but significant positive relationship was found between ghosting and self-esteem. This suggests that some youth may maintain or even strengthen their self-concept through resilience or by de-emphasizing romantic influences in favor of external sources of worth like academic or familial achievements. This suggests that while RS leads to hyper vigilance, cultural frameworks can mediate the impact of digital rejection.
    a) *5.* **Ghosting as Cyber-Ostracism: Neuropsychological Parallels to Pain** Reframing ghosting through Williams' Temporal Need-Threat Model allows us to map the trajectory of the injury across three stages: the reflexive phase (initial pain and distress), the reflective phase (rumination and coping), and the resignation phase (long-term inability to trust).

4) **The Anatomy of Ghosting** A central component of this experience is "epiphanic communication." As Mehta (2019) notes, this is the moment of revelation where the recipient realizes that the silence is not a delay, but the message itself. The unanswered communication is the demonstration of intent.

Reflexive Phase: The feeling and response when someone ghosts you is instant and involuntary. The brain is hurt by the lack of sound and emotional wellbeing decreases almost immediately. This is not just a lack of communication, it is an attack on the four deeply human needs: Belonging, self-worth, sense of control and sense of mattering to someone.

Reflective Phase: After the initial shock there is a mental strain. The person makes effort to understand why the other didn't say anything; they may play back what went on before and try to find some reason why they stopped talking. In fact, there is no moment of clarity, no conversation that clarifies here, there is no closure. Rather, it's a seemingly endless cycle of unanswered queries.

Resignation Phase: If ghosting becomes a habit, it can take its toll. They slowly come to feel like they have no control over their situation — their emotional tampons get used up and helplessness creeps in. This often does not lead to a real moving on but rather means that they're not motivated or confident enough to go out there again.

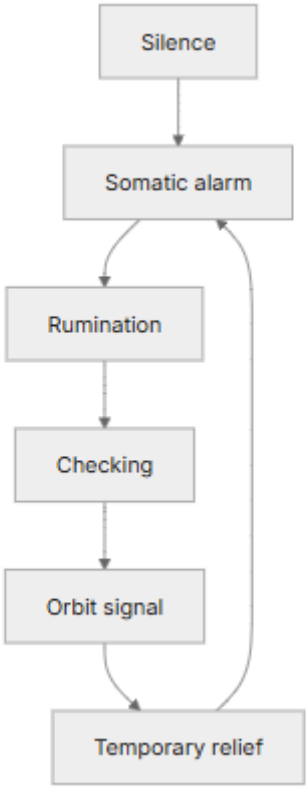
1) **Scientific Integration** The impact of this ostracism is measurable. Unexpected rejection triggers "cardiac deceleration"—a literal slowing of the heart rate (Timmermans et al., 2020). Unusual occasions of social rejection have been found to trigger a measurable cardiac deceleration (slowing down of the heart rate), which is seen as a physiological alarm signal in response to sudden rejection.
2) Endogenous μ-opioid signaling has been shown to be dysregulated when experiencing a prolonged period of digital silence (without expected communication). With time this neurochemical change seems to make people more sensitive to the next time they are rejected, and more neurobiologically sensitive to further social exclusion.
3) Furthermore, neuroimaging confirms that social exclusion activates the anterior cingulate cortex, the brain's primary processing center for physical pain. Digital rejection is not a metaphor; it is a neurological event.Digital rejection is a literal description of emotional pain: it can be seen and measured in the brain's activation and body's reaction.The Affective Pain Network was established in 1996.Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies of social exclusion revealed that key structures involved in the affective component of physical pain – such as the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (dACC) and anterior insula – are also active in response to social exclusion. In short, on the brain level of these fundamental neural substrates, the pain of exclusion cannot be clearly distinguished from the pain of damage to the body.The autonomic and opioidergic responses are to be expected. Unanticipated social rejection not only affects central neural activation, but also measurable autonomic changes.

6. Orbiting: The Neurological Trap of Intermittent Reinforcement

Orbiting differs from clean ghosting because it preserves ambiguous contact while eliminating meaningful communication. A like, story view, or sporadic appearance in one's digital orbit signals continued visibility without relational commitment. The effect is especially destabilizing because it prevents the finality that ordinarily enables grief. Rather than being fully released, the recipient remains suspended in a semi-social limbo, unsure whether the relationship is over, merely paused, or covertly monitored.

The psychological consequences of this ambiguity are not identical to ghosting. Pancani, Aureli, and Riva's experimental work suggests that orbiting may partially buffer victims relative to clean ghosting because the ambiguous signals prevent complete social erasure (Pancani et al., 2022). This finding complicates the argument that orbiting is simply more harmful. It may soften the shock of total disappearance by preserving a trace of connection, however minimal. Yet this buffering is fragile and may come at the cost of prolonged uncertainty. A temporary reduction in abandonment intensity can be offset by a longer-duration cycle of hope, inference, and self-doubt.

Orbiting is thus best understood as an intermittent reinforcement schedule. The nervous system is organized around unpredictable returns of attention, which function much like variable-ratio rewards in behavioral psychology. As mentioned in **Figure 2** a story view or brief like may deliver a momentary relief response, but because the signal lacks genuine relational follow-through, it reinforces checking rather than resolving uncertainty. The person learns that persistence may occasionally produce a reward, and that learning is precisely what makes the cycle difficult to exit.



Source: Author's Creation (**Figure 2**)

The orbiting relief cycle begins with triggering silence. Messages go unanswered, calls cease, and the absence of direct communication becomes a daily presence. Somatic activation follows: tightened jaw, shallow breathing, chest heat, and muscular bracing. These sensations are often dismissed as anxiety, but they are more accurately understood as embodied anticipation of social threat. Cognitive rumination then attempts to solve the silence by replaying prior exchanges, scrutinizing timestamps, and searching for missed cues. The false repair occurs when the ghoster reappears in a low-cost way, such as liking a post or viewing a story, briefly easing distress without restoring relational integrity.

The design of social platforms makes this cycle especially potent. Because viewing and liking are low-effort actions, they can be deployed without committing to conversation. This asymmetry enables a kind of pseudo-intimacy: the ghoster remains perceptibly present while withholding any effort required for repair. The recipient receives just enough signal to remain engaged, but not enough to obtain closure. In platform-economy terms, orbiting is ideal because it sustains attention while minimizing communicative labor.

Yet orbiting also reveals a deeper cultural shift. It blurs the boundary between absence and presence, turning relational life into a stream of semiotic residues rather than accountable exchanges. If ghosting is disappearance, orbiting is persistence without responsibility. Both normalize disposability, but orbiting may do so more insidiously because it preserves the fantasy of connection. The result is a chronic state of hopeful vigilance that can be more difficult to name than outright abandonment.

The transitional insight here is crucial: the same neuropsychological systems that make rejection painful also make orbiting seductive. Because the brain is sensitive to occasional rewards following uncertainty, intermittent digital traces can strengthen attachment rather than weaken it. This is why orbiting is not merely a softer

version of ghosting. It is an affective trap that converts uncertainty into a self-sustaining loop.

7. Digital Severance: Blocking as a Motif of Power and Control

Blocking and unfriending represent the most decisive forms of digital severance because they impose unilateral break-up permanency. Unlike ghosting, which leaves uncertainty intact, blocking often declares the relationship over by eliminating access altogether. This can be experienced as an assertion of power and control, especially when the recipient is denied the opportunity for account-making or closure (LeFebvre et al., 2019), (Pancani et al., 2022). The initiator controls not only the end of interaction but the very conditions under which the end can be understood.

Blocking is therefore distinct from ghosting in temporal structure. Ghosting can extend indecision by withholding explanation; blocking can end indecision by foreclosing all further exchange. Yet the latter is not necessarily less traumatic. When blocking follows conflict or coercion, it may function as a necessary safety practice. When deployed as punishment, avoidance, or domination, it can operate as symbolic erasure. The ethical meaning depends on context, but the structural feature remains the same: one person controls the terms of visibility, accessibility, and interpretation.

Research on breakup strategy suggests that these practices are common across youth relationships and often reciprocal over time. Participants frequently report being both initiators and recipients of ghosting (LeFebvre et al., 2019). This reciprocity matters because it indicates that youth do not merely experience digital severance; they also learn to reproduce it. Digital norms are internalized through repetition. What begins as an exception becomes a script, and what begins as a script becomes relational common sense?

There are, however, important counterarguments. LeFebvre et al. and related safety literature show that ghosting can be a necessary self-protection tool, especially for women facing harassment, coercion, or escalation risks (LeFebvre et al., 2019). In these contexts, direct termination may be unsafe, and disappearance may be the least harmful available strategy. Similarly, research by Forrai, Koban, and Matthes suggests that communication overload predicts romantic ghosting, implying that not all disappearing is motivated by disposability or moral disregard (Forrai et al., 2023). These findings demand a non-punitive framework. A trauma-informed analysis must preserve the distinction between ghosting as predation and ghosting as self-defense.

At the same time, the existence of protective ghosting does not negate the relational harm of unilateral severance. It simply reframes the issue as one of constrained choice. In many cases, the available options are not "direct honesty" versus "cold cruelty," but safety versus exposure, or bandwidth exhaustion versus emotional accountability. This is where platform design becomes ethically relevant. If systems encouraged structured exits, message archiving, and low-risk termination pathways, they might reduce the need for abrupt disappearance while still preserving user safety.

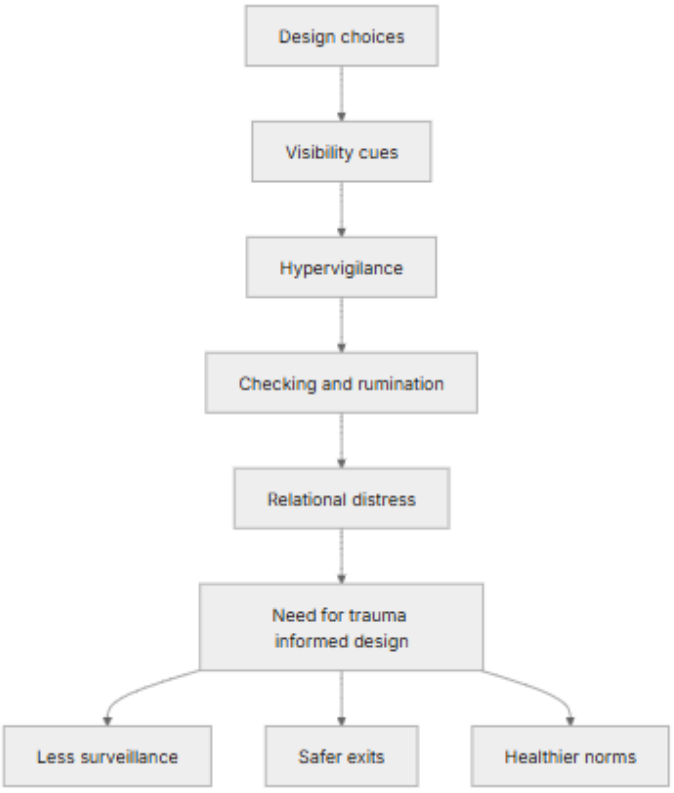
The social and personality literature adds another layer. Jonason et al. link ghosting behavior to dark triad traits in some contexts (LeFebvre et al., 2019), and work on pathological personality traits suggests that ghosting evokes more negative emotion and paranoia than direct breakup, regardless of whether trait moderation is strong (Fanti et al., 2023). Yet it would be analytically unsound to collapse all blocking into narcissistic manipulation. Doing so ignores the structural pressures of over communication, harassment, and emotional fatigue. The more convincing conclusion is that digital severance is a technologically enabled practice whose meaning ranges from defense to domination.

8. Conclusion: Toward Trauma-Informed Platform Design

Digital architecture is not a neutral setting; it actively shapes interpersonal ethics. Interfaces guide users toward particular norms of contact, response, and withdrawal. The present normalization of ghosting suggests that convenience has displaced accountability so gradually that many users no longer perceive the moral compromise embedded in platform design. Holmes' account of young adults' ghosting narratives captures this logic succinctly: "Something would've been better than nothing" (LeFebvre et al., 2019). The statement is powerful precisely because it names absence as harm.

This essay has argued that digital relational trauma emerges from a layered process. Platform cues transform silence into evidence; attachment systems convert evidence into threat; neuropsychological networks encode threat as pain; and intermittent reinforcement extends pain into compulsive checking. Orbiting, blocking, and ghosting are not identical phenomena, but they participate in the same ecology of disposability. They teach youth that relationships can be entered casually, exited silently, and sustained ambiguously without moral remainder.

The policy and educational implications are significant. First, digital literacy must expand beyond technical competency to include socio-emotional literacy. Young people need explicit instruction in recognizing somatic cues, identifying hypervigilance, and understanding how platform signals can amplify rejection sensitivity. Second, relational education should normalize direct termination when safe and feasible, rather than treating disappearance as the default exit strategy. As mentioned in **Figure 3**Third, trauma-informed design should minimize intrusive awareness cues whose primary function is to facilitate surveillance and proof of ostracism.



Source: Author's Creation (**Figure 3**)

None of this requires naïveté about the realities of digital safety. In some circumstances,

blocking and disappearance are indispensable. But trauma-informed ethics begins by refusing to romanticize frictionless severance as harmless convenience. It recognizes that the smallest design decisions can reorganize emotional life at scale. If platform economies profit from perpetual engagement, then relational integrity will remain subordinate unless deliberately redesigned.

In summary, moving toward trauma-informed platform design requires critical examination of digital environments and a commitment to reshaping them in ways that honor the emotional well-being of users. By recognizing the profound impact of digital architecture on interpersonal ethics, fostering somatic resilience, promoting direct communication where possible, and advocating for thoughtful design choices, it becomes possible to cultivate a more humane digital landscape. Youth do not simply inhabit these systems; they are formed by them. The ethical challenge is therefore not only to teach resilience within digital culture, but to redesign digital culture so that resilience is not continually demanded as compensation for structural harm.

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Chapter 40: Co-Creativity with Generative AI in Art Education: Toward a Prompt-Based Pedagogy for Developing Critical Literacy and Ethical Awareness in Emerging Creative Knowledge Systems

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Abstract:

The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into creative practice is reconfiguring pedagogical frameworks in art and design education, yet empirical accounts of how structured prompt-based pedagogies affect students' technical, critical, and ethical development remain scarce. This research-intervention examines how a structured "scientific prompt engineering" pedagogy can simultaneously enhance technical proficiency, critical literacy, and ethical awareness among emerging digital creators. A 14-week mixed-methods case study was conducted with 21 Master's students in Digital Animation at the Higher Institute of Multimedia Arts of Kairouan (ISAMK), Kairouan, Tunisia. Participants followed a four-phase prompt-engineering model within a three-phase pedagogical workshop, and their co-creative process was documented through pre/post questionnaires, weekly observations, digital portfolios, reflective journals, and juried final productions. The central case, Invisible Links, a micro-animated narrative built from 60 iterative prompts, illustrates the workflow in depth. Quantitative results show significant gains in creative exploration (+90%, $p < .01$, $r = .55$), critical awareness of AI systems (+76%, $p < .001$, $r = .58$), and technical mastery of generative tools (+1.7/5, $p < .001$, $r = .62$). Thematic analysis ($\kappa > .85$) identified four cross-cutting dimensions: a decision-abundance paradox, the emergence of a specialized prompt language as an epistemic practice, the reassertion of human creative intentionality, and an augmented ethical awareness of algorithmic bias. The study contributes an empirically grounded definition of "generative literacy" and a transferable three-phase pedagogical model that positions the educator as a techno-critical mediator, with direct implications for the responsible integration of AI in art education and for the design of ethical safeguards applicable to younger and more vulnerable learner populations.

Keywords: *generative AI in education; prompt-based pedagogy; generative literacy; co-creativity; critical digital literacy; creative knowledge systems*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) systems constitutes a paradigmatic shift in pedagogical practice across the visual arts and design disciplines (Carroll, 2023). Capable of producing text, images, and animated sequences from natural-language instructions, these technologies are reshaping not only creative production chains but also the epistemological foundations of artistic learning (Fawns, 2022). Within digital animation specifically, generative tools promise to accelerate exploratory phases of production while simultaneously raising fundamental questions about learners' creative autonomy, the evolving role of the educator, and the ethical implications of human–machine co-creation (Gourlay, 2023).

Early scholarship on AI in creative education tended to adopt a dichotomous framing, presenting GenAI either as a threat to artistic authenticity or as an unprecedented opportunity for optimization (Broussard, 2023; Zylinska, 2022). More recent work has moved past this binary to focus on designing pedagogical devices that integrate these tools reflexively and critically (Gerrard & Knight, 2024; Pang, 2023). The pressing question is no longer whether GenAI should be used in the classroom, but how it can be structured to serve creative emancipation and the formation of students' critical judgment. This shift resonates with broader debates on the future of creative skills in a labor market increasingly mediated by automation and augmentation (Bakhshi et al., 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023).

It is within this context that the present research-intervention was conducted, situated in a Master's-level digital design workshop in Tunisia, where the creation of animated micro-narratives served as a privileged experimental ground for a pedagogy of human–machine co-creativity.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Human–AI Co-Creativity

Contemporary theories of creative cognition increasingly recognize human–AI collaboration as a distinct creative modality, situated neither within traditional tool-use paradigms nor within full delegation to the machine (Bilda & Gero, 2023). Whereas tool-use paradigms preserve unilateral human control, co-creativity foregrounds an iterative dialogue between human intention and algorithmic suggestion, in which each iteration refines both the creative output and the user's understanding of the system's affordances (Cetinic & She, 2022). This dialogic process entails a dynamic distribution of roles: the human contributes intention, aesthetic judgment, and contextual sensitivity, while the AI system contributes combinatorial exploration, execution speed, and a diversity of generative possibilities.

1.2.2 Prompt Engineering as an Emerging Literacy

Prompt engineering the art of formulating instructions for generative AI systems is evolving rapidly from a narrow technical skill into a foundational critical literacy (Klingemann, 2022). Effective prompting requires linguistic precision, an understanding of the technical constraints of specific generative models, and sensitivity to how contextual framing shapes outputs (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022). In creative contexts, this competence extends further to encompass aesthetic sensibility, stylistic awareness, and the capacity to anticipate and actively compensate for algorithmic bias (Benjamin, 2019).

1.2.3 Critical Algorithmic Literacy in Creative Contexts

Beyond technical mastery, students must develop a substantive understanding of the logics underlying generative systems: bias embedded in training data, model opacity, the complex relationship between prompt and output, and the broader social implications of

algorithmic technologies (Crawford, 2021; Noble, 2018). This form of augmented media literacy is a precondition for the responsible and inventive use of generative tools, and it distinguishes a critically literate creator from a merely competent operator of AI systems (Kim & Lee, 2024).

1.2.4 Ethics and the Protection of Young Audiences

In light of contemporary concerns regarding the protection of children and adolescents in digital environments, the theoretical framework adopted here also integrates an explicit ethical dimension concerning the use of AI with young or vulnerable audiences. Recent scholarship on AI ethics in education (UNESCO, 2023; Council of Europe, 2024) emphasizes principles such as algorithmic transparency, systematic human mediation, and learners' right to an emancipatory digital education. The pedagogical model advanced in this study is deliberately oriented toward forming not passive "users" of AI, but "creative citizens" capable of dialoguing with generative systems while preserving their autonomy and their humanity.

1.3 Research Gap and Originality

While a growing body of literature addresses either the technical affordances of GenAI in creative production (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022; Cetinic & She, 2022) or the ethical risks of algorithmic bias in generative systems (Benjamin, 2019; Crawford, 2021; Noble, 2018), few empirical studies examine how a single, structured pedagogical device can simultaneously cultivate technical proficiency, critical algorithmic literacy, and ethical awareness within the same learning trajectory. Existing case studies of GenAI in animation education (Kim & Lee, 2024) document creative outcomes but rarely formalize the prompt-construction process itself as a teachable, evaluable competence. This study addresses that gap by (a) formalizing a replicable four-step "scientific prompt engineering" methodology, (b) empirically testing its pedagogical effects using a mixed-methods, sequential explanatory design, and (c) explicitly connecting the resulting model to the ethical imperative of responsible AI use with young and vulnerable audiences — a concern that remains largely absent from existing GenAI-in-education scholarship. The originality of the contribution is therefore threefold: theoretical (an empirically grounded definition of "generative literacy"), methodological (a validated multidimensional prompt-evaluation framework), and practical (a transferable three-phase workshop model).

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

This research is organized around two central research questions:

- RQ1: How can a pedagogical device structured around co-creativity with generative AI simultaneously increase students' formal creative exploration and their critical capacity toward algorithmic productions?
- RQ2: What specific competencies emerge when students learn to translate their artistic intentions into "scientific prompts" for generative systems?

Three complementary objectives guide the study:

- Pedagogical objective: to design, implement, and evaluate a hybrid workshop model integrating generative AI as a co-creativity partner.
- Methodological objective: to develop and formalize a "scientific prompt engineering" methodology as both a creative and a critical competence.
- Ethical objective: to propose a framework for the responsible integration of AI in art education, aligned with the protection of young audiences and the development of informed digital citizenship.

1.5 Organization of the Article

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 details the mixed-methods research design, participants, pedagogical intervention, data collection instruments, and analytic procedures. Section 3 presents the quantitative and qualitative results, anchored in the in-depth case study of Invisible Links. Section 4 discusses these findings in relation to the existing literature and their theoretical, ethical, and practical implications. Section 5 concludes with a synthesis of contributions and directions for future research.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), combining quantitative and qualitative strands within a logic of methodological triangulation. Its principal component is an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), an approach well suited to developing an in-depth understanding of an emerging pedagogical phenomenon within its natural setting and to evaluating innovative pedagogical devices (Yin, 2014). The quantitative strand (pre/post questionnaires) establishes the magnitude and statistical significance of change, while the qualitative strand (reflective journals, portfolios, observations, and the in-depth case study) explains the mechanisms underlying that change.

2.2 Study Context and Participants

The study was conducted over 14 weeks with 21 Master's students (14 women, 7 men; ages 22–28, M = 24.3, SD = 1.8) enrolled in the second year of a Master's program in Animated Narrative Design at the Higher Institute of Multimedia Arts of Kairouan (ISAMK), Kairouan, Tunisia. All participants held solid competencies in 2D/3D animation and narrative construction (a minimum of three years of practice) but had no prior significant experience with generative AI tools in a creative context.

To anticipate a future transposition of the model to younger audiences, exploratory interviews were additionally conducted, outside the main sample, with three specialized educators and five volunteer children (ages 9–11). These interviews were used solely to identify the adaptations that a younger-audience version of the model would require in terms of language, interface design, attention span, and parental mediation; they did not contribute data to the quantitative or thematic analyses reported in Section 3.

2.3 Pedagogical Intervention: The Three-Phase Model

The workshop was structured around three progressive phases, summarized in Table 1.

Phase	Weeks	Main Objective	AI Tools Used	Competencies Developed
Phase 1: Research & Inspiration	1–4	Visually explore and generate ideas	Nano Banana Pro, Flow, Google AI Studio	Visual exploration, basic prompting, curation
Phase 2: Narrative Development	5–9	Build scripts and dialogue	DeepSeek, ChatGPT-4, Claude	Assisted narration, critical dialogue, prompt refinement

Phase 3: Final Production	10–14	Produce a 60–90s micro-fiction	Full toolset + editing software	Creative synthesis, critical evaluation, augmented project management

At the core of the intervention lies a four-step "scientific prompt engineering" methodology designed to translate artistic intentions into effective algorithmic instructions:

- Step 1 Intention analysis: deconstructing creative objectives into visual, narrative, and emotional components; identifying success criteria; formalizing them as keywords and constraints.
- Step 2 Parameter mapping: identifying the prompt components that correspond to desired outputs; selecting technical parameters specific to the model in use.
- Step 3 Iterative testing: systematically varying prompt elements; documenting outputs and adjustments; building a personal learning database of prompt–output pairs.
- Step 4 Bias evaluation: recognizing potential algorithmic biases; actively compensating through inclusive formulations; critically auditing produced outputs.

Student prompts were evaluated using a multidimensional framework spanning four weighted dimensions, summarized in Table 2.

Dimension	Criteria	Metric	Weight
Technical precision	Parameter conformity, stylistic coherence	1–5 score	25%
Creative alignment	Fulfilment of artistic intention, narrative relevance	1–5 score	30%
Algorithmic efficiency	Token optimization, time/quality ratio	Efficiency ratio	20%
Bias mitigation	Output diversity, avoidance of stereotypes	1–5 ethical audit score	25%

Inter-rater reliability, measured with Cohen's Kappa, exceeded $\kappa = .85$ across all four dimensions, indicating satisfactory methodological robustness for the evaluation framework.

2.4 Data Collection

Five complementary data sources were mobilized: (1) pre/post questionnaires on a 1–5 Likert scale measuring perceptions of AI, creative confidence, and perceived competencies; (2) weekly ethnographic observations conducted by the instructor-researcher; (3) exhaustive digital portfolios documenting the entirety of students' prompt iterations and corresponding outputs; (4) structured reflective journals (25,000 words in total across the cohort); and (5) final productions evaluated by a mixed jury of educators and industry professionals.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for paired samples ($\alpha = .05$), and effect size estimation (Cohen's r), computed in SPSS 27.0. Qualitative data were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis procedure, with independent double coding ($\kappa > .85$) conducted in NVivo 14. Systematic triangulation cross-referenced findings across all five data sources to strengthen the credibility of the interpretive claims.

2.6 Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness

Reliability of the qualitative coding was established through independent double-coding with a Cohen's Kappa exceeding .85 for both the thematic analysis and the multidimensional prompt evaluation. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic-inquiry criteria, credibility was supported through data triangulation across five sources; dependability through a documented, auditable coding protocol; and transferability through thick description of the pedagogical context and case study. Quantitative validity was supported by the use of validated Likert-type instruments and non-parametric paired-sample testing appropriate for the sample size. Methodological limitations, including sample size and single-institution context, are addressed in Section 4.3.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles governing human and social science research: informed consent signed by all participants, data anonymization, a guarantee of non-maleficence, algorithmic transparency, systematic human mediation, participants' right to withdraw without penalty, and compliance with GDPR data-protection standards. For the exploratory interviews involving minors, parental authorization and age-appropriate mediation were secured prior to any data collection.

3. Results

3.1 Case Study: Invisible Links

The in-depth case study focuses on Invisible Links, an animated micro-fiction developed as part of a Master's thesis project in Animated Image Design. The narrative explores the telepathic bond between two twin sisters, Shams and Kmar, separated by distance yet connected by an intuitive link that transcends space and time. The project was selected for the depth of its reflection on affective bonds in the digital age, the quality of its AI-augmented creative process, and the richness of its reflexive documentation.

The collaborative workflow unfolded across four stages: a hand-drawn conceptual sketch grounded in the student's personal experience of twinship; AI generation of key visual assets via Gemini and Flow; iterative critical evaluation with the instructor and peers; and final curation and integration in After Effects and Premiere Pro.



Figure 1. Set and environment design boards generated during Phase 1 (visual exploration), showing stylistic and chromatic variations of the same interior spaces.

Environment and set-design boards such as those in Figure 1 were used to converge on a stable visual universe before narrative work began: successive prompt iterations varied palette, lighting, and material rendering while holding spatial layout constant, allowing students to compare options side by side and justify their final choice to the instructor and peers.



Figure 2. Storyboard development for Invisible Links, from rough black-and-white sequencing to color key frames, illustrating the transition from Phase 1 exploration to Phase 2 narrative structuring.

As shown in Figure 2, the storyboard evolved from loosely sketched panels — used to test pacing and framing — into fully rendered color key frames once the narrative sequence had been validated. This progression mirrors the shift, documented in the reflective journals, from open-ended visual exploration toward increasingly intentional, narrative-driven prompting.

In total, 60 prompts were generated across the three pedagogical phases, with formulations growing progressively more sophisticated, as shown in Table 3.

Phase	Prompts (n)	Avg. Words	Representative Example	Biases Compensated

Phase 1	25	15–20	"Brown-haired girl, long hair, shy smile, cartoon style"	12%
Phase 2	20	40–60	"Close-up shot, joyful expression, warm lighting, cinematic style"	45%
Phase 3	15	80–120	"Female character, 20–25 years old, surprised/joyful expression, Rembrandt lighting, warm palette, avoiding gender stereotypes"	78%

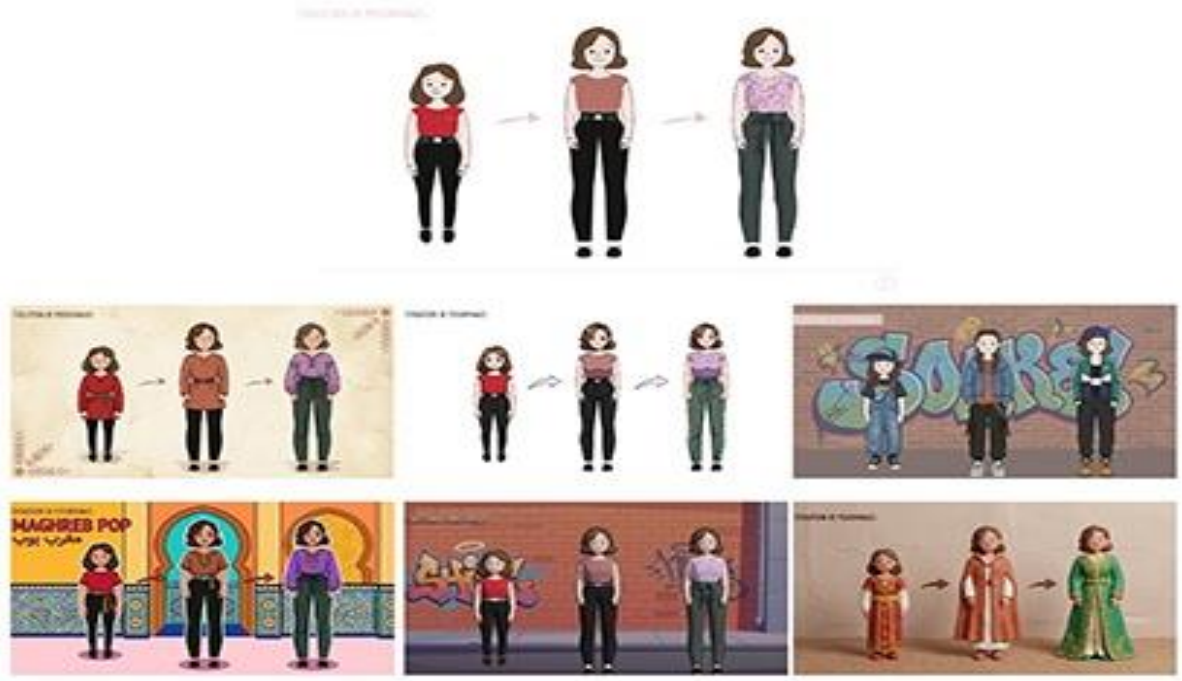


Figure 3. Character design exploration for the protagonist, showing outfit, palette, and cultural-styling variations (including a "Maghreb Pop" treatment) produced across successive prompt iterations.

Figure 3 illustrates the character-design iterations referenced in Table 3: as prompts grew longer and more constrained (Phase 3 averaging 80–120 words), students used them not only to refine likeness and outfit continuity across shots, but also to deliberately test culturally specific stylistic treatments and screen for unwanted stereotyping — a concrete instance of the bias-mitigation step (Step 4) described in Section 2.3.

3.2 Quantitative Results

Table 4 reports the pre/post evolution of self-perceived competencies (1–5 Likert scale) across the 21 participants.

Competency	Pre-workshop M (SD)	Post-workshop M (SD)	Δ	p	r

AI technical mastery	2.1 (0.9)	3.8 (0.7)	+1.7	< .001	.62
Creative exploration	3.2 (0.8)	4.5 (0.5)	+1.3	< .01	.55
Critical awareness	2.8 (1.0)	4.2 (0.6)	+1.4	< .001	.58
Human–AI collaboration	2.5 (0.9)	4.0 (0.7)	+1.5	< .001	.60

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; r = Cohen's effect size; Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for paired samples. All improvements were statistically significant, with moderate-to-large effect sizes (r > .50). Additional indicators corroborate these results: 90% of students reported having explored "substantially more" narrative and visual options; 76% reported a "substantially higher" awareness of the ethical biases and limitations of AI tools; and 100% intended to use GenAI in future projects, with 86% specifying they would do so "selectively and critically."

3.3 Qualitative Findings: Four Core Themes

Thematic analysis of the reflective journals and semi-structured interviews yielded four principal themes.

Theme 1 — The Decision-Abundance Paradox

The ease of generating large volumes of content produced a form of "decisional paralysis" in 62% of students during Phase 1. This paradox was progressively resolved through the acquisition of critical curation skills and the establishment of explicit selection criteria.

> *"I had too many options, I no longer knew what to choose."* (Student 7)

> *"The AI overwhelmed me before it helped me."* (Student 14)

Theme 2 — Emergence of a Specialized Prompt Language

Students progressively developed a sophisticated technical and aesthetic vocabulary (e.g., "Rembrandt lighting,""asymmetrical composition,""monochromatic palette"). Eighty-five percent reported an improved capacity to verbalize their artistic intentions.

> *"Before, I would say 'I want it to look nice.' Now, I know how to say 'I want a wide shot, with warm lighting, shallow depth of field, and an earthy color palette.'"* (Student 3)

Theme 3 — Reaffirmation of Intentional Artistic Agency

Seventy-eight percent of students felt that AI had helped them clarify their artistic "voice." Intensive use of algorithmic generation paradoxically reinforced the value students placed on human creative intentionality.

> *"The more I master the AI, the more I realize that what matters is what I myself bring to it."* (Student 11)

> *"At first, I was afraid the AI would erase my creative signature. But by learning to formulate precise prompts, I discovered the opposite was true."* (reflective journal excerpt)

Theme 4 — Development of an Augmented Ethical Awareness

Eighty-nine percent of students explicitly mentioned gender or ethnicity bias in their reflections, and 67% modified their prompts to counteract observed biases. A critical stance toward generative models emerged clearly across the cohort.

> *"I no longer trust AI blindly. I know it has blind spots."* (Student 19)

4. Discussion

4.1 Pedagogical and Theoretical Contributions

This study demonstrates that a pedagogical framework structured around scientific prompt engineering can transform generative AI from a production tool into an authentic learning partner. The model fosters deep creative exploration while simultaneously developing critical awareness of algorithmic systems, aligning with recent work on augmented digital literacy (Pang, 2023; Gerrard & Knight, 2024) and extending prior case-study evidence from animation education (Kim & Lee, 2024) by formalizing the underlying pedagogical mechanism rather than describing its outcomes alone.

The emergence of a specialized "prompt language" suggests the development of a new form of literacy — generative literacy — that combines technical competence, aesthetic sensibility, and critical reflexivity. We propose this construct as a complement to traditional media literacy, essential for twenty-first-century creators operating within an increasingly algorithmic media environment (World Economic Forum, 2023; Bakhshi et al., 2023).

The three-phase model offers an operational framework for the progressive integration of AI into artistic training, respecting learners' cognitive and creative developmental stages. It highlights the instructor's essential role as a techno-critical mediator and guarantor of the ethical frame, resonating with Fawns's (2022) conception of pedagogy as an entanglement of technologies, practices, and values.

4.2 Ethical Implications and the Protection of Young Audiences

This research offers several essential ethical contributions: (1) a responsible design model incorporating safeguards transferable to contexts involving young audiences; (2) a framework for training educators in techno-critical mediation competencies; and (3) a creative-empowerment model that forms "creative citizens" capable of dialoguing with machines while preserving their humanity. Art education in the age of AI cannot be ethically neutral: it must explicitly address questions of algorithmic bias, representation, equity, and the protection of vulnerable individuals, particularly children and adolescents (UNESCO, 2023; Council of Europe, 2024).

4.3 Limitations and Critical Perspectives

Several limitations warrant caution in interpreting these findings. The small sample size (n = 21) and its institutional homogeneity limit generalizability. The initial cognitive overload reported by 38% of participants during Phase 1 underscores the need for a more gradual pedagogical progression. The rapid evolution of AI tools requires ongoing updating of training content. Finally, the transposition of this model to younger audiences has not yet been empirically tested and remains an important avenue for future research; the exploratory interviews with children and specialized educators reported in Section 2.2 informed design considerations only and should not be read as empirical validation of the model with minors.

5. Conclusion

This research-intervention demonstrates the feasibility and effectiveness of a structured pedagogical model integrating generative AI into digital animation education. By positioning AI as a co-creativity partner and developing a scientific prompt-engineering methodology, the workshop facilitated the simultaneous development of technical, creative, critical, and ethical competencies. Empirical results significant gains across all measured dimensions, with moderate-to-large effect sizes substantiate the validity of the proposed model. Regarding RQ1, the intervention simultaneously increased students' formal creative exploration (+90%) and their critical capacity (+76%), a dual movement made possible by the articulation between the exploratory freedom afforded by AI and the critical mediation exercised by the instructor and peers. Regarding RQ2, the emergent competencies include a sophisticated technical and aesthetic vocabulary, heightened awareness of creative parameters, critical curation capacity, ethical vigilance toward algorithmic bias, and a reaffirmation of human creative intentionality as a central value. These findings open several avenues for future research and practice: longitudinal studies to assess the durable professional impact of acquired competencies; comparative studies across different institutional and cultural contexts; empirical transposition of the model to child and adolescent audiences; development of dedicated pedagogical platforms for prompt engineering; and the design of certification pathways in "Applied Generative Literacy" and "Creative Prompt Engineering." Ultimately, the future of creative education in the age of AI lies neither in the rejection nor in the uncritical adoption of generative technologies, but in the development of sophisticated pedagogies that transform these tools into levers of creative emancipation and critical thought. The fundamental challenge is to train generations capable of dialoguing with machines, mastering their codes, critiquing their limitations, and infusing them with what constitutes human singularity: intentionality, emotion, ethics, and the capacity to forge authentic connections.

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Chapter 41: Echoes of Humanity: Rethinking Caste, Justice and Dignity in Modern Dalit Literary Narratives

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Abstract

Canonical Indian literary texts excluded a vast section of Indians in order to obscure internal discrimination and division based on class, caste, gender and religion. Therefore, my attention is to present: centuries of caste-based structure in India have left a legacy of Inequality in access to land, education, occupation etc., a sense of the nuanced of Dalit literature, a critical lens through which we can explore the interplay between objective realities and subjective experiences.It invites us to interrogate our moral values, ethical assumptions, socially constructed definitions, and our evolving understanding of what it means to be human. In other words, it deepens our engagement with questions of morality, ethics, social definitions, and the very ways in which we perceive and interpret humanity.The present study is also an attempt to explore how emerging Dalit literature offer a deep understanding of the human desire for the equality, freedom and dignity. These writings do not mere express the lived experiences of the Dalit writers through their works, but also serves as a powerful tool for social change. Critical Dalit writings insists on the hitherto overlooked intersectional aspect of caste, gender, race and class. This study employs interdisciplinary theoretical framework comprising Dalit Literary theory, subaltern studies, Ambedkarite thoughts and intersectionality to provide a nuanced understanding of: the question of justice, dignity and humanity.

Keywords: *Dalit, intersectional, interrogate, Caste, humanity, dignity, justice, subaltern*

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Introduction and Meaning

Several references mentioned that in the 15th century BC the word 'caste' was used by the Portuguese invaders to define the Sanskrit word 'varna'. Or it is said that the History of caste can be traced back to over 3000 years. the ancient text, such as Rigveda, describe a social structure known as Varna system, which categorized society into four main groups: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (laborers). In other words, the emergence of social categories based on occupational and functional distinctions happened. As the time progressed, the functional varna framework transformed into the more stratified *jati* system. It leads to evolved structure with numerous sub-castes based on birth. As historical processes unfolded, the caste system was further complicated by the colonial rule. Using categories of convenience, Indian social identities were invented or constructed during a period that covered roughly the 19th century. The primary aim was to construct a single society with a common law that could easily be watched and governed. To serve the British Indian government's own interests, a regionally diverse and complex system of social identities was "simplified." "There came to be real and material consequences of belonging to one category (like Jain or Scheduled Caste) instead of another," writes Sanjoy Chakravorty, Professor in the College of Liberal Arts at the temple University Philadephia in his article, "Viewpoint: How the British reshaped India's caste system" (*BBC*).

In everyday life, caste identity is experienced and practiced as *jati* (Srinivas, 1976). In his book, *Caste and Race in India*, Ghurye says, caste was considered as central to organized form of division of labour in Aryan society. He further adds, "Castes are small and complete social worlds in themselves marked off definitely from one another though subsisting within the larger society." In his book, *Interrogating Caste*, Dipankar Gupta writes, "we will define the caste system as a form of differentiation wherein the constituent units of the system justify endogamy on the basis of putative biological differences which are semaphored by the ritualization of multiple social practices" (141). According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary: a)*a division of society based on differences of wealth, inherited rank or privilege, profession, occupation, or race. b) one of the hereditary social classes in Hinduism that restrict the occupation of their members and their association with the members of other castes. Therefore, to pronounce caste as mere social system would be erroneous and oversimplification, as it permeates nearly every aspect of life: social, cultural, political, economic, epistemological. According to Dr B R Ambedkar, the structure of caste is maintained through beliefs, culture, traditions, prejudices, social practices, etc. To put it in a more specific way, Ambedkar says. "Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind" (Ambedkar2014).

Towards Conceptualization of Caste and Identity in Modern Dalit Writings

One of the most crucial and powerful literary movements in India is Dalit literature found on what Sharan Kumar Limbale in his *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* says, anubhava (lived experience) rather than imagination. Such as Omprakash Valmiki, celebrated Dalit author of *Joothan,* declared in the preface to his autobiography: "After a long period of procrastination, I started to write. Once again, I had to relive all those miseries, torments, neglects, admonitions. I suffered a deep mental anguish while writing this book. How terribly painful was this unravelling of myself, layer upon layer." Interestingly, for Dalit writers, literature by/for Dalit and marginalized communities is not an artistic expression but a matter of social, political and economic rights. It serves as a form of resistance against caste-based oppression, foregrounding lived experiences of exclusion and exploitation while demanding dignity, equality, and justice. Munshi Premchand, Mulk

Raj Anand, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, BaburaoBagul, NamdeoDhasal, Mannu Bhandari, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Bama, Sharmila Rege, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Meena Kandasamy, ManoranjanByapari and other writers and activists brought out social purpose in their writings rather than mere entertainment and artistic expression in their writings.

The question of Caste hierarchy and Dignity

Historically, the Dalits are treated as outcastes. The varna system remains evident in contemporary social realities. At present time, the caste system in India has become one of the most important means of exploitation and oppression at the hands of ruling class. "The people made outcastes by the Hindu religious order, deemed despicable, polluted, unworthy of life beings whose mere sight in public would bring a cascade of violence upon the entire community" (Suraj Yengde). They are still looked down upon, demeaned as Chandalas and assignedthe lowest social status: They are not just forced to live outside villages but are forbidden access to clean water, temples, and town centers. Shockingly, they are assigned degraded tasks, such as disposing of corpses or manual scavenging.Moreover, the society was afflicted with several evils emerging out of caste discrimination and caste hierarchy. The shadow of a lower caste community person should never fell upon an upper caste person. If it happens, it supposedly defiled an upper caste person. He would not eat or drink anything until he had bathed away the 'polluted effect.' Caste discrimination has become more stringent day by day with the intersection of caste and class. However, several great thinkers voiced their opinions against caste hierarchy. As mahatma Gandhi clearly stated that such divisions are "harmful both to spiritual and national growth" (Basu 151). Rabindranath Tagore severy criticized and condemned the caste system in one of his powerful poems: "My wretched country, those whom you have crushed and trampled, deprived of their rights, made them stand and never drew them close. Share you must their indignities and sufferings (Basu 151).

In Premchand's*Kafan*, Dalits are landless and they seem to be the victim of both caste and poverty. In this work, characters like Ghisu, Madhav (father-son) and Budhia (Madhav's wife) suffers caste oppression. Pus Ki Raat, another short story of Premchand depicts how caste and class positions force a Dalit community into bonded labor with no control over harvests. However, for several Dalit writers Dalit literature: autobiographies, novels, biographies etc. was/is not mere about sorrowful accounts alone but about establishing a discourse in which Dalit literature is rather a revolutionary form of assertion aiming to celebration of dignity of the hitherto marginalized community. Above all, these writings were a part of the movement aiming to annihilation of caste by questioning the inhumane caste-based hierarchy.

In *karukku*, Bama writes, being born in a Dalit family means, "you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear." Every moment of Dalit community is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look at them with disgust "the moment they know our caste."Bama shows the politics of the gaze. In other words, caste discrimination is communicated not only through explicit acts of violence but also through **looks, gestures and bodily reactions.**Bama does not only raisequestions but forces the reader to ask **why Dalit people have been denied qualities that are universally human:**

> How did the upper castes become so elevated? How is it that we have been denigrated?...How is it that people consider us too gross even to sit next to when travelling? They look at us with the same look they would cast on someone suffering from a repulsive

> disease. Wherever we go we suffer blows. And pain. Is there never to be any relief?

Through her writings, Bama and many other Dalit writers exposes caste humiliation and Ambedkar frequently compared caste oppression to slavery. Dr B R Ambedkar, in his Annihilation of caste, put it in more appropriate way, "The untouchables are social slaves. Their slavery is not voluntary; it is imposed by birth." They are mere workers in the fields of upper caste community. The caste system has historically denied Dalit's dignity, self-respect, and equal social status. In Bama's Karruku, Bama's brother advised her study hard if she wants overcome the indignities heaped by caste system on Dalits. As Bamaasks:

> Because we are born into the Parayjati, we are never given any honor or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lesions, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn (Bama 18).

Such struggle for Dalit rights leads us to the debate on whether caste should be confined to the question of whether caste is equivalent to race or not. In response to this Naunidhi Kaur's article ***In the Cause of Dalits*** (2001) says the more pressing issue of **caste-based discrimination as a violation of human dignity and human rights.** As India has already completed 75 years as a Republic, yet this milestone, compels us to ask a difficult and urgent question**: What does dignity mean for Dalits in contemporary India?Has the Indian Constitution ensured dignity and equality for Dalits?** How do everyday practices of exclusion undermine Dalit dignity? Why does the question of Dalit dignity remain relevant in contemporary India? Several powerful Dalit narratives represented the subjective experience of caste hierarchy, oppression and everyday life gives an idea about Dalit lives at present time in India.Numerous reports on caste discrimination demonstrate that the denial of dignity remains a defining feature of Dalit lives. Reviewing *Caste and the Crisis of Dignity*, A. S. Panneerselvan contends that at caste conferences, Periyar addressed the bothersome question of caste hierarchies and his statement was, 'nobody above and nobody below'. The reality is more unsettling. Mr Deepesh Chithra in his book, *Five Years of Caste Based Atrocity* writes:

> The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recently released the Crime in India Report 2023 on 29th September 2025, following a year long delay since the previous release. "The data reveals a continued and alarming rise in crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), reflecting the persistent oppression and marginalization faced by these communities" (*Five Years of Caste Based Atrocity*18)

Most unfortunate thing is many hierarchies exists in Indian academia. Caste marginalized students are always the sufferer, not always well versed with the English medium and many other kinds of exposure. "The *Savarnas*or upper castes prominently rule

the academic scenario in India and abroad" (Dasgupta). As Sharmila Rege also says in her seminal work, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*, "The burden of caste in our universities and classrooms, as in other institutions, has always weighed more heavily on the dalit and bahujan students" (1). Prasenjeet Patil in his article, Caste in Higher Education: Examining and Redefining Affirmative Action" writes, as per the National Sample Survey Organization (2011-12), the under-represented castes—SCs, STs, and OBCs, represented 71.5 per cent of the total population and hold poor representation in the educational and professional circuit. Hindu upper castes have roughly double the total number of graduates among all other castes and communities put together."

The persistence of caste discrimination within higher education has been sharply criticized by Tamil Dalit writer Bama, argues that educational institutions have increasingly become sites of exclusion rather than spaces of critical learning and social justice. As she notes:

> Educational institutions that should be independent are becoming factories to simply mint money. Religion, caste, language and colour are used to decimate the lives of students who fight for social justice. When economically depressed Dalits, struggle to reach the threshold of higher education, they are mentally tormented, their thoughts and emotions deliberately killed. They are ground down by many powerful agents.

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things,*Velutha is the microscopic vision of the orthodoxy's brutality of against Dalits. He died in the police custody at the Kottayam police station. The police didn't listen to his plea as he was a Dalit and not supported by anyone. The dying moments of Velutha in the police station had been described by Roy in the novel as:

> Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in...hisskull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheek bones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split his upper up and broker six teeth. Four of his ribs were splintered; one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. (Roy 308-310)

Therefore, this is a high time to identify who is privilege at the cost of someone else's life in places like educational institutions. There is a dire need to deploy systems of meaningful interventions and severe repercussions on discrimination against marginalised students by the government to make the educational system inclusive for them.

Caste and Class: The Intersection

Caste system remained an indispensable pillar of the system of class exploitation in Indian structure. According to Sisir Kumar Das, "caste intersects class to ensure control over material resources such as land and labour by the dominant interests in the society. Class power usually replicates caste through it ultimately goes further concealing the concentration of class power in possession of elite, and in the perpetuation of that possession through compulsion and coercion" (Basu xxiii).Since time immemorial, its chief beneficiaries were only the ruling class, the nobility and the *Zamidars*.With the advent of commercialization of agriculture, large number of peasants were converted into landless labourers.According to Karl Marx, social

stratification emerged primarily with economic injustice. For Marx, there are some sections of the society who owns the means of production. Those who own and control productive resources occupy a different position in the society. A Marxist analysis therefore directs us to apply this framework in the Indian context, particularly to the agrarian relations. A large landowner controls land while a landless agricultural labourer depends upon the sale of labour for survival.

However, the Indian system and situation complicates a purely class-based explanation. At first, the labourer is economically dependent upon the landlord; also, simultaneously they occupy a lower position within the caste order. As caste questions involves hereditary status, marriage restrictions, occupation, notion of purity and pollution and access to particular social spaces, caste do not remain a question of money only. Importantly, this is where the thought of B. R. Ambedkar's distinction between a division of labour and division of labourers becomes significant to understand the intersection of caste and class in Indian structure.

Dalit Modern Discourse and Gender

Some scholars says that the reforms created by the Britishers (such as abolished *Sati,* child marriage, polygamy, and some laws for widows)only benefitted the women from the upper strata of society. In the pages of a conventional mainstream historiography Dalits were no where existing. However, Dalit voices such as Savitribai Phule is very prominent who along with her husband Jotiba Phule raised the issues of Dalit women and upper caste women or women in general as well. They wrote poems, started schools exclusively for *Sudra* and Dalit women. This kind of struggle was the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Hindu culture. Later, Marathi Dalit writers such as Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar contributed towards making the Dalit women struggles, exploitation and injustice visible and exposed through Ambedkarite movement. and hence, several women took participation in the movement. The movement ultimately questioned the dehumanization and subjugation of a large section of humankind.

Dalit feminist writings argues for identity and representative for Dalit women and foregrounds the relationship between the control over upper caste women's sexuality by upper caste male as against the exploitation of Dalit women's sexuality and labour by the upper caste men. Though the significant form of autobiography, Dalit feminist writings are bringing out the conditions of lower caste women is the worst as they are suffering and victims of patriarchy and caste patriarchy both. According to Uma Chakravarty, these women were oppressed as subject to caste oppression at the hands of the upper castes, as labourers subject to the class-based oppression, and as women who experience patriarchal oppression not just from the men of their own caste but at the hands of all men (Chakravarty 143)

In contemporary times, writers like Suraj Yengde and many echoed calls for humanity. Their language, protest and expression voiced an alternative genre of the Dalit voice amplifies the declarations of the everyday subaltern. They felt it indispensable to reinterpret Dalit experience through the lens of gender, recognising that caste oppression is experienced differently by Dalit men, Dalit women, and gender-diverse individuals. In the words of Suraj Yengde, the sections of Dalit discourse inadvertently reproduce the same **heteronormative**and**transphobic** assumptions that characterise Brahminical patriarchy. He articulates:

> The dissenting Dalit public sphere continues to lament about the specific rights of the binary genders of male and female, which gets echoed in the chambers of hetero-normative, anti-queer and trans-phobic Brahminical spaces. By proffering a reactionary stable space to maintain the Brahminical order,

> Dalits end up challenging the system without demonstrating the will to destroy it.

While Dalit feminist interventions have successfully exposed the gendered dimensions of caste oppression, contemporary scholarship increasingly argues that Dalit literature must move beyond the male–female binary to engage with the complexities of queer and transgender Dalit experiences.

Conclusion

There are people who have imagined and written about utopian society based on complete equality: no division between rich and poor and no suffering from want or malnutrition. But according to Dipankar Gupta, a doctorate in Sociology from Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi, "what these utopias forget to mention is that equality does not mean sameness. If that were to be the case then most utopias would be dreadfully boring places to live in. In a true Utopia people should be equal but also different" (Interrogating Caste: Understanding hierarchy & difference in Indian Society 15). But it is not possible without complete transformation of sociology and anthropology into far healthier and just way. The Indian constitution provides legal safeguards against caste discrimination. However, several implementations remain uneven. Importantly, the studyis not a criticism of Humans. Rather, it is a call for Humanity and Justice to them. It voices equality regardless of caste, gender, creed and religion. The study also underscores an urgent need for comprehensive reforms in the criminal justice system, including the expansion of Exclusive Special Courts, improved police accountability, and targeted legal support for survivors. Drawing from Dalit writers' lived experience and literary journey, and Ambedkar's call to "educate, organise and agitate", the present work demands a complete annihilation of caste hierarchy, thereby inventing a new society for the oppressed to thrive with equality, freedom and dignity. Some of the findings are as follows:

- Dalit literature seeks to reclaim the dignity and self-respect that have historically been denied to Dalit communities by the caste system. It challenges social structures that perpetuate humiliation and asserts the right of Dalits to equality, justice, and human dignity.
- Our feminist pedagogies are required to analyse caste from the standpoint of Dalit women and class from the standpoint of working-class women, and heterosexuality from the standpoint of lesbians.
- Through their works, Dalit writers plays a significant role in the reconstruction of their Identity by replacing narratives of victimhood with narratives of agency, self-respect, and collective resistance.
- Modern Dalit literary narratives and expressions dealt with the reformative voices, emphasizing on the importance of education, dignity, consciousness, knowledge, resistance etc, and are also creating a transcending societal norm that allowed them to reach to the intersection between caste and boundaries. Through such works, Dalit writers created a neo-literary tradition and create a society shown by emancipators like Phule and Dr B R Ambedkar.

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Chapter 42: Understanding the Hallmarks of Academic Writing through the Use of Metadiscourse Markers

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Abstract

Academic writing has entrenched conventions which are conformed to in order for the text to be acceptable by a disciplinary or institutional community. The established norms make up the hallmarks or the tenets of every academic genre. In this exposition, it is demonstrated that academic writing and Metadiscourse markers share a symbiotic and congruent relationship. This unit shows that Metadiscourse markers are the linguistic tools academic text producers deploy to argue their propositions and sell their ideas convincingly to their readers. Besides the use of Metadiscourse, the chapter has revealed the appropriate choice of lexical items for academic texts. This unit concludes by examining various citation and reference styles appropriate for a particular academic discipline

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Metadiscourse Markers, Reference Styles, Language*

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Introduction

Academic writing isa unique and critical genre. The reason is that it aims to convince and persuade the reader to accept the perspectives and arguments of the writer. This is done by following the established norms of a discipline and institution. In the main, this book chapter focuses on the nexus between academic writing and metadiscourse markers. In this regard, it identifies and underscores the use of metadiscourse markers as the essential linguistic tool academic writers deploy in their scholarly works and arguments. The chapter proceeds to explore the tenets and language of academic writing genre. Varied forms of academic writing are equally discussed . Citation formats and reference styles in various academic disciplines are given desired attention .The target audience of this exposition includes university students, postgraduate students, academics, scholars and researchers.

The Concept of Academic Writing

Academic writing is a genre where a writer makes effort by the use of resources of language to organize their thoughts and view points in a coherent and logical manner so as to persuade their intended audience to accept their view points. It is a means by which writers and researchers share their research findings to the members of a disciplinary community and society. In contrast with other genres of writing, academic writing conforms to disciplinary conventions which make it acceptable by the intended audience. This means that it has well established structure which it must follow in order to advance logical and reasoned arguments as well as logical conclusions .These attributes are what make it acceptable and what make it to be seen by the members of the profession as having made contributions to knowledge. Academic writing identifies a problem in society and provides the logical steps to solve it.. The writing could be in the form of reviews, patented works, reports, theses or dissertations and literature reviews. Academic writing is considered critical and serious because it follows precedents,, identifies existing literature, reviews them, builds on existing theories , identifies missing gaps in existing literature and fills them in.

According to Strongman (2013), "Writing is about communicating with words and academic writing is about choosing words carefully to communicate complex ideas to a range of readers and audiences" (p.xiii). Ultimately, it is intended to sell or promote the writer's scholarly arguments and claims. Hyland (2004) added that the use of Metadiscourse markers is one means through which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible and persuasive to a particular audience. He went on to say that such markers in academic writing enhance the way academic writers engage their readers, produce a coherent text by making choices to create convincing and coherent. Academic writing is known to be a style of writing that investigates the state of a subject matter or idea and presents positions based on the research evidence. In another parlance and in relation to the basic function of this genre of writing, it is described as a balanced writing because it provides valid reasons why the ideas of other people may be accepted, or treated with caution. It is, as well, writing that displays one's confident evaluation of the results of one's research (Ventrola&Muaranen, 1996)

The Use and Relevance of Metadiscourse Markers in Academic Writing

The word "Metadiscourse" is almost analogous to metatalk which is an inset of the field of Discourse Analysis. It studies the distinctive words and expressions people use to discuss language. Halliday (1973) declared that Metadiscourse is applied in language to fulfil three basic functions at the macro level and that those functions include that writers use Metadiscourse markers to give expression to their experiences, to interact with their audience and organize their expressions and thoughts into cohesive discourses in such a way that their addresses can be make coherent sense of. According to him, these basic functions result in three basic meanings in

language which are ideational, interpersonal and textual, respectively.

Academic texts focus on issues. One of the linguistic resources academic writers deploy to achieve these objectives is the choice of metadiscourse strategy. In academic texts, Metadiscourse elements become the pathway or the channel through which an academic writer buttresses their argument and sells their ideas to the audience. Toumi (2009) submitted that what the authors in academic writing use to reveal their personality, their identity and indicate how they hope their readers to respond to their polemics is through the metadiscourse elements. This is because they enhance comprehension of an academic text. It is in this regard that Ventrola and Mauranen (1996) highlighted that metadiscourse is a suitable linguistic and rhetorical analytic tool in understanding academic writer's identity in relation to readers.

According to Hyland (2004), Metadiscourse markers are important in academic writing because the collective and social practice of an academic discipline reflect its disciplinary culture and its discourses. It also helps writers to show their awareness of social negotiation of knowledge and their efforts to pursue their claims in order to gain their communities' acceptance in their disciplines. Hyland (2004), in justifying the importance of Metadiscourse in academic writing, stated that with the judicious addition of Metadiscourse markers in critical writing, "a writer is able to not only transform a dry, difficult text into coherent, reader – friendly prose, but also relate it to a given context and convey their personality, credibility, audience – sensitivity and relationship to the message." (p. 157). This implies that Metadiscourse markers are the rhetorical devices academics utilize in presenting their arguments.

According to Vande-Kopple (2012), Metadiscourse becomes very imperative to academic writers because it is one way of demonstrating how meanings and interpretations of lexical items could vary from one discipline to another, and can only be arrived at if subjected to a disciplinary context. For instance, the use of an interpersonal Metadiscourse like hedging in the form of the modal auxiliary **shall**is bound to generate different meanings in the context of Law and non -legal disciplines. That is, the same lexical item in different texts and different academic communities will generate nuances of meanings. So are other modals that function as hedging in language. Therefore, it is the writer's appropriate use of Metadiscourse that will account for the precise linguistic function of similar markers.

On the use of Metadiscourse in academic texts, Sara, Najafabadi and Borowieni (2016) noted that using Metadiscourse markers in such texts helps on the part of the reader to locate precisely the meaning, the specific purpose or aim of the writer in the passage. While on the part of the writer, it helps to support and encourage the writer's academic claims. This is so because according to Hyland (2004), academic writers are not meant to write texts that represent external realities; rather, they are meant to use language as a means of expressing themselves and their work, and at the same time acknowledge and negotiate social relations with their audience. This implies that Metadiscourse markers demonstrate the internal relationships that parts of a text have. They also serve as internal ingredients of the text and in this regard, only comment on issues within the text, not outside the text, unlike the propositional contents.

Academic writing, particularly at the university level, ideally is meant to represent academic competence and expertise. To be able to demonstrate this level of competence and expertise incumbent on the writer, they have to be familiar with the typical discourse practices of their academic discipline. In that light, Swales (1990 and 1996) instructively stated that one of the ways through which such academic competence could be showcased is by the use of Metadiscourse resources. He went on to expatiate that an academic who aspires for competence and expertise in their fieldexploits

the linguistic elements of Metadiscourse to organize their data and observations into meaningful patterns for the receivers. These linguistic elements enable the writer who is investigating the state of an issue, which is the basis of academic writing, to present their position based on the evidence of their findings. As observed byLim and Kim (2013), academic writing, being critical writing also, weighs up the evidence and arguments of its investigation to contribute to knowledge. It does this by exploiting boosters, commentaries, sequencers, illocution markers, hedges, evidential, engagement and frame markers and other relevant Metadiscourse units to justify its position and the credibility of the idea. This informs the use of such rhetorical devices in academic works as illustrated by Lim and Kim as follows: *According to Smith (2010), In sum..., You can see that..., In this paper, we show that..., etc.*

Beauvais (1989) has noted that rhetoricity in communication is largely built on the appropriate use of Metadiscourse. This, he demonstrated by the use of speech act theory. If rhetoric is an act of persuasion, then as Hyland (1998) corroborated: "Academic writing is thus invariably a persuasive task where a writer seeks to produce specific responses in an active audience" (p.5). In relating this scholarly view to our study, it underscores the point that rhetoric or persuasive reading which is synonymous with academic reading is not just reading for the sake of reading, but being able to interpret, analyse and understand the thought structure of the text producer "as part of a larger discourse world." (Beauvais,1989, p.27).

Academic writing is not only serious, but factual and objective, showcasing all aspects of life in the real world. It is in the domain of academic journals that contemporary and topical issues and discourses are reported for dissemination of current knowledge. It is from this perspective that academic research articles are described as a widely practiced genre of communication for the introduction of new findings and claims, and for receiving peer feedback.In academic writing which is also referred to as critical writing, the state of an issue is investigated and the position of the investigator is presented based on the evidence of their enquiry. Again, as a very critical form of writing, it is not done in a vacuum, rather the researcher relies on the evidence and arguments of others to contribute their own knowledge. It is in this light that Hyland (2004) stated that academic writings are concerned with issues other than themselves, seek to inform readers of activities, objects or people in the world, to persuade them to some action or thought or seek to promote the writer's scholarly claims and credentials.

Types of Academic Writing

Academic writing is classified based on its purpose and function. Oshima and Hogue (2007) identified four(4) types of academic writing, and they are the following: 1. Descriptive Writing 2. Analytical Writing 3. Persuasive Writing 4. Critical Writing. 5. Journal Articles

Descriptive Writing: This type of academic writing explains processes, facts, and information about things

Analytical Writing: This requires the researcher to rearrange facts and information, and make comparisons and contrasts. In doing this, relationships between categories, parts, and groups are examined and established.

Persuasive Writing: This is one of the forms of academic writing found in articles and more serious scientific writings. It requires the researcher to convince their intended audience by presenting their point of view which often appears in the discussion and conclusion section of an article.

Critical Writing: This form of academic writing is also known as scientific writing.It takes place at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It proves and shows an identifiable gap in knowledge filled in and presents more detailed viewpoints than in persuasive writing. It is referred to as critical because it involves more rigours and thoroughness as it passes through

various stages of supervision, reviews, and blind peerreviews.Ideas are presented more convincingly and logically. It follows laid down universal academic writing standards which include components like abstract, introduction, statement of the problem, literature review, data presentation and analysis, discussion, conclusion, and summary sections. Critical writing is realized in the form of long essay projects, articles, academic seminar presentations, and dissertations. Examples include undergraduate long term essays, postgraduate theses or dissertations, academic seminar and conference papers.

Journal Articles

Journal articles, as a type of academic writing, are understood to be balanced writing that gives valid reasons why the ideas of others may be accepted, dismissed, or treated with caution; it is writing that displays one's confident evaluation of the results of research,Journals embody a very serious form of issues and writing and discourses that represent all aspects of human endeavours. In underscoring the quality and reliability of academic writings, Li and Wharton (2010) made this observation:

> Academic writing should be seen as a highly situated practice; it refers not only to the situation within disciplines, but also to specific places, times, and micro-communities. Tutors' expectations of student writing are shaped by departmental and institutional priorities as well as by disciplinary practices and these expectations are in turn likely to impact the writing that students produce (P. 3).

In relation to the present study, critical and scientific writing texts that are found in the university setting are selected as research instruments and for data analysis. In justifying the choice of this particular type of academic writing in this type of study, it is widely positedthat discourse markers in academic writing are the micro-discursive elements that are found in academic writing for different purposes to ensure coherence and cohesion.

The Language and Principles of Academic Writing

By its principles, academic writing has well established structure, diction, fornatting styles and citation formats. It adheres to the use of formal language. This is realized in the use of more complex grammar, vocabulary and forms associated with a particular discipline. Its language is very explicit by directing the reader to the relationship between the different parts of the same text. It achieves this by the use of cohesive ties and transitional words and expressions. In academic writing, other people's arguments are criticized in the course of investigating an issue or a phenomenon, after which the position of the arguer is made known. By the use of formal language and register in academic writing, this implies that it is devoid of colloquial and informal registers and expressions such as *"Researchers looked at the way strain builds up around a geological fault"* but in academic style: *Researchers examined the way strain intensifies around a geological fault"* (UTS library,2024, p.14). *Everybody knows that we have had a good year. You can see from the graph that sales have gone up significantly over the quarter*, but are rendered thus in academic genre: It *is generally accepted that this year has been favourable with respect to profit margins. As can be seen from the graph, sales have increased significantly over the quarter*. Other examples of academic style include: "it can be argued that" instead of "I am sure that" (informal). Others include "it is evident from the data that "... (academic)" *There is no way* that the design concept can be implemented within the budget" (informal) "*It seems unlikely* that the design concept can be implemented within the budget" (academic). This implies that academic writing contrasts with informal writing and register but conforms to formal style of writing.

The use of passive forms and third person is preferred because it is concerned with what is

done and the result, not on the agent which the active voice is concerned with, as in: "The research was carried out in stages" (passive voice), not" Nathaniel carried out the research in stages" (passive voice).In terms of tense, according to UTS Library (2024), academic writing argues and reports its findings with the use of present tense, despite that the event may have taken place even long ago in the past as in: "The study centres on ..." "The findings reveal that ... "The facts prove that ..." "It is concluded that..." Academic texts collocate with verbs in the 3rd person present simple tense. The rationale for this is to make the work timeless and ever useful and relevant at all times, in spite of the period of time in the past when the event or the study being reported took place as in: "They observe that...", "Clark and Soyinka (2014) argue that ..." "it *reveals* that..." "The *researchers expatiate* that ..."

Academic writing prefers the use of complement clauses, particularly, *that – clauses,* as in the following examples: 1.This implies that Metadiscourse use is informed by academic disciplines.Prepositional phrases are always present in academic genre as in: The study investigates the rationalebehinduse of transitional words in long essays, The work is all aboutwriting which focusesonacademic disciplines.

Lexical density ,which is one of the hallmarks of this form of writing , ensures that fewer words than necessary are employed. This is achieved by the use of content words in place of functional words, as in:"It shows that the agency is adamant on the type of punishment to be meted out to the perpetrators of the dastardly act" instead of "It shows how the agency is going to handle people who have been committing crimes in the society" Halliday (1996, p. 347). The presence of higher proportion of content words is one thing that makes academic writing lexically dense. This is realized by modification of nouns to realize nominal groups as in: "an emerging trend in the economy" where an= determiner; emerging= premodifier; trend= head; in the economy= postmodifier. This analysis proves that nominal groups can function as subjects, complements or objects of prepositions in a sentence. Further examples provided by Halliday (1989, p. 79) below show that a nominal group can be modified by another nominal group in apposition, as in:

1. Dr. Maurice Aumont, the Director of the Berlitz School of Bordeaux, looked after him in an efficient and kindly way.
2. A more detailed life of Lord Reading, liberal leader in the House of Lords and an important actor in the events of 1931, would be of great value.

Hyland (2009) stated that academic writing deals with the ways of constructing language in the academy. Academic writing makes more use of nouns than verbs. It is one genre of writing that appropriates the use of signalling and transition words to buttress the author's argument. It is backed up with evidence, sometimes with the source of information provided. The use of hedges is one of the dominant cultures of academic writing. This enables the writer to soften the tone of his argument, lessen the degree of commitment and it allows room for flexibility. In order words, the use of hedging devices leaves options open and makes the argument inconclusive (Nikula, 1997). Nominalization in this genre of writing shows that academic texts prefer the use of noun groups to verbal groups. This accounts for the presence of more nominal words such as *likeness, speech, accommodation, investigation, achievement, deterioration, examination, organization* in place of *like, speak, accommodate, investigate, achieve, deteriorate, examiner, organize.* Preference is often given to nominal groups more than the verbal group, as in the following sentences:

1. *" Like all other forms of life, we human beings are the product of evolution.*
2. *Like all other forms of life, we human beings are the product of how we are evolved.*

Sentence 1 above typifies the feature of academic discourse with regard to the appropriation of nominal groups, for the noun "evolution" becomes the more appropriate choice than the verb "evolves" and the "how" subordinate clause in sentence 2.

Although both attributive and predicative adjectives are used, attributive adjectives appear more common, as in the following sentences:

> *"In this period of economic recession, the socio-economic factors responsible ..." "The fundamental question to ask is ..." "What matters is the prestigious nature of the school".*Academic writings exhibit complexity by the use of subordinate clauses and embedding as in:

1. There are a number of factors which influence reading and writing habits of adult learners.
2. The research work shows the discipline that uses hedges in academic writing more,

Writers of this genre are very conscious of and careful about the lexical items and expressions they choose to convey their messages. This is why they carefully select registers and terminologies that are closely related to their academic disciplines. This does not negate the point that there are, however, words end expressions that are common in academic writing. They include: examine, analyse, compare, identify, discover and negotiate. That is, they follow and conform to their disciplinary conventions.

In terms of sentence construction, passive and impersonal use of language is preferred such as: it was reported, the data was analysed, instead of "I reported", "I analysed the data. The reason for the adoption of this style is to make the author sound objective, unobtrusive and detached from the text. The use of active voice is also permissive in academic writing, especially when the use of passive voice appears ambiguous and clumsy. In that case, active construction becomes imperative as in: *This* research *investigates the use of Metadiscourse devices in Nigerian academic works. In this chapter, we are going to show that...* Oftentimes, the object of focus is always placed at the beginning of the sentence and paragraph. E.g. *Figure* 2 illustrates..., *we shall find out in this section*, etc (UTS Library, 2024). The use of transition words is to guide the reader to understand the thought structure of the author as well as to follow the link between the ideas in the text.

Hidden in good academic writings are the answers to questions raised in the text. Writers always select and decide on the answers to their questions. This is a way of guiding the reader in understanding the propositional content of the text material. Biber and Finegan (1988) observed that academic writing is more complex, more lexically densed than other forms of writing. It implies that in academic discourse, more lexical words than grammatical words are employed. According to them, academic discourse is so a serious genre that it utilizes brevity, more complex words and phrases. Chaffe (1982) and Halliday (1989) averred that this genre employs more noun-based phrases, more nominalization and more lexical variation. They list the following features as common in good academic tests: noun – based phrases, subordinate clauses/embedding, complement clauses, sequences of prepositional phrases, participles, passive verbs, lexical density, lexical complexity, nominalization, attributive adjectives and adjectival groups as complements.

These features are relevant to our study because being the features of critical texts, they help the researcher in selecting only the academic texts that conform to these principles since not all texts will be considered.

Reference Styles

Although this chapter is not primarily focused on research writing, the principles and characteristics of various citation formats and reference styles are highlighted. Therefore, only the common and notable ones are discussed. They are American Psychological Association

(APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago Style sheet, or Kate Turabian Style sheet. They are the three common and most widely used citations and reference styles.

Styles of Referencing in Academic Writing

Style Sheet is part of the convention in Academic Writing. These are the rules guiding citations and referencing in this form of writing. Citations and referencing are very essential, for they are used to acknowledge the original owners of ideas and sources of information therein a research work. It is obligatory in academic writing because failure to acknowledge sources of a writer's ideas used in one's piece of writing is tantamount to plagiarism or theft of one's intellectual property which is a punishable academic offence.

In-Text Citation, Referencing, and Bibliography

On the one hand, in-text citations are very short references that occur in the body of a research paper. It shows the source of information or quote, as in: **(John, 2025)**. On the other hand, referencing appears at the end of a piece of work by providing in detail all the bibliographic details that have to do with a cited work in the body of the paper. The bibliographic details include surname and initials of the source, full title of the work, place of publication, name of publisher, volume number, issue number, page numbers, depending on the type of work cited (if a published book or journal article) and depending on the reference style used (if APA or MLA or Chicago / Kate Turabian reference styles).

In academic writing, a number of reference styles exist and they vary according to academic disciplines. They include Vancouver and American Medical Association (AMA) reference styles which are mainly for the fields of Medicine and Allied Medical Sciences; Harvard, Blue book and OSCOLA for referencing law and citation of court cases in the US and the UK respectively. There are, however, three most popular and most commonly used reference styles in academic writing today. They are American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA) and Chicago Manual of Style or Kate Turabian reference styles or Chicago-Turabian style sheets (for Turabian is just an adaptation and student-friendly form of Chicago Manual of Style). These three are the ones that receive the attention of this book chapter.

Bibliography, in contrast with reference list, is a list of sources that include those cited in the text and those that are not cited in the work. Bibliography shows all the lists of sources that are relevant to the paper, but may not be cited in the body of the work. It is important in academic writing to show evidence of voracious and extensive study and knowledge of a subject matter. This explains the relevance of bibliography, depending on the particular reference style adopted.

American Psychological Association (henceforth referred to as APA) 7th Edition

APA was originally and primarily meant for the academic fields of Social Science, Education, Health Science, including Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy but over the years, it has been appropriated by scholars in other disciplines such as Arts and Humanities. The reason could be due to its simplicity and non-rigorous style. Over the years, it has undergone different changes, resulting in editions and versions. The latest edition is the 7th edition which is discussed in this chapter. APA makes use of in-text citation which provides surname of the author, followed by a comma and year of publication. An example is, **Nwoko, 2022**. This is known as author-date citation format.

This latest edition (7th edition) came into use in 2020. It uses the term "References" in the reference section and on the reference page. It

does not make use of running head. Below are examples of citation formatting in APA, 7th edition:

In a work written by one person, an in-text citation is provided thus: **Gilbert (2021) argued that sole dependence on AI does not encourage creativity**. On the other hand, if the quotation contains the exact words of Gilbert (2021), it should be formatted in this manner: Gilbert (2021) argued "Sole dependence on AI does not encourage creativity" (p. 201). **P. 201** shows the exact page of this argument by Gilbert in his work written in 2021.

The reference section must begin on fresh page, designated **Reference**.On the reference list section, APA provides that the full publication information of the book by Gilbert be provided, and an example is thus:

Gilbert, A. E. (2021). *Ethical Considerations in the Use of AI*. Longman.

APA allows for author's surname, initials, title of text and name of publisher. Place of publication is no longer needed in the 7th edition.

An example of reference formatting of a work by more than one author:

Charles, A. & John, E. (2024). *Linguistic Media*. Legacy Publishers.

In a work authored by over two to 20, the rule is that the first 19 authors should be listed, followed by an ellipsis and a comma and the name and initials of the last author.

In referencing journal articles, besides the author- initials- year of publication, such bibliographic pieces of information as title of the article, name of the journal in italics, volume number, issue number, page numbers and DOI if available are required. An example:

Nwoko, C. N. (2014). The Suitability of Genre Analysis Teaching Methodology in ESL

Classroom. *Journal of English Language Teachers' Association of Nigeria (JELTAN)*,

1(4), 135–142.

If in-text, however, a text written by more than two persons, the Latinate abbreviations **et al** which mean **"**and others" are used after the surname of the first corresponding author, as in: **Charles et al., 2022**.

A case where an author publishes more than one work in the same year, the rule is that, they should be alphabetized and labelled a, b, c, d, e, as the case may be.

If a work is an essay, or book chapter found in an edited text, the editor's name should be included, as in:

Nwoko, C. N. (2020). The Perspectives of Teaching Modern English at a Postgraduate Level. In E. J. Wales (Ed.), *The Ideas* (pp. 102–118). Legacy Publishers.

In citing works that appeared in newspapers or online texts, examples are provided below:

Harry, I. A. (2024, March 9). Rules of Etiquette. *Daily News*. https://www.dailynews.com 2024

Use of Language in APA 7th Edition

APA is one citation format that attaches much importance to the use of language, hence considers some forms of expression bias, disrespectful, offensive and unacceptable. Such words and expressions include those that denote gender discrimination, stereotypes, etc. APA (2025) identified the following choice of language as unacceptable:

Senior citizens instead of **Elderly** or **Older people** or their age range; **the disabled** instead

of **People with disability** or **disabled persons**; **homosexuals** instead of **LGBTQ** or **gay** or **straight**; **the poor** instead of **people whose incomes are low**; **the homeless** instead of **people who don't have homes**. In terms or race or ethnicity, it is recommended that words like**Black** or**White** should be capitalized and put in context instead generalizing the race , while **Caucasian , Hispanic** and**Latino** should be avoided, rather one should be specific on a particular group in a race or be specific on the population.

Gender- inclusive language in APA requires the use of singular **THEY** instead of **HE** or **SHE** and the use of **CHAIRPERSON** instead of **CHAIRMAN.**It should be understood that the personal pronoun **THEY** is used in the singular sense

Page numbering in APA 7th edition is unique, for it starts from the title page as page number 1. Page numbers are inserted in the top right hand corner

CMOS: The Chicago Manual of Style / Kate Turabian 18th Edition

The latest version of this reference style is the 18th edition which was introduced in 2024. It was introduced in the year 1891 at the University of Chicago Press and was modified and simplified for students' use by Kate L. Turabian. It is primarily meant for disciplines in Humanities, including Arts and History. It makes use of footnotes and endnotes which appear at the bottom of a page and at the end of the entire work, respectively. It is also used in Natural Sciences and Social Sciences.

On the reference page, it is designated "Bibliography". An example of a published textbook formatting in CMOS shows that author's initials are avoided but written in full, while date of publication comes last before web link or URL. Examples:

Charles, Henry, "Etiquette in the 21st Century," *Daily News*, July 8, 2020, https://www.dailynews.org/daily. This example is an endnote written in detail.This also shows that CMOS does not make use of indentation, rather block style of referencing.

In the in-text citation where the footnote occurs, a superscript number that corresponds to a footnote is used. The endnote begins with the first name of the author, followed by book title, place of publication, name of publisher, year of publication and page number. The same applies to journal articles, in addition to volume number, issue number, year of publication, page number, DOI or URL if available, for example:

Jerry P. Charles, "Language Imperatives," *Journal of Languages* 20, no. 5 (2019): 80, dx.doi.org...

It should be noted that in endnotes, first name of the author comes first. In the reference list, surname comes first, as in: Charles, Jerry 2019...

To avoid repeating a source which has been earlier cited, the word "Ibid" is used. At the end of the paper, instead of "References", "Notes" and "Bibliography".are used.

Modern Language Association (MLA)

The latest edition of MLA is the 9th edition which was introduced in 2021. It is this edition that this chapter discusses. MLA is popularly adopted by disciplines in Humanities, including English Language and Literature. It is described as author-page style of reference because in its in-text citation, author's surname is followed by page number. At the end of the paper, instead of using "References" or "Bibliography", MLA uses "Works Cited". Author's names are written in full, hence initials are avoided. An examples of reference formatting in MLA, in a book is provided thus:

John, Jerry. *Linguistics Paradigm*. Legacy Publishers, 2019.

Example in a journal article:

John, Andrew. "Headword Elements." *Forensic Journal*, vol. 2, no. 6, 2008, pp. 31–48.

In MLA, when quoting the exact words of a source which are more than three or four lines, it should be indented in block quote. The same applies to fictional works such as drama and poetry. Examples:

Clark describes the destructive African thunderstorm thus:

> What time of night it is
>
> I do not know
>
> Except that like some fish
>
> Doped out of the deep
>
> I have bobbed up bellywise.
>
> (59)

If more than one page, it should be cited as **(Nwoga 59–78).** Iin citing internet sources or weblinks, this is an example:

Uzo, Chinyere. "The Use of Cliches." *Daily Words*, 20 May 1998, thedailywords.com.org

In the in-text citation, when multiple authors are to be cited simultaneously, they should be separated with a semicolon as in:

The characteristics of child language include babbling and cooing (Nwoko 2–5; Uzo 6–9; Ugo et al. 90 and Uche and James 94).

A direct quote should be enclosed in double quotation marks, followed by the page number which should appear at the end of the quote.An in-text example is provided thus:

Uzor cautions, "Ethical considerations must be considered while using AI tools" (102).

The following are examples of how to format **Works Cited** section in MLA latest edition:

Uzor, Charles. "Linguistics Divides." *Scientific Journal*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2021, pp. 20–42.

It should be understood that place of publication is only needed for books published before 1900 and books where the publisher operates in more than one office, city or state, as in:

Jowitt, David. *Nigerian English: An Introduction*. Longman, 1991.

In contrast with APA, reporting verb in MLA should be in the present tense, as in: **John cautions**, **John states, John opines**, etc. An exception could be in reporting empirical investigations and observations or methodologies. In such contexts, it is logical to use simple past tense.

In a circumstance where the name of the author is unknown, the convention is that the short form of the title of the work and the page number should be used.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that academic writing has established formats and principles, which if adhered to, makes a scholarly work convincing and acceptable by the members and non members of the profession. It has shown that academic writing and the use of metadiscourse markers share a congruent relationship. Metadiscourse markers, as linguistic signals, help to drive and sell an academic writer's arguments to their intended audience. They become indispensable in academic text production, for they are used to establish a relationship between the text

producer and the reader. The hallmarks of academic writing ensures that scholars write and format their works in accordance with the disciplinary andinstitutional demands and conventions. The tenets of an academic genre are skills that are learnt and acquired . Academic works require critical and evaluative thinking on the part of the writer. This is because it is a genreof writing that necessitates more than a writer's opinion or ideas.

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