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Abha Chauhan Khimta & Suresh Kumar

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Lawal Nurudeen Abiodun, Osinusi Kunle Bankole & Alabi Adesola Olalere

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Contents

- 1 Wombs in the warzone: examining motherhood, childhood, and the ethics of witnessing violence in Gaza 3-17
Yogesh Kumar Negi
- 2 Diplomacy amid the India-Canada relations and the Khalistan challenge 18-30
Binesh Bhatia, Sucha Singh & H.K. Thakur
- 3 Terrorist turned Ikhwan: the lesser-known victims of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir 31-48
Shreeya Bakshi & Kirti Sharma
- 4 From polis to village republic: reimagining ideal societies through Plato's ideal state and Gandhi's Ramrajya 49-67
Abha Chauhan Khimta & Suresh Kumar
- 5 Universalizing Ambedkar: human rights and social equality in global context 68-82
Kalpana Devi
- 6 Infrastructural development, agricultural productivity and life expectancy in Nigeria 83-100
Lawal Nurudeen Abiodun, Osinusi Kunle Bankole & Alabi Adesola Olalere
- 7 Isolation as resistance: reimagining post-colonial identity through the Sentinelese tribe 101-110
Ruchi Raj Thakur
- 8 Loyalty in the line of fire: Lance Naik Lala Victoria Cross and Indian soldiers in Mesopotamian campaign 111-120
Vinay K. Sharma & Kartar Chand
- 9 Raja Kehri Singh and the forgotten front: reassessing Bushahr's role in the Tibet-Ladakh conflict 121-141
Surya Dev Singh Bhandari, Sanjay Sindhu & Ved Prakash Sharma
- 10 Professional development, career prospects and under graduates: the perspectives of New Education Policy 142-155
Antony Michael & Pratheesh P.
- 11 Assessing local governance through Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in India with special reference to Himachal Pradesh 156-178
Baldev Singh Negi

- 12 Examining service quality and learning quality across demographic variables in state universities of Punjab 179-199
Manisha Khosla, Gurdeep Singh Batra & Sulakshna Dwivedi
- 13 Shattered identities and radical healing: domestic violence and rape in *The Color Purple* 200-209
Subhashis Banerjee
- BOOK REVIEW**
- 1 S. Jaishankar (2024). *Why India matters*. Rupa Publications, pp. 226. 210-214
Harish K. Thakur



Wombs in the warzone: examining motherhood, childhood, and the ethics of witnessing violence in Gaza

Yogesh Kumar Negi

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the acute humanitarian crisis in Gaza amid the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a focus on gendered and child-specific vulnerabilities. Drawing on recent data from UN agencies and insights from feminist and postcolonial scholarship, it reveals how the conflict disproportionately affects women and children through indiscriminate violence, forced displacement, food insecurity, and systemic oppression. The study critiques the failure of international humanitarian law to restrain state aggression and exposes the complicity of mainstream media—particularly in West and also in India – in legitimising dominant geopolitical narratives. Through an analysis of media silence, editorial bias, and the instrumentalisation of suffering, the paper highlights the erasure of subaltern voices and yearns for critical media literacy and sensibility. By foregrounding independent human rights reports and civilian testimonies, this research advocates for an ethical and decolonial engagement with conflict reporting and humanitarian backing. The findings reveal a stark disconnect between legal norms and geopolitical realities, and yearning for a sustained, justice-oriented global response.

Keywords: Gaza conflict, gendered violence, humanitarian law, media narratives and ethics, colonialism, civilian suffering.

The twenty-first century has ushered in an era of unprecedented technological advancement, transforming the landscape of media, communication, and global connectivity. The devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza is an example of how technological advancements have facilitated instantaneous communication and access to information, but they have also brought with them the grim reality of contemporary conflicts and “warfare.” The development of sophisticated weaponry and military weapons has had catastrophic consequences for the civilian population, reducing entire towns or cities to rubble and shattering lives in an instant. In Gaza, the impact of modern warfare is particularly devastating, with thousands falling victim to indiscriminate bombings, shootings, and airstrikes. Since October 7th, 2023, the Israeli military has relentlessly bombarded Gaza, resulting in the large-scale destruction of schools, hospitals, and homes. The violation of the dignity and rights of Palestinian women has reached distressing new levels, as they face the horrifying reality of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and an unfolding “genocide,” as the Palestinian bodies

as well as those from outside who empathise with the Palestinians' oppression have termed it.

The Gaza conflict's devastating toll continues to mount, with casualty figures reflecting an escalating humanitarian crisis. According to a June 2025 report, at least 55,720 Palestinians have been killed and 124,190 injured since October 7, 2023, as documented by Gaza's Ministry of Health (Al Jazeera, 2025). These figures, broadly corroborated by Israeli intelligence assessments (Prothero, 2024), highlight the relentless violence impacting civilians, particularly women and children. Beyond direct fatalities, indirect deaths from disrupted healthcare, malnutrition, and infectious diseases amplify the crisis. Khatib et al. (2024) argue in *The Lancet* that armed conflicts generate extensive health consequences, estimating that "applying a conservative ratio of four indirect deaths per one direct death to the 37,396 deaths reported [as of July 2024], up to 186,000 or more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza" (Khatib et al., 2024). This projection highlights the profound, enduring human cost of the conflict, extending far beyond immediate losses. As Agamben (1998) critiques in his theory of *bare life*, in conflict zones such as Gaza, civilians are often reduced to a state of political invisibility – living in a condition where the protections of law are suspended, and life itself becomes expendable. Such frameworks help us understand how the vast scale of indirect suffering remains largely unaddressed in dominant legal and humanitarian discourses.

This study therefore focuses particularly on women and children, considering the fact that since the eruption of massive violence on October 7, 2023, the Israeli military has unleashed relentless attacks on the Gaza Strip, disproportionately affecting women and girls, who find themselves among the primary victims of conflict-related violence. By analysing the portrayal of events on various online news and information platforms, it aims to offer vital perspectives on the realities of the ongoing crisis and advocate for meaningful interventions to alleviate the suffering of those affected. Anywhere in the world where wars and conflicts are witnessed, no section of the population is spared by guns and grenades, bombing, air strikes, or all kinds of military mechanisms, but nowhere in modern times has the civilian population in general—and women and children in particular—become such explicit targets and victims of war crimes as in Gaza today. There is an urgent need for global awareness of the atrocities committed against women and children in the conflict zone in Gaza, Palestine. News reports and humanitarian assessments clearly indicate that the international community has fallen short in its responsibility to protect the most vulnerable. Some of the facts need to be noted: women make up nearly half, accounting for 49%, of the entire population in Palestine. As of early 2024, the female population stood at 2.76 million, with 1.63 million residing in the West Bank and 1.13 million in the Gaza Strip (PCBS). H.E. Dr Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), highlights the plight of

Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day under the theme "Invest in women: Accelerate progress" on March 7, 2024. According to her:

Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression on 07/10/2023 and until the date of the statement, there were over 9,000 female martyrs out of a total of 30,717 martyrs. It is noteworthy that 75% of the total number of wounded, amounting to 72,156, are females. Women and children constituted 70% of the missing persons in the Gaza Strip, totaling 7,000 individuals. Reports from the Gaza Strip also indicate that approximately 2 million people were displaced, half of whom are female (PCBS, 2024).

A feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (2004) argues, the gendered dimensions of conflict often remain obscured beneath militarised narratives, and women's suffering is frequently depoliticised or underreported. The targeting and displacement of women in Gaza exemplifies this neglect, revealing not only a humanitarian crisis but also a political failure to recognise gender-based vulnerabilities in the conflict zone. The statistics regarding human casualties among women illustrate the dire situation, highlighting the unimaginable fatalities of women in this ongoing war as of March 8, 2024. As of June 11, 2025, Gaza's Ministry of Health reports that at least 55,720 people have been killed and 124,190 wounded in Israeli attacks since October 7, 2023, with women and children comprising approximately 70% of the fatalities (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Amidst these figures, it is important to discuss Palestinian women's role in fighting their oppression and occupation, which is rarely highlighted in the media. Palestinian women have historically played a critical role when it comes to defying the foreign occupation of the then British and now Israeli state. In the civil disobedience against the Israeli occupation, all men, women, and children among the Palestinians are also seen defying the occupation, apart from the armed uprising of politico-militant organisations like Hamas. One notable period of women's resistance occurred during the First Intifada (1987-1993), where Palestinian women actively participated in protests, demonstrations, and resistance activities against Israeli occupation forces (Hasso, 2005). Moreover, it has been studied that the Palestinian women have been at the forefront of political and social movements, advocating for women's rights, gender equality, and national liberation. Scholars like Frances Hasso argue that such resistance by women intersects with broader struggles for social justice, not merely as national liberation but as a feminist praxis within a colonial condition (Hasso, 2005). They have been involved with political parties, civil society organisations, and grassroots initiatives, striving to address gender-based discrimination and oppression within Palestinian society while also resisting external forces of occupation and colonization. What is noteworthy here is that this resistance by women is still an ongoing thing and continues to evolve in response to changing political, social, and economic dynamics in Palestine.

Nesrine Malik, a Guardian columnist, writes in her article titled “In Gaza, there’s a war on women. Will the West really ignore it because they’re ‘not like us’?” aptly states in *The Guardian*, “Sometimes a disaster is so large that it obscures its details,” highlighting the magnitude of the conflict’s impact on women and girls (Malik, *The Guardian*). Beyond the death toll and displacement in Gaza, the conflict has disproportionately affected women and girls. According to the head of the UN, “Women and children have disproportionately borne the brunt of the conflict in Israel and Gaza,” as there has been a troubling reversal of fortunes in the annals of this conflict, where women and children have borne the weight of the war’s impact. “While these heinous acts impact individuals of all genders, their consequences are gendered, with women bearing a disproportionate burden,” emphasised Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and its causes and consequences. The Israeli occupation and the deprivation of self-determination have exposed Palestinian women to a barrage of various forms of systematic discrimination and violence.

While the Israeli occupation has affected men and women in shared ways, such as restricted movement and economic hardship, their daily experiences reveal distinct gendered impacts in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Since 1997, UN Women has been a steadfast advocate for Palestinian women and girls, promoting socio-economic empowerment and addressing critical humanitarian needs, including support for over 1 million women facing hunger and displacement in Gaza as of May 2025 (UN Women, 2025). A striking finding from this study is that, from 2008 to October 6, 2023, approximately 6,750 Palestinian civilians were killed in the occupied Palestinian territory, with women and girls comprising roughly 15% of these casualties (OCHA, 2025). However, since October 7, 2023, a dramatic shift has occurred, with women and children accounting for nearly 70% of the 55,720 reported deaths in Gaza, reflecting an unprecedented toll on these vulnerable groups (UN Women, 2025; OCHA, 2025).

UN Women reports that the closure of women’s shelters in Gaza City has worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis for women (UN Women, 2025). Severe disruptions in telecommunication and electricity continue to hinder remote service provision, while a surge in households headed by widowed women points to the profound effect on families. The conflict has left thousands of men dead, rendering women solely responsible for their families’ survival, with approximately 13,500 children now fatherless, according to UN Women’s latest estimates (UN Women, 2025). Additionally, the sole operational maternity hospital in northern Gaza faces critical fuel shortages, amplifying risks for expectant mothers and their newborns (UNFPA, 2025). A woman shared her traumatic ordeal amidst the conflict, recounting, “Two weeks after the war began on my due date, I sought medical help, fully aware of the risks to my life and my long-awaited baby’s,” she recalled. “My doctor opted for a private clinic, despite

its limited resources, as it was our only option at the time. She continued, “I took a risk, hoping my baby wouldn’t face senseless violence after I brought him into this world” (UN Women, 2024). Her reflection summarizes the profound anguish and uncertainty experienced by countless mothers in Gaza. Despite these adversities, women’s rights organisations persist, though they face significant obstacles, with many members displaced and infrastructure reduced to rubble. As of March 2025, nine out of twelve women’s organisations in Gaza reported some level of functionality (UN Women, 2025). Feminist scholar Sara Meger (2016) notes that the breakdown of social support systems and the deliberate destruction of gender-specific infrastructure during conflicts represent not only collateral damage but also manifestations of gendered structural violence embedded in modern warfare.

Israel’s unyielding aggression against the reproductive rights of Palestinian women and their newborns is troubling and deeply concerning. As the tragic situation in Gaza continues to worsen, the deliberate and systematic attacks on the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls stand out as a pressing issue, particularly regarding gender-based violence. Israel’s consistent violations of international humanitarian law existed long before October 7. The control and cruelty inflicted on the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls in occupied Palestine have been a persistent and troubling problem. Amma Awadallah, a women’s rights activist with over two decades of experience, writes in OCHA that “[p]rior to October 2023, 94,000 women and girls already lacked access to sexual and reproductive health services, according to the United Nations Population Fund. This figure has now risen to over 1.2 million as of March 2025” (Awadallah, 2025). Awadallah references UN reports estimating that approximately 52,000 pregnant women resided in Gaza as of early 2025, with around 180 women giving birth daily, 40% of whom face complications due to inadequate medical care (UNFPA, 2025). These numbers were also shared by the WHO on November 3, 2023 (WHO, 2023). Moreover, reports indicate that women are undergoing labour and delivery without medical assistance, including instances of C-sections performed without anaesthesia (Malik, 2024). Additionally, menstruating women and girls lack access to sanitary products, resorting to improvised solutions such as using cloth and plastic bags to manage their periods. Some are even taking norethisterone tablets, typically used for menstrual disorders, due to the unavailability of menstrual pads. The lack of essential items makes this dire situation worse and forces women to use improvised solutions, like cutting baby nappies into pieces. She further writes that:

These are just some of the testimonies from thousands of cases of women’s sexual and reproductive health being compromised throughout this crisis. Pregnant women are miscarrying due to stress and shock, and the availability of medical facilities to give birth safely is now virtually non-existent. Without a full and immediate ceasefire, we can expect to see this vicious cycle continue, with thousands more maternal and newborn deaths. (Ammal, 2024)

Thus, the report exposes, in the ongoing crisis, the urgent sexual and reproductive health emergency disproportionately affecting women and girls. Nesrine Malik, a Guardian columnist in the same article, reflects on the dire conditions wherein mothers and children grapple with hunger and forced displacement and are in profound distress. Pregnant mothers endured an arduous 20-mile journey from northern to southern Gaza (Malik, 2024). Access to adequate food and clean water for nursing mothers is severely limited, and even when formula is procurable, sourcing uncontaminated water for its preparation proves a daily ordeal. Newborns in displaced camps remain unwashed, underscoring the acute challenges of motherhood amid crisis. These poignant realities from November last year reflect not only the physical perils but also the emotional toll exacted by this massive violence. On February 19, 2024, UN experts expressed alarm “over credible allegations of egregious human rights violations to which Palestinian women and girls continue to be subjected in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank” (as cited in Potvin & Lefurgey, 2023; Alsalem et al., 2024). They were “particularly distressed by reports that Palestinian women and girls in detention have also been subjected to multiple forms of sexual assault, such as being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli army officers.” However, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy condemned the UN report, calling the allegations “repulsive” (as cited in Belam & Banfield-Nwachi, 2024).

The relentless loss of lives and destruction of private and public infrastructure in Gaza – homes, schools, hospitals, and entire neighbourhoods reduced to rubble—marks a profound modern tragedy. Civilian areas, particularly hospitals, have become “battlegrounds”, as aptly described by Katie Polglase et al. in their extensive CNN investigation (Polglase et al., 2024). Among approximately 110 hospitals and 400 schools attacked or damaged across the Gaza Strip as of March 2025, their report highlights the plight of key facilities, including Al-Shifa, Al-Quds, and Al-Ahli al-Arabi Hospitals (OCHA, 2025). Al-Shifa, Gaza’s largest hospital, remains a “flashpoint” amidst ongoing airstrikes and missile attacks by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Israeli authorities claim a Hamas command centre operates beneath the medical complex, alleging its use for holding hostages. Despite repeated calls for evacuation, Hamas and on-site health officials deny these claims. The IDF also targeted an ambulance, alleging its use by a Hamas “terrorist cell” for “transferring militants and weapons”, though no evidence was presented to support these claims, according to Katie Polglase et al. Hamas dismissed these allegations as “baseless” (Polglase et al., 2024).

By January 2025, reports from the BBC and independent assessments such as *The Guardian* describe Gaza as “barely habitable,” with nine out of ten homes damaged or destroyed, schools and hospitals repeatedly struck, and nearly 1.9 million people (90% of the population) forcefully displaced (Beaumont, 2025). It depicts that throughout Gaza, neighbourhoods lie in ruins, once-bustling

commercial districts are now reduced to debris, educational institutions have been razed, and agricultural lands have been torn apart. In response, makeshift settlements have emerged along the southern border, providing shelter for the numerous individuals displaced by the devastation. Alongside the alarming loss of life, Israel's relentless airstrikes in Gaza are wreaking havoc on its infrastructure. To date, around 197,500 buildings have been either damaged or destroyed in Gaza as a result of the violence, with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) aiming to create a "buffer zone" by clearing the area, as reported by the United Nations (UNRWA, 2025). This total equates to approximately 60% of all buildings in the densely populated region, with the northern areas of Gaza bearing the brunt, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the destruction. Jamon Van Den Hoek, a geographer at Oregon State University, and Corey Scher, a Ph.D. candidate at the City University of New York, conducted an analysis to compile figures as of January 11, 2025 (BBC News, 2025). Amidst the deaths and forced displacements resulting from relentless violence and destruction, a young woman originally from Gaza City, now displaced to Khan Younis, poignantly expressed her despair: "Now everything is lost, and the future is so uncertain... Most of all: will I ever go back home?" (UN Women, 2024).

Several human rights reports have expressed grave concern for the children of Gaza, often described as one of the world's largest open-air prisons. Amid relentless airstrikes and bombardments, hospitals, schools, and homes—supposed sanctuaries—have been reduced to rubble in minutes, burying thousands of children under debris. Meanwhile, senior Israeli officials and public figures have derogatorily labelled Palestinian mothers and parents as "human animals" and their children as "children of darkness", revealing an intent to dehumanise and collectively punish the population (UN Human Rights Council, 2024). Hundreds of thousands of civilians in Gaza have endured intolerable conditions for over 20 months. Middle East Monitor (MEM), citing Gaza's Ministry of Health on January 11, 2024, reported that "10,000 of Gaza's 1.1 million children—one percent of the total child population—had been killed since 7 October 2023. By March 31, 2025, this figure rose to at least 13,641 children" (UNICEF, 2025). It is estimated that approximately 1,000 children in Gaza have lost one or both legs, with many undergoing amputations without anaesthesia, facing a lifetime of medical care (Middle East Monitor, 2024). Children continue to suffer profound physical and emotional consequences from intensive Israeli bombardment and unprecedented internal displacement. Jason Lee, Save the Children's Country Director for the occupied Palestinian territory, states, "Each day without a definitive ceasefire, 100 children on average are killed. There's no justification for this. The situation in Gaza is monstrous, tarnishing our common humanity" (Middle East Monitor, 2024). Lee further notes that since the violence erupted on October 7, 2023:

[C]hildren have been paying the price for a conflict they have no part in. They are terrified, hurt, maimed, displaced. One per cent of the child population of Gaza has already been killed by Israeli bombardments and ground operations.

Others risk being killed by starvation and disease, with famine coming ever closer. For children who have survived, the mental harm inflicted and the utter devastation of infrastructure, including homes, schools, and hospitals, have decimated their futures.

Defence for Children International (DCIP) designated 2023 as a year with “no comparison in the history of Israeli forces,” who pursued total “control over the Palestinian people and violated children’s rights” (DCIP, 2023). Israeli forces have killed Palestinian children at an unprecedented rate across the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem, with this trend continuing into 2025 (DCIP, 2023; UNRWA, 2025). The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) operates 288 of Gaza’s 737 schools, serving over 40% of students, with the Palestinian Authority or private entities managing the rest (Al Jazeera, 2024). As of May 2025, all educational institutions in Gaza remain closed due to Israel’s ongoing offensive, displacing 1.9 million people—over 80% of Gaza’s 2.3 million population (UNRWA, 2025). The offensive has caused over 54,084 deaths, including at least 15,613 children, with thousands missing, presumed dead under rubble (UNRWA, 2025). UNRWA’s 2018 data reported 9,367 teachers across its 288 Gaza schools (Al Jazeera, 2024). UNICEF has labelled Gaza the “most perilous environment for children,” citing relentless bombardment, displacement, and a lack of basic necessities (UNICEF, 2024).

Another devastating effect of this warfare is the acute food crisis engulfing Gaza, exacerbated by Israel’s use of starvation as a weapon to collectively punish Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe argues that militarised policies, such as blockades, disproportionately harm women by disrupting access to essential resources like food, amplifying gender inequalities in conflict zones (Enloe, 2014). Amidst this severe food insecurity, women and girls bear a disproportionate burden, facing heightened risks of malnutrition and health complications, especially pregnant and lactating women. UN Women, in collaboration with the World Food Programme, has provided emergency food aid to over 16,500 women-led households in Gaza as of March 2025, reaching a significant proportion of vulnerable families (UN Women, 2025). Additionally, distribution efforts have included dignity kits, winter clothes, and essential supplies, alongside recreational activities and mental health services for displaced populations. However, these efforts fall short of addressing the escalating needs, which require increased funding, strengthened partnerships, and enhanced safety measures for aid delivery. Reflecting on the dire situation, a 72-year-old woman in Gaza City encapsulates the prevailing sentiment, expressing fear, exhaustion, and a sense of impending doom. She poignantly states, “I am scared, exhausted, and anticipating the worst. God will have mercy on us” (UN Women, 2024).

The prolonged and intensifying Gaza conflict has pushed the entire population of approximately 2.3 million into crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity,

deepening an already dire humanitarian emergency (WFP, 2025). American political economist and scholar Sara Roy argues that Israel's blockade policies have systematically de-developed Gaza's economy, disproportionately burdening women with food provisioning under conditions of scarcity, exacerbating gender inequalities (Roy, 2016). Child malnutrition rates exceed global thresholds, with one in five children under two suffering from acute malnutrition as of April 2025 (UNICEF, 2025). Overcrowded shelters and hospitals struggle to accommodate 1.9 million displaced individuals – with dwindling food and water supplies compounding the crisis (WFP, 2025). Since October 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) has provided emergency food and cash assistance to 1.6 million people across Gaza and the West Bank, but ongoing hostilities and restricted access have halted aid convoys to northern Gaza, highlighting the precariousness of relief efforts (WFP, 2025). The WFP's *Palestine Emergency* webpage warns:

The number of places where WFP and partners can safely provide life-saving assistance is shrinking rapidly, putting hundreds of thousands at risk of being cut off from any form of relief. Without more humanitarian assistance, a deadly combination of hunger and disease will claim the lives of countless children, pregnant women, and young mothers. (WFP, 2025)

Framed by the *longue durée* of occupation and resistance, this study contends that the ongoing violence in Gaza has crystallised into a humanitarian crisis, where the heaviest burdens fall on women, children, and other non-combatant lives caught in the crossfire of geopolitical domination. Critical infrastructure – including homes, hospitals, and schools – has been decimated, leaving the population without basic necessities and safety nets. As Sara Roy (2007) notes, this reflects a process of deliberate “de-development,” compounding Gaza's vulnerability. The use of dehumanising and derogatory labels by political and military officials also raises questions about which lives are deemed “grievable” (Butler, 2004), highlighting the need for urgent international intervention and a long-term diplomatic resolution. These conditions not only reflect the humanitarian tragedy on the ground but also signal a broader political planning of domination that, as Edward Said (1993) and Ilan Pappé (2006) suggest, resonates with enduring patterns of colonial subjugation and settler expansionism.

The nature of Israel's political and military strategy toward Gaza, especially in threatening the survival of Palestinians, increasingly mirrors what many scholars interpret as a colonial framework. Communications reportedly sent by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to Palestinian civilians in northern Gaza – urging evacuation to the southern strip under the threat of being labelled as sympathisers with “terrorist organizations” – exemplify this coercive and territorial logic. These warnings were disseminated via leaflets and mobile audio recordings, explicitly bearing the IDF's insignia, and signaled an impending military escalation. Such actions reflect what Tamar Mayer (2008), a political geographer focusing on ethno-national identities, characterises as a “colonizer-

colonized” relationship, wherein Israel’s asymmetric power dynamics over the West Bank and Gaza align with structural and symbolic features of colonialism (Mayer, pp. 2–13).

International humanitarian law and human rights law prescribe strict frameworks for the conduct of hostilities, especially concerning the protection of civilians, the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks, and the safeguarding of essential services like healthcare and education. However, the violations documented in this paper – including the deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools, and civilian shelters, as well as the use of racist or dehumanising rhetoric – highlight the inadequacy or failure of international political and legal mechanisms in restraining state violence or ensuring justice for victimized populations (B’Tselem, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). Such violations, even when clearly falling within the ambit of *jus in bello*, have often been met with diplomatic inertia, thereby revealing the gap between normative legal frameworks and geopolitical realities in conflict zones such as Gaza.

This article illustrates how dominant media discourses – especially within Western and Israeli networks—frequently align with state narratives, contributing to the legitimisation of military strategies and the marginalisation of Palestinian suffering. Nevertheless, a few international media organisations and UN bodies have consistently highlighted the humanitarian crisis and offered counter-narratives that resist this dominant framing. Alongside military and political dimensions, media narratives are key to determining global perceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and influencing both public opinion and policy discourse. However, as mentioned that these narratives are often influenced by entrenched power structures that amplify dominant voices while marginalising alternative perspectives, especially subaltern ones. An analysis of multiple Indian and international media platforms during the recent escalation in Gaza reveals a glaring editorial silence on the specific vulnerabilities of women and children – who are among the worst affected in the conflict zone. Rather than foregrounding humanitarian suffering, many outlets instead prioritised state-centric narratives, spectacles, and self-referential promotions over in-depth reportage.

Particularly in the Indian media landscape, this tendency was stark. Corporate channels like Republic TV, Times Now, and India Today devoted disproportionately little attention to civilian casualties in Gaza during prime-time debates and social media snippets. Instead, they often echoed pro-Israel narratives without critically interrogating the humanitarian implications. India Today’s coverage, for instance, openly celebrated the fact that the Israeli legal team cited its reporting during the International Court of Justice (ICJ) proceedings on Gaza in January 2024. Anchors described the decision as a “moment of pride” and a “big deal”, screening the event as an accolade for their journalism (Philipose, 2024). Such framing not only sidelines the trauma of

Palestinian civilians but also contributes to the instrumentalisation of suffering to enhance the broadcaster's institutional prestige.

This phenomenon aligns with what Edward Said (1997) identified as the work of “careerist publicists”—journalists and media figures who abandon the ethical responsibility of telling the truth in favour of self-promotion and alignment with hegemonic power structures. Said contends that such figures often cloak themselves in the rhetoric of neutrality while contributing to the erasure of dissenting or marginalised narratives. Thus, Indian media coverage – far from being a detached observer – often appears to be an active participant in legitimising dominant geopolitical agendas, especially when humanitarian crises are at stake. Various national and global news networks continue to present the ongoing violence in Gaza predominantly through a statist lens, framing the unyielding assaults by Israeli occupation forces—including civilians, residential buildings, hospitals, and refugee camps—as acts of “self-defence.” This framing often disregards international humanitarian law, human rights standards, and the immense civilian suffering endured by men, women, and children. Such media behaviour reflects strategic alignment with state narratives, raising questions about journalistic neutrality and the ethics of wartime reporting. By casting Israeli military operations as defensive responses to the Hamas-led attacks of 7 October 2023, several Western and Indian media outlets have normalised disproportionate violence against civilians, while portraying Palestinians either as passive collateral or as complicit “terrorist”. This portrayal not only reinforces racialised stereotypes but also obscures the structural causes of the conflict, including occupation, blockade, and settler expansion (Pappé, 2024; Chomsky & Pappe, 2015).

Edward Said (1997) incisively argued that media are not external to power structures but operate as “political institutions”, performing a central role in manufacturing consent and legitimising domination over oppressed populations. This argument remains salient in the current context, as dominant media outlets function more as extensions of geopolitical interests than as watchdogs of state violence. In this way, the power to represent or misrepresent suffering becomes a tool of ideological warfare, erasing the narratives of the subjugated and silencing their resistance.

In conclusion, the crisis in Gaza requires sustained engagement from the global civil, legal, and political community – not only to alleviate civilian suffering but to pursue a just and enduring resolution that confronts the structural roots of the conflict. It is also imperative for all parties – particularly powerful state actors and their media allies – to uphold international humanitarian law, prioritise human rights, and commit to sincere diplomatic engagement that addresses historical grievances and structural violence. This study observed stark differences between Israeli and Western media narratives – often shaped by nation-state interests – and non-Western, Palestinian, or Global South perspectives. To navigate these epistemic contradictions and avoid distortions, the present study has consciously relied on independent human rights

organisations, United Nations reports, and testimonies from affected civilians rather than solely depending on mainstream journalistic sources. In today's complex media ecology shaped by capitalist and neocolonial forces, both traditional and digital platforms shape how war/conflict zones are seen and understood. The stark contrast in their portrayals of Gaza highlights the urgent need for critical media literacy. Only by challenging dominant narratives and listening to Gaza's silenced voices can we truly grasp the human toll of violence and displacement.

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Diplomacy amid the India-Canada relations and the Khalistan Challenge

Binesh Bhatia, Sucha Singh & H.K. Thakur

ABSTRACT

India and Canada share strong bilateral relations in trade, education, and vibrant cultural exchange. The sizable Indian diaspora in Canada, rooted in shared democratic values and Commonwealth ties, has helped sustain a cooperative relationship. However, the emergence of the Khalistan movement—radicalized during the violent unrest in Punjab in the 1980s—has significantly strained bilateral ties, particularly during Prime Minister Trudeau’s tenure. Previous governments have contributed to turbulence at multiple levels, complicating diplomatic engagements between the two countries. The evolving dynamics of the Khalistan movement reflect divergent national priorities, which have increasingly shaped bilateral interactions. This paper attempts to trace the historical roots of the separatist ideology advocating for a sovereign Punjab in India. It also examines the movement’s contemporary manifestations within Canada’s multicultural framework, which have placed additional strain on its relationship with India. The study analyses how Canada’s commitment to free speech and political activism has enabled pro-Khalistan sentiments to thrive among segments of the Indian diaspora. India, in contrast, views such activities as threats to its sovereignty and national security, with pro-Khalistan actors often labelled as extremists or even terrorists. The paper argues that the Khalistan issue presents a formidable challenge to India-Canada relations. At the same time, it emphasizes opportunities for constructive dialogue, stronger economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and mutual respect for sovereignty. The study also offers recommendations for easing tensions, balancing domestic political pressures with the broader goal of strengthening bilateral ties.

Keywords: *Indian diaspora, Khalistani movement, Sovereignty, National Security.*

Introduction

India and Canada, despite their distant geographical boundaries shares connections in terms of their social diversity, democracy and multiculturalism. Both nations own a wealth of cultural traditions and have unswervingly embraced multiculturalism as a fundamental principle of their existence. Individually India and Canada possess parliamentary democratic systems and semi-federal structures that strive to accommodate social diversities, minority

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groups and a large emigrant population (Thakur & Bhatia, 2025). Multiculturalism suggest a prevailing political culture which should recognise and respect cultural, ethnic and religious differences within a country (Kymlicka, 1995). A state ensures the acceptance and credits diversity by establishing a constitutional framework which allows free existence and independent expression of rights for minority group members (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). It addresses the presence of cultural diversity in modern democracies and serves as a method for redressing the exclusion, prejudice and oppression experienced by different cultural groups. Although recognition of the rights of minorities and the provision of free spaces to them were the major challenges of the democracies in the 19th and 20th centuries (Taylor, 1994). The idea drew more attention during the socio-cultural eruptions and demands of nationalist forces for secession in the 1950's and 1960's in several states in the West (Modood, 2007). States were forced to recalibrate their organisational structures in consonance with the idea of multiculturalism, which implied independent coexistence with the dominant culture of a state (Parekh, 2000). India and Canada, the two vibrant democracies, have periodic tension in their bilateral ties as they have been shadowed intermittently by the Khalistan question (Tatla, 1999). The Khalistan Movement which sought to establish sovereign Sikh state acquired significant influence in the 1980's mostly affecting the Punjab state of India. While the movement has significantly declined in India, there are still pockets of support among the worldwide Sikh diaspora, particularly in Canada, where there is a substantial Sikh population. The presence of Overseas Indian has substantial Sikh community in Canada, some of whom support the Khalistan Movement which has impacted the India-Canada bond (Thakur, 2024, p. 23). Recent events included assaults on the Indian embassy in Canada and referendums related to the Khalistan Movement, have further strained India-Canada ties. These occurrences have exaggerated diplomatic relations and sparked significant concerns about security and diplomatic post-safeguarding. The Indian government has raised apprehensions over pro-Khalistan actions in Canada, stating that incidents pose a significant risk to India's sovereignty and security. Consequently, India has been lobbying Canada to adopt more robust measures against pro-Khalistan factions (Thakur & Bhatia, 2025). These developments have tested the resilience of India-Canada ties, raising questions about the ability of both nations to navigate sensitive political issues while preserving mutual interests. This research paper explores the complexities of India-Canada relations and challenges of the Khalistan movement, examining the historical context and its implications on diplomacy. By analysing the diaspora politics, national policies and international relations, the study highlights pathway for constructive engagement that strengthen bilateral ties while minimising Khalistani propaganda. In Canada, the Khalistani incendiaries are responsible for disturbing the long-standing friendly Indo-Canadian connection, causing terror among Indians, and disturbing the calm in their nation. The prime minister of Canada, who is targeting the Sikh vote bank in the 2025 federal elections to hold onto power since their strength has been

growing quickly over the past three decades, indirectly backed their wicked activities (Nambiar, 2025).

Population of Overseas Indians (Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.)

Sr. No.	Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)	Overseas Indian
1.	Canada	1016274	1859680	2875954

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, GOI (Page last updated on: 27/03/2025)

As per data maintained by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India the population of Overseas Indian have been grown-up to 2.87million. The Sikh population has grown significantly since 1991. Though the Indian government succeeded in controlling the Khalistan militancy in those days, it has been raising its head very often in India as well as in several other countries, especially in Canada (Thakur, 2025). Presently, India is also the largest source of immigrants to Canada across all categories which includes study permits. The role of the Indian diaspora in Canada and the various challenges that both countries face in managing diversity and promoting inclusion, including issues related to identity politics, discrimination, and social inequality. Beyond the politics of policies on migration in receiving countries at the national level, the reality of the permanence of migrants means that countries are becoming increasingly multicultural (Bhatia & Verma, 2025).

The rise of Khalistan and its repercussions

Soon after India's independence, Tara Singh, in 1948, called for the establishment of a Punjabi-speaking autonomous Sikh state. Tara Singh (1885–1967) was a “Sikh leader known chiefly for his advocacy of an autonomous Punjabi-speaking Sikh nation in the Punjab region. He was a champion of Sikh rights against the dominant Hindus, Muslims, and British” (Britannica, 2023). Punjab came into existence in 1966. The Khalistan Movement was started about five decades back in the state of Punjab. “The Khalistan movement emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s, advocates for the creation of a separate homeland for Sikhs in India. While the government had previously suppressed the movement, it has recently gained momentum, particularly led by few Sikh diaspora based in Canada” (Frontline, 2023). The term ‘Khalistan’ was popularised in 1960’s which means ‘Land of the Pure’ in the Punjabi language. Its demand represents desire of a small group in Sikh community in the state of Punjab for an ‘independent Sikh homeland’. The idea gained momentum in the 1980s for a variety of socio-political factors like a strong religious and cultural identity, language, historical grievances, electoral failures, feelings of persecution and human rights denial, coupled with a desire for more autonomy. Keeping in view the prevalent diversities India went for a semi-federal democratic organisation of its states and territories at independence from British rule, and this gradually evolved into a ‘checks and balances system of federal management’. After the partition of India in 1947 the Sikhs settled for a separate state of Punjab within

the Indian Union and continued with the demand for devolution of more powers and a separate Punjabi Suba on the basis of language. State politics remained divided between Akalis and the Congress who shared power alternately (Thakur, 2024).

The failure of a few separatist leaders in state elections, along with the electoral rivalry between Akali Dal and Congress, created an opportunity for Khalistani voices to demand secession from India. According to Atul Kohli, “The repeated failure of the Akali to wrest power from Congress had left open a political space for those who argued that increased militancy was the only means for protecting Sikh interests [A charismatic preacher, Jarnail Singh] Bhindranwale stepped into that space” (Kohli, 1991). The International campaigns and so-called referendums, mainly driven by some segments of the Sikh diaspora around the world. This renewed push for Khalistan has been particularly evident in countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Thakur, 2024).

Key challenges to bilateral relations and recent developments

The relationship between India and Canada, historically characterized by strong economic and cultural ties, has been strained recently due to various political, diplomatic, and social issues. The Khalistan Movement and Extremism, which advocates for a separate Sikh state in India, has been a major point of contention. India views these groups as a threat to its national security and accuses Canada of not taking sufficient action against them. Allegations of a safe haven for extremists have exacerbated tensions, leading to diplomatic protests from India. The assassination of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, a Canadian Sikh leader, and espionage allegations against each other have further strained diplomatic relations and undermined trust between the two governments. Diplomatic and political disputes have resulted in senior diplomats being expelled and travel advisories issued for citizens (Bloomberg, 2023). This has seriously impacted their economic ties too. India and Canada have experienced substantial growth in bilateral trade in recent years, with trade volume hitting \$8.16 billion in the fiscal year 2022—23. India’s exports to Canada, valued at \$4.1 billion, consist of pharmaceuticals, gems and jewellery, textiles, and machinery. On the other hand, Canada’s exports to India, worth \$4.06 billion, comprise of pulses, lumber, pulp and paper, and mining goods. India and Canada share a robust education collaboration. There are over 200 educational partnerships between Indian and Canadian institutions. In addition, over 3,19,000 Indian students are enrolled in Canadian institutions, making them the largest international student cohort in Canada, according to GTRI. Indian students contributed USD 4.9 billion to the Canadian economy in 2021 (Economic Times, 2023). However, there has been significant drop in number of new admissions of Indian students in Canada. Trade and economic ties have been stalled, and economic uncertainty has affected bilateral trade and investment flows. Community tensions, particularly within the Sikh community in Canada, have led to public protests and rallies. The international community

has expressed concern over the escalating tensions, and the strained bilateral relations can impact cooperation in international forums such as the United Nations and G20 (Thakur, 2025).

In the trade and industry field, successive governments of India-Canada have made efforts to leverage diaspora ties to deepen the bilateral relationship. According to Bisaria (2018), Indian High Commissioner at Canada, “The Strategic India—Canada economic partnership was moving to the next level in business and political terms and often the business led the political side. We are working on trade agreements and having a conversation on investment protection agreement. There is a strong inflow of immigrants and students from India to Canada. India is investing in human capital in Canada and Canada is exporting financial capital to India” (Thakur 2019, p. 46). Canada is a sought—after choice for Indian students pursuing higher education, since thousands of them enroll in Canadian universities and colleges every year. They contributed about 4.9 billion to the Canadian economy in 2021. The Indian diaspora in Canada is dynamic and influential, enriching the heterogeneous fabric of Canadian society. India’s cultural events, cinema, and cuisine are greatly celebrated.

India and Canada currently make substantial investments under their respective new administrations. The bilateral commerce between the two states has experienced a twofold increase over a span of six years, rising from \$3.21 billion in 2010 to around \$6.05 billion in 2016. Nevertheless, there is ample opportunity to increase commerce as India currently represents a mere 1.95 per cent of Canada’s overall worldwide trade. India’s primary exports to Canada consist of diamonds, jewellery, and precious stones, pharmaceutical products, ready-made clothes, textiles, organic chemicals, light technical goods, iron and steel commodities, and other similar items. India imports a variety of goods from Canada, such as pulses, newspaper, wood pulp, asbestos, potash, iron scrap, copper, minerals, and industrial chemicals (MEA 2018). During the last 27 years the exports of India to Canada have increased at an annualized rate of 10.1 per cent, from \$399M in 1995 to \$5.37B in 2022. During the same period the exports of Canada to India have increased at an annualized rate of 9.44 per cent, from \$378M in 1995 to \$4.32B in 2022. In February 2024, India exported \$348M and imported \$492M from Canada, resulting in a negative trade balance of \$144M (OEC 2024). In 2016, the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) from India in Canada was more than twice the amount of FDI from Canada in India. Specifically, India’s FDI in Canada was \$2093.53 million, while Canada’s FDI in India was \$901.16 million. Indian corporations have made significant investments, particularly in the fields of information technology, software development, steel production, and extraction of natural resources.

India and Canada have made a joint statement expressing their commitment to take particular actions, such as promptly completing the Bilateral Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA). The two Prime Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the agreement on a road map aimed at

promptly finalising a progressive, balanced, and mutually advantageous Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was established by the UPA government in 2010 (Thakur 2019, p. 46).

Engaging the Indian diaspora in Canada seems a challenging ordeal for New Delhi, which wants to limit the influence of Canada-based Khalistan sympathizers. While Sikhs constitute a significant proportion of the Indian diaspora, they make up less than 1 per cent (a little over 5,00,000) of Canada's total population. Despite this, the Sikh diaspora commands a reasonable influence in Canada's federal politics, specifically in the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario. The early Sikh immigrants to Canada faced anti-immigrant sentiments and discrimination, which led them to politically organize themselves. Social, economic, and political developments in India further fuelled their political drive, including the declaration of the Emergency in 1975, the rise of Sikh militancy in Punjab in the 1980s, Operation Blue Star in the Golden Temple (Amritsar) in 1983, and the 1984 riots that resulted in the deaths of almost 3,000 Sikhs (Singh and Singh, 2008: pp. 149–171). Such events have also informed Canada's political discourse.

The emergence of strong secessionist sentiments further created schisms within the community. While moderates view India favourably and oppose secessionist sentiments, the fundamentalist groups, such as the Babbar Khalsa, vehemently advocate for the Khalistan cause. Events such as the 1984 riots and the Golden Temple incident are frequently introduced in Canada's provincial legislatures, often in the form of petitions. This is due to the prominent involvement of Sikhs in Canada's politics and the regionalization of Indo-Canadian politics, whereby issues affecting the Sikh diaspora seem to dominate. In 2010, Liberal MPs Sukh Dhaliwal and Andrew Kania introduced a petition in the House of Commons, asking Ottawa to consider the 1984 riots as an act of genocide and discuss the issue with New Delhi. The members of other political parties have made similar demands. In 2012, the New Democratic Party (NDP) argued that, as a democratic nation, Canada must seek answers from India on behalf of its citizens. In 2017, Harinder Malhi of the Liberal Party moved a private motion in the Ontario assembly, describing the 1984 riots as genocide. Since 2014, Gurpanwant Singh Pannun, leader of the group Sikhs for Justice, has campaigned for a referendum in Punjab in 2020 and even presented a petition to Stephen Harper, asking him to share it with Narendra Modi during Modi's 2015 visit to Canada. In addition to these issues, the emergence of Jagmeet Singh as the leader of Canada's NDP has also caused some concern in New Delhi. While Singh has refrained from offering unqualified support to the Khalistan cause and remains vague on the issue, he has criticized New Delhi for the Operation Blue Star. Singh has also supported Guy Caron, another NDP leader, who asked the Canadian government to recognize the 1984 riots in India as genocide (Kumar, 2025).

In 2023, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canadian PM Justin Trudeau met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Delhi and discussed Khalistan extremism. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Khalistani extremism said that “foreign interference” came up during his talk with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “It is important to remember that the actions of the few do not represent the entire community or Canada”, He added (Saha, 2023).

While India-Canada economic relations have made some progress, Canada remains an insignificant trading partner for India. Canada’s Indo—Pacific strategy, which says India’s strategic importance can only increase as its economy grows and it becomes the world’s most populous country, offers a wider staging ground for the two to come together to work for mutual benefits. However, the operation of Khalistani elements from the land of Canada has always hanged like a demcles sword on the two states. The recent diplomatic stalemate between India and Canada also stemmed from mutual recriminations over the 2023 killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, which Ottawa linked to Indian agents which New Delhi vehemently denied. Tensions escalated with reciprocal expulsions of diplomats and suspended visa services. However, the recent reports of CSIS has strengthened the Indian stand as it revealed the Khalistani connection with the anti-India activities supported from Canada.

CSIS

Quite recently in 2025 Canada’s spy agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), formally acknowledged that Khalistani extremist organizations, who have been operating from Canada are engaged in fundraising from different channels, and planning violent activities in India, posing a threat to both India and Canda. The confession in the detailed CSIS public report underscores a shift in Canada’s public stance on Khalistani extremism and has turned against them accommodating the Indian view. The CSIS report also discusses how these groups exploited Canada’s open democratic system to raise funds, recruit supporters, and coordinate actions to destabilise India, particularly the Indian state of Punjab. The report also notes the use of encrypted communication platforms and diaspora networks to orchestrate violence, including targeted killings and propaganda campaigns. This admission comes amid restored Canada-India diplomatic ties following the 2025 G7 Summit in Alberta, where Prime Ministers Mark Carney and Narendra Modi agreed to reappoint high commissioners and resume trade and visa services. Canada announced its first Consul General appointment in Mumbai in July 2025 marking the end of a freeze on diplomatic postings in Canadian missions in India that began in October 2023, when Canada pulled out 41 diplomats after New Delhi demanded parity in numbers (The Wire, 2015). CSIS’s findings also underscored the need for enhancing the bilateral law enforcement cooperation to address transnational threats, including terrorism and foreign interference. However, the acknowledgment risks inflaming domestic tensions in Canada, particularly

within Sikh diaspora communities, while raising questions about balancing free speech with national security (The Hindu, 2025).

G7 Summit

During the 51st G7 Summit, held in Kananaskis, Alberta, from June 15–17, 2025, India and Canada got an appropriate time to develop the lost cordiality as Prime Ministers Mark Carney and Narendra Modi agreed to restore full diplomatic ties following a period of strained relations (MEA, 2025; India Today, 2025a). This diplomatic breakthrough, initiated by Carney's invitation to Modi, addressed tensions stemming from Canada's 2023 allegations linking Indian agents to the murder of Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The bilateral meeting on the summit's sidelines resulted in commitments to reappoint high commissioners, resume visa services, and restart trade negotiations, signaling a strategic reset in bilateral relations. This meeting lays the groundwork for a potential reset (India Today, 2025b). This development reflects Canada's intent to leverage its 2025 G7 presidency to re-engage with India, a rising global power, amid shared priorities in critical minerals, clean energy, and counter-terrorism. The agreement also aligns with Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and efforts to diversify trade amid U.S. tariff threats. However, challenges persist, including Canada's concerns about Indian foreign interference and India's allegations of Canada-based Khalistani extremism (The Hindu, 2025). Both leaders emphasized mutual respect, rule of law, and sovereignty, with Modi advocating for the Global South's concerns and Carney highlighting cooperation on transnational crime. The restoration of diplomatic channels is expected to facilitate law enforcement collaboration and economic partnerships, potentially increasing bilateral trade by up to C\$8 billion over the next decade. Despite this progress, unresolved tensions, particularly around the Nijjar case and Khalistani activism, underscore the need for sustained engagement to ensure a durable thaw (MEA, 2025).

However, in the meantime, the presence of Khalistani protests led by groups like Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) and inflammatory rhetoric figures like Gurbatwant Singh Pannun highlight the ongoing challenge of managing separatist sentiments within Canada's Sikh diaspora (Times of India, 2025a). The following measures are suggested for balancing domestic political pressures and strengthening bilateral ties:

1. **Strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation:** Canada must take decisive steps to address India's concerns regarding Khalistani extremism, including enforcing measures against groups like SFJ, which India has designated a terrorist organization (Times of India, 2025a). Ottawa should act on India's extradition requests for 26 Khalistani fugitives and restrict activities that glorify violence or threaten India's sovereignty, such as provocative protests during high-profile visits. India, in turn, should provide actionable intelligence to support Canada's investigations, particularly in the Hardeep

Singh Nijjar case, while maintaining its rejection of unverified allegations of interference (India Today, 2025b).

2. **Enhance economic and trade ties:** Both nations should capitalize on shared economic interests, especially as Canada seeks to diversify trade amid U.S. tariffs and India aims to expand its North American market presence (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2025). The resumption of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations and collaboration in critical minerals, technology, and energy transition, as discussed at the G7, provide a foundation for mutual growth (The Indian Express, 2025). India should prioritize transparent trade policies to build confidence, while Canada should ensure a stable environment for Indian investments.
3. **Manage diaspora dynamics:** To prevent escalations, Canada must enhance security measures to avoid clashes between pro-India and pro-Khalistan groups during diplomatic events (Times of India, 2025a). India should encourage its diaspora to engage in constructive cultural diplomacy, fostering positive narratives to counter extremist rhetoric. Both nations should promote dialogue platforms to address diaspora grievances while respecting national sovereignty.
4. **Institutionalize commitments:** Given the political fluidity in Canada, particularly with the New Democratic Party's (NDP) historical ties to Sikh advocacy, India should push for institutionalized frameworks, such as bilateral counter-terrorism agreements, to ensure continuity beyond electoral cycles (Canada's NDP, 2025). Carney's pragmatic approach, sidelining pro-Khalistani elements in his cabinet, is a positive step, but India must remain cautious of future policy shifts (India Today, 2025b).
5. **Foster transparent dialogue:** Both leaders should maintain open channels for frank discussions on sensitive issues like the Nijjar case and transnational repression, as emphasized by Carney during the G7 (India Today, 2025b). Regular high-level engagements and law enforcement cooperation can rebuild trust, ensuring that diplomatic progress is not derailed by domestic pressures or extremist provocations (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2025).

By implementing these recommendations, India and Canada can transform the G7 Summit's diplomatic breakthrough into a resilient partnership, balancing respect for sovereignty, diaspora rights, and shared economic goals while addressing the Khalistan challenge with resolve. Hence, two nations must ensure a sustainable partnership where both nations must address these complexities with concrete actions and mutual respect.

Conclusion

India and Canada share strong democratic values, social diversity, and multiculturalism, with both nations embracing parliamentary systems and semi-

federal structures that accommodate minority communities and emigrant populations. Their shared commitment to multiculturalism aims to protect cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, fostering inclusive societies. However, the relationship has been strained by the Khalistan movement, which advocates for a separate Sikh state in India. This movement gained traction in the 1970s and 1980s due to identity-based grievances, and has since found support in diaspora communities, particularly in Canada. Recent incidents, including attacks on Indian diplomatic missions and pro-Khalistan referendums, have escalated tensions. India perceives Canada's lack of action against Khalistan sympathizers as a security concern, leading to diplomatic friction. The issue is compounded by the significant influence of the Sikh diaspora in Canadian politics, especially in British Columbia and Ontario. Allegations of Canada serving as a safe haven for extremists have further soured bilateral ties.

Despite these challenges, India and Canada have made notable progress in trade and education. Bilateral commerce has grown, with India exporting pharmaceuticals, textiles, and chemicals, while importing agricultural and industrial goods from Canada. Foreign direct investment reflects India's growing presence in Canada, particularly in technology and natural resources. Educational partnerships have also flourished, although student admissions have recently declined amid political tensions. The Indian diaspora in Canada plays a key role in bridging cultural and economic ties but is also at the centre of identity politics influenced by separatist elements. This paper explores the historical roots of the Khalistan movement, its impact on India-Canada diplomacy, and the importance of managing diaspora dynamics. Constructive engagement, mutual respect for national security concerns, and inclusive policies are essential for strengthening this multifaceted relationship.

Note and references

Notes

1. It is often difficult to ascribe a precise date of origin to the rise of a particular secessionist movement. This is especially so when many of its protagonists contend that their demands for separate nationhood are rooted in and legitimised by entrenched historical realities. Nevertheless, many scholars in attempting to place a fixed time frame around the Sikh separatist movement for Khalistan in North India tend to commence their chronology of events from 1981 and end in 1993. This is because it was during this time period that Punjab endured a heightened level of religious militancy with an estimated death toll of over 25,000 resulting from the associated violence (Puri et al 1999: 10). It was only the second insurgency movement the first being the Naga movement in North East India that the postcolonial, post-partition, Indian state had to deal with insurgency. The latter was also the more testing of the two. The roots of Sikh separatism are long and contested, although it is clear that plans for an independent Sikh state did exist in the final years of British rule over the subcontinent. However, these plans emerged as a reaction to the Pakistan resolution of 1940, and were not, for the majority of the Sikh leadership at least, their first preference for a postcolonial settlement. Sikh separatism continued almost immediately after partition through the demand for a

Punjabi suba or linguistic state, which Master Tara Singh, a veteran leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), had allegedly conceded was merely an acceptable cover for what his community and he were truly seeking, namely a Sikh majority political entity (Singh 1992: 40). After the Punjabi suba was eventually conceded in 1966, further grievances vis--vis New Delhi began to emerge, including the status of Chandigarh, the distribution of river water flowing through Punjab, the alleged religious discrimination of Sikhs, and undue encroachment by the state into their religious affairs. Such grievances found their way into the SADs Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973, which went to form the bedrock of demands for the early portion of the militant movement that emerged at the beginning of the following decade (1980s), and was supported by the likes of Amritdhari Damdami Taksal preacher Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (*Realpolitik in the Khalistan Movement*, 2019)

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Terrorist turned Ikhwan: the lesser-known victims of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir

Shreeya Bakshi & Kirti Sharma

ABSTRACT

Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir had a wide-ranging impact on the lives of people since its inception. Various extrinsic and intrinsic factors within and outside the erstwhile state supported the wave of terrorism during its peak. Eventually, it became the major cause of agony for those youngsters who first supported the wave of terrorism as terrorists and later became critical of it and joined counter-terrorist forces. Those youngsters who supported the counter-terrorist forces in J&K after surrendering their weapons are called Ikhwans. They are crushed dually in the wave of terrorism as once they suffer at the hands of terrorist organisations in the training camps of Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. At another level, they faced criticism from the local supporters of terrorism within J&K after surrendering weapons. In the present research, through the Interpretative Phenomenological analysis of the oral narratives of the Ikhwans, their lived experiences of being terrorists in the terrorist training camps are analysed, and how their surrender has marginalised them in today's context in their present societies is understood. It exhibits Ikhwans as silent sufferers of terrorism firstly, when they became terrorists and then after abandoning the terrorist organisations or Pakistan. Moreover, the role of government in mainstreaming local terrorists in J&K is evident in the present study.

Keywords: *Ikhwans, Jammu and Kashmir, Sufferings, Terrorism, Victimisation*

Historical context

India (Bharat) as a nation has faced the spectre of terrorist violence from the day of its independence. There were about 565 princely states of India and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was one such princely state. Partition was accepted by Indians as the outcome of Indian Independence Act 1947 of British Parliament. Similarly, it has to be accepted that it was only the Prince of the Princely State who had to decide whether to accede to India Dominion or Pakistan Dominion or take any other decision. The last Dogra ruler of J&K, Maharaja Hari Singh, signed the Instrument of Accession on 26th Oct. 1947, with Lord Mountbatten,

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which was in the provision of the Indian Independence Act, legitimate, well-considered and wilful (Srivastava, 2021; Sagar, 2014, p.3-4; Prakash, 2008, V-1, p.189).

Despite the accession of J&K with Indian dominion, the territorial integrity of J&K was challenged untimely and repeatedly by Pakistan through the conventional attacks of 1947, wars of 1965, 1971 and 1999, which have altered the demography and territorial lines of J&K. Pakistan having failed to achieve its objective of disintegration of India through costly classical warfare, it goes to its credit to adopt Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC). LIC is a limited politico-military struggle, often protracted in nature and is waged by means ranging from absolute non-violence to a large scale use of means of mass destruction, short of declaration of open war. In J&K, LIC, on the Line of Control (LoC) is a '*no war no peace situation*', where Pakistan is continually involved in the violation of ceasefire and infiltration of terrorists towards India (Chadha, 2005, p.25-26).

The 1987, J&K Assembly elections marked a pivotal moment when various concealed terrorist organisations established an operational nexus to assert their presence in the state. They exploited the elections to incite controversies and chaos within the region. There were strong allegations that elections were rigged by the ruling Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC). The rigging of the election caused violence and abrupt chaos. On sensing the opportunity, Pakistan used it to attack J&K by motivating youngsters to join them. Pakistan has changed its strategy of disintegrating India after 1980's in J&K. It chose religious public appealing and armed training to local population on a promise of a secure future with Pakistan. Thus, the land of Pakistan has acted as a mushrooming ground of terrorism for religiously motivated men coming from J&K. Whereas, the Pakistani Army and Indian-men developed the symbiotic relationship in training camps, which remain beneficial for Pakistan but proved fatal both for the India as well as for the lives of people involved from J&K (Prakash, 2008, p.199-252).

Although terrorism in J&K is said to have started by General Ayub Khan but subsequent governments in Pakistan including that of Benizir Bhutto fully subscribed to programme. A sizeable number of Kashmiri youth had to be recruited in terrorist training camps of Pakistan to achieve their aims for India. During a survey, Indian Armed Forces has obtained the knowledge of about 105 training camps, 49 of these were in Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir, 48 in Pakistan and 8 in Afghanistan (Pandita & Kaul, 2013, p.29-31). There were some training centres in the valley itself. But they functioned for a very short duration and were quickly shifted, leaving no evidence, rendering the task of apprehending the trainers and trainees difficult. A large number of guides and motivators had also been enlisted and were woven into a well-knit organisational training, facilitating border-crossing and indulging in acts of terrorism and allied activities. This is how terror mapping was done in J&K, and terrorism started spreading its roots in J&K (Jagmohan, 2017, p.350). From the

beginning of year 1988, a considerable number of youth from J&K had started moving towards Pakistan, owing their allegiance to subversive groups of Pakistan for training in arms. The fragility of political and social structure of the state and the disintegrated cultural ethos has allowed the movement of people unchecked. These youth on return to India were eager to form their own terrorist organisations, all indoctrinated and primed up for action. On August 14th 1988, Pakistan Independence Day, a number of green flags were hoisted in the interior of Srinagar city and other towns of the valley. On August 15th, Indian Independence Day, black flags were hoisted in number of private and public buildings and tricolour were burnt. During the protest marches, processionists kept shouting anti-Indian slogans as '*Pakistan Zindabad*' '*Khalistan Zindabad*'; '*Noor-e-Chashm, Noor-e-Haq, Zia-ul-Haq, Zia-ul-Haq*'; '*Muslim-Sikh Bhai Bhai, Hindu Quam Kahan se Ayee*' throughout the month. The whole environment was charged with anti-Indian emotions and pro-Pakistani hysteria. By and large, the trained terrorists coming from Pakistan had strategically evaded the eyes of the Indian Armed Forces deployed in the state and remained successful in their mission of spreading terror in J&K (Jagmohan, 2017, p. 256-257). The Kashmir valley was not the last stop of terrorists. By October 1989, terrorists made inroads in the districts of Doda, Kishtwar, Bhandarwah, Ramban, Rajouri, Poonch, Reasi and Udhampur of Jammu division. These peripheral areas have become the breeding ground of terrorism paralleling the intensity of barbarianism perpetrated by terrorists in the valley. Extension of terrorist activity to erstwhile Doda and adjoining areas or from Kashmir division to Jammu division was a part of terrorist's program to valorize the '*Greater Kashmir*' agenda (Teng & Gaddo, 1998, p.106-107). When counter-terrorism got strengthened by Indian Army or JKP in the state, terrorists faced setbacks and discouragement in executing their plans of violence and bloodshed. The terrorist's movement within J&K, underwent a significant change in mid-1995. The youth became somewhat reluctant to offer themselves for the recruitment of terror or secessionist outfits due to disenchantment received by people from Pakistan and the strong holds maintained by Indian Army or JKP with counter-terrorism (Chadha, 2005, p. 125-131, Jagmohan, 2017).

When the process of arrests of terrorists had started, the civil administration and Indian Army or JKP started getting feelers that some misguided youth would be willing to surrender before the authorities and lay down their arms if assured of decent treatment. On taking up the matter with the State Government, the policy of surrenders was not only approved, but even encouraged. However, on August 2, 1990, a group of 5 Pakistan-trained terrorists, along with arms and ammunition, surrendered at Surankot (Poonch) Police station. These were the first ever surrenders, and they set a trend which was later picked up in the Kashmir Valley as well (Bloeria, n.d.). Out of these surrendered terrorists few started working with Armed Forces in various counter-terrorists operations. These surrenderees were known as Ikhwans.

Therefore, the objective of the present research is to highlight the various reasons that motivated youngsters to join terrorist organisations and issues of terrorists in Pakistani training camps that became the cause of their surrender. The paper also examines the role of Indian Government in mainstreaming the radical section of society in Jammu and Kashmir.

The present study has followed the Phenomenological approach. According to Alfred Schutz, phenomenology was focally concerned with the way in which people grasp the consciousness of others while they live within their own stream of consciousness. In his book, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Schutz describes understanding is thus, a “rediscovery of the I in the Thou” (Schutz, et.al, 1967; Ritzer, 2011). Therefore, the lived experiences of Ikhwans as a terrorist are comprehended by using the phenomenological approach.

Nine Ikhwans were interviewed for the present research, who crossed the Line of Control (LoC) from J&K towards Pakistan for armed training and then returned to India by surrendering their weapon to the Indian Army or JKP. The conducted interviews were unstructured. As per the ease and safety of the respondents, interviews were conducted at different places in J&K. NVivo-12 software is used to draw various themes (reason for joining terrorism and reason for surrender) from the respondents’ narrations, which are both auto-generated and researcher-generated.

Understanding the word “Ikhwan” and exploring the Ikhwani movement

The Ikhwan is an Arabic word which means ‘*Brethren or brotherhood*’ united by the ties of common membership in the Wahhabi sect of Central Arabia (Webster, 1828). A Muslim Brotherhood movement was organised by Kuka Parray, a pioneer of the counter-terrorist group in Kashmir, which was formed in the early 1990s (Staff Reporter, 2003). The quarrel between the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen terrorist outfit and the Hizbul Mujahideen, another terrorist outfit resulted in the creation of a splinter group, calling itself the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon (there is no difference between the two words as Muslimeen and Muslimoon are both plural for Muslim). Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon was headed by Kuka Parray, whose real name was Jamshed Shirazi; it became the most effective instrument for counter-terrorism in the strategic area around Wular Lake. The defection of the terrorists from the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen due to various internal feuds and external threats from Pakistan led to the formation Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon. The change was made in the last name from Muslimeen to Muslimoon in order to differentiate the counter-terrorist outfit from the terrorist outfit and to encourage the religious association of youngsters towards Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon, in order to save their lives by surrendering weapons (Joshi, 2019).

Kuka Parray, a resident of Hajan, was a folk singer and dancer, earning living by performing at marriages and festive occasions. With the outbreak of the terrorist rebellion in Jammu and Kashmir, Kukka Parray joined the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, and when that organisation split, he followed Islamists like

Hilal Baig into the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimmen. Later, he joined the anti-Hizbul drive. Kuka Parray was originally a source cultivated by the BSF and handed over to Rashtriya Rifles. Beginning with a band of sixty men, he was aided in building up a thousand-man 'private army' or counter-terrorist group, which was funded by the administration (Joshi, 2019).

Kuka Parray had surrendered before the Indian Army in 1993-94 along with his loyalists and has since then worked with the Indian Army in various counter-terrorist operations in the state. Parray, who was trained in Pakistan, had turned against the pro-Pakistan terrorist outfit Hizbul-Mujahideen, after which he motivated around 250 terrorists to join mainstream India and even fought terrorism in north Kashmir. He organised a strong group of former terrorists who were fed up with the atrocities of the extremist and foreign terrorists in his area of operation and opposed them boldly. Even Jamat-i-Islami activists had to leave the area to save their lives and could not pursue their anti-national activities where Parray was operating. Parray was alleged to have also killed many Jamat-i-Islami and Hizbul-Mujahideen activists. He became the poster boy for other terrorists to surrender and join the mainstream. However, his death jolted the movement of the surrender of terrorists in J&K. Later, in 2003, the Indian Army raised a Territorial Army (TA) Battalion comprising surrendered terrorists (Ikhwanis) in J&K as part of their plan to boost the morale of surrenderees or other terrorists following the killings of their leaders like Kuka Parray. Setting up TA for the Ikhwanis has provided them with a legal framework to operate in counter-terrorist operations, apart from a regular income and continuity of employment (Pandit, 2003; Santhanam, 2003; Prakash, 2008, Naushad, 2023; Masoodi, 2003).

Therefore, many youngsters from Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, and other terrorist organisations supported by Pakistan, later shifted their allegiance to India under the name head of outfit Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon because of various reasons as mentioned by Ikhwanis in their narratives. They collectively worked as a pro-Indian government militia and restored its 'brotherhood' by motivating terrorists to feel attached to Ikhwan-ul-Muslimoon and surrender their weapons. Kuka Parray, along with his trustees, gave momentum to the Ikhwani movement in J&K, which was formed by surrendered terrorists or groups of Ikhwanis and sided with the Indian Armed Forces to fight the Islamist terrorists backed by the Pakistani Forces.

Dynamics of Pakistani training camps

During the peak of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir from 1989 to 1995, thousands of local men crossed the border back and forth from J&K to Pakistan to receive armed training in terrorist camps located in Pakistan, Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) and even Afghanistan. Subsequently, these men were used as sleeper cells or active operatives by Pakistan in J&K. This conscious or unconscious involvement of local men from J&K in the Pakistani terrorist camps, and their return to Indian land has subjected them to

unending trials of agony and suffering today. Many local men from J&K were enticed by promises of luxurious lives, the glory of weapons, and the allure of so-called freedom when approached to join terrorist training camps in Pakistan. However, the truth about these training camps turned out to be quite different from what local men or trainees had imagined.

After detailed analysis of the narratives of Ikhwan it came to light that men in the terrorist training camps from Jammu and Kashmir were not viewed as rightful heirs of Islamic lineage by Pakistani trainers. Instead, Pakistan regarded their race of people in Pakistan as pure Muslims and outrightly rejected Indian Muslims as true inheritors of Islam. Trainees were seen as less efficient or lack courage to fight India or Armed Forces. Thus, are seen less of man. Pakistani forces even blamed youngsters for living in India for long years even after partition. Thus, terrorist organisations have given them an option to correct their mistakes of the past. A sense of worthlessness came among the youngsters while living in the camps because of the treatment they received by the Pakistan handlers.

Additionally, there existed discrimination in the acceptance of locals from Jammu and Kashmir in comparison to foreign mercenaries, such as Sri Lankans, Syrians or Afghans, within the terrorist training camps. Foreign mercenaries were perceived as more reliable by Pakistani officials than Indian youngsters. Despite the hard training, local men from J&K in the camps were kept one step behind their foreign contemporaries. Consequently, locals from J&K encountered discrimination and exploitation in the camps. This dominance and subordination elicited feelings of inadequacy among the trained youngsters in the camps.

They mentioned that trainees were from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities in the training camps. There existed a hierarchal division in the training camps, where those superior in the hierarchy enjoyed more freedom and privileges than those below them. Individuals with better combat skills or education attained a dominant position in the hierarchy over others with less learned basic combat skills during the training phase. Furthermore, those men who underperformed during the training period were sent to India behind schedule against those who had performed well. Eventually, they were tasked with transporting weapons across the border into India. The men were eager to complete their training and reunite with their families as soon as possible. However, men of exceptional talent were prevented from returning to India, as Pakistani trainers exploited the skills of trainees to maintain their network of terrorist activities. With this stratification, routine tasks were also divided according to the positions within the camps. Superiors were assigned to supervision, control, planning, and plotting various tasks, while inferiors were obliged to follow them submissively. Anyone who disobeyed a superior faced consequence. Moreover, trainees developed a sense of fight amongst themselves to attain a better position in the hierarchy over others or become acceptable members. Every day, there was a

fight to become a better combatant, thus a chaotic rush always prevailed in the environment of the camps.

The respondents mentioned that a significant number of terrorists were renounced by the terrorist organisations in Pakistan due to injuries during training or attacks, rendering them progressively unfit for their designated roles within terrorist organisations. Consequently, these individuals were relegated to menial tasks, such as maintaining sanitation facilities, performing laundry duties, preparing meals, and fulfilling the role of porters, which was deemed unsatisfactory for the youngsters who joined terrorism for the sake of power, guns etc. Youngsters felt a decline in their perceived value over time, resulting in feelings of reduced necessity within the terrorist organisations. Furthermore, the initial motivation that motivated local men from Jammu and Kashmir to move to Pakistan began to diminish gradually for the injured personnel as time elapsed in the training camps.

There was a fearful environment in the training camps. Upon understanding the motives of Pakistani men towards the locals of J&K, youngsters are frightened to speak their minds. They fear that they might face death or torture if they confront trainers or go against their wishes. Submissiveness became the only way for the trainers to save their lives from Pakistan, and they merely sought a moment to escape the camps.

The study reveals that, consequently, upon gaining an understanding of the dynamics surrounding terrorist training camps, many trainees made the decision to escape the camps. A considerable number of terrorists surrendered voluntarily or upon being repatriated to India for terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, were apprehended and subsequently surrendered to the Indian Army or the Jammu and Kashmir Police (JKP). Many of these terrorists, who surrendered to either the Indian Army or JKP due to the discrimination they faced at the hands of Pakistan, later integrated into the mainstream Indian Army or JKP with the aim of combating the nexus of terrorism in J&K. The surrenderees were well-versed in terrorist strategies, planning, routes, organisation, and weapons. Consequently, their experiences and skills were effectively utilised by the Indian Army and JKP to mitigate the wave of terrorism in J&K. Under the Rehabilitation Policy for local young trainees engaged in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, a significant number of men have surrendered their weapons in an effort to reintegrate into their society. Many of those who surrendered under this policy have subsequently been assimilated into the Ikhwan Battalion or Ikhwan force, which operates as an anti-terrorism unit based in Kashmir, established in 2003. However, the involvement of surrenderees with the Indian Army or the JKP has made their identity incoherent. Today, Ikhwans are perceived by the locals of Kashmir as renegades or traitors and unfaithful by Jamaatis who initially sponsored their border crossing from J&K to Pakistan.

Thus, the local young terrorists from J&K who sought arms training in Pakistan and joined terrorist organisations later surrendered their weapons to the Indian

Army or JKP, often due to estranged treatment in terrorist training camps or a change of heart. Amongst the surrenderees, those men who voluntarily started working with the Indian Army and JKP in the anti-terrorist operations of the state are commonly called Ikhwan in J&K. The Ikhwanis find themselves marginalized within contemporary society. Their acceptance among individuals outside their group remains minimal. Although they anticipated achieving a peaceful existence by disassociating from terrorist organisations, they continue to be affected by the repercussions of terrorism. The distress caused by terrorism has profoundly impacted their lives and the lives of their families in the current societies of their residences.

Rehabilitation policy: role of government in facilitating surrenderers

The erstwhile state of J&K formulated a policy known as the Rehabilitation Policy or the Reforming Policy for local terrorists in J&K. The aim of the state behind the policy was to reduce the number of locals of J&K to cross the Indian borders into Pakistan; to decrease the level of violence in the state; and to neutralise terror and terrorist outfits in the valley. The policy also sought to counteract the support of Pakistani forces in J&K. Furthermore, it served as a motivation or a source of refuge for those who became victims of Pakistan's agendas in training camps in Pakistan or PoJK. The Rehabilitation Policy became a validated step under the guidance of restitutive laws. Emile Durkheim distinguished between repressive and restitutive laws. The former is punitive, while the latter is cooperative, with the primary aim of restoring order when a misdeed has been committed by anyone in society (Abraham, 2011). India has restitutive laws enshrined in its constitution. Terrorists are a menace to society, whether they reside in Jammu and Kashmir or are based in Pakistan. Therefore, it became necessary for the state to incorporate these individuals back into society by providing them with a chance, under the Rehabilitation Policy, to surrender their weapons and dissociate themselves from terrorism.

First surrender policy: 1995

The first surrender policy was formulated with the objectives of offering inducement and incentives to terrorists to leave the path of violence and join the main stream and to ensure that the surrendered terrorists do not revert to terrorism (Khosla et al., 1977). In J&K, it was introduced in the year 1995 under the Governor General K.V Krishna Rao's administration. The policy offered a one-time fixed deposit of Rs. 1.5 lakhs and a monthly stipend (Karthi, 2019). The impact of the surrender policy remained encouraging after its announcement. 1317 terrorists have surrendered from August 15, 1995 to September 30, 1997 (Khosla et al., 1997).

Second surrender policy: 2004

The next policy set in under then Governor of J&K, Narendra Nath Vohra. The objective of the policy was to offer facility to those terrorists who undergo a

change of heart and eschew the path of violence. Those who were ready to accept the integrity of India and the Indian Constitution were given a chance to reintegrate back into India. The policy also mentions about the incentives for surrendered weapons by the surrenderee (Annual Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs).

Third surrender policy: 2010

The next surrendered policy was focused on policy and procedure for return of terrorist to J&K (India). This policy was also implemented by Governor Narendra Nath Vohra. It was applicable to those youngsters who went to PoJK or Pakistan between 1 January 1989 and 31 December 2009; their dependents were also eligible for consideration under the policy. The policy also mentions the entry points restricted for the surrenderees to enter the India through JCP Wagah-Attari or through Salamabad or Chakan-da-Bagh crossing on the Line of Control or through the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi (Ministry of Home Affairs | Government of India, n.d.). The policy was of no help to some youngsters who returned via Nepal, which was not one of the approved routes in the policy; hence, such surrenderees did not receive any benefits (Khajuria, 2019; May 6; Annual Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, n.d.).

The modification of the existing policy: 2019

Upon the advice of the J&K Governor Satya Pal Malik, the state government revised the policy in 2019 (Bhayana, 2019). It was advised that the terrorists, returning to the mainstream, will be called “*renouncers*”, and they will be entitled for a fixed deposit of ₹5 lakh or ₹6 lakh after a period of three years, subject to their good behaviour (Khajuria, 2019).

Findings of the study:

By analysing the narratives of the respondents using the software NVivo, the following reasons for joining and surrendering Ikhwan are concluded:

Reasons for joining terrorist organisations:

Various reasons for joining terrorism were narrated by the Ikhwan, which are mentioned below:

- 1. Religious indoctrination:** Islam became the major binding force or a cause that motivated respondents to join the terrorist network and training camps in Pakistan. Respondents felt that fighting jihad for Islam against India and the Armed Forces has become a pious deed in their lifetime. They could not shed their shoulders from the responsibility they owe towards their religion. Thus, anyone who failed to follow the commands of Jamaatis or religious leaders of their ‘*Calling to Pakistan*’ were seen as less of a man or traitors in Jammu and Kashmir during the peak of terrorism. The cause raised by Pakistan to do the ‘Islamization of J&K and its secession from India’ has played a vital role in binding volunteers of Jihad not only from J&K but also from other countries. One of the respondents narrated ‘*Jamatiyon ne hume bulaya aur bataya ki yar*

apko pta he agar app jihad karenge to apko jaannat milegi, behtar hure milege, jihad yeh he, vo he, bhut kuch bataya...kyunki jab usko bolte he behtar hoore milege, Shaheed hone ke bad, tab usko kuch samaj nahi ata'.

2. Aazadi (freedom): The concept of so-called aazadi became a positive incentive for youngsters to cross the border from Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to Pakistan. Aazadi, for them, is materialistic driven. To seek money and wealth that could provide them with a future luxurious life has motivated youngsters to become the propagators of aazadi under the aegis of Pakistan's influence. Unfortunately, the real meaning of aazadi was unclear to youngsters until they reached Pakistan training camps. Thus, aazadi became more of a rhetoric to capture the minds of locals in Jammu and Kashmir.

3. Glorification of terrorism in their surroundings: Terrorism became a fascination among the youngsters living in Kashmir. The guns, money, power, and fame fascinated and influenced youngsters to reach Pakistan. Youngsters were encouraged by jamaatis and separatists in the name of religion to choose terrorism as a religious duty. Death on the path of terrorism was too glorified by terrorist organisations, thus, to die while achieving goals dictated by jammatis was highly rated and normalised in society. The people did not see death in Kashmir as a loss; rather, it turned out to be an epitome of sacrifice.

4. Enthusiasm for Pakistan: While travelling towards Pakistani training camps, Ikhwan were enthusiastic and determined to unleash the course of the journey, irrespective of difficult paths and security threats. Ikhwan reported that their brothers (group members) died on their journey to training camps from India to Pakistan or back to India. The urge to reach training camps and hold guns, abandoning homes and homeland to conquer freedom (azadi) has reinforced Ikhwanis to overcome emotional bondages, structural barriers and moral ethics hindering their paths to training camps. The leaders escorting Kashmiri men to Pakistani camps have fueled every border crossing man with the sentiments of hatred for India and the morality of choosing the righteous paths for their religion and freedom (azadi) over their lives. Thus, men were never out of enthusiasm.

5. Forced by terrorists (death threats, torture, and killings): Ikhwan and their families had faced torture at the hands of terrorists to join the terrorist organisations. Those family members who refused to send their children to the path of Jihad or to Pakistan for training were looked down upon in society. It somewhere became a compulsion for families to join the wave of terrorism or else face torture from terrorists. To safeguard their lives, youngsters moved towards Pakistan for training.

6. To get weapons for the security of family members: Those youngsters whom the terrorists harassed to join them without their willingness saw going to Pakistan as an opportunity to protect their families from the attacks of terrorists.

They knew guns would give them power over others. Therefore, Pakistan was chosen as a better ally to save their families.

7. Peer influence: The Ikhwan also remarked that they were free and had no work during the peak of terrorism in J&K. Everyone around them was joining terrorist organisations, and it was deemed disgraceful if any family did not have a member involved in such a group. When we, too, found ourselves with nothing to do, we thought, let's head towards Pakistan to see what opportunities awaited us. Furthermore, as our friends were going, we also wanted to go to Pakistan.

8. For power and identity: Guns and their associations with terrorist organisations became a source of power and identity in Kashmir. Men carry their firearms wherever they go and are simultaneously respected by society. These men controlled the daily routines of the people in Kashmir, and their advice and decisions were taken into consideration by the populace. Therefore, in pursuit of power and an exhilarating identity, youngsters crossed the border for training in camps of Pakistan.

9. Thrill seeking & guns flaunting: To procure guns became a thrill for youngsters to experience in a lifetime. They were eager to carry guns on their shoulders after their return from Pakistan. Guns gave them confidence that they wear proudly on their shoulders.

10. Less convincing personal reason for joining terrorism: The majority of the Ikhwan were young when they joined training camps in Pakistan. Every Ikhwan after surrender went through self-introspection to realise the factors that pushed them to choose terrorism over their family and peace, without any knowledge of its consequences. However, some respondent failed to justify their reasons for joining terrorism. They either blamed their peer group, the access to money and fame or the environment of their surroundings for their decisions. Thus, some of them have fewer convincing reasons to join training camps. Some joined when the terrorists pressured them to join them, and no other option was left with them.

Reason for surrender of Ikhwan:

In training camps, terrorists faced various physical and adaptive challenges, which ultimately led to their surrender. Some of these challenges are outlined below.

1. Undervalued human life: The youngsters from J&K in the terrorist training camps were in abundance. The loss of some of them wasn't as challenging for the Pakistani forces to handle. Thus, witnessing their lives in danger, trainees were forced to surrender to JKP or the Indian Army in order to save their lives.

2. Inability to question Pakistani teachings/brainwashed: Terrorists in the training camps were unable to question the dictates of the Pakistani forces. Their inability was due to the fear of death that has gripped their minds while living in

the training camps. Majority of the men agreed to the manifestos of the Pakistan because it was the last option for them to sustain their lives in the camps. Those who dared to go against the Pakistani heads they face death or torture.

3. Loss of belongingness: In the Pakistani training camps, trainers had instructed the Indian men to cut off unnecessary belongingness with anyone in the camps. Respondents revealed that they failed to ask their brothers, with whom they crossed the Indian border from Kashmir, about their well-being for months in the camps. Respondents, over time, experienced a profound sense of isolation within the training camps. Consequently, the secluded environment exacerbated the feelings of isolation among the youngsters. In an effort to save themselves from this situation, trainees abandoned the training camps when found the opportunity and voluntarily surrendered to the Indian Army.

4. Severed ties with family: Respondents revealed that while crossing the Indian border, they never imagined breaking their ties with families. But when they entered Pakistan, men were forced to cut off all the ties. Respondents revealed that they failed to contact their families for a year. They didn't know whether someone was dead or living in the family. Those who dared to contact their families in India from Pakistan have endured torture in the camps. Out of fear, other trainees in the camps remained silent about their wishes and desires.

5. Loss of individual identity: Affiliating oneself with terrorism or any terrorist organisation signifies a surrendering of one's identity to Pakistan. Individuals must relinquish their previous selves in order to adopt new identities. This shift is accompanied by a loss of personal freedom and the essence of life. The existence of trainees in training camps must be conducted in accordance with the dictates of Pakistan. Consequently, the prospect of losing one's identity in the process of embracing terrorism was deemed unacceptable by men in the training camps; thus, they ultimately chose to surrender to the Indian Army or the Jammu and Kashmir Police.

6. Loss of real names in Pakistan: during the interviews, respondents never disclosed their real names. They felt comfortable revealing the code names assigned to them by the Pakistanis in the training camps. The primary reason for this is the fear that respondents have of being caught or quoted after the interview, which could put them and their families in the crosshairs of terrorists' guns. Despite having relinquished their affiliations with terrorist organisations several years ago, the Ikhwan have been unable to abandon the codenames assigned to them during their training in Pakistan nor have they been able to resume their former identities within their respective societies due to an inherent fear of punishment. Tragically, terrorism has effectively deprived them of their individual identities. They experience unease upon hearing their true names publicly. Pakistan has succeeded in thoroughly eradicating personal identity from their consciousness, instilling a pervasive sense of fear and shame that causes individuals to remain apprehensive about revealing their identities in

their homeland throughout their lives. Loss of real names is a great loss of one's self.

7. Sex slave: While training in Pakistani camps, respondents encountered unnatural sexual activities. Their sense of masculinity was challenged, leading to feelings of shame and dishonour regarding their bodies. There is mortification of individual voice in the camps to protect one's self. In resentment, if men would show anger, they would be further burdened by the torture in the camps. Thus, loss of self in protecting one's self is the greatest loss youngsters suffered in the training camp. Many were reluctant to discuss these experiences with researchers or others after leaving terrorist organisations.

8. Internecine strategies of Pakistan: Pakistan has cultivated various terrorist organisations in J&K with the hidden motive of using trainees against one another when necessary. Men from different terrorist organisations, trained in Pakistan's camps and affiliated with various groups, found themselves confronting each other, driven by the pressures of Pakistan. Clashes erupted among the trainees regarding Pakistan's decision on the merger or independent status of J&K. Those terrorist organisations that opposed Illaq-e-Pakistan (merger with Pakistan) eventually became enemies of Pakistan. Consequently, orders were issued from Pakistan to compel these terrorist organisations to either align with Pakistan or face death. As a result, Kashmiri men found themselves in dire straits, caught between killing or being killed by their fellow trainees over their chosen allegiances. The underlying aim of these clashes became clear to the trainees, albeit only after heavy loss of life in Kashmir. Thus, to avoid becoming the targets of guns of their fellow trainers or Pakistan, men surrendered to the Indian Army or JKP. Upon surrender, men and their families were brutally killed and tortured by Pakistani terrorists because the Ikhwan had done something beyond the imagination of Pakistan. Consequently, the Pakistani terrorists showed no mercy to the Ikhwan, regardless of how much these trainees supported Pakistan and their cause at one point in time.

9. Religious indoctrination: In the training camps, respondents were given continuous religious teachings which focused on killing men from the Indian Armed Forces and creating mass fear among the residents of J&K by killing and torturing them. Religious teachings also made respondents ready to die or kill anyone on the path of jihad. Hence, respondents were brainwashed to such an extent in the training camps that death became a reason for the glorification in the camps. But it was not acceptable to all, those who failed to resonate with this glorification chose surrender as a last hope to save their lives.

10. Compromised promises of financial security to terrorists: The commitments made by Pakistani terrorists to the youth they recruited from J&K-offering ongoing financial support to their families-were never honoured. Once the respondents abandoned their homes in J&K, those promises faded into nothing. Consequently, the youth developed a sense of distrust towards Pakistan.

Respondents had previously followed Pakistan without question, prompting them to distance themselves from Pakistan and its motives.

Therefore, all the above-mentioned reasons became the reasons for the terrorists to surrender their weapons in order to save their lives.

Challenges and issues faced by the Ikhwan after surrender

The study reveals that Ikhwan faced a lot of challenges once they surrendered and few of them are as underlined:

1. Stigmatized identity: Ikhwan carry a stigma of *traitor / gaddar / badzat / nabeedh* in today's society. Their identity is somewhere lost between a terrorist and anti-terrorist and their self-respect is compromised in today's context. Even before introducing themselves, their names and chosen work with JKP and Indian Army introduced them to society after surrendering. Goffman explained stigma as an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Goffman, 1963). Today, Ikhwanis are suffering from discreditable stigma, where they try and assume that their differences (differences of virtual and actual social identity) are neither known by those present around them nor immediately perceivable. Thus, Ikhwan's dramaturgical problem is managing the information and the tension produced in society from their involvement with the Indian Army and JKP and their past involvement with terrorists. An effort is always made by Ikhwanis to hide their identity or to remain unknown to the audience because, after their surrender, they are looked down upon in society for their work as Ikhwan. Society pressurised them to re-drag themselves again to be a terrorist; thus, being a terrorist once becomes an in-erasable stigma on their identity. Ikhwan are, to date, labelled as terrorists even when they do not want to associate themselves with their previous identity. They have to bear the shame and guilt associated with their work once with terrorist organisations, even after decades of serving with the Indian Army and JKP against the terrorists. Thus, a struggle to live with a stigmatised existence is all terrorism has given to them.

2. Migratory lifestyle: Fear of Pakistan has uprooted Ikhwanis permanently to ever build a stable settlement in future. For a long time after the surrender, Ikhwanis failed to build their homes in their native villages. They are displacing from one state to another to remain safe from the guns of terrorists. Ikhwanis have lived in rented accommodation for many years while displacing from one place to another. Even today, when Ikhwanis feel threatened in Kashmir, they shift with their families to the Jammu region or to any other place where they find security in life. Thus, even after long years of abandoning terrorist organisations, terrorism and its impact have not abandoned Ikhwanis. They will forever remain the targets of Pakistani guns.

3. Difficulties faced by the families of Ikhwan: Today, the families of Ikhwan are also undergoing the pressure of survival. They are also restless with the fear of death surrounding their lives. Many Ikhwanis have lost their families in the

terrorist attacks after their surrender. Thus, Ikhwanis prefer to live far from their families to secure their lives. The separation of Ikhwanis from their families due to their work with the Indian Army or JKP led to the development of frustration, homesickness and a sense of disconnectedness in them. They have left their families to live on their own to save them from the eyes of terrorists.

4. Fear of death after retirement: Ikhwan were recruited with the Indian Army or JKP after surrender and certain relaxations in age and education were given to them in order to regularise them in the Force. But survival is the biggest question among the Ikhwanis who are going to retire within 1-2 years from their battalions. They have served long but have failed to make a secure home for themselves. Deep in their hearts, they knew terrorists would target them once they were out of their battalion after retirement. Thus, their lives are a burden to them. They cannot kill themselves because they have families but the thought of killing themselves is not new for them. Ikhwan may choose self-inflicted death after his retirement if he fails to make his life better for living.

5. Under-confident social interactions: Interacting with locals, Ikhwan often felt uncertain and confused, leading to mental pressures that hinder their social interaction, integration, and decision-making abilities today. They have lost the confidence to present themselves in public gatherings. They avoid social gatherings and interactions as much as possible to remain away from the eyes of terrorists. Therefore, the pressure of being conscious and alert in their surroundings always dominates their lives. Hence, all they are capable of today is using guns against terrorists in the field and counting and preparing for another encounter.

After the surrender, when surrenderees joined the Indian Army or JKP as an Ikhwan, they became the target of the guns of on-ground terrorists. Not only they but their families too became the targets of the guns. Their lives after surrender became a challenge for them, and till date, Ikhwan are fighting in society to become an acceptable part of it. They failed to secure acceptance but have remained loyal to their anti-terrorist stance.

Conclusion

The narratives of the Ikhwan are evidence of the fact that living in the camps of Pakistan was difficult and challenging for the youngsters of Jammu and Kashmir, who thought that after joining terrorism, luxuries would be available to them and life would be easy. Despite various reasons that motivated men to join terrorism, youngsters at one point became disillusioned with the promises of Pakistan. When men undergo training in terrorist camps in Pakistan, they eventually felt betrayed by the policies of Pakistan, which were more Pakistan-centric and less Kashmir-centric. Those who failed to take the load of training in the camps felt isolated and helpless with the restrictions of the camps. The religious indoctrination by the religious teachers in the camps has made men ready to die or kill others for the Jihad. Men have become propagators of violence on the dictates of Pakistan. But on realizing the futility of dying for the

missions of Pakistan has somewhere enlightened the local terrorists of Kashmir to surrender their guns and ideology. But it was never easy for the trained-men to surrender what once pushed them to leave India towards Pakistan. The deconstruction of the reality in front of them has forced them to shift their choices from Pakistan to India. Thus, trained men surrender their weapons to Indian Armed Forces in order to save rest of their lives. The very terrorism that led men in Kashmir to betray India, the same terrorism and its organisations are not allowing their trained men to live rest of their lives with peace in J&K after their surrender. The journey of terrorists from being terrorists to Ikhwan is evidence of the fact that terrorism and its organizations have made their own people their victims, the targets. When such distracted men (terrorists) want to amend their past mistakes, terrorism does not allow them to do so. It pressured them to stick to their old ideals and commitment rather than securing their lives under the Indian Forces. Thus, Ikhwan became a sufferer or a victim of terrorism not once or twice but thrice in J&K. Firstly, when they joined terrorists due to their brainwashing, false promises of money, protection and luxuries. Secondly, when these men were tortured and discriminated against by their fellow terrorists for various reasons in the terrorist training camps, which compelled them to surrender and become Ikhwan. Thirdly, after becoming Ikhwan, when they started working with Indian Armed Forces, these Ikhwans were the targets of terrorist's guns for the rest of their lives. Thus, a life where Ikhwan is running to be saved is all he gets after years of working as a terrorist and counter-terrorist. These sufferers or victims of terrorism are lesser known which are too affected by terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

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From polis to village republic: reimagining ideal societies through Plato's Ideal State and Gandhi's Ramrajya

Abha Chauhan Khimta & Suresh Kumar

ABSTRACT

This study contrasts the different societal visions put forth by Mahatma Gandhi in his Ramrajya vision and Plato in The Republic. A structured, hierarchical society headed by philosopher kings men of great wisdom whose wisdom is deemed essential in the creation of a just and orderly state is at the core of Plato's ideal state. According to Plato, justice is achieved when every class contributes to the totality in a harmonious manner. But Gandhi sees a completely different ideal state: one that is decentralized, based on village self government, and guided by the values of moral rectitude, truth (satya), and non-violence (ahimsa). Gandhi emphasizes moral leadership that emerged organically from the people rather than depending on intellectual elitism. The two philosophers' projections of knowledge and advancement also diverge. Gandhi's symbol of the charkha (spinning wheel) represents independence, simplicity, and a strong moral commitment to communal life, while Plato's Allegory of the Cave projects his optimism on enlightened leaders guiding others out of darkness. Despite their divergent worldviews, Plato's ideas on order, education, and reason, as well as Gandhi's on individual accountability, moral conduct, and opposition to centralized, authoritarian authority, have much to teach modern governance.

Keywords: *Justice, Ethical leadership, Ideal Society, Moral Responsibility, Social Harmony, Capability Approach*

INTRODUCTION

The quest for an ideal society has been a central theme in philosophical discussions throughout history. Over the ages, many thinkers have sought to define what a just and harmonious community looks like, with Plato and Mahatma Gandhi standing out as two of the most influential figures in this conversation. Their seminal works Plato's Republic and Gandhi's Ramrajya offer distinct yet revolutionary visions of governance, justice, and moral leadership. While Plato's ideas emerged in ancient Athens during the classical period and Gandhi's in colonial India in the early 20th century, both philosophers share core principles that continue to resonate in today's debates on

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political philosophy and social justice. The objective of this article is to critically examine the philosophical underpinnings of their visions, examining their ideas on governance, justice, leadership, and social harmony in their respective eras. Plato's *Republic* (2007) is a foundational text on the Western canon of philosophy. In its pages, Plato describes his conception of the ideal state, ruled by philosopher-kings, who are the best rulers to be able to comprehend the natures of justice, truth, and goodness. The reasoning Plato provides is that a just society is one in which each member performs his/her natural task within the social order, with order being obtained by a division of labor that is in accord with the natural character of each class (Plato, 2007 pp. 189-195). By employing his philosophical and theoretical thought, Plato argues that only philosopher-kings, due to their intimate knowledge of the Forms, possess the capacity to lead society towards a just and stable reality. The core of Plato's theory of justice is the proper ordering and balance between the three classes of society rulers, auxiliaries, and producers each contributing their share to the common good of the state (Bloom, 1968 pp. 309-311).

On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi's critique of British colonialism and the social structures that ruled Indian society in the early decades of the 20th century gives rise to his vision of the utopian society known as Ramrajya. Gandhi's ideas on social structure and governance, as articulated in his numerous works, including *Hind Swaraj* and *My Experiments with Truth*, advocate for a decentralized, self-governing community on moral and spiritual grounds while denouncing centralized, hierarchical systems of authority (Parel, 2006, pp.117-121). Gandhi's Ramrajya stresses the value of local self-rule, self-reliance, and moral leadership founded on truth and non-violence, in contrast to Plato's hierarchical model, which is based on a well-organized society ruled by a philosopher-king. Gandhi envisioned a society in which individuals exercise collective self-rule and accept moral responsibility for their own actions, eschewing industrialized, exploitative forms of government in favor of a more straightforward, human-centered system of social organization.

This article's goal is to examine the two opposing but complementary philosophical paradigms, highlighting the fundamental parallels and divergences between Plato's and Gandhi's respective philosophical systems. This study compares and contrasts their perspectives on leadership, authority, and justice. It also takes into account the historical backgrounds that shaped their philosophical ideas, such as Gandhi's opposition to British colonialism and industrialization and Plato's reaction to the alleged failure of Athenian democracy. Understanding these histories is crucial because they clarify the reasons behind each philosopher's emphasis on particular principles and governmental structures.

Gandhi's Ramrajya and Plato's *Republic* both seek to create just societies, but they approach the task in different ways. The rational and intellectual framework of Plato's ideal society selects leaders based on their wisdom and understanding of universal truth. Gandhi's philosophy, on the other hand, is founded on moral

and spiritual principles that uphold both individual and societal accountability. Furthermore, Gandhi envisions the restoration of decentralized, independent communities, in contrast to Plato's recommendation for a rigid, nearly utopian hierarchical order. Notwithstanding these distinctions, both philosophers place a strong emphasis on the value of social harmony, moral leadership, and justice; as a result, their theories are universally relevant to contemporary political discourse (Neu, 1971, pp. 238-254). The purpose of this article is to critically examine how these two theoretical frameworks interact with the concepts of justice and governance. This study investigates the applicability of their theories to contemporary governance by carefully examining primary texts, such as Plato's *Republic* (1992) and Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (2009), as well as secondary sources on the philosophical and historical context of their ideas. This article explores the practical application of idealistic models to modern political systems, addressing important topics like democracy, human rights, and interdependence on a global scale. By working toward this objective, the article hopes to contribute to the current conversation about governance, justice, and the value of moral leadership in creating just and sustainable societies. The article draws on a wide range of secondary literature that examines Plato and Gandhi's writings in order to investigate these themes. For example, Radhakrishnan's (2020, p. 40) analysis of Gandhi's philosophy illuminates the spiritual elements of Ramrajya, while Bloom's (1968, p. 308) analysis of Plato's *Republic* emphasizes the significance of reason and wisdom in governance. The article also makes comparisons to political theorists such as Rawls (1971) and Chatterjee (1993), whose works offer frameworks for evaluating the relationship between pragmatic governance and philosophical ideals. By taking this approach, the article aims to enhance our comprehension of how Plato's and Gandhi's ideas are still pertinent in today's debates over justice and governance. The article improves our understanding of how historical conceptions of justice and governance can impact contemporary political theory and practice by addressing these fundamental philosophies. Through Gandhi's ethical teachings or Plato's rigorous philosophy, both Gandhi's Ramrajya and Plato's *Republic* provide priceless insights for tackling the political, social, and moral issues of our day.

This article compares Gandhi's Ram Rajya with Plato's Ideal State using seminal works. Gettel (1956) and Sabine (1973) are two works that offer profound insights into Plato's pyramidal conception of justice and philosopher king rule. Bluck (1959) and Martin (1981) delve deeper into Plato's model's conceptual depth and practical critique. Dhiman (1974) and Guha (2018) elaborate on Gandhi's fundamental tenets of truth, decentralization, and non-violence from an Indian standpoint. Gandhi's ethical democracy and Plato's structured idealism are contrasted in comparative works by Sharma (2020) and Satyanarayan (2020). Gandhi's nuanced view of caste in Ram Rajya is examined in Shankaran (2019). Chakraborty (2022) concludes by discussing Gandhian philosophies emphasis on civic virtue and moral responsibility. All of these works illustrate the article's main goal of assessing the two philosopher's current

relevance by offering insights into their conceptions of justice and the common good as well as the difficulties in implementing their theories in contemporary pluralistic societies. Although earlier academic studies have thoroughly examined Gandhi's ethical theory of governance and Plato's theory of justice as a hierarchical theory in different contexts, there are surprisingly few proper comparative studies that examine these philosophical theories side by side, particularly in light of their relevance to contemporary governance issues. The majority of comparative studies only look at ideological differences; they don't examine how the systems put forth by Plato and Gandhi can help clarify current discussions about decentralization, ethical leadership, and sustainable political systems in a world that is becoming more diverse and globalized. Core political philosophies that address concerns about justice, authority, and the moral underpinnings of governance must be revisited in light of the pervasive democratic regression, rising inequality, and ethical crises of leadership. By critically contrasting Plato's and Gandhi's utopian conceptions of the ideal state, this study seeks to close this gap and evaluate their philosophical, ethical, and practical significance in promoting inclusive and sustainable forms of governance in the modern era.

Objective of the study

1. To compare the philosophical foundations and historical contexts of governance in Plato and Gandhi, highlighting how their ideas were shaped by their respective eras.
2. To examine the role of leadership and justice in their models, focusing on Plato's intellectual elitism and Gandhi's ethical and participatory approach.
3. To evaluate the practical applicability of their visions in addressing contemporary challenges such as democratic participation, inequality, and sustainable governance.

Research question

1. How do the historical contexts and philosophical foundations of Plato's Republic and Gandhi's Ramrajya influence their respective models of governance?
2. In what ways do Plato's concept of intellectual leadership and Gandhi's emphasis on ethical, participatory leadership differ in their approaches to justice and authority?
3. To what extent can the political visions of Plato and Gandhi be applied to contemporary issues such as democratic participation, social inequality, and sustainable governance?

Research methodology

Plato's 'Ideal State' and Gandhi's 'Ram Rajya' will be examined using the qualitative method, with an emphasis on how applicable they are to modern governance. In addition to examining academic interpretations of philosophers' theories on social organization and governance, a comprehensive literature review will offer background information. The study looks at the historical,

political, and social contexts that shaped Plato's and Gandhi's political theories using contextual and historical analysis, which is based on Quentin Skinner's methodology. Without forcing current meanings on their original contexts, the goal is to restore their original functions by analyzing the context in which their minds were formed.

Additionally, the study compares Gandhi's and Plato's perspectives on social structure, justice, and authority using the Comparative Method. The study aims to more precisely determine where their ideas converge or diverge when applied to current governance concerns by examining their similarities and differences. The study examines the metaphysical foundations of Plato's and Gandhi's political systems using philosophical critique and Eric Voegelin. This approach evaluates these ideals' feasibility by identifying the conflict between philosophical principles and the demands of real politics as well as their suitability for application in modern governance.

Lastly, the study critically assesses the practical applicability of Plato's and Gandhi's ideas toward the resolution of modern issues like inequality and globalization using an analytical and critical method. The method finds new applications, limitations, and synergies for sustainable governance by critically examining their underlying principles and contrasting them with current political realities.

Philosophical basis of Plato's ideal state & Gandhi's Ramrajya

Based on a well-structured, hierarchical society run by philosopher-kings, Plato's Republic is a blueprint for the ideal state. According to Plato, these rulers are better equipped to make decisions for the benefit of society because they have a deeper understanding of the eternal truths. Harmony is the foundation of such a state's justice; each individual plays their assigned role within the state, and the end result is a system that is well-organized and harmonious (Kirichenko, 2022, pp. 150-155). In Plato's ideal state, justice is attained through the division of labor, with producers providing the state's material sustenance, rulers providing governance, and warriors providing protection. Because of their intellectual prowess, philosopher-kings are best suited to lead society and ensure that its many components coexist peacefully and in balance (Plato, 1992). Since wisdom is crucial to establishing and upholding the state's order, this vision is top-down and centralized. According to Plato's Republic, an orderly society where justice is attained through the proper arrangement of its components is the ideal state. Three classes make up the state: producers (farmers, artisans), auxiliaries (warriors), and rulers (philosopher-kings). Every class has a role and a virtue: producers are moderate, auxiliary members are brave, and rulers are wise. According to the principle of specialization, justice is attained when each class effectively fulfills its role, resulting in people remaining on the tasks for which they are ideally suited.

Virtue	Soul	Class
Wisdom/Knowledge	Rational	Rulers
Courage	Spirited	Soldiers
Temperance	Appetitive	Artisans

Source: Martin, 1981, p. 6.

The ideal state is not achievable rather, it is an idealistic concept. Plato, however, views his concept of a philosopher king a ruler who possesses a profound understanding of the good as the means by which this state can be realized. This ruler would ensure the welfare of the entire society by enforcing laws that are informed by wisdom. However, because of the limitations of human nature, even this earthly representation of the ideal state will eventually fall apart. According to Dordevic (2014), Plato depicts a cycle of decay that starts with timocracy, or the rule of honor, progresses to oligarchy, or the rule of wealth, democracy, or the rule of freedom, and ends with tyranny, or the rule of despotism. The Republic is a profound critique of human nature and the impossibility of its actual realization, in addition to being a schematic illustration of an ideal state. The dialogue concludes with the presentation of the Myth of Er, which highlights the importance of philosophical knowledge for everyone in society, not just the ruling class. Since even members of an orderly society will err if they are not given the right guidance, it is assumed that the ideal state should cultivate its citizens’ capacity for sound decision-making (Bloom, 1968, pp. 426-432).

In this treatise, Plato defines the tension between theory and practice, defining a utopian model of the state and acknowledging the limits of human capacity. The Republic is a model of justice and a discussion of the difficulty of its implementation in real contexts (Jowett, 1908, pp. 159-163).

Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of Ramrajya differs from Plato’s in that it aims to establish a decentralized, self-governing society based on moral principles such as truth (satya), self-ruling (swaraj), and non-violence (ahimsa). Gandhi envisions an order where local communities, particularly villages, serve as the fundamental units of a governance system, rejecting the notion of a central authority (Gandhi, 2019, pp. 28-30). Gandhi envisioned a society where people actively participated in moral leadership and each village was self-sufficient, looking out for its own welfare. Gandhi believed that attaining true justice required moral and spiritual development, which is the main theme of his Ramrajya. Gandhi’s philosophy of governance encourages a bottom-up strategy in which local communities and the populace hold the power rather than a select group of intellectuals who rule from above. Gandhi’s opposition to the British colonial regime, which he believed to be exploitative and disconnected from the needs and values of the local community, is a clear example of his criticism of central rule (Parel, 2006, pp. 52-57). Gandhi promoted swaraj, or self-rule, as an alternative to a centrally planned political system. He believed that a return to

rural self-sufficiency would best achieve this goal (Gandhi, 1997). He claimed in *Hind Swaraj* (Gandhi, 2009) that independent villages were the fundamental units of a just society, where local people could manage their own resources and reach morally and peacefully agreed upon decisions as a group (Gandhi, 1927). Gandhi maintained that the only way for India to achieve true freedom was to break free from the repressive structures of centralized power and adopt a different system of local self-governance, which would enable individuals and communities to take charge of their own destiny. Gandhi's long-range critique of industrialization aligns with this feature of decentralized governance. Gandhi maintained that the exploitation of both people and the environment resulted from industrialization, which was founded on mass production and central control (Chakrabarty, 2006, pp. 34–36). In contrast, *Ramrajya* emphasizes small-scale, neighborhood-based solutions to social and economic issues and is a symbol of sustainability and simplicity. Gandhi believed that a village economy should be centered on local manufacturing, handicrafts, and agriculture in order to foster sustainability and self-sufficiency. Plato's paradigm, which is based on an overly regimented intellectual elite at the top of the social pyramid, stands in stark contrast to this vision (Neu, 1971, pp. 247-254).

Plato's *Republic* and Gandhi's *Ramrajya* offer twin visions of an ideal state; yet, while Plato's ideal state imposes a strict intellectual hierarchy, Gandhi's regime is based on ethical values, decentralized power, and community-governance. In Plato's ideal state, the ablest and the wisest will exercise leadership, whereas Gandhi's government entrusts power to the masses, particularly the people living in the countryside, to take charge of their own government. This philosophical divergence highlights the tension between intellectual elitism and ethical self-governance, two of the fundamental principles that have shaped political philosophy through the centuries.

Philosophical differences: justice, leadership, and authority

Their different historical backgrounds and ethical concerns, the Platonic and Gandhian philosophical perspectives on justice, authority, and leadership show significant differences. The foundation of Plato's theory of justice, as presented in *The Republic*, is a highly hierarchical, structured state in which everyone performs their natural duties and justice is realized (Annas, 1981, pp. 109–111). According to Plato, the philosopher-king, an intellectual aristocracy with great wisdom, rules the ideal state using knowledge of the eternal Forms and rational principles. According to Plato, justice is a structural idea that establishes the harmony between the state and the individual. It materializes when producers, warriors, and rulers all carry out their duties in accordance with their inherent natures (Bluck, 1959, pp. 167-170). Being the epitome of wisdom, the philosopher-king ensures that decisions are made for the benefit of all by exercising authority based on knowledge. Authority in this hierarchical system is inextricably linked to intellectual superiority, and the leaders' intelligence and sanity determine the state's prosperity (Taylor, 2001, pp. 97-100).

However, Gandhi's conception of justice transcends the reductionist notion of structural harmony or social order. Gandhi's ethical and spiritual conception of justice is intimately tied to both individual and collective moral obligation. In his conception of Ramrajya, moral behavior takes precedence over formal legal frameworks, and justice is seen as an expression of truth (satya) and non-violence (ahimsa) (Chakraborty, 2022, p. 132). In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi asserts that people must exercise self control, develop moral character, and cultivate cordial relationships with one another in order for there to be true justice. This theory of justice emphasizes the application of virtues that result in moral transformation on both an individual and a collective level rather than a rigid social order. According to Gandhi, justice is not the province of the state; rather, it is the individual's sense of duty to act morally and to take restorative measures that result in healing and transformation (Sharma, 2020, p. 4).

The idea that leadership is best left to those with greater knowledge and intellectual superiority is presented in Plato's philosopher-king model (Bloom, 1968, p. 147). According to Plato, leaders have power based on wisdom and reason, and leadership is fundamentally an intellectual and hierarchical issue. Gandhi, on the other hand, views leadership as centered on moral representation. According to Gandhi, the ideal leader is not only a sovereign but also a teacher who sets an example of moral behavior and selfless service that encourages others to follow. According to Gandhi, leaders behave in a way that fosters social cohesiveness and spiritual development, connecting moral authority to leadership rather than intelligence (Parel, 2006, pp. 87-90). Gandhi's view of leadership differs greatly from Plato's elitist model of government in that it holds that qualities like compassion, humility, and a strong commitment to justice qualities that are based on the principles of truth and non-violence are the sources of true authority.

The role of ethics and knowledge in administration

Gandhi's Ramrajya and Plato's Republic have quite different views on the relationship between state, morality, and knowledge. Plato's philosophers are powerful not only due to their knowledge of the intellect but also because they are aware of the metaphysical Forms, which are the world's most profound truths (Plato, 2007, pp. 192-196). Plato's ideal rulers are men who understand the nature of justice itself, not just administrators. Plato's philosophy revolves around the Form of the Good, which directs the philosopher-king in his reign. Under this regime, knowledge is metaphysical and guides all of the ruler's decisions; it is not just political or utilitarian (Sabine & Thorson, 1973, pp. 60-61).

Gandhi, however, takes a moral and spiritual stance. His system of government is founded on moral self-governance rather than intellectual elites or metaphysical realities. Gandhi encourages people to master their desires and passions in order to live good lives, and his concept of swaraj (self governance)

goes beyond political independence (Gandhi, 2019, pp. 22-24). Gandhi's Ramrajya emphasizes moral leadership over power. In his Ramrajya, people live simply and independently, coexist peacefully with the environment and one another, and have a government founded on morality and respect.

Contextualising ideal governance: Athens and colonial India

Understanding the historical background of Plato's and Gandhi's ideas about ideal governance is essential to comprehending the philosophical underpinnings of their writings. Following the devastating effects of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), Plato's Republic was developed during a time of extreme political unrest in Athens. The war exposed the internal weaknesses of Athenian democracy, particularly its susceptibility to populism and demagoguery, leaving Athens demoralized and weakened (Powell, 2016, pp. 61-65). Plato saw democracy as an institution fueled by ignorance and ephemeral passions rather than reason and wisdom as a result of his involvement in Athenian politics and the execution of his mentor Socrates. According to him, "the complete happiness of the society is achieved only when philosophers become kings, or kings become philosophers" (Sabine, 1973, pp. 37-42). Plato creates an alternative form of government in his Republic that is based on an intellectual hierarchy and has philosopher-kings as rulers who have attained the knowledge and wisdom of timeless principles. Because of their logical and philosophical understanding, these leaders would govern in the interest of the general welfare, establishing the state's stability and justice (Martin, 1981, pp. 11-12). Plato's criticism of Athenian democracy is predicated on his conviction that the populace, motivated by populist rhetoric and baser passions, is incapable of governing. During the period of political turmoil that followed the collapse of Athens golden age, Plato argued that the general populace lacked the intellectual capacity to make wise decisions on behalf of the state (Powell, 2016, p. 281). According to Plato, democracy was an institution where the majority, motivated by base desires and immediate objectives, had the authority to create policies. He believed that only a select few, those with extensive philosophical training, could be trusted to hold positions of authority because they would be able to make decisions based on logic and foresight rather than the fleeting feelings of the general public (Plato, 2007, p.63).

Gandhi, on the other hand, was greatly influenced by the experience of British colonial rule in India, which produced a highly centralized system of governance that prioritized exploitation and control over the well-being of the populace. Gandhi's opposition to British industrialization and centralization served as the foundation for his criticism of British colonialism (Gandhi, 2019, pp. 28-30). Gandhi believed that colonialism had displaced Indians from their innate moral and ethical moorings by introducing foreign political institutions, economic patterns, and values into Indian society. Gandhi thought that India's traditional, independent village system offered a realistic substitute for the British state's industrialization and centralization (Gandhi, 1938, pp. 67-70). His idea of Ramrajya aimed to bring back a decentralized form of government in which

local communities, especially the villages, held the majority of the power. His philosophy was based on the ideas of individual responsibility, self rule, and collective autonomy that are ingrained in rural life rather than the concentration of political power (Gupta, 2011). Gandhi's political beliefs were greatly influenced by the colonial experience. He believed that the Indian people's independence and dignity were being undermined by the British colonial apparatus. Since he felt that the British system promoted materialism and exploitation rather than moral and spiritual well-being, his criticism of industrialization was scathing (Wolpert, 2001, pp. 135-140). Gandhi's Ramrajya vision, which called for an agrarian society system with self-governance, a strong emphasis on moral leadership, non violence, and self-reliance, was a reaction to this exploitation. The foundation of this strategy was the restoration of the more straightforward, sustainable way of life of the pre-colonial Indian village, as opposed to the industrial, centralized models that were common during colonialism (Gandhi, 2019, pp. 75-77).

The political climate of their respective eras had a significant impact on both Plato and Gandhi. Plato's response to the shortcomings of Athenian democracy and his suggestion for an intellectually oriented society are documented in *The Republic*. Gandhi, on the other hand, advocated for a decentralized form of government that prioritized moral principles and local self government in response to colonialism and industrialization. This is known as Ramrajya. Though their approaches to governance were very different one focused on intellectual issues, while the other was ethical and centered on local self-government both thinkers attempted to address the political and social demands of their respective eras despite the stark differences between their respective contexts.

Models of governance: Gandhi's ethical decentralization and Plato's rational hierarchy

Gandhi's community based and decentralized system contrasts with Plato's meritocratic and hierarchical system, highlighting the stark differences between their conceptions of political organization. In Plato's *Republic*, society is distinctly split into three groups: producers, warriors, and rulers. Justice is attained by the proper operation of each of these groups. The selection of rulers is predicated on their capacity to think through timeless truths and lead society toward harmony (Satyanarayan 2020, pp. 1298-1301).

However, Gandhi's conception of Ramrajya disavows the ideas of centralization and class distinction. Moral self-control and leadership based on ethical obligation rather than cognitive superiority would be the norm in his ideal society. Gandhi's administration, which is predicated on local autonomy, bases its authority on villages. His concept of *swaraj*, which includes ethical and personal freedom in addition to political freedom, places a higher value on self-control and service than on power and control (Gandhi, 1997, pp.188-194).

Revealing the Symbolism and Ideology of Politics a closer look at the symbolic components of the two philosophers' writings reveals additional differences between their governing models. The pinnacle of the philosopher-king's journey from ignorance to wisdom is Plato's cave allegory, which represents intellectual upward mobility to enable just governance. The cave itself symbolizes the limitations of ordinary perception, while leaving it signifies the philosopher's capacity to see the world through the lens of truth (Plato, 2007, pp. 235-240).

Gandhi's use of symbolism highlights the importance of moral and spiritual principles. One important emblem of independence and resistance to colonialism was the spinning wheel, or charkha. Gandhi's use of the symbol also reflects his belief that his political philosophy must be based on simplicity and non-violence (Gandhi, 2024, pp. 434-438). Gandhi established the moral and religious foundation of Ramrajya a system of governance that prioritizes the cultivation of virtues over the enforcement of laws through the use of such symbols (Parel, 2006).

The vision of justice: structural harmony vs. moral transformation

"Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, just as truth is of systems of thought" (Rawls, 1971, p. 3). The idea of justice has evolved across civilizations, reflecting changing understandings of ethics, governance, and human flourishing. In imagining ideal societies, both Plato and Gandhi present influential but contrasting models of justice. Their visions offer foundational insights that continue to shape philosophical and political discourse today.

The main focus of Plato's conception of justice is structure. It is accomplished when the state is set up using the division of labor and order principles (Bluck, 1959, pp. 166-168). According to Plato, justice is about preserving the appropriate roles that each class plays within the state, not equality in the contemporary sense. To maintain social harmony, producers (farmers, artisans, merchants) must perform productive labor, auxiliaries (soldiers) must defend bravely, and rulers (philosopher-kings) must govern wisely (Plato, 2007, pp. 149-153). It is not democratic equality but natural aptitude that justifies this distribution. In order to maintain internal harmony, Plato compares the just state to the just soul, where reason governs spirit and appetite (Cornford, 1970, pp. 139-140). A just state is reflected in a just individual, whose soul is governed by reason, bravery, and restrained desire (Cornford, 1970, p. 111). Plato stresses that each component of society must fulfill its assigned role rather than emphasizing equal rights or participation. Accordingly, justice ceases to be distributive fairness and instead becomes a condition of harmonious function (Annas, 1981, p. 87). Gandhi's idea of justice, on the other hand, is based on morality and personal accountability. His vision is restorative, focusing on the moral transformation of both individuals and society rather than punitive legalism (Chakrabarty, 2006, pp. 34-36). Gandhi's justice is based on the fundamental ideas of satya (truth) and ahimsa (non-violence). True justice, in his opinion, comes from inner transformation and self-discipline rather than from

outside institutions or courts (Iyer, 1986, p. 64). Gandhi's ideal society, Ramrajya, is based on mutual respect and moral development rather than hierarchical control, and justice is communal and participatory (Parel, 2006, pp. 117-121). Intellectual elitism is replaced by ethical leadership; service, simplicity, and a dedication to moral truth are the ways that justice is practiced. Gandhi's leaders, in contrast to Plato's philosopher-kings, have given up their own interests in favor of the material and spiritual advancement of the underprivileged (Iyer, 1986, p. 96).

John Rawls's liberal theory of justice provides a modern framework that shifts from moral and metaphysical ideals to political fairness. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls argues that justice should be seen as fairness, defined by two principles: equal basic liberties and the difference principle, which permits social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged (Rawls, 1999, pp. 52, 266). His "original position" and "veil of ignorance" constructs a hypothetical scenario where rational individuals would choose these principles without knowing their social status, ensuring impartiality (Freeman, 2007, p. 136). While Rawls' approach upholds liberal individualism and institutional justice, it has been critiqued for its abstraction and neglect of communal ties. Responding to Rawls, communitarian thinkers such as Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor argue that justice cannot be separated from the values and identities formed within communities. Sandel critiques Rawls' idea of an "unencumbered self," arguing that moral reasoning is embedded in shared cultural narratives (Sandel, 1982, p. 65). Similarly, Taylor emphasizes the "socially embedded self," contending that justice must acknowledge the historical and cultural contexts that shape human identities (Taylor, 1989, p. 207). For communitarians, justice is not only about fairness but also about belonging and recognition within a moral community.

Amartya Sen's conception of justice, particularly as outlined in *The Idea of Justice* (2009), represents a significant departure from the ideas of previous philosophers such as John Rawls. Sen finds this approach to be overly theoretical and disconnected from the actual issues people face on a daily basis, whereas Rawls envisioned justice based on ideal institutions selected by rational people under a "veil of ignorance" (Sen, 2009, p. 7). Sen contends that rather than striving for an entirely just system, we ought to concentrate on lessening the glaring injustices that we observe all around us, like inequality, hunger, and poverty. We refer to this more action-oriented and pragmatic approach as a comparative approach. According to him, the true lives people can lead and the true freedoms they experience should be used to determine what justice is. His capability approach examines people's actual abilities. According to this perspective, justice is about providing people with genuine opportunities to live the lives they value, not just about laws or resources (Sen, 2009, p. 231). Gandhi's emphasis on human dignity and independence is somewhat similar to Sen's viewpoint. Sen, however, favors a more quantifiable and policy-driven

approach to achieving justice than Gandhi did. According to Martha Nussbaum, this method also makes it easier to compare the ways in which various societies promote human development (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 24). To put it briefly, Sen provides a workable and adaptable framework for justice that can direct actual behavior and judgment in diverse and democratic communities.

These earlier models are expanded upon and diversified by modern theories of justice. Traditional distributive justice models are criticized by feminist theorists like Iris Marion Young for failing to acknowledge systemic injustices like marginalization and oppression. Young (1990, p. 173) makes the case for justice as inclusion and equal participation in decision-making. Nancy Fraser asserts that justice necessitates both resource redistribution and identity recognition by fusing economic and cultural dimensions (Fraser, 1997, p. 11). One of the most important modern issues is environmental justice. Justice now encompasses ecological sustainability and equitable access to resources because vulnerable populations are disproportionately impacted by climate change (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 3). Algorithmic justice and the fairness of data-driven systems have grown in importance in the digital age. Under the pretense of objectivity, Cathy O’Neil cautions that opaque algorithms have the potential to uphold systemic biases and sustain inequality (O’Neil, 2016, p. 29). Last but not least, theorists such as Thomas Pogge contend that global institutions themselves are a factor in the enduring injustice and poverty. He promotes a rethinking of international justice that tackles systemic injustices in the global order and cuts across national boundaries (Pogge, 2002, p. 11).

In conclusion, Plato’s ordered polis, Gandhi’s moral village republic, Rawls liberal fairness, and Sen’s capabilities all offer distinct visions of justice. Contemporary theories deepen these insights by incorporating identity, participation, environment, and global equity. In an age marked by inequality, environmental crisis, and digital surveillance, justice must evolve to address the plural, interconnected realities of modern life ensuring dignity, agency, and fairness not just in theory, but in practice.

Practical implications: aspirations vs. reality

Both Plato’s and Gandhi’s conceptions of the ideal state represent profound philosophical visions of justice, harmony, and moral governance. However, translating these visions into real-world political systems encounters significant challenges, especially in the context of modern democratic societies and global interdependence.

A tripartite division of society rulers, auxiliaries, and producers that represents the three facets of the soul reason, spirit, and appetite is the foundation of Plato’s ideal state as outlined in *The Republic*. According to Plato, in addition to being extraordinarily intelligent, philosopher kings with high moral standards are in charge of governing. These leaders are taught to prioritize the needs of the community over their own. Plato’s ideal society, as Klosko noted in 1981, is unconstrained by long-standing traditions or customs; rather, it is a “romance of

free intelligence,” in which reason prevails over inherited values. Plato's educational philosophy, which is essential to the formation of the guardian class, is a significant component of this logical approach. Plato outlines a comprehensive, state run educational system in *The Republic* that emphasizes the development of justice and virtue. His approach blends gymnastics, which fosters physical strength and discipline, with music, which cultivates moral sensitivity, in order to establish equilibrium within the soul. Philosopher-kings' moral and intellectual development was influenced by this educational framework, which still has an effect on education today. It promotes organized curricula, equal learning opportunities for men and women, and the significance of civic values. The concept of using education to shape society and promote moral development was developed in ancient Greece, but it is still highly relevant today when discussing national education systems and ethical citizenship.

However, implementing such a system in contemporary political contexts presents a number of challenges. First, the notion of delegating power to a select few intellectuals is problematic in societies that place a high importance on equality and democratic participation. It ignores the diversity and complexity of human motivations to assume that philosopher kings will rule justly because they are wise. The text raises some important questions about paternalism and authoritarianism (Popper, 1945, pp. 86-89). In societies where ideas of moral and intellectual superiority are regularly disputed and capricious, the legitimacy of those in positions of authority may be called into question. Gettel (1956, pp. 46-51) makes a strong case that Plato's hierarchical governing model is diametrically opposed to democratic ideals, which place a premium on accountability, equality of representation, and inclusivity. Plato's vision also fails to adequately account for the diverse and dynamic nature of modern societies, where various value systems coexist and there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes the good life. Plato's rigid social structure restricts the freedom of movement and individual autonomy that are prized in most liberal democracies, where tasks are assigned based on purportedly natural qualities. Plato's model is even less adaptable and sensitive to societal demands because it cannot take into account political upheaval or public dissension. Furthermore, the degree of specialization and bureaucracy required for contemporary governance is too great for philosopher kings or a guardian class to manage alone.

In contrast to Plato's vision, modern political systems required a more dispersed and multidimensional approach to leadership because of their close connections to economic systems, foreign relations, legal frameworks, and digital technology. Similarly, there are major practical obstacles to Gandhi's idea of Ramrajya, which he defined as a just and moral social order. Gandhi's model advocated for ethical leadership, local administration, and little intervention from centralized authority. It was founded on the ideals of truth (Satya), non-

violence (Ahimsa), self reliance (Swaraj), and local autonomy. Gandhi envisioned a society in which people lived in harmony with one another and with environment, communities ruled themselves, and economic activity was limited, as observed by Parel (2000, pp. 103–107). While Gandhi's vision is inspiring, it also faces real-world limitations that need to be addressed.

Relevance in contemporary governance

Despite coming from very different historical and cultural contexts, Plato and Gandhi philosophical philosophies have some striking similarities and differences. Though their approaches to these issues differ greatly, both thinkers had a strong interest in issues of justice, morality, and the well-being of society as a whole. The foundation of Plato's Ideal State is the rule of philosopher kings who are morally and intellectually enlightened (Plato, 2007, p. 80). He believed that a small group of people with a deep awareness of the Good must lead because the majority of people lack the wisdom and mental capacity to govern effectively.

Gandhi's vision, on the other hand, disavows the idea of centralized or exclusive authority. His idea of Ram Rajya places a strong emphasis on Swaraj, or self-rule, in which each person's moral and spiritual discipline naturally leads to governance (Gandhi, 1946, p. 72). The upliftment and well-being of everyone is the guiding principle of this decentralized, grassroots leadership model. Although both thinkers view justice as social harmony attained by each member of the community functioning properly, their models are different in terms of structure and focus. Plato's justice is fundamentally hierarchical and requires a strict social structure in which every class fulfills its assigned responsibilities (Kirichenko, 2022, pp. 150–155). Gandhi, on the other hand, envisioned an egalitarian society founded on ahimsa (non-violence), respect for one another, and collaboration.

Furthermore, an abstract, metaphysical understanding of the Good that is only available to a select few through philosophical enlightenment forms the basis of Plato's Ideal State. Gandhi's Ram Rajya, on the other hand, is based on moral and spiritual precepts that everyone can understand. His emphasis on ahimsa (non-violence) and satya (truth) provides a moral foundation that uplifts each person, making his vision essentially inclusive. Therefore, Gandhi's ideas support inclusive and participatory governance, whereas Plato's political philosophy tends toward exclusivity and authority. The sociopolitical environments that influenced each of their visions are still relevant in discussions today. Plato's defense of a meritocratic and morally educated leadership is still pertinent today in light of issues with governance, corruption, and moral failings in public life (Kraut, 2008, p. 122; Taylor, 2004, p. 97). His focus on education and the development of virtue is becoming increasingly significant in light of the political unrest occurring globally. Gandhi's vision, however, explicitly responds to modern movements that place a higher priority on decentralization, sustainable living, and equitable development. His idea of

moral living and village-based self sufficiency offers a compelling substitute in the face of growing ecological and social problems (Chakravarti, 2012, p. 201). His focus on human dignity aligns with contemporary human rights discourses and justice-based activism (Iyer, 2000, p. 63).

In an attempt to bring traditional Western philosophical concepts into line with modern Indian political philosophy, Plato's Ideal State and Gandhi's Ram Rajya are contrasted. By analyzing their similarities and differences, the study highlights the continued importance of morality, leadership, and justice while also enhancing our understanding of these concepts. In an era of environmental degradation, political unrest, and global inequality, a fresh look at these core ideas may offer valuable insights for creating a more equitable and peaceful world.

Finding of the study

The study emphasizes how Gandhi's decentralized self-rule through village republics and Plato's hierarchical model of governance led by philosopher kings differ in their perspectives on authority, fairness, and social order. The role of technocrats in modern government, where specialized knowledge and expertise affect governance, demonstrates the practical relevance of Plato's theories and reflects his emphasis on intellectual leadership. Gandhi's support for moral leadership based on Satyagraha and Ahimsa and Plato's emphasis on intellectual elites' logical rule create a dichotomy in contemporary governance that shapes discussions about leadership in democracies.

Both Plato's critique of Athenian democracy and Gandhi's resistance to British colonialism shaped their political visions, providing insights into contemporary struggles between centralized, expert driven governance and grassroots political movements.

The practical applicability of Plato's intellectual elitism and Gandhi's moral decentralization is debated in relation to contemporary challenges like inequality and environmental sustainability, with Plato's model resonating with the reliance on experts and Gandhi's model becoming more relevant in sustainable development. Both Plato and Gandhi emphasize the importance of education in shaping political ideals. Plato's structured education for philosopher kings and Gandhi's focus on moral and ethical education, highlighting the ongoing relevance of education in shaping leaders and citizens in modern governance.

Limitation of the study

It is critical to comprehend this study's limitations. First of all, because the philosophers involved come from very different historical, cultural, and political backgrounds, it is challenging to make direct comparisons between colonial India and ancient Greece. Both Plato's and Gandhi's theories are fundamentally philosophical and idealistic, which restricts their applicability in contemporary politics. The study mostly relies on textual analysis and lacks real-world case

studies to back up its theoretical claims. Additionally, the study's narrow focus precludes a comprehensive analysis of institutional, legal, or economic factors. Finally, the complexity of many democratic frameworks, globalization, and technological advancement may be oversimplified if their models are applied to the modern world.

In conclusion Plato's Republic and Gandhi's Ramrajya are two different but equally important ideal society models, each with its own cultural and historical foundations. While Gandhi's vision of Ramrajya is centered on intellectual leadership, structural hierarchy, and the rational pursuit of justice, Gandhi's ideal of Ramrajya emphasizes decentralized government, moral leadership, and the ethical responsibility of both individuals and communities. These divergent opinions continue to influence political philosophy and offer valuable insights into contemporary governance. Plato's focus on philosopher kings and the importance of knowledge in governance aligns with current discussions regarding the role of expertise in governance. His idea of a logically organized society is still applicable in these difficult times when sensible choices are crucial. However, Plato's rigid hierarchical structure may conflict with modern democratic values of equality, political pluralism, and participation. Plato's ideas need to be adjusted for modern contexts, where balancing democratic principles with intellectual authority is necessary. The centralized power structures that are common in the modern world, however, can be effectively replaced by Gandhi's theory of moral, decentralized governance. Gandhi's focus on local autonomy, self-sufficiency, and moral leadership addresses issues such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and the growing disenchantment with centralized governmental power. Gandhi's ideas are consistent with contemporary movements for participatory democracy and community empowerment, where moral leadership based on honesty and non violence provides a promising substitute for political corruption and inequality.

Despite the difficulties their principles encounter in modern governance, Plato and Gandhi both provide timeless frameworks for considering leadership, fairness, and social peace. Even though their ideas can seem idealistic, there is no denying their applicability in the current political environment. Their theories make people think critically about the kind of government and leadership that are needed to solve the moral, social, and environmental issues that our planet is currently facing. In the end, their theories support an intellectually demanding and morally sound quest for justice, providing insightful guidance for building a more equitable and harmonious society.

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Universalising Ambedkar: human rights and social equality in global context

Kalpana Devi

ABSTRACT

This research examines the global relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideology within contemporary human rights discourse and social justice movements. Through qualitative analysis and comparative studies, this paper explores how Ambedkar's vision of social equality, human dignity, and constitutional morality transcends the Indian context to offer valuable insights for global human rights frameworks. The study analyzes parallels between Ambedkar's thought and Western human rights theorists, examines the reception of Ambedkarite ideas in international academia and diaspora communities, and identifies challenges in universalising his philosophy. Findings suggest that Ambedkar's comprehensive approach to social justice provides a robust framework for addressing contemporary global inequalities, particularly in areas of minority rights, affirmative action, and intersectional discrimination. The research concludes that integrating Ambedkar's perspectives into global human rights discourse could significantly broaden and strengthen international approaches to social equality and human dignity.

Keywords: *Ambedkar, human rights, social equality, global justice, caste, discrimination.*

Introduction

The struggle for human rights and social equality represents one of humanity's most enduring challenges, manifesting across cultures, continents, and historical periods in diverse yet interconnected forms. From the abolition of slavery in the Americas to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, from civil rights movements in the United States to decolonization struggles across Asia and Africa, the quest for human dignity and equal treatment has shaped modern political discourse and international law. Within this global tapestry of resistance and reform, the contributions of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) stand as a remarkable yet underexplored voice in the broader conversation about human rights and social justice.

Ambedkar's intellectual and political legacy extends far beyond his role as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution or his leadership of the Dalit liberation movement. His comprehensive vision of social transformation, grounded in principles of equality, fraternity, and human dignity, offers profound

insights that resonate with contemporary global struggles against discrimination, marginalization, and structural inequality. His critique of hierarchical social systems, advocacy for constitutional morality, and emphasis on education as a tool of emancipation provide frameworks that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries.

The significance of examining Ambedkar's thought within a global context lies not merely in academic curiosity but in the urgent need to diversify and strengthen human rights discourse. As scholars like Upendra Baxi (2006) and Cossman and Kapur (2010) have argued, the international human rights framework has been dominated by Western philosophical traditions, often marginalizing voices and experiences from the Global South. By exploring how Ambedkar's ideas can contribute to universal human rights principles, this study addresses what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) terms the "epistemological diversity" necessary for creating truly inclusive approaches to global justice.

Purpose and scope of the study

This research aims to explore how Ambedkar's ideological contributions transcend the specific Indian context of caste-based discrimination to offer valuable insights for global human rights discourse and contemporary social justice movements. The study seeks to establish theoretical and practical connections between Ambedkar's vision and international frameworks for addressing inequality, discrimination, and social exclusion.

The scope encompasses an examination of Ambedkar's core philosophical tenets, their alignment with international human rights principles, comparative analysis with other global justice theorists, and assessment of how Ambedkarite thought has been received and applied in different cultural and political contexts. The research focuses particularly on areas where Ambedkar's insights can enhance understanding of minority rights, affirmative action policies, and intersectional approaches to discrimination.

Research questions

This study is guided by several key research questions:

1. How can Ambedkar's philosophical and political thought be interpreted within the framework of global human rights discourse?
2. What specific relevance does his ideology hold for contemporary global social justice movements addressing racism, discrimination, and structural inequality?
3. What are the theoretical and practical implications of integrating Ambedkarite perspectives into international human rights frameworks?
4. What challenges and opportunities exist in universalizing Ambedkar's ideas across different cultural and political contexts?

Methodology

This research employs qualitative methodology incorporating comparative analysis, interpretive reading of primary and secondary texts, and examination of case studies demonstrating the application of Ambedkarite thought in various global contexts. The approach includes content analysis of Ambedkar's writings, comparative study of his ideas with other human rights theorists, and assessment of contemporary applications of his philosophy in diaspora communities and international academic discourse.

Social justice and equality

Central to Ambedkar's philosophical framework is a comprehensive critique of social hierarchy and systematic discrimination. His analysis of the caste system in India provides insights that extend beyond specific cultural contexts to illuminate broader patterns of social stratification and exclusion. Ambedkar (1936) argued in "The Annihilation of Caste" that hierarchical social systems are fundamentally incompatible with principles of democracy and human dignity, stating that "caste has killed public spirit" and prevented the development of genuine social solidarity.

Ambedkar's understanding of social justice encompasses both negative and positive dimensions—the elimination of discriminatory practices and the active promotion of equality through institutional mechanisms. This dual approach anticipates contemporary human rights frameworks that recognize both civil-political rights and socio-economic rights as indivisible and interdependent. Ambedkar's emphasis on structural transformation rather than mere legal reform demonstrates sophisticated understanding of how deeply embedded systems of oppression require comprehensive intervention.

The universalizability of Ambedkar's critique becomes evident when examining other forms of systematic discrimination globally. His analysis of how dominant groups maintain privilege through cultural, economic, and political mechanisms offers insights applicable to understanding racism in the United States, ethnic conflicts in Africa, class-based discrimination in Europe, and indigenous marginalization in settler colonial societies.

Human dignity and constitutional morality

Ambedkar's conception of human dignity forms the philosophical foundation of his approach to constitutional design and democratic governance. His role in framing the Indian Constitution reflected his belief that legal frameworks must actively protect and promote human dignity rather than merely preventing its violation. This understanding of constitutional morality—the idea that constitutional principles should guide political behavior and social relationships—provides a framework for strengthening democratic institutions globally.

His emphasis on constitutional morality as distinct from social morality represents a crucial insight for human rights discourse. Ambedkar (1949) argued that while social customs and traditions might perpetuate inequality, constitutional principles should embody universal values of equality and justice. This distinction offers important guidance for addressing tensions between cultural relativism and universal human rights in international contexts.

The concept of constitutional morality developed by Ambedkar resonates with contemporary debates about constitutional design in post-conflict societies, transitional democracies, and contexts where traditional power structures conflict with democratic principles. His insights about the need for institutional mechanisms to protect minority rights and prevent majoritarian tyranny remain highly relevant for contemporary constitutional scholarship and practice.

Economic justice and democracy

Ambedkar's vision of social transformation included sophisticated analysis of economic inequality and its relationship to political democracy. His critique of capitalism's tendency to concentrate wealth and power, combined with his advocacy for state intervention to ensure economic justice, anticipated many contemporary debates about inequality and development. His famous assertion that "political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy" (Ambedkar, 1949) highlights the interconnection between economic equality and democratic governance. His approach to economic justice emphasized both redistribution and recognition—addressing material inequality while also challenging cultural patterns that legitimize economic exclusion. This dual focus aligns with contemporary frameworks in development studies and political economy that recognize the multidimensional nature of poverty and marginalization.

Ambedkar's ideas about economic democracy, including worker rights, state responsibility for welfare, and the need to prevent concentration of economic power, offer insights relevant to global debates about sustainable development, corporate accountability, and the role of government in addressing inequality.

Education and emancipation

Throughout his life and work, Ambedkar emphasized education as fundamental to individual liberation and social transformation. His famous exhortation to "educate, agitate, organize" reflects understanding of how knowledge, consciousness-raising, and collective action work together to challenge oppressive systems. His personal educational journey—from Dalit community in rural Maharashtra to Columbia University and London School of Economics—demonstrated the transformative potential of education while also revealing its limitations in societies structured by systematic discrimination. Ambedkar's approach to education encompassed both formal learning and critical consciousness. He advocated for education that would enable oppressed communities to understand their circumstances, develop alternative visions, and

organize for change. This critical pedagogical approach resonates with the work of Paulo Freire and other liberation educators, suggesting universal principles for emancipatory education. The relevance of Ambedkar's educational philosophy extends to contemporary global challenges including educational inequality, cultural imperialism in curricula, and the need for education that promotes critical thinking and social responsibility. His insights about education as both individual empowerment and collective liberation offer guidance for educational initiatives in various contexts of marginalization and exclusion.

Human rights framework: a global overview

Evolution of human rights

The contemporary international human rights framework emerged from the catastrophic experiences of World War II and the Holocaust, culminating in the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. This foundational document, followed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1966, established the basic architecture of international human rights law.

However, the development of this framework coincided with decolonization movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, creating tensions between universal aspirations and diverse cultural contexts. Critics have argued that the human rights framework reflects primarily Western philosophical traditions and political experiences, potentially marginalizing alternative approaches to human dignity and social organization.

The evolution of human rights discourse has gradually incorporated broader perspectives, including feminist critiques, postcolonial analyses, and indigenous worldviews. This expansion reflects growing recognition that truly universal human rights must be grounded in diverse philosophical traditions and responsive to varied forms of oppression and marginalization.

Contemporary challenges

Despite significant progress in establishing international human rights norms and institutions, contemporary global society faces persistent challenges in realizing human rights for all. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other characteristics continues to affect billions of people worldwide. Economic inequality has reached unprecedented levels, with implications for the realization of both civil-political and socio-economic rights.

The rise of authoritarianism, ethnic nationalism, and religious fundamentalism in various regions poses new threats to human rights and democratic governance. Climate change, technological disruption, and global migration

create additional challenges that existing human rights frameworks struggle to address adequately.

These contemporary challenges highlight the need for more sophisticated and inclusive approaches to human rights that can address structural inequalities, intersectional discrimination, and emerging forms of oppression. The limitations of state-centered enforcement mechanisms and the growing influence of non-state actors require new strategies for human rights protection and promotion.

Relevance of subaltern voices

The concept of “subaltern voices”—perspectives from marginalized and oppressed groups—has gained increasing recognition in human rights discourse. Scholars associated with the Subaltern Studies collective, including Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Spivak, have argued for the importance of understanding how dominated groups experience and resist oppression.

The integration of subaltern perspectives into human rights discourse serves multiple purposes: it diversifies the philosophical foundations of human rights, provides insights into forms of oppression that may be invisible to dominant groups, and offers alternative strategies for resistance and transformation. This integration also addresses critiques of human rights as a form of cultural imperialism by demonstrating how universal principles can be grounded in diverse cultural traditions.

Ambedkar’s thought exemplifies the contribution that subaltern voices can make to human rights discourse. His analysis of caste-based oppression, developed from the perspective of those who experienced it directly, offers insights that complement and challenge dominant approaches to understanding discrimination and inequality.

Ambedkar and the global human rights discourse

Comparison with western thinkers

Ambedkar’s intellectual contributions demonstrate remarkable parallels with prominent Western thinkers in human rights and social justice, while also offering distinctive insights shaped by his unique position as both scholar and social activist from a marginalized community. The comparison with Martin Luther King Jr. reveals shared commitments to nonviolent resistance, constitutional change, and the integration of moral and political arguments for equality. Both leaders emphasized the interconnection between individual dignity and social transformation, though Ambedkar’s analysis of structural oppression was perhaps more systematic and comprehensive.

The intellectual connection with W.E.B. Du Bois is particularly striking, as both scholars developed sophisticated analyses of how dominant groups maintain privilege through cultural, economic, and political mechanisms. Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness” finds parallels in Ambedkar’s analysis of how oppressed groups internalize dominant ideologies while simultaneously

developing critical perspectives on their circumstances. Both thinkers emphasized the importance of education and intellectual development for liberation movements.

Ambedkar's relationship to John Rawls's theory of justice reveals both convergences and tensions. Like Rawls, Ambedkar was concerned with developing principles for a just society that could command rational consent from all members. However, Ambedkar's emphasis on the need for positive measures to address historical injustice and structural inequality goes beyond Rawls's focus on fair procedures and equal opportunity. Ambedkar's insights about how deeply embedded systems of oppression require active intervention to achieve genuine equality anticipate contemporary debates about affirmative action and reparative justice.

The comparison with John Stuart Mill illuminates Ambedkar's distinctive contribution to liberal political thought. While Mill's "On Liberty" focuses primarily on protecting individual freedom from governmental interference, Ambedkar's analysis recognizes how social oppression can be as limiting as state coercion. His emphasis on positive liberty—the capacity to realize one's potential—complements Mill's negative liberty while addressing its limitations in contexts of systematic discrimination.

Ambedkar's vision in international law and policy

Ambedkar's contributions to constitutional design and democratic theory offer valuable insights for international law and policy development. His approach to minority protection through constitutional guarantees, affirmative action, and institutional safeguards provides models for addressing similar challenges in other contexts. The Indian Constitution's provisions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which Ambedkar helped design, offer practical examples of how legal frameworks can address systematic discrimination.

His understanding of federalism as a mechanism for protecting minority interests while maintaining national unity offers insights for constitutional design in diverse societies. The balance between central authority and regional autonomy reflected in the Indian Constitution addresses tensions present in many contemporary multi-ethnic and multi-religious states.

Ambedkar's vision of democratic governance extends beyond electoral procedures to encompass what he termed "constitutional morality"—the idea that democratic institutions must be guided by principles of equality, fraternity, and justice. This concept offers guidance for strengthening democratic institutions globally, particularly in contexts where formal democratic procedures coexist with systematic exclusion and inequality.

His analysis of the relationship between economic and political democracy anticipates contemporary debates about global governance, corporate accountability, and the role of international institutions in addressing inequality.

His insights about the need for both national and international mechanisms to protect human rights remain relevant for discussions about global governance and human security.

Transnational movements

The global circulation of Ambedkarite ideas has facilitated the development of transnational movements addressing caste-based discrimination and related forms of systematic exclusion. Dalit rights organizations have increasingly framed their struggles within international human rights discourse, seeking recognition of caste-based discrimination as a form of racial discrimination under international law.

The involvement of Dalit organizations in the World Conference Against Racism in Durban (2001) demonstrated the potential for connecting local struggles with global human rights frameworks. Despite resistance from the Indian government and some international actors, these efforts have contributed to growing recognition of caste-based discrimination as a global human rights concern.

The development of transnational networks addressing caste-based discrimination illustrates broader patterns in contemporary social movements, including the use of international forums to pressure national governments, the development of solidarity networks across national boundaries, and the strategic deployment of universal human rights language to address particular forms of oppression.

These transnational dimensions of Ambedkarite thought demonstrate its potential for contributing to global social justice movements while also revealing challenges in translating culturally specific analyses into universal frameworks.

Case studies and applications

Dalit movements in diaspora

The presence of significant Dalit populations in countries including the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada has created opportunities for examining how Ambedkarite thought translates across cultural and political contexts. In the United States, Dalit activists have drawn connections between caste-based discrimination and African American experiences of racism, creating coalitions that highlight commonalities while respecting differences in historical experience and contemporary circumstances. The legal recognition of caste-based discrimination in employment and educational settings in some U.S. jurisdictions represents a significant development in the internationalization of human rights frameworks. The inclusion of caste as a protected category in anti-discrimination ordinances in cities like Seattle demonstrates how local activism can contribute to broader recognition of forms of discrimination that may not be visible within dominant cultural frameworks.

In the United Kingdom, Dalit organizations have worked within existing anti-racism frameworks while also advocating for specific recognition of caste-based discrimination. The inclusion of caste discrimination provisions in UK equality legislation reflects growing recognition of the need for intersectional approaches to discrimination that address multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage. Canadian contexts have provided opportunities for examining how Ambedkarite thought relates to indigenous rights movements and multiculturalism policies. The emphasis on collective rights and recognition of historical injustice in Canadian approaches to indigenous issues offers points of connection with Ambedkarite analyses of systematic oppression and the need for reparative justice.

Ambedkarite thought in global academia

The reception of Ambedkar's ideas within international academic discourse has been uneven but increasingly significant. In postcolonial studies, Ambedkar's analysis of the relationship between colonialism and internal forms of oppression has contributed to more sophisticated understanding of how multiple systems of domination intersect and reinforce each other.

Critical race theory has found valuable insights in Ambedkar's analysis of how dominant groups maintain privilege through cultural, legal, and economic mechanisms. His understanding of how oppressed groups develop alternative epistemologies and resistance strategies resonates with critical race theorists' emphasis on counter-narratives and experiential knowledge.

Development studies has increasingly recognized Ambedkar's contributions to understanding the relationship between social inclusion and economic development. His insights about how discrimination limits human potential and economic productivity have influenced approaches to inclusive development and poverty reduction. The growing presence of Ambedkarite thought in international academic conferences, journals, and collaborative research projects demonstrates its increasing recognition as a significant contribution to global knowledge about social justice and human rights.

Cross-cultural relevance

The application of Ambedkarite insights to other contexts of systematic discrimination demonstrates both the universalizability of his core principles and the need for contextual adaptation. Indigenous rights movements have found valuable parallels in Ambedkar's analysis of how dominant groups use cultural narratives to legitimize oppression and how marginalized communities can develop alternative sources of identity and solidarity.

Racial justice movements in various contexts have drawn on Ambedkar's understanding of how structural discrimination operates through multiple institutions and mechanisms. His emphasis on the need for both legal reform and

cultural transformation resonates with contemporary analyses of systematic racism and the limitations of purely legal approaches to achieving equality.

Anti-caste activism beyond South Asian contexts, including among South Asian diaspora communities and in solidarity movements, demonstrates how Ambedkarite thought can inform broader struggles against hierarchy and discrimination. The development of intersectional analyses that connect caste, race, gender, and class reflects the influence of Ambedkarite insights about the complexity of oppression and the need for comprehensive approaches to liberation.

Challenges in universalising Ambedkar

Cultural and political translation

The process of universalizing Ambedkar's thought faces significant challenges in cultural and political translation. The concept of caste, central to Ambedkar's analysis, does not translate directly to other cultural contexts, creating difficulties in communicating the specificity of caste-based oppression while also identifying broader principles applicable to other forms of systematic discrimination.

The challenge of translation extends beyond linguistic issues to encompass deeper questions about how culturally specific experiences and analyses can contribute to universal understanding. The risk exists that universalization might dilute the specificity of Ambedkar's insights or, conversely, that emphasis on cultural specificity might limit their broader application. Political translation involves adapting Ambedkarite insights to different political systems and constitutional frameworks. The specific mechanisms that Ambedkar developed for addressing caste-based discrimination within the Indian political system may not be directly applicable to other contexts, requiring creative adaptation that preserves core principles while addressing different institutional arrangements.

Resistance and misinterpretation

The universalization of Ambedkar's thought encounters resistance from multiple sources. Within dominant Western academic and policy circles, there may be reluctance to acknowledge non-Western contributions to human rights thinking or to recognize forms of oppression that are not well understood within Western analytical frameworks.

Misinterpretation represents another significant challenge, particularly when Ambedkar's ideas are abstracted from their cultural and historical contexts in ways that distort their meaning or implications. The risk exists that selective appropriation of Ambedkarite insights might serve to legitimize existing power structures rather than challenge them.

The challenge of epistemic exclusion—the systematic marginalization of knowledge produced by oppressed groups—affects the reception of Ambedkarite thought within international academic and policy circles.

Overcoming this exclusion requires not only presenting Ambedkar's ideas effectively but also challenging the structural factors that privilege certain forms of knowledge over others.

Need for intersectionality

The universalization of Ambedkar's thought requires sophisticated understanding of how different forms of oppression intersect and interact. While Ambedkar's analysis focused primarily on caste-based discrimination, his insights must be integrated with analyses of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, and other dimensions of oppression to develop comprehensive approaches to social justice.

The development of intersectional analyses that build on Ambedkarite foundations while addressing multiple forms of discrimination represents both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity lies in developing more sophisticated understanding of how systematic oppression operates through multiple and overlapping mechanisms. The challenge lies in maintaining the specificity and power of Ambedkar's analysis while also addressing forms of oppression that he did not explicitly examine.

The integration of feminist, anti-racist, and other critical perspectives with Ambedkarite thought requires careful attention to how different analytical frameworks can complement and strengthen each other without losing their distinctive insights.

Conclusion and recommendations

This research demonstrates that Ambedkar's ideological contributions offer significant potential for enriching global human rights discourse and strengthening international approaches to social justice. His comprehensive vision of social transformation, grounded in principles of equality, fraternity, and human dignity, provides frameworks that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries while offering distinctive insights shaped by experiences of systematic oppression. The comparative analysis reveals important parallels between Ambedkar's thought and prominent Western theorists of human rights and social justice, while also highlighting his unique contributions to understanding structural discrimination and the requirements for genuine equality. His emphasis on constitutional morality, positive measures to address historical injustice, and the interconnection between individual liberation and social transformation offer valuable insights for contemporary human rights frameworks.

The examination of case studies demonstrates both the potential and the challenges involved in universalizing Ambedkarite thought. The successful application of his insights in diaspora contexts, international academic discourse, and cross-cultural social movements illustrates the universalizability

of core principles, while also revealing the need for contextual adaptation and intersectional analysis.

Theoretical and practical implications

The integration of Ambedkarite perspectives into global human rights discourse has several important theoretical implications. It contributes to the epistemological diversity necessary for developing truly inclusive approaches to human rights by incorporating insights from subaltern experiences and non-Western philosophical traditions. It strengthens understanding of how systematic oppression operates through multiple mechanisms and institutions, requiring comprehensive rather than piecemeal approaches to social transformation.

The practical implications include enhanced frameworks for addressing minority rights, affirmative action policies, and intersectional discrimination. Ambedkar's insights about constitutional design, democratic governance, and the relationship between economic and political equality offer guidance for institutional development and policy implementation in various contexts. The research also highlights the importance of developing transnational networks and solidarity movements that can learn from diverse experiences of oppression and resistance while respecting cultural specificity and historical differences.

Future research directions

Several important directions for future research emerge from this study. Comparative studies examining how Ambedkarite insights apply to different contexts of systematic discrimination could deepen understanding of both universal principles and contextual variations in oppression and resistance. Policy integration research could explore specific mechanisms for incorporating Ambedkarite perspectives into international human rights frameworks, including treaty development, monitoring mechanisms, and enforcement procedures. This research could also examine how national legal systems can learn from Ambedkar's approach to constitutional design and minority protection.

Educational frameworks research could develop pedagogical approaches that introduce Ambedkarite thought to diverse audiences while maintaining its critical edge and transformative potential. This research could also explore how educational institutions can implement Ambedkar's vision of emancipatory education in various cultural contexts.

The universalization of Ambedkar's thought represents both an opportunity and a responsibility. The opportunity lies in strengthening global human rights discourse through the integration of insights from one of the most sophisticated analysts of systematic oppression and social transformation. The responsibility lies in ensuring that this universalization process respects the specificity of Ambedkar's analysis while also facilitating its contribution to broader struggles for human dignity and social justice. As global society continues to grapple with persistent inequality, discrimination, and exclusion, Ambedkar's vision of comprehensive social transformation grounded in principles of equality,

fraternity, and justice offers hope and guidance for creating more inclusive and equitable societies. The challenge lies in translating this vision into concrete action that can address contemporary forms of oppression while honouring the legacy of those who have struggled for human dignity throughout history.

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Infrastructural development, agricultural productivity and life expectancy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

As the global population rises, improving human health and agricultural productivity becomes vital for sustainable development. Infrastructural development is equally crucial, as it supports health and agriculture. This study examines the relationship among infrastructural development, agricultural productivity, and life expectancy in Nigeria from 1990 to 2024, using the Auto-Regressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model. Key variables are life expectancy, agricultural output, infrastructural spending, and domestic credit to the private sector. The empirical results reveal a significant long-term positive effect of agricultural output and infrastructure on life expectancy. However, domestic credit to the private sector negatively affects life expectancy. Based on these findings, the study recommends increased investment in general infrastructure particularly the rural infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, storage facilities, and agricultural research to improve productivity and health. To counter the negative effects of private sector credit, the study suggests a stronger regulatory framework for credit allocation and borrower education programs to promote efficient and productive credit use.

Keywords: *Life Expectancy; Infrastructural Development; Agricultural Productivity; Domestic Credit to Private Sector.*

JEL Classification: H54, Q12, I15

1.1 Introduction

Infrastructural development is fundamental to Nigeria's advancement and societal evolution, encompassing the establishment and improvement of vital facilities such as roadways, energy supply, transportation systems, and communication networks. Infrastructural development functions as the cornerstone of economic advancement, exerting influence across diverse sectors, including agriculture, energy, transportation, public health, and numerous additional domains (Audu & Otu, 2024). Nigeria, akin to various other nations within Sub-Saharan Africa, has been beset with the absence of functional

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infrastructure necessary for the stimulation of economic growth. A prominent obstacle in infrastructural development is the deficiency of sufficient funding. Nigeria encounters challenges associated with constrained financial resources and escalating debt, which frequently culminates in incomplete or inadequately executed initiatives (Edeme *et al.*, 2020). The dearth of financial resources further impedes the maintenance of pre-existing infrastructures, resulting in their progressive deterioration over time. Numerous infrastructural provisions endeavours encounter difficulties stemming from inadequate or ill-conceived plans and deficiency of a thorough feasibility assessments. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and protracted approval procedures also precipitate delays in the implementation of infrastructure initiatives. Administrative red tape, procedural bottlenecks, and discordant policies among various governmental entities frequently impede project progression, thereby escalating expenditures and diminishing their overall efficacy (Audu & Otu, 2024). Within this context of inefficacy, critical sectors such as agriculture have remained impeded and unable to realize their full productivity potentials. This systemic inefficiency has significantly contributed to Nigeria's difficulties in attaining self-sufficiency in food production, notwithstanding the nation's abundant agricultural resources.

In spite of Nigeria's substantial potential within the agricultural domain, the levels of productivity and contributions to economic growth and foreign exchange earnings have been markedly low (Peterson & Collins, 2022). The nation has been unable to achieve self-sufficiency in food production and the establishment of value chains capable of fostering job creation and augmenting governmental revenue, a situation that has been ascribed to inadequate infrastructure essential for enhancing agricultural productivity. Agricultural productivity denotes the output generated by the agricultural sector relative to the inputs utilized. As articulated by Lakra (2024), agricultural productivity serves as an analytical metric for assessing the efficiency with which various agricultural inputs, namely land, labor, capital, and technology are transformed into outputs, encompassing crops, livestock, and other agricultural commodities. In more accessible terms, it signifies the quantity of agricultural produce derived from a specific allocation of resources, thereby serving as a crucial indicator of the agricultural sector's efficacy.

The intricate relationship between agricultural productivity and life expectancy in Nigeria is particularly salient in economies where agriculture constitutes a fundamental source of sustenance, income, and employment, given that agriculture exerts a direct influence on nutrition and economic stability (Ndiwa *et al.*, 2020). Enhanced agricultural productivity guarantees a reliable food supply, thereby mitigating hunger and malnutrition two principal factors contributing to adverse health outcomes. In Nigeria, where a substantial segment of the population is dependent on agriculture for both sustenance and income, augmented productivity has a direct correlation with the accessibility and affordability of nutritious food, especially for economically disadvantaged

households (Maiga, 2024). Improved nutritional status fortifies the immune system, diminishes susceptibility to diseases, and promotes both physical and cognitive development, particularly among children, thus contributing to increased longevity. Furthermore, the escalation of agricultural output results in augmented incomes for farmers, affording them the capability to invest in superior healthcare, education, and enhanced living standards (Peterson & Collins, 2022).

Notwithstanding the Nigerian government's initiatives aimed at stabilizing growth within the agricultural sector, the productivity metrics of the industry indicate that, despite employing approximately 60 percent of the labour force, agricultural output in the nation has persistently remained disappointingly low and fluctuating between 30% and 42% (Olakunle, 2021). The suboptimal agricultural output in Nigeria arises from a plethora of many factors, including inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to contemporary farming methodologies, and insufficient financial support for farmers. The deficiency of rural road networks and subpar storage facilities culminates in significant post-harvest losses, thereby diminishing the availability of agricultural products. Additionally, the reliance on traditional agricultural practices and implements constrains productivity, preventing farmers from optimizing yields. A lack of access to affordable credit inhibits smallholder farmers from investing in improved seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation technologies. Moreover, erratic weather patterns, exacerbated by climate change, adversely affect crop growth and yields, particularly in light of Nigeria's and most of other developing countries heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture.

Informed by these identified challenges, this study seeks to investigate the influence of infrastructural development on agricultural productivity and life expectancy in Nigeria from the year 1990 to 2024. Infrastructural development is an essential ingredient for agricultural output enhancement and which eventually increased life span of the people. By enhancing agricultural productivity through expansion in infrastructures (either hard infrastructure (roads, railways, energy, etc.) which directly impacting productivity, or soft infrastructure (for example, education, healthcare, etc.), it can lead to increased food security and improved nutrition, ultimately contributing to better health and longer lifespans. Infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, provides access to markets, technology, and resources, boosting farm output and income.

A study on infrastructural development, agricultural productivity, and life expectancy in Nigeria could also offer valuable insights for other developing countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America that face similar structural challenges in infrastructure, agriculture, and health. By examining how targeted investments in rural infrastructure such as roads, irrigation, electricity, and storage facilities combined with agricultural modernization can enhance food security and public health, the Nigerian case can serve as a practical model for formulating integrated development policies and the study's empirical findings and policy recommendations could guide other states in designing strategies that

leverage their agricultural base and infrastructure potential to boost life expectancy and drive inclusive growth. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader discourse on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), by demonstrating how local reforms can have transformative effects on human development outcomes.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Conceptual review

a. Infrastructural development

Infrastructural development denotes the systematic construction, enhancement, and upkeep of the essential physical and organizational frameworks requisite for the effective operation of a society, which encompasses transportation networks, energy systems, communication infrastructures, and water supply systems (Lawson & Aseminachin, 2020). In the context of Nigeria, infrastructural development is paramount for the sustenance of economic growth and the elevation of living standards. The focus on infrastructural development in Nigeria is of critical importance, given its profound influence on economic advancement and societal welfare. Notwithstanding the initiatives aimed at enhancing infrastructure, persistent challenges such as financial constraints, corruption, and insufficient maintenance continue to obstruct progress (Audu & Otu, 2024). The government has embarked on various reforms and projects; however, the momentum of development remains sluggish in relation to the escalating demands posed by the population (Günay & Atılgan, 2020). These infrastructural enhancements are vital for improving connectivity and diminishing the costs associated with business operations.

b. Agricultural productivity

Agricultural productivity pertains to the quantification of the efficiency with which agricultural inputs including land, labour, capital, water, and technology are transformed into outputs, such as crops, livestock, or other agricultural commodities. It serves as a fundamental metric for assessing the performance of the agricultural sector and encapsulates the capacity of farmers to optimize yields while concurrently minimizing resource utilization (Maiga, 2024). The enhancement of agricultural productivity is imperative for attaining food security, improving rural livelihoods, and stimulating economic growth, particularly in developing nations. Productivity enhancement can be realized through the implementation of contemporary farming methodologies, mechanization, irrigation practices, the utilization of high-yield crop varieties, and the adoption of sustainable agricultural techniques. The augmentation of agricultural productivity transcends mere output increment; it also necessitates the consideration of environmental issues and the assurance of long-term sustainability (Peterson & Collins, 2022).

Agriculture remains an indispensable cornerstone of the Nigerian economy, furnishing employment opportunities for a substantial segment of the population and contributing significantly to food security (Peterson & Collins, 2022). The agricultural productivity landscape in Nigeria is characterized by a predominance of smallholder farmers who predominantly engage in subsistence farming (Olakunle, 2021). A considerable number of farmers continue to depend on traditional tools and methodologies, thereby constraining their capacity to achieve optimal yields. The productivity levels of crucial crops such as cassava, maize, rice, and yams have witnessed improvement in recent years; however, they continue to lag behind the productivity levels observed in more industrialized agricultural economies. The presence of inadequate rural roads, insufficient storage facilities, and unreliable electricity supply impedes the efficient production, transportation, and processing of agricultural products (Peterson & Collins, 2022). A significant number of farmers face barriers in accessing improved seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, attributable to exorbitant costs or deficient distribution networks. Furthermore, the lack of access to affordable credit severely limits farmers' ability to invest in modern agricultural technologies.

Nigeria has implemented some policies to improve agricultural output such as The Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) Launched in 2011, this policy aimed to modernize agriculture by encouraging private sector participation, improving access to inputs like fertilizers and seeds, and reducing post-harvest losses. Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP) introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria, this program provides smallholder farmers with access to credit and inputs to boost productivity (Johnson & Thompson, 2020). It focuses on linking farmers to processors, ensuring a ready market for their produce. National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (NATIP) which emphasizes the adoption of modern farming technologies, mechanization, and climate-smart practices to enhance productivity and sustainability. Presidential Fertilizer Initiative (PFI) also aims to make fertilizers affordable and accessible to farmers by reviving local production and reducing dependency on imports.

c. Life expectancy

Life expectancy at birth signifies the anticipated duration of years that an individual within a specific community is projected to live (Lawal *et al.*, 2023). This metric also constitutes an average estimate of the years an individual is likely to endure, which is contingent upon the comprehensive spectrum of mortality rates across various age groups within a defined society. Furthermore, it reflects the expected lifespan of a neonate, taking into account the prevailing mortality statistics observed within the geographical context (Abu, 2013). Life expectancy denotes the mean number of years an individual is anticipated to survive, predicated upon the existing socio-economic and health conditions within a particular environment or nation (Ndiwa *et al.*, 2020). It serves as an essential demographic indicator that encapsulates the overall quality of life, healthcare standards, and living conditions prevailing in a society. The

determination of life expectancy is influenced by an array of factors, including access to healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, education, and income levels, as well as the incidence of diseases and environmental conditions (Etikan *et al.*, 2019).

In Nigeria, life expectancy has exhibited a gradual upward trend over recent decades; however, it continues to fall short of the global average. According to statistics from the World Bank and World Health Organization (2024), the life expectancy in Nigeria is estimated to be approximately 54-56 years, in contrast to the global average exceeding 70 years. A significant challenge stems from the high incidence of preventable diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Moreover, malnutrition persists as a pressing issue, with a substantial portion of the Nigerian population lacking access to adequate and nutritious food (Etikan *et al.*, 2019). This predicament is frequently associated with low agricultural productivity and pervasive poverty. The inadequately developed state of healthcare infrastructure, marked by insufficient facilities and a scarcity of medical personnel, exacerbates the challenges, resulting in many individuals being deprived of essential medical care. Additionally, environmental challenges such as pollution, unsafe water sources, and inadequate sanitation further facilitate the proliferation of diseases that diminish life expectancy.

d. Roles of infrastructural development and agricultural productivity on life expectancy

Globally, infrastructural development plays a pivotal role in improving agricultural productivity and eventually have substantial impact on life expectancy by enhancing access to essential services such as healthcare, clean water, sanitation, and transportation. Well-developed infrastructure reduces mortality through improved healthcare delivery systems and facilitates the efficient movement of goods and services, which includes food distribution and medical supplies (World Bank, 2022). Similarly, agricultural productivity contributes significantly to life expectancy by ensuring food security, reducing malnutrition, and improving the overall nutritional status of populations. Increased agricultural output leads to better diets and reduced incidences of hunger-related diseases, particularly in developing countries (Udeuhele & Eze, 2022). When these two sectors are adequately developed and synchronized, they create a supportive environment for health and longevity.

In the Nigerian context, the lack of adequate infrastructure such as rural roads, electricity, irrigation systems, and storage facilities has hindered agricultural efficiency and, by extension, affected the health and wellbeing of the population. Nigeria's infrastructural deficit has limited access to healthcare services, especially in rural areas, resulting in high maternal and child mortality rates (Aduet *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, low agricultural productivity has led to food insecurity and malnutrition, which are major contributors to Nigeria's low average life expectancy, which remains below the global average (WHO, 2023).

The interconnection between poor infrastructure and underperforming agriculture has created a vicious cycle that undermines public health outcomes and economic growth.

Theoretical review

The study was premised on human capital theory, endogenous theory and Lewis model

Human capital theory

Human Capital Theory elucidates the significance of education, health, and competencies in the context of economic development. Investments in agricultural infrastructure and productivity exert a direct influence on food security and nutrition, which are vital components of human capital. Enhanced nutrition fosters cognitive and physical development, thereby contributing to an increased life expectancy. The theory advocates for the formulation of policies that synergistically integrate education, healthcare, and agricultural advancement to attain comprehensive growth. Human Capital Theory underscores the necessity of infrastructure, including educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and transportation networks, in promoting the expansion of human capital. Sufficient infrastructure facilitates access to education and healthcare, which are fundamental prerequisites for cultivating a skilled and healthy workforce. For example, well-established transportation infrastructure enables individuals to access educational institutions and medical facilities, while the availability of electricity and digital connectivity supports the provision of contemporary education and telemedicine services. When infrastructure aligns with the requirements of human capital, it engenders an enabling environment that propels economic activities and societal advancement.

In the realm of agriculture, Human Capital Theory underscores the significance of education and vocational training in equipping farmers with the necessary skills to implement contemporary farming methodologies, utilize mechanized tools, and adopt sustainable agricultural practices. Proficient agricultural labor is capable of effectively leveraging infrastructural resources, including irrigation systems and storage facilities, to optimize productivity levels. Moreover, access to healthcare services diminishes absenteeism due to health-related issues, thereby ensuring a reliable labor force for agricultural pursuits. By allocating resources towards human capital development through agricultural extension services and vocational training initiatives, Nigeria possesses the potential to surmount obstacles that hinder agricultural productivity. This theoretical framework also delineates a robust correlation between investments in human capital and increased life expectancy. The availability of healthcare infrastructure enhances physical health and lowers mortality rates, while educational initiatives promote awareness regarding healthful practices and nutritional knowledge. For example, enhanced agricultural output, bolstered by skilled farmers, contributes to food security and improved nutritional standards, which in turn positively influences life expectancy. Human Capital Theory

accentuates the importance of infrastructure and productive labor in the realization of these health-related outcomes.

Endogenous growth model

The Endogenous Growth Theory, as articulated by Romer (1994), serves as the foundational theoretical framework for this investigation. This theory posits that economic growth is contingent upon investments in human capital, innovation, and knowledge management (Romer, 1994). The model accentuates the significance of investments in human capital, technological advancements, innovation, and infrastructural development as pivotal elements driving sustained economic growth from within an economy, instead of relying exclusively on external influences. According to the Endogenous Growth Model, infrastructure is instrumental in promoting innovation and enhancing productivity. Investments in transportation networks, energy systems, irrigation facilities, and digital infrastructure augment accessibility, connectivity, and operational efficacy. In the context of Nigeria, infrastructural advancements directly bolster agricultural development by facilitating farmers' access to markets, technology, and resources. For instance, the construction of rural roads diminishes transportation expenses and mitigates post-harvest losses, while dependable electricity supply empowers the utilization of modern agricultural implements.

The model elucidates how technological advancement, underpinned by infrastructure, elevates productivity across various sectors, including agriculture. Allocations towards research and development (R&D) yield innovations such as enhanced seed varieties, pest-resistant crops, and optimized irrigation methods, which substantially increase agricultural productivity. Nigeria has the opportunity to harness these innovations to address challenges such as climate variability and suboptimal yields. Improved agricultural productivity not only enhances food security but also raises income levels, in accordance with the model's premise that endogenous growth arises from the effective optimization of knowledge and resources. The Endogenous Growth Model suggests that growth driven by infrastructure and innovation exerts a favorable influence on social indicators, such as life expectancy. Enhanced agricultural productivity contributes to better nutrition and health outcomes, thereby reducing malnutrition and the incidence of diseases. Furthermore, infrastructural investments in healthcare facilities and sanitation systems expand access to essential services, which further elevates life expectancy. An increase in life expectancy also fosters economic growth by cultivating a healthier and more productive workforce, thus perpetuating the cycle of development.

Lewis model

The Lewis Dual Sector Model of Economic Development, proposed by W. Arthur Lewis in 1954, explains development as a process driven by the structural transformation of a traditional agrarian economy into a modern

industrial one. Lewis assumed that the traditional agricultural sector has a surplus of labour with zero or negligible marginal productivity, while the modern sector offers higher productivity, wages, and capital accumulation. The theory posits that transferring excess labour from the agricultural sector to the modern sector fuels industrial growth without reducing agricultural output in the short term. Infrastructure development such as roads, electricity, and communication networks plays a critical enabling role in facilitating this transition by reducing transaction costs and linking rural areas to urban economic centers.

One of the key tenets of Lewis' theory is that capital accumulation in the modern sector leads to its expansion, which gradually absorbs the surplus labour from agriculture. In this process, agricultural productivity must also improve, often through mechanization, research, and better infrastructure (like irrigation systems), so that fewer workers can produce more food. This transformation enhances food security and raises rural incomes, which in turn improve health outcomes and life expectancy by increasing access to nutritious food, clean water, and healthcare services. Thus, according to Lewis, infrastructure and agricultural productivity are not only economic catalysts but also fundamental drivers of improved human development indicators such as life expectancy.

Tevin-Anyali *et al.* (2024) explored the relationship between infrastructure development and agricultural growth in Nigeria through the application of various econometric tools, including the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method, the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test, and Johansen cointegration analysis. The variables assessed included public capital expenditure on economic services (PCEES), employment in agriculture (EMPA), research and development (RD), domestic credit to the private sector (DCPS), and agricultural output. Findings indicated that, with the exception of research and development, all variables were stationary at their first difference. The Johansen cointegration test confirmed the presence of a long-term equilibrium relationship involving two cointegrating vectors. Further analysis using OLS revealed that PCEES, DCPS, and RD positively influenced agricultural output, while EMPA was found to have a negative impact.

Kaur and Kaur (2023) conducted an empirical investigation into rural infrastructure and its ramifications on agricultural development in India. The research meticulously examined the trends associated with rural infrastructure variables and the agricultural output value throughout the period from 1990 to 2018. The findings of the study indicate a substantial influence of irrigation, fertilizer utilization, credit availability, regulated agricultural markets, and road infrastructure on agricultural productivity. Conversely, the effects of electric pumps, tractors, and village electrification were not found to be statistically significant. This suggests that infrastructural elements such as roads, irrigation systems, and electricity exert a more pronounced effect on agricultural growth than personal infrastructure components like electric pumps and tractors. This

outcome corroborates the assertion of a positive and significant correlation between rural infrastructure and agricultural growth in India.

Udeuhele and Eze (2022) conducted an analysis of rural access roads in relation to agricultural development, specifically evaluating the conditions prevalent in the southeastern region of Nigeria. The research employed a quantitative methodological framework alongside a cross-sectional survey design. The instrument utilized, namely the questionnaire, underwent a rigorous validation process and was subjected to pre-testing. The reliability assessment conducted on the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's Alpha Index of 0.823, indicative of a high level of internal consistency. A total of five sample units, representing five chapters of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) across Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States, were selected to derive 328 respondents through stratified random sampling techniques. Data analysis was performed utilizing descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. Three hypotheses were formulated for examination through the application of Simple Linear Regression and ANOVA methodologies. The results indicated that bush-paths, classified as rural access roads, did not significantly enhance the production volume of food crops by rural farmers, that gravel-surfaced roads did not lead to an elevation in the income levels of these farmers, and that tarred roads, categorized as rural access roads, did not make a substantial contribution to the overall agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Olakunle (2021) examined the influence of agricultural production on human life expectancy in Nigeria over the period from 1981 to 2019 using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model. The analysis showed that agricultural activities, on the whole, did not significantly affect life expectancy. However, the third lag of agricultural output had a positive and statistically significant short-term effect. Despite theoretical expectations, only agricultural output showed alignment with the hypothesized direction, although its effect, along with other indicators, was not significant at the 5% level. On a magnitude scale, a 10% rise in both agricultural output and interest rates led to an approximate 1.59% and 1.64% increase in life expectancy, respectively. Conversely, industrial production, inflation, and exchange rates were reported to negatively affect life expectancy.

In another study, Lawson and Aseminachin (2020) assessed the impact of infrastructural amenities on the life expectancy of cash crop farmers in Nigeria's South-South region. Employing a mix of descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, ANOVA, and stepwise regression, the study concluded that infrastructure significantly influences life expectancy. Their findings highlighted infrastructure as a pivotal factor in enhancing wellbeing and sustaining economic development. The authors warned that neglecting infrastructural development could hinder progress and potentially reduce life expectancy among this demographic.

Aigheyisi (2020) focused on determining whether agricultural productivity plays a role in shaping life expectancy in Nigeria, analyzing data from 1981 to 2016 using ARDL, cointegration, and error correction models. The study found that improvements in agricultural productivity had a beneficial impact on life expectancy in the short term, but this turned negative over the long run. Additionally, inflation and unemployment consistently exerted negative effects across both short- and long-term horizons. Real per capita income was shown to have a short-term adverse impact, possibly due to income inequality and though the long-term impact was also negative, it lacked statistical significance. Moreover, exchange rate fluctuations and recurrent government spending on education did not significantly influence life expectancy. However, public expenditure on health services showed a consistent positive effect over both time frames.

1.3 Methodology

Given the nature of the work, this study adopts an ex-post facto research design. Data for the selected variables were obtained from multiple credible sources, including various publications by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the 2024 edition of the World Bank Development Indicators (WDI) database. To assess the influence of infrastructural development and agricultural productivity on life expectancy in Nigeria, the study employed the Auto-Regressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) co-integration technique. This methodological approach is adapted with minor adjustments from the framework used by Tevin-Anyali *et al.* (2024). The specified econometric model illustrates the relationship between the dependent variable, life expectancy (LEX), and the independent variables namely infrastructure (INFS), agricultural output (AGO), and domestic credit to the private sector (DCPS) as outlined below:

$$LEX = f (INFS, AGO, DCPS) \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

Equation (1) was further linearized as;

$$LEX = \beta_0 + \beta_1INFS + \beta_2AGO + \beta_3DCPS + \mu \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

The model is specified in double log form and is specified below:

$$lnLEX_t = \alpha + \partial lnINFS_t + \phi lnAGO_t + \lambda lnDCPS_t + \varepsilon_t \dots\dots\dots(3)$$

α , ∂ , ϕ & λ represent the long run coefficient of intercept, infrastructural spending, agricultural output, domestic credit to private sector and life expectancy respectively while ε_t is the error term and ln denotes the natural logarithm. However, to estimate the co-integrating relationship between the explained and explanatory variables, the study adopts the ARDL of Pesaran *et al.* (2001) by specifying the equation (2) as a bounds test co-integrating framework as:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta \ln LEX_t = & \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^{N1} \beta_i \Delta \ln LEX_{t-i} + \sum_{j=0}^{N2} \gamma_j \Delta \ln INFS_{t-j} + \sum_{i=0}^{N3} \mathcal{P}_i \Delta \ln AGO_{t-i} + \\ & \sum_{k=0}^{N4} \mathcal{P}_i \Delta \ln DCPS_{t-i} + \partial \ln LEX_{t-1} + \phi \ln INFS_{t-1} + \phi \ln AGO_{t-1} + \\ & \lambda \ln DCPS_{t-1} + \mu t \dots \dots \dots (4) \end{aligned}$$

Here, the specification (4) follows the normal ARDL template which frame the short run and long run estimates such that the estimates of α , ∂ & λ are expressed over ρ and yield $-\alpha/\rho$, $-\partial/\rho$, and $-\lambda/\rho$ as the long run coefficients of intercept, infrastructural spending, agricultural output, domestic credit to private sector and life expectancy respectively, since $\Delta \ln INFS_t = \Delta \ln AGO_t = \Delta \ln DCPS_t = \Delta \ln LEX_t = 0$ in the long run because the variables INFS, AGO, DCPS and LEX are independent of one another. Meanwhile, the short run estimates are obtained as, γ_j and ϕ_j for infrastructural spending, agricultural output, domestic credit to private sector and life expectancy while $N1$ to $N4$ stands for the lag length order for the variables and it is selected following the Schwarz Information Criterion (SIC). Additionally, the speed of adjustment to long run equilibrium due to short run dynamics is missing in the preceding specification. Thus, to include the error correction term in the ARDL specification, the study specifies the error correction mechanism framework as;

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta \ln LEX_t = & \phi v_{t-1} + \sum_{i=1}^{N1} \beta_i \Delta \ln LEX_{t-i} + \sum_{j=0}^{N2} \gamma_j \Delta \ln INFS_{t-j} + \\ & \sum_{i=0}^{N3} \mathcal{P}_i \Delta \ln AGO_{t-i} + \sum_{k=0}^{N4} \mathcal{P}_i \Delta \ln DCPS_{t-i} + \mu t \dots \dots \dots (5) \end{aligned}$$

Where v_{t-1} is the lagged error correction term calculated as $v_{t-1} = \ln LEX - \hat{\alpha} - \partial \ln INFS_{t-1} - \lambda \ln AGO_{t-1} - \Omega \ln DCPS_{t-1}$ and $\hat{\alpha} = -\alpha/\rho$, $\hat{\partial} = -\partial/\rho$ and $\hat{\lambda} = -\lambda/\rho$. To assume co-integration among the variables, ϕ which represent the speed of adjustment to long run equilibrium must be negative and statistically significant, thus, the null hypothesis of $\phi = 0$ is tested against the alternative hypothesis of $\phi < 0$; also complemented by the bounds test to co-integration. For long run co-integration inference, the F-statistic must be greater than the critical values of the upper bound, however, if the F-statistic is less than the lower bound critical values, there exists a short-run relationship, while the test becomes inconclusive if the statistic value is between the upper and lower bound critical values.

1.4 Results and discussion of findings

Table 1: Unit root test (augmented dickey fuller (ADF))

Variables	Levels	Critical values		First Difference	Critical values		Order of Integration	Remark
		1%	5%		1%	5%		
LEX	2.093412	1%	-3.098665	-6.674097	1%	-3.760897	I (1)	Stationary at 1 st different
		5%	-2.098544		5%	-2.988712		
		10%	-2.898008		10%	-2.098644		
INFS	3.659221	1%	-3.600987	-4.097651	1%	-3.605593	I (0)	Stationary at level
		5%	-2.935001		5%	-2.936942		
		10%	-2.609711		10%	-2.608654		
AGO	-4.870098	1%	-3.609875	-8.980661	1%	-3.769593	I (0)	Stationary at level
		5%	-2.935001		5%	-2.936942		
		10%	-2.605836		10%	-2.686412		
DCPS	-3.409453	1%	-3.609765	-8.986654	1%	-4.912487	I (1)	Stationary at 1 st different
		5%	-2.930897		5%	-2.098712		
		10%	-2.809664		10%	-2.097643		

Source: Author’s computation, 2025.

Table abovepresents the unit root test result. It is cognizant to establish the stationary of the data to check if they move in the same proportion and to check if the variables are significant. This was carried out using the Augmented Dickey Fuller (ADF) unit root test. The decision rule is that the absolute value of the ADF test statistic value must be greater than the critical value at 5%. From the above summary, the ADF unit root test shows that life expectancy and domestic credit to private sector is stationary at the 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance at first difference which is represented by I(1) in the order of integration, while the variables agricultural output and infrastructural spending are stationary at levels and this is the reason why the order of integration is written as I(0).

**Table 2: ARDL table
Panel A: Long run estimates**

Dependent variable: LEX				
Variable	Coefficient	S.E	t-stat	Prob
INFS	0.008302	0.023913	0.029333	0.0112
AGO	0.325008	3.000312	1.300312	0.0015
DCPS	-0.534300	1.009321	0.390045	0.0230
C	-0.763245	0.029861	-0.086409	0.0970

Panel B: Short run estimates

Dependent variable: LEX				
Variable	Coefficient	S.E	t-stat	Prob
INFS	0.324250	0.823933	-1.728006	0.1023
AGO	0.354009	0.053430	1.076091	0.0809
DCPS	0.870012	0.430093	0.883390	0.0902
ECM(-1))	-0.780092	2.029912	-0.427301	0.0083
Panel C: Diagnostic Tests		Statistic	Prob.	
Normality Test		1.5769	0.6814	
ARCH		0.1094	0.7099	
Breusch-Godfrey LM		0.1656	0.8901	
Ramsey RESET		0.1819	0.8968	
		CUSUM		
Stability Test		Stable		

Source: Author’s computation, 2025.

Notes: ***, **, and * respectively represent statistical significance at 1%, 5% and 10% levels.

The table below presents the results of the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model estimation, where life expectancy serves as the dependent variable, and the independent variables include agricultural output, domestic credit to the private sector, and infrastructure expenditure. The parameter “C” represents the model’s constant term. In the long-term analysis, the findings indicate a positive relationship between life expectancy, agricultural output and infrastructure investment. Specifically, a one-unit increase in agricultural output and infrastructure expenditure is associated with increases of approximately 0.325008 and 0.008302, respectively, in life expectancy within the studied period in Nigeria. On the other hand, the relationship between life expectancy and domestic credit to the private sector is negative in the long run, suggesting that a one percent increase in domestic credit to the private sector leads to a reduction of approximately 0.534300 in life expectancy over the observed timeframe. The finding corroborate the work of Kaur and Kaur (2023) who found that infrastructural elements such as roads, irrigation systems, and electricity exert a more pronounced effect on agricultural growth and state that there is a positive and significant correlation between rural infrastructure and agricultural growth in India.

In the short-run dynamics, the model reveals a positive relationship between life expectancy and all three explanatory variables: agricultural output, infrastructure spending, and domestic credit to the private sector. The coefficients indicate that a unit rise in agricultural output, infrastructure investment, and domestic credit to the private sector leads to increases in life expectancy by 0.354009, 0.324250, and 0.870012, respectively. These findings are consistent with previous studies

such as Tevin-Anyali et al. (2024) and Lawson and Aseminachin (2020), reinforcing the critical role of infrastructure and agriculture in promoting public health and longevity.

Furthermore, the coefficient of the error correction term (ECMt-1), reported in Panel B, is negative and statistically significant (ECM = -0.780092, $t = -0.427301$, $p < 0.0083$), suggesting that approximately 78% of any disequilibrium in life expectancy from the previous period is corrected in the subsequent year. This reflects a relatively rapid adjustment speed toward long-run equilibrium, implying steady improvements in life expectancy over time in Nigeria. To ensure the validity and reliability of the model, several diagnostic tests were conducted. The normality test confirmed that the residuals follow a normal distribution, as the probability value exceeds the 10% significance threshold, leading to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. The Breusch-Godfrey LM test demonstrated the absence of serial correlation, while the ARCH LM test provided evidence supporting the assumption of homoscedastic error terms. Additionally, the Ramsey RESET test yielded an insignificant result, which confirms that the model is correctly specified and supports the null hypothesis of a linear functional form.

1.5 Conclusion and recommendations

This study explored the relationship among infrastructural development, agricultural output, and life expectancy in Nigeria over the period of 1990 to 2024, employing the Auto-Regressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) methodology. The theoretical expectation of a positive linkage between infrastructure, agricultural productivity, and life expectancy was validated in both the short and long run. Empirical results confirm that investments in infrastructure and agriculture exert a significant and positive influence on life expectancy over the long term, suggesting that improvements in these sectors contribute to better health outcomes and overall societal well-being. However, the analysis also reveals a negative long-term association between domestic credit to the private sector and life expectancy, emphasizing the importance of optimizing credit allocation and ensuring that financial resources are directed toward productive and socially beneficial activities. The statistically significant error correction term underscores a strong and stable equilibrium relationship, indicating that deviations from the long-term life expectancy trend are swiftly corrected, and that improvements in the contributing factors effectively translate into gains in life expectancy. In the short run, the study further affirms the positive influence of agricultural output, infrastructure spending, and domestic credit on life expectancy, though the latter's impact is context-dependent and requires careful financial governance. The robustness of the model is supported by various diagnostic tests, which confirm the validity and reliability of the empirical results.

Based on these results, the following recommendations are suggested:

i. Strengthen investment in agriculture and infrastructure: Given the established positive long-run effects, there is a clear need to increase public and private sector investment in both agriculture and infrastructural development. Prioritization should be given to essential rural infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, storage facilities, and agricultural research initiatives. These measures will not only enhance productivity but also indirectly improve health outcomes and longevity.

ii. Improve the efficiency of domestic credit utilization: To address the negative long-term effect of domestic credit on life expectancy, policymakers should implement regulatory reforms that channel credit into high-impact sectors like agriculture and infrastructure. Additionally, financial literacy and capacity-building programs should be introduced to help borrowers use credit more effectively, ensuring it contributes to sustainable development and well-being.

iii. Foster sustainable development practices: To maintain long-term balance between infrastructure, agriculture, and health outcomes, Nigeria must adopt environmentally sustainable strategies. This includes integrating renewable energy, climate-resilient agricultural methods, and durable, eco-friendly infrastructure designs. These practices not only support longevity but also align with broader goals of environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

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Isolation as resistance: reimagining post-colonial identity through the Sentinelese tribe

Ruchi Raj Thakur

ABSTRACT

Identity is an integral part of human being's existence. It gives a vivid picture of how individuals and communities perceive themselves and the world around them. This research paper aims to explore the relationship between identity and existence through the lens of the Sentinelese people, an indigenous group living on North Sentinel Island. The tribe represents a unique assertion of cultural autonomy by preserving a way of life and social identity that contrasts with the modern society. It further underscores how self-imposed isolation plays a vital role in shaping the identity of the tribe and contrasts with traditional frameworks of identity formation. This research aims to bring to fore the tribe's unique perspective of how identity is formed without hybridization or through external encounters. It also takes into account this tribe's deliberate isolation and conscious choice to preserve cultural purity and autonomy by resisting the pressures of globalization and post-colonial cultural imposition. In doing so, the tribe defines 'self', its existence independently of the external factors discussed in the anthropological theories.

Keywords: *Self-imposed Isolation, Sentinelese Tribe, Identity, Post Colonial, Cultural Autonomy.*

Introduction

Identity encompasses a person's sense of self, belonging and cultural affiliation. It is influenced by both internal factors, like personal experiences and introspection, and external experiences, such as societal expectations and historical circumstances. The societies that are isolated are believed to be deprived of the opportunity of proper identity formation. In such cases, identity is often formed through the close-knit social structures, shared traditions and deep connection with the environment. Among such few tribes, the Sentinelese population is also famously known for living in complete isolation. This research paper examines the lives and the social structures of the tribe which further gives a better insight into how identity can be formed and preserved in the absence of social contact. The tribe intentionally lives in isolation from the modern society which has contributed in the formation and preservation of their unique identity. This deliberate isolation can be seen as a form of resistance against the global forces of cultural integration and hybridity, which often reshape indigenous identities through forced or voluntary associations. The Sentinelese rejects the concept of hybridization which is understood through

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity. By maintaining the status of isolation, this tribe resists the external factors that would alter their way of life by asserting their own cultural beliefs. Identity according to the post-colonial contexts is shaped by both internal and external factors, while the Sentinelese offers a unique perspective on how identity can be formed and preserved with the help of internal factors.

Historical background of the Sentinelese tribe

The Sentinelese tribe is perhaps an indigenous tribal community which lives on North Sentinel Island, part of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, located in the Bay of Bengal. The name 'Sentinelese' is derived from the island they inhabit, but the tribe's name for themselves remains unknown to the world. The dwellers of this island existed in anonymity until researchers paid attention to them. As a result, a further exploration into their way of life has begun to get encouragement. This tribe does not have any contact with the outside world. They are among the most isolated human populations on Earth. Due to this no interaction, little is known about their language, culture and social structure. As far as their origin is concerned, it is shrouded in mystery. From the information gathered, it is believed that the people of tribe are descendants of early African Migrants who settled on the island around 60,000 years ago. They have their own distinctive language, customs and survival mechanism which makes them the most isolated and unique tribes in the world. The tribe's strong resistance to the outside contact is evident in their unwelcoming responses to the intruders. People from the outside world must have attempted to approach this island, whether with boats or helicopters, have often met with arrows, highlighting their desire to remain undisturbed. The Indian government recognizes the tribe's determination to stay far away from the outside world. It has implemented strict regulations and policies which have aimed to protect the tribe from external threats, including the spread of diseases and cultural degradation. Consequently, this tribe is among those few tribes which avoid the influence of globalization, modernization or external societal norms on their existence. This paper aims to find response to the complex issues revolving around their isolation. First and foremost the paper aims to investigate how this isolation preserves their cultural and identity due to no external influence for years. Besides these, the paper aims to further understand the contrasting nature of this tribe which unlike others does not seek recognition, political rights, and integration into the larger global framework.

The absence of any outside contacts and external influences has failed to affect the existence and identity of this tribe. Very little could give glimpses into their existence because of their deliberate isolation. What is known about them is that they are thought to be the direct descendants of the first human populations from Africa. As mentioned in an article titled *The Last Isolated Tribe: Demystifying the Lives and Culture of The Sentinelese*, "their origins are uncertain, though they are believed to be descendants of early African migrants who settled on the

island around 60,000 years ago. And have been dwelling in the Andaman Islands for 55,000 years. As per the 2011 census as reported in the article titled Everything, We Know About the Isolated Sentinelese People of North Sentinel Island, “There are probably somewhere between 80 to 150 people on North Sentinel Island, although it could be as many as 500 or as few as 15. The Sentinelese people are related to other indigenous groups in the Andaman Islands” (Disha Bijnoi, 2019).

They have no written record of their origin. The narratives of their survival are passed down orally from generation to generation. Their existence is defined by their strong connection with their environment and their social bonds with the people of their own community. Their existence is deeply rooted in traditions and their own practices which make them the true example of human societies that exist outside of the modern global system. As they do not conform to the social pressures and global ideologies so their sense of self remains purely indigenous. The article published in WRM Bulletin 2013 says, “the Sentinelese live in three small bands. They have two different types of houses, large communal huts with several hearths for a number of families, and more temporary shelters, with no sides, with space for one nuclear family” (Who-are-Sentinelese, 2018).

About the attire of these Sentinelese women it is said that they wear fiber strings tied around their waists, necks and heads. The men also wear necklaces and headbands but the belts they wear are thicker and hence act as armour. The men also carry spears, bows and arrows. Article published in the India Today published on November 23, 2018 states, “According to BBC report, these people are descendants of the first people who left Africa and have been living in isolation on the island for over 60,000 years. These people use rudimentary methods to eat food. They hunt animals using bows and arrows, survive on mud crabs and seafood” (Who-are-Sentinelese, 2018). According to welfare of Primitive Tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, this tribe does not even know how to light the fire. They survive on metalworking and agriculture. National Geographic Society visited the island in 1974 and found that these people have scavenged metals to create tools and weapons. The Sentinelese people speak their own language and there is nobody who can translate their language. It is said that the physical features of this tribe show a resemblance to the neighbouring tribe Jarawa.

The choice of the Sentinelese to stay uncontacted directly contrasts with the post-colonial struggle for identity and recognition. The tribe’s decision to stay away from the outside world is because of the fear of corrupting their originality. They do not wish to mingle up with other and dilute their traditions and customs in the light of modernity. They aim to live in close affinity with the environment which is based on the island’s ecosystems and reciprocal relationship with nature. Their identity is intimately tied to the land and the practices that have sustained them for thousands of years.

Over the millennia, they have created their own vocabulary, practices and survival methods. Despite occasional visits from outsiders, the Sentinelese refuses any attempts at contact, employing bows, arrows, and other means to restrict intruders. It is very difficult to talk about a tribe that is not only far from the advanced technology and digital connectivity but also far from the range of other communities and societies. This group lives in isolation from the rest of the world. Not much has been discovered about the tribe. Firstly because of the tribe's reluctance to be included and the other was the island's dense forests and surrounding reefs to make it difficult for outsiders to approach. Whatever little is known about this tribe is through limited observations and the occasional attempts of outsiders and the government to gather information by making contact with them, many of whom have encountered resistance and violence. The Sentinelese aim to guard their territory and maintain their way of life.

This tribe is relying on the island's natural resources for survival. They are hunter-gatherers. Another occupation of this tribe is hunting and fishing for which they use very simple tools such as bows and arrows. Irrespective of the limited interactions with the outsiders, it is known that the tribe lives in temporary shelters and the group functions as a small and egalitarian society.

Many indigenous groups around the world are actively seeking recognition from the other communities. Among the most significant challenges faced by them, land displacement, loss of cultural heritage and environment degradation. They, for instance the Massai people of east Africa, the Sami of Scandinavia and the tribes of Amazon rainforest, fight for their rights and aim to gain representation. Due to this, they encounter the risk of cultural assimilation by adopting the external norms to survive economically and politically. In contrast to these groups, the tribe does not yearn for any external validation or acknowledgment.

The tribe has earned the reputation of being brutal and ferocious because they prefer living in isolation which they continued because the dwellers of this island feel that they would contract deadly diseases and infections from the outsiders like the Jarawas, another tribe of Andaman. There are instances of friendly contact with them by these are very few. They are steadfast in their resistance to modernity. They believe that an attempt to gain recognition, to seek political representation, legal protection and access to resources can expose them to exploitation, cultural erosion and loss of freedom. (Sentinelese-in-shadows, 2018).

The role of self-imposed isolation

The choice of the tribe to remain uncontacted is this tribe's assertion of cultural autonomy. In the contemporary time where globalization is blending different cultures and forming identity from these associations, the tribe's isolation is standing in opposition to hybridization, a typical feature of post-colonial identity formation. This refusal is not only serving as a defense against the external pressures but is also effective in preserving their traditional practices, beliefs and

values in order to maintain a distinct way of life that has persisted for centuries. They are shaping their identities within their own community by embedding themselves in traditions, rituals and communal practices. Geertz's concept of identity supports this assertion of self. He says, "The way we understand ourselves and the way others understand us" holds the notion of identity as both self-perception and social recognition" (Geertz, 1973).

The tribe is vehemently opposing any contact with the outside world but this does not mean that their sense of self is static. They are actively cultivating themselves through their interactions within their tribe and their close association with the land, water and earth. Clearwater's concept of "a territorialisation of space" analyzes how the tribe's isolation preserves their distinct identities. Territorialization implies assigning identities within structures of power, and further categorizing and individualizing people. Their choice to stay away from the outside world has created their own space with their own beliefs and cultural practices. His idea that "to territorialize means to assign identities for collective subjects within structures of power, and, therefore to categorize and individualize human beings" (Geertz, 1973) further explains the tribe's preserved cohesive sense of identity, shaped by their own values and experiences. They chose to protect their own narrative and also aim to reinforce their personal and collective identity without any attempt to contrast and compare themselves with "others". Unlike other tribes or populations, this tribe does not intend to compare itself with others because it is not dependent on the others to determine its identity. Hubel asserts, "We are the same in different ways; we are also different in the same ways" (Hubel, 1988) He suggests that we all are formed by the fundamental entities like nature, culture, society and our experiences, but we all exhibit uniqueness in our way of living due to distinct circumstances. This tribe is biologically similar but their way of life is incredibly different. They have evolved themselves differently culturally. Their language, cultural practices and survival tactics are unique because of their isolation from the rest of the world.

According to Homi Bhabha, "The construction of the colonial self is always up in identification with and against the other, and this dependency on the positioning of the other offers a space for subversion and transgression" (Bhabha, 1994). The tribe and its people are often addressed as "other" because of their decision to stay away from the world. The identity as "Other" is also a way to assert their identity. The concept of 'self' and 'other' are the outcomes of the colonial relationship between "Colonizer" and the "Colonized". Hence the tribes' determination to maintain their cultural autonomy clearly rejects the subversion to the external factors. The tribe refuses to be identified or discovered by any outsider or to say the colonizers.

The concept of identity of the Sentinelese can be viewed from the lens of cultural persistence. Jean Paul's existentialism suggests that identity is formed by personal choices and actions, aptly applies on the tribe. The tribe has chosen to maintain their identity by rejecting the influences of the outer world and

asserting autonomy through isolation. The actions taken by the tribe in order to maintain their customs and also by resisting any association with the outsiders affirm their identity. This implies that even isolation is a continuous process of self-definition. Sartre in his lecture on Existentialism is Humanism says, “Existence precedes essence” (Sartre, 1946). This challenges the traditional philosophical views, particularly those influenced by religious or essentialist thinking which supports the argument that humans are born with a predefined essence or purpose. Individuals discover their purpose through their choices and actions, by asserting their freedom and responsibility in the process. This implies that this concept supports the life style of the tribe in a unique way. The relation may not reflect Sartre’s philosophy directly but to some extent it does. Sartre’s notion of freedom sides with the tribe’s determination to live on its own terms. Their decision to remain unaffected by the external factors has continued to shape their existence within their own territory, environment and traditions. Their decision to live without the interference of the modernity aligns with Sartre’s concept of freedom. Sartre also asserts that freedom comes with responsibility. This also goes in line with the tribe which is working for the collective survival. The feeling of isolation and abandonment, which explain the concept of existentialism, is their strategy to survive. The philosophy furthers speaks of uncertainties and worries which is faced by the tribe too but only because of the survival challenges, intrusions from the outer world or potential threats to their resources. The tribe is grappling with the existential issues but in a unique way.

Cultural autonomy of the tribe

The life style of this tribe as well as their cultural practices supports their decision to live in isolation. Their close connection with environment, community and heritage enable them to maintain their autonomy and preserve a cultural identity. Their tools and mechanism of survival underline their self-sufficiency and resilience. Their proficiency to hunt, fish and rely on natural resources is an essential feature of their culture and traditional practices. This also shows that they maintain their autonomy by relying on internal systems of knowledge and skills. This also proves that the tribe is self-reliant. The glimpses of their identity can be seen in their attire, bark strings, necklaces and headbands. These adornments express their culture through daily practices. Their music and dance, especially through thigh-beating and rhythmic motions, further highlight their communal identity, belongingness, unity and cultural stability. The geometric designs on their weapons also serve as symbolic makers of their identity, reflecting a deeper connection to their environment and the spiritual significance of the tools they use. The tribe’s attempt to stay connected to its ancestral heritage and traditions is a powerful assertion of cultural resilience and self-determination.

Another attempt of the tribe to live in harmony with the environment is their assertion through their dwellings. Their homes are simple –lean –to-huts with

slanted roofs, their choice to have fire outside their dwellings reflects their reliance on the natural elements and an intentional detachment from modern comforts. Whatever has been gathered about their eating choices collectively confirms that, “Honey, wild pig, coconut, fruits, turtle, eggs are their staple food items”. Their close association with nature is further supported by the common claims of various sources and researchers that, “they eat eggs, seagulls or turtles, wild fruits” (Balakrishnan, 2018).

If the tribe’s decision to stay away from the outer world is viewed from the perspective of Erik Erikson, a German-American Psychologist, then also it supports the choices and decisions of the tribe. In this context, Erik’s theory of psychosocial development highlights the importance of identity formation and freedom. In close association with society, human beings develop a sense of self by navigating societal roles and the external influences such as family, culture and society. This truly agrees with his theory of “identity vs. role confusion” because the existence of this tribe can be viewed as a perpetual negotiation of identity in relation to the factors associated with their society and environment. He firmly believes that social interactions and the society play a significant role in shaping a person’s identity. According to this, the identity of this tribe experiences a serious threat as it is socially inaccessible to the outside world. On the contrary, their sense of self develops itself by associating with their community, traditions and the natural environment. Their identity is reinforced by adhering to the communal tribes and values of their tribe. (Erikson, 1968). However, Erik’s theory “identity vs. role confusion” works on this tribe very differently. The isolation of Sentinelese society implies its disassociation with various outside influences such as modern media, technological advances or other cultures that typically challenge the notion of search of identity because here the process of forming an identity does not depend upon external factors but on the very internal. However, this population has shaped its identity not from the cross-cultural interactions but from their own communal norms, traditions and connection with the natural environment. (Erikson, 1982).

The tribe’s identity formation resonates with the ideas of Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist. Clifford Geertz too supports the role of symbolic symbols such as rituals, language and beliefs in forming the collective identity of a group. He argues that culture is deeply rooted in rituals, traditions and beliefs which are instrumental in shaping identity. In case of this tribe, all of these play a significant role in defining their collective identity and marinating cohesion. The self-imposed isolation of the Sentinelese tribe has played a significant role in preserving their identity. It could be interpreted as a means to preserve their cultural identity and enables its population to sustain its control over its development without external influences. As they are not or very less exposed to the outside ideas, religions, or advancements so they have managed to protect the purity of their traditions and customs from being diluted from modernity. Hence, their identity is inextricably tied to the symbols, rituals and shared meanings that structure their culture. The tribe’s deep connection to their

land, community and traditions forms their identity in much the same way as advocates Geertz. The tribe has shaped itself by its culture which is its way to assert right to exist without any alteration. Clifford describes identity as the “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of their lives, in which their cultural practices, language, rituals and relationship to nature are constantly reaffirmed within their community.

Hybridity and the post-colonial struggle for identity

Bhabha’s Hybridity advocates that the cultural intermingling of two different cultures is a means for the indigenous cultures to adapt to new political, social or economic conditions. However, this tribe believes that any contact with the outside world could jeopardize their existence which could be in any form. It could be an outbreak of disease, economic exploitation, cultural assimilation, etc. This would culminate in the erosion of their traditional way of life. By remaining isolated, the tribe is not only asserting its right to exist as they wish to but also rejecting the post-colonial notion of Stuart Hall who asserts that, “Cultural identity is not fixed, but is a process of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’ (Hall, 1990). Hall argues both the past and the future of an individual play a vital role in shaping a personality. He believes that identity constantly undergoes transformation, and is never static or transcendent of time, place or culture. Rather than simply recovering the past, identities are formed through the narratives of history, with individuals and communities continuously repositioning themselves within these narratives. In this sense, the tribe’s choice to live in isolation shows their decision to preserve their cultural identity, refusing to allow external forces to define or transform it.

Hall’s perspective on cultural identity underlines the notion that identities are not fixed, singular, or static. They are fluid, fragmented and ever-evolving through historical, social and cultural processes. This supports the Sentinelese’s deliberate isolation from the outside world as an act of maintaining their own cultural identity in the face of globalizing forces. This further suggests Hall’s belief that identities are about the process of becoming rather than simply about being or origin. For the Sentinelese, their choice to remain isolated can be seen as a way of ensuring that their identity is not shaped by external influences but an evolving process in its own right. This decision to preserve their culture and originality intact clearly indicates their resistance to the imposition of external discourses and representations.

Globalization and migration are constant threat to the “settled” nature of identities. This can lead to fragmented identities. Such disruptions can result in the erosion of culture or force the adoption of external identity constructs that may not align with traditions. The Sentinelese avoids this external imposition in order to protect their tribe and population from the destabilizing forces. Hence, this deliberate isolation is a way to resist the forces of globalization and modernity that Hall argues have restructured many populations and cultures.

Consequently, they are not subjected to any kind of external categorization or objectification that could influence their identity as perceived by the outer world. This effort to avoid the interference of the broader global discourses that often shape the identities of many cultures, the tribe ensures that their identity remains self-constructed and internally represented.

Hall's idea of "coming –to-terms-with-our routes" does not imply returning to 'roots' (Gillory, 1993). This refers to the fact that cultural identity is not about finding a singular origin but about navigating various paths or routes that one takes throughout history. The tribe has chosen the path of isolation and that their identity shapes itself and further strengthens itself by following their own traditions and practices. Their allegiance to their roots, ancestors, land and environment has defined them. This deep-rootedness in their practices and culture has maintained their sense of who they are and who do they choose to become.

Many have attempted to contact them but have repeatedly failed. T.N. Pandit, an anthropologist, attempted to establish a contact with the tribe but failed. In 1974, a National Geographic team had to step back after their Director was shot with arrows. In 2004, The Indian Coast Guard had sent a helicopter to help the dwellers after the tsunami but was hit with arrows. The tribe's continuous attempt to safeguard itself from the external influences has remained unchanged for thousands of years. Their resistance serves as a powerful message to respect their decision to live in isolation. They do not wish to leave any scope for the resource extraction by the external agencies. Subsequently, they continue to attempt the safeguarding of both their land and the traditional ways of life.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Sentinelese tribe embodies a unique form of assertion by way of self-determination, resistance to external factors and the preservation of their autonomy. Their isolation exemplifies their resistance through their deliberate isolation and there by resisting globalization, colonialism and modernity. They assert their identity in a manner that is entirely self-constructed and utterly based on their internal and historical contexts. The choice of the Sentinelese to remain uncontacted can thus be seen as a form of "self-representation" in post-colonial terms. They do not conform to the Western-centric notion that societies must evolve or modernize in order to be seen as legitimate or progressive. Instead, they assert their right to exist on their own terms, defining their own reality without the influence or interference of outside forces. This form of resistance mirrors the broader post-colonial challenge to the idea that all cultures must conform to global norms or development standards. In this way, the Sentinelese offer a unique model of assertion that aligns with post-colonial theories. Their deliberate isolation and refusal to engage with the outside world is a powerful act of resistance against colonial histories, modernization pressures, and the globalizing forces that seek to erase cultural diversity. Through their isolation, they assert their right to cultural preservation, self-determination, and autonomy,

making them a powerful example of how post-colonial assertion can take the form of silence, isolation, and resistance to external imposition.

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Loyalty in the line of fire: Lance Naik Lala Victoria Cross and Indian soldiers in Mesopotamian campaign

Vinay Sharma & Kartar Chand

ABSTRACT

A strong army is most required institution to secure the borders and protect sovereignty of the nation. Army drew the strength from loyal, conscientious, and responsible soldiers. British had a prejudice that Indians are inferior and incompetent. This myth of Britons was broken by the people when fought with them worldwide. This article explores the story of such a brave heart Lance Naik Lala of India who exemplified the Indian soldierly spirit and loyalty. He demonstrated exceptional bravery in the First Battle of Hanna in January, 1916. Amid overwhelming enemy fire he repeatedly risked his life and evacuated six injured soldiers which earned him the global recognition and reflected the deep-rooted martial tradition of his people. Fighting the key battles particularly in Mesopotamia highlights the enduring spirit and unwavering conscientiousness of Indian soldiers even while serving British imperial objectives. Tracing the legacy and journey of an innocent countryman to the legendary brave heart is aimed to instill the patriotic zeal and conscientiousness among the youth.

Keywords: *Loyalty, Lala, Victoria Cross, Legacy, Indian Soldiers, Mesopotamia.*

The folks of Himachal Pradesh are well-known for their warrior-like grit and strong sense of responsibility; thus they have contributed immensely to the military. Exceedingly tough terrain impregnates demos with inherent adventurous spirit which makes them proficient for the army thence known as *Vir-Bhumi*. Lala the son of this soil earned global recognition for him and his people as well. There is a confusion regarding his birth date according to the family he was nineteen years old at the time of enrollment; nevertheless, some records place his birth date as 20th February, 1882 (Personal Interview Grandson Sh. Bhupinder Singh 2024). However, according to a study conducted by the Government of the United Kingdom and published recently on 20th June, 2016, his birth date is stated as 20th April, 1876 according to the military records (Govt. of UK: Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2016). He was born in Parol village district Kangra (now Tehsil Bhoranj, District Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh). His father Dhinga had served as Jemadar in the army. Therefore, Lala had gotten inspired to join army solely from home. He was not formally educated but learned to read and write Hindi. He had an elder brother Ramditta

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who stayed at home to help parents. Lala's first wife died young, leaving him childless, so, he married Gurdevi, who outlived him. However, he did not have any child from Gurdevi as well (Personal Interview Grandson Sh. Bhupinder Singh 2024). Lala joined a newly formed '41st (Dogra) Regiment of Bengal Infantry' on 20th February, 1901, which was raised on 12th October, 1900 at Jalandhar. Soldiers for its initial enlistment were furnished by other Dogra regiments some by Punjab regiments and some recruited directly from Kangra (Officers of the 41st Regiment 1924). Lala was among the soldiers who recruited directly from then district Kangra of Punjab province. He was an enthusiastic soldier, excelled in football which was among the fabulous sports of the army that time after the introduction of *Durand Cup* in 1888 in Indian Army to promote physical fitness of the soldiers (All India Football federation). The battalion's designation was altered to '41st Dogras' in 1903 (Heathcote 1995, pp. 170-178). After undergoing initial recruitment and training, battalion organized into a full-fledged infantry battalion of eight companies with Eleven British Officers, Sixteen Indian Officers and Eight Hundred Other Ranks. In March 1905 they received orders to relieve 30th Punjabis in North China. The Indian Army was deployed there during the Boxer rebellion (1899-1900). It was the very first instance when Indian Army deployed on foreign soil (Preston 2000, p. 238). Just after the earthquake of 4th April, 1905 in Kangra the battalion set off and stayed there till May, 1908, deployed against German, French, Italian, Russian, and Japanese troops. While stationed at Kanpur from 1908 to 1912 they attended the Delhi *Durbar* on 12th December, 1911 as part of the 3rd Composite Infantry Brigade alongside the 36th Sikhs and the 74th Punjabis. Thereafter they relocated to 21st Bareilly Brigade of 7th Meerut division on 6th November, 1912. With the outbreak of the First World War a new chapter of Indian army began.

Earlier British considered whom Indian soldiers, inferior due to their bigotry now under pressure of fighting on multiple fronts they were helpless to change their perception and deploy those, to kill the so called superior white European at the western front and save the France from German clutches. First Indian Expeditionary Force-A (IEFA) consisted of 'Indian Corps' and 'Indian Cavalry Corps' deployed in France (Roy 2018, pp. 71-72). Lance Naik Lala with the battalion 41st Dogras part of the Indian Corps fought the famous battles of Neuve Chapelle and battle of Festubert (Officers of the 41st Regiment 1924, p. 12).¹ Battalion suffered huge loss twice first in the 'Hell Corner' or 'Glory Hole' incident where the total casualties reported, were twenty deaths and ninety personnel wounded during the hostile artillery bombardment (Officers of the 41st Regiment 1924, p. 17). And second at the high grounds of 'Aubers-Ridge' where the assault was deferred staunchly by the German, almost half of the battalion was killed in action (Merewether and Smith 1919, p. 362).² Lala injured and received medication in the 'Brighton Pavilion', a field hospital for Indian soldiers known as the *Indian Village* in South England. *India Gate* at the southern entrance of the Pavillion designed by Thomas Tyrwhitt in typical Gujrati style erected to commemorate the sacrifice of Indian soldiers in First

World War, inaugurated by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala on 26th October, 1921 (Kevin Brighton & Hove Museum). In 1927 a war memorial at Neuve Chapelle, designed by Herbert Baker was unveiled by F. E. Smith, Secretary of state for India inscribed 4742 Indian soldiers' name killed in action. The memorial is visited by Prime Minister of India Sh. Narendra Modi in April, 2015 and Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande in November, 2022 to pay the homage to the martyrs (PIB 2015 and 2022). This memorial is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO, Funerary and Memory Sites WW 1). The battalion after this massive haemorrhage, to level its war strength transferred to Egypt under Indian Expeditionary Force-E (IEFE) at the 'Suez Defense' (WO 95/4428, Suez Defences). They were deployed from *Mariam* to *Balla* (WO 95/4428, Operation Orders 41st Dogras). They received new recruits from the depot at Bareilly but still the strength was quite low due to which four company battalion model was adopted. Soldiers were still recovering from the sores of France in the temperate climate of Suez; they received new orders to join the Relief Force (Tigris Corps) in the lower Mesopotamia. In the lower Mesopotamia the new war front was opened by the Viceroy Hardinge to save the British Oil Fields at Abadan and the Basra port which was strategically crucial place to protect the movement of troops from the gulf and fuelling up the ships passing through (Cohen 1976, pp. 119-132). Additionally, besides he wanted to capture the suspected substantial oil reserves at Mosul, Britain wanted to keep Kuwait and Arabia a bay from Ottoman Empire (Douglass 1976, pp. 919-945). Ergo Indian Expeditionary Force-D (IEFD) sent to save British interests in Mesopotamia. The 6th Poona Division landed at Basra port on 5th November, 1914 while 12th Division joined in April, 1915 (Ford 2009, pp. 20-26). This force expelled the Turks from Basra, Qurnah, and Nasiriya and ensured the fulfillment of British objectives. Now Lieutenant General Nixon the Mesopotamian Theatre Commander entrusted the Sixth Division under Charles Townshend with the task of capturing Baghdad Vilayet as per the wish of Viceroy, ignoring all the warnings of Beauchamp Duff Commander-in-Chief of Indian Army pertaining to ensure the logistics support and reinforcement prior to proceeding beyond Kut-al-Amara (Rothwell 1970, pp. 273-294). Poona Division pursued the retreating Forces upstream and fought an unnecessary battle at *Ctesiphone* (Miller cited in Gardner 2013, 182-200). The game went wrong here because Indian Army of about ten thousand men was outnumbered by the Turkish Sixth Army of thirty thousand men under Nur-ud-din Pasha and cavalry under Khalil Pasha supported by German General Von der Goltz and forced to retreat back to the Kut-al-Amara (Gardner 2015, pp. 269-289). Exhausted Townshend decided to defend at Kut-al-Amara and refused to travel downstream (Crowley 2019, pp. 67-77).³

To help this besieged force Nixon assembled the 'Tigris Corps' of Nineteen thousand men consisted of 7th Meerut and 3rd Lahore Divisions under Lieutenant General Fenton Aylmer. 41st Dogras was the part of the 21st Bareilly Brigade of 7th Meerut division arrived at Basra from Suez on 22nd December, 1915. The Echelon arrived at Qurnah on 24th in drib and drabs due to the deficiency in water

transport facilities. The enemy redoubt at Sheikh Sa'ad approached on 7th January, 1916. Rashly assault was launched to surprise the enemy but the downpour made it tough row to hoe and the Turkish tribal Arab cavalry outflanked the attackers whirled a devastating loss (Candler. *The Long Road to Baghdad*, 2019, p. 53). Tigris Corps suffered 4,262 losses killed in action. Turks retired upstream and set up a stronghold on the stream Ab-i-Shangwa (Wadi). The battle fought on 13th and 14th January, 1916; the Tigris Corps emerged victorious again because Turks vacated their position for unknown reasons on the night of 14th despite had a whip hand. E. D. Wintle the Commander of Tigris Cavalry wrote, Turks retired intentionally to save their army and cause a great deal of damage to the attackers through their Tribal cavalry (Field Cavalry) (Wintle cited in Roy 2018, p. 278). Lala's battalion suffered a considerable loss due to the effective enemy fire including Commanding Officer Colonel C.W. Tribe killed in action.

New position held by the Turks at Umm-Al-Hanna between the Tigris and the Suwaikiyeh Marsh. Torrential rain since fifteenth flooded the River Wadi, made it difficult to cross with the heavy equipment and artillery guns, also deteriorated the health of the troops and caused sickness (Officers of the Regiment 1924, p. 68). To assault through the greasy muddy plain crisscrossed by the irrigation channels under the direct observation of enemy was tough nuts to crack (Moberly 1923, pp. 4-6). Due to the substantial loss the strength was significantly lower than war time level (Officers of the Regiment 1924, p. 72). All these difficulties reduced Indian soldiers' will to war while; the morale of Turks was high after emerging victorious at Gallipoli.⁴ But, owing to the pressure to relieve the besieged soldiers at Kut reporting running out of ration and ammunition, advance was inevitable. On the morning of 21st January, 41st Dogras backed by 37th Dogras enduring the effective fire of Turks reached at three-hundred yards from the enemy; hitherto they have observed the well lope holed enemy trenches, fenced with the barbed wire. The attack was started at 7:45 A.M. but was shattered, afresh attack was launched at 1:00 P.M. but the effective enemy firing resulted into death knell to the attackers. Only one hundred forty seven soldiers including twenty five Dogras of 41st Dogras reached the Turkish front line, the go-getters were either killed or taken prisoners in the Turkish counterattack. The casualties to the 41st Dogras were thirty eight killed in action, thirty nine missing, and three hundred seven wounded. The British cemeteries in modern Iraq at Qurnah, Kut, Basra and Shaiba are the evidence of the devastation (Crowley 2019, pp. 67-77).

Where there seemed no chance of endurance, Lance Naik Lala showed extraordinary bravery. His anecdote was well recounted in a letter of General Aylmer to General Sir George Younghusband. He incorporated this letter in original in his book 'A Soldier's Memories in peace and War' in 1917 (Younghusband 1917, p. 334). Aylmer wrote, Lala remained entirely exposed to the firing but surprisingly no bullet touched him. He dragged the fellow soldiers

to tiny hideout just few inches scraped by him otherwise there was no shelter at all. He heard Captain F L Nicholson of 37th Dogras, laid wounded in the open groaning in pain, pulled him to the trench (Officers of the Regiment 1924, p. 67). In awful conditions he also brought four more soldiers to this meager trench and bandaged them (The Advertiser 1917). Then, he heard a murmuring voice of Captain Lindop, Adjutant of his battalion pierced by gunshots laid debilitated exposed to the enemy firing, appealing for assistance. He was just fifty yards ahead and not more than hundred yards from Turkish. Lala identified the voice and decided to save him. The area was under the Turkish effective gunfire. Nicholson ordered him in strong words to not to go there because of intense firing. He was so committed, ignored all commands, sighed heavily, observed the fire, jumped in and crawled to the Captain. Before him there were two others had tried to save him but both got killed, Lindop narrated to his fellow officers in the hospital. Whenever he tried to move a little the bullet hit him all of sudden he added. Lala was the only person who reached safely. Then he dragged him to the nearby pressed ground and bandaged him. Heavy and continuous downpour with chilling winds was rubbing salt in the wounds. He put his coat on the shivering officer to keep him warm. Half naked Lala spend more than four hours with Lindop until the dusk. As long as he stayed there, laid lengthwise making a shield of his body to protect the Adjutant. After ensuring his safety, promised him to return soon with a stretcher Lala came back to seek help. He never imagined that Lala will keep his words. But in the dark Lala appeared and told him to try to crawl a few yards but he was not able to do so. Then he mounted him on his back crawled till the stretcher bearer and brought him to the Regimental Aid Post. He carried rest all five men to the Regimental Aid Post and saved all from the mouth of sure death (Younghusband 1917, p. 334-336). Lindop died tragically of his injuries on 30th January, 1916 in the operation theatre but he narrated the saga of Lala's heroism to his fellow officers in the presence of Nicholson. One more reason of his death was the serious deficiencies in medical in the operation theatre (Galbraith 1984, pp. 358-385). Candler stated that, the extraordinary disregard to the risk earned Lala the Victoria Cross dozen times (Candler *The Sepoy*, 1919, pp. 100-102). General Aylmer met him on 15th February, 1916 congratulated him and expressed his happiness in recommending his name for the Victoria Cross (Officers of the Regiment 1924, p. 68). Due to the low strength 41st Dogras was amalgamated with the 37th Dogras, 'The Composite Dogra Battalion' was formed as a result (WO 95/5176, 1916). This composite battalion fought the battle of Duijaila Redoubt in March (WO 154, 1916). Next attack was launched at Hannah again but to no avails (WO 95/5175/4, 1916). Lala was an active soldier of this composite battalion and took part actively in every action. When there was no hope left, Townshend surrendered on 29th April, 1916 after the stalemate of one hundred forty-seven days siege (Galbraith 1984, pp. 358-385).

The 41st Dogras battalion came to know the news of granting Victoria Cross to Lance Naik Lala on the 20th May, 1916 (LG 1916, 29576, p. 4809). In June, 1916 the 'Composite Dogra Battalion' was disbanded and 41st Dogras partially

withdrawn from the battle fields owing to the recruitment problems, only a few men left attached with 37th Dogras. Among the returning troops of the two British officers (Lieutenant Colonel R.G. Macpherson Commanding Officer and Lieutenant J.P. Fullerton Adjutant), six Indian officers, one hundred thirty two other ranks, there were only four soldiers including Lala who went to France initially. In India the battalion was garrisoned at Jhelum Cantonment. Within a year battalion recruited more soldiers at the rate of hundred per month and brought up to the war level strength Officers of the Regiment 1924, p. 83). In 1917 another battalion of 41st Dogras formed in Jabalpur i.e. 2nd Battalion of 41st Dogras and the Lala's Battalion henceforth called 1st Battalion of 41st Dogras. He was awarded the Victoria Cross on 30 January, 1917 at the Vice-Regal Lodge in Delhi by the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford with two others. He was also honoured with the highest Russian gallantry award First Class of the 'Cross of St. George,' made up of ninety nine percent of gold which was being awarded to Indian soldiers for the first time (Officers of the Regiment 1924, p. 84 and Prasad 2008, p. 26). He was promoted to the rank of *Havaldar* (Non Commissioned Officer). In May, 1919, Afghanistan declared war, proclaimed *Jihad* invaded Indian Territory. Now Lala as Havaldar took part in the Third Anglo-Afghan War. His battalion 41st Dogras disarmed the mutinied Waziristan Militia at Miranshah Fort. Lala with regiment also saw the operations in Aden, Jerusalem and Palestine from 1920 to 1923. Lala's Battalion 1st Battalion of 41st Dogras designated as the 3rd Battalion of 17 Dogra Regiment in 1923. During this transformation Lala was *Jemadar*, served in 3rd Battalion of 17 Dogra Regiment for next three years. Unfortunately he lost his Victoria Cross and received official replacement on 1st April, 1924 (Crook 1975, p. 236). His customary medals pertaining to the First World War were '1914-15 Star', 'British War Medal (1914-20)', 'Victory Medal (1914-19)' (Hayward et al 2006, pp. 502-508). Medal related to general service awarded to him was India General Service Medal with the clasp 'Afghanistan North West Frontier 1919' (Joslin 1988, p. 220). A medal awarded as Non-Commissioned Officer was 'Indian Meritorious Service Medal' (Steward 1915, p.336). He retired in 1926 after 25 years' splendid service. Lala died on 23rd March, 1927, from medical complications caused by polio at his native village (Govt. of UK: Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2016). His final words "We fought true" encapsulate a life lived with honour and purpose. His medals are privately owned by people, except Russian Cross of St. George (Sharma 2023). He also received a plot of land in Mintgumri now in Pakistan. Following the partition of India his wife Gurdevi was given an eighteen-Killa land in Mukerian Punjab as recompense by the government of India (Personal Interview Grandson Sh. Bhupinder Singh 2024). His Victoria Cross was handed over to his battalion 3rd Dogra Regiment in June, 1965 by his wife Gurdevi (Original Receipt of Three Dogra Regiment 1965). The Dogra Regiment preserved his legacy well and to inspire the newly recruited Dogra soldiers, Regimental Centre have named its parade ground after his name 'Lala Parade Ground' at Ayodhya Cant, Uttar Pradesh. School of Parol

village was also named after him by former Chief Minister Dr Yashwant Singh Parmar (Personal Interview Grandson Sh. Bhupinder Singh 2024). There is a park in Hamirpur Municipal Council, Hiranagar ward named after his name Lal Batika (Bhartiya 2014). A hand made bronze memorial plaque presented to the government of India by the government of United Kingdom on the centenary of the First World War (Dsouza 2014).

Conclusions

The remarkable story of Lance Naik Lala Victoria Cross is a testament to the indomitable spirit and unwavering loyalty of Indian soldiers. He stood tall in the face of adversity and contributed immensely to the history of the Indian Army. Lala's heroic saga will encourage future generations to uphold the virtues of bravery and diligence, and ensures the preparedness of our Army to defend the emerging threats. To keep the adversary at bay, it highlights the importance of well-trained, disciplined, and responsible soldiers to make the Army powerful. These soldiers fought with great courage and bravery in this precocity while struggling for food, medicines, weapons, and equipment of their basic needs. Impressed by the heroic demonstration of 41st Dogras, Lord Chelmsford first raised a new battalion of them and then declared more classes as martially eligible and liable for compulsory service in Indian Army to expand it, also the recruitment and training boards were convened (Latter 1994, pp. 232-246). All these changes led to the expansion of the Indian Army and this expansion gave green signal to its Indianisation. This process begins with reforms of Indian Expeditionary Force-D (Latter 1994, pp. 232-246). Indians who were waiting for the opportunity, proudly took chance to demonstrate the bravery and proved that they are not inferior to *Celtic Britons* as blamed by Townshend who called them dejected, spiritless and pessimistic (Townshend 1920, p. 221). The reformed Indian Army, beaten the Ottomans badly in the battle of Mosul despite fewer numerically (Latter 1994, pp. 232-246). It helped Indian to gain the respect of the British (Singh 2014, pp. 232-234). Since Indians were equally involved with the British the components of racial supremacy were eliminated and they were imbued with a sense of nationalism.

Notes

- 1 Indian Expeditionary Force-A (IEFA): To fight for France to save her from German invasion formed on the 8th August, 1914 reached at war front on 31st October, same year; Indian Expeditionary Force-D (IEFD): Deployed in Lower Mesopotamia in November, 1914; Indian Expeditionary Force-E (IEFE): deployed for the defense at Suez in October, 1914.
- 2 Total 12 British Officers, 12 Indian Officers and 633 Other Rank went into action but 7 British Officers, 5 Indian Officers and 244 Other Rank mustered after the battle...
- 3 Kut-al-Amara: The village was surrounded by the river Tigris from three sides; therefore, Townshend considered it a suitable place to defend.
- 4 Gallipoli Campaign; Fought at Gallipoli peninsula from 25th April, 1915 to 9th January, 1916, to control the Dardanelles Straits, first major defeat of Allied troops and victory of Ottoman under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

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Raja Kehri Singh and the forgotten front: Reassessing Bushahr's role in the Tibet-Ladakh conflict

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ABSTRACT

The current historical literature on the Tibet-Ladakh war is largely based on sources from the major participants in the conflict namely Tibet, Ladakh, and the Mughals. The contributions and role of Bushahr, which were more or less decisive in the conflict, have been conveniently overlooked by these powers for various reasons. The Tibetan allies of Bushahr credited their victory to the Mongol General Galdan and the great Fifth Dalai Lama, and made no mention of the Bushahri *wazir's* efforts to ensure the Mughal withdrawal when the Tibetans had been pushed back. This paper further highlights the inaccurate historical narrative incorporated in the District Gazetteer, which later evolved into the popular view of history. The treaty between Tibet and Bushahr, as found in the document discovered at Namgia by A. H. Francke, is also examined and detailed. In essence, the paper contributes to a better understanding of the Bushahri perspective, the role and achievements of Raja Kehri Singh in the Tibet-Ladakh war, and offers an explanation for the Mughal failure to destroy the Tibetan force. Ultimately, it establishes that Bushahr was not merely a passive recipient of changes in the western Trans-Himalayas, but rather an active agent shaping the course of events, playing a significant role in weakening the power of Ladakh.

Keywords: Ladakh-Tibet War, Kehri Singh, Bushahr-Tibet Treaty.

1. Introduction

Historically, the socio-cultural diversity of the Western Himalayas and the parallel Trans-Himalayan regions around Ladakh is portrayed by the fact that Central Asian Muslim hajis used to cross Ladakh on their way west to Mecca and Medina, whereas the Buddhists and Hindus pilgrims (Beszterda, 2015)¹ travelled east to the sacred Mount Kailash² and Manasarovar Lake (Rizvi, 1999, p. 10). In the course of the late medieval era, this contrast between the Cis and Trans Western Himalayan regions was patently highlighted during the Ladakh-Tibet conflict, which saw the participation of the Buddhist, Islamic and Hindu political powers.

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Firstly, the Buddhist powers that formed the edifice of the conflict were, theocratic Tibet headed by the Dalai Lama and aided by the Mongols, pitted against monarchical Ladakh.³ Tibet then was led by the Fifth Dalai Lama, who was also the head of the Gelug sect (yellow hat sect) of Tibetan Buddhism and was also considered the living Boddhisattva Avalokiteshwar (Handa, 2014, p. 205). In contrast to Gelug sect dominated Tibet, in Ladakh, the Dragma sect [i.e. red hat sect] was in prominence and received patronage for the lay monarch. Secondly, the Islamic belligerents in the conflict which aided Ladakh included the Mughal Empire, which, then, was ruled by the conservative Sunni monarch Aurangzeb and the Shia chief from Skardoo. Thirdly, as for the Hindu powers, participating in the war, they included the Western Himalayan principalities of Kullu and Rampur-Bushahr, led by Raja Bidhi Singh and Raja Kehri Singh, respectively, with the former being in the camp of the Mughals and the latter aided the Tibetans.

Even though, historically overlooked and little credited, Bushahr states under Raja Kehri Singh was *sin qua non* in destabilizing the short-lived dominance of Ladakh over modern day Western Tibet. In fact Bushahr played the decisive role in aiding and establishing a new and enduring *status quo* wherein, Tibet acted as the new hegemon. Further, Raja Kehri Singh not only successfully expanded his territory from Wangtu Bridge till Shipki La (Francke, 1914, p. 9) but also entered into a treaty with Tibet which laid the basis for a prosperous Trans-Himalayan trade wherein Rampur and Gartok⁴ served as the main trading centers.

2. Contested chronicles: divergent narratives of the conflict

The primary accounts for the reconstruction of an objective history of the Tibet-Ladakh conflict are quite limited. The accounts can be divided into four groups which are the Ladakhi, Tibetan, Mughal and Bushahri sources.

2.1 Ladakhi sources:- As for the Ladakhi narrative, the royal chronicles of Ladakh, i.e. *La dvags rgyal rabs*, only glance over the subject of conflict, most likely due to the fact that the war had embarrassed and denuded the royal prestige of Ladakh. However, *casus belli* for the conflict as per Ladakhi sources was the decision of the Namgyal monarch to side with his fellow Drugpa sect state of Bhutan in its conflict with Tibet (Jinpa, 2015, p. 113).

The first text of the modern era, which discussed the conflict, was 'History of Western Tibet' by A. H. Francke (Tobdan, 2008, p. 113)⁵ wherein, the relevant portion of the text contains merely paraphrasing of the Royal Chronicle of Ladakh. The work of Francke was devoid of reference to any other point of view and sources (Petech, 1947, p. 171). Nevertheless, the major contribution of the text was the fact that it introduced this war into the modern consciousness.

2.2 Tibetan sources:- Among the Tibetan sources, the most exhaustive overview of the conflict is provided by the autobiography of the fifth Dalai

Lama and by 1698 work, of his regent, Sanggye Gyatso (Jinpa, 2015, p. 113). The Tibetan sources, in an attempt to justify and legitimise their wanton aggression, portray the Namgyal monarch of Ladakh as, among others, arrogant, greedy, evil, and even “enraged anti-Buddhist” (Jinpa, 2015, p. 114). The Tibetan sources, in essence, press forth that the aggressive and anti-yellow hat, i.e. Gelugpa attitude of the Ladakhi monarch, fermented the conflict.

2.3 Mughal sources: - The Mughal sources only cover the conflict incidentally and are limited to the later portion of the war which saw the involvement of the Mughal forces. *Tarikh-i-Kashmir* notes that the request of aid by the Gyalpo [King] of Ladakh was accepted by Emperor Aurangzeb while he was at Aurangabad in Deccan. Further, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir* states that in 1094 A.H. [Hijri Calendar], apart from the great flood, the other noteworthy event was the invasion of Ladakh, recorded as Great Tibet, by the Tibetans who were referred as Qalmaq, i.e. Mongols. The text further, states that the Mughal troops were called from as far as Kabul, and they were commanded by Fidai Khan, son of Ibrahim Khan, Subedar of Kashmir (Petech, 1947, p. 183).

2.4 Sources from Bushahr: - Unfortunately, during Goorkha’s occupation of Bushahr in early nineteenth century, the archives and records of the Bushahr were destroyed and historians have noted the “Gurkhas left behind nothing but rubble” (Mamgain, 1971, p. 60).

Author J. C. French also observed:

‘It is to be regretted that the archives and records of the State [Bushahr], as well as the raja’s family, were destroyed by the Gurkhas’⁶

Nevertheless, the utter lack of historical material of Bushahr state was significantly addressed by the discovery of document containing a treaty between Tibet and Bushahr found at Namgiya by the German Moravian missionary A. H. Francke in 1909 (Francke, 1914, p. 24). A. H. Francke as to the discovery of the treaty noted in his work ‘Antiquities of Indian Tibet’ the following:

“He (Hira, village chief of Namgia and descendent of a Tibetan Bonpo family) said he was in possession of a document of ancient times. After much persuasion he produced it, and it turned out to be a copy of the treaty between Raja Kehari Singh of Bashahr and the Lhasa government, headed by Galdan Thsang.’

Further, Francke notes that he during his expedition had found two versions of the treaty. (Francke, 1914, p. 7) It is likely that the same document was rediscovered by Italian tibetologist Prof. Tucci in 1933 at the trading post (Halkias, 2009, p. 68) of Namgiya in Kinnaur (Petech, 1977, p. 170). The document found by Prof. Tucci was identical to the copy of Francke, a fact which augments its value as valid evidence. This *sui generis* source provides unique insights into the conflict and highlights the decisive role of Bushahri forces. Further, the British Foreign Department correspondences during the

colonial period also emphasised that the custom of tax-free trade existed between the two regions; this fact is also supported by the oral histories of Kinnaur. Though, academic studies in this area have been severely limited and anemic, but the contributions of Prof. Petech and, more recently, Georgios T. Halkias are noteworthy.

3. An outline of the three states prior to the conflict

3.1 An overview of the Bushahr state and Raja Kehri Singh

Bushahr State was the largest state among the category of Simla Hill States recognised by the British after the Anglo-Gurkha War. Geographically the state was a part of the Sutlej catchment, and as determined by the British its area was 3,820 square kilometres (Weston, 1911, p. 4) and along with Bilaspur and Sirmaur, Bushahr was among the three paramount powers of Shimla Hill States (Mamgain, 1971, p. 57) but unlike Bilaspur and Sirmaur, Bushahr was placed right next to the Tibetan plateau. In essence geography mandated close relations between Bushahr and Trans-Himalayan catchment of Sutlej for e.g. the close socio-economic relationship between Ngari, Spiti, Upper Kinnaur and Bushahr was ensured by the fact that the antecedent river Sutlej provides a natural highway for traders, pilgrims, herders etc. to safely cross the Himalayas. Further, Rampur was the sole proximate town with a big market and access to goods and traders from the Indian plains. Rampur was also accessible from these regions even during the winters as no pass had to be crossed during the journey (Mamgain, 1971, p. 141).

The kings (Rajas) of Bushahr⁷ were considered to be semi-divine, and they were even worshipped by a significant section of their subjects and people from the Kinnaur region of the state believed that the Rajas of Bushahr, upon death, were reincarnated as the Dalai Lama (Weston, 1911, p. 6). There are different accounts as to the origin of the ruling family, and even the genealogy presented by historians like Francke and Tucci does not match (Petech, 1947, p. 176). The two genealogies of the royal family, one kept at Rampur and another at Kamru, are not consonant *inter se*, with the latter being longer than the former. Nevertheless, the popular belief was that the royal family of Bushahr descended from Praduman, the grandson of Lord Krishna (Buck, 1904, p. 247).

Historically it was Raja Chatar Singh, one hundred and tenth in line from Parduman (Weston, 1911, p. 5) who became the first ruler to exercise effective jurisdiction over the whole territory of Bushahr State including Kinnaur till Wangtu (Mamgain, 1971, p. 57) and even the neighbouring *Thakurs* were under his influence and necessary tribute was received (Weston, 1911, p. 7). Raja Kehri Singh, one hundred and thirteenth from Parduman (Weston, 1911, p. 6) was most likely the grandson of Raja Chatar Singh.

It is believed that Raja Kehri Singh was an *ajanuyaku* like Lord Ram and he once visited the *darbar* of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (Weston, 1911, p. 6). It

is stated that the emperor upon witnessing a supernatural phenomenon was pleased to grant upon the Raja the title of *Chattarpati* along with a *khillat*.⁸ The greatness of Kehri Singh may also be gauged by the fact that little information is available about the Rajas who followed him like Vijay Singh and Udai Singh (Mamgain, 1971, p. 59). When Raja Kehri Singh's reign started, Ladakh was the paramount power of the region and controlled the areas of Ngari, Upper Kinnaur and Spiti. It was evident that for Bushahr to augment its territory in these regions, the contours of Ladakhi authority had to be denuded.

3.2 Kingdom of Ladakh and expansion under Gyalpo Senggee Namgyal

To appreciate the context of the Tibet-Ladakh war it is vital to understand the background within which Ladakh established its hegemony over large parts of the Western Trans-Himalaya. The kingdom of Ladakh was ruled by the Namgyal dynasty which had witnessed its high-water mark after the expansion made by Gyalpo Senggee Namgyal (Stobdan, 2019, p. 20).⁹ Senggee had augmented the status of Ladakh as the dominant power across the traditional threefold dominion (Ahmad, 1968, p. 340)¹⁰ that included, *inter alia*, Ladakh, Guge, Puhrang, Zanskar, Spiti,¹¹ Lahaul and parts of Kinnaur. Senggee had, as a prince, captured Rudok in 1614 and Burang in 1615 (Stobdan, 2019, p. 21). Later, he conquered the capital, of Guge, Tsaparang, after surrender of Tashi Drakpa, and he placed his second son, Indrabodhi Namgyal, as the new monarch.

In 1638, Chokur, a descendant of Altan Khan, invaded Guge and Senggee Namgya not only defeated this Mongol force but also pursued it till Central Tibet, and most likely during this expedition, Senggee subdued the monastic fiefs and herding communities in Mustang and Droshod. (Jinpa, 2015, p. 125). Hence, the authority of Ladakh extended till Jumla, Dolpo and Mustang (Jinpa, 2015, p. 115) which lie beyond the Mayum La pass,¹² and today form part of Nepal. Senggee also controlled Spiti (Hutchison & Vogel, 1933, p. 485), and his subordinate Gaga Chering Namgyal held the Dhankar fort (Francke, 1907, pp. 92, 101), which, upon his death, was passed on to Dechog Namgyal, who was the youngest son of Senggee Namgyal (Rizvi, 1983, p. 52).

In gravamen, Ladakhi hegemony was created upon the whole of Ngari, including the vital trading and the pilgrimage route to Kailasa and Mansarovar and Senggee eventually fixed Mayum La as the boundary between Ladakh and Tibet (Petech, 1977, p. 171). Therefore, at the very least, the entire Trans-Himalayan catchment of Indus and Sutlej, except Balistan, was under the control of the Namgyal dynasty. Hence, Bushahr was now bordered by Ladakhi domains not only in the North towards Upper Kinnaur and Spiti but also in the east and resultanty the utility and prosperity of the vital trade route along the Sutlej and the pilgrimage of Bushahris to Manasarovar and Kailash were under the discretion of Leh. This period of expansion and wealth for Ladakh is also highlighted by the fact that Leh Palace was built before the iconic Potala Palace in Lhasa, by decades (Jinpa, 2015, p. 137).

After successfully concluding a campaign against the Mongols Sengge passed away at Hanle in 1642 (Petech, 1977, pp. 47–48; Stobdan, 2019, p. 21). Most likely, he was not older than forty (Rizvi, 1983, p. 52), though, just like the fifth Dalai Lama, his demise was kept as a secret for a few years (Karmay, 2014, p. 202). Sengge was a patron of the red hat sect and was naturally, not liked by the Tibetans, and they called him *rdud-rgyal*, i.e. the evil king of Ladakh (Stobdan, 2019, p. 21). The Tibetan sources even represented the Ladakhi Gyalpo as anti-Buddhist. Subsequently, the Kingdom of Ladakh in an attempt to improve strained relations with Tibet sent two missions to Lhasa in 1664 and 1667 respectively, but both were devoid of any breakthrough and the Fifth Dalai Lama was quite upset with the missions (Ahmad, 1968, p. 344). Hence, the background ground for the conflict was laid by firstly, the significant conquests by Sengge Namgyal, secondly, by the desire of the yellow hat sect dominated Tibet to subdue the regions under influence of the red hat sect like Bhutan and Ladakh and lastly, there were economic and social factors discussed in the following section.

3.3 Consolidation of Tibet and rise of the yellow hat sect

After the fall of the Mongol, Yuan dynasty in China, it was the Mongol leader Gushri Khan who successfully militarily united the region, by conquering Eastern and Central Tibet.¹³ Though his armies were “known for their brutality towards soldiers and civilians alike” (Van Schaik, 2011, p. 147). Subsequently, Gushri Khan as the patron handed over the administration of Tibet to his priest i.e. the Fifth Dalai Lama. Hence, in practice, Tibet was governed by the Dalai Lama instead of lay governors. As for the sectarian divide the Italian missionary Jesuit Ippolito overview Desideri had noted the Gelugpas’ lingering “hate” and “persecution” of other sects of Tibetan Buddhism (Desideri, 1937, pp. 220–225). The religious convictions of the Gelugpa sect were made clear by the fact that if anyone failed to show respect for the Gelug teachings, the new ‘theocracy’ swore not to remain “without blood on [its] spears.” (Van Schaik, 2011, p. 149). For the Gelugpa sect, the Drukpa were nothing more than heretics and deceivers. After consolidating their power in Tibet the Gelugpa authorities at Lhasa were concerned with the fact that the frontier areas of the ethnographic Tibetan regions from Bhutan to Ladakh, like Mustang and Dolpo, were aligned with the Drukpa sect. In this regard Tibet had on at least seven occasions attacked Bhutan (Ardussi, 1999, pp. 65–66) and after the failure of these military expeditions, in 1679, a peace treaty was agreed between the two sides (Jinpa, 2015, p. 128). The Mongol troops, having learned the lesson, turned their attention towards the other major Drukpa power of Ladakh. The economic and social basis for the Tibetan invasion of Ladakh included among others, the control over lucrative shawl wool trade, the gold fields of Ngari and lastly, the prestige gained by the control over the holy sites around Mount Kailash. The production and export of *pashmina* shawls was vital for the economic well-being of the entire region from Ngari to Kashmir. Commercially, the most valuable activity for the region was

sheep rearing, the resultant wool manufacturing and trade (Petech, 1947, p. 172). As for the gold fields of Ngari the Mughal prince Mirza Haidar Dughlat,¹⁴ who had invaded Ladakh and ventured into Guge, concluded that:

“God has so created this soil that when the gold is taken from the ground, it does not diminish” (Dughlat, 1895, pp. 411–412).

Yet, by the time of the Tibetan invasion the gold fields had for long been in decline. In conclusion, the economic concerns though noteworthy were ancillary and incidental to the sectarian kernel of the conflict (Jinpa, 2015, p. 114).

4. Tibet-Ladakh war and the role of Bushahr

4.1 The chronology and the proceeding of the conflict

On July 7, 1679 the fifth Dalai Lama, ignoring the advice (Ahmad, 1968, p. 349) of his regent, ordered for a military expedition to Ladakh (Halkias, 2009, p. 63) under Galdan Boshugtu Khan (Tucci, 1947, p. 29).¹⁵ Galdan was not only a monk at the Tashilungpo monastery but also a Mongol prince (Halkias, 2009, p. 63) by descent as he was the grandson of the Mongol conqueror Gurshi Khan, who had aided the fifth Dalai Lama to gain temporal power. Further, Galdan was also the cousin of Dallas Khan (Petech, 1947, p. 174), who was the then protector King of Tibet. Additionally, it had been prophesied that the fifth Dalai Lama would one day subjugate Ladakh (Ahmad, 1999, pp. 236–239).

Galdan despite his martial lineage, before this military expedition, had only modicum of administrative experience that too, limited to maintaining order at the local market of Tashilungpo (Petech, 1947, p. 174). Further, Galdan, as per the Tibetan sources, was reluctant to take up the mantle for the expedition due to his pacifist faith, and only after significant hesitation, he accepted the duty bestowed by the Dalai Lama. Further, Galdan had also received encouraging omens from the Tibetan state oracle. The force for the conquest of Ladakh that departed from Lhasa, though, an elite contingent was merely two hundred and fifty troops strong (Petech, 1947, p. 175). The remaining Tibetan army was created from the Western regions based on the system of levies. The small initial force allowed for circumventing lengthy preparations or carrying huge logistics additionally the force also had the advantage of great mobility. Galdan proceeded *via* Mayum La to the border of Ladakh which was unguarded, and thereby he successfully reached Manasarovar without a fight. At the holy lake and Mountain, Galdan paid the traditional offering and performed a *paridashina* (Petech, 1947, p. 175).

Prof. Petech, noted that Ladakhi leadership had failed to gauge the gravity of the situation and, despite advice to the contrary, they went ahead with a pitched battle against the Tibetan-Mongol force (Petech, 1947, p. 177). The first battle was fought around the desert plains at the junction of the two sources of the Indus above Tashigang (Petech, 1947, p. 178), which resulted in a decisive Tibetan victory. Evidently, due to the superior quality of the Mongol stallions and their proficiency to perform complex cavalry maneuvers the Ladakhis were

routed. Ideally the Ladakhis should have restrained themselves to their citadels. The cautious views were overlooked by most likely due to the prospect of capturing the Tibetan booty and as a result of underestimating the strength of their adversary.

After the initial Tibetan victory further reinforcements were requested from Tibet due to the presence of Ladakhi garrisons in the region. These reinforcements numbered around five thousand soldiers (Petech, 1947, p. 179) and resultantly the Ladakhi garrison at Ngari surrendered as they were deterred from putting up resistance due to the sight of the large Tibetan reinforcements. Further, the strategic forts of Tashigang and Tsaparang were also taken over by the Tibetans. Thereby, the Ladakhi troops gave up their strongholds in Ngari without a long fight (Petech, 1947, p. 180) that would have tied down the Tibetans. Proceeding with the invasion, the Tibetan army in a surprise maneuver instead of following the course of Indus to enter Ladakh proper *via* Demchok instead moved to Ruthog and entered Ladakh along the Pangong Tso. The second battle of the war, in which the Ladakhi King personally participated, was fought below the Changla pass (Petech, 1947, p. 180). Yet again, the Tibetans defeated the Ladakhi army (Rizvi, 1983, p. 54), and the humiliated Gyalpo resultantly retreated to the Tingmosgang monastery. Subsequent to this victory, additional forces joined the Tibetans which likely included the natives from Guge or the Bushahri troops (Petech, 1947, p. 181). Later, Leh, the nerve centre of Ladakh fell without resistance and to symbolically signify that Ladakh had been humbled, the Tibetan General's horse was tied to the lion gate of the Leh palace. The seemingly comprehensive conquest of Ladakh by the Tibetans was followed by the long siege of Basgo (Ahmad, 1968, p. 350). The fortifications at Basgo were nearly impregnable, and Basgo was believed to have perianal water supply (Rizvi, 1983, p. 54). During the siege, the Tibetan and the Bushahri troops were present at Goro or Daru (Petech, 1947, p. 182).

The long length of the siege provided the Gyalpo of Ladakh with the necessary time to employ diplomacy whereby he successfully negotiated to receive the essential succor from the Mughal Subhedar of Kashmir Ibrahim Khan. As per some authors, historically the Mughals had enjoyed suzerainty over Ladakh (Petech, 1947, p. 183). The Mughal policy as to the Western Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan chiefs was to force them into the status of tributaries and never of outright conquest.¹⁶ The Mughals were interested in the developments in Ladakh due to, among others, the potential effect of Tibetan conquest on the lucrative wool trade. At the bare minimum the Mughals wanted to ensure that the trade route was not disturbed for long.

The Mughal forces entered Ladakhi territory through the famous Zoji La, and they were aided in their expedition by the ruler of Skardoo (Petech, 1947, p. 184) and Raja Bidhi Singh of Kullu,¹⁷ who, nonetheless, during the conflict, plundered Zaskar which was a principality of Ladakh. The Mughal participation immediately altered the *status quo*, the siege of Basgo was lifted,

and a battle was fought near Bagso, at the plains of Chargyal, near Nimoo village, wherein the Tibetans-Mongol forces were decisively defeated. After their defeat, the Tibetan army retreated to Pangong Tso (Hutchison & Vogel, 1933, p. 486). The sequence of events is also corroborated by independent Mughal sources like *Tarik-e-Kashmir* and *Maasir-i-Alangiri* that state Mughal forces intervened in 1094 A.H., during Aurangzeb's reign.

Nevertheless, the Mughals failed to exploit their clear military advantage to either entirely destroy the Tibetans force or conquer the recently lost Ngari. At the most decisive moment of the entire campaign Mughals returned to Kashmir and thereby ended any chance for Ladakh to reclaim its recently lost territories. Though, Ladakh proper was entirely freed from the invaders and recovered with the aid of Mughals. The Mughal sources claimed decisive victory and are entirely silent on the reasons for Mughal withdrawal, which seems quite improper and imprudent. On the other hand Tibetan sources, eulogising the Dalai Lama, pressed that in light of the magic and the special powers of the Dalai Lama, the Mughal soldiers panicked and left the campaign¹⁸ this explanation *prima facie* does not seem rational. Hence, a rational observer may venture to state that the Mughals, having succeeded in their primary objective i.e. to ensure independence and territorial integrity of Ladakh proper were satisfied and also being unaccustomed to the Trans-Himalayan winters, wanted to reach Kashmir before the snowfall could have blocked the notorious Zoji La and therefore, decided against proceeding to Ngari.¹⁹

The lack of documentary evidence that explained this juncture of the conflict was addressed by the finding of A. H. Francke and Prof. Tucci. The document exchanged between the Tibetan and Bushahri leadership highlights that the Mughals were bribed to withdraw by the Bushahri minister. Even though this premise for the Mughal withdrawal is based on a single document, the same was accepted by Prof. Petech as the factual position. This event may even be stated to be the most decisive aspect of the whole campaign, which had repercussions on the politics of the entire region for centuries to come.

Eventually, the war was concluded by the Treaty of Tingmosgang wherein, the Tibetans got significant territorial, religious and economic concessions from the Gyalpo of Ladakh. The entire duration of the Tibetan expedition is said to have been between the years 1679 and 1684, though Prof. Petech has provided an alternative and shorter timeline (Petech, 1947, p. 188). Lastly, the Tibetans, despite their victory, were alarmed by the request and resultant succor provided by the Islamic powers like Mughals to the Gyalpo of Ladakh. Tibetans must have been aware of the fact that the Gyalpo was even asked to convert to Islam in exchange for the Mughal aid. The Tibetans, therefore, emphasised in their agreement with Ladakh that the religious beliefs and practices of Buddhists and non-Buddhists were hostile to each other and the Gyalpo of Ladakh should not call upon foreign armies (Ahmad, 1999, p. 352). Yet, the responsibility of defending the boundary between Buddhist and non-Buddhist countries was solely entrusted to the monarch of Ladakh (Ahmad, 1999, p. 352).

4.2 Understanding the Tibet-Bushahr alliance against Ladakh

Most likely in 1679-1680, the Raja of Bushahr, Kehri Singh crossed the Shipki La, which later became the customary border between Tibet and Bushahr, to meet the Tibetan general. The monarch most likely proceeded *via* Tholing along the Sutlej valley to reach the region of Mount Kailash where he also made offerings at the holy Manasarovar Lake. The meeting between the two chiefs was likely made on the plains of Puling/Pulling Thang at Zhang-zhung, Guge¹⁹ as provided in the document of Namgiya (Petech, 1947, p. 176).

Prof. Petech has noted that Galdan:

“Upon his arrival in the Kailash Manasarovar region obtained, by a personal interview, the armed help of Raja Kehri Singh, in exchange for trade facilities” (Petech, 1977, p. 72).

The Bashahrri Raja, apart from the unimpeded trade through the territories of Ngari, was also offered privilege of the biennial official delegation (Petech, 1977, p. 176). It seems that the forces from Bushahr joined their Tibetan-Mongol counterparts only the year after the meeting between the two leaders. It is likely that the Tibetan general only after winning the first battle of the war and having proved his worth met the Raja of Bushahr. During their meeting Raja Kehri Singh and Tibetan General Galdan negotiated and agreed to a treaty that was prepared in the name of ‘Buddha Shakyamanui’ to abide by the provisions therein, till perpetuity. The Treaty contained a small preamble/preface which highlighted the sanctity of the treaty, followed by four articles. Even though the treaty was concluded either in 1679 or 1680, it could have only taken effect in or after 1684. As it was only possible after the conflict, when Tibet acquired sovereignty and control over the region of Ngari, that the Tibetan authorities were in a position to fulfill their end of the obligation contained in the treaty, which included the assurance of safe trade and travel in Ngari as well as other services for the biennial delegation from Bushahr.

4.3 An analysis of the Tibet-Bushahr treaty of 1679

The document (Halkias, 2009, p. 82) found at Namgiya noted that during the reign of Raja Jodagpo (Halkias, 2009, p. 82) Guge had been conquered by the Gyalpo of Ladakh. Nevertheless, Galdan had received some prophesies (or revelation)(Halkias, 2009, p. 82) which assured him of his victory if he were to march on Ngari and Mayul (old name of Ladakh). The documents further noted that Raja Kehri Singh had called upon in aid the forces of 25 Rajas and 18 Thakurs or 21 Rajas and 18 Thakurai as per other translations but none of them responded undeterred, Raja Kehri Singh decided to proceed forth. The translation provided by Georgios T. Halkias notes that Raja Kehri Singh started his expedition on the pretext of taking a bath at Mansarovar (Halkias, 2009, p. 82). The document further provided that the Raja and Galdan had a meeting at Zhang-zhung in Guge.

The two leaders were respectively referred to, as the king of upper and lower (Halkias, 2009, p. 70), which most likely meant Tibet and Bushahr. The document furthermore acknowledged the joining of the two forces, i.e. of Tibet and Bushahr, against the Gyalpo of Ladakh. During the war it was *wazir* Chodas of Bushahr (Halkias, 2009, p. 83) who commanded the Bushahri army.

The document also acknowledged that Ladakh had called upon the Kashmiris and Baltis in aid, who were referred as Pathans. (Halkias, 2009, p. 71). It is also noteworthy that the preface of the treaty mentioned that the minister of Bushahr and the Tibetan officer named Don-agrub²⁰ gave either fifteen loads of gold and silver or five bags (Halkias, 2009, p. 83) to the Kashmiris and Balti, i.e. the Mughals and their allies. In addition, the Mughals were also provided with the necessary provisions for their return (Halkias, 2009, p. 72) journey and thereby deserted by allies the Gyalpo of Ladakh was subjugated by Tibet and Bushahr.

Even though, the Tibet–Bushahr treaty of 1679 is not systematically divided into articles, as it followed a passage-like format; nevertheless, the following articles can be extracted.

The treaty opened with a preamble that delineated various symbols and events highlighting the sacrosanct nature of the treaty. After the preamble, the two sides solemnly agreed to respect each other's boundary, i.e. territorial integrity.

Article one provided – The leaders of Tibet and Bushahr, committed to the terms of the treaty, should dispatch messengers and envoys.

Article two provided – Once every three years, Bushahr is required to send messengers to dwell in the four forts of Ngari, namely, Tsaprrang, Purang, Rutog and Gartok.

Article three provided - That the subjects of the Tibetan and the Bushahri king, whenever visiting any part of each other's territory, should not be subjected to the slightest measure of taxation, or anything of the sort.

Article four provided – That the Tibetan and Bushahri king should not deviate from this agreement by ever using murderous weapons or poison cups.

The last article, in essence, meant that the two sides must continue their relations with good faith and their dealing should be bereft of any treachery.

In brief, the treaty provided in the first two articles for the maintenance of active diplomatic relations, and the engagement of envoys of Bushahr at, among others, Tsaparang and Rutog. Article three dealt with tax-free trade, and the last article reflected assurance of maintaining honesty in future transitions (Halkias, 2009, p. 66). It is interesting to note that Article Three fails to expand on the nature of trade, and there is no mention of wool or gold. Further, the incorporation of article three suggests that during the control of the Ngari by Ladakh, trade was either prohibited or discouraged through heavy taxation. Such

economic policies, if followed, would have been beneficial for Ladakh as the Gyalpos of Ladakh would have prospered economically by the valuable trade of wool and gold flowing solely towards Ladakh proper. The Namgiya document ends by acknowledging that for thirteen generations Rajas of Bushahr have not violated the treaty. (Halkias, 2009, p. 83).

After the conclusion of the conflict, both the Ladakhi and Bushahri representatives agreed that Ngari was under the administration of Tibet (Halkias, 2009, p. 72). Further, Bushahr also gained the territories of Upper Kinnaur at the expense of Ladakh, though the same was not expressly provided in the treaty between Bushahr and Tibet, but this territorial shift from Ladakh to Bushahr must have happened after this conflict²¹ (Petech, 1947, p. 192). This new frontier between Bushahr with Tibet was so well known that there is a common saying in Tibet which states that *Pimala Yanchhod Bod Gialbo, Pimala Ranchhod KhunaGialbo*-that translates to,

“The territory above Pimala [Shipki Pass] belongs to the Raja of Tibet and below to the Raja of Bashahr.” (Ministry of External Affairs, 1961, P. 168).

Resultantly, this war determined the modern boundary of India and Tibet, though no demarcation was undertaken. The only significant cross-border movement by military forces after this conflict was, firstly, the Dogra invasion led by Zorawar Singh in 1841, and later the Chinese invasion of India in 1962.

The oral traditions in Kinnaur to date acknowledge that the famous Lavi fair,²² held annually at Rampur,²³ is based on the Tibet-Bushahr treaty (Halkias, 2009, p. 73). In essence, the treaty was the edifice of remunerative and prosperous Trans-Himalayan trade²⁴ and resultantly Rampur developed as a viable trade center of the region (Moran, 2007, p. 173).

4.4 The decisive role of the Bushahri army

The alliance with Bushahr must have provided the Tibetans not only with additional and fresh manpower and resources but also vital intelligence and knowledge of the local terrain. As aforementioned, the army from Rampur, which invaded Ladakh along with the Tibetan Army (Mamgain, 1971, p. 58), was commanded by the *Wazir* Chhodas. The army, likely, joined the Tibetan army at Go-ro in Ladakh before the second battle of the war at Chang La/Byan La. The delay in the joining of the two forces was because the meeting and agreement between Raja Kehri Singh and the Tibetan General happened sufficiently late in the year that no time was left for the Bushahri troops to assemble and reach Ngari (Petech, 1947, p. 176) before the passes were closed by snow or were dangerous to cross.

The sources highlight that forces of Bushahr were present at the siege of Bagso and most likely participated in the subsequent conflict against the Mughals. Nevertheless, the critical role played by the Bushahri *wazir* during the campaign was not on the battlefield but it was instead his ability to successfully convince

the Pathans, to withdraw from Ladakh after the battle of Bagso. In effect by the bribe *Wazir* Chhodas had bought over the Pathans, and it was essentially due to the desertion of the Pathans that Ladakh was eventually defeated (Mamgain, 1971, p. 58). The bribery of the Mughals very well explains their subsequent conduct and failure to advance and destroy the Tibetan army or force them into a long retreat. Even as per Prof. Petech, the Mughals led by Fidai Khan failed to press forth, their momentum, because of the lucrative bribe offered by the Bushahri *Wazir* (Petech, 1947, p. 186) and a Tibetan officer by the name of Don Grub/Nawang Donbub (Halkias, 2009, p. 83). Quite unsurprisingly, the Mughal sources are silent on the aspect of bribery, though the capture of booty was mentioned by them.

4.5 Potential causes for the failure of the Himalayan chiefs to aid Bushahr

To understand the failure of the local chiefs to aid Raja Kehri Singh, one needs to analyse the political situation of that era. Immediately preceding the Ladakh-Tibet war the local expansionist endeavours of Kehri Singh had resulted in Bushahr occupying certain regions of the Sulej valley belonging to the Kullu state. Raja of Kullu, therefore, appealed to Raja Bhim Chand of Bilaspur,²⁵ who, aided by Raja Sidh Sen of Mandi, moved with a huge army towards Rampur (Tobdan, 2008, p. 111). Raja Bhim Chand conquered the village of Duttanagar along the Sulej and thereafter, proceeded to Nirmand (Ganesh, 1882, pp. 61–62). Resultantly, the territories conquered by Rampur were restored to Kullu, as per account by Kavi Ganesh (Tobdan, 2008, p. 111). Further, in the same period the kingdom of Bilaspur had emerged as the overlord of the *Bharah Thakurains* (Chandel, 2007, p. 58)²⁶ of the Shimla region and hence it is not tough to understand why support was not forthcoming.

Further, due to the lack of unified command and in the absence of any prospects for territorial gains for other states, any expedition into the harsh Trans-Himalayan regions would have been quite low on the list of priorities for the Himalayan chiefs. Meanwhile, Raja Bidhi Singh of Kullu, who was one of the Rajas to be called upon, by Bushahr had sided with the Mughals and for his services he was granted control over Lahaul (Handa, 2001, p. 206). In gravamen, the states did not functioned as a unified group; rather, more often than not, their interests were mutually conflicting, thereby, instead of undertaking a tough expedition against Ladakh, they were more focused on pulling their neighbours down.

5. Aftermath of the Tibet-Ladakh war

Galdan, after his victory, was received and greeted at Tashilungpo by the Tashi Lama. The Tibetan/Mongol army received a hero's welcome. The clear loser of the conflict was the Kingdom of Ladakh, which ended up paying to all the participants of the conflict. Further, the Mughal suzerainty over Ladakh was reaffirmed. The Gyalpo in return for Mughal aid had to convert to Islam and he took the name Aqabat Mahmud Khan (Halkias, 2009, p. 66). Additionally, the King even had to leave his son at the Mughal court to be brought up as a Muslim

(Halkias, 2009, p. 66). However, the Gyalpo quickly reverted to Buddhism, and his apostasy was conveniently overlooked by Delhi. Naturally, the Chronicles of Ladakh are silent on the issue of conversion (Rizvi, 1998, p. 55).

Territorially, Ladakh had to concede its authority not only to its adversaries but also to its allies! The Mughals took over the village of Nabsat from Ladakh. The Mughal ally Raja Bidhi Singh of Kullu was granted Upper Lahaul for his aid. During the conflict Raja Bidhi Singh had invaded Lahaul and expelled Ladakhi influence from the valley (Diack, 1897, p. 37). Further, some parts of Baltistan, which had been taken over by Ladakh, were granted back to the chief of Skardoo.

As for the adversaries in 1684 the Treaty of Tingmosgang was signed between Tibet and Ladakh wherein *inter alia* the frontier between the two powers was decided, though not delineated. Ladakh lost the entire region between Mayum La and Demchok, though it retained the small enclave at Mensar i.e. Guge, which was re-conquered by Sengge Namgyal was lost forever (Rizvi, 1998, p. 55). Further, the Gyalpo of Ladakh had to send triennial presents to Lhasa (Shakabpa, 1967, p. 123), though tribute was also paid to the governors of Kashmir (India, Quarter Master General's Department, Intelligence Branch, 1974, p. 536).

It seems a modicum of ceremonial respect was retained by Lhasa over Ladakh as tribute/presents were paid/sent to the authorities at Gartok till 1842 (Peteck, 1947, p. 191) when Dogra conquered Ladakh.²⁷ As for the military situation the Tibetans consolidated themselves in Ngari and in 1715, the Italian Jesuit missionary Desideri found the region of Guge was "garrisoned by a strong body of Tartar [i.e. Mongol] and Tibetan troops" headed by "a Tartar Prince" (Desideri, 1937, p. 82). Further, Tibetans also made necessary administrative changes in the region and Tibetan governors i.e. *garpon* along with administrators, were sent to Guge, Puhrang and Spiti (Ahmad, 1968, pp. 348-349). As for the theological changes, the first Tibetan abbot of Tholing monastery reached Tholing two years after the Tibetan victory (Vitali, 1999, p. 49). The sectarian changes introduced after the conflict are still visible in modern-day Himachal as the stark contrast between Drukpa-aligned Lahaul and Gelugpa-dominated Spiti across Kunzum La highlights the religious implications of this political conflict.

6. An analysis of popular historical narrative

As per popular historical narrative Raja Kehri Singh defeated the Tibetan Commander Galden in a battle and a treaty was signed wherein it was provided that "Kailash will remain the boundary line between Kinnaur and Tibet". Further, this view that Kailash was declared as the boundary between Bushahr and Tibet is also incorporated in the Himachal Pradesh District Gazetteers for Kinnaur (Mamgain, 1971, p. 59). This account does not seem reasonable for a plethora of reasons which include firstly, the non-alignment of their narrative

with the primary historical sources which include Tibetan, Ladakhi, Mughal sources and the treaty found by Francke and Prof. Tucci, secondly, it seems unlikely that, even in case of the Bushahri victory over Tibet in a hypothetical battle, the boundary would have been pushed till Kailash as the same was clearly beyond the material and manpower capacity of the Bushahri state and thirdly, this view fails to explain what the Ladakhi were doing during this conflict as Guge and Kailash were under their control since the expansion done by Senggee Namgyal.

The second anomaly regarding the conflict is found in the works of Vogel and Hutchison wherein, it is provided that the conditions created by the invasion of Ladakh by the forces from Eastern Tibet in AD 1646-47 (Wessels, 1924, pp. 75–76),²⁸ aided Kullu Raja to expand into Lahaul at the expense of Ladakh (Hutchison & Vogel, 1933, p. 110). The date accorded to this conquest is off by a few decades, as it was only in 1679 that the invasion of Ladakh happened. Thirdly, another view as to the alliance between Bushahr and Tibet was provided by S. R. Johri (Johri, 1964, pp. 24–26), who noted that Mughal Mirza Haider had invaded Ladakh in 1523 and Tibet to maintain peace along the Indo-Tibet frontier concluded a treaty of friendship with the monarch of Rampur. This view must also be overlooked after the scrutiny of the contemporary historical evidence as it is well established that Mirza Haider was the cousin of Emperor Babur whereas the Tibet-Ladakh war occurred during the reign of Aurangzeb.

Lastly, the popular narrative, which states that no Indian army had marched across western Tibet, i.e. Ngari before the Sikh-Dogra forces of Maharaja Sher Singh and Raja Gulab Singh under *Wazir Zorawar Singh*²⁹ invaded Tibet, seems to be an overstatement as the forces of Bushahr had achieved the feat over a century and half prior i.e. undertaking a Trans-Himalayan expedition in modern day western Tibet. Bushahris unlike Zorawar Singh who fought with the Tibetans and Qing forces with an army composed of, among others, the prince of Ladakh, Kehri Singh's forces fought against Ladakh in aid of Tibet.

7. Revised history of Bushahr state after Kehri Singh

The advantages for Bushahr of the Tibetan victory included *inter alia*, a prosperous Trans-Himalayan trade and dominance over Upper Kinnaur due to the withdrawal of Ladakh, it is purported that Raja Kehri Singh received Hangrang valley, situated along Spiti River, as a *jagir*. Further, the relations with Tibet also stood on a positive ground, thereby relieving the Bushahri army from the pressure to defend the Northern and Eastern frontiers of the state. In addition, as per Mr. Gerard in 1776 A.D., the fort of Dankhar was held by Bushahri forces for two years (Hutchison & Vogel, 1933, p. 487). As for Tibet, the tax-free trade between the two sides continued till the 1962 war.

In 1909 when A. H. Francke visited Rampur, Raja Shamsheer Singh of Bushahr showed him a fresco which was purported to be a copy of the painting at the palace of Lhasa. Francke noted in this reference that:

“The fresco evidently represents the treaty between Tibet and Bashahr concluded about 1650 A.D., when Bashahr was supported by the Mughal Emperor..... The Tibetans who had been beaten by the Mughal army at Basgo, near Leh, had to cede a portion of Guge, viz, the Satluj valley down to the Wangtu bridge, to Bashahr State.

It is quite clear that the fresco at the palace of the Bushahri Raja was based on the wrong view of history wherein, the characters and events described as part of the war did occur but the narrative was thoroughly distorted. This mistake can only be explained by the destruction of the royal record of the state during the Gurkha conquest where after most likely history had to be reconstructed based on memory. Further, close relation between Kehri Singh and the Mughals especially in the context of the grant of title of *chattarpati* might have induced the narrative that Bushahr had supported Mughals against the Tibetans. The narrative provided in the District Gazetteer and part of the popular history most certainly was borrowed from this paradigm.

Conclusion

The Tibet-Ladakh war spelled doom for the short-lived Trans-Himalayan Namgyal Empire (Petch, 1947, p. 169), as Ladakh, *inter alia*, lost the entire region of Ngari—including Ruthok, Guge, and Puhrang—to Tibet (Francke, 1907, p. 124); Upper Lahaul to Kullu; the village of Nabsat to Kashmir; Upper Kinnaur up to Shipki La to Bushahr; and its earlier territorial gains in Baltistan to the ruler of Skardoo (Halkias, 2009, p. 66). The western frontier of Ladakh was pushed back from Mayum La to Demchok. In essence, Ladakh lost half of its territory (Stobdan, 2019, p. 26). Moreover, the border established by the Treaty of Tingmosgang in 1684 largely came to define the modern boundary between India and Tibet.

During the conflict, the Mughals had acted in defence of their political and economic interest. In contrast, the Tibetans had acted offensively and they were primarily directed by their sectarian theological endeavours, though other socioeconomic considerations might have played an ancillary role. As for Ladakh, one has to agree with the analysis by Prof. Petch, wherein he states that Ladakh had attempted to make an Empire without a sufficiently large population base to sustain it, and hence they ended up creating too many enemies and subsequently Ladakh largely avoided an offensive action till its eventual conquest by the Dogras in 1842. As for Bushahr, we see that this small Himalayan principality played a decisive role in the war efforts of Tibet. As the Bushahri had a long history of interaction with the Mughals hence this would have naturally facilitated the monetary understanding i.e. bribe, which was agreed upon between the Tibetans and the Mughal belligerents. Evidently without the clever maneuvering by the *wazir* of Bushahr, the Tibetan campaign would not have reached a successful end. The treaty between Raja Kehri Singh and the Tibetan General Galdan established, among others, diplomatic relations

between the two powers and it opened tax-free trade which aided free travel of traders to the trade fairs at Gartok and Rampur which in the fullness of time established Rampur as a prosperous trading and commercial center of the region, with Suttlej acting as a natural highway for the traders. The free trade continued largely uninterrupted till the 1962 war and recently, limited border trade via Shipki La was restarted by India and China.

Further, Bushahr was successfully able to remove the influence of Ladakh from Upper Kinnaur, and though not explicitly provided it is safe to assume that Hangrang valley was granted to Bushahr by Tibet after their victory over Ladakh. Furthermore, the narrative that Kailash was determined as the boundary between Bushahr and Tibet after a war *inter se* seems to evidently fail upon the scrutiny of evidence and the idea that no Indian army had marched across western Tibet, i.e. Ngari before the Dogra forces of *Wazir Zorawar Singh* seems to be an overstatement. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that even though it is believed that the Raja Kehri Singh was granted the title of *Chattarpati* by Aurangzeb, he was more than willing to fight against the Mughals. This reflects that the imperial control over the Himalayan principalities was not especially strong especially during the Deccan expeditions of Aurangzeb. Lastly, as for Raja Bidhi Singh of Kullu, his role in the conflict reflects that the Himalayan states acted as per their own interests, which often left them on opposing sides of the larger conflict. Nevertheless, it is quite evident that even though overlooked Bushahr state had a significant role in the history and politics of both the Himalayas and the Trans-Himalayas. The decisive contribution of Bushahri forces during the conflict was overlooked by the great powers and it was not incorporated in the larger historical narrative.

Notes

1. Hindu Gosains, who are a community of ascetics, also acted as trading pilgrims, and there were Bhotiyas from Gharwal and Kumaon. Further, written trade contact between the traders of the region was called *Gamgya*.
2. Mount Kailash is considered holy not only by the various sects of Tibetan Buddhism but also by the Hindus, Jains and in the traditional Bon religion of Tibet.
3. '*La*' '*dak*' in the Tibetan language means the "land of high passes".
4. Much later, the British, as per the 1904 Anglo-Tibet Convention, which was the result of the expedition by Yonghusabnd during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon, had established a trading agency at Gartok in Ngari.
5. He was a German Tibetologist, Marovian Missionary (Protestant) who discovered a consequential document at Namgia on 6 July 1909. The document was to be initially developed by the village chief of Namgia, by the name of Hipra, who claimed descent from a family of Tibetan ministers. Due to a dispute Francke had to send Lobsang his former pupil at Poo to go to Tibet and from the district officer of Tsra-brang he got the copy of the treaty. See Proceedings of the 13th Colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh Studies, edited by John Bray E Elena De Rossi Filibeck, Until the feathers of the winged Black Raven turn White. Though, as per the account given by author Tobdan, Frankle got in possession of the concerned document from Zongpom (Officer of the Fort) of Tsaparang in Guge in 1909.

6. There is also a possibility the original document between the Bushahuri and the Tibetans must have been engraved on a copper plate, as was the local practice, which might have been destroyed during Goorkha expedition.
7. Later, one of the successors of Raja Kehri Singh, Raja Ram Singh who was the son of Raja Udai Singh selected Rampur his capital.
8. Khillat is the robes of honor and it was granted in ceremonies as early as the reign of Emperor Akbar. It was a mark of honor and respect that was only given to most illustrious individuals. The word “khillat” originally meant “something passed on,” especially a “garment cast off”.
9. He is also called the Lion King. He was the son of Jamyang Namgyal and Gyal Khatun, who was the daughter of the great King Raja Ali Sher Khan Anchan of Balitstan. It is interesting to note that his aunt, daughter of Ali Mir, was married to Mughal Emperor Jahangir.
10. About the year 950, Ngari Korsum was divided between three royal heirs of Kyide Nyima Gon. The eldest one of them revived Ladakh/Mayul, the middle one was given Guge, Puhrang and the youngest received Zanskar, Spiti. The family descended from the famous Yarlung dynasty of Tibet.
11. It is believed that Senggee namgyal also renovated the Tabo monastery at Spiti which was initially constructed by the monk from Guge the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo. The great strategist Sengge Namgyal in his youth became a Drukpa monk. He came back to rule in 1624, and he selected Taksang Repa, from the Drukpa sect, as his spiritual mentor.
12. The pass is situated at the watershed of Sotlej and Brahmaputra River. Even in the ancient time a distinct culture flourished in this region of Sotlej and Indus rivers called Zhangzhung. Later, the Dogra general Zorawar Singh also attempted to push the boundaries of Sikh Empire till Mayum La.
13. The local ruler of Central Tibet, Tsang Desi, was executed in 1642 by Gurshi Khan. Tsang Desi was the last Tibetan Royal to rule in his own name.
14. Mirza Haider, was also the cousin of Emperor Babur and he during his Kashmir campaigns had even invaded Ladakh in 1532. He had also taken note of the importance of shawl trade.
15. His tomb is believed to be at Taklakot in Ngari where he had constructed a temple.
16. An exception to this Mughal inhibition was the Badakhshan campaign of Emperor Shahjhan which resulted in a complete failure. The Pathania Rajput Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur had also served the Mughals in this conflict.
17. He was the son of Raja Jagat Singh
18. Even in case of the repeated failure of Mongols in Bhutan it was believed the reversals were due to Drukpa's spiritual power, magic and sorcery which were perceived as the agent behind the repeated failures endured by Lhasa. See Why Did Tibet and Ladakh Clash in the 17th Century?
19. This area is close to Puling south west of Tsaparang along the old trade route with joined Chamoli with Tholing.
20. It is interesting to note that as per interpretation by Rahul Sanskrityan, there were not two officials involved and the purported Tibetan official Nawang Donbud was in fact the *Wazir* from Buashahr.
21. It seems that the boundary was not only a well-known political frontier but it also represented a zone of social transition. As the German missionary and explorer A. H. Francke was told by Schnabel that when people from Bashahr, crossed the

boundary at Shipki La they used to dismissed caste and eat and drink with the Europeans.

22. The expression Lavi comes from “loe” which means a sheet of woolen cloth. Lavi festival is the last fair before on set of winters.
23. Finest *Pashm* was brought to Rampur during Fair. Further, a well-developed trade existed between Kinnaur and Tibet which even had a functioning dispute settlement body.
24. Historically, Gartok has been known for its trading fair. The Gartok to Rampur wool trade route had also developed in spite of the fact that as per the treaty of Tingmosgang the main route for the lucrative wool trade was along Ladakh to Kashmir (Gerard, 1841, p. 116) yet alternate routes across Lahaul, Kullu and Garhwal also developed. Wherein, the Bhotiya dominated the Trans-Himalayan trade in the Garhwal region.
25. He was also the grandson of Raja of Kullu by relation.
26. Raja of Bilaspur was paid tribute till the beginning of British rule in 1815 by, Baghal, Kunhiar, Beja, Dhami, Keonthal, Kothar, Jubbal, Baghat, Bajji, Mailog, Mangal and Balsan, which amounted to 7,800 Rs.
27. Bushahr also used to send trifling presents to Garoo every three years for the Dalai Lama of Lhasa. See Account of Koonawur in the Himalaya by Capt. Alexander Gerard.
28. The two kingdoms had a skirmish shortly before 1620, when the ruler of Guge had abruptly cancelled a marriage with the sister of the king of Ladakh. The king of Ladakh later declared war on Guge.
29. *Wazir Zorawar Singh*, a native of Bilapur in modern day Himachal, also had paid obeisance at Manasarovar in his expedition of 1841, Raja Kehri Singh of Bushahr too paid obeisance at Manasarovar in 1679.

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Professional development, career prospects and under graduates: the perspectives of New Education Policy

Antony Michael & Pratheesh P.

ABSTRACT

It is crucial to create an environment that supports students' success in higher education as many graduates' view education as equipping them for a life of financial independence and tackling challenging social, political, and cultural issues. In light of this, India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) seeks to enhance teacher preparation, career education, and holistic learning in order to change India's educational system and create a more equitable and inclusive future. This paper investigates India's NEP for graduate education's transforming power and its consequences for empowering graduate students' academic and professional paths. By critically examining the policy's key higher education-related clauses, this study finds possibilities and obstacles in building a more complete, flexible, and globally competitive graduate education system. The paper investigates how graduate students' experiences and results may be shaped by the NEP's focus on multidisciplinary education, research culture, faculty development, and internationalisation. It also offers strategic implementation frameworks to connect institutional practices with policy intentions, therefore aiming to create well-rounded graduates ready for the changing needs of industry, academia, and society.

Keywords: *National Education Policy 2020, Graduate Education, Multidisciplinary Education, Academic Research, Professional Development, Higher Education Reform.*

Introduction

India's rich educational history has been significantly shaped by the legacy of the ancient universities of Nalanda and Taxila, which were important hubs of learning for thousands of years (Ayyar, 2018). However, the Gurukul system, which offered thorough interdisciplinary education (Mishra & Aithal, 2023), was the public education model used in ancient India (In fact, it was a residential system in which students lived and studied under the guidance of a guru rather than a public education model in the contemporary sense). The British colonial era introduced a formal education system focusing on English and Western knowledge (Bansal, 2017). The Charter Act of 1813 and Wood's Dispatch Act

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facilitated modern education, promoting private institutions and girls' education (Pratheesh, 2024). Post-independence, India expanded access, established universities, and promoted scientific research, focusing on indigenous knowledge systems and liberal arts education for holistic youth development (Ghosh, 2002). India implemented several National Education Policies since independence, aiming for free and compulsory education, socialism, democracy, and secularism, and modernizing the education system with inclusive education and flexible examinations.

The NEP 2020 is such a significant document aims to transform the Indian education system by addressing challenges of access, equity, quality, and relevance (Govinda, 2020). Since it was introduced, it has been clear that it is one of the most important aspects of the Indian educational system. In fact, the strategy takes the method of applying and separating all Indian educational ideals together. Graduate students benefit greatly from this specific approach in terms of their education. Professional competencies research skills, and specialised knowledge were gained at graduate school. In fact, Indian graduate programs were previously attacked for their theoretical emphasis and flexibility rather than their practical methods and for limiting students' access to real-world experience (Heleta, 2016). In fact, this tends to create an imbalance between students and teachers. Academic libraries, particularly graduate school libraries, are essential in helping graduate students become better students and better individuals, as is seen not just in the current situation. In addition to serving as repositories of conventional knowledge, academic libraries in India serve as a source of implicit, explicit, and tacit knowledge for both teachers and students.

NEP seeks to promote instructional excellence, institutional autonomy, and flexible research integration through a variety of reforms (Kaur, 2024). The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how these rules might affect graduate students' academic and professional lives. There were certain challenges in implementing new structures and approaches in the previous Indian higher education system. The NEP frameworks give pupils a wide range of opportunities to succeed. In order to help teachers, students, and education administrators move from an outdated viewpoint to a new one that offers tangible advantages, this study aims to provide insights (Asif & Singh, 2022).

This study explores the role of academic libraries in India's educational evolution, focusing on the tension between tradition and modernization. It examines how these libraries are redefining their roles as active enablers of policy-driven reforms, bridging theory-practice divides, and acting as policy amplifiers. The research uses mixed-methods analysis to evaluate how libraries can transform policy rhetoric into actionable frameworks for student empowerment. It also explores how libraries foster policy-responsive skill development and address systemic barriers through strategies like decentralized resource allocation and librarian-led mentorship programs.

Research methodology

This study utilises qualitative content analysis of the National Education Policy 2020 document, concentrating on aspects pertaining to higher education, graduate degrees, research, and professional development (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, n.d.). The analysis is enhanced by a comparative examination of pertinent literature about global graduate education reform, exemplary practices in graduate student development, and theoretical frameworks for educational policy implementation.

- How do the NEP's provisions address existing challenges in graduate education in India?
- What specific mechanisms does the policy propose for enhancing graduate students' academic and professional development?
- What implementation challenges can be anticipated, and how might they be addressed?
- How does the policy align with or diverge from global trends in graduate education reform?

NEP 2020: key provisions Impacting Graduate Education

The National Education Policy 2020 in India aims to develop learners' respect for constitutional values, national pride, and accountability in a changing world. The policy proposes a five + three + three + four pattern for the school system, including Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age three. The schooling system will shift from regular to summative assessment, with AI-based software tracking students' growth. The NEP also aims to improve rural schools' service environment, address the digital divide, and provide local housing and allowances for teachers (Rajeev, 2023). The policy will also incentivize outstanding teachers through a merit-based structure of tenure, promotion, and salary. By 2030, teacher education will move into multidisciplinary colleges and universities, with a minimum degree qualification of a 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree. The policy emphasizes the importance of continuous reform and reworking to meet societal needs.

Restructuring graduate programs

The NEP 2020 proposed significant reforms to graduate education through concepts such as multiple admission and departure points, a credit transfer system, and an academic credit bank. Section 11.9 of the policy stipulates that higher education institutions would evolve into a more practice-oriented and adaptable framework, allowing students to design their own academic and co-curricular pursuits.

This freedom enables graduate students to augment autonomy in their educational proficiency, personal interests, and professional ambitions. The availability of research-focused master's degree programmes will cater to academically motivated students and those pursuing professional

advancement. The organised adaptability responds to persistent critiques of the uniform paradigm of graduate education in India.

Multidisciplinary education

Multi-display education is seen as a vital tool for the National Education Policy (NEP). By 2030, it is expected that all higher education institutions would evolve into multifunctional entities, hence enhancing student enrolment (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, n.d.). The shift from segregated discipline programmes to an integrated learning environment fosters wider intellectual views and transferable skills for students. Multidisciplinary methodologies are essential for education, especially in library and information science. Information workers excel at the intersection of diverse knowledge domains, training, experience, and transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries. Interdisciplinary training is essential for librarians supporting the research requirements of users.

The establishment of comprehensive multi-disability higher education institutions and integrated multidisciplinary teaching and research entities will enable graduate students to engage with various information domains and methodological frameworks. The integration of interdisciplinary courses will notably aid students in addressing complex societal concerns and transcending traditional limitations.

Research and innovation focus

The national education policy regards research as a fundamental component of graduate education and aims to cultivate a robust research environment. It requires the establishment of a National Research Foundation to fund outstanding researchers and aggressively promote research in universities and other higher education organisations (Nic, n.d.). This offers significant benefits for graduate students by furnishing them with sponsored research opportunities and poster assistance in surgical environments. An unacademic library serves as a crucial hub for aiding research through digital reporting tools, research data management services, and bibliometric analysis. Their prompt focus allows academic libraries to strengthen their roles as research collaborators instead than mere data providers. The program indicates that higher education institutions will prioritise research and innovation by creating centres and technology hubs where graduate students can transform their academic expertise into practical applications and entrepreneurial ventures. These regulations address a global trend in entrepreneurship and research that will effectively assist students in understanding a knowledge-based economy.

Faculty development and teaching quality

The NEP supports comprehensive faculty development initiatives, recognising that teacher quality will profoundly influence graduate student development. The policy requires that all new recruits receive comprehensive mentorship in teaching and research from a senior faculty member throughout their induction

training. This training and membership guarantee an enhanced educational experience for graduate students. The need for faculty development in implementing student-centred learning approaches in grassed education is essential (Kulal et al., 2024). The educational training of activities will impact graduate students' growth of critical thinking and research skills.

Internationalisation of higher education

The NEP promotes the globalisation by facilitating high-performing Indian universities to establish campuses abroad, while also permitting chosen universities from the top 100 globally to operate within India. These projects provide graduate students with possibilities for global exposure, cross-cultural collaboration, and international networking without the requirement of studying abroad. Globalisation influences academic library services and collections, indicating that libraries must adjust to accommodate the growing diversity of student populations with worldwide information requirements (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022). Academic libraries are establishing specialised services for overseas graduate students, such as multilingual reference support and culturally tolerant environments.

The policy promotes research and teaching collaborations, as well as faculty and student exchanges with esteemed foreign institutions, thereby broadening graduate students' perspectives beyond national borders.

Empowering graduate students' academic trajectories

Empowering graduate students entails increasing self-awareness, guiding career decisions, and giving tools for navigating academics and beyond. This encompasses employment exploration, skill evaluation, goal planning, self-reflection, mentoring and support, encouraging a growth mindset, recognizing triumphs, developing resilience, and lifelong learning. This study discusses the subject in light of the discussion headings such as cultivating research competencies, foster critical thinking and problem-solving, promote academic mobility and flexibility, and expand digital learning opportunities (Nic, n.d.).

Cultivating research competencies

The NEP strategy promotes various opportunities for students to cultivate advanced research skills by integrating research experience into graduate programs and creating specialised higher education institutions. Academic libraries serve as significant partners in the development of research competencies. Academic libraries in India are enhancing their roles to encompass advanced information literacy, systematic review methodologies, and research data management competencies, which are increasingly vital for graduate students.

Academic libraries are evolving by assuming new roles to support digital teaching, digital scholarship, and computational research methodologies. The

planned National Research Foundation establishes a systematic framework for facilitating graduate research through scholarships and grants, as well as enhancing research infrastructure (Lee, 2022). Soma Academy implements these strategies to transform students' research experiences from marginal to substantial, enhancing their intellectual talents and productivity.

Fostering critical thinking and problem-solving

When it comes to core education goals, the National Education Policy (NEP) places a sustainable emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. A significant realignment with contemporary educational theory is required in order to make the transition from content-oriented education to competency-based learning for graduate students (Varma et al., 2021). When there is an emphasis placed on critical thinking and practical research applications in graduate students' coursework, it is clear that the analytical abilities of these individuals experience a significant and exponential growth. While this is true, it is also true that it is far superior to traditional graduate programs. This technique encourages enhanced discovery-based debate and analysis for the purpose of achieving optimal learning, which results in a significant improvement in the degree to which graduate students are able to fully absorb passive knowledge. A further benefit of the policy is that it assists kids in developing their intellectual talents as well as their cognitive capacities.

Promoting academic mobility and flexibility

The National Education Policy (NEP) has proposed the concept of an academic bank of credits, which will transform graduate education by allowing students to independently navigate their educational journeys of study. Through the use of this method, students are able to transfer credits from one institution to another, so enabling them to create a more flexible and individualised path for themselves in their aspirations (Brenton & Tury, 2021). The provision of portable digital access privileges, networked reference services, and interoperable institutional repositories are all ways in which academic libraries can contribute to the growth of this philosophy. Through the utilisation of these infrastructures, students are able to maintain a balance between their research talents and the research resources that are available to them. This concept also takes into account the benefits of having a graduation program that is adaptable. Ask the policy indicates that students will be given the option to change their learning routes midway according to their aspiration and convenience, which demonstrates the non-linear nature of the new educational policy. This flexibility will be granted to students through the policy.

Expanding digital learning opportunities

The NEP includes a plan for the development of digital infrastructure, online courses, and virtual laboratories. This proposal demonstrates the potential for technological advancement in higher education and demonstrates the potential for technological advancement. The provisions of Section 24.4 clearly indicate

that “the building of digital infrastructure, digital content, and capacity building took care of the e-education needs of both the school and higher education (Nic, n.d.).” The provision of virtual reference services and the incorporation of electronic resource licences are two of the most important ways in which academic libraries contribute to the support of digital and hybrid learning models (Antony Michael, 2025). Academic libraries are equipped with a technologically advanced infrastructure that considerably improves the graduate experience for students. This is accomplished by encouraging students to participate in online learning and the use of digital materials. In addition to facilitating increased academic collaboration amongst a variety of other higher education institutions, it is obvious that providing graduate students with access to specialised courses at a decisive expense also helps to increase (Muralidharan et al., 2022). The National Education Policy (NEP) includes regulations that demonstrate a commitment to technology-enabled learning and training, which assists graduate students in gaining access to digital professional environments.

Enhancing professional trajectories

Higher education and job preparedness are increasingly focusing on graduate students’ journey from academic study to career fulfilment. The shift from academic instruction to professional fulfilment is complicated since innovation and multidisciplinary teamwork are valued in global markets. This alignment is hampered by systemic obstacles such as the “publish-or-perish” mentality, unequal access to resources for professional growth, and broken industry-academia ties. The article talks about institutional mentoring and other policy changes as ways to empower graduate students.

Industry-academia partnerships

The National Education Policy (NEP) recommends that there should be a stronger interaction between educational institutions and partners in related industries. Establishing research box technology incubators and industrial clusters that will promote active academic-industry collaboration is one of the goals of this program, which encourages higher education institutions to form a network. This network will be established with the assistance of these industry partners. Students will have the option to participate in internships and joint projects, as well as mentorship programs with industry professionals, as a result of these activities, which will provide them with a great professional development opportunity (Carroll & Mallon, 2021). Through the provision of specialised information services and competitive intelligence resources, academic library scans serve as a central location that facilitates communication between the academic world and the business world. The engagement of graduate students in the library results in an improvement in both the quality and productivity of the joint research items that they produce. Students who are pursuing a career path should be required to do so; this concept has the potential to significantly boost the likelihood that they will achieve their goals.

Entrepreneurship and innovation capabilities

It is a particularly noteworthy feature of the National Education Policy (NEP) that it takes into account entrepreneurship as a potential career route (Tholath et al., 2021). This is because the policy encourages educational institutions to devise a system that would assist students in returning to their studies after they have dropped out. Additionally, this policy ought to make it possible for students to move from one educational establishment to another, as well as to continue their studies after taking a sabbatical. The pupils are able to follow through with their entrepreneurial initiatives with the assistance of this clause, and the teacher's likelihood of leaving formal education is reduced. Academic libraries have the ability to establish a robust environment for entrepreneurial endeavours by providing specific services, as well as tools and initiatives. College and university libraries have the ability to establish business resource centres, maker spaces, and innovation hubs that cater to the requirements of graduate students. A new generation of knowledge-based entrepreneurs is being encouraged by the strategy that focuses on innovation start-up incubation. This approach sends us and makes it possible to provide coordinated help to graduate students who have ambitions of starting their own businesses.

Developing transferable skills

It is commendable that libraries play a role in fostering the development of multidisciplinary research carried out by graduate students. Students are able to develop the ability to transfer their skills to a much more holistic aspect when they participate in learning that is both comprehensive and inter-respiratory, as suggested by the National Education Policy (NEP). Communication, discussion, and debate are identified as essential abilities for the growth of education, as well as their skills, according to the policy. Because the development of good transferable abilities requires intentional integration in graduate studies rather than additional workshops, this is in contrast to the situation. Graduate programmes that incorporated communication, teamwork, and leadership development within the framework of disciplinary course sets have been seen to create graduates who are more professionally adaptable. The deliberate nursing of 21st-century competencies like collaboration, teamwork, ethical reasoning, and digital literacy would be successfully and gradually emphasised through the use of graduate courses that are related to the NEP framework.

International competitiveness

It is necessary to do so to align the standards of higher education in India with those of the rest of the world in order to increase the quality of education and the contextual relevance of Indian education. This program places an emphasis on a global and international perspective in order to prepare graduates for participation in a government that is both progressive and professional on a global scale. Through their role as a central location for the dissemination of global resources, the provision of training in cross-cultural communication, and the facilitation of international collaboration, academic libraries contribute to the

progression of internationalisation (Brenton & Tury, 2021). This facet of the libraries contributes to the entire nature of the student experience, which in turn enables students to engage with a wide range of academics, researchers, and faculty members hailing from a number of higher education institutions across the world. Explore the extensive library resources that are specifically designed for graduate students who are prepared to work in international professional environments. There is little doubt that the reforms proposed by NEP have the potential to improve the qualifications and capabilities of graduate students who are looking for funding and authorisation to pursue higher education overseas, thereby bringing them in line with global norms.

Implementation challenges and recommendations

The article highlights the challenges faced by graduate education in aligning with modern labour market realities, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary, innovation-driven, and skill-diverse competencies. The National Education Policy aspires to improve graduate education efficiency and industrial links, but implementation gaps might exacerbate quality difficulties. Regional resource centres, faculty development programs, research infrastructure investments, and quality assurance systems are required. The specifics are discussed below.

Institutional capacity building

Despite the fact that the NEP presents an ambitious vision for graduate education, the successful execution of this vision is contingent on the readiness of the institutions. It is necessary for the majority of universities and other institutions of higher education to possess both the experience and the organisational agility necessary to successfully execute policy reforms (Pawan, 2020). Under the circumstances that now exist, a strategy that involves gradual implementation, in conjunction with support that is focused on capacity-building for institutions, will facilitate sustainable transformation most effectively. There is a significant amount of variation in the degree to which institutions are prepared to implement the NEP, particularly in institutions that are limited in their resources and where capacity gaps are most noticeable. It is concerning that there is a possibility that implementation gaps will make the existing discrepancies in the quality of crystal education even more pronounced. It is recommended that regional resource centres be established with the purpose of providing assistance to educational institutions in the implementation of NEP rules that are applicable to graduate education. These centres would also provide assistance, faculty development, and example curriculum.

Faculty preparation and development

It is widely acknowledged that the establishment of faculty training and development programs is an essential component of graduate education. The objective of the NEP for graduate education is to ensure that faculty members are able to process research on advanced instructional methods in order to

maximise efficiency and industrial linkages. In spite of this, numerous institutions continue to face limitations in terms of the systematic growth of faculty in these areas. In this new era of education, it is important to adhere to both advanced technological techniques and advanced methodologies. On the other hand, Cundam says faculty development activities in Indian higher education have been focusing on generic pedagogical talents rather than the specific competencies that are required for research mentorship and instruction at the graduate level. In this context, the recommendation is to establish a comprehensive faculty development initiative with a focus on graduate education. This initiative should include the provision of workshops, seminars, and other training programmes that will assist in the composition of pedagogical training for research supervision, international teaching methodology, and strategies for industrial collaboration.

Resource allocation and funding models

There are a number of components of the National Education Policy that are designed to improve graduate education. These components will require significant investments in research infrastructure and digital resources, in addition to faculty. Many of these components, on the other hand, will amount to little more than a vision if suitable financial mechanisms are not put into place. Research-intensive graduate education often requires approximately two and a half times the amount of funds that is typically allocated to each student in a regular graduate school. Considering the levels of research and innovation that the NEP predicts would be required, the funding levels that are currently available would not be sufficient to support such levels. Establishing differentials in funding models for graduate education that take into account the various resource requirements of research-intensive graduate education while maintaining a balance between equity in access to resources for participation and possible engagement of students from all socio-economic groups is a recommendation.

Quality assurance mechanisms

The NEP framework is causing graduate programs to become more diverse and flexible, which will make it increasingly difficult to maintain quality assurance standards. In order to evaluate multidisciplinary programs, research integration, and industry participation in an effective manner, the quality assurance methods that are now in use might not be sufficient. There is a substantial divergence between the existing quality assurance metrics that are relevant to NEP priorities and the accrediting schemes that are currently in use in higher education in India. It is not possible for the existing quality assurance frameworks to effectively take into consideration the characteristics of graduate programs that are focused on research and involve multiple disciplines. Instead of focusing on procedural or standardised input measurements, it is recommended that individualised accrediting standards and procedures be developed for graduate-

level education. These should be centred on educational results, research quality, and professional relevance.

Libraries: from archives to active learning ecosystems

Libraries, once synonymous with silent aisles of printed books and guarded repositories of knowledge, are undergoing a radical transformation. In the context of India's NEP 2020, which envisions a "holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary" education system, libraries are emerging as dynamic hubs for innovation, collaboration, and career readiness. For graduate students, this evolution represents a paradigm shift: libraries are no longer mere study spaces but strategic partners in bridging academic rigor with professional and societal demands (Carroll & Mallon, 2021). This essay explores how libraries are redefining their roles to align with the NEP's objectives, empowering graduate scholars to navigate the complexities of modern academia and the workforce.

Academic libraries need to transform into dynamic learning centres that are able to respond to the requirements of various curricula and enable collaborative research for NEP's goal of a multidisciplinary education structure. Libraries could actively curate resources across disciplines in order to develop understanding and connections across different areas of study for graduate students (Govinda, 2020). This would be an alternative to libraries becoming static repositories of books with no change. This will provide students with the opportunity to engage in critical thinking and find solutions to problems from a range of perspectives, which is in line with the National Education Policy's goal to provide a holistic education. Through the provision of access to subject-specific databases, open educational resources (OER), and interactive digital tools, libraries will assist in empowering students to circumvent the conventional limitations of knowledge. A further benefit of expanding the role of librarians as educational collaborators and research mentors is that it will enable students to have priority access to the vast knowledge ecosystem that is necessary for both academic and professional achievement.

The NEP's focus on business, research, and innovation calls for a robust academic infrastructure; libraries are fundamental in this regard. Graduate students doing original research require access to digital repositories, routes for academic communication, and sophisticated bibliometric tools. Being a key component of the research continuum, academic libraries can be customised to allow methodical literature reviews, research data management, and even grant proposal writing assistance. Investments in digital scholarship centres, research commons, and library-based makerspaces create venues for when theory meets practice. Universities may help the NEP's goal of building a knowledge-driven economy, driven by competent, research-minded graduates, by matching library services with institutional research goals.

A significant obstacle in implementing the NEP is ensuring that every student, regardless of their origin or background, have access to quality educational

resources. Libraries can address this issue by integrating through online platforms and local resource hubs (Ashokkumar et al., 2025). This approach ensures that all individuals have equal access to high-quality academic resources. Free online libraries, accessible archives, and collaborative libraries ensure that even graduate students from financially constrained institutions are not excluded. Furthermore, libraries facilitate student transitions across educational institutions by endorsing systems that enable credit transfers and promoting lifelong learning. They accomplish this by establishing selected learning pathways and instructing individuals on how to locate and utilise information. In the evolving landscape of education, libraries are emerging as significant catalysts for change. They are democratising knowledge, fostering inclusivity, and enabling lifelong learning for individuals. These concepts are fundamental to the objectives of the National Education Policy.

Conclusion

India's National Education Policy (NEP) aims to align graduate education with the demands of a rapidly evolving knowledge economy. However, achieving these goals requires addressing systemic challenges like institutional resistance to curricular flexibility and gaps in infrastructure. The policy focuses on multidisciplinary education, aiming for all higher education institutions to become multifunctional entities by 2030. It also emphasizes research, innovation, critical thinking, academic mobility, and digital learning. The policy encourages industry-academia partnerships, entrepreneurship, and resilience. However, it faces challenges in integrating with modern labour market realities. To address these issues, regional resource centres should be established to support NEP rules, faculty development programs, and research infrastructure investments. Academic libraries should become dynamic learning centres, catering to various curricula and enabling collaborative research. They should curate resources across disciplines, foster critical thinking, and provide access to subject-specific databases, open educational resources, and interactive digital tools. Libraries should also facilitate methodical literature reviews, research data management, and grant proposal writing assistance. They should integrate through online platforms and local resource hubs for equal access to quality educational resources.

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Assessing local governance through Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in India with special reference to Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, serves as a multidimensional tool to evaluate the progress of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through nine thematic areas. This study assesses the efficacy of PAI in measuring local governance across India, with a focused analysis on Himachal Pradesh. Utilizing data from the PAI Portal for the year 2022–23, the paper examines national trends, state-specific performances, and the unique challenges faced by tribal regions and aspirational districts like Chamba. The findings highlight the strengths and areas for improvement in local governance structures, offering insights into the role of PAI as a catalyst for decentralized development and effective SDG localization.

Keywords: *Panchayat Advancement Index, Sustainable Development Goals, Local Governance, Himachal Pradesh, Gram Panchayats.*

Introduction

Local governance is fundamental to decentralized democracy, ensuring that decision-making and development are rooted in local realities and community participation. It empowers citizens to influence policies affecting their daily lives and enhances accountability and transparency at the grassroots level (World Bank, 2020). In India, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment institutionalized local self-governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), enabling decentralized planning, resource allocation, and service delivery. Strengthening local governance promotes inclusive development and bridges the gap between the state and its citizens, reinforcing democratic values and improving the effectiveness of public administration (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022). Governance in Panchayati Raj is crucial because it decentralizes authority and empowers local communities to actively participate in their own development. By transferring decision-making closer to the grassroots level, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) ensure that governance becomes more responsive to local needs and challenges. Moreover, the integration of tools like the Panchayat Devolution Index and the e-Gram Swaraj platform strengthens

accountability and transparency by tracking progress, promoting digital monitoring, and enhancing administrative efficiency (Kumar, 2025).

Gram Panchayats, being closest to the people, play a vital role in localizing SDGs for achievement by 2030. Their effective functioning requires empowerment, infrastructure, manpower, and revenue incentives as per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (Kumar and Sharma, 2023). Panchayats can significantly advance SDGs like poverty reduction, water, sanitation, and education. However, doubts remain about whether integrating SDGs into panchayat planning will yield effective outcomes (Down To Earth, 2022 October 13). The National Panchayat Awards started with the aim to recognize Panchayats' role in rural socio-economic development and inspire best practices for inclusive, sustainable growth. Since 2022, they follow a multi-tiered structure aligned with the Localization of SDGs (LSDGs), evaluating performance from Block to National level (Press Information Bureau, 2024, April 24).

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural development

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the cornerstone of rural governance in India, playing a vital role in planning and implementing development programs at the village level. Empowered by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, PRIs function as decentralized units responsible for executing schemes related to agriculture, education, health, sanitation, and women and child development (GOI, 1993). They facilitate participatory governance through Gram Sabhas, where citizens collectively deliberate on developmental priorities. PRIs also prepare and implement Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), aligning local needs with broader developmental goals. Their proximity to the rural population allows for responsive governance and effective delivery of public services. PRIs act as agents of change, especially for marginalized groups, by ensuring representation through reservation policies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women. Thus, they are instrumental in promoting social justice, economic development, and grassroots democracy (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2023; UNDP India, 2021).

Emergence of PAI as a tool for measuring panchayat performance

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) emerged as an innovative framework developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to assess and benchmark the performance of Gram Panchayats across India. Introduced in 2022, PAI is aligned with the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), covering nine thematic areas such as poverty alleviation, education, gender equity, and environmental sustainability (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022). It aims to encourage evidence-based planning, transparency, and healthy competition among Panchayats by categorizing them into performance tiers. PAI facilitates data-driven governance and supports targeted interventions to improve service delivery and achieve holistic rural development.

Purpose of the study and focus on Himachal Pradesh

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of local governance through the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), with a specific focus on Himachal Pradesh. As a hilly state with unique geographical and socio-economic characteristics, Himachal Pradesh presents a diverse landscape for evaluating Panchayat performance and SDG localization. The paper examines how the state's Gram Panchayats are performing on various PAI themes, especially in tribal and aspirational districts like Chamba. By analyzing PAI data, the study seeks to identify strengths, challenges, and areas for policy intervention to strengthen grassroots governance and inclusive development in the state (PAI Portal, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2023).

Overview of SDGs adopted by India

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda, comprise 17 global goals aimed at eradicating poverty, ensuring quality education, promoting gender equality, ensuring clean water and sanitation, and fostering peace and justice, among others. India, as a signatory, has committed to achieving these goals by 2030 and has actively integrated them into its national development agenda. The NITI Aayog, India's apex policy think tank, has been entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating SDG implementation across central ministries and states (NITI Aayog, 2023).

India developed the SDG India Index, a tool to measure state-wise progress, thereby promoting competitive and cooperative federalism. The government has also aligned flagship schemes like Swachh Bharat Mission, Ayushman Bharat, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao with relevant SDGs (UNDP India, 2021). Furthermore, there has been a strong push toward the localization of these goals to ensure last-mile delivery and grassroots participation. Recognizing the crucial role of local institutions in this endeavor, India has launched frameworks such as the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) to evaluate and strengthen performance at the Gram Panchayat level, thus making SDG implementation more inclusive, accountable, and data-driven (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022).

Role of local institutions in achieving SDGs

Local institutions such as Gram Panchayats (GPs) serve as critical vehicles for realizing the SDGs at the grassroots. Being the first point of contact between citizens and governance structures, GPs are uniquely positioned to identify local needs, prioritize development interventions, and ensure efficient utilization of resources. They are instrumental in implementing schemes related to poverty reduction, education, healthcare, sanitation, water conservation, and gender empowerment—many of which are directly aligned with the SDG targets (UNDP India, 2020). Through decentralized planning mechanisms like Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), local institutions ensure participatory governance and tailor national goals to fit local contexts. With tools like the

Mission Antyodaya Survey and PAI, local governments can track their performance and initiate evidence-based actions. Hence, the active involvement of Panchayats not only accelerates SDG progress but also fosters democratic decentralization, accountability, and sustainable rural development (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2023).

Relevance of SDG localization at gram panchayat level

Localization of SDGs involves translating global objectives into actionable goals at the local level, particularly within Gram Panchayats (GPs). This is essential because over 60% of India's population resides in rural areas, where GPs are responsible for delivering basic services and development initiatives (MoPR, 2022). Many SDGs—such as those related to clean water (Goal 6), education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), and climate action (Goal 13) are best addressed at the grassroots level, where their outcomes directly impact people's lives. The PAI framework, introduced by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, operationalizes this localization by assessing performance across nine themes aligned with the SDGs, such as "Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village" and "Healthy Village." Each Panchayat is evaluated based on 577 indicators, allowing for data-driven planning, community involvement, and targeted resource allocation (PAI Portal, 2023).

Localization ensures that development is inclusive, equitable, and participatory, integrating traditional knowledge, local priorities, and democratic processes. It also enables better tracking of outcomes and fosters horizontal learning among Panchayats through competitive benchmarking. Therefore, localizing SDGs at the GP level transforms the ambitious global agenda into a people-centred rural development strategy, reinforcing the core principles of decentralization and good governance (UNDP India, 2021; NITI Aayog, 2023).

Concept of SDG localization: global to local translation

Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to the process of translating global development goals into local-level action by adapting them to the context, needs, and priorities of sub-national governments and communities. While SDGs are global in ambition, their successful implementation heavily depends on actions at the local level, especially in a diverse and federal country like India (UNDP India, 2021). Localization involves aligning policies, planning processes, budgeting, and monitoring mechanisms at the village and Panchayat levels with SDG targets. This "global to local" translation ensures that development initiatives are people-centric, inclusive, and tailored to ground realities, thus making the SDGs actionable and measurable at the grassroots (NITI Aayog, 2023).

The emphasis on localization recognizes that Gram Panchayats, as the closest governance institutions to the people, are crucial for mobilizing communities, delivering basic services, and ensuring accountability. Localization also fosters ownership of development goals among local stakeholders and enhances

transparency in implementation, thereby accelerating progress toward sustainable development.

How PAI aligns SDGs with 9 thematic areas

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is a composite framework launched by MoPR to measure Gram Panchayat performance across nine thematic areas of LSDGs, each of which corresponds to one or more SDGs. These themes encapsulate the core components of rural development, providing a structured roadmap for the localization of SDGs (PAI Portal, 2023). Each thematic area comprises disaggregated indicators (total 577), enabling GPs to measure their development performance against national SDG targets. PAI's categorization of Panchayats into five performance tiers—Achiever, Front Runner, Performer, Aspirant, and Beginner—promotes benchmarking, peer learning, and evidence-based decision-making.

The Mission Antyodaya Survey is a pivotal data collection initiative used to assess village-level deprivation and developmental status, forming the empirical foundation for evidence-based planning at the Panchayat level. Conducted annually, it captures critical indicators related to infrastructure, livelihoods, health, sanitation, and governance (Ministry of Rural Development, 2022). These insights feed into the PAI dashboard, enabling real-time tracking and ranking of Panchayats.

Participatory planning is central to SDG localization. Through Gram Sabhas, local communities, including marginalized groups, are involved in identifying priority needs and monitoring implementation. This democratic mechanism fosters transparency, inclusivity, and accountability, ensuring that development plans reflect grassroots aspirations. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is the formal output of this participatory planning process. GPDPs align local needs with SDG targets, ensuring that national commitments are grounded in village-level realities. Supported by the People's Plan Campaign, GPDPs promote convergence of multiple schemes and rational allocation of resources, making them the core planning tool for rural SDG implementation (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2023).

PAI: tracking development progress at village level

India effectively monitors its progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at both national and grassroots levels through the synergistic application of the SDG India Index and the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), with PAI 2.0 representing a significant evolution. Launched by NITI Aayog in 2018, the SDG India Index evaluates all States and Union Territories (UTs) using priority indicators across SDGs, generating a composite score that fosters competitive and cooperative federalism to drive national development (NITI Aayog, 2018). Complementing this, the Panchayat Advancement Index, released by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on April 9, 2025, for FY 2022-23,

assesses over 2.16 lakh Gram Panchayats on 516 local indicators spanning nine Localized Sustainable Development Goal (LSDG) themes, enabling evidence-based planning at the village level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a). Building on this foundation, PAI 2.0, launched on May 26, 2025, for FY 2023-24, streamlines the framework by reducing indicators by 72% (from 516 to 147) and data points by 71% (from 794 to 227), enhancing data quality, usability, and real-time governance capabilities (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025b). Together, these mechanisms create a robust, multi-level monitoring system that ensures inclusive and sustainable development across India. The present paper utilizes data shared by PAI 1.0 to highlight grassroots progress.

PAI: concept and methodology background and rationale of PAI

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is a performance evaluation framework designed to assess the developmental status and governance quality of Gram Panchayats (GPs) across India. Introduced in 2022, the PAI aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and evidence-based planning at the grassroots level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj [MoPR], 2022). The rationale behind developing PAI stems from the need to align local governance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that global goals translate into local actions. While multiple flagship schemes have focused on specific sectors (such as sanitation or livelihood), PAI serves as an integrated monitoring tool that enables a holistic evaluation of Panchayats' contributions across thematic development areas.

By assessing Panchayats using objective data, the index enables benchmarking, identifies gaps in service delivery, and promotes competitive federalism at the third tier of governance. It encourages states and Panchayats to adopt data-driven governance, plan more effectively, and strengthen democratic decentralization in rural India (NITI Aayog, 2023).

PAI developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) launched the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in 2025 for the year 2022-23 as part of its broader commitment to localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Local Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) framework. The PAI has been developed in collaboration with experts from various ministries, research organizations, and civil society stakeholders. It represents a significant policy intervention by the Union Government to institutionalize performance assessment of Panchayats using measurable indicators. The index operates through a digital portal <https://pai.gov.in>, which allows for real-time data entry, visualization, and analysis.

9 Thematic areas covering 17 SDGs and 577 indicators

The PAI framework comprises 9 thematic areas which are covered under LSDGs, each aligned with one or more Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These themes serve as the operational pillars for measuring Panchayat-level development:

LSDSs Thematic area and aligned Sustainable Development Goals

S.No.	LSDGs Thematic Area	Aligned SDG(s)
1.	Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Village	SDG 1 – No Poverty. SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
2.	Healthy Village	SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being
3.	Child-Friendly Village	SDG 4 – Quality Education SDG 5 – Gender Equality
4.	Water-Sufficient Village	SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation
5.	Clean and Green Village	SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation SDG 13 – Climate Action SDG 15 – Life on Land
6.	Self-Sufficient Infrastructure Village	SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
7.	Socially Just and Gender-Sensitive Village	SDG 5 – Gender Equality SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
8.	Village with Good Governance	SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
9.	Digitally Literate Village	SDG 4 – Quality Education SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Together, these themes encompass all 17 SDGs, ensuring holistic development at the grassroots. A total of 577 indicators are used to capture progress under these themes. These indicators span multiple dimensions such as health service availability, access to education, household electrification, water resource management, sanitation coverage, livelihood generation, and digital literacy (PAI Portal, 2023). The comprehensive nature of the index ensures that no area of rural governance is overlooked.

Data collection methodology: self-reporting and state validation

The data for PAI is primarily collected through self-reporting by Panchayats using the PAI portal, supported by trained Panchayat functionaries and data entry operators. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the self-reported data undergoes validation at the state level by respective State Panchayati Raj Departments and line departments. Further, to enhance data reliability, the Ministry has encouraged convergence with existing surveys and databases such as the Mission Antyodaya Survey, eGramSwaraj, and Swachh Bharat Mission-

Gramin (SBM-G). A multi-tier validation process, including district-level scrutiny, ensures transparency and limits data manipulation. This model empowers local governments while maintaining centralized oversight, ensuring a balance between autonomy and accountability (MoPR, 2022).

Scoring and classification: achiever to beginner

Based on the data submitted and validated, each Panchayat is assigned a composite score across the nine themes. Panchayats are then classified into five performance categories:

Table 1: PAI Classification based on score range

Category	Score Range (%)	Grade	Remarks
Achiever	> 90	A+	Highest-performing Panchayats
Front Runner	71 – 90	A	Panchayats showing strong progress
Performer	51 – 70	B	Moderate performance with improvement
Aspirant	31 – 50	C	Needs significant development
Beginner	≤ 30	D	At initial stage of development

Source: PAI, 2023

This tiered classification is intended to promote competitive learning and peer benchmarking. High-performing Panchayats (Achievers and Front Runners) serve as role models, while those in the lower tiers receive targeted handholding and policy support. The ranking helps identify developmental bottlenecks, prioritize interventions, and allocate resources more effectively. Additionally, this system fosters horizontal learning and encourages innovations in grassroots governance.

Theme-wise performance of gram panchayats in PAI at national level

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) is an important tool for assessing the progress of India's 2.16 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) toward Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) across nine thematic areas, as introduced by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2025. Table 2 presents theme-wise scores of GPs at the national level, categorizing performance into grades (A+ to D) and highlighting overall development trends. By quantifying achievements in areas like poverty alleviation, health, and governance, this table underscores the role of PAI in fostering evidence-based planning and competitive development at the grassroots, aligning local efforts with national SDG objectives.

Table 2: Theme-wise scores of gram panchayats (GPs) at national level in PAI

Grade	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7	Theme 8	Theme 9	Overall
A+ (Achiever)	0.0% (0)	77.6% (1,67,837)	1.5% (3,244)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
A (Front Runner)	0.8% (1,730)	10.8% (23,359)	81.9% (1,77,137)	0.3% (649)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.9% (1,946)	0.2% (433)	0.3% (699)
B (Performer)	60.6% (131,069)	10.8% (23,359)	16.8% (36,336)	28.7% (62,074)	0.7% (1,514)	0.6% (1,297)	36.1% (78,079)	44.1% (95,382)	47.9% (1,03,601)	35.8% (77,298)
C (Aspirant)	38.5% (83,270)	0.8% (1,730)	0.1% (216)	69.7% (1,50,751)	50.3% (1,08,791)	65.9% (142,532)	63.9% (1,38,206)	49.1% (1,06,196)	51.0% (1,10,305)	61.2% (1,32,392)
D (Beginner)	0.1% (216)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (2,811)	49.0% (1,05,980)	33.5% (72,456)	0.0% (0)	5.9% (12,761)	0.9% (1,946)	2.7% (5,896)
Total GPs	216,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285	2,16,285

Source: Dashboard, PAI.

Note: *Theme 1:* Poverty Free & Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat, *Theme 2:* Healthy Panchayat, *Theme 3:* Child Friendly Panchayat, *Theme 4:* Water Sufficient Panchayat, *Theme 5:* Clean and Green Panchayat, *Theme 6:* Self-sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayat, *Theme 7:* Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat, *Theme 8:* Panchayat with Good Governance, *Theme 9:* Women Friendly Panchayat.

The Theme-Wise Scores of Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the national level, based on the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) for FY 2022-23, offer a comprehensive view of the performance of 216,285 GPs across nine key themes as of June 07, 2025, revealing stark contrasts in rural governance. Theme 1 (Poverty Free & Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat) indicates moderate progress, with 60.6% (131,069 GPs) in the B grade (Performer, PAI 60–75) and 38.5% (83,270 GPs) in the C grade (Aspirant, PAI 40–60), while only 0.8% (1,730 GPs) achieve A (Front Runner, PAI 75–90) and 0.1% (216 GPs) fall into D (Beginner, below 40), suggesting that poverty alleviation efforts are underway but far from optimal.

Theme 2 (Healthy Panchayat) appears exceptionally strong, with an estimated 77.6% (167,837 GPs) in A+ (Achiever, PAI 90–100), 10.8% (23,359 GPs) in both A and B, and just 0.8% (1,730 GPs) in C; however, this conflicts with the national data of 0 Achievers, indicating the state-level data used for estimation may be an outlier, possibly from a high-performing region, though it suggests health services could be a strength in some areas.

Theme 3 (Child Friendly Panchayat) also shows a high 81.9% (177,137 GPs) in A and 1.5% (3,244 GPs) in A+, with 16.8% (36,336 GPs) in B and 0.1% (216 GPs) in C, but this exceeds the national Front Runner total of 699 GPs, pointing to an overestimation; still, it highlights child-friendly initiatives as a potential area of success.

Theme 4 (Water Sufficient Panchayat) reveals significant challenges, with 69.7% (150,751 GPs) in C, 28.7% (62,074 GPs) in B, 1.3% (2,811 GPs) in D, and only 0.3% (649 GPs) in A, underscoring widespread water access issues.

Theme 5 (Clean and Green Panchayat) is concerning, with 50.3% (108,791 GPs) in C and 49.0% (105,980 GPs) in D, only 0.7% (1,514 GPs) in B, and none in A or A+, reflecting a national struggle with environmental sustainability.

Theme 6 (Self-sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayat) similarly lags, with 65.9% (142,532 GPs) in C, 33.5% (72,456 GPs) in D, just 0.6% (1,297 GPs) in B, and none in A or A+, indicating a critical infrastructure deficit.

Theme 7 (Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat) has 63.9% (138,206 GPs) in C and 36.1% (78,079 GPs) in B, with no GPs in A, A+, or D, suggesting moderate but uneven progress in social justice.

Theme 8 (Panchayat with Good Governance) shows a balanced distribution, with 44.1% (95,382 GPs) in B, 49.1% (106,196 GPs) in C, 5.9% (12,761 GPs) in D, and 0.9% (1,946 GPs) in A, indicating governance as a relative strength yet with room for improvement.

Theme 9 (Women Friendly Panchayat) has 47.9% (103,601 GPs) in B, 51.0% (110,305 GPs) in C, 0.9% (1,946 GPs) in D, and 0.2% (433 GPs) in A, reflecting moderate efforts in gender equity but with significant gaps.

Overall, the composite PAI scores across all themes show no GPs in A+ (Achiever, 90–100), only 0.3% (699 GPs) in A (Front Runner, 75–90), 35.8% (77,298 GPs) in B (Performer, 60–75), 61.2% (132,392 GPs) in C (Aspirant, 40–60), and 2.7% (5,896 GPs) in D (Beginner, below 40), highlighting that the majority of GPs are functioning at a basic level, with critical weaknesses in infrastructure, cleanliness, and water sufficiency, despite potential strengths in health and child-friendliness (though overestimated), underscoring the need for targeted interventions to elevate overall performance.

State-wise gram panchayat performance in PAI

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on April 9, 2025, for FY 2022-23, is a transformative framework designed to monitor the progress of India's 2.55 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) toward Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) across nine thematic areas, aligning grassroots development with national and global SDG commitments (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a). Table 3 presents a state-wise distribution of 2.16 lakh GPs that submitted validated data on the PAI portal, categorizing their performance into five grades: Achiever (A+), Front Runner (A), Performer (B), Aspirant (C), and Beginner (D). This table highlights the varying levels of development across States and Union Territories (UTs), offering insights into regional disparities and achievements in areas such as poverty alleviation, health, education, and governance. By showcasing the number of GPs in each grade, it underscores PAI's role in fostering evidence-based planning, promoting healthy competition, and incentivizing progress at the village level. The data, sourced from the PAI dashboard (www.pai.gov.in), serves as a critical tool for policymakers, enabling targeted interventions to bridge developmental gaps and support the national vision of inclusive growth. This table is particularly relevant for understanding how localized efforts contribute to India's broader SDG agenda, emphasizing the importance of grassroots governance in achieving sustainable development.

Table 3: PAI Grades of GPs in all States/UTs

Sr. No.	State/UT	Total No of GPs	No of GPs Submitted Data*	Grades				
				A+ <i>(Achiever)</i>	A <i>(Front Runner)</i>	B <i>(Performer)</i>	C <i>(Aspirant)</i>	D <i>(Beginner)</i>
1.	Andaman and Nicobar (UT)	70	70	4	14	55	1	-
2.	Andhra Pradesh	13310	13310	4	6372	5780	104	-
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	2108	2108	1	63	1968	77	-
4.	Assam	2194	2194	1	1084	1097	1	-
5.	Bihar	8053	8053	-	810	7148	95	-
6.	Chhattisgarh	11643	11643	1	1239	8955	1449	-
7.	Gujarat	14618	14618	1	346	13781	491	-
8.	Haryana	6223	6223	1	339	5071	813	-
9.	Himachal Pradesh	3468	3328	-	673	2647	-	-
10.	Jammu & Kashmir (UT)	4291	4291	2	1520	2746	-	-
11.	Jharkhand	4297	4281	-	375	3229	-	-
12.	Karnataka	5921	5907	8	1644	4245	-	-
13.	Kerala	941	941	-	902	31	-	-
14.	Ladakh (UT)	193	193	-	11	-	-	-
15.	Lakshadweep (UT)	10	10	4	6	-	-	-
16.	Madhya Pradesh	23011	23011	1	7912	14942	157	-

168 | Assessing local governance through Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in India with special reference to Himachal Pradesh

17.	Maharashtra	27849	27655	8	1124	24944	461	-
18.	Manipur	3222	1976	-	11	1741	224	-
19.	Mizoram	834	834	-	86	731	17	-
20.	Odisha	6794	6794	1	285	6806	46	-
21.	Punjab	13239	10514	-	548	9786	182	-
22.	Rajasthan	11207	10634	-	1580	8677	178	-
23.	Sikkim	199	199	-	145	54	-	-
24.	Tamil Nadu	12525	12525	-	5557	6880	88	-
25.	Telangana	12768	12768	-	270	10099	2390	9
26.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu (UTs)	38	38	12	8	18	-	-
27.	Tripura	1176	1176	42	728	406	-	-
28.	Uttar Pradesh	57072	23207	4	6593	15573	1237	-
29.	Uttarakhand	7795	7795	-	1022	6741	32	-
	Total	255699	216285	699	72728	132392	5896	-

Source: Dashboard, www.gov.in

Table 3 explains the state wise performance of Gram Panchayats on each grade. The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2022–23 offers a comprehensive evaluation of Gram Panchayat (GP) performance across Indian states and Union Territories (UTs), based on nine thematic areas aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the national dataset, a total of 2,16,285 Gram Panchayats out of 2,55,699 reported data and were assessed under five performance grades: Achiever (A+), Front Runner (A), Performer (B), Aspirant (C), and Beginner (D). Among these, 699 GPs (0.33%) were categorized as Achievers, 72,728 (34.05%) as Front Runners, 1,32,392 (61.98%) as Performers, and 5,896 (2.76%) as Aspirants. No GP was graded as a Beginner under the reported data. Below are the top five states performance on each PAI Grades as per the above table.

Achiever (A+) – Score > 90%

The Achiever category had only a few Panchayats across India. Tripura led with 42 Achievers (3.6%) out of 1,176 total GPs. Lakshadweep and Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu followed with 4 GPs each. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra each had 4 and 8 Achievers, respectively. While numbers are small, their significance lies in the exceptional performance across SDG-linked thematic areas.

Front runner (A) – Score 71–90%

In this major category, Andhra Pradesh topped with 6,372 GPs (47.9%) of its 13,310 Panchayats. Madhya Pradesh followed with 7,912 GPs (34.4%), then Uttar Pradesh with 6,593 (28.4%) out of 23,207 reporting GPs. Tamil Nadu had 5,557 GPs (44.3%), and Chhattisgarh contributed 1,239 GPs (10.6%) to the Front Runner category. These states demonstrate relatively balanced development across rural sectors.

Performer (B) – Score 51–70%

This is the largest category. Gujarat had the highest number of Performers with 13,781 GPs (94.3%) of 14,618. Maharashtra followed closely with 24,944 GPs (90.2%). Andhra Pradesh also had a large share with 5,780 (43.4%). Haryana reported 5,071 (81.5%), and Madhya Pradesh showed 14,942 (65%) in this category. These figures reflect stable and consistent governance performance, though they may still lack high-end innovation or integrated development.

Aspirant (C) – Score 31–50%

States with a high number of Aspirant Panchayats need targeted improvement. Telangana reported 2,390 GPs (18.7%) in this category. Chhattisgarh had 1,449 GPs (12.4%), and Manipur with 224 (11.3%) out of 1,976 reporting GPs. Uttar Pradesh had 1,237 GPs (5.3%), while Maharashtra recorded 461 (1.7%) in this bracket. These Panchayats may be lacking in multiple indicators like infrastructure, social inclusion, or participatory planning.

Beginner (D) – Score \leq 30%

No Panchayat was categorized under the Beginner grade in the submitted data, indicating that even the lowest-performing Panchayats had surpassed the minimum threshold, reflected a base level of development or reported efficiency across India.

Among the top-performing states in the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), Andhra Pradesh clearly leads with 47.9% of its Gram Panchayats (6,372 out of 13,310) ranked as Front Runners and 43.4% (5,780) as Performers, reflecting a strong balance in governance and rural development. Madhya Pradesh follows closely with 7,912 Front Runners (34.4%) and 14,942 Performers (65%) from its total 23,011 GPs, indicating wide-scale but moderately advanced development. Maharashtra demonstrates consistent performance, with 90.2% (24,944) of its GPs as Performers and a small number (0.03%) as Front Runners, suggesting widespread yet mid-tier progress. Gujarat stands out with the highest proportion of Performers (94.3%), showcasing a uniform governance model though with fewer Panchayats reaching the top tier. Tamil Nadu also performs well, with 44.3% (5,557) of its GPs classified as Front Runners and 54.9% (6,880) as Performers, indicating well-rounded success in both infrastructure and social indicators.

In contrast, the lowest-performing states (excluding UTs) reflect structural and developmental challenges. Bihar, with 8,053 GPs, has only 10% (810) Front Runners and 88.7% (7,148) as Performers, with no Achievers, highlighting gaps in reaching higher governance standards. Jharkhand and Manipur both display low percentages of Front Runners (8.8% and 0.56%, respectively), suggesting limited progress in thematic areas like infrastructure and inclusiveness. In Odisha, although nearly all 6,806 reporting GPs fall under the Performer category, only 4.2% (285) are Front Runners, indicating stagnation in advancing beyond the middle tier. Rajasthan too reports a modest 14.9% (1,580) as Front Runners and 81.6% (8,677) as Performers among its 10,634 GPs. These states may require targeted policy interventions, improved data governance, and inclusive planning to push a larger share of their Panchayats toward higher PAI classifications.

The PAI-based assessment reveals that most Indian states have a majority of Panchayats in the “Performer” category, indicating stable but mid-level progress on the SDGs. A relatively smaller proportion of Panchayats have reached the “Front Runner” or “Achiever” levels, highlighting the need for strategic interventions in participatory planning, infrastructure, health, and gender inclusiveness. While high-performing states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu can serve as role models, lagging states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and Manipur require focused policy attention and resource infusion.

Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh has a total area of 55,673 square kilometers. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of the state is 68,64,602, comprising 34,81,873 males (51%) and 33,82,729 females (49%). A large majority 90% of the population lives in rural areas, while only 10% lives in urban areas. The population density of the state is 123 persons per square kilometer. The highest density is in Hamirpur district (405 persons per sq. km), while the lowest is in the tribal district of Lahaul and Spiti (2 persons per sq. km). The sex ratio of the state is 972 females per 1000 males, and during the decade 2001–2011, the total population increased by 12.9% (Census of India, 2011). Administratively, the state is divided into 12 districts, 88 development blocks, 188 Tehsils/sub-Tehsils. Development blocks have risen to 88, suggesting improved local governance infrastructure. The number of towns and cities remains stable at 59, as per the 2011 census. Gram Panchayats have increased to 3,615, reflecting greater rural administrative coverage. The number of inhabited villages stays at 17,882, consistent with the 2011 census, indicating no significant change in rural settlement numbers (Department of Economics & Statistics, 2023).

The districts with the highest number of Gram Panchayats are Kangra (814), followed by Mandi (559), Shimla (412), Chamba (309), Sirmour (259), Hamirpur (248), Solan (240), Kullu (235), Bilaspur (176), Kinnaur (73), and Lahaul-Spiti (45). Under the Panchayati Raj system in the state, there are a total of 30,644 seats, of which approximately 70.1% are for Ward Members, 11.8% for Pradhans (Presidents) and Up-Pradhans (Vice Presidents), 5.5% for Panchayat Samiti Members, and 0.8% for Zila Parishad Members. Kangra district alone accounts for 22.4% of the total seats, while Lahaul-Spiti district has the lowest share, with only 1.2% of the total seats in the Panchayati Raj system (Negi, 2022).

Theme-wise gram panchayat performance

Tracking progress at the panchayat level is crucial for addressing local development gaps and ensuring inclusive growth across India's diverse rural landscape. It empowers communities to align with national Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through localized action. The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2025, facilitates this by evaluating India's Gram Panchayats (GPs) on Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025a). Table 4 details the performance of 3,328 GPs in Himachal Pradesh across nine LSDG themes, graded A+ to D. This PAI dashboard data highlights strengths and weaknesses, guiding targeted interventions for sustainable village-level development.

Table 4: Himachal Pradesh: Theme-wise scores of gram panchayats (GPs)

Grade	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7	Theme 8	Theme 9	Overall
A+ (Achiever)	0.0% (0)	77.6% (2583)	1.5% (50)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
A (Front Runner)	0.8% (27)	10.8% (361)	81.9% (2725)	0.3% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (1)	0.9% (31)	0.2% (7)	0.0% (1)
B (Performer)	60.6% (2018)	10.8% (359)	16.8% (551)	28.7% (954)	0.7% (23)	0.6% (20)	36.1% (1201)	44.1% (1466)	47.9% (1594)	25.1% (835)
C (Aspirant)	38.5% (1280)	0.8% (25)	0.1% (2)	69.7% (2321)	50.3% (1674)	65.9% (2192)	63.9% (2125)	49.1% (1634)	51.0% (1699)	74.8% (2489)
D (Beginner)	0.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (44)	49.0% (1631)	33.5% (1116)	0.0% (1)	5.9% (197)	0.9% (31)	0.1% (3)
Total GPs	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328	3328

Source: Dashboard, PAI

Note: Theme 1: Poverty Free & Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat, Theme 2: Healthy Panchayat, Theme 3: Child Friendly Panchayat, Theme 4: Water Sufficient Panchayat, Theme 5: Clean and Green Panchayat, Theme 6: Self-sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayat, Theme 7: Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat, Theme 8: Panchayat with Good Governance, Theme 9: Women Friendly Panchayat

The above table 4 reveals the theme-Wise Scores of Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the State Level in Himachal Pradesh reflect a diverse and mixed performance across the nine thematic areas aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as per the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) Dashboard. A total of 3,328 GPs submitted data, and their scores are categorized into five grades: A+ (Achiever), A (Front Runner), B (Performer), C (Aspirant), and D (Beginner) for each thematic area. Theme 2 (Healthy Panchayat) shows the strongest performance, with 77.6% (2,583 GPs) in the highest A+ grade, and an additional 10.8% (361 GPs) in the A grade, indicating a clear emphasis on health-related infrastructure and services. Similarly, Theme 3 (Child-Friendly Panchayat) is highly rated, with 81.9% (2,725 GPs) in the A grade and 16.8% (551 GPs) in the B grade, suggesting that initiatives for child development are widely implemented and effective.

In contrast, themes such as Theme 1 (Poverty-Free and Enhanced Livelihoods Panchayat), Theme 4 (Water-Sufficient Panchayat), and Theme 5 (Clean and Green Panchayat) have most of their GPs in lower grades. For example, in Theme 1, a significant 60.6% (2,018 GPs) are graded as B, while 38.5% (1,280 GPs) fall into C, and very few are in higher categories, showing limited advancement in poverty alleviation and livelihood opportunities. Theme 4 sees 69.7% (2,321 GPs) in C grade, indicating substantial room for improvement in water sufficiency. Similarly, Theme 5 has nearly half of the GPs (49.0% or 1,631 GPs) in D grade, and only 0.7% (23 GPs) in the B grade, highlighting significant environmental and sanitation challenges.

Theme 6 (Self-Sufficient Infrastructure) and Theme 7 (Socially Just and Socially Secured Panchayat) are largely concentrated in the C grade, with 65.9% (2,192 GPs) and 63.9% (2,125 GPs) respectively, which again underscores infrastructural and social equity gaps in rural governance. Theme 8 (Good Governance) is relatively better, with 44.1% (1,466 GPs) in B grade and 49.1% (1,634 GPs) in C, reflecting a mid-level performance in democratic accountability and transparency. Theme 9 (Women-Friendly Panchayat) shows a split trend, with 47.9% (1,594 GPs) in B grade and 51.0% (1,699 GPs) in C, suggesting moderate progress in gender inclusivity.

The overall performance of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Himachal Pradesh, based on the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), reveals that none (0.0%) of the 3,328 GPs achieved the A+ (Achiever) grade, and only 1 GP (0.0%) reached the A (Front Runner) level. A substantial proportion, 25.1% (835 GPs), fall under the B (Performer) category, while the vast majority—74.8% (2,489 GPs)—are placed in the C (Aspirant) category, indicating average performance across thematic areas. Only 3 GPs (0.1%) are classified as D (Beginner), reflecting minimal development. This distribution suggests that while most Panchayats in the state are progressing, they remain largely aspirational and need focused policy and programmatic support to transition into higher performance tiers.

Top and bottom five performer gram panchayats in Himachal Pradesh

The top five Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Himachal Pradesh, ranked by the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), represent the highest-performing rural governance units, achieving superior scores in the nine Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), including social justice, water sufficiency, health, education, and infrastructure. High PAI scores signify effective leadership, resource utilization, and community engagement, making these GPs models for sustainable rural development. Conversely, the bottom five GPs, classified as Beginners, exhibit low scores, reflecting challenges in these LSDGs, as measured by PAI’s indicators. Identifying these underperformers is critical for targeted interventions like funding or capacity building, addressing disparities and aligning all GPs with Himachal Pradesh’s SDG objectives.

Table 5: Top Five Gram Panchayats

Ranks	Gram Panchayat	Block	District	PAI Score	Category
1.	Thanadhar	Narkanda	Shimla	77.63	A (Front-Runner)
2.	Uhal	Bamson	Hamirpur	70.94	A (Front-Runner)
3.	Lower Rewalsar	Balh	Mandi	69.75	B (Performer)
4.	Kirti	Narkanda	Shimla	69.64	B (Performer)
5.	Ghangot-Kalan	Bijhri	Hamirpur	69.63	B (Performer)

Source: <https://pai.gov.in/PS/Public/State-Dboard.aspx>

The table 5 revealed the top five Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Himachal Pradesh, based on PAI scores, highlights exemplary rural governance. Thanadhar (Narkanda, Shimla) leads with a PAI score of 77.63, earning a Front Runner (A) grade, reflecting its strong performance across nine Localized Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), such as social security and sustainable development, as evidenced by its 2024 National Panchayat Awards. Uhal (Bamson, Hamirpur) follows with 70.94, also a Front Runner, indicating robust progress in areas like water sufficiency. The remaining three—Lower Rewalsar (Balh, Mandi), Kirti (Narkanda, Shimla), and Ghangot Kalan (Bijhri, Hamirpur)—score between 69.63 and 69.75, categorized as Performers (B), showcasing consistent but slightly less exceptional progress. Shimla and Hamirpur dominate, likely due to better infrastructure and governance, while Mandi’s presence reflects its development focus. These GPs excel in socio-economic indicators like health, education, and infrastructure, aligning with PAI’s multi-domain framework. Their high scores suggest effective resource utilization and community participation, setting benchmarks for others. However, the narrow score range (69.63–77.63) indicates competitive performance among top GPs, with room for more to achieve Front Runner status.

Table 6: Bottom five-GramPanchayats

Rank	Gram Panchayat	Block	District	PAI Score	Category
1.	Thaili –Chakti	Nankhari	Shimla	39.30	D (Beginner)
2.	Mandhol	Jubbal	Shimla	39.45	D (Beginner)
3.	Jana	Naggarr	Kullu	39.71	D (Beginner)
4.	Pandrada	Chaupal	Shimla	40.38	D (Beginner)
5.	Dehna	Theog	Shimla	40.49	D (Beginner)

Source: <https://pai.gov.in/PS/Public/State-Dboard.aspx>

The table 6 of the bottom five Gram Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh reveals significant development gaps, with all scoring below 40.49 and classified as Beginners (D). Thaili-Chakti (Nankhari, Shimla) ranks lowest at 39.30, followed closely by Mandhol (Jubbal, Shimla), Jana (Naggarr, Kullu), Pandrada (Chaupal, Shimla), and Dehna (Theog, Shimla). Shimla dominates this list with four GPs, suggesting uneven development within the district, possibly due to remote terrain or limited resources in blocks like Nankhari and Chaupal. Jana’s inclusion from Kullu highlights similar challenges in hilly areas. These low PAI scores indicate deficiencies in key LSDG themes, such as infrastructure (e.g., roads, electricity), health, and economic indicators, as defined by PAI’s 435 metrics. The tight score range (39.30–40.49) suggests uniformly poor performance, with no GP reaching the Aspirant (40–59.99) threshold. This underscores the need for targeted interventions, like enhanced funding under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan or capacity-building programs, to address governance and resource constraints. Improved digital connectivity via BharatNet and community-driven planning could help these GPs progress, aligning them with Himachal Pradesh’s broader SDG goals.

Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) in Himachal Pradesh reveals the critical role of local governance in fostering decentralized democracy, as empowered by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, enabling Gram Panchayats (GPs) to drive participatory decision-making that reflects community needs and enhances accountability and transparency. PRIs are pivotal in rural development, executing schemes in agriculture, health, education, sanitation, and women’s empowerment, with Gram Sabhas and GPDPs aligning local priorities with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The PAI, introduced in 2022, evaluates GP performance across nine thematic areas, including poverty alleviation and gender equity, using a robust framework of indicators to promote evidence-based planning. Data is collected through self-reporting on the PAI portal, validated by state authorities, and integrated with surveys like Mission Antyodaya, with GPs classified into performance tiers from Achiever to Beginner. Nationally, the PAI highlights strengths in health and child-friendly initiatives but exposes weaknesses in water sufficiency, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. In Himachal Pradesh, with its largely rural

population and extensive PRI system, the PAI underscores strong performance in health and child-focused areas but significant gaps in water, infrastructure, and clean-green initiatives. Top-performing GPs in Shimla and Hamirpur demonstrate effective leadership, while lower performers, primarily in Shimla and Kullu, face challenges due to remote terrain and resource constraints, indicating uneven development across the state.

To enhance local governance in Himachal Pradesh through the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), several strategic measures are recommended. Strengthening infrastructure in underdeveloped Gram Panchayats, particularly in tribal and aspirational districts like Chamba and Lahaul-Spiti, is crucial, alongside expanding digital connectivity to improve data reporting. Water sufficiency should be prioritized by implementing national programs and promoting community-led conservation efforts, especially in weaker-performing areas. Scaling up environmental initiatives, such as waste management and renewable energy adoption, and providing training on sustainability practices can address gaps in clean and green efforts. Capacity building for low-performing panchayats through technical assistance and peer-learning with high performers will foster better governance. Focused resource allocation and tailored indicators for tribal districts will bridge regional disparities. Enhancing gender equity and social inclusion through targeted programs and campaigns is essential for inclusive development. Improving data accuracy through training and adopting streamlined systems will ensure reliable reporting. Strengthening participatory planning via community engagement in development plans and encouraging local monitoring will align priorities with sustainable goals. Recognizing high-performing panchayats with awards and financial incentives will motivate progress, while state-specific strategies and budget alignment will address unique challenges, ensuring effective SDG localization across Himachal Pradesh.

Conclusion

The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) serves as a transformative framework for assessing and advancing local governance in Himachal Pradesh, reinforcing the critical role of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in decentralized democracy and rural development. By aligning local priorities with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through nine thematic areas, PAI highlights Himachal Pradesh's strengths in health and child-focused initiatives while exposing critical gaps in water sufficiency, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. The uneven performance across districts, with top-performing GPs in Shimla and Hamirpur contrasting with struggling panchayats in remote areas like Shimla and Kullu, underscores the need for targeted interventions. Strategic recommendations, including enhanced infrastructure, water conservation, environmental initiatives, and capacity building, alongside improved data reporting and participatory planning, offer a roadmap to elevate the majority of Aspirant GPs to higher performance tiers. By leveraging state-specific strategies, recognizing high

performers, and addressing tribal and aspirational district challenges, Himachal Pradesh can harness PAI to foster inclusive, sustainable, and equitable rural development, aligning with national SDG objectives.

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Examining service quality and learning quality across demographic variables in state universities of Punjab

Manisha Khosla, Gurdeep Singh Batra and Sulakshna Dwivedi

ABSTRACT

This study examines service and learning quality across demographic variables in Punjab's state universities. With the rapid expansion of technical education, understanding student perceptions is crucial. Analyzing responses from 720 students across five universities and disciplines—Management, Computer Science, Engineering, Pharmacy, and Hotel Management—the study uses a structured questionnaire to assess service quality dimensions (Assurance, Tangibility, Reliability, Empathy, and Responsiveness) alongside learning quality indicators. Findings show gender has no significant impact, ensuring an inclusive environment. Postgraduates report higher satisfaction in Assurance, Reliability, and Learning Quality, while undergraduates perceive greater Empathy. Course-wise differences are minimal, but universities vary, with Punjabi University, Patiala excelling in Reliability and Learning Quality. The study highlights the need for tailored educational services to enhance student satisfaction. Addressing disparities in service reliability and learning quality can improve academic outcomes, guiding policy improvements, faculty development, and infrastructure enhancement in Punjab's technical education sector.

Keywords: *Service Quality, Learning Quality, Student Satisfaction, Technical Education, India.*

Introduction

Punjab, a state located in the northern part of India, has been making remarkable strides in improving its educational infrastructure, particularly in the realm of technical education. As one of the country's rapidly developing regions, Punjab is facing a significant demand for skilled labor, especially in sectors such as engineering, manufacturing, and information technology. The state's industrial growth, spurred by both private and public investments, has created a substantial need for technical professionals. However, addressing this demand has posed several challenges, primarily related to the quality and accessibility of education, particularly in the growing number of technical institutions such as engineering

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colleges and polytechnics. As these institutions expand, the focus on service quality and learning outcomes becomes increasingly critical, particularly in the face of challenges such as unregulated technical academies and overcrowded classrooms (Pardeep, 2008; Palshikai, 2010).

Service quality, defined as the degree to which educational institutions meet or exceed student expectations, has become a key determinant of student satisfaction and learning outcomes. Several studies have explored the relationship between service quality and learning quality, emphasizing various aspects that influence students' educational experiences. Kwan and Ng (1999) found that students from different cultural backgrounds place varying levels of importance on different aspects of educational services, such as faculty engagement, support services, and infrastructure. Similarly, Barnes (2007) extended the SERVQUAL framework to include elements such as university support and mentoring, which further enhance the student learning experience. Stodnick and Rogers (2008) applied the SERVQUAL model to traditional educational settings and concluded that factors such as tangibility and responsiveness have a lesser impact on student satisfaction compared to other service quality dimensions like reliability and assurance. This finding has important implications for understanding how service quality affects students' perceptions of learning quality in educational institutions.

In the context of Punjab's technical education system, the service quality of institutions plays a pivotal role in shaping learning outcomes. The rapid expansion of both public and private technical institutes has led to varying levels of infrastructure, teaching quality, and administrative support, which in turn affects the overall learning experience for students. Students who enroll in these institutions expect high standards of education, which include well-equipped classrooms, up-to-date learning materials, and faculty with industry-relevant knowledge. However, challenges such as outdated infrastructure, limited resources, and faculty shortages often hinder the delivery of high-quality education (Pardeep, 2008). Thus, understanding how service quality impacts learning outcomes in Punjab's technical education sector is crucial to improving the state's educational standards and addressing the skills gap.

Learning quality refers to the effectiveness of the educational process in terms of students' knowledge acquisition, skill development, and overall personal growth. It has been widely acknowledged that learning outcomes are influenced by various institutional factors such as course design, faculty support, and availability of resources (Kintu & Zhu, 2016). Furthermore, demographic variables such as age, gender, academic background, and socioeconomic status significantly shape students' learning experiences and their ability to achieve academic success. Kintu and Zhu (2016) demonstrated that factors such as age, family support, and attitude play a crucial role in students' engagement and success in blended learning environments. In line with this, several studies have also emphasized the importance of personalized learning experiences and peer

interaction in enhancing learning quality (Zafiroopoulos and Vrana, 2008; Diette & Raghav, 2015).

Demographic factors also play a significant role in students' perceptions of service quality and learning outcomes. For instance, the HEDPERF model introduced by Abdullah (2006) specifically addresses the role of student demographics in shaping service expectations and experiences. Zafiroopoulos and Vrana (2008) examined how faculty and student perceptions of service quality differ, finding that demographic factors such as age, background, and academic standing significantly influence students' expectations of educational services. In a similar vein, Kintu and Zhu (2016) highlighted the influence of family support, workload management skills, and academic ability on students' performance in blended courses. These findings suggest that demographic variables must be considered when evaluating both service quality and learning quality, as they can significantly impact students' satisfaction, engagement, and academic success.

In Punjab, the rapid expansion of technical education has been accompanied by significant demographic changes, with an increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds seeking admission to state universities. The demographic composition of the student body, including factors such as age, gender, family support, and digital literacy, influences how students perceive and experience both service quality and learning quality. Byungura et al. (2018) highlighted that disparities in digital access and prior exposure to technology create significant barriers to e-learning adoption, which is increasingly important in the modern educational landscape. In addition, research by Patra et al. (2021) has demonstrated that students' digital literacy and network accessibility significantly affect their engagement with online learning platforms. Given the growing reliance on digital tools and online learning in Punjab's educational institutions, addressing these disparities is crucial to ensuring equitable access to quality education.

The relationship between service quality, learning quality, and demographic factors is of particular relevance in the context of Punjab's evolving technical education system. As the demand for skilled labor in industries such as engineering, IT, and healthcare continues to rise, it is imperative to examine how state universities in Punjab are meeting the needs of their diverse student populations. This research aims to explore the relationship between service quality and learning quality across different demographic variables in Punjab's state universities. By identifying how demographic factors influence students' perceptions of service quality and their learning outcomes, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into how institutions can enhance their educational offerings and improve overall student satisfaction.

The goal of this study is to investigate how demographic differences shape students' experiences in Punjab's state universities regarding service quality and learning quality. With the state's technical education sector expanding rapidly,

understanding the intersection of service quality, learning quality, and demographic variables will be essential to improving the quality of education and ensuring that students are equipped with the skills required to succeed in a competitive labor market. This research will contribute to the ongoing efforts to modernize and reform Punjab's higher education system, ensuring that it meets the needs of both students and industry stakeholders.

Literature review

Service quality and learning quality

Numerous studies have looked at how service quality affects learning quality, emphasizing several aspects that affect students' experiences. Students from different cultural backgrounds place varying values on different components of educational services, according to Kwan and Ng's (1999) comparison of service quality indicators in China and Hong Kong. In order to evaluate the quality of learning among Chinese students, Barnes (2007) extended the SERVQUAL framework by adding new elements including university assistance and mentoring. After applying SERVQUAL to conventional educational settings, Stodnick and Rogers (2008) came to the conclusion that tangibility and responsiveness had less of an impact on predicting student satisfaction and learning quality.

Faculty and student views of service quality were evaluated by Zafiroopoulos and Vrana (2008) discovered that staff expectations were typically greater than students. In order to assess online learning, Udo et al. (2011) modified SERVQUAL, renaming tangibility as website content and finding that Reliability was the least important component. Kintu and Zhu (2016) investigated the connection between learning outcomes and service-related elements like student support and course design. Their research highlighted how peer interaction, course design, and student characteristics all influence the quality of learning. The SERVQUAL model was further altered by Tere et al. (2020), who added learning material quality and LMS quality as new criteria for evaluating online learning services. The significance of SERVQUAL aspects was emphasized by Abu-Rumman and Qawasmeh's (2021) analysis of the relationship between e-learning service quality and learning quality. According to Stankovska et al. (2024), responsiveness has the largest gap score, although other aspects of service quality have a favourable impact on learning quality. All of this research highlights the importance of institutional support in improving student experiences and confirm the close connection between service quality and learning quality.

Service quality and demographic variables

Student characteristics and demographic factors play a crucial role in shaping learning quality, engagement, and service quality in education. Abdullah (2006) introduced the HEDPERF scale, tailored for higher education, incorporating

academic and non-academic factors to measure service quality, highlighting the role of student demographics in shaping service expectations. Zafiroopoulos et al. (2008) examined faculty and student perceptions of quality in education, revealing that demographic factors such as age and background significantly influence students' expectations and experiences. Kintu and Zhu (2016) found that factors such as age, attitude, and family support significantly impact student success in blended courses. Similarly, Sánchez-Mena and Martí-Parreño (2017) highlighted motivation as a key driver for gamification, while knowledge gaps hinder engagement, emphasizing the role of individual learning traits. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, as disparities in access to technology, infrastructure, and policy limitations create major barriers to e-learning adoption (Byungura et al., 2018; Kibuku et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). Danjuma et al. (2018) compared SERVQUAL, SERPERF, and HEDPERF models in higher education, assessing their strengths and applicability in measuring service quality across diverse student demographics. Mobile learning, influenced by learner demographics and social factors, was explored by Ng and Wong (2020), who used the FRAME model to assess its effectiveness among Chinese students. The impact of digital literacy on virtual class effectiveness was further analyzed by Inan and Karaca (2021), who found that access to technology and ICT skills, often shaped by demographic factors, significantly affect engagement in online learning (Wolverton et al., 2020; Ansari et al., 2020). Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of addressing demographic disparities to enhance learning experiences and service quality in education.

Learning quality and demographic variables

Several studies have explored the relationship between learning quality and demographic variables, highlighting how factors such as student background, institutional support, and digital accessibility influence learning quality. Kintu and Zhu (2016) student demographics significantly impact intrinsic motivation, knowledge acquisition, and satisfaction with course design. Diette and Raghav (2015) and Koc and Çelik (2015) investigated the impact of class size on learning quality, particularly among students with varying academic abilities. Both studies concluded that first-year students, low-performing students, and high-achievers are the most affected by larger class sizes. They emphasized the importance of maintaining an appropriate student-to-teacher ratio to enhance learning quality, reinforcing the notion that demographic factors such as academic ability and year of study influence educational experiences. Nakayama et al. (2017) further contributed to this discussion by analyzing the effect of note-taking support services on student self-efficacy and learning quality. The study found that students who received note-making instructions exhibited improved self-regulated learning, which was linked to their individual characteristics measured through the Big Five personality traits. This suggests that learning quality is not only influenced by institutional factors but also by inherent personality differences among students. Byungura et al. (2018)

addressed digital divides in online learning, emphasizing that prior exposure to digital tools, computer training, and access to technology impact student learning outcomes. Similarly, Patra et al. (2021) identified digital literacy and network accessibility as major factors affecting e-learning adoption among students and faculty, indicating that demographic differences in digital competency can significantly influence learning quality. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that demographic variables, including student background, technological access, academic standing, and personality traits, play a crucial role in shaping learning experiences and outcomes (Zafiroopoulos et al., 2008; Diette & Raghav, 2015; Koc & Çelik, 2015; Kintu & Zhu, 2016; Nakayama et al., 2017; Byungura et al., 2018; Patra et al., 2021).

Methods

Participants and procedures

The five state universities in Punjab that offer courses in a variety of subjects, such as Management Studies, Computer Science, Engineering, Pharmacy, and Hotel Management & Catering, are the subject of the study: Punjabi University, Patiala; Punjab University, Chandigarh; Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; Maharaja Ranjit Singh Punjab Technical University, Bathinda; and IKG Punjab Technical University, Kapurthala. Undergraduate students studying engineering, pharmacy, and hotel management as well as postgraduate students studying management and computer science provided primary data.

A total of 720 students were chosen, 30 in each of the five disciplines at each institution (instead of 750 as IKG PTU, Kapurthala does not have a pharmacy department). This sampling strategy, which takes into account 50% of a typical class unit of 60 students, complies with NAAC and AICTE standards. A comprehensive dataset for evaluating service quality, learning quality, and students' demographic profile is provided by this systematic sample, which guarantees broad representation across institutions and fields.

Measures

Service quality

The 15-item Service Quality scale is broken down into five smaller subscales. Respondents' opinions on service quality, learning quality were categorized into three groups based on a 7-point scale: "**P < E**" (service performance falls short of expectations), "**P = E**" (service performance meets expectations), and "**P > E**" (service performance exceeds expectations). Three important items under the five subscales of Assurance are related to collaborative learning experiences, prompt assessment feedback, efficient knowledge transfer, and making sure students receive dependable educational support. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.852.

The three components of tangibility are the availability of links to downloadable content on the LMS, the cleanliness of the student facilities, and the simplicity of LMS installation. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.918.

Three elements are used to measure reliability, and representative items include the capacity of teachers to capture students' attention again, the clarity of their explanations of concepts, and the timely distribution of information through effective podcasting. This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.787.

Three components make up empathy: giving each student individualized attention, encouraging mutual respect through positive learning assistance, and letting students evaluate and reflect on their own work. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.862.

Three components make up responsiveness: quick communication between teachers and students, attention to misbehaviour, and a readiness to hear students' perspectives. This scale's Cronbach's alpha was 0.869.

Learning quality

Nine factors make up learning quality: exposure to the industry, student control over learning activities, flexible exam design, and the development of a skill set in students that includes higher-order thinking, creativity and critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation, self-managed learning, interpersonal and leadership skills, and global competitiveness. Learning Quality's reliability estimate was 0.782.

Demographic profile of students

Demographic profile of the study participants, including information on how they were distributed by gender, class, course, and university. A balanced representation of both genders was there with 337 male students (46.80%) and 383 female students (53.2%). Academically, 300 students are post-graduates (41.67%) and 420 are under-graduates (58.33%). Student enrolment in different courses is further broken down into five streams viz. Management Studies, Computer Sciences, Engineering and Technical Course, and Hotel Management and Catering each have 150 students, while Pharmacy has 120 students. In a same vein, it shows a fair distribution across universities, with 150 students from each of the following institutions: Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (GNDU); Punjabi University, Patiala (PUP); Punjab University, Chandigarh (PUC); and MRSPTU; 120 students from IKGPTU, as there was no pharmacy department in this university. A sophisticated comprehension of the student demographics is made easier by this thorough split, which guarantees sufficient representation for insightful analysis and interpretation of study results.

Analysis

Determining the various viewpoints and experiences of students in the technical education programmes provided by Punjab state universities requires analyzing aspects of learning and service quality in relation to demographic variables. A

variety of traits are included in demographic variables, such as age, gender, academic class, study programme, and university affiliation. This investigation seeks to identify potential differences in students’ views of learning quality and service quality by exploring these demographic distinctions.

Analysis - gender and class wise

Examining how gender and academic class are analysed in the context of technical education programmes explores the possible differences in students’ perspectives according to these demographic variables. Education establishments looking to improve the overall quality of education must comprehend how gender and academic status may affect the aspects of learning and service quality.

Table 1: Independent samples test (Gender wise)

Factor	Male (N=337)	Female (N=383)	T-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Assurance	3.87	3.89	-0.208	0.836
Tangibility	3.80	3.74	0.602	0.548
Reliability	4.05	4.04	0.013	0.989
Empathy	3.99	3.92	0.681	0.496
Responsiveness	3.98	3.98	0.089	0.929
Learning Quality	3.84	3.77	0.911	0.363

The independent samples test in Table 1 investigates the relationship between students’ views of several aspects of service quality and learning quality in technical education programmes and differences in gender. Gender-wise analysis revealed that there were no significant differences in the mean scores of Assurance, Tangibility, Reliability, Empathy, Responsiveness and Learning Quality between male and female students. Specifically, Assurance scores were similar between genders ($M_{male} = 3.87, M_{female} = 3.89, p = 0.836$), as were Tangibility ($M_{male} = 3.80, M_{female} = 3.74, p = 0.548$), reliability ($M_{male} = 4.05, M_{female} = 4.04, p = 0.989$), Empathy ($M_{male} = 3.99, M_{female} = 3.92, p = 0.496$), Responsiveness ($M_{male} = 3.98, M_{female} = 3.98, p = 0.929$), and Learning Quality ($M_{male} = 3.84, M_{female} = 3.73, p = 0.363$). These findings suggest that gender may not significantly influence students’ perceptions of service quality Dimensions and learning quality within technical education programs. Therefore, educational institutions can focus on providing equitable learning experiences and support to all students regardless of gender, ensuring an inclusive and supportive learning environment for everyone.

Table 2: Independent samples test (Class wise)

Factor	Under-graduate (N=420)	Post-graduate (N=300)	T-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Assurance	3.78	3.99	-2.265	0.024
Tangibility	3.67	3.87	-1.916	0.056
Reliability	3.94	4.16	-2.021	0.044
Empathy	4.06	3.83	2.272	0.023
Responsiveness	3.87	4.11	-2.506	0.012
Learning Quality	3.58	4.00	-3.492	0.001

Further, Table 2 depicts Class wise analysis revealed significant differences in several Dimensions of service quality and learning quality between undergraduate and postgraduate students. Specifically, undergraduate students reported significantly lower mean Assurance scores ($M = 3.78$) compared to postgraduate students ($M = 3.99$, $p = 0.024$), indicating a potential disparity in the perceived level of Assurance between the two groups. While there was no statistically significant difference in Tangibility scores ($p = 0.056$), undergraduate students had lower mean scores ($M = 3.67$) compared to postgraduate students ($M = 3.87$), suggesting a trend toward higher Tangibility perceptions among postgraduates. Furthermore, undergraduate students reported significantly lower mean scores in Reliability ($M = 3.94$) compared to postgraduates ($M = 4.16$, $p = 0.044$), indicating a perceived difference in the Reliability of service delivery between the two groups. In terms of Empathy, undergraduate students had significantly higher mean scores ($M = 4.06$) compared to postgraduates ($M = 3.83$, $p = 0.023$), suggesting a stronger perception of Empathy among undergraduate students. Additionally, undergraduate students reported significantly lower mean Responsiveness scores ($M = 3.87$) compared to postgraduates ($M = 4.11$, $p = 0.012$), indicating a potential difference in the Responsiveness of educational services. Moreover, undergraduate students had significantly lower mean scores in Learning Quality ($M = 3.58$) compared to postgraduates ($M = 4.00$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting variations in the perceived quality of learning experiences between the two groups. These findings underscore the importance of addressing and bridging potential disparities in service quality and learning quality across different academic levels to ensure equitable and enriching educational experiences for all students.

Analysis with respect to courses

The purpose of the analysis done in relation to various academic courses is to identify any possible differences in how students perceive the aspects of service quality and the quality of learning across a range of disciplines.

Table 3: ANOVA results with respect to courses

Attribute	Management Studies	Computer Sciences	Engineering Technical	Pharmacy	Hotel Mgmt Catering	Total	F Value	Sig.
Assurance	3.85 (1.27)	3.85 (1.41)	4.02 (1.19)	3.81 (1.08)	3.92 (1.12)	3.88 (1.24)	0.579	0.678
Tangibility	3.77 (1.24)	3.62 (1.35)	3.88 (1.35)	3.86 (1.17)	3.76 (1.31)	3.77 (1.28)	0.967	0.425
Reliability	4.17 (1.49)	3.88 (1.59)	4.25 (1.32)	3.98 (1.38)	3.97 (1.42)	4.04 (1.46)	1.760	0.135
Empathy	3.94 (1.35)	4.05 (1.41)	3.85 (1.20)	4.04 (1.25)	3.83 (1.36)	3.96 (1.32)	0.817	0.514
Responsiveness	4.01 (1.15)	3.86 (1.31)	3.95 (1.33)	3.95 (1.24)	4.18 (1.29)	3.98 (1.26)	1.223	0.300
Learning Quality	3.80 (1.54)	3.85 (1.61)	3.71 (1.62)	3.76 (1.56)	3.72 (1.55)	3.78 (1.57)	0.198	0.939

Each value is in **Mean (standard deviation)**

The ANOVA results with respect to different courses, as depicted in Table 3, provide insights into potential differences in the mean scores of service quality Dimensions and learning quality across various academic disciplines.

Assurance: The mean Assurance scores varied across different courses, with the highest mean score observed in the “Engineering and Technical Course” category (M = 4.02) and the lowest in “Pharmacy” (M = 3.81). However, the F-value of 0.579 and the associated p-value of 0.678 indicate that these differences are not statistically significant.

Tangibility: Similar to Assurance, the mean Tangibility scores also varied across courses, with the highest mean score observed in the “Engineering and Technical Course” category (M = 3.88) and the lowest in “Computer Sciences” (M = 3.62). However, the F-value of 0.967 and the associated p-value of 0.425 suggest that these differences are not statistically significant.

Reliability: The mean Reliability scores varied across courses, with the highest mean score observed in the “Engineering and Technical Course” category (M = 4.25) and the lowest in “Computer Sciences” (M = 3.88). Although the F-value of 1.760 suggests some variation among groups, the associated p-value of 0.135 indicates that these differences are not statistically significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05.

Empathy: The mean Empathy scores showed some variability across courses, with the highest mean score observed in “Computer Sciences” (M = 4.05) and the lowest in “Hotel Management and Catering” (M = 3.83). However, the F-value of 0.817 and the associated p-value of 0.514 indicate that these differences are not statistically significant.

Responsiveness: The mean Responsiveness scores also varied across courses, with the highest mean score observed in “Hotel Management and Catering” ($M = 4.18$) and the lowest in “Computer Sciences” ($M = 3.86$). Nevertheless, the F-value of 1.223 and the associated p-value of 0.300 suggest that these differences are not statistically significant.

Learning quality: The mean Learning Quality scores showed some variability across courses, with the highest mean score observed in “Computer Sciences” ($M = 3.85$) and the lowest in “Engineering and Technical Course” ($M = 3.71$). However, the F-value of 0.198 and the associated p-value of 0.939 indicate that these differences are not statistically significant.

Overall, while there are differences in mean scores across different courses, the ANOVA results suggest that these differences are not statistically significant for most Dimensions of service quality and learning quality at the conventional significance level of 0.05.

Table 4: Post hoc analysis with respect to courses

Dependent Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval (Lower - Upper)
Empathy	Management Studies - Computer Sciences	0.29244	0.25155	0.773	-0.3989 to 0.9837
	Management Studies - Engineering and Technical course	-0.08885	0.24250	0.996	-0.7553 to 0.5776
	Management Studies - Pharmacy	-0.15481	0.31799	0.989	-1.0287 to 0.7191
	Management Studies - Hotel Management and Catering	-0.57147	0.24991	0.153	-1.2583 to 0.1153
	Computer Sciences - Management Studies	-0.29244	0.25155	0.773	-0.9837 to 0.3989
	Computer Sciences - Engineering and Technical course	-0.38129	0.27295	0.630	-1.1314 to 0.3688
	Computer Sciences - Pharmacy	-0.44725	0.34177	0.686	-1.3865 to 0.4920
	Computer Sciences - Hotel Management and Catering	-0.86392*	0.27955	0.019	-1.6322 to -0.0957
	Engineering and Technical course - Management Studies	0.08885	0.24250	0.996	-0.5776 to 0.7553
	Engineering and Technical course - Computer Sciences	0.38129	0.27295	0.630	-0.3688 to 1.1314
Engineering and Technical course - Pharmacy	-0.06596	0.33517	1.000	-0.9871 to 0.8552	

