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Section: Contents

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Contents

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: i, Section: Editorial

Editorial Note

Kushal Andrew Biswas

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With great pleasure and pride, Women's Christian College presents Volume 3, Issue 3 of 'Sophos', the institution's annual, peer-reviewed, open access e-journal for the year 2026.

An open access e-journal offers significant utility and opportunity to readers across the globe, at a time when paywalls and paid access contribute to an undesirable guardianship restricting the free dissemination of knowledge and viewpoints. From this perspective, as has been evident in the previous issues, this e-journal serves as an unrestricted enabler of seemingly disparate disciplines using diverse approaches to deal with a variety of topics, in a process that works almost alchemically, producing a play of polyphonies.

This issue preserves the tradition, generating rewarding encounters between apparently unrelated fields of specialisation. Here the historical meets the technological; there the cultural engages with the political; elsewhere, gender and musicology come together; and so on. Through it all the reader, one hopes, emerges both challenged and changed, moving ultimately to a more integrated perception of the world we live in.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

The Role of Artisans Guild for Sustainable Development of Folk Craft and Its Marketing Aspect: A Case Study of Mukhosh Gram, Charida in Purulia District

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Abstract

The artisans guild or association (Samity) plays a crucial role for development of local art and craft practice. The creative art work completely belongs from small scale cottage sector. The local artisans acquired craftmanship by tradition from their forefathers. The Charida village is located under Baghmundi block of Purulia district. It is famous for majestic Chhau mask (locally named as Chhau mukhosh). The local artisans samity (Purulia Chhou Mukhosh Silpi Unnayan Samiti, Charida) plays a crucial role for the development of Chhau craft in respect of its production techniques, marketing channels, financial allocations etc. In this study selected Sutradhar artisans have been selected through purposive sampling techniques. This study reveals that artisans who have possessed membership of said artisan's guild (samity) remains in good socio-economic profile.

Keywords: *Samity, Sutradhar, Chhau, artisan's guild.*

Introduction:

In present day context Industrial cluster in forms of agglomeration has emerged a strategic intervention and promotional aid of entrepreneurship development and business propagation in small scale industry like Folk craft and art as well as all type of applicable cottage sector industry. It provides a golden opportunity to participate in globally competition and wide market access. The major hindrances of small-scale sector like crafts are lack of finance, poor technology; inhospitable market access which can reduces successfully through its geographical proximity and exploration of new business windows made possible by cluster principle. In our studied craft villages, the artisans admits that the production units cluster made a healthy competitive market with enriched productivity as well as it attains the need of global market demands. This will attract the unskilled artisans to join in this craft making sector actively and the existing artisan can promote their scale of production into a large sector by combating all kind of negative factors and strengthen regional rural economy of this studied region.

The term cluster it indicates the economies of agglomeration of craft production units within a geographical territory (village). It strengthens the innovation and competitiveness of this small-scale production unit (craft unit) that helps to promote the socio-economic aspect of artisans by engaging this craft production unit a substitute of agrarian economy. The concept of industrial cluster or industrial district concept was first

invented in developed countries later its success stories motivate the small-scale handicraft sector of developing and under developed countries. Enright (2005) explored the new dimension of craft cluster in small scale sector of developed and developing countries in a comparative way. the wine industry in California, IT sector in Bangalore, ceramic tiles and footwear in Italy, surgical instruments in Sialkot; Pakistan, woolen knitwear in Tirupura; India is such example of that. Rocha and Sternberg (2005), Delgado, Porter and Stern(2001) observed the positive impact of cluster analysis in fostering entrepreneurship and sustainable business development in small scale craft sector. In small scale sector such association or formal guild (samity) formation plays a crucial role for sustainable development of folk craft in terms of marketing assistance, financial allocation, expansion of craft business etc.

Development of cluster concept in respect of historical time period:

The origin and evolution of industrial cluster was made earlier by classical and neo-classical economist, geographers and planners. The Location Theory of Von Thunen (1826), The Agglomeration Theory (1920), The Marshalls Industrial District Theory, The Industrial Location Theory of Alfred Weber (1909) are the earlier invention of this theory. Later on, this theory get mounted success after the significant contribution of Michael Porter who emphasizes on industrial cluster theory in his world famous book named as "The Competitive Advantage of Nations" published in 1990. It explores a new innovative dimension of Cluster concept. The studies of classical economist in context of spatial economy and location theory explore the new orientation of cluster theory of craft marketing and its existence.

There are no universal or specific definition of Industrial cluster found unanimously. The research scholars, academicians have conceptualized the Industrial cluster theory according to different perspectives. Chen (2005) segmented this cluster into three distinct categories.

Category -I	Category -II	Category -III
It is based on the principle of localization economies	It is based on inter industrial relationship found in input and output tables.	This type of cluster is based on widest spectrum of arguments discussing about geographical proximity, economies of localization, value chain linkage, technological innovations
Alfred Marshall is the inventor.	Czamansky (1974, 1979); Roepke et al. (1974)	Porter"s theoretical approach. (1980)

Source: (Deb & Dey, 2016)

Hill and Brennan (2000) defines Industrial Cluster as "concentration of competitive firms or establishments in the same industry."Morosini (2004) defined cluster as "socioeconomic entity characterized by a social community of people and a population of economic agents localized in close proximity in a specific geographicregion".

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

According to Rosenfeld, (1997) "A cluster is concentrations of firms that are able to produce synergy because of their geographical proximity and interdependence, even though their scale of employment may not be pronounced or prominent."

Porter (1998) defined cluster as "Geographic concentration of interconnected companies and institutions in the particular field". He redefined the cluster concept in the year 2000 "as a geographically proximity group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities and defining it boundaries that canrange from a single city or state to a country or even a group of neighboring countries".

UNIDO defines Industrial cluster as a clubbing or amalgamation as well as concentration of micro, small and medium enterprises within common geographical territory.

Govt. of India introduced this cluster development programme by accepting the recommendation of Abid Hussain committee in 1997 for providing support to small and medium enterprises. The cluster related Governmental schemes are discussed below

1. Micro and Small enterprises – Cluster Development Programme (MSE-CDP)
2. Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)
3. Babasaheb Ambedkar Hasta Shilpa Yojana (AHVY)

According to UNIDO-CDP and industrial or artisanal cluster in small scale cottage sector requires at least 100 SME or 50 handicraft units in its corresponding town or craft village and surrounding areas.

Table: 1 Clustersat Glance in India

Sl. No.	Name of the Industrial/Production sector	Number of Industrial cluster
1.	**Traditional Manufacturing**	388
2.	**Handicrafts**	2780
3.	**Handlooms**	594
4.	**Others**	2896

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

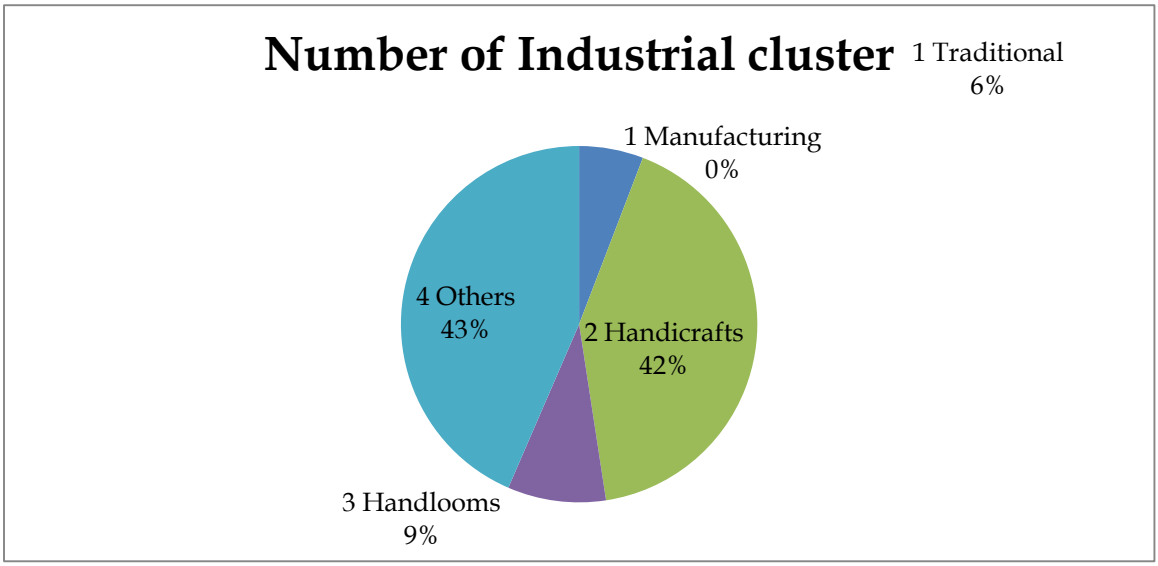

Figure 1 category wise percentage distribution of clusters in india

Table: 2 The state wise distribution of Small and Micro Enterprises (SME) Cluster in India is given below

Sl. No.	State	Clusters	Sl. No.	State	Clusters
1.	Maharashtra	58	12.	Orissa	13
2.	Gujarat	49	13.	Kerala	10
3.	Uttar Pradesh	34	14.	Madhya Pradesh	10
4.	Andhra Pradesh	32	15.	Jammu and Kashmir	04
5.	Punjab	30	16.	Jharkhand	03
6.	Tamil Nadu	28	17.	Himachal Pradesh	03
7.	Haryana	24	18.	Uttaranchal	03
8.	Rajasthan	20	19.	Chhattisgarh	02
9.	Delhi	19	20.	Goa	01
10.	Karnataka	19	21.		

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

11.	West Bengal	17			
Total SME Cluster in India					388

Source: http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/clusters/clus/smelist.htm#clus (Data retrieved on 19th August, 2020)

In India more than 50% of total cluster located five states of India namely Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and remaining clusters located in 16 states of India. It is also an alarming issue that 1/3 rd of Indian state remains untouched from the benefits of Industrial cluster.

Impact of artisan's guild (samity) in folk crafts (Chhau mukhosh) of Charida village:

Location of the study area:

The village Charida is situated in Bagmundi CD block of the Purulia district of West Bengal. Geographically, it is in the lowest step of Chotonagpur Plateau's. The terrain in this area is undulating with numerous sporadic hills are prevalent. A fewportions of its western boundary are traversed by the Subarnarekha River. The village's coordinates are $23^{0}19/$ N and $86^{0}05/$E. It is situated in the picturesque foothills of the Ajodhya Hills, approximately 5 km from Bagmundi. The village is surrounded by Bagmundi GP to the east, Ajodhya GP to the north, Ghorabandha GP to the south, Dhaba mouza to the southwest, Dhundhikhap mouza to the west, and Khirabera and Baredi mouza of Sindri GP to the northwest form the village's borders (Saha, 2017).

About 308 artisans are manufacturing masks (mukhosh) lives in Charida village. It uses to wear by the Chhau dancersduring Chhau dance, an acrobatic dance style which is recognised by UNESCO as a representation of intangible cultural heritage. The Geographical Index (GI) tag was recently applied to the Chhau Mask. The colourful mukhosh (masks) depicted a variety of animals, Hindu gods and goddesses, and epic characters. Tourists frequently visited this village to know about the unique craft-making procedures. Recently the Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises & Textiles, Government of West Bengaldevelops arural craft hub in this village to promote its business potentialities. Usually Shiv, Durga, Kali, Ganesha, Kartika, Asura and other gods and goddesses are depicted by the masks. Moreover lions, tigers, monkeysand other animals are also well depicted in Chhau mukhosh. Recently masks are sold in a customized manner, to meet the need for lifestyle and home décor items.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

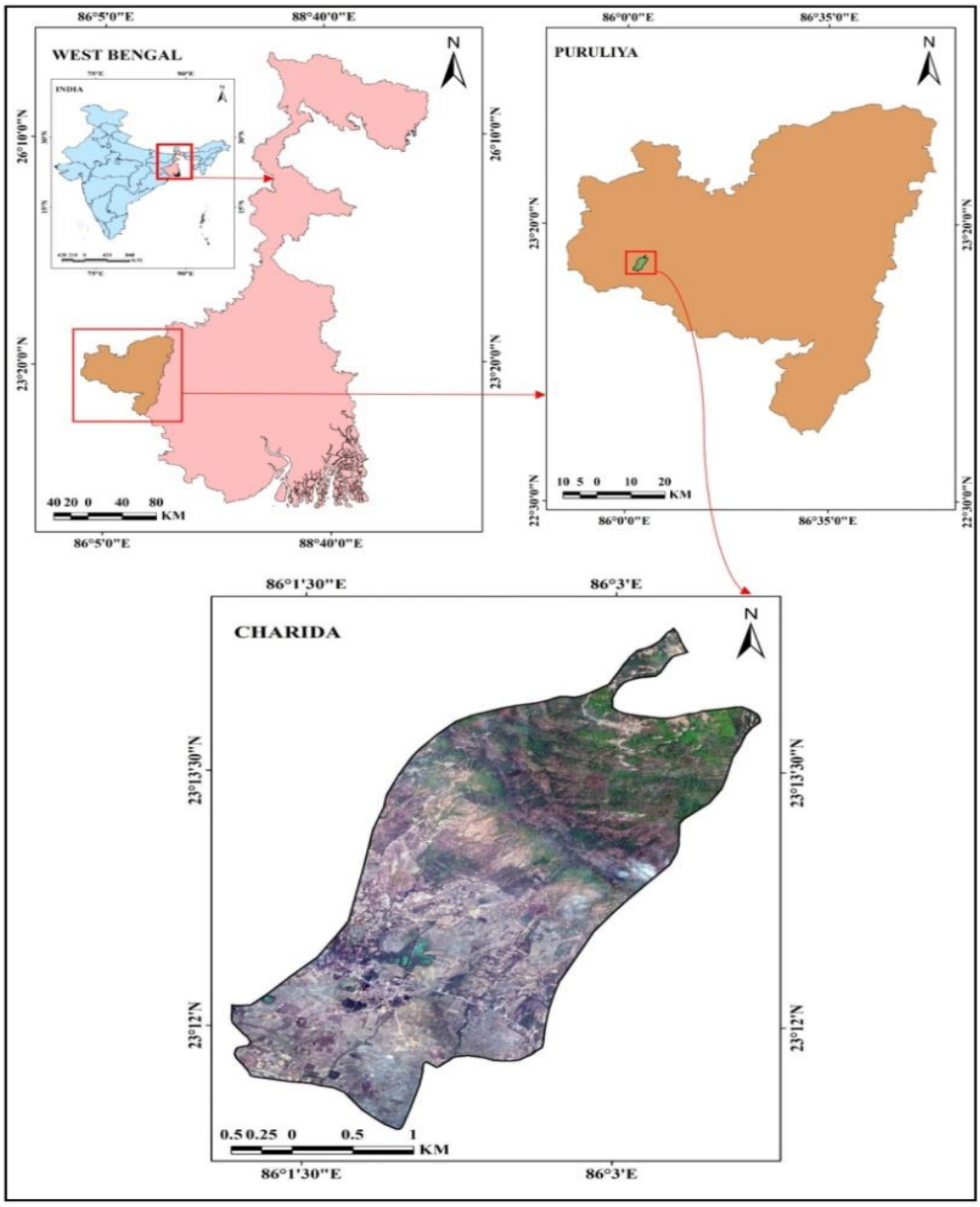

Figure: 2 location map of charida village

The impact of Industrial cluster in small scale Folk craft sector governs by numerous socio-economic parameters. In the present study 'with and without approach' are applied to study the impacts of Industrial cluster on selected crafts of studied craft villages.

In the year 2021, the government registered the Sutradhar artisans' cooperative guild, locally known as a samiti. During the formation this samiti was called "Chhow Mokosh Shilpi Sutradhar Samiti". In Charida village, there were about 250 artisan families, most of them were Sutradhar community as well as registered members of this samity. There are currently over 112 craft shops (stalls) in this village that sell a wide range

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
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Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

of Chhau mask products. A small percentage of Sutradhar craftsmen (5%) who don't have an outlet setup at home, manufacturing mask products and sell them to nearby artisans.

Techniques of Chhau Mukhoshproduction:

The Chhau masks are made by the Sutradhar artisan community through sequential stages. They start with soft paper layers dipped in glue, then pasted onto a mould. Clay components are then used for the facial cover. The mask is sun-dried, polished, segregated and then finished with frilling for eyes and nose. The mask is then decorated with lucrative colour and ornamentation. The Gods and goddesses are represented by various colour like Lord Shiva, Ganesh, and Devi Saraswati are represented by white. Evil or Asuras are representedthrough black or dark green, while Kali is represented by black or dark blues.

Figure 3 wide variety of chhau mukhosh adorns in a wall of mukhosh stall at charida village

Impact of artisan's guild (samity) based on 'With or Without Approach' in Charida Village:

In present research study we evaluate the role of artisan's guild (samity) in Charida village through 'with or without approach' is studied. A total number of 75sample artisans were selected among which 68 (to be filled after sample selection in field study) artisans are registered as samity member and rest 7artisans were non- registered for samity based production system. The comparative assessment of sustainability of craft production were studied between registered and non-registered artisan for samity in terms of financial assistance, literacy and training, access to wide marketing channels, rise in income, hired workers status etc.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

Table: 3 Craft production-based training facilities available: A comparative assessment between 'with or without' Approach:

Training status	Without approach (Samity)		With the approach(Samity)	
	No. of Artisan	%	No. of Artisan	%
Yes	2	28	61	89
No	5	72	7	11
Total	7	100	68	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

A total 75 respondent artisan are selected from the craft village Charida. Among which 68 artisans are registered as guild craftsmen (member in Samabay samity) and 7 artisans are not registered in any group (samity). From the given table it can be said that hands on training and workshop is taken in a satisfactory percentage among samity registered artisans whereas training facilities and workshop participation rate is very poor among artisans, have not registered under samity.

Table: 4 Utilization of various medium of marketing: A comparative assessment between 'with or without' Approach:

Marketing channel	Without approach (Samity)		With the approach (Samity)	
	No. of Artisan	%	No. of Artisan	%
Own shops and joined craft market and exhibition and utilizing other marketing channels	1	14	65	95
Can't afford Others miscellaneous marketing channel	6	86	3	5
Total	7	100	68	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

From this table it is clear that the artisans of guild approach have much stability in respect of their shops position and ownership. They have wider and diversified scope of utilization of marketing channels. In contrary the artisans without samity membership having a least scope to diversify their commercial channels. So, the artisans without guild approach became deprived from financial mainstreaming and economic independence.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 01-11, Section: Article

Table: 5 Income range per month: A comparative assessment between 'with or without' Approach:

Monthly income range	Without approach (Samity)		With the approach (Samity)	
	No. of Artisan	%	No. of Artisan	%
Less than 5000	1	14	2	4
5000-10000	5	72	8	12
10000-20000	1	14	37	54
More than 20,000	0	0	21	30
Total	7	100	68	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Around 54% of artisans having samity membership, belongs an income range of 10-20 K, where majority of artisans (72%) without samity membership have a limited income range of 5-10K. Hence, it proves that artisan's guild (samity) helps the artisans to earn much capital in comparison of artisans without cluster approach.

Table: 6 Hiring status of artisan worker: A comparative assessment between 'with or without' Approach:

Hiring status	Without approach (Samity)		With the approach (Samity)	
	No. of Artisan	%	No. of Artisan	%
Craft production unit Hired workers	1	14	57	84
Craft production unit without Hired workers	6	86	11	16
Total	7	100	68	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the table (Table-6) it shows that around 84 % of artisans with samity membership are able to hire workers as they have much production capabilities and demands. On the other hand, artisans without

samity membership delimits their production of crafts by themselves. Only 14% of them can hire workers as their business demands are very poor in comparison to artisans with samity membership.

Table: 7 Opportunity and ease of marketing status: A comparative assessment between 'with or without' Approach:

Marketing opportunities and scope	Without approach (Samity)		With the approach (Samity)	
	No. of Artisan	%	No. of Artisan	%
Enhanced and progressive state	1	14	65	95
Conservative and stagnant	6	86	3	5
Total	7	100	68	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

The artisans belong to formal samity have more scope to opt multiple marketing channel to sale their artefacts. Around 95% of sample artisans opt this diversified scope and opportunities. Whereas the artisans without association with samity have a little scope to enjoy modern diversified marketing channels like craft fairs, festivals and e-marketing etc. only 14% of sample respondent got these opportunities. Hence, the artisans having formal membership with samity got numerous marketing opportunities which imparts a drive towards optimal business succession.

In overall survey outcome, it is clear that the Chhau mask artisans who produces under the assistance of artisans samity (guild) have unity and integrity which helps to earn satisfactory profit and sustainable business development in comparison of artisans who produces individually and doesn't have any association or craft guild (Samity).

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

Tracing Kalachuri Grandeur: A Study of the Viratesvara Temple at Sohagpur

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Abstract

This study examines the Viratesvara Temple at Sohagpur, Madhya Pradesh, a significant monument of Kalachuri art and architecture located in the historic region of Dahalamandala. The Kalachuris (this dynasty was active between the 6th and 17th/18th centuries CE), among the most powerful dynasties of central India, were noble patrons of temple architecture and religious institutions. While earlier scholarship has largely addressed dynastic histories, this paper focuses on a site-specific architectural and archaeological analysis of the Viratesvara Temple to assess its historical and artistic importance.

The research draws upon literary sources, inscriptions, numismatic evidence, and secondary scholarship, complemented by extensive fieldwork conducted across Madhya Pradesh between 2023 and 2024. Using formalist and stylistic approaches, the study analyses the temple's architectural plan, sculptural programme, and iconography, situating it within the broader framework of Kalachuri temple architecture. Comparative analysis with other Kalachuri monuments suggests that the temple was constructed over multiple phases between the reigns of two popular rulers Yuvarajadeva I and Yuvarajadeva II. The findings highlight the temple's role not only as a Saiva sacred space but also as a symbol of dynastic authority and Sohagpur's regional significance within Dahalamaṇḍala.

Keywords: *Kalachuris, Dahalamandala, Sohagpur, Viratesvara Temple, Central Indian architecture.*

Introduction

Numerous regional royal dynasties flourished across the ancient and early medieval Indian subcontinent. The Kalachuri dynasty, a prominent and powerful ruling family, held sway over a vast expanse of central India, particularly present-day Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, for an extended period. The name "Kalachuri" itself has several variations, documented in the Bombay Gazetteer Vol. I, part 2, pages 293 and 470, including "*Kataccuri,*" "*Katachhuri,*" "*Katacuri,*" "*Kalacuri,*" "*Kalatsuri*" (Sanskrit form), "*Kalacurya,*" and even "*Kalaturya.*" "Kalachuri"[i] appears to be the root form. The Kalachuris are unique among early Indian dynasties, boasting at least twelve branches and sub-branches spread across the subcontinent. The earliest rulers, known as the Kalachuris of Mahismati, governed west-central India between the 6th and 7th centuries CE.[ii] Later, the Kalachuris of Tripuri reigned from the 7th to the 13th centuries CE.[iii] The Mahismati Kalachuris, also known as the Haihayas or Early Kalachuris (6th-7th centuries CE), controlled a territory encompassing parts of modern-day Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, with their capital at Mahishmati in the

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

Malwa region.[iv] The Tripuri Kalachuris, alternatively known as the Kalachuri dynasty of Chedi or Later Kalachuris, ruled parts of central India from the 7th to the 13th centuries CE. Their domain, the Chedi region (also known as Dahala-mandala), was cantered on their capital, Tripuri (present-day Tewar near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh). Claiming lunar lineage (*Chandravanshi*), they notably endured the famed Tripartite Struggle among the Palas, Rashtrakutas, and Pratiharas.

The term "Kalachuri" possesses a rich mythological background, appearing in texts such as the Epics, *Rigveda*, *Vayu Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, and contemporary Buddhist and Jain literature.[v] Beyond literary sources, inscriptions, coins, monuments, and sculptures reveal the political, religious, and cultural history of this dynasty. The term itself can be divided into two parts - "*Kala*"[vi] (or "*Kali*"), meaning long moustache, and "*Churi*,"[vii] meaning sharp knife. The Kalachuris of Chedi oversaw the construction of numerous magnificent religious and secular structures. This paper focuses on the Virateswar Temple of Sohagpur (Figure. 1), examining its architectural features and its significance as a landmark of Kalachuri art. This temple is designated a monument of national importance by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Figure 1 Viratesvara Temple
Source: Author

Literature Review:

Several scholarly works have examined the Kalachuris. These include general histories, studies of their political and social life, economic conditions, religious practices, and art and architecture. However, these studies often focus on specific aspects and tend toward generalization. M.C. Choubey's 'Tripuri: History and

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

Culture'[viii] explores the traditional history of the Tripuri line, including the regional environment, antiquity, chronology of rulers, and socio-political and religious history, but lacks detailed architectural analysis. R.D. Banerji's 'The Haihayas of Tripuri and their Monuments' - Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India (No. 23)[ix] provide crucial insights into the monument-building activities of the Tripuri Kalachuris (Haihayas). This pioneering survey by British and Indian archaeologists offers primary information on Sohagpur's emergence as a key politico -religious centre for the Dahala Kalachuris. S.N. Manwani's 'Evolution of Art and Architecture in Central India (with special reference to the Kalachuris of Ratanpur)'[x] examines the architectural activities of the Southern Kosala Kalachuris, providing an initial overview of their religious monuments. However, it lacks updated information on archaeological sites in Madhya Pradesh, particularly Sohagpur. Finally, R.K. Sharma's 'The Kalachuris and Their Times'[xi] offer a general dynastic history, attempting to reconstruct the chronology of the various Kalachuri branches.

In addition to these books, I consulted several other books and journals. One notable article is L.S. Nigam's 'Art Tradition of Daksina Kosala,'[xii] published in the Journal of Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University; Part-A. Vol.: 8-15. Nigam provides an overview of sculptural representations in Daksina Kosala and Dahalamandala, discussing the Kalachuri dynasty and other royal families who ruled that region. I also read Jeeban Kumar Patnaik's 'Temples of South Kosala'[xiii], which examines temple construction by various dynasties in the region from the first to the fifth century CE. While Patnaik mentions the Kalchuris, he omits detailed information regarding their specific architectural or archaeological sites. R. Ali's 'Advances in Temple Architecture in Daksina Kosala (Chhattisgarh)' [xiv] offers a general survey of the construction and features of religious monuments in the area. Finally, Hans T. Bakker's 'Observations on the History and Culture of Daksina Kosala'[xv] provides valuable background on Daksina Kosala, Dahalamandala, and their relationship, but does not offer information concerning Kalachuri sites in either region.

Research Methodology:

My research paper on the Viratesvara Temple in Sohagpur, Madhya Pradesh, involved a multifaceted approach encompassing the study of primary sources like inscriptions and coins, a thorough examination of existing secondary literature, and extensive fieldwork. This immersive investigation allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the temple's significance as a prime example of Kalachuri architecture within the Dahalamandala region.

My fieldwork was conducted in two phases. The first phase took place from October 29th to November 7th, 2023, and the second from February 13th to 20th, 2024. During these periods, I explored various archaeological sites across Madhya Pradesh, including the Rani Durgavati Fort & Museum in Jabalpur. Crucially, I also visited all relevant Site Museums adjacent to the main archaeological sites, each maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). These visits provided valuable contextual information and further enriched my understanding of the region's historical and architectural landscape.

My exploration of Sohagpur focused intensely on the Viratesvara Temple. I observed firsthand the temple's remarkable state of preservation, standing as a testament to its enduring significance. It remains an active place of worship, attracting not only the local populace but also devotees from neighbouring regions and states who

come to pay their respects. This vibrant religious activity underscores the temple's continuing cultural importance. My analysis of the Viratesvara Temple employed a dual methodological approach. Firstly, I adopted a formalist perspective, meticulously examining the visual elements of the structure. This involved a detailed study of the materials used in its construction, the specific patterns employed in its design, the colour and texture of the stone, and the overall shape and composition of the temple complex. This close observation allowed me to appreciate the intricate craftsmanship and artistic skill involved in its creation. Secondly, I implemented a stylistic approach to determine the temple's precise architectural classification within the broader context of Kalachuri architecture. This involved a comparative analysis of the Viratesvara Temple's stylistic features with other established examples of Kalachuri temples from different periods. The primary objective of this analysis was to ascertain whether the Viratesvara Temple belongs to the early or mature phase of Kalachuri architectural development. This involved a detailed examination of specific architectural elements, such as the shape of the *Shikhara* (tower), the design of the *Mandapa* (hall), and the ornamentation of the various components of the temple structure. By comparing these features with those of other dated Kalachuri temples, I aimed to establish a more precise chronological placement for the Viratesvara Temple within the overall trajectory of Kalachuri architectural evolution. This stylistic analysis, combined with the formalist approach, provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the temple's artistic and historical significance. Furthermore, my research considered the temple's ongoing role as a living religious centre, acknowledging its continued relevance within the cultural fabric of the region. This holistic approach, combining historical analysis, architectural study, and ethnographic observation, allowed for a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Viratesvara Temple's enduring legacy. The temple stands not only as a monument to the past but also as a vibrant testament to the continuity of cultural and religious traditions in the region. My research aims to contribute to a deeper appreciation of this remarkable architectural gem and its enduring significance within the rich tapestry of Indian history and art. The detailed analysis of the temple's architectural features, combined with the study of historical records and the observation of contemporary religious practices, provides a multifaceted perspective on this important cultural landmark. The research seeks to illuminate the temple's historical context, artistic achievements, and ongoing cultural relevance, offering a comprehensive understanding of its place within the broader narrative of Indian art and architecture.

Results and Discussion:

The term "Kalachuri" appears in the *Rigveda, Vayu Purana, Vishnu Purana*, the Epics, and contemporary Buddhist and Jain literature. Beyond literary sources, inscriptions, coins, monuments, and sculptures further illuminate the dynasty's history. The Kalachuri dynasty of central India held power and exerted political influence from the 6th to the 17th/18th century CE, extending their diplomatic and artistic influence across the subcontinent. This paper focuses on the archaeological site of Sohagpur, historically situated within Dahalamandala.

Modern scholars identify Dahala/Chedi with the present-day Bundelkhand region. Their capital, Tripuri, corresponds to the modern Tewar village, located on the Jabalpur-Bheraghat highway. Most Dahalamandala archaeological sites are located in present-day Madhya Pradesh state, within the Bundelkhand region. This

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
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Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

early medieval dynasty is unique for its more than twelve branches, each distinctively named after its geographical location. The Kalachuri family possesses a rich artistic heritage.

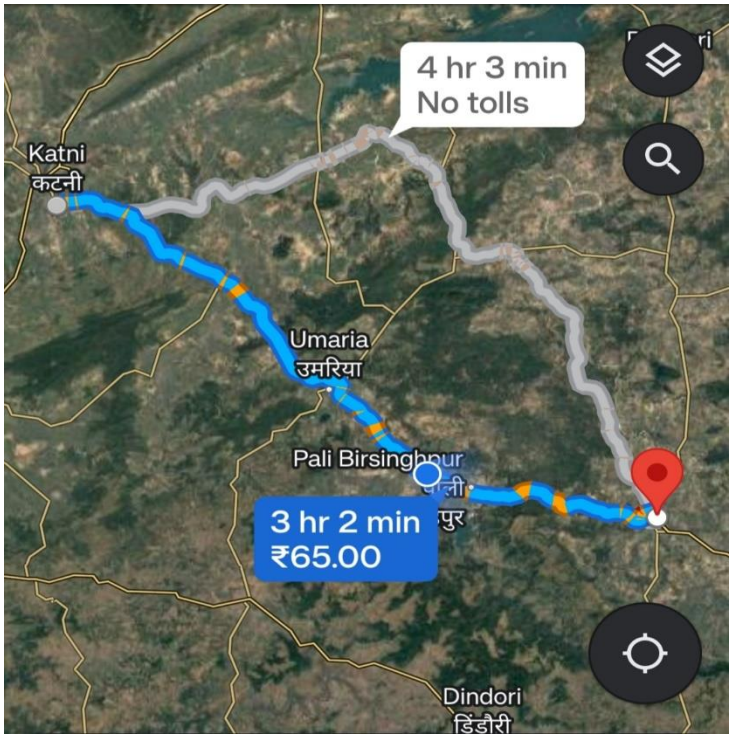

Figure 2 The Location Of Sohagpur
Source: Google Earth

Sohagpur, located in the Shahdol District (Figure. 2) of Madhya Pradesh (22° 42' 3.5244" N, 78° 11' 51.1728" E), is renowned as a significant repository of Kalachuri art. Its most prominent example is the Viratesvara Temple, a prime example of Kalachuri architecture, situated near the Shahdol-Rewa road, approximately 3 km from Shahdol on the Shahdol-Manpur route. On October 31, 2023, I visited Sohagpur from Katni, a journey of 135 km which took approximately 3 hours and 3 minutes. Sohagpur rose to prominence under the Kalachuris of Tripuri during the 10th-11th centuries CE, the era of the Viratesvara Temple's construction. The town's ancient name, Saubhagyapura, is documented in the Bilhari stone inscription of Yuvarajadeva II.[xvi]

Beyond the Virtesvara temple, often described as "Poetry in Stone,"[xvii] lays a wealth of historical remains awaiting comprehensive investigation. J. D. Beglar, a pioneering archaeological surveyor, first documented this area between 1873 CE and 1874 CE.[xviii] His meticulous records describe a centrally located palace, constructed of brick and repurposed stone from earlier temples, illustrating the cyclical nature of construction and the site's layered history. Beglar's survey extended beyond the palace to encompass the numerous ruins east of the Viratesvara temple. He meticulously catalogued eight temple groups and twenty-one Sati monuments, structures commemorating widow immolation. Local traditions identify these ruins as Viratanagara, the capital of King Virata, enriching the archaeological record with narrative depth. While scholars like R.D. Banerji[xix] and Dr. Rahman Ali[xx] have recognized the significance of the Viratesvara Temple, a comprehensive analysis of its architectural evolution and surrounding landscape remains a critical need. A

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

thorough examination of the temple's stylistic shifts, from its foundations to its intricate carvings, promises to reveal a deeper understanding of its construction phases and the influences that shaped its design. Furthermore, the adjacent areas, with their smaller ruins and ancient tanks, hold the potential to illuminate the daily life, religious practices, and societal structures of Viratanagara's inhabitants. The interconnectedness of these elements - the temple, the palace, the smaller ruins, and the water systems - offers a holistic view of this once-thriving urban centre. My comprehensive survey of the Viratesvara temple and its environs, conducted over an extended period, aims to address this scholarly gap. The research suggests a multi-generational construction timeline, potentially initiated during the reign of Yuvarajadeva I (915 CE – 945 CE)[xxi] and completed under the patronage of Yuvarajadeva II (980 CE – 990 CE). This extended timeframe likely contributed to the temple's complex architectural narrative, with varying stylistic elements reflecting the artistic trends and royal preferences of each era.

This survey presents a detailed analysis of the Viratesvara temple's architecture, its relationship to surrounding ruins, and insights derived from studying ancient tanks and other archaeological features. This in-depth exploration illuminates the historical significance of Viratanagara, its royal patrons, and the cultural context of this remarkable "Poetry in Stone" and its landscape. The study examines construction materials, artisan techniques, and the symbolic meaning embedded within the temple's design and iconography. This multifaceted approach allows for a deeper appreciation of the Viratesvara temple not merely as an isolated monument, but as an integral part of Viratanagara's historical narrative. The analysis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the site's development and the complex interplay of factors shaping its evolution. Finally, the study considers the implications of these discoveries for understanding the broader historical context, including the region's political and religious dynamics during the temple's construction.

A detailed study of the Viratesvara temple and its surroundings suggests a prolonged construction process. It likely began during Yuvarajadeva I's reign (915–945 CE) and concluded under Yuvarajadeva II (980–990 CE).[xxii] Minor construction and ornamentation continued into the 11th century CE, placing the temple within the mature phase. This extended timeline resulted in a complex architectural narrative, incorporating stylistic elements reflecting the artistic trends and royal preferences of each era.

Constructed within a large complex, this east-facing sandstone temple sits upon an elevated *Jagati* platform. Both the *Jagati* and portions of the temple have undergone renovation. The temple features a horizontal layout, comprising a *Vedibandha*, a square *Garbha-griha* (sanctum sanctorum), a rectangular *Antarala* (vestibule), a square Mandapa (hall) with lateral *Kakshasana* (side chambers), and an eastern entrance *Ardha-mandapa* (porch). As noted by Banerji, the northern lateral transept had sustained significant damage and was near collapse, while the southern transept remained in better condition. The Garbha-griha measures 2.96 meters by 2.96 meters. Inside, corner pilasters support the ceiling. A north-facing Sivalinga is (Figure. 3) enshrined within. The ceiling consists of concentric, overlapping circles, diminishing in size from bottom to top. This structure rests upon an octagon formed by heavy lintels supported by eight pairs of pilasters and four central pillars. The central portion of the *Vitana* (ceiling), originally adorned with a thousand-petalled lotus carving, is partially damaged. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has conserved the ceiling and

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

sealed the damaged opening. The upper brackets of each pilaster feature carvings of *Nayikas* in *Tri-bhanga* poses beneath trees.

Figure 3. Siva Linga Inside The Garbhagriha
Source: Author

The square *Mandapa* (6.25 m. x 6.25 m.) features elaborately carved lateral sides. Lateral transepts terminate in *Kakshasanas*, complete with backrests and seats. The southern *Kakshasana* is well-preserved, while the northern one is missing. Each *Kakshasana* includes benches with brackets on three sides, supporting two front half-pillars. These half-pillars, along with back pilasters, support the *Kakshasana* roof. This section is richly carved with *Apsaras*, *Gaja-shardula* motifs, and other figures. The original eastern entrance appears to have been replaced by a simpler, later addition. The newer *Mandapa* houses three to four in situ sculptures. Its ceiling comprises four square lintels, decreasing in size from bottom to top, with a central motif of three full-blown lotuses. Two pilasters adorn each corner, decorated with *Chaitya* dormers and other motifs.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

Figure 4 The Doorjamb Of Garbhagriha
Source: Author

The *Garbha-griha's* main doorway exhibits elaborate ornamentation (Figure. 4), indicative of a mature architectural phase. Its construction features *Shaptashakhas*, notably *Patrashakhas* and intricately rendered *Rupashakhas*. River Goddesses occupy their customary positions, sheltered by serpent hoods and attended by flanking figures. Four-armed Siva *Dvarapalas* are also present. The right jamb's *Dvarapala* holds a *Vajra* (thunderbolt), *Akshamala* (rosary), *Trishula*, and *Kripana* (dagger). The left jamb's *Dvarapala* holds a *Padma* (lotus), *Khatvanga* (skull-mace), *Damaru,* and *Kapala* (skull-cup). A *Rupa-shakha*, positioned between two *Mithuna-shakhas*, contains large niches with divine images. From top to bottom, the left jamb's images depict *Brahma*, *Sarasvati*, two devotees worshipping a *linga*, *Shiva* with *Durga*, and *Sarasvati*.

The lintel features three large projecting brackets: one centrally positioned and two at each end. The left bracket depicts a seated, eight-armed *Sarasvati* holding a *Vina*. Figures of Brahma, a standing *Sarasvati*, and another *Brahma* are also present on this bracket. The central bracket, or *lalata-bimba*, displays an eight-armed *Nataraja* with his attributes: *Damaru, Trishula, Akshamala, Dhanush* (bow), and *Khatvanga*. His remaining three hands

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

exhibit distinct *mudras*: *Tarjani-mudra* (left hand), *Abhaya-mudra* (right hand), and *Varada-mudra* (right hand). To *Nataraja's* left, within a recessed space, are Vishnu, a standing female figure holding a vase, and *Gaja-Lakshmi*. The right bracket portrays a six-armed, dancing *Ganesha*. A panel of *Sapta-matrikas* accompanied by *Shiva* and *Ganesha,* and *Nava-grahas* are situated on the door in their customary positions. Inside the *Mandapa* are various free-standing sculptures in a damaged state, including a female figure in *Tribhanga* posture holding a pot, a seated *Mahavira* (Jain sculpture, with only the lion visible), a seated Buddha, a standing four-armed Vishnu, and a *Vyala* figure. These sculptures are currently in a state of significant disrepair.

Figure 5 Shikhara Portion
Source: Author

The *Sapta Ratha* (Figure. 5) temple comprises an *Adhisthana, Vedibandha, Jangha*, and *Sikhara*. Six stairs ascend from the *Jagati* to the *Adhisthana*, which measures 2.44 meters high and consists of five mouldings. The *Vedibandha* also features five mouldings, with scroll motifs carved into the upper five mouldings. Two *Madhya-Bandhana* mouldings divide the *Jangha* into three tiers. The lowest tier is the largest, while the uppermost is the smallest. The *Bhadra* niches on all tiers house various divinities. The *Anuraha* and *Anuratha* niches on the lower two tiers depict *Apsaras*, *Vyalas*, and celestial damsels (Figure. 6) in various postures. The uppermost tier of these niches features flying celestials holding garlands. *Karna* niches display *Ashta-dikpalas* on the lowest tier, *Vasus* on the middle tier, and a *Shaiva* deity on the top tier. Recessed areas are carved with *Gaja-shardula* motifs,

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

amorous couples, and divinities. Each *Bhadra* niche contains unique sculptures. The south *Bhadra's* middle tier features a four-handed *Shiva-Tripurantaka* holding a bow and arrow, *Khadaga*, and possibly a trident. A four-handed seated *Shiva*, holding a *Damru* and trident among other attributes, is also present. The lowermost niche is empty. The west *Bhadra* niches depict an eight-armed *Shiva-Nataraja* in *Tri-bhanga* pose in the lowest tier. While some attributes are missing, identifiable ones include a *Damru*, trident, and *Kapala*. A six-armed *Sadashiva* in *dhyanasana* posture occupies the middle tier, and three standing deities, one possibly *Ardhanareeshvara,* are in the uppermost tier. The north *Bhadra* niches feature a six-armed *Chamunda* in *Tri-bhanga* pose in the lowest tier. Her attributes, though not entirely clear, likely include a *Khadaga*, skull, javelin, and a boon-giving gesture. Also present are a four-armed figure holding a *Kamandalu* and trident in the middle tier, *Shiva-Ekapada* in the middle tier and *Shiva-Vinadhara* in the uppermost. The north *Kapili* niches contain a six-armed *Sarasvati* holding a *Veena, Akshamala*, and *Kamandalu* in the lowest tier, *Ardhanareeshvara* in the middle, and three goddesses in the uppermost. The south *Kapili* niches display a four-armed *Ganesh* in the lowest tier, *Kartikeya* in the middle, and *Uma-Maheshvara* in the uppermost.

Figure 6 The Outer Wall Of The Temple
Source: Author

The *Varandika* section features four to five mouldings. The *Sikhara* displays *Raha-paga, Anurah-paga, Anuratha-paga*, and *Kanika-paga*, indicative of the *Saptaratha* style. Each *ratha* of the *Jangha* culminates in a miniature

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 12-24, Section: Article

Shikhara, with the *Bhadra's shikhara* reaching a slightly higher elevation, demonstrating the presence of *Anga-Shikhara*. The *Bhadra's Anga-shikhara* is crowned by an *Amalaka* and *Kalasa*. The main *Shikhara* is topped with an *Amalaka, Chandrika, Amalasarika,* and *Kalasa*. A *Suka-nasika* projects from the front of the *Shikhara* above the *Antarala*, surmounted by a circular medallion featuring Shiva as *Nataraja*. Pilastered niches on the lateral facades house images of sixteen-armed *Durga* (south) and Shiva (north). The Viratesvara Temple stands as a prime example of mature Kalachuri architecture in Dahalamandala, marking the transition from a transitional to a supreme phase. Within the temple complex, a small, artificial tank is present, along with scattered architectural fragments, including *Jagati* and *Vedibandha* portions and a broken lintel, suggesting the presence of other structures. Under Kalachuri rule, Sohagpur flourished as a prominent *Shaiva khetra*. [xxiii] This magnificent temple was constructed to promote Shaivism, the state religion, and to honour Shiva, the Kalachuris' royal deity. Its visually striking structure exemplifies Kalachuri architectural achievement.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The archaeological investigation of Sohagpur, specifically focusing on the Viratesvara Temple connected to the Kalachuris of Dahalamaṇḍala, offers invaluable insights into the artistic traditions and architectural heritage of this dynasty. This in-depth exploration allows us to transcend a mere surface appreciation of their aesthetic accomplishments and delve into the historical, political, and religious contexts that shaped their artistic expressions. The Viratesvara Temple stands as a testament to the pinnacle of Kalachuri architectural achievement, showcasing their mastery of design and construction. A detailed examination of this temple reveals the intricate constructional patterns employed, the developmental methods utilized, and the remarkable sculptural advancements achieved under the patronage of the Dahala rulers. This study illuminates not only the artistic prowess of the Kalachuris but also provides a window into the political landscape and religious practices prevalent in Sohagpur during their reign.

The interconnectedness of these elements – artistic innovation, political ambition, and religious fervour – contributes to the unique historical significance of Sohagpur. The Viratesvara Temple serves as a powerful symbol of the Kalachuris' ambition to establish their distinct identity and lasting legacy within the broader narrative of Indian art history. While Amarkantak often garners attention as a prime example of magnificent Kalachuri architecture, the Viratesvara Temple in Sohagpur presents a compelling counterpoint, showcasing the dynasty's multifaceted approach to artistic patronage and their desire to leave an indelible mark on various regions under their control. The temple's intricate carvings, elaborate architectural features, and overall grandeur speak volumes about the resources and skilled craftsmanship the Kalachuris commanded. Furthermore, the temple's strategic location in Sohagpur suggests a deliberate attempt to solidify their presence and influence in this specific area.

The study of the Viratesvara Temple also provides crucial insights into the religious climate of the time. The temple's dedication to Lord Shiva, a prominent deity in the Hindu pantheon, reflects the prevailing religious beliefs and practices of the Kalachuri rulers and the population they governed. The temple's architecture and iconography likely served as a powerful medium for communicating religious narratives and reinforcing the legitimacy of the Kalachuri dynasty. By constructing such a magnificent temple, the Kalachuris not only demonstrated their piety but also projected an image of power and prosperity. This careful cultivation of

religious symbolism played a vital role in consolidating their rule and fostering a sense of unity within their kingdom. The archaeological investigation of Sohagpur, therefore, offers a rich and nuanced understanding of the Kalachuris of Dahalamaṇḍala, revealing their artistic achievements, political strategies, and religious devotion, all interwoven to create a unique and enduring legacy. The Viratesvara Temple stands as a tangible embodiment of this complex interplay of factors, inviting further exploration and appreciation of this fascinating period in Indian history. Through continued research and analysis, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the Kalachuris' contributions to Indian art and architecture and their enduring impact on the cultural landscape of the region.

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Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

Public Health and Healthcare Administration during the Reign of King Ashoka

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Abstract

The Mauryan period marks a significant phase in the development of public welfare and administrative governance in ancient India. Among Mauryan rulers, King Ashoka stands out for his emphasis on social welfare, morality, and public health. This paper examines the nature and structure of public health and healthcare administration during the reign of King Ashoka, drawing evidence from archaeological sources such as rock and pillar edicts, as well as literary texts including Buddhist chronicles, Arthashastra, and accounts of foreign observers. The study highlights Ashoka's innovative approach to healthcare through state-supported medical services, the establishment of hospitals for humans and animals, promotion of herbal medicine, sanitation measures, and preventive healthcare practices. Ashoka's Dhamma policy played a crucial role in integrating ethical governance with public health, ensuring compassion, accessibility, and equity in medical care. The paper also explores the administrative mechanisms employed to implement healthcare policies across the empire, reflecting an early form of organized public health administration. By analyzing these measures, the study argues that Ashoka's reign represents one of the earliest systematic efforts toward state responsibility in healthcare. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of ancient Indian health systems and their relevance to the historical evolution of public health administration.

Keywords: *King Ashoka , Public Health, Healthcare Administration, Mauryan Empire, Ancient Indian Medicine*

Introduction

The history of public health and healthcare administration in ancient India reveals a sophisticated understanding of human well-being that extended far beyond mere medical treatment. Among ancient rulers, Emperor Ashoka Maurya (c. 268–232 BCE) stands out as a pioneer who integrated healthcare into the broader framework of governance, ethics, and social responsibility. His reign marked a significant transition from conquest-driven imperialism to welfare-oriented administration, with health care emerging as a key concern of the state.

Ashoka's policies were deeply influenced by the principles of Dharma, which emphasized compassion, non-violence, moral conduct, and care for all living beings. Unlike modern healthcare systems that are largely institutional and technologically driven, Ashoka's approach to health was holistic. It encompassed physical health, mental well-being, ethical living, environmental care, and social harmony. Health, in this context, was

not viewed as an individual responsibility alone but as a collective obligation shared by the ruler, administrators, and society at large.

Archeological evidence, particularly Ashoka inscriptions found across the Indian subcontinent, provides valuable insights into the emperor's commitment to public welfare. These inscriptions refer to the establishment of medical facilities, the provision of medicinal herbs, the appointment of medical officers, and the care of both humans and animals. Such references indicate the presence of an organized administrative mechanism aimed at ensuring access to healthcare, even in remote regions of the empire.

In addition to archaeological sources, ancient literary texts such as Buddhist chronicles, and Ayurveda treatises suggest that medical knowledge and healthcare practices were already well-developed during this period. Ashoka's contribution lay not in inventing medicine, but in institutionalizing healthcare as a state-supported service. His reign thus represents one of the earliest examples of government-led public health initiatives in world history.

Furthermore, Ashoka's emphasis on animal welfare and veterinary care highlights the inclusive nature of his healthcare vision. The establishment of veterinary services and protection of animals reflected both economic considerations given the importance of animals in agriculture and transport and ethical values rooted in Dharma. This dual concern for human and animal health reinforces the idea that Ashoka's healthcare policies were comprehensive and forward-looking.

The relevance of Ashoka's healthcare administration extends beyond historical interest. In the contemporary era, where public health challenges demand ethical governance, equitable access, and preventive care, Ashoka's model offers valuable lessons. His integration of morality, administration, and healthcare provides a framework for understanding how governance can play a proactive role in promoting societal well-being.

This study seeks to examine the nature and scope of healthcare administration under King Ashoka by analysing archaeological records and literary sources. By exploring the role of Dharma, medical institutions, public health measures, and veterinary services, the research aims to assess the significance of Ashoka's policies in shaping early healthcare systems and their enduring relevance in the history of public health administration.

This study follows a qualitative historical research methodology based on a critical analysis of archaeological and literary sources to examine public health and healthcare administration during the reign of King Ashoka. Since the subject pertains to ancient history, the research relies entirely on secondary data derived from authentic primary records and classical texts. An interpretative and contextual approach has been adopted to understand healthcare practices within the administrative and ethical framework of the Mauryan state.

Archaeological evidence forms the core foundation of this study, as it provides direct and contemporaneous information about Ashoka's public welfare policies. The primary archaeological sources include the Major Rock Edicts, Minor Rock Edicts, and Pillar Edicts of King Ashoka, discovered across different regions of the Indian subcontinent. These inscriptions explicitly refer to the establishment of medical treatment facilities for both humans and animals, the plantation and distribution of medicinal herbs, the digging of wells, and the

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

construction of rest houses along roads. Edict II and Edict VII are particularly significant for understanding state-sponsored healthcare and welfare initiatives. These inscriptions reflect the administrative intent of the Mauryan state and demonstrate an early form of organized public health policy.

Archaeological evidence provides the most direct and reliable information regarding healthcare policies during the reign of King Ashoka. Although the term "hospital" is not explicitly used, several inscriptions clearly indicate organized and state-supported medical care.

1. Major Rock Edict II

"Everywhere within my dominions, and also in the neighboring territories, arrangements have been made for medical treatment for both human beings and animals. Medicinal herbs beneficial for humans and animals have been imported and cultivated wherever they were not previously available."

Source: Major Rock Edict II, English translation adapted from Thapar (1997).

This is the most important archaeological source related to healthcare. In this edict, Ashoka explicitly states that arrangements were made for medical treatment of both humans and animals throughout the empire and even in neighboring territories. It also mentions the plantation and distribution of medicinal herbs, roots, and plants wherever they were not available.

This edict is widely regarded as the earliest epigraphic evidence of state-sponsored healthcare in ancient India.

2. Major Rock Edict VII

Although this edict does not directly mention hospitals, it emphasizes public welfare, moral responsibility, and the well-being of subjects. These principles form the ethical foundation of Ashoka's public health policies and support the idea of healthcare as a state concern.

3. Pillar Edict V

This edict refers to regulations on animal slaughter and protection of certain animal species. These measures indirectly relate to animal health and veterinary care and reflect Ashoka's concern for the physical well-being of living beings.

4. Minor Rock Edicts

Some Minor Rock Edicts stress Ashoka's commitment to moral governance and social welfare, which scholars interpret as including healthcare and humanitarian policies within the administrative framework.

In addition to archaeological evidence, the study draws extensively from **ancient literary** texts that provide indirect yet valuable information about healthcare systems during the Mauryan period. The Arthashastra attributed to Kautilya offers insights into state administration, public officials, urban sanitation, regulation of medical practitioners, and the role of the state in public welfare. Buddhist texts such as the Mahavamsa,

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

Dipavamsa, and Ashokavadana highlight Ashoka's moral governance and his emphasis on compassion, non-violence, and care for living beings, which directly influenced healthcare practices.

Further references are drawn from medical and semi-medical traditions preserved in classical texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, which, although not exclusively Mauryan, reflect the medical knowledge and practices prevalent during the broader ancient Indian period. Additionally, accounts of foreign observers such as Megasthenes, preserved in later Greek writings, provide supplementary descriptions of urban hygiene, public facilities, and medical practices in Mauryan cities.

Literary sources supplement archaeological evidence by providing broader administrative, ethical, and medical contexts.

1. Arthashastra (Kautilya)

The Arthashastra contains references to state responsibility in public welfare, including regulation of physicians, sanitation in cities, and administrative supervision of health-related activities. While it predates Ashoka, it reflects the administrative system inherited and modified by the Mauryan rulers.

2. Ashokavadana

This Buddhist text describes Ashoka's transformation into a welfare-oriented ruler and highlights his concern for compassion, care for the sick, and humanitarian governance, indirectly supporting the existence of healthcare institutions.

3. Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa

These Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles mention Ashoka's support for public welfare, medical assistance, and establishment of facilities for monks and the general population, especially in the context of Buddhist monastic communities.

4. Charaka Samhita

Although not specifically focused on Ashoka, this classical Ayurvedic text represents the medical knowledge and institutional practices prevalent during the Mauryan period. It indicates the presence of trained physicians, organized treatment methods, and medicinal formulations likely used in state-supported healthcare settings.

5. Sushruta Samhita

This text provides evidence of advanced surgical practices and medical training, suggesting the existence of medical institutions capable of systematic healthcare delivery during the broader ancient Indian period.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

6. Megasthenes' Indica

The Greek ambassador Megasthenes describes urban planning, sanitation, and public facilities in Mauryan cities. His account supports the presence of organized civic infrastructure that indirectly contributed to public health and medical care.

The study adopts a comparative and analytical method by correlating archaeological inscriptions with literary narratives to ensure historical reliability. Healthcare-related references are examined in their socio-political and ethical contexts, particularly in relation to Ashoka's Dhamma policy. Through systematic analysis of multiple sources, the research aims to reconstruct a coherent picture of public health and healthcare administration during Ashoka's reign.

Public Health and Healthcare Administration under King Ashoka

The reign of King Ashoka represents a landmark phase in the history of public health and welfare administration in ancient India. Unlike earlier rulers whose policies primarily emphasized military expansion and revenue collection, Ashoka integrated healthcare into the core functions of state governance. Public health during his reign was recognized as a collective responsibility of the state, reflecting a systematic and humane approach to administration.

One of the most significant aspects of healthcare administration under Ashoka was the establishment of medical facilities for both humans and animals. Archaeological evidence from the Major Rock Edicts, particularly Edict II, clearly indicates that the Mauryan state made provisions for medical treatment not only within the empire but also in neighboring regions. This demonstrates an advanced understanding of healthcare as a public service that transcended political boundaries. The inclusion of animal healthcare further highlights the comprehensive nature of Ashoka's welfare policies.

Preventive healthcare formed another crucial dimension of Ashokan public health administration. The plantation of medicinal herbs, roots, and trees, as mentioned in the edicts, suggests an organized effort to ensure the availability of medical resources. The construction of wells, rest houses, and roadside facilities contributed to improved sanitation, hygiene, and the well-being of travelers and local populations. These measures indicate an awareness of environmental and infrastructural factors affecting public health.

Healthcare administration under Ashoka was closely linked to his policy of Dhamma, which emphasized compassion, non-violence, and social responsibility. Medical care was not limited to elite sections of society but extended to common people, reflecting an inclusive approach. The appointment of officials responsible for public welfare and moral supervision further strengthened the administrative framework supporting healthcare initiatives.

Overall, public health and healthcare administration during Ashoka's reign reveal an early model of state-sponsored welfare, combining ethical governance with practical administrative measures. These initiatives laid a foundation for organized public health systems and highlight the progressive nature of Mauryan administration in addressing the health needs of society.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

Hospitals and Medical Institutions: The existence and development of hospitals and medical institutions during the reign of King Ashoka reflect a significant advancement in organized healthcare administration in ancient India. Although the term "hospital" in its modern sense was not used during the Mauryan period, archaeological and literary evidence clearly indicates the presence of state-supported medical facilities that functioned as organized centers for treatment and care.

Ashokan inscriptions provide the most reliable evidence regarding institutionalized healthcare. Major Rock Edict II explicitly mentions arrangements for medical treatment for both humans and animals throughout the empire. This suggests that healthcare facilities were not isolated or privately managed, but were instead integrated into the administrative framework of the Mauryan state. The reference to the availability of medical treatment in both urban and rural areas implies a decentralized network of medical institutions under state supervision.

Medical practitioners during this period were likely trained in the traditional systems of medicine prevalent in ancient India. Texts such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, though not directly attributed to Ashoka's reign, represent the medical knowledge and surgical practices that informed healthcare delivery during the Mauryan era. These texts indicate the presence of organized medical education, specialized physicians, and systematic treatment methods, which would have supported the functioning of medical institutions.

In addition to curative care, Mauryan medical institutions emphasized preventive and supportive healthcare. The cultivation and distribution of medicinal plants, herbs, and roots—mentioned in Ashokan edicts—suggest that medical centers had access to essential pharmaceutical resources. Facilities such as rest houses and water reservoirs, constructed along major routes, also served a health-related function by providing shelter, clean water, and relief to travelers, monks, and the general population.

Another distinctive feature of Ashoka's healthcare policy was the establishment of veterinary medical institutions. The provision of animal hospitals highlights the inclusive and ethical character of Mauryan healthcare administration and reflects the influence of Ashoka's Dhamma, which promoted compassion toward all living beings.

Overall, hospitals and medical institutions under King Ashoka represent an early and organized attempt at institutional healthcare. These establishments functioned not merely as treatment centers but as integral components of a broader public health system, demonstrating the Mauryan state's commitment to welfare-oriented governance.

Animal health care and veterinary services constituted a significant and innovative aspect of public welfare administration during the reign of King Ashoka. In the broader framework of Mauryan governance, animal welfare was not treated as a secondary concern but was integrated into the state's ethical, economic, and administrative priorities. Influenced by the principles of Dhamma, Ashoka's policies extended compassion and protection beyond human society to encompass animals, reflecting an advanced moral vision for his time.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

Archaeological evidence, particularly the Ashokan rock and pillar edicts, provides clear indications of organized veterinary care under Ashoka's rule. Several inscriptions explicitly mention arrangements for medical treatment for animals alongside provisions for human healthcare. These references suggest the existence of designated facilities or institutional arrangements where animals received treatment. Moreover, the imperial policy of planting and distributing medicinal herbs throughout the empire—both indigenous and imported—points to a structured system that supported veterinary medicine as well as human healthcare.

Animal healthcare under Ashoka served multiple purposes. Ethically, it was rooted in the Buddhist ideals of ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion toward all living beings. The regulation of animal slaughter, protection of certain species, and discouragement of cruelty reflect the moral dimensions of healthcare governance. Such measures contributed to a social environment that valued care, restraint, and respect for life, which indirectly supported public health and social harmony.

From an administrative and economic perspective, veterinary services were essential for maintaining agricultural productivity and transportation networks. Animals such as cattle, horses, and elephants played a vital role in farming, trade, communication, and military operations. Ensuring their health was therefore crucial to the stability and efficiency of the Mauryan state. The provision of veterinary care can thus be understood as a strategic policy that balanced ethical considerations with practical governance needs.

Literary sources further support the presence of veterinary knowledge and practices in ancient India. Ayurvedic traditions, including early references in texts such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, acknowledge the treatment of animal diseases and the use of herbal remedies. Buddhist literature also reflects Ashoka's concern for animal welfare, reinforcing the interpretation that veterinary care was both a moral and administrative responsibility of the state.

Overall, animal health care and veterinary services under King Ashoka represent one of the earliest examples of state-supported veterinary administration in world history. By institutionalizing animal care within the broader framework of public welfare, Ashoka demonstrated a holistic approach to governance that linked ethical values, economic sustainability, and public health. This model highlights the interconnectedness of human and animal well-being and underscores the progressive nature of healthcare policies during the Mauryan period.

The concept of **Dhamma** played a central role in shaping the public health and healthcare policies during the reign of King Ashoka. Following the Kalinga War, Ashoka adopted Dhamma as a guiding principle of governance, emphasizing moral responsibility, compassion, non-violence, and concern for the welfare of all living beings. These ethical values were not confined to personal conduct but were systematically incorporated into state policies, including healthcare administration.

Healthcare under Ashoka was deeply influenced by the humanitarian ethos of Dhamma. The emphasis on kindness and empathy translated into concrete measures such as the provision of medical treatment for the sick, care for the vulnerable, and the extension of healthcare services to both humans and animals. Ashokan inscriptions reflect this moral orientation by highlighting welfare activities as essential duties of the ruler rather

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

than acts of charity. In this framework, healthcare emerged as a moral obligation of the state, rooted in ethical governance.

The policy of Dhamma also promoted preventive healthcare by encouraging socially responsible behavior. Ashoka advocated moderation, non-violence, and respect for life, which indirectly contributed to healthier social practices. Regulations on animal slaughter, protection of certain species, and concern for environmental well-being supported a balanced and sustainable approach to public health. These measures reveal an early understanding of the interconnectedness between ethical conduct, environmental stability, and physical health.

Administrative mechanisms further reinforced the role of Dhamma in healthcare policies. Officials appointed to propagate Dhamma were also involved in supervising welfare activities, ensuring that moral principles were effectively implemented at the local level. This integration of ethics and administration strengthened the delivery and accessibility of healthcare services across the Mauryan Empire.

Overall, Dhamma functioned as the ideological foundation of Ashoka's healthcare policies. By embedding moral values into public administration, Ashoka transformed healthcare into a humane, inclusive, and state-supported system. This ethical approach not only enhanced the effectiveness of healthcare governance but also contributed to the historical development of welfare-oriented public health systems in ancient India

The analysis of public health and healthcare administration during the reign of King Ashoka reveals a remarkably advanced and organized system of welfare governance for an ancient empire. The evidence drawn from archaeological inscriptions and literary sources indicates that healthcare was not treated as a peripheral or voluntary activity, but as an essential responsibility of the state. This approach represents a significant departure from earlier forms of governance that largely confined medical care to private practitioners or religious institutions.

Ashoka's healthcare policies demonstrate a conscious integration of ethical principles with administrative practice. The policy of Dhamma functioned as a moral framework that reshaped state priorities, placing compassion, non-violence, and public welfare at the center of governance. Healthcare initiatives such as the establishment of medical institutions, provision of treatment for humans and animals, and promotion of medicinal resources illustrate how ethical values were translated into practical administrative measures. This fusion of morality and governance distinguishes Ashokan healthcare administration from purely utilitarian systems.

From an administrative perspective, the Mauryan healthcare system reflects elements of decentralization and accessibility. The widespread distribution of medical facilities, wells, and rest houses across urban and rural areas suggests an intention to ensure equitable access to healthcare services. The involvement of state officials in supervising welfare activities indicates the presence of an organized bureaucratic mechanism to implement health-related policies. Such administrative coordination points toward an early model of public health management.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1* (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 25-34, Section: Article

Preventive healthcare emerges as a notable strength of Ashoka's policies. Environmental measures, sanitation-related infrastructure, and regulation of animal welfare contributed indirectly to disease prevention and public well-being. The emphasis on animal healthcare further highlights an advanced understanding of the interdependence between human health, livestock, and the environment—an idea that resonates with modern concepts of holistic and sustainable healthcare.

However, the limitations of available evidence must also be acknowledged. Much of the information regarding healthcare institutions is derived from inscriptions that emphasize royal intent rather than operational details. Literary sources, while valuable, often reflect religious or normative perspectives, which may idealize Ashoka's policies. Despite these constraints, the convergence of multiple sources strengthens the credibility of the overall picture.

Overall, the healthcare administration under King Ashoka can be viewed as one of the earliest examples of state-sponsored public health systems. Its emphasis on ethical governance, institutional care, and preventive measures marks a significant contribution to the historical evolution of healthcare administration in India.

Conclusion

The examination of public health and healthcare administration under King Ashoka reveals a remarkably advanced and ethically grounded system of welfare governance in ancient India. Ashoka's reign represents a critical moment in history when healthcare was consciously incorporated into state policy rather than remaining confined to individual practitioners or religious institutions. His approach reflects an early understanding that the health of the population was directly linked to social stability, moral order, and effective administration.

One of the most significant contributions of Ashoka was the integration of Dhamma into healthcare policies. By promoting compassion, non-violence, and responsibility toward all living beings, Ashoka established a moral foundation for public health initiatives. Healthcare under his rule was not limited to curing diseases but extended to preventive care, mental well-being, ethical conduct, and environmental considerations. This holistic vision distinguishes Ashoka's model from purely curative medical systems and aligns closely with modern concepts of comprehensive public health.

Archaeological evidence, particularly the Ashokan edicts, confirms the existence of organized healthcare measures, including the distribution of medicinal herbs, establishment of medical facilities, and appointment of officials responsible for public welfare. These initiatives demonstrate that healthcare was supported by administrative mechanisms and state resources. The inclusion of veterinary services further emphasizes the comprehensive nature of Ashoka's policies, highlighting the importance of animal health for both ethical and economic reasons.

Literary sources such as Buddhist texts, Ayurvedic traditions, and administrative treatises complement archaeological findings by illustrating the broader intellectual and cultural context of healthcare during the Mauryan period. Together, these sources suggest that Ashoka did not merely endorse existing medical

practices but actively facilitated their expansion and accessibility. His policies contributed to the diffusion of medical knowledge and services across a vast and diverse empire.

From a contemporary perspective, Ashoka's healthcare administration offers valuable lessons for modern public health systems. His emphasis on state responsibility, ethical governance, preventive measures, and equitable access remains highly relevant in addressing present-day healthcare challenges. The integration of moral values with administrative efficiency under Ashoka underscores the potential of governance models that prioritize human welfare over purely economic or political considerations.

In conclusion, the healthcare policies of King Ashoka represent one of the earliest and most comprehensive examples of state-supported public health administration in world history. By combining ethical principles with practical governance, Ashoka laid the foundation for a welfare-oriented state that recognized health as a collective social responsibility. The study of his policies not only enhances our understanding of ancient healthcare systems but also provides enduring insights into the role of ethical leadership in shaping effective and humane public health frameworks.

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

Partitioning the Intelligence Branch: Problems of the Intelligence officials of West Bengal

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Abstract

The division of the Intelligence Branch (IB) between East Bengal and West Bengal, due to the British partition of Bengal in 1947, adversely affected the operations of IB officials. From the division of intelligence records to the division of officials, the problems faced by the IB of West Bengal were tremendous. Unfortunately, the problems encountered by the IB officials due to partition have received little historical attention. This paper, therefore, using declassified data from the West Bengal State Archives and a few other memoirs, will showcase the problems arising from the partition of the Intelligence Branch. By highlighting the challenges, the paper will underscore that a disarrayed intelligence system resulting from partition was a reason behind the lawlessness in post-independent West Bengal. Besides the organization problem, the paper will also highlight the challenges faced by the intelligence officials at a personal level.

Keywords: *Partition; West Bengal; East Bengal; Intelligence Branch; Post-independence*

Introduction

The "standard history" (Kamtekar, 2017 : 1064) of the Intelligence Branch (IB) of West Bengal ends in 1947, the year of India's partition and independence from British rule. After this, the agency has not been mentioned by historians anywhere. Like Punjab, Bengal—the Indian province—bore the brunt of partition and was divided into West Bengal, which remained within India, and East Bengal, which went to Pakistan. As a result of this division, the IB of Bengal was also split, creating chaos within the agency. However, no piece of literature describes the ordeal of the IB officials that followed the split.

The division of the IB between West Bengal and East Bengal led to the division of its records, vehicles and, most importantly, its officials. As a result, it reduced IB West Bengal's capacity to operate and restrained it from functioning against threats. Unfortunately, the issues arising from the division of a premier security agency like the IB have gained little attention from historians. Instead, the partition literature, as argued by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2009 : 2), is dominated by the narratives of refugees and borderland inhabitants. Though we find a few pieces of literature on the partition's impact on government agencies and institutions, the impact on the IB has received little attention. As a result, the problems encountered by the IB officials from the partition remain obscure.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

Drawing on declassified data from the West Bengal State Archives and a few memoirs, this paper examines the impact of partition on the Intelligence Branch of West Bengal. An analysis of the constraints arising from the split will reveal the chaos within the agency that prevented its officers from seamless functioning against lawlessness in post-independent West Bengal. It will also reveal the crisis faced by IB officials, despite their status as government servants, at a personal level. Before showcasing these problems, the paper will provide a brief overview of the Intelligence Branch's colonial origins. This is because without understanding the IB's background, it will be difficult to understand the problems faced by IB officials in the aftermath of partition.

Origin of the Intelligence Branch

Formed in 1908, in the aftermath of the British partition of Bengal in 1906, the Intelligence Branch was headed by a Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) (Silvestri, 2019: 42). With CWC Plowden as the first DIG, the IB's role was to gather intelligence for the British government in Bengal (Ibid). Since Lord Curzon's decision to partition Bengal led to the assassinations of the colonial officers by the Indian revolutionaries, the colonial state established this secret organization within the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to gather intelligence on political crime. Led by British Imperial Police officers, the IB was part of the Bengal Police force, whose subordinate ranks were occupied by Indian police officers. Headquartered at 13, Lord Sinha Road, Calcutta, the IB used to gather intelligence from the District Intelligence Branches (DIBs), which were stationed in every district headquarters under a Superintendent of Police (SP) or an Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP). The task of the DIBs, through the District Intelligence officers, who in turn depended on police officers at local police stations, was to gather intelligence through a network of agents and informers, and transmit it to the IB headquarters, where, after analysis, the intelligence was presented to the government for guiding its strategic actions (Silvestri, 2019: 78). In 1947, this secret organization was split between West Bengal and East Bengal, leading to serious repercussions. At the same time, its management passed into the hands of Indian police officers, and Hirendranath Sircar became the first IB chief of post-independent West Bengal.

Partitioning the Intelligence Branch

On June 3, 1947, when Lord Mountbatten announced the decision to partition India, a Partition Committee comprising leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League was formed under his leadership (Sengupta, 2014: 530). While the Congress in this committee was represented by Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad, the League was represented by Liaquat Ali Khan and Abdur Rishab Nishtar (Ibid.). Aided by an Expert Committee of senior bureaucrats, the Partition Committee was responsible for overseeing matters of division (Ibid). To bridge the gap between the Partition Committee and the Expert Committee, a Steering Committee was established, headed by H.M. Patel and Muhammad Ali (Ibid). While this was the setup at the central level, partitioned provinces like Punjab and Bengal also had a similar one.

Since Bengal was to be partitioned, its administrative assets and liabilities had to be divided between East Bengal and West Bengal (Chatterjee, 2007: 21). To achieve these monumental tasks, Bengal was to set up a Separation Council chaired by the governor, Sir Fredrick Burrows, and assisted by four members, two nominated by the Congress and two by the Muslim League (Ibid). From 26th June 1947, the council began dividing Bengal into two (Ibid). However, there were pressures from all around to get everything done by 21st

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

July, but later, a few more days were given (Ibid.22). A Steering Committee, composed of Police personnel from both East Bengal and West Bengal, was established to oversee police-related matters (Ibid). As the IB was part of the police force, its division rested on the Steering Committee's decision. Dividing the IB meant dividing its records, vehicles and officials — a complex process that caused diverse problems.

Division of Records

The Steering Committee's decision to divide the intelligence records was the beginning of all the problems. The records covered the Communist Party, labour unrest, IB appointments and training, Congress affairs, interceptions, political suspects, agrarian situations, terrorist societies, foreign countries, legislation, and other miscellaneous matters (Archives, File: 594-47 (3)). The plan was to duplicate these records and then divide them proportionately. But as the records were bulky, duplication was protracted, which delayed the process. The longer the delay, the greater the problem. These records, which contained information about the past, were vital for post-independent intelligence operations. And so, delays in their division and exchange meant delayed intelligence response against lawlessness. Therefore, the pressure on the IB officials to work without records was immense, as evidenced by the steps taken by the DIGs, IB, of West Bengal and East Bengal to hire more typewriters to expedite the process (Ibid).

In addition to the delays, the problem was with records that went missing due to their transfer and destruction by the British before the transfer of power. Known as Operation Legacy, the British, prior to their departure from the country, destroyed voluminous records and transferred them in bulk to London to erase their dirty secrets and conceal the truth, thereby protecting their image (Milmo, 2013). Since these records were databases, their destruction and transfer meant the loss of information, and, as a result, IB of West Bengal faced an enormous challenge. For instance, when districts like Malda and Jalpaiguri were partitioned, East Bengal received no intelligence records of the areas under its jurisdiction from the Steering Committee, as the British had destroyed them before the partition (Archives, File: 594-47 (3)). Without these records, intelligence and policing operations were impossible, which may have allowed criminals and miscreants of those areas to enter West Bengal by infiltrating the border and engage in illicit activities. Thus, the inability of IB, East Bengal, to contain them was not only a problem for East Bengal but also for West Bengal's law and order. Without surveillance and intelligence sharing from the other side, keeping the criminals and miscreants at bay by the IB officials of West Bengal was indeed difficult.

The delays in duplication and problems emerging from the destruction and transfer of records, therefore, played a significant role in preventing the IB of West Bengal from seamless operations.

Division of vehicles

Next to the records, the problem of the IB officials was with the vehicles. Before partition, the IB of undivided Bengal had one motor car, one of which was found to be unserviceable (Archives, File: 840/47). Subsequently, one of the remaining two vehicles was taken to East Bengal, disregarding the Police subcommittee's decision, whose mandate was not to divide the vehicles but to retain them in favour of West Bengal (Ibid). When it

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

came to light, it caused resentment within IB, West Bengal, as becomes evident from the following note of a senior IB officer:

> No order was issued from this office regarding the division of IB's cars…. It is not understood under what authority one of the vehicles was handed over to East Bengal (Ibid).

The tone with which this IB officer wrote the above letter underscores the importance of those vehicles whose division was unacceptable. Vehicles were useful for various security functions, viz., interviewing agents at all hours, carrying important postal letters to guard against tampering, transporting arms and ammunition, and carrying out searches and raids for office purposes (Ibid). However, the resentment was not just for losing such a valuable asset from a security aspect, but also for the economic burden created to purchase a new vehicle, which becomes apparent from the following letter of the same IB officer:

> Two Fords would have been adequate for the IB had one not been taken away by East Bengal (Ibid).

Therefore, discontent with the disproportionate allocation of vehicles is evident, underscoring their importance for intelligence operations and the economic burden of purchasing new vehicles to address the resulting deficit. Without sufficient vehicles, it was indeed difficult for IB officials in West Bengal to conduct security functions.

Division of officials

In the wake of the partition, the IB officials, like the other government servants, were given six months to choose either the Government of East Bengal or the Government of West Bengal for service. While the Muslim IB officers opted to serve in East Bengal, their Hindu counterparts chose to remain in West Bengal. The latter's decision was influenced by two factors: (i) moving to East Bengal meant jeopardising their religion and severance of ties with family and friends, and (ii) the Congress party's highhandedness proved far from reality. Although the first one is understandable, the second one needs a detailed analysis. Initially, the Hindu IB officials were highly anxious about the Congress Party's formation of the government in post-independent West Bengal. Since the IB officers had repressed the Congress during the colonial rule, there was a widespread fear that it would launch a drive against them after forming the government. As Joya Chatterji (2007: 37) has said, initially, Congress was apathetic towards the "colonial bureaucrats", for it used to view them as "quislings working for imperial overlords". And so, because of their past actions, the intelligence officials remained sceptical of the Congress government. Such worries were natural given the views of Congress giants like Jawaharlal Nehru—independent India's first Prime Minister—for having had an apparent distaste towards the intelligence agencies, for they during the colonial period kept him "under constant surveillance" (Chaya, 2022: 103). However, this didn't translate into reality, as the Congress's realisation of the necessity of the intelligence service for successful statecraft and diplomacy restrained its leadership from taking a hard stance against it.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

Instead, the problem was with the Hindu IB officials of East Bengal who opted to serve in West Bengal. Their influx was so massive that it exceeded the vacancies, creating a barrier to optimisation. Upananda Mukherjee, a former IB chief of West Bengal, has best described the situation in his memoir:

> The Hindu police officers came in large numbers from East Bengal. But where were we to keep them? What work should we give them? These were our biggest concerns (Mukherjee, 1987:66). [Translation mine from Bengali to English]

Initially, the plan before partition was to induct East Bengal officials who opted for positions in West Bengal into the vacancies left by West Bengal officials who opted for service in East Bengal. The decision was then to grant special leave to the surplus officers and, later, to appoint them to temporary or permanent vacancies (Archives, File: 594/47 (1)), which did not do any good. Surprisingly, when the division of officials should have reduced the workforce, it did the reverse by augmenting it to an unbearable extent. The situation became so tumultuous that assigning jobs and giving postings to those coming from East Bengal became a strenuous task. Besides, the problem was whether to trust the officials from East Bengal. It was because the influx was so massive that it prevented background checks of these people. Without prior details, it wasn't easy to ascertain their merits before inducting them into the service.

As Sukumar Sen, the then Chief Secretary of West Bengal, noted:

> With a tremendous number of surplus employees, the government is experiencing and will experience great difficulties in finding out for all government servants who have opted out of East Bengal for service. The question was…about the efficiency of men taking intrastate transfer whose merits couldn't be ascertained in partition days (Ibid).

Sen's letter suggests the devaluation of the intelligence service due to a lack of vetting of the East Bengalee officials before their induction into the service. Moreover, their untimely promotion to senior positions, along with that of West Bengalee officials, led to some disorganisation in the intelligence service. This became evident when Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, admitted in the legislative assembly that the incompetence of IB officers, due to poor vetting and untimely promotion, reduced the quality of the intelligence service (Secretariat, 2022: 632). One can, therefore, gauge one of the many reasons for IB's inability to repress the increase in lawlessness in post-independent West Bengal. Furthermore, the apathy of a few IB officials, especially those from East Bengal, in joining the DIBs exacerbated the problems. With a reduced workforce, the DIBs of West Dinajpur, Malda, Nadia, Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri, Midnapur, and Darjeeling found it increasingly difficult to sustain intelligence operations. For instance, the situation of DIB West Dinajpur, a district bordering East Bengal, escalated to such an extent that the SP considered taking strict actions by writing to the IB headquarters against the officer who did not join the office:

> One assistant, Babu Ajit Kumar Banerji has joined this office, but Phanindranath Ganguly seems to be avoiding this district. Necessary steps may please be taken to ensure that he joins his place of posting without any further delay (Archives, File: 594/47 (1)).

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

Although we do not have any account of Phanindranath Ganguly, who was from Tippera, East Bengal, to examine his reasons for "avoiding" the district, it is clear from the above text that he was "avoiding" the district. Alongside DIB West Dinajpur, the condition of DIB Malda was so horrible that the district's SP asked for immediate reinforcements from the IB headquarters (Ibid). But of all, the case of DIB Midnapur was more alarming, as is revealed by the letter of the ASP to the headquarters:

> This DIB is having a very hard time, and it will be impossible to manage with the present working staff…if the deficits are not replaced immediately (Ibid).

The cases outlined above illustrate the strain on DIBs in intelligence gathering. As the DIBs were the fulcrum of intelligence collection, any deficit in their workforce meant the IB was unable to engage in surveillance and other covert activities. With work falling in arrears, the pressure on the SPs and the ASPs of the districts mentioned above was tremendous, as is evident from their aforementioned letters, to keep sustaining the DIB operations. But why were officers like Phanindranath Ganguly reluctant to join these DIBs? There were two reasons: first, having come from the eastern part of Bengal during turbulent times, they were unwilling to join the DIBs of remote and border districts where the communal situation was at stake. Given West Dinajpur's border location with East Bengal and communal composition, Phanindranath Ganguly, as a Hindu, didn't want to risk himself by joining the DIB of a Muslim-dominated district, and two, they didn't want to compromise their livelihood by moving to a remote interior district. Staying in Calcutta was safer and more comfortable, as the city offered urban amenities and other lucrative opportunities. Although we do not have any account of Ganguly to examine the actual causes, Sailesh Chandra Sengupta's letter testifies to it.

An IB assistant of DIB Rangpur of East Bengal, Sailesh Chandra Sengupta, during partition had opted for service in West Bengal (Archives, File: 594/47 (5)). When transferred to Murshidabad, a remote, border and Muslim-dominated district, Sengupta refused to join, leaving his family alone in Calcutta. Instead, he pleaded for a posting near his home to be with them in those turbulent times:

> …with great difficulty I booked my furniture and other personal things from Rangpur to Ballygunje…undergoing terrible hardship all throughout the journey…. I now find that I have been transferred to Murshidabad DIB. In this connection, I beg to state…I cast my choice for Calcutta because I have a house in Calcutta to live in…you can very well imagine how difficult it is for me in these hard and abnormal days to maintain two establishments in two different places. Unfortunately, I have no parents and I am the guardian of my…brothers…. Now the problem of housing accommodation is very acute everywhere and…no sustainable habitation can be secured at an offer of three times the usual rent. Besides, my wife and daughter are suffering badly from various ailments…and I wish to make proper arrangements for their treatment…and this will not be possible unless I stay here (Ibid).

Having suffered "terrible hardship" during his journey from Rangpur to Ballygunge, Sengupta was unwilling to face any further "hardship" by moving to Murshidabad. Instead, staying with "wife, daughter, and brothers" was safer and the only way to avoid the "hard and abnormal days." By moving to this remote Muslim-dominated district, Sengupta, as a Hindu, did not want to jeopardize himself and also did not want to lose the health care facilities in Calcutta for his "wife and daughter". At the same time, it reflects his

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

willingness to stay with them and provide emotional support during chaotic times. Although the headquarters conceded Sengupta's request, we do not know whether similar requests by other officers were accepted.

While the story of Sailesh Chandra Sengupta demonstrates the problems encountered by the IB at an organisational level, that of Jitendranath Roy and Paresh Chandra Chakrvarti reveals the problems faced by IB officials at a personal level. When Jitendranath Roy, an IB assistant, asked his landlord to let his family members from East Bengal stay in the house, the request was turned down. The reason for the decline was their East Bengalee connection, which the landlord feared would lead him into unnecessary trouble. By letting them stay in the house, the landlord feared overcrowding and higher utility consumption, which would cause wear and tear of his property. We do not know whether Roy was from East Bengal or West Bengal. Irrespective of his place of belonging, it is apparent that, in an age of flux, staying with the household is imperative, and Roy was thus no exception. Had the partition not happened, family members from East Bengal would not have come, and Roy would not have faced the problem. His agony becomes evident from his letter to the IB headquarters:

> I need a government quarter for my family accommodation as my house owner is not willing to let out any portion of her house, as the family members of my house came down from East Bengal. I pray that you please accommodate me a government quarter (Archives, File: 1011-47).

The aforementioned letter depicts the crisis that men like Jitendranath Roy faced at a personal level due to the partition. This becomes further evident from the case of Paresh Chandra Chakravarti, an IB assistant, who pleaded to the IB headquarters for accommodation in the government quarters:

> The houseowner has asked me to vacate the house as he will reconstruct within a very short time. If I am to leave the house, there will be no other alternative but to stand on the street with my family. Please accommodate me in government quarters with my family in these days of crisis (Ibid).

Unlike Chakravarti, Roy's reason for giving up tenancy was different; yet the problem they faced in seeking shelter was the same. Surge in population and lack of housing because of the refugee influx had made accommodation an acute crisis. With no reliable connections or place to stay, Paresh Chandra Chakravarti feared to "stand on the street" if the state didn't provide any shelter. Although both Jitendranath Roy and Paresh Chandra Chakravarti received accommodation in government quarters, the stress they endured reveals the agony they had at a personal level in seeking safe shelter as government servants.

Thus, the division of officials led to a massive influx from East Bengal, which lowered the quality of the intelligence service, as officials from that dominion were inducted without adequate vetting. Furthermore, their untimely elevation, along with the officers who chose to remain in West Bengal to senior positions, also downgraded the operational quality of the intelligence agency. The problem was compounded by the reluctance of a few IB officials from East Bengal to join the DIBs in remote districts, hindering the agency's ability to collect intelligence and conduct covert operations. While this was an organizational problem, the IB officials also faced personal constraints, the most prominent of which was the accommodation problem.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

Conclusion

The division of the IB in 1947, due to the partition of Bengal, created intense turmoil within the agency. Problems arising from the division of records, vehicles, and officials disarrayed the intelligence system, preventing swift responses of the IB to threats and violence. After all, the role of the intelligence system is to gather intelligence to prevent, pre-empt, and disrupt threats. And so, the breakdown in such machinery inevitably leads to lawlessness within the state. Historians, therefore, assessing the reason behind the surge in lawlessness in post-independent West Bengal must take into account the fragility of the intelligence machinery, which was the most fundamental reason. With limited resources in hand, the task of the intelligence officials of West Bengal was undoubtedly daunting. At the same time, the stress the IB officials faced at a personal level due to the partition cannot be brushed aside. It reveals their mental agony despite belonging to the government service.

This paper, therefore, by bringing to the fore the problems of the Intelligence Branch of West Bengal in the aftermath of partition, has established its presence in West Bengal's partition historiography. By highlighting their challenges, this paper has given voice to the intelligence officials who always operate in secrecy. Finally, this paper, as the first major study on the Intelligence Branch of post-independent West Bengal, has made a significant contribution to the emerging discipline of India's intelligence history.

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 35-43, Section: Article

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

The impact of Class on Street Food Vendors in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Abstract

Situations of crisis leave varying impacts on differential groups of people in society. The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth the role of class and how belonging to class divisions determined their chances of survival amidst the chaos. This paper seeks to understand the situation of street food vendors in Kolkata and how their experiences and coping mechanisms differed from other food entrepreneurs from a higher socio-economic background. The intersectionality of class and gender further results in differential experiences which has also been explored in this paper.

Keywords: *Street food vendors, class, capital, coping mechanisms, COVID-19.*

Introduction

Vendors are part of the informal economy and can be classified into vendors selling food, household utilities, flowers and clothes. (Dalwadi, 2010: 88) Street food vendors are an integral part of the urban landscape and form about one-fifth of the total number of street vendors in India as per data collected by the FSSAI (2016:3). They can be understood as subsistence entrepreneurs (Schoar, 2010:59) who sell goods and services from public spaces. They in turn, provide food and services to the urban populace at affordable prices and from convenient locations. (Bhowmik, 2005:2256) They constitute part of the informal sector which is why their livelihood is insecure characterized by a lack of worker rights and safeguards of any kind. (Hart, 1973:62) This renders them vulnerable in many situations. Their livelihood is also considered debatable due to problems such as overcrowding, barriers to traffic and pedestrian movement and most importantly, illegal occupancy of public spaces. (Sarkar, 2016:326) They are faced with harassment, eviction and confiscation of goods and equipment from local authorities. Street food vending can be observed majorly in two spaces, that is on the sidewalks and pavements and secondly, in fairs or melas which take place in public spaces. The former constitutes a more permanent form of vending which occurs through the year while fairs illustrate a case of occasional or seasonal vending.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 brought the world to a standstill. Albeit all individuals were affected by it, the pandemic wreaked more havoc for some social groups than others. This brings forth questions of inequality and power positions in society. We have heard about the rich purchasing hospital beds and oxygen supplies while the poor visited hospitals only to receive no help due to the sheer dearth of resources required to cope with the gargantuan pandemic. The work of street food vendors as micro-entrepreneurs makes them a participants in face-to-face, regular interactions; with consumers, local authorities, and fellow vendors. However, such interactions had come to a standstill due to the pandemic. Underlying the

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

experiences of street food vendors is the larger political structure and actors embedded in it. There is a polarization of classes, and street vendors are considered part of the masses engaged in the informal sector. The minority power- holding and wielding group determine the experiences of the street vendors. This group is constituted by the police officials and ward members of a given area of city. Orders from the government led to complete shutdown of all vending activities. However, street vendors who mostly belong to the lower echelons of society had no means to cope with the pandemic and subsequent closure of their livelihood source. How the pandemic affected the livelihood experiences of street food vendors in Kolkata and how class played a significant role in determining the same forms the key research question for this research paper.

Within the larger group of street food vendors, there is the presence and manifestation of class inequalities that demarcate their experiences. Vendors from a stronger socio-economic background differ from other street vendors. The former are often registered, and their businesses are considered legal in nature. Street food has itself become a lucrative business and, many such as MBA *chaiwala* (News18,2023) and b.tech *panipuriwali* (Jain,2023) have started food vending carts which require higher amounts of investment and resources. Thus, the definition of street vending is also undergoing change and is no longer limited to the lower echelons of society.

The theoretical backing of this paper primarily draws from Ulrich Beck's conception of the risk society (1992:20) which pointed out how different situations of crisis affected people differently based on their position in society. Furthermore, class positions are significant in determining peoples' access to opportunities in life. (Weber, 1922:305) The aspect of global risk through natural and man-made calamities affect all, despite their class divisions. (Beck, 1992:92) However, the impact on people and their ability to deal with the crises is often determined by their wealth and power in society. Economic inequalities became stark during the pandemic when the world was faced by scarcity of resources. The poor had lesser chance of surviving the pandemic since stratification leaves the powerful minority with more resources and amenities. People with higher socioeconomic capital (Bourdieu, 1977:171) were thus, in a better position to deal with the pandemic.

Objectives

The key objective of this paper is to understand the problems of street food vendors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, how their experiences differed from those with higher socio-economic status during the same time frame facilitates the study of the impact of class and how it shapes human lives. Furthermore, women belonging to a weaker economic background implied a dual disadvantage, which has been understood through the intersectionality of class and gender.

Methodology

The data and insights provided in this paper largely draw from the author's doctoral research work based on street food vendors as small entrepreneurs operating in the commercially rich areas of Kolkata, such as New Town, Sector V and BBD Bag. With a sample size of 150 respondents, in-depth interviews through convenience and purposive sampling had been conducted with both male and female vendors selling

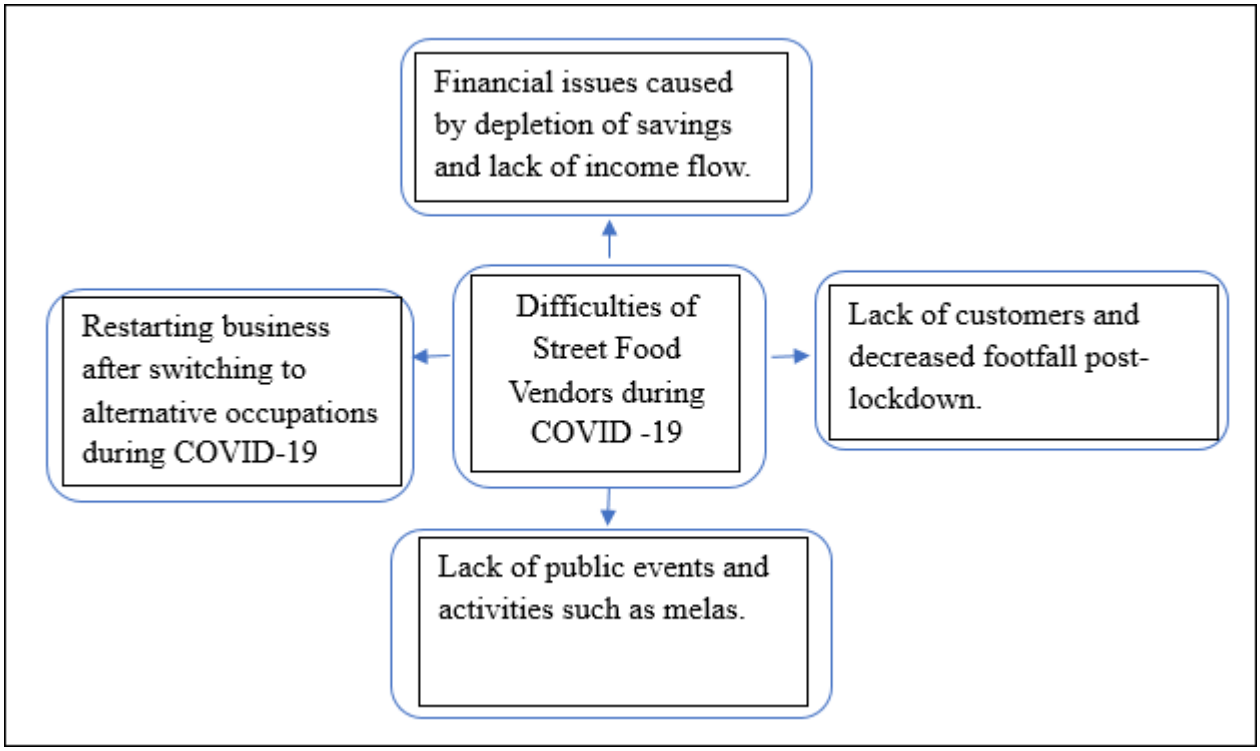
Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

processed food. [1]Paired up from secondary sources of knowledge, the paper is descriptive in nature trying to understand the differential experiences of people in the contextual backdrop of the pandemic. The propositions have been accompanied by corresponding narratives by the respondents. The research adopts a mixed method approach, drawing insights from the collection of quantitative variables such as income, investment and pricing of items and qualitative data through the experiences and narratives of street food vendors.

Problems experienced by Street Food Vendors during the pandemic

The problems faced by street food vendors during the pandemic have been summarized as below and have been understood through a four-fold classification. The lack of savings due to low monthly incomes left most in a state of serious financial drain. Their main consumer base was also experiencing lockdown, and even after the lockdown was lifted, people hardly left their houses in fear of contracting the fatal virus. Thirdly, the pandemic was uncertain in nature and continued for an indefinite period of time. Vendors were left confused whether to switch to another occupation, with many engaging temporarily with other jobs while most lived with the meagre sales they made.

Figure 1. Problems of street food vendors



Under the rubric of the informal economy, lies a much more complex relationship between social groups and political structures. Politics form a part of all social groups and their relationships with other social groups.

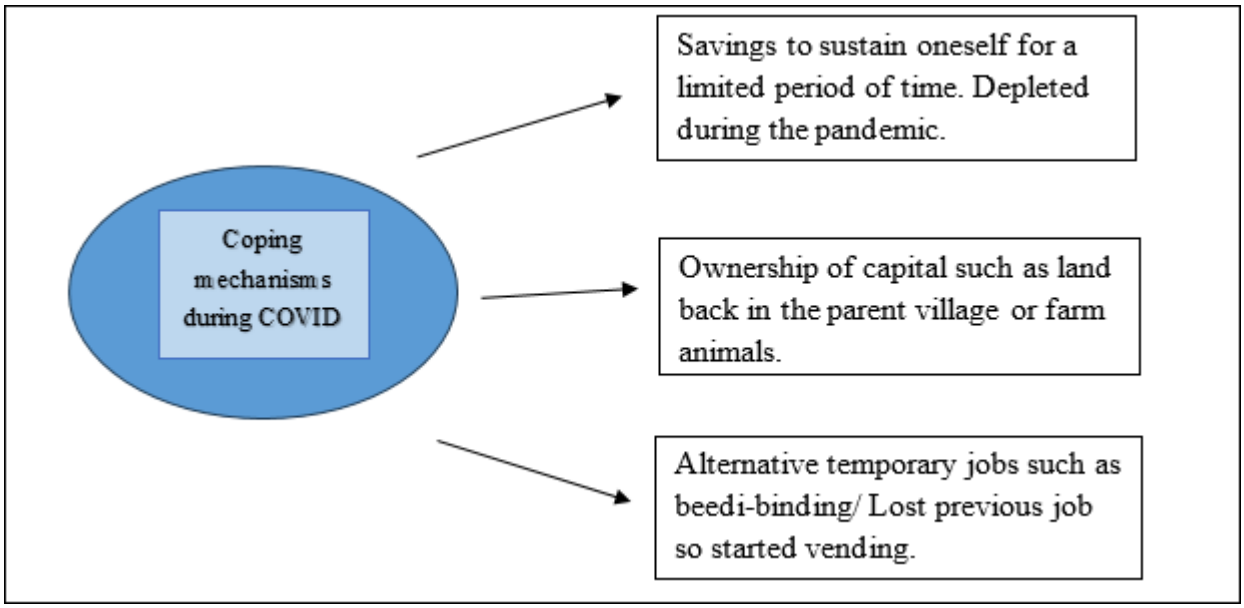
[1] Street food can broadly be divided into unprocessed consisting of raw, uncooked food such as fruits and vegetables while processed food are those which have undergone at least one stage of processing or cooking.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

(Ashraf & Sharma, 1983:3) It is present in all social institutions-within the family, marriage, religion, and media. Power relations manifest themselves in the street as a space. Street food vendors often face difficulties trying to hold and maintain their position in the street as small entrepreneurs. The street is a site of politics and hosts a myriad of social interactions on a day-to-day basis. The street has its own character and changes its nature at different points of time. For street vendors, it is their site of work and source of livelihood. It is the street that was rendered empty during the pandemic with people inside their houses in fear of the virus that could kill thousands. The street vendors lost their livelihood overnight who were already part of the urban poor struggling to make ends meet (Bhadra, 2021:2)

Most vendors did not have sufficient savings to last them throughout the lockdown. However, as a form of contingency plans, some vendors engaged in farming on lands they owned back in their village. A male vendor said that she had two cows back in his hometown and he sustained himself by selling milk during the lockdown. Thus, a few went back to animal husbandry while some relied on other informal sector occupations such as beedi-binding. The figure below shows the various ways in which street food vendors coped with the pandemic and its impact on their livelihood as street food vendors. The presence of alternative occupations, however, were only available to a minority of the sample size. 84.14% of the sample size stated that vending was their only source of income and livelihood, which illustrated their dependence on the occupation and eliminating the stereotype that vending is a temporary and fleeting occupation for many.

Figure 2: **Street vendors' approach to COVID-19**



Some also underwent a transition within the same occupation. A respondent selling fruit chaat said that he had temporarily transitioned to selling fruits and vegetables, that is, raw and unprocessed food. He had stopped travelling to and vending at high regular location, that is, near BBD Bag and limited his vending activities to around his residence. Thus, it also encompassed a change in the nature of selling, since he had

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

moved from being a static vendor to being a mobile vendor, who moved from locality to locality near his house to sell fruits and vegetables.[2] Many street food vendors are also immigrants and were unable to return to their hometowns to their families. The hardships faced by the street food vendors were not ameliorated once the lockdown was lifted. The reason lay in the fear and wariness regarding the consumption of food cooked outside of the home. Street food has often been scrutinized for lack of nutritional value and questionable health and sanitation standards, and the pandemic only increased scepticism regarding the same. The sales of street vendors selling goods and services apart from food thus faced lesser difficulties to re-store their consumer base after the lockdown was lifted. People continued to purchase unprocessed or raw food such as grains, fruits and vegetables since they constitute basic nutritional requirements. Processed or cooked food vendors further suffered in this situation. However, many vendors also said that the pandemic was also characterized by the shift of consumers who preferred to buy food from larger supermarkets in Kolkata like Bigbazar and Spencers, rather than purchasing from the vendors in local markets. The impact of shopping malls on the sales of street vendors studied by Sumana Roy (2011:297) pointed out how the organized retail sector negatively affected the hawker economy of the city.

Many individuals lost their previous jobs due to the pandemic. One such respondent said that he had to relocate from another city to Kolkata since he lost his previous job at an eatery. In Kolkata, he started to work as an employee at a juice vending stall. In such cases, COVID caused people to change from one job to another. People vending at various fairs across the city also faced a number of difficulties. All events had been indefinitely postponed which caused financial trouble for those people who relied heavily on the annual fairs that account for more than half the money they made all round the year. Some expressed their worry and concern regarding the uncertainty of melas. A female vendor selling achaar at the Book Fair of 2024 said that she was constantly worrying about whether she and her husband would find future opportunities to conduct vending at upcoming fairs. Her concern was rooted in the problems she faced during the pandemic and also the steadily rising rent in for putting up a stall in fairs. She has two sons, one of whom had to leave their college education to help out in the business.

Social capital proved to be of great advantage for street food vendors. Usually, the street vendors are subject to the exercise of power by local authorities. They are required to pay regular or occasional sums of money in order to conduct vending in public spaces. In the older office localities such as BBD Bag, there were many vendors who had been vending for well over a decade. Some of the businesses were also generational in nature, that is, were being passed on from father to son. One such respondent selling *muri makha* (puffed rice) said that he had been vending in the same location for many years and lived at the vending location as a squatter. He received cooperation and assistance during the pandemic from police officials in the form of food. He said that the police provided *khichdi* which he did not prefer, especially since the meals lacked meat. The aforementioned narrative brought forth the role and significance of social capital and how networks with local authorities helped vendors to survive during the pandemic. The case shows that despite lacking

[2] Street vendors can be broadly classified on the location of vending into stationary, mobile, and semi-mobile vendors. Stationary vendors conduct their business from a fixed vending setup each day, characterized by relatively immovable vending equipment. Mobile vendors have light paraphernalia which they carry from location to location in order to sell their goods and services. Semi-mobile vendors are those who sometimes change their vending location depending upon the density of crowds in order to enable optimum business.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

economic capital, the presence and strengthening of social capital. During the pandemic, such businesses were in a better position to survive and sustain themselves through accumulated savings and also changing the mode of their business operations such as switching to online modes. Thus helped the vendor survive in the politics of the street. However, vendors with weaker background often lack education, especially regarding technical know-how thus leading to the complete closure of the business.

A female respondent running a home-based bakery business was interviewed at a privately organized mela. She said she had the hobby of baking since she was in college, but had stopped after she got married. During the pandemic, she started baking again, and her friends and family encouraged her to start this business. The kind of foods being sold in such kind of businesses also differed. For instance, they sold bakery goods or handmade chocolates which are often considered parts of leisurely activities. Furthermore, this group of vendors were also aware about the potential of online platforms and social media, and they drew from these resources to continue their business during the pandemic. Street food vending also served as the sole viable way to earn a livelihood. For instance. Two friends started a *momo* vending stall in the Sector V area of Kolkata after they lost their jobs during the pandemic. Thus, there emerged a stark difference between the impact the pandemic had on individuals from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Although the lockdown was lifted after three months, the street remained empty, and workplaces remained closed negatively impacting the main consumer base of the street food vendors. The majority of vendors (80.79%) of the sample size re-opened their businesses immediately after the lockdown was lifted due to the dearth of finances. This also put them at an increased risk of contracting the virus but most respondents said that they did so to earn their daily subsistence. The remainder of the sample had resources and savings at their disposal, that enabled them to keep their business operations stopped or limited for an additional period of time till the spread of the virus decreased further. A female respondent in the Sector V area of Kolkata, which is a bustling office locality with a number of private corporate offices stated that the footfall has still not returned to its original number.

The role of gender- dual disability.

Gender is a source of dual oppression and subjugation. Women belonging to lower social classes or weaker financial backgrounds are at a greater disadvantage and face dual oppression. There is an invisibilization of women in the sphere of street food vending. It is an irony since cooking is considered the domain of women and the latter are associated with cooking, cleaning, and nurturing responsibilities. Women in street food vending are also assigned similar tasks. Ownership however, often lies with their male counterparts such as husbands and in-laws. Many male *phuchka* sellers said that either their wives or mothers woke up early in the morning to prepare the dough and then the phuchkas which the former then carried to the vending set up. Thus, most of the work was being done by women on a regular basis who were entirely absent at the location and time of selling, leading to an invisibilization of women. Women are often kept away from public spaces and streets continue to be dominated by men. (Chowdhry, 2014:42) Vending setups may also be owned by another individual, who employs or hires women in the vending setup in exchange for a salary. In both these cases, women lack agency regarding decision-making about and around the business and also monetary tasks involved in street food vending. Women hired in street food vending stalls faced additional

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 44-52, Section: Article

harassment from fellow vendors. A female respondent in sector V working at a *bhaater hotel* said that the neighboring vendors treated her and the other workers badly, and was also being yelled at for throwing leftover water in the drain on the opposite site of the street. She said that she was only doing what her employer had instructed her to do. The owner of the business, in such cases, only visited the stall for a few hours each day. Working at such stalls was often not the sole decision of the woman herself. Some women went back to their home village and engaged in household work or *beedi-binding* for the duration of the lockdown. Older women having more years of experience had better relations with the employers.

A different set of cases emerged when women belonging to a stronger economic background operating as food entrepreneurs in fairs were interviewed. Most of them were educated, either high school or college graduates and the initial amount of investment in order to start the business was also higher, sometimes amounting to one to one and half lakh. These women were entrepreneurs who had started their businesses from the space of the home, many of them available on online platforms. The distinguishing factor was that most belonged to higher socio-economic backgrounds and had access to education. Many had earlier worked in formal sector jobs, which they had left either after marriage or after they had children. The pandemic and the corresponding quarantine provided them the time and opportunity to explore their hobbies. (Freire, Pereira, Faria, Marinho, Alves, Banhidi & Uvinha, 2025:19) Leisure time thus became a source for business ideas. Friends and family members gave such respondents the idea to start their own food business. These women found the idea suitable because it also enabled them the flexibility of working hours in order to balance between their work and household responsibilities, including child rearing. This group also had access to social media and actively promoted their business on social media, and also used the same to procure raw materials and other components required. They engaged in vending on an occasional basis in fairs *(melas)* and exhibitions across and outside the city. Fairs organized by the government usually had more self-help groups who businesses selling food such as *achaar, nimki, bori and pithe,* while privately-organized fairs hosted individual entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Almost five years after the pandemic, the consumer base for street food vendors has still not returned to becoming the same as it was before the virus struck. Footfalls in office localities are lower, mainly due to flexible modes of work available in many workplaces. Employees are required to come in three to four days of the week that greatly impacted sales for tea stalls and stalls selling meals such as rice, lentils, and curries. However, street vending has also provided a means for earning a livelihood for many when they lost their source of employment due to the pandemic. The precautionary measures adopted during the pandemic such as wearing gloves, washing hands and maintaining an overall standard of hygiene has continued even after the pandemic. The COVID-19 once again proved the lack of security involved in informal sector occupations like street food vending. Post the pandemic, the PM SVANidhi scheme (Prime Minister's Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi scheme) was launched in the year 2020 in order to provide loans at very low rates of interest. (Manicktala & Jain, 2020:553) However, most vendors interviewed were unaware of the scheme and therefore could not benefit from it. Thus, the formulation of welfare policies should focus on implementation

and awareness. Street vendors are part of ground-level politics but are often excluded from decisions concerning them.

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

Cinema as Historical Intervention: Heeramandi and the Rediscovery of Courtesans' Role in India's Freedom Narrative

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Abstract

Historical narratives of the Indian freedom struggle have long been dominated by the figures of masculine leadership and the "respectable" woman (the Bhadramahila), systematically erasing the contributions of marginalized socio-cultural groups. Among the most glaring omissions is the role of the Tawaifs (courtesans), who were not merely entertainers but pivotal political actors, financiers, and spies. This article examines Sanjay Leela Bhansali's web series Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar (2024) as a form of "historical intervention." Drawing on Robert Rosenstone's theory of "history on film," the paper argues that while Heeramandi employs an aesthetic of opulence, it effectively reclaims the Tawaif from the periphery of history, positioning her as a central, albeit tragic, patriot in the 1940s resistance against British colonialism.

Keywords: *Indian freedom struggle; marginalised histories; history on film; Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar.*

'Learning from history is never simply a one-way process. To learn about the present in the light of the past means also to learn about the past in the light of the present. The function of history is to promote a profounder understanding of both past and present through the interrelation between them.' EH Carr (1961:86). But history is often a narrative of silences. In the context of the Indian subcontinent, the respectable nationalist discourse of the early 20th century, influenced heavily by Victorian morality, systematically erased the contributions of the *Tawaif* or the courtesan community. Since time immemorial, courtesans have had a tempestuous reputation. In India, they were branded by different names, depending on their social location and the performances they did. From TAWAIFS, who performed in courts and salons in Mughal India, to BAIJIS and GAANEWALIS, who were the first recorded superstars, to LAVANI dancers performing at theatres across Maharashtra, courtesans remained an integral part of the subcontinent's cultural heritage. They were admired for their knowledge of Urdu and Persian society and literature, and for ages they catered to the Mughal era and nobility. But over time, courtesan culture and the people's identities became conflated, not only with each other but with sex workers – even though sex work may or may not be a part of the equation. (Inzamam and Qadri:2021)

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

Hence, it could be argued that courtesans were identified only in terms of possible sex work, or sexual relationships with patrons and never as vastly significant in the arenas of music, dance, poetry, etiquette, theatre, and film. They remained marginalized in the public sphere even when they were proactive and participated in cultural and political life. Public discourse deeply shaped this marginalization, including what we choose to remember and erase. None of our history books has attempted to acknowledge their nationalistic feelings, the contribution of the courtesans in the Indian independence struggle, the role they played in nation-building, and the sacrifices they made. However, a few individual writers, podcast series, movies, and research articles have highlighted the issue. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Heeramandi* (2024) emerges as a flamboyant yet critical intervention into this silence. It narrates the lives of courtesans during the 1920s-40s during the British rule in India and portrays how these nautch women transformed into freedom fighters during India's fight for independence.

Cinema as Historical Intervention

Visual history has been older than oral history. For ages, visual art forms have created social memories. In the Palaeolithic age, the hunting community resorted to cave painting to share their feelings, activities, and even their daily lives. Along with the various archaeological sources like tools, utensils, coins, and ornaments, these cave paintings became immensely significant in understanding the lives of these communities. The preliterate societies in the Chalcolithic and Neolithic ages developed etching, sketching, painting, and sculpting models as means to preserve and leave behind records of their way of life. Archaeologists take these records as an important source of history. Further, rock carvings in many Indian architectural monuments like Konark, Ajanta, Ellora, Sanchi, the temples in Badami and Khajuraho, etc., play a significant role in depicting India's socio-economic life.

Even at the threshold of modernisation, portrait, still-life, landscape, oil paintings became very important for depicting the live the time. With the advent of the Renaissance, better pens, ink, paints and paper came. The artists took their help to create better artwork narrating the eulogies, victories and royal lifestyles of the kings and zamindars. With the arrival of the 18th and early 19th centuries and the Industrial Revolution, the printing press emerged. More reliance was placed on these visual narratives of history, with pictorial representations of the kings. The invention of the camera changed the entire history and historiography with texts and photography. Everything revolutionised with the commencement of the moving camera invented by Edison. With the beginning of the 21st century, historical documentaries that rely on archival footage, photographs, narration, expert commentary and visual narratives became popular. Very recently, acknowledging these visual narratives, Robert A. Rosenstone argued that the films should also be taken seriously as a legitimate form of historical representation. His concept of "Film on History," which posits that cinema does not merely reflect history but constructs a discourse that traditional text-based history cannot capture. Movies such as *Gandhi*, *Glory*, or *The Return of Martin Guerre* shape historical understanding even among academics. Rosenstone identified that History as drama is the most common form and includes popular narrative films set in the past. These films often blend real and fictional characters and events. While they have been criticised for inaccuracy, Rosenstone notes that they dominate public historical imagination and hence are an excellent intervention in the realm of history.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Heeramandi,* staged in the twilight of the British Raj in Lahore, portrays the lives of courtesans during that period. " *Heeramandi* performs a vital socio-historical function: it transforms the courtesans from a tragic figure of the fallen woman into a revolutionary subject of the anti-colonial movement.

Who are courtesans?

Courtesans across the world were front-runners of the first professional women entertainers. They were in the entertainment business, which was intended for the enjoyment of select sections of society, or for society at large. They were celebrated and their position in society was inextricably linked with the overall position of women, in the separation of domesticity and childbearing from finer skills of influencing outcomes of significance. The domain of the courtesan was described as an oasis of refinement, pleasure, and contentment that the wealthy gravitated to, while the rulers of native Indian states sent their sons to imbibe both etiquette and culture. The courtesans were known for their graciousness, impeccable manners, refined customs, and proficiency in singing and dancing, extending to the sophisticated literary realm.

Courtesans were freed from domestic conventions but were mostly considered specialists in winning friends and influencing people, not just through their charm, but also through entertainment and persuasion. They were trained in literary and performing arts (though in a commercial way), and were independent and believed in free thinking. They applied these principles to all matters of life, including state and diplomacy. Courtesans - the devdasi or kothewali, accepted by both Hindus and Muslims, were accomplished musical and dance artists, some even became erudite scholars and were proficient in the art of conversation, persuasion, argument, debate, and discourse. (Sengupta:2014:124-125)

But the depiction of the characters of courtesans was extremely iconic. There were fictions about them, narratives about how they acquired in their ordinariness and everydayness an archetypal image. 'Tawaif, the term used for a courtesan, had accumulated over time moralistic, value-loaded connotations; in the popular mindset, it was equated to a whore, forcing these women performers into silence. But when they did speak, they had to reinvent themselves and reinforce their self-esteem through polite myths. However, society consistently battered them by referring to them as fallen and dangerous women. They had to constantly camouflage the personas, a crucial process to make them into the legends they were. By the end of the 19th century, tawaif had become an impolite word not used in genteel conversation; in the popular mindset, the tawaif was equated to a whore. Unfortunately, very few writings were dedicated to these women. Only a handful knew that they were considered to be the most educated women of their time. Many did write poetry, but even those seemed to have been censored from the literary canon. But the intentional silence of the scholars, left gaping holes in social history [Kidwai 2004]. Even in the writings of feminist scholars, these women have remained invisible. The feminists were limited by their own class bias and by their continued adherence to a "separate sphere" ideology that stressed women's purity, moral supremacy, and domestic virtues.) Singh-2007-1677.

Courtesans could practice their skills freely in the kingdom of Wajid Ali Shah. However, with the British takeover, even the king became a powerless prisoner in exile along with his influential courtiers. The British

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

government overlooked the artistic and creative element of the kothas and equated them with brothels. The identity of the courtesans was adversely affected. They were targeted by the same medical laws (Britain's Contagious Disease Act of 1864) to control venereal diseases afflicting European soldiers along with prostitutes, which were implemented for the prostitutes to regulate, inspect and control them. The provisions of Britain's Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 were incorporated into a comprehensive piece of legislation, Act XXII of 1864; it required the registration and periodic medical examination of prostitutes in all cantonment cities of the Indian empire. It became imperative that the courtesans and prostitutes of Lucknow, along with those in the other 110 cantonments in India where European soldiers were stationed, be regulated, inspected, and controlled [Talwar Oldenburg 1991:28-33].

Heeramandi and its Intervention in the Silenced Narratives of Indian Freedom Struggle

Cinema, as a public history, has the power to reach audiences that academic journals cannot. By using the "Bhansali Aesthetic"—grand sets, intricate costumes, and heightened melodrama—the series forces the modern viewer to acknowledge the dignity of a community that was systematically stripped of it. The *Tawaif's* resistance is not just through pistols and protests, but through the preservation of language (Urdu), dance (Kathak), and music, which the colonial state sought to categorise as obscenity.

Bhansali's *Heeramandi* reimagines the *Shahi Mohalla* as a micro-nation with its own power dynamics. The character of Mallikajaan represents the old guard, concerned with survival and prestige, while the younger generation, embodied by characters like Bibbojaan, bridges the gap between the *Kotha* and the revolutionary underground.

The series depicts Bibbojaan acting as a spy for the freedom fighters, providing information and refuge, helping revolutionaries with arms smuggling, too. When at the Congregation of the Courtesans Bibbojan appealed to other courtesans' Ekbar Mujrewali Nahin mulkwali ban ke socho' (think once like citizens and not courtesans), it showed her commitment as a citizen of a country. This is not purely fictional; historical records suggest that courtesans like Azizunbai of Kanpur during the 1857 Rebellion played pivotal roles in supporting the rebels. By positioning the *Tawaif* within the Inquilab (Revolution) movement, the series challenges the binary of the 'pure mother/goddess' vs. the 'impure whore' that characterised nationalist iconography.

The series culminates in a collective political awakening. The transition of the *Tawaifs* from being 'entertainers of the elite' to 'daughters of the soil' marks a significant shift in historical perspective. In the final episodes, the *Kotha* becomes a site of open rebellion and ultimately Bibbojaan embraced imprisonment, demonstrating her commitment to her motherland. Hearing her arrest, her mother, MallikaJaan, proudly pronounced that for long they were the tawaifs, but with her daughter's arrest, they have become patriots of their homeland. This cinematic choice aligns with the arguments of Subaltern Studies scholars like Ranajit Guha, who suggests that the history of the Indian people is distinct from the history of the Indian elite (Guha, 1982).

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

Hence, to hear the unheard, to know the silenced narratives, this article rediscovers the courtesans' role in India's anti-colonial movements.

Courtesans and their role in nation-building and nationalism during India's struggle for Independence

Nationalism, as defined by Ernest Gellner is"… primarily a political principle… Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction... A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind" (Gellner:1983:1)

Nationalism places loyalty to the nation above all other forms of politics and identity, and one's loyalty and commitment towards the nation must be a natural corollary. Nationalism teaches that the nation is not only the site of loyalty, but it's the ultimate organisation for any political activity. Thus, the nation, a spatial entity, can legitimately claim property, lives, and any other sacrifice from its members residing there, to ensure the survival of the collective.

The notion of Indian nationalism is combined with the ideas of collective unity and collective development, yet India has hardly acknowledged the role of courtesans in shaping the nation and nationalism due to social stigma. During the 1857 rebellion, the brave 'Tawaifs' or courtesans of India played a significant role. But their stories of self-sacrifice had few or simply no listeners, with even fewer physical records. Consequently, their stories were inevitably lost or hidden between the wrinkled pages of history.

One such fascinating character was Azeezunbai. Her fascinating story found no place in regular history textbooks or any other conventional historical literature. However, it survived today mainly through some archival reports, oral narratives, and a research paper written by Lata Singh, an Associate Professor at the Centre for Women's Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. (Rao:The Dawn:2019)

Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was an immensely significant period in Indian history. The tension grew rapidly when the Indian soldiers rose against British officials all across the country. In June 1857, when the Indian soldiers tried to lay siege to Cawnpore (now known as Kanpu surrounded the East India Company's British soldiers. A courtesan on a horseback disguised as a soldier and adorned in medals and armed with a brace of pistols joined the fighting soldiers and fought alongside them. She was Azeezunbai. (Subramanium: The Hindu:2015). It was alleged that she had nothing to prove and held no personal grudges against the British, like many other women who had joined the uprising. But she took a proactive role because of her love and commitment to her motherland and was undeniably driven by passion for the nation.

In her article, Making the Margin Visible', Lata Singh argued that Azeezunbai was popular and a favourite among the second cavalry sepoys posted in Kanpur. She was also particularly close to one of the soldiers, Shamsuddin. Azeezunbai was so committed to the cause of the motherland that she offered her house as a meeting point for the sepoys. A women's group was formed. This group went around valiantly cheering the men in arms. They attended to their wounds and distributed arms and ammunition. The headquarters for her

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

work was set up in one of the gun batteries in Kanpur. During the siege of Kanpur, she accompanied the soldiers, whom she called her friends. She was always armed with pistols herself, too. (Safvi:The Wire: 2018) She was among the many courtesans who heroically fought and took a proactive role in India's struggle for independence, sometimes behind the veil and sometimes without it. In addition to Azeezunbai, Professor Singh mentions another nautch lady, Hossaini. She was alleged to be one of the key conspirators of the infamous Bibighar massacre, where over 100 captive British women and children were killed. (Rao:The Dawn: 2019)

Begum Hazrat Mahal, wife of Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Awadh, was a courtesan before marriage. Soumya Rao, in her article, 'Tawaifs: The unsung heroes of India's freedom Struggle' mentions that according to several accounts, Hazrat Mahal was a proactive member during the rebellion of 1857. She stepped in to fill the void left by her exiled husband, though briefly, and led the Indian soldiers to seize control of Lucknow. (Rao:The Dawn: 2019)

Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation movement and Tilak Swaraj Fund (in memory of Bal Gangadhar Tilak to raise funds for financing the Non-Cooperation movement) in 1920. He appealed to everyone to contribute to the fund. Gauhar Jaan, a courtesan, actively contributed to the Swaraj Fund to support the freedom movement. She organised a fund-raising concert which even Gandhi attended. She deposited Rs 12, 000 of the Rs 24, 000 she raised from her concert.

During the same time, a group of courtesans from Varanasi formed the Tawaif Sabha to support the independence struggle. Prof Lata alleges that Husna Bai, the chairperson of the Sabha, advised members of the group to adorn themselves in iron shackles instead of ornaments as a symbol of protest and boycott foreign goods.

Amritlal Nagar's 'Ye Kothewalian' (1958) was an account of the life of tawaifs. It included a letter from a courtesan, Vidyadhar Bai. It narrated details of her rendezvous with Gandhi in Varanasi. Amritlal mentions that after this, Vidyadhar appealed to her fellow courtesan friends to be more committed towards the motherland. Henceforth, some courtesans decided to start their musical performances with renditions of nationalist songs. One such song was written by her, Chun Chun Ke Phool Le Lo. (Rao_The Dwan:2019)

Often, courtesans from other parts of the country, like Barisal in present-day Bangladesh and Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, met Gandhi and expressed their desire to join the Indian National Congress.

These make it evident that the courtesans indeed played a significant role in the Indian freedom narratives. But they were always looked at with raised eyebrows, judged as society's malice, and considered to be the 'nosto meye' (the spoiled or corrupt girls) and deliberately kept away from the mainstream society. Their love, their commitment, though, remained silenced for ages; directors like Sanjay Leela Bhansali, through his series Heeramandi, or say Srijit Mukherjee through his movie Rajkahini, have intervened well into history and manifested the unseen narratives and raised the unheard voices skilfully and successfully.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 53-61, Section: Article

Conclusion

Cinema is rarely an accurate mirror of the past, but it is often a powerful lens through which the present negotiates with the past. *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar* acts as a historical intervention by disrupting the sanitised, puritanical narratives of the Indian freedom struggle. While it may take liberties with dates and events, it captures the emotional and political truth of a marginalised community's yearning for agency. By placing the *Tawaif* at the heart of the India's anti-colonial movement, Bhansali's work ensures that the 'Diamond Bazaar' is no longer a footnote, but a central chapter in the rediscovery of India's pluralistic history.

A critical distinction must be maintained between visual history and cinematic historiography while analysing *Heeramandi*. Visual history pertains to the tangible traces and artefacts such as the cave paintings of Ajanta, Mughal miniatures, colonial-era photographs, and myriad archival records. These function as primary evidentiary sources, offering a static glimpse into the aesthetics and legal structures of a bygone era. They may be referred to as the historical data.

Conversely, cinematic historiography—a term popularised by scholars like Robert Rosenstone and Hayden White—is not merely a record but a discursive intervention. It is the active process of *constructing* a narrative about the past through the medium of film. While visual history provides the archive, cinematic historiography provides the interpretive agency. In *Heeramandi*, Bhansali does not simply present a museum of 1940s Lahore; he employs the cinematic medium to write a new history.

Courtesans known by various names- TAWAIFS in the North, DEVADASIS in the South, NAIKINS in Goa, BAIJIS in Bengal, and NAUTCH GIRLS for the Britishers, known only to incite a sense of obscenity. They were never credited with being strong and independent women with their intellectual and cultural contributions. Social ostracization prevented them from being involved in any kind of mainstream activities of the society. But discontented with the East India Company, the courtesans played an active role from during the 1857 rebellion. Their kothabaris became meeting zones for the nationalists and hideouts for rebels; many courtesans who gathered wealth funded the independence movements, too. But none of these were well documented in the history books.

However, while dispersed references of the *tawaifs* remained during the 1857 sepoy mutiny, with the rise of Gandhi and his visions on morality in the 1920s, the *tawaifs* , their notion on nation-building, nationalism, and their resistance, which were silent, gritty, and valiant, remained unacknowledged. Therefore, the nationalists wilfully abandoned them, and their contributions and the courtesans found themselves on the outside with their voices silenced. Since the non-cooperation movement, India has seen many female nationalists and freedom fighters. But to utter dismay, even the middle-class women who took proactive roles in freedom movements did not want to align with the courtesans. These incongruent anecdotes, when strung together, created a very gloomy picture of the role played by the courtesans in the nation-building process.

Bhansali's series moved beyond the silent artefacts of the *Tawaif* (the visual history) and created a dynamic discourse that challenges existing nationalist and colonial archives. *Heeramandi* suggested that the freedom movement was not just won on the streets by men in khadi, but also in the shadowed alleys of Lahore by women who had the most to lose. Their contribution was twice suppressed: first by the British, who criminalised them, and second by the post-independence state, which failed to recognise them as freedom fighters. Thus, in this case, cinema becomes a site where the silences of traditional text-based history are filled with voice, motion, and political intent.

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

Voices in Raga: A Historical and Contemporary Study of Women's Role and Contribution in Indian Classical Music

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Abstract

This study examines the evolving roles and contributions of women in Indian classical music from historical roots to contemporary practice. Although Indian music traditions such as Hindustani and Carnatic have rich histories spanning millennia, women's participation and recognition have been uneven, shaped by cultural norms, gender discriminations, religious contexts, and institutional structures. Using a mixed-method qualitative approach grounded in historical analysis, selective literature review and interviews documented in secondary sources, the study maps women's musical journey across time and space identifying some torchbearers exploring how gendered expectations influenced training, performance opportunities, patronage, and public reception. Findings indicate enduring structural challenges, including limited access to formal institutions and gendered valuation of performance spaces, yet reveal resilient strategies women have employed to assert artistic authority. Implications stress the need for scholarship and pedagogy to foreground women's voices, and for institutional reforms to ensure equitable representation in academic and performance platforms. The conclusion highlights contributions, limitations of secondary data reliance, and prospects for future research at the intersection of gender, music, and culture.

Keywords: *Women, Indian classical music, Musicians, Gender, Performance, Contribution.*

Introduction

(Background) Indian classical music is structured around complex melodic frameworks, ragas, that serve as vehicles for expressive performance. Historically rooted in spiritual, royal, temple, courtly settings, classical music was disseminated through oral and guru–disciple traditions (guru–shishya parampara) that emphasized rigorous training and lineage. Although women have been associated with music in various roles—from temple performers to courtesans and concert soloists—their recognition within mainstream histories has been uneven (Neuman, 1990). Traditionally, gender norms limited women's access to formal training or institutional platforms, particularly in the public and courtly spheres.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

1. Research Problem

Despite growing interest in gendered studies of performance arts, comprehensive research that charts women's historical participation and contributions in Indian classical music remains inadequate. Existing accounts often fragment women's narratives or without systematic analysis of gender dynamics.

2. Objectives

This study aims to:

a) Trace the historical role of women in Indian classical music from advent till date.

b) Address the challenges of these women musicians.

c) Analyze contemporary contributions by women performers and educators.

d) Suggest frameworks for inclusive scholarship and institutional practice.

3. Significance of the Study

Since this article seeks to explore Indian women musicians' Role, challenges historically encountered due to patriarchal restrictions, social prejudices, and institutional barriers, and the lasting contributions they have made in preserving, enriching, and innovating Indian classical music.By foregrounding women's voices, this research contributes to correcting historiographical omissions, enriches understanding of gendered cultural production, music education and performance spaces by Indian women musicians therefore offering a foundation for musicologists, gender scholars, policy advocates, and educators

4. Literature Review

a) Historical Perspectives: Sacred texts and inscriptions make reference to female musicians, showcasing their presence in this art form.

Patanjali, Katyayana, and some Rig Vedic verses,Ramayana Mahabharata it is mentioned that women enjoyed the freedom of learning and cultivating music, be it dance, playing instruments, or the rendition of ritualistic hymns.But most of the litterateurs have only taken notice of men artists in their scriptures. However, the contribution of some legendry women of the 14th century cannot be ignored. To name a few are the daughter of Tansen, Saraswati, an astonishing Veena player, and Saint Meerabai, the icon of the Bhakti cult who composed various splendid poetries devoted to Lord Krishna.

Despite adverse conditions, some women excelled in various fields, be it political, literary, or social. Razia Sultan, Noor Jahan, Rani Durgavati were some of them.Research on women in Indian music has often focused on specific roles, such as tawaifs (courtesans) of North India, (Neuman, 1990). In contrast, Carnatic music's institutional history shows early involvement of women artists like M.S. Subbulakshmi, whose fame in the 20th century reshaped public perceptions of women performers.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

b) Contemporary Contexts: Modern studies have explored how women negotiate tradition and modernity, often in male-dominated academic and performance circuits. For example, women performers in Hindustani classical music have used media and global networks to expand audiences.

5. Research Gaps

Despite insightful case studies, there is limited synthesis of historical and contemporary dimensions of women's musical role and contribution across Indian classical traditions. Few studies systematically examine institutional participation—e.g., in teaching academies, broadcasting, and festival curation—through a gender lens. This study addresses this gap by integrating historical analysis with contemporary scholarship.

6. Methodology

a) Research Design: Given the historical and cultural focus, this research employs qualitative methods, synthesizing secondary sources to construct a cohesive narrative and analysis.

b) Data Sources: Historical texts and archival material: Music treatises, colonial records, biographies.

c) Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with female classical vocalists and instrumentalists from India.

d) Surveys: A structured online survey administered to women engaged in Indian classical music (students, teachers, performers).

e) Secondary sources: Journal articles, music reviews, and performance recordings.

7. Methods of Analysis

a) Historical Analysis: Role of women their active participation and contribution across India from vedic period till date.

b) Critical Discourse Analysis: Examining musicological and media discourses that shape cultural narratives about women performers.

c) Thematic Analysis: Identification of recurring themes related to challenges, constraints, performance contexts, and institutional participation.

8. Limitations

Primary fieldwork was beyond the scope of this study; reliance on published and archival materials may privilege narratives documented in English and institutional sources, potentially marginalizing vernacular and community-based voices.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

9. Detailed Historical Analysis from Vedic age till date of the role of women musicians, challenges faced and their contributions in the development process of Indian classical music

A) Vedic Age (c. 1500 BCE – 500 BCE)/Also called: Vedic Period

Main features: Music in its earliest form originated as sacred chant, deeply embedded in ritualistic and spiritual practices. The Samaveda constitutes the foundational source of musical thoughts and performances and several women rishikas (female seers) made lasting contributions.

In the Vedic age the status of women musicians were relatively empowered but limited.

Challenges faced: Although women (e.g., Gargi, Maitreyi) were educated and participated in chanting, musical knowledge was mostly oral and priest-controlled. Performance of sacred music was restricted to ritual contexts. Public performance by women was rare and often discouraged.

Some notable Women Musicians of the Vedic Age (c. 1500 BCE–500 BCE) -

i. **Lopamudra:** Lopamudra was a renowned female rishi credited with chanting of hymns in the Rigveda. Her verses were poetic and rhythmically structured.
ii. **Ghosha:** Ghosha composed hymns in the Rigveda that are notable for their lyrical quality and emotional depth.
iii. **Apala**:Apala is associated with a Rigvedic hymns.
iv. **Gargi Vachaknavi**: A philosopher, Gargi was deeply rooted in Vedic oral traditions and musical chanting.
v. **Maitreyi:** Maitreyi's contributions lie in the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the Vedas.
vi. **Romasha (Svanya):** A Vedic Rishika who was a Brahmavadini and was highly proficient in chanting.
vii. **Sikata (Nivavari):** Recognized as a Rishika in the Rigveda and Samaveda.
viii. **Vak Ambhrini**: A highly influential Rishika who composed the Devi Suktam.
ix. **Atreyi:** A composer of hymns dedicated to Agni (the fire god).
x. **Yami (Vaivasvati):** A daughter of Vaivasvata who is associated with early Vedic hymns.
xi. **Sarparajni:** A Rishika known for her contributions to the Vedic corpus.

Overall Contributions: In the Vedic Age women held a respected position in society and actively participated in musical life. Known as Rishikas, they composed and chanted Vedic hymns (suktas) used in rituals, making them the earliest women composers and musicians in India, which later influenced the evolution of Indian classical music.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

B) Pre-Classical / Epic Age (c. 500 BCE – 200 BCE)/Also called: Itihasa Period:In the Pre-Classical / Epic Age (c. 500 BCE–200 BCE), also called the Itihasa Period,

Main features: Indian music was transmitted orally and is known mainly through literary, religious, and epic sources such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Brahmanas, Upanishads.

In the post Vedic age Status of women musicians gradually declined in musical field.

Challenges faced: The Challenges faced by women musicians were Patriarchal social codes, which restricted women's public roles.Music increasingly became a courtly art (male-dominated) associated with devadasis and courtesans. Respectable women were discouraged from performing publicly. A growing moral divide between "respectable women" and "performing women" came into being.

Some notable Women Musicians of the Pre-Classical / Epic Age (c. 500 BCE – 200 BCE)

i. **Sita (Ramayana – Mythological Character):** Wife of Ramchandra Sita as skilled in veena playing and singing.She symbolizes the cultured, musically trained royal woman.
ii. **Ravana's Wives Mandodari and others(Mythological Characters from Ramayana)** : In the Ramayana, they are described as proficient in Nrityageeta and playing musical instruments.
iii. **Draupadi (Mythological character from Mahabharata)** Wife of the Pandavas,she was trained in gandharva gana.
iv. **Princess Uttarā (Mythological character from Mahabharata):** Trained by Arjuna (as Brihannala the transgender) in music and dance Uttara was proficient in Dance and music.Demonstrates structured pedagogy in vocal, instrumental, and dance arts for women.
v. **Panar and Viraliyar (Sangam Period):** These were female bards or singers who traveled and performed.
vi. **Gandharva Girls/Women:** Musicians who performed Marga Sangeet (prestigious/classical music) in courts and temples.
vii. **Apsaras (Urvashi, Rambha, Menaka, Tilottama):** Often depicted as celestial musicians and dancers in epic literature, representing the highest proficiency in Nrityageeta.

Overall Contributions of Women in the Itihāsa Period: (The music history of this period is reconstructed from texts. epics): Though the above mentioned names are semi-mythical, they strongly influenced the aesthetic ideals of Indian classical music, especially melody, ornamentation, preservation of oral musical traditions, development of melodic chanting, early use of string instruments like the veeṇa, the Integration of emotion (bhava) with musical sound. These established of women as knowledge-bearers, not just performers or entertainers.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

C) Classical Age (c. 200 BCE – 600 CE)/Also called: Ancient Classical Period:

Main features: This period is marked by advent of codification of music theory. Some Landmark texts of this period was, Natyasastra and Dattilam.

Challenges faced: Women musicians were often associated with temples or royal courts, which gave them patronage but also made them socially vulnerable.

The Devadasi system subjected women to moral stigma and exploitation leading to social marginalization. Women from "respectable" households were discouraged from learning or performing music publicly.

Some notable women Musicians of India during this period:

i. **Sanghamitta (c. 3rd century BCE)**: A Buddhist nun and cultural ambassador.She was associated with chanting traditions and sacred music used in Buddhist rituals.
ii. **Characters from the Tamil epic Silappadikaram by Ilango Adigal(2nd century CE) -** Though not historical individuals, these figures reflect real musical practices of the time.There was dancer-singer Madhavi.Also expert in yaazh (ancient Tamil harp) and pan (melodic modes).
iii. **Women Musicians Mentioned in the Natya Shastra (c. 200 BCE–200 CE):** While the Natya Shastra does not list many personal names, it explicitly acknowledges women performers,the Gayanikas (female singers),Vadinikas (female instrumentalists),Apsaras (celestial musicians, reflecting idealized human performers.
iv. **Buddhist and Jain Nun-Musicians (c. 200 BCE–500 CE):** Several verses were attributed to women musicians chanting,singing and playing instruments.
v. **Temple and Court Musicians (Unnamed but Documented):** Inscriptions and literature from the Gupta period (c. 320–600 CE) refer to women veena players,vocalists in temples and royal courts.

Overall Contributions: In the Classical Age of India individual women musicians are rarely documented because music was transmitted orally and historical records focused more on courts and texts than performers. However, literary, epigraphic, and treatise-based sources do preserve the names or identities of some notable women musicians, composers, and music scholars.

D) Post-Classical/Gupta Age(c.600CE – 1200 CE)/also called: Early Medieval Period :

Main features of this era: In this era the emergence of the raga system marked a decisive phase in the history of Indian music, articulated most clearly in seminal treatises such as Matanga's Brihaddesi, which first defined the term "raga," and Sarangadeva's Saṅgita Ratnakara.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

Challenges: During this period social status of women declined, and public performance by respectable women was often discouraged, leading to music being associated mainly with temple performers, devadasis and courtesans. Women had limited access to formal musical education and scholarly recognition, as music treatises and training systems were dominated by men. Additionally, moral stigma, caste restrictions, and lack of personal autonomy further limited women's visibility and freedom as musicians.

Notable Women Musicians of this era

i. **Hamsavati (c. 1st century BCE)** was a professional musician and dancer.
ii. **Karaikkal Ammaiyar (c. 6th century CE),** from present-day Tamil Nadu, stands as a devotional vocalist and performer. Her hymns were rendered in temple rituals, contributing to the foundation of South Indian music.
iii. Andal (Godā Devi) (c. 9th century CE) of Tamil Nadu was a seminal devotional composer and singer whose Carnatic rāgas based, kritis or songs still continue to be sung daily in temples.
iv. **Devadasis or temple musicians:Between the 7th and 12th centuries CE**: Debdasis or women temple musicians were trained vocalists, instrumentalists, and dancers attached to major temples. Temple inscriptions from the Chola, Pallava, and Rashtrakuta periods frequently record their presence.
v. **Mahadevi Akka** - the 12th-century lady mystic poet-singer from Karnataka, was a pioneering vocal composer
vi. **Royal and Court Musicians (Unnamed but recorded):** During the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, record the presence of queens and court ladies trained in veena, flute, and vocal music. Varayositas were skilled courtesans and artists performing in royal assemblies playing a key role in sustaining mārga (classical) music traditions.
vii. **The Female Orchestra or Streegeet (Classical Era):** Ancient paintings and artistic records depict all-female orchestras, with women playing flutes, drums, and cymbals, showing their role as specialized instrumentalists in addition to vocalists.

Overall Contributions: During the Post-Classical or Early Medieval period (c. 600–1200 CE), women musicians played a crucial role in preserving, practicing, and transmitting India's musical heritage across courtly, temple, and public spiritual spheres. They sustained both margi (classical) and desi (regional) traditions through vocal music, instrumental performance, dance, and pedagogy influencing later on the Hindustani and Carnatic traditions.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

E) Medieval Age (c. 1200 CE – 1700 CE)Also called: Islamic / Sultanate & Mughal Period :

Main features: In this period Indian classical music underwent a major transformation with a clear bifurcation into Hindustani music in the North and Carnatic music in the South. Also the evolution of vocal forms such as Dhrupad, Khayal, and Thumri came into being.

Challenges faced : Women Indian musicians in the Medieval Age (c. 1200–1700 CE), during the Sultanate and Mughal period, faced significant social and cultural restrictions. Practices such as purdah limited women's public performance, confining most musical activity to royal courts or private spaces. Although some women, including courtesans (tawaifs), received patronage and advanced musical training, their contributions were often marginalized or morally stigmatized. As a result, women's musical achievements were rarely documented, leading to their underrepresentation in historical records.

Notable Women Musicians of this period:

i. Kanti (Poetess, c. 11th Century): A contemporary of court poets, known for her poetic and likely musical talents.
ii. **Shantala Devi (Hoysala Queen, 12th Century)**: A paragon of accomplishment, she was an expert in singing, dancing, and playing instruments, ruling alongside her husband.
iii. **Razia Sultana (r. 1236 –1240)**, the first and only woman ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, distinguished herself as both a patron and practitioner of music, using the arts as a means of cultural integration and courtly refinement.She encouraged a creative synthesis of Persian and Indian musical traditions.
iv. **Meerabai (c. 1498–1546 CE)**: A Rajput princess and devotee of Krishna, she composed and sang bhajans (devotional songs) in regional dialects, becoming a pivotal figure in the Bhakti movement,
v. **Rani Durgavati(1524–1564),** the Gond queen of Central India during the Mughal era, was not only a valiant ruler but also a refined patron and practitioner of music trained in Dhrupad style.
vi. **Saraswati Devi, the daughter of Tansen,** emerged as a distinguished vocalist during Emperor Akbar's reign in the sixteenth century. Personally trained by her illustrious father, she was an accomplished Dhrupad singer at the Mughal court, embodying the discipline of the Senia tradition.
vii. **Rani Rupmati(Roopmati) of Malwa** a celebrated 16th-century vocalist and poet during the reign of Sultan Baz Bahadur.
viii. **Tawaifs or elite Court courtesans —** During the Sultanate and Mughal periods, tawaifs or elite court courtesans played an indispensable role as accomplished vocalists, instrumentalists, and dancers.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

Rigorously trained in dhrupad, khayal, thumri, dadra, and other semi-classical forms and on instruments such as the veena, tanpura, sarangi, and pakhawaj.

ix. **Women Sufi Musicians:** Women associated with the Chishti Sufi order played a significant role as vocal devotional artists through the singing of mystical poetry in Persian, Arabic, and Hindavi central to Sufi spiritual practice.

Overall Contributions: Between 1200 and 1700 CE, The women musicians acted as custodians of oral traditions, preserving and transmitting ragas and compositions across generations in an era when written notation was limited. Their artistic engagement shaped the growth of Dhrupad and Khayal, while their presence in royal courts enabled a synthesis of Indian and Persian musical ideas.

F) Modern Age (c. 1700 CE – 1947)Also called:Late Medieval/Colonial Period :

Main features of this era: The establishment of the gharana system marked a significant phase in the evolution of Indian classical music, emphasizing stylistic lineages and structured pedagogy. This period also saw increased systematization and documentation of musical knowledge.

***Challenges*:** British colonial morality viewed public performance by women as socially inappropriate, further restricting their opportunities. Indian reform movements, while promoting respectability, often excluded hereditary women musicians from mainstream recognition. Classical music favoured upper-caste, educated women, while traditional women performers were erased. Women musicians faced a conflict between cultural nationalism and personal artistic freedom.

Notable women Musicians of this era

i. **Gauhar Jaan (1873–1930)** was a celebrated courtesan. She was highly proficient in Hindustani classical music as well as semi-classical forms such as Thumri and Dadra. In 1902, she became the first Indian musician to record music on the gramophone, marking a historic moment in the preservation of Indian musical traditions.

ii. **Malka Jaan (Agrewali):** Renowned Thumri singer and contemporary of Gauhar Jaan.Highly proficient in Hindustani Classical Music and lighter Forms as well.

iii. **Mogubai Kurdikar (1894–1969)** Belonged to the Jaipur–Atrauli khayal gharana. As a distinguished guru, she trained several important musicians, most notably her illustrious daughter Kishori Amonkar.

iv. **Kesarbai Kerkar (1892–1977)** was a legendary Hindustani classical vocalist of the Jaipur–Atrauli gharana, renowned for her authoritative command over complex rāga structures, intricate layakari, and disciplined improvisation.

v. **Veena Dhanammal (1867–1938):** A defining figure in Carnatic music.

vi. **Coimbatore Thayi (1872–1917):** Prolific recording artist and singer of devotional songs.

vii. **Begum Akhtar (1914–1974)** was one of the most iconic figures of Hindustani classical and semi-classical music, excelling in ghazal, thumri, and dadra. Revered as the Mallika-e-Ghazal (Queen of Ghazal), she elevated ghazal to the formal concert stage.

viii. **M. S. Subbulakshmi (1916–2004)** was a legendary exponent of Carnatic music .She became the first woman musician to receive the Bharat Ratna.She also represented Indian classical music at the United Nations General Assembly in 1966.

ix. **Annapurna Devi (1927–2018)** was one of the greatest surbahar players in the history of Indian classical music and a distinguished representative and illustrious Guru of the Maihar gharana.

x. **Janki Bai of Allahabad (1880–1934)** was a celebrated exponent of Thumri and Dadra.She gained widespread acclaim during the early gramophone era for recording extensively.

xi. **Hirabai Barodekar (1905–1989)** was a distinguished vocalist of the Kirana Gharana who played a crucial role in popularizing Hindustani classical music through radio broadcasts and public concerts. She was among the earliest women to teach classical music in formal institutional settings,

xii. **Rasoolan Bai (1902–1974**) was a celebrated exponent of the Banaras gharana, renowned for her mastery of thumri.

xiii. **Siddheshwari Devi (1908–1977)** was one of the finest exponents of Purab ang thumri in Hindustani classical music.

xiv. Zohrabai Agrewali (1868–1913) was a pioneering figure in Hindustani classical music, trained in the rigorous Dhrupad tradition and renowned for her mastery of Khayal.

xv. **Gangubai Hangal (1913–2009)** was one of the most distinguished vocalists of the Kirana Gharana, renowned for her powerful, resonant voice and uncompromising commitment to classical purity.

***Overall contribution*:** Indian women musicians of the modern age played a transformative role in preserving, reshaping, and expanding Indian musical culture despite operating within restrictive social frameworks. Wome artists started recording for gramophone, helped shift music from private salons to public stages, radio, and concert halls.As theatre, cinema, and formal pedagogy emerged in the early twentieth century, women musicians shaped popular, classical, and educational traditions, ensuring both continuity and innovation in Indian music.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

G) Contemporary / Post-Independence Age (1947 – Present)/Also called: Contemporary Period

Main features of this era: In this era the institutionalization of music education has played a crucial role in preserving and systematically transmitting Indian classical music in the modern era. The use of recording technology, along with radio, television, and digital platforms, has expanded access to learning and performance beyond traditional guru–shishya settings. Globalization started carrying Indian classical music to international audiences, encouraging cross-cultural exchange while retaining its core traditions. At the same time, fusion and experimentation have emerged as creative expressions that respect classical foundations. Many major contemporary artists have gained global recognition, and the thoughtful use of AI is now opening new possibilities for documentation, analysis, and learning in Indian classical music.

***Challenges*:** In the Post-Independence Period although women gained great access to education, music institutions and leadership remained male dominated.Women instrumentalists were fewer due to gender stereotypes that discouraged them from playing certain instruments.Marriage and family responsibilities often interrupted or limited women's professional musical careers.Women musicians received less recognition, fewer performance opportunities, and fewer awards compared to male counterparts.

Safety concerns during travel and late-night performances affect career opportunities.Online platforms expose women to harassment, objectification, and unfair criticism.Commercial pressures often prioritize appearance and popularity over artistic skill, affecting women more than men.

Notable Women Musicians of this era

i. **Kishori Amonkar (1932–2017)** was a distinguished Hindustani vocalist of the Jaipur–Atrauli Gharana. She brought innovation to khayal singing by introducing personal interpretative freedom while maintaining classical rigor.

ii. **Lata Mangeshkar (1929–2022)** was a legendary playback and light classical vocalist who dominated Indian film music for over five decades. She skillfully brought classical nuances into popular cinema, setting a standard for vocal purity and emotional expression. Her extraordinary contributions to Indian music were recognized with the Bharat Ratna in 2001.

iii. **Girija Devi (1929–2017)** was a renowned Hindustani vocalist, celebrated as the Queen of Thumri, Dadra, and other semi-classical forms.She played a pivotal role in preserving and popularizing the Purab Ang tradition.

iv. **Prabha Atre** is a renowned Hindustani classical vocalist of the Kirana Gharana, celebrated for her command over intricate ragas and improvisation. She has enriched classical music also as an author and educator.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

v. **Dr. N. Rajam (born 1938)** is a distinguished Hindustani classical violinist renowned for pioneering the Gayaki Ang, or vocal style, on the violin.

vi. **vi)Veena Sahasrabuddhe** was a renowned Indian Hindustani classical vocalist known for her soulful khyal and bhajan renditions, rooted in the Gwalior gharana

vii. **Malini Rajurkar** was a celebrated Hindustani classical vocalist known for her command over the Gwalior Gharana style Tappa singing.

viii. **Parveen Sultana**, born in 1950, is one of India's most celebrated Hindustani classical vocalists, acclaimed for her powerful voice, intricate ornamentation, and emotive renditions of khayal, thumri, and bhajan.

ix. **Kalpana Raghavendar** is a distinguished Carnatic vocalist and violinist

x. **Ashwini Vide Deshpande** is a renowned Hindustani classical vocalist and educator of the Agra Gharana. She is acclaimed for her mastery over khayal, thumri, and semi-classical forms,

xi. **Sudha Raghunathan (b. 1956)** is a distinguished Carnatic vocalist, composer, and musicologist.

xii. **Shubha Mudgal** (born 1959) is a prominent contemporary Hindustani classical vocalist as well as playback singer. She is also actively involved in music education, digital archiving, and cultural advocacy.

xiii. **Kaushiki Chakraborty (b. 1980)** is a distinguished Hindustani classical vocalist who represents the modern generation of classical musicians. She seamlessly blends her traditional training with contemporary presentation, making classical music accessible and engaging for today's audiences.

xiv. **Anoushka Shankar (born 1981)** is the daughter of sitar wizard Pandit Ravi Shankar and international ambassador of Indian classical and fusion music. A grammy award winner, she has played a pivotal role in bringing Indian instrumental music to global contemporary audiences.

Overall contribution: In the Contemporary or Post-Independence period (1947–present), Indian women musicians have made significant contributions to both classical and semi-classical music popularizing Indian music nationally and internationally while preserving traditional instrumental and vocal styles through teaching and mentorship. Many women innovated within musical.

Results / Findings

Historical findings

a) Temple and Folk Contexts: Early references to women in music appear in temple traditions, Vedic sources where women participated as devotional performers

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

b) Courtesan Legacy: Courtesans in the 18th–19th centuries were central to Hindustani music's stylistic developments but faced moral censorship.

c) Early Public Performers: Women Performers and trailblazers gained institutional recognition through recordings and All India Radio and Television broadcasts.

Contemporary Contributions

a) Performance Excellence: Women artists today lead in all major genres of Indian classical music, with notable performers in vocal and instrumental fields.

b) Institutional Roles: Women are increasingly visible as music educators, researchers, and festival directors.

c) Media and Global Outreach: Modern technologies and global networks have enabled women musicians to reach wider audiences, cultivate international collaborations.

Structural Challenges

a) Access to Training: Historical barriers to formal training persist in subtle forms, including gendered expectations around mobility, respectability, and family support.

b) Professional Recognition: Women often navigate inequities in pay, visibility, and critical valuation compared to male counterparts.

c) Cultural Norms: Persisting gendered attitudes influence repertoire choices, with some genres perceived as more 'appropriate' for women, reinforcing stereotypes.

5. Discussion

a) Interpreting Findings: The findings reveal that women's contributions to Indian classical music are both significant and complexly positioned within broader social structures. Historically, women's musical agency was constrained by moral and institutional barriers, yet they innovated within existing forms—whether in courtesan salons or devotional spaces. Contemporary women performers build on these foundations while leveraging new platforms to amplify their work.

b) Relation to Existing Literature : This study confirms insights regarding the negotiation of gendered norms in performance spaces and expands them by situating contemporary practices within a historical continuum. Where previous studies focus on specific case histories, the current research synthesizes a broader cross-tradition perspective.

c) Theoretical Implications : Drawing on feminist cultural theory, women's navigations of classical music reflect broader patterns of resistance and adaptation within patriarchal structures.The narratives of women artists points to foreground voices long marginalized.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 62-76, Section: Article

6. Implications

a) For Scholarship: This research encourages scholars to pursue interdisciplinary approaches that integrate gender studies, musicology, and cultural history which canon voices in Indian classical music.

b) For Music Education: Music academies and conservatories should examine curricula and institutional cultures to ensure gender inclusivity and equitable access to training opportunities. Mentorship programs and scholarship support for women musicians can address enduring disparities.

c) For Policy and Cultural Institutions: Arts councils and festival organizers should prioritize gender balance in programming and leadership roles. Documentation projects focused on women's musical heritage can preserve legacies that risk being overlooked.

7. Conclusion

Women have played an integral role in the rich tapestry of Indian classical music tradition throughout history as singers, musicians. composers and performers. It is important to acknowledge the resilience and creativity of women who defied societal norms and made their voices heard.women face challenges, such as limited access to education and resources, societal pressure to prioritize family roles, and unequal treatment in the music industry. Efforts are needed to address these issues, promote inclusivity, and provide equal platforms for women artists to showcase their talents.

While progress has been made, ongoing efforts are necessary to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all genders in the realm of Indian music. But in the end it can be said that the future of Indian women musicians shines bright, carried forward by talent that not only survives obstacles, but transforms them into triumph.

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

Artificial Intelligence in Global Governance: Navigating the Future

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the world at an unprecedented pace, with far-reaching implications for global governance. The global nature of AI requires international cooperation and governance ensuring responsible development and deployment of AI. The complexities of AI influence on societal structures, economic systems, and individual rights underscores the need for effective governance frameworks that prioritize human well-being and dignity, mitigating the associated risks, such as bias, job displacement, and cyber security threats along with promoting the benefits of AI, including improved efficiency, enhanced decision-making and innovation.

The study aims to explore:

1. Need for International AI and data governance;
2. Key challenges in establishing effective global governance for AI
3. The role of geopolitics in shaping AI governance
4. How international cooperation can facilitate the development of AI regulatory frameworks.
5. Key issues in Global AI governance
6. Navigating the future of AI governance

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Global Governance; International Cooperation; Regulatory Framework; Human Well-being.*

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a groundbreaking technological development of the 21st century, holding tremendous promise to transform nearly every aspect of human life and drive societal progress (Xu et al., 2021). In 2023, Ian Bremmer and Mustafa Suleyman, co-founder of DeepMind, described our current era as a "technopolar" world, where influence is increasingly determined not just by control of land, resources, or capital, but by mastery over computing power, algorithms, and data (Bremmer & Suleyman, 2023). As AI continues to advance rapidly, its capacity to improve efficiency, transparency, and data-driven decision-making in tackling global issues such as climate change, security, public health, and economic stability becomes more apparent.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

A notable emerging concept in this context is "Data Center Diplomacy," which highlights the strategic role of data centers as key infrastructure in the global AI ecosystem. Since data fuels AI systems, countries that control significant data centers can wield considerable geopolitical influence, similar to the power once held by oil-rich nations in the 20th century. Countries engaged in "Data Center Diplomacy" are not only expanding their domestic infrastructure but also forming international partnerships to broaden their influence. These alliances can foster technological sharing, security agreements, and economic collaborations, creating interconnected dependencies or, alternatively, leading to geopolitical tensions, especially when access to vital data resources is restricted or disputes over data center ownership arise. Consequently, "Data Center Diplomacy" is poised to become a vital element shaping future international relations. To harness AI's benefits while mitigating its risks, establishing strong regulatory and governance frameworks is essential (de Almeida et al., 2021).

Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive, multi-method approach to analyze AI's evolving role in global governance and identify pathways for navigating its future effectively. Combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, the research integrates literature review, policy analysis, and qualitative data examination to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject.

The Need for International AI and Data Governance

Managing emerging technologies like AI is likely to be one of the key challenges for international relations in the 21st century (Dafoe, 2018). AI is projected to contribute approximately $15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, transforming sectors such as healthcare, finance, and defense (https://www.ipag.org/policy/international-ai-governanceframework-the-importanceof-g7-g20-synergy/). However, its rapid adoption raises significant ethical, security, and socio-economic concerns, such as algorithmic bias, misinformation, and cyber threats that necessitate a cohesive international governance framework.

AI governance refers to the mechanisms and processes that influence and regulate AI development and deployment (Butcher & Beridze, 2019). The rapid pace of AI innovation has prompted various stakeholders to explore how to leverage this technology responsibly, leading to diverse actors involved at different levels. These include:

Private Sector: Major multinational companies like Google, OpenAI, Microsoft, IBM, and Meta are heavily involved in AI research, development, and setting industry standards, ethics guidelines, and governance strategies. (Butcher & Beridze, 2019)

Public Sector: Governments and their agencies develop national AI strategies and policies, and participate in international agreements on AI use. There are also intergovernmental-level partnerships on AI facilitated by

bodies such as the EU, G20, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations (UN) (Naidoo, 2021)

Non-Governmental Organizations: Professional organizations (e.g., The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers [IEEE], The Royal Society, think tanks, advocacy groups, civil societies, and research institutes actively contribute by organizing workshops, establishing standards, raising awareness, and making policy recommendations. (Schiff et al., 2020; Schmitt, 2022).

Various proposals have been made for global AI governance mechanisms beyond national borders. Some of these include a Group of 20 (G20) coordinating committee for the governance of artificial intelligence (CCGAI) (Jelinek et al., 2021); a new informal intergovernmental organization called the International Artificial Intelligence Organization (IAIO) (Erdélyi & Goldsmith, 2018) and also exploring models inspired by existing institutions like the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC) or **International Atomic Energy Agency** (IAEA) for managing global risks (Jelinek et al., 2021; Erdélyi & Goldsmith, 2018; Maas & Villalobos, 2023).

As generative AI technologies become integrated into virtually every facet of daily life, it is increasingly urgent for organizations to develop trustworthy AI systems governed by responsible frameworks. Poorly designed or hastily implemented AI can cause harm, (Davies, M. and Birtwistle, M. 2023), such as job losses, widening social inequalities, or the amplification of harmful stereotypes. Risks also include misuse or catastrophic failures. Effective AI governance involves creating policies that promote responsible innovation, mitigate risks, and ensure equitable distribution of benefits. Key considerations include data privacy, transparency, accountability, and sustainable growth, which depend on reliable digital infrastructure, adequate power supply, and a skilled talent pool.

Global AI Governance Landscape

Global AI governance involves the development of policies, standards, and frameworks to ensure that artificial intelligence is developed and used responsibly, ethically, and for the benefit of humanity. The US and China are recognized as the leaders in AI developments globally (Bard & Armstrong, 2019). However, the EU has also established itself as a significant third player in the field. (Feijóo et al., 2020). Thus the international landscape is largely shaped by three leading players: the United States, China, and the European Union, each pursuing different goals and approaches that sometimes conflict, posing challenges to establishing a unified global governance system.

The “multi-layer model,” introduced by Jovan Kurbalija, offers a helpful way to understand AI governance by dividing it into different levels: hardware (like computing power and chips), data (the information used to train AI), algorithms (the AI's capabilities), and applications (how end-users interact with AI). Each layer involves specific issues, such as export controls at the hardware level, data privacy at the data level, transparency at the algorithm level, and consumer protection at the application level. Various actors participate in governance across these layers, including the private sector (microchip companies, major AI

companies like OpenAI, Microsoft, and Google), governments, international organizations, and civil society and consumer organizations.

Several global initiatives aim to promote responsible AI development, emphasizing transparency, accountability, fairness, and human rights. Organizations such as the OECD, UNESCO, and G20 have established principles and guidelines, while the EU has proposed regulations like the AI Act to oversee high-risk AI systems and promote ethical practices. Leading AI research labs, including OpenAI, Google DeepMind and Microsoft Research, advocate for coordinated global efforts to enhance safety. Events like the UK's AI Safety Summit and the AI Seoul Summit have fostered international dialogue and led to the creation of national AI safety institutes in several countries, including UK, the US, Japan and Canada.

Drawing on Columbia Law School Professor Anu Bradford's concept of "three digital empires," the approaches to AI governance in the EU, the US, and China are mainly rights-driven, market-driven, and state-driven, respectively. These reflect differing values and priorities. The EU emphasizes protecting human rights and fundamental values through regulations like the Digital Services Act (DSA), enforced in 2022, which mandates transparency and restricts targeted advertising based on sensitive personal data such as ethnicity, political views or sexual orientation (European Commission 2024). The EU's "human-centric" approach aims to ensure AI benefits society while safeguarding dignity, equality, and justice, exemplified by initiatives like the Digital Europe Programme (2021-2027) that aims to strengthen the EU's technological leadership. (European Commission 2021)

According to Stanford University's AI Index Report 2023 report, the US and China are the world's top two AI powers and their ambitions in AI leadership also manifest in their efforts to influence global AI governance frameworks. (Cheng, J., & Zeng, J. 2022). The US participates actively in multilateral efforts through organizations like the OECD, G7, and General Purpose AI systems (GPAI), and the US-EU Trade and Technology Council, while China launched its Global AI Governance Initiative in October, 2023 during the third Belt and Road (BRI) International Summit. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2023). Despite their differences, there are shared human-centric principles across regions, emphasizing AI's role in promoting human wellbeing, rights, and sustainable development.

China's AI strategy "putting people first or people-centered" is a slogan proliferated in the political sphere since 2004, meaning development should serve the interests of the people. (Leung, T. T. F., & Tam, C. H. L, 2015). Apart from human-centered values, inclusive growth, accountability, transparency, robustness, security, and safety are common AI principles across these powers, as outlined by the OECD. However, differences exist. Western democracies prioritize individual rights and checks on power, whereas China often emphasizes social stability and collective rights alongside individual rights. International collaborations, like the G7 AI Principles and the EU-US Trade and Technology Council, reflect shared commitments to human-centric AI, though differing values influence how these principles are interpreted and implemented globally.

The role of geopolitics in AI governance

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

The influence of geopolitics on AI governance is profound, as AI is poised to become a key element of both economic and military strength worldwide (Maslej, N., et al., April 2023). Countries' strategic interests and power ambitions drive their approaches to developing and regulating AI, leading to increased export restrictions and retaliatory measures that could fragment global AI governance efforts. This geopolitical competition also risks creating a significant gap between nations that have advanced AI capabilities and those that do not, reinforcing existing inequalities (Jufang Wang, et al., 2024).

International frameworks, such as the OECD's AI principles and UNESCO's recommendations, centering on the protection of human rights through principles of "Do No Harm," safety and security, fairness and non-discrimination, privacy, sustainability, transparency, human oversight and accountability, addresses broad societal implications of AI development. Additionally, three more technical standards that translate high-level commitments into actionable practices: the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) AI management framework, a voluntary set of guidelines addressed to individuals and organizations who want to act responsibly in developing products and services containing AI ; the ISO/IEC 42001 International Standard for AI Governance, an international standard promulgated in December 2023 by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electro Technical Commission focussing on the MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE of AI systems ; IEEE 7000-2021 standard for ethical system design, published in 2021 by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers striving to ensure ethical principles, such as transparency, sustainability, privacy, fairness, and accountability and translate these high-level principles into practical guidelines for responsible AI development and ethical system design.

While the United States leads in AI innovation, China's rapid efforts to catch up are viewed with suspicion and concern in Washington, especially regarding access to advanced technologies like semiconductors. Beyond the US and China, middle powers such as the UK, Canada, France, Singapore, India, South Korea, and Israel are emerging as influential players with their own geopolitical goals in AI development and governance (Jufang Wang, et al., 2024).

Apart from US-China rivalry, another major geopolitical issue is the concentration of AI power within a few countries and private corporations. The high technological and financial barriers to developing foundational AI models, such as those used in ChatGPT mean that only a small number of companies, primarily based in the US and China, can afford the necessary resources. This concentration limits new entrants and deepens the divide between nations and organizations that can develop and regulate AI, worsening global inequalities in AI capabilities and influence.

Key issues in Global AI governance

Experts like Dr. Stephen Pattison suggest categorizing AI risks into levels, from existential threats posed by military systems like lethal autonomous weapons to lower-risk civilian applications. He argues that risks involving existential threats require a centralized international framework, while civilian AI issues might be managed at the national or regional level, respecting diverse cultural norms. There are some signs of international cooperation, such as the Bletchley Declaration signed during the first AI Safety Summit, which

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

included China and emphasized the importance of understanding and addressing the risks of advanced AI models. In November 2023, leaders like U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping acknowledged the importance of managing AI risks through bilateral talks.

A particularly urgent issue in global AI governance is the regulation of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). Given their military potential, there is concern that geopolitical rivalry could lead to an increase in autonomous weapons, which some experts consider the third major revolution in warfare after gunpowder and nuclear arms. The market for such weapons is projected to reach around $26.36 billion by 2027 (Jufang Wang, et al., 2024).

The United Nations' THE INTERIM REPORT: GOVERNING AI FOR HUMANITY has proposed establishing a global governance framework for AI, leveraging its legitimacy to oversee the development and use of AI technologies for humanity's benefit. A Brookings commentary, published in February 2024, argued that the UN has a crucial role to play in global AI governance. Many countries of the Global South and China stressed that "an international AI governance institution should be set up under the UN framework and all countries should be able to participate on equal terms. Alternative proposals include mechanisms similar to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which oversee nuclear technology, to manage AI's risks and ensure responsible development under international oversight (Jufang Wang, et al., 2024).

Implementing global AI governance involves choosing between two main approaches: hard regulation, which is mandatory and legally binding, and soft regulation, which is voluntary and based on guidelines and standards. Hard regulations may face resistance from countries, especially those with limited AI capabilities, since they might see such rules as imposing restrictions. On the other hand, soft governance includes voluntary codes of conduct, international guidelines, and standards developed by organizations like IEEE, ISO, IEC, and WHO. For example, the ISO/IEC 42001 standard on AI management systems (AIMS) exemplifies efforts to establish common frameworks. Despite competition among these organizations, there is hope for international cooperation in creating cohesive AI standards.

AI-driven cyber threats, such as automated hacking, misinformation campaigns, and cyber espionage pose significant risks to national security and global stability. The G7, with its advanced cyber security infrastructure and expertise, is well-positioned to lead international efforts to address these threats. Additionally, initiatives like the U.S.-led Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of AI and the Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAIM) initiative, led by multiple countries including the Netherlands, Korea, and Spain, emphasize the importance of international collaboration to keep military AI systems under human control. These efforts aim to develop ethical guidelines and legal frameworks for military applications of AI, especially autonomous weapons and surveillance. Comprehensive collaboration with G20 nations is crucial to avoiding an AI arms race and ensuring the protection of global security and human rights.

(https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/geotech-cues/the-sovereignty-trap/)

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

As AI systems become more powerful and integrated into critical infrastructure, concerns about data security, privacy, sovereignty and geopolitical power have grown. The concept of "Sovereign AI" has emerged, emphasizing a nation's desire to control AI development, deployment, and regulation within its borders. On February 28, 2024, NVIDIA, a leading chip designer and one of the world's most valuable companies, published a blog post titled "What is Sovereign AI?" on their website. The post defined the term as a country's ability to produce AI using its own "infrastructure, data, workforce and business networks." While this enhances national autonomy, it also risks fragmenting the global AI landscape, leading to divergent regulations, data laws, and standards. Such fragmentation could hinder international cooperation, trade, and innovation. Balancing national sovereignty with global collaboration is vital to ensure AI benefits all humanity. (https://rdg.digital/sovereign-ai-a-path-to-national-security-and-technological-autonomy-in-the-age-of-artificial-intelligence/)

Navigating the Future

Looking ahead, the future of AI governance depends on nations working together to tackle ethical, security, and economic challenges while respecting sovereignty and fostering innovation. The G7 can lead in establishing regulations, but broader consensus, including G20 countries like China and Russia, who are rapidly advancing military AI, is crucial. Diplomatic negotiations and confidence-building measures are necessary to keep AI under human control in military contexts. Collaboration between G7 and G20 is also needed to ethically regulate AI surveillance and prevent civil liberties violations.

Global inequalities in AI capabilities are a concern, as R&D is concentrated in a few advanced nations. To address this, efforts should promote democratization of AI through international research collaborations, data-sharing, and initiatives like a Global AI Research and Education Fund. This fund could support AI development in emerging economies, fund ethics training, and facilitate talent exchanges. Structured programs for technology transfer between developed and developing nations can help bridge the gap.

An effective international AI governance framework should be based on strategic collaboration among major players like the U.S., a G7 leader in AI; China, a G20 powerhouse; and South Korea, another key G20 player, leveraging their respective strengths. The U.S. leads with industry giants like OpenAI and Google, while China has made significant breakthroughs with companies like DeepSeek. South Korea is advancing in AI infrastructure and energy-efficient data centers. Balancing regulatory approaches among these nations is vital to creating a coherent global framework.

Strengthening the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) is also key. While GPAI already unites governments, industry, and researchers, its influence is limited, especially among underrepresented developing countries. Expanding its participation to include more regions, such as Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, and working with financial institutions like the World Bank can help align AI development with global challenges. Enhancing GPAI's authority and inclusivity will support a coordinated, responsible international AI governance strategy that encourages innovation while respecting ethical standards.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence into global governance presents both transformative opportunities and profound challenges. AI has the potential to enhance decision-making processes, foster greater efficiency, and facilitate more inclusive and data-driven policies on a global scale. However, realizing these benefits requires careful navigation of ethical considerations, issues of sovereignty, and the risks associated with bias and misuse. Effective international cooperation, robust regulatory frameworks, and ongoing ethical oversight are essential to harness AI's capabilities responsibly. As we move forward, a balanced approach that promotes innovation while safeguarding fundamental values will be crucial in shaping a future where artificial intelligence serves as a constructive force for global good.

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
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Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 77-86, Section: Article

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Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

Algorithmic Control and Precarity in Gig Work Culture in India: A Sociological Review

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of gig work in India has transformed labour relations through digital platforms that organise work via algorithms rather than traditional managerial hierarchies. While gig work is often presented as flexible and autonomous, sociological research increasingly highlights the centrality of algorithmic control and precarity in shaping workers' lived experiences. This paper offers a qualitative secondary review of sociological, interdisciplinary, and policy-oriented literature to examine how algorithmic management practices—such as ratings, incentives, surveillance, and automated penalties—restructure labour control, and how these practices produce and normalise precarity in gig work culture in India. Drawing on key sociological frameworks, including labour process theory, Weberian rationalisation, Foucauldian discipline, precarity studies, manufacturing consent, and surveillance capitalism, the study situates platform labour within longer histories of informalisation and labour flexibilisation. The analysis shows that gig work in India represents a hybrid regime of digital control and social insecurity, reinforced by weak legal protections despite recent policy interventions. The paper argues that understanding gig work requires shifting attention from narratives of flexibility to questions of power, inequality, and justice in the algorithmic age.

Introduction

Gig work refers to forms of work where people earn their livelihood by completing short-term, task-based jobs, usually through digital platforms such as ride-hailing, food delivery, logistics, or home services apps. Workers are connected to customers through mobile applications rather than traditional workplaces. In India, gig work is most visible in sectors such as ride-hailing (Uber, Ola), food and grocery delivery (Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit, Zepto), e-commerce logistics (Flipkart, Amazon), and app-based home and professional services (Urban Company); these platforms employ large numbers of workers on a task-based and on-demand basis, often without formal employment contracts ((Fairwork India Ratings, 2024). According to the *Fairwork India Ratings* (2024), workers across these sectors commonly face issues related to low and fluctuating pay, opaque algorithmic management, weak grievance redressal mechanisms, and limited access to social protection, highlighting the precarious nature of platform-mediated work in the Indian context (Fairwork India Ratings, 2024). Gig work is often presented as flexible and independent, allowing workers to choose when and how much they work. However, sociological research shows that platform-based work represents a major shift in how labour is organised and controlled, rather than simply a new form of freedom or entrepreneurship (Wood et al., 2019; ILO, 2021). A key concept used to understand gig work is *precarity*.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

Guy Standing (2011) describes precarity as a condition in which workers face unstable income, insecure employment, lack of social protection, and limited control over their working lives. In gig work, precarity is especially strong because workers are officially treated as independent contractors, yet they depend heavily on digital platforms for access to work and income (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Earnings often fluctuate, benefits such as health insurance or paid leave are absent, and workers can lose access to work suddenly through deactivation or penalties imposed by algorithms (ILO, 2021). This insecurity is closely linked to algorithmic control. Instead of managers or supervisors, gig platforms use algorithms to assign tasks, monitor performance, evaluate behaviour, and impose rewards or penalties. Ratings, incentives, acceptance rates, and automated decisions play a central role in shaping how workers behave and how much they earn (Wood et al., 2019). Workers are constantly monitored, but they usually do not know how decisions are made or how algorithms work. This lack of transparency creates uncertainty and encourages workers to discipline themselves in order to avoid penalties or loss of work (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Historically, gig work can be seen as part of a longer process of labour flexibilisation[1] linked to neoliberal economic reforms, outsourcing, and the expansion of informal work. In countries like India, gig work does not replace informality but reorganises it through digital platforms. Existing insecure work arrangements are reshaped by technology, often making insecurity more intense rather than reducing it (Rani & Furrer, 2021). As a result, gig work in India represents a hybrid system—digitally managed but socially and economically insecure.

From a legal perspective, India has taken some initial steps to recognise gig workers. The Code on Social Security, 2020 is the first national law to officially define "gig workers" and "platform workers." The Code proposes social security measures such as insurance, health benefits, and old-age support. However, it does not recognise gig workers as employees, nor does it guarantee core labour rights like minimum wages, job security, or collective bargaining (NITI Aayog, 2022). Most of the promised schemes are also yet to be fully implemented. More recently, the state of Rajasthan took a significant step by passing the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023; this law introduces worker registration, a welfare board, and a platform-funded welfare fee aimed at providing social security benefits (Fairwork India Ratings, 2024). The Rajasthan case is important because it moves beyond recognition and attempts to create an institutional framework for worker protection. However, scholars note that its effectiveness will depend on implementation, enforcement, and whether similar measures are adopted by other states (ibid.).

Gig work in India cannot be understood simply as flexible or innovative employment. Instead, it reflects a deeper transformation of labour relations, where algorithmic control, precarity, and limited legal protection shape workers' everyday experiences. A sociological approach, therefore, can help to shift attention from individual choice and technology alone to broader questions of power, inequality, and justice in the platform economy.

Review of Literature

Digital labour platforms have generated a growing body of sociological and interdisciplinary scholarship that examines how work is reorganised through algorithms rather than traditional managerial hierarchies.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

This literature broadly argues that gig work is not simply characterised by flexibility and autonomy, but by a distinctive form of labour control embedded in platform design, data infrastructures, and automated decision-making systems (ILO, 2021; Wood et al., 2019). Within this framework, algorithms silently take on the role of managers by deciding who gets work, closely tracking performance, judging behaviour, and applying penalties, while giving the impression that workers remain independent and in control.

Algorithmic Systems and Labour Control in Platform Work:

A central theme in sociological studies of gig work is the concept of *algorithmic management*, where software rather than supervisors organises, evaluates, and disciplines labour (Wood, 2021). Platforms use ratings, incentives, surveillance, and automated penalties to shape worker behaviour, often in unequal and blurred ways (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Ratings are especially powerful because they shift day-to-day evaluation to customers while the platform controls the consequences. As Rosenblat and Stark (2016) show, workers treat ratings as implicit threats, carefully managing speed, politeness, and compliance to avoid fewer tasks or sudden deactivation. Since workers rarely know how ratings are calculated or reviewed, this lack of transparency produces constant uncertainty and self-monitoring, encouraging conformity to algorithmic expectations rather than direct managerial orders (Wood et al., 2019).

In addition to ratings, platforms employ incentive structures (such as bonuses, surge pricing, and task streaks) to direct worker behaviour. Sociological studies interpret these incentives as forms of "*gamified labour control*", where economic rewards are used to insist workers into longer hours, higher intensity, and strategic availability (ibid.). While participation in such schemes is formally optional, empirical research suggests that declining base pay and income volatility often make incentive chasing economically necessary (Fairwork India Ratings, 2024). In the Indian context, *Fairwork* report on platform assessments reveal that incentive structures increasingly regulate not only how much workers earn, but also when and how long they work, thereby reshaping the meaning of "*flexibility*" (ibid.). This supports broader sociological arguments that algorithmic control operates subtly, through behavioural nudges rather than overt coercion.

Algorithmic management also relies heavily on continuous digital surveillance, including GPS tracking, task completion times, and communication monitoring. The ILO (2021) notes that such systems enable platforms to exercise detailed oversight while minimising accountability and worker participation. Surveillance data are frequently integrated into automated evaluation systems, allowing platforms to impose penalties—such as reduced visibility, incentive withdrawal, or account suspension—without human mediation. Automated penalties and deactivation have been conceptualised as "*accountability shocks*" that discipline workers while shielding platforms from direct responsibility (Wiener et al., 2023). In India, NITI Aayog (2022) highlights that gig workers classified as independent contractors face heightened vulnerability to such penalties, as grievance redressal mechanisms remain weak or inaccessible. Together, these studies show that algorithmic systems constitute a powerful mode of labour control that combines visibility, uncertainty, and unilateral authority.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

Precarity and Lived Experience in Gig Work Culture:

Precarity in gig work refers to a condition of chronic insecurity in which workers experience unstable income, uncertain job continuity, limited social protection, and constant exposure to platform control through ratings, algorithms, and unilateral rule changes (Standing, 2011; Wood et al., 2019). Rosenblat and Stark (2016) show that behind the language of flexibility and entrepreneurship, gig platforms quietly manage workers through algorithms—using ratings, incentives, surveillance, and automated decisions rather than face-to-face supervision; For workers, this means living with constant uncertainty: earnings fluctuate, rules change without warning, and access to work can disappear suddenly through deactivation, often without explanation or appeal. In gig economies, precarity is intensified because workers are formally classified as independent yet remain structurally dependent on digital platforms for access to work (Yasih, 2025). Beyond mechanisms of control, sociological studies increasingly focus on how gig work culture shapes workers' everyday experiences of precarity. Precarity in platform labour is understood not only as unstable employment, but as a multidimensional condition involving income insecurity, psychological stress, dignity loss, and constrained agency (ILO, 2021).

A recurring finding across studies is that platforms systematically transfer economic risk to workers. Costs related to fuel, maintenance, waiting time, illness, and accidents are borne by workers, while platforms retain the ability to unilaterally alter pay algorithms and incentive rules (Wood et al., 2019). The ILO (2021) describes this as a defining feature of digital labour platforms, where fragmented task structures and mediated contracts intensify income volatility. Indian policy-oriented research similarly notes that gig workers often experience fluctuating earnings despite extended working hours, making financial planning difficult and reinforcing economic vulnerability (NITI Aayog, 2022). Precarity, therefore, emerges not as an accidental outcome, but as a structurally produced condition embedded in platform governance.

Although gig workers are formally designated as independent, empirical studies reveal high levels of dependence on one or two platforms for livelihood (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Wood et al., 2019; Fairwork India Rating, 2024). This creates a paradox of *autonomy without security*, where workers lack collective bargaining power while remaining vulnerable to sudden rule changes or deactivation (Fairwork India Rating, 2024). Such conditions contribute to chronic stress, particularly due to fear of penalties and uncertainty surrounding performance evaluation. Research on Indian ride-hailing platforms shows that workers develop practical knowledge of platform logics—learning how to interpret incentives, manage acceptance rates, and avoid sanctions—yet remain exposed to unpredictable algorithmic decisions (Sehrawat, 2021). This highlights how precarity is lived through constant calculation and adaptive labour, rather than passivity.

Several sociological studies frame gig work precarity as also involving struggles over dignity and recognition. Customer ratings, surveillance, and platform judgements often function as moral evaluations of workers, reinforcing feelings of disposability and disrespect (Wood et al., 2019). While platforms promise professionalism and status through app-based identities, workers may still experience stigma, suspicion, and everyday humiliation in public and customer-facing interactions (Wood et al., 2019; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). In Global South contexts, these experiences intersect with existing class inequalities and informal labour

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

histories, producing a hybrid work culture that is digitally organised but socially insecure (ILO, 2021). Workers may value platform affiliation for its symbolic legitimacy, even as they confront intensified control and vulnerability.

Despite structural constraints, the literature consistently documents worker agency in the form of coping and resistance strategies. These include strategic compliance with algorithmic rules, multi-platform work, informal peer networks, and limited forms of collective action (NITI Aayog, 2022; Wood, 2021). However, the individualised and competitive design of platforms often restricts sustained collective organisation, reinforcing isolation and dependence. India-specific research highlights workers' everyday adaptations to algorithmic management. Studying ride-hailing platforms in India, Chakraborty and Heeks (2023) show that workers respond to platform management through coping, navigation, and tactical practices, indicating that precarity is lived through continuous calculation and adjustment rather than passive insecurity.

Recent policy commentary and parliamentary records show that *Raghav Chadha*'s 2025–2026 interventions have focused on consumer welfare, gig-worker safety, and regulatory accountability as part of a wider debate on everyday economic governance in India. Media reports from January 2026 note Raghav Chadha's parliamentary criticism of ultra-fast "10-minute delivery" models, where he highlighted that such time pressures create intense, constant, and often dangerous stress for gig workers, affecting their safety, income security, and dignity and sparking widespread public debate on platform responsibility (India Today/NDTV, January 13–15, 2026). India Today (2026) reports, a Blinkit delivery worker spoke about the intense pressure created by the platform's highly publicised *10-minute delivery* promise during a conversation with Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha. The exchange was shared in a teaser posted on Chadha's official X account in January, 2026, where he noted that he had spent a day working as a delivery agent to understand the everyday realities faced by gig workers. Related reports show his engagement with the lived conditions of delivery workers through symbolic immersion and public dialogue, framing gig work precarity as a policy concern rather than an individual failure (NDTV, 2025). Regulatory intervention in early 2026 saw the Indian government urging quick-commerce firms—including Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy—to drop their "*10-minute delivery*" branding amid concerns that such ultra-fast commitments were pressuring delivery workers to take unsafe risks on congested roads (Kalra, 2026; Thaker, 2026). The removal of 10-minute branding can be interpreted as a symbolic corrective, yet Economic Times highlight that on-the-ground pressures remain intense even without formal time guarantees, since workers still fear penalties or loss of income if they fail to deliver quickly (The Economic Times, 2026). Thus, news accounts of the quick-commerce adjustments in India serve as empirical illustrations of how platform norms—even where softened at the branding level—continue to shape workers' lived precarity. They show how regulatory and public responses interact with platform algorithmic pressures, reinforcing the need to analyse gig work not only as technological innovation but as a regime of labour governance with tangible consequences for worker safety, dignity, and economic vulnerability.

Overall, the literature converges on a key sociological insight: gig work culture in India is shaped by algorithmic control and institutional gaps, producing a durable condition of insecurity that workers must

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

continually manage through everyday strategies (Fairwork, 2024; ILO, 2021; NITI Aayog, 2022; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Methodology

The present study is based on a qualitative secondary review of sociological and interdisciplinary literature on gig work in India. The review is guided by two objectives: **(i)** ***to examine how algorithmic management practices—such as ratings, incentives, surveillance, and automated penalties—structure labour control in platform work***, and **(ii)** ***to analyse how gig work culture produces and normalises precarity in workers' lived experiences, including income insecurity, job instability, stress, and dignity loss***. Secondary data were drawn from journal articles, books, and institutional reports published by sources such as the ILO, NITI Aayog, and Fairwork India. The selected literature was analysed thematically using key sociological frameworks.

Analysis & Discussion

This section analyses the reviewed literature through major sociological frameworks to interpret how algorithmic control reorganises labour power and how precarity is experienced, normalised, and contested within gig work culture. Rather than treating digital platforms as a technological novelty, sociological theory helps reveal them as new institutional forms of labour governance embedded in long-standing relations of power, inequality, and domination.

(a) *Algorithmic Control and the Labour Process: A Marxian Perspective:*

From a Marxian labour process perspective, algorithmic management can be understood as a contemporary mechanism for extracting *surplus value* (Marx, 1867/1976) while obscuring relations of exploitation. Classical labour process theory emphasised managerial control over workers' time, effort, and output. In gig platforms, this control is not exercised through supervisors but through algorithms that regulate work allocation, performance metrics, and sanctions. Following Karl Marx, the commodification of labour power in platform work is intensified by the fragmentation of tasks and the individualisation of employment relations. Workers sell discrete units of labour (rides, deliveries, tasks) rather than stable labour time, allowing platforms to externalise risks while maintaining control over the labour process. Algorithmic systems thus function as instruments of capital's domination over labour, even as platforms deny the existence of an employment relationship.

The literature shows that ratings, incentives, and deactivation mechanisms discipline workers into self-regulation, aligning their behaviour with productivity goals without direct coercion. This reflects what later labour process scholars describe as "*responsibilisation*" [2] *(Rose, 1990;1999;2000)*—workers are made accountable for outcomes shaped by opaque systems they do not control. In this sense, algorithmic control deepens exploitation by combining economic dependence with legal and institutional invisibility.

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

(b) Rationalisation and Bureaucracy Without Bureaucrats: Weberian Insights:

A Weberian perspective helps illuminate platform labour as an advanced form of *rationalisation*, where work is organised through calculability, predictability, and technical control rather than personal supervision (Weber, 1978). Gig platforms embody this logic by converting labour into measurable indicators such as ratings, acceptance rates, completion times, and performance scores, allowing work to be continuously evaluated and compared (Wood et al., 2019). Yet, unlike classical bureaucracies, platform governance is marked by limited transparency and weak procedural accountability. Workers are governed by rules and algorithms that they cannot fully access, interpret, or challenge, creating a system that resembles a form of *"bureaucracy without offices"*—rationalised, impersonal, and often arbitrary in its operation (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

In this digital reworking of Weber's "*iron cage*" (Weber, 1978) control no longer depends on written rules or supervisors but on proprietary algorithms whose logic remains opaque to workers. Existing studies suggest that this form of governance generates persistent uncertainty and anxiety, as workers must continuously adjust their behaviour to shifting system expectations without the security of formal rights or institutional safeguards (Wood, 2021).

(c) *Surveillance, Discipline, and Power: A Foucauldian Perspective:*

The role of surveillance in gig work closely reflects Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, where control operates through continuous observation rather than direct command (Foucault, 1977). Digital platforms routinely track workers' locations, interactions, and performance through data traces, producing a condition of constant visibility. This visibility, however, is asymmetrical: workers are continuously monitored by the system, while the logic of the system itself remains largely opaque to them (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Such algorithmic surveillance gives rise to *self-disciplining subjects* who aware that their actions are constantly recorded, rated, and evaluated, workers internalise platform norms and adjust their conduct accordingly, regulating speed, availability, and customer interaction without explicit supervision (Wood et al., 2019). Ratings systems further intensify this process by merging surveillance with moral judgement, transforming customer feedback into a powerful mechanism of social control (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Punishment in gig work is often automated and immediate, taking the form of reduced task visibility, withdrawal of incentives, or sudden deactivation, with little scope for explanation or appeal (Wood, 2021). This shift signals a move from corrective discipline to *preventive governance*, where the ever-present threat of exclusion ensures compliance. Taken together, the literature supports a Foucauldian interpretation of platform power as diffuse, continuous, and embedded in everyday work practices rather than exercised through overt authority (Foucault, 1977; Wood et al., 2019).

(d) Precarity, Class, and the "New Dangerous Class":

The concept of precarity has been most systematically developed by Guy Standing, who describes the *precariat* as a class-in-the-making marked by unstable employment, insecure income, and limited access to

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

social protection (Standing, 2011). Much of the literature on gig work aligns with this framework, particularly in documenting income volatility, absence of employment benefits, and workers' exposure to sudden algorithmic decisions such as incentive withdrawal or deactivation (Wood et al., 2019; ILO, 2021). However, sociological studies from India and the wider Global South complicate Standing's argument by showing that platform-based precarity intersects with long-standing histories of informal labour rather than emerging entirely anew. Research suggests that gig work does not create precarity from scratch; instead, it digitally reorganises existing informal work arrangements, often intensifying insecurity through algorithmic governance and weak institutional protection (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Yasih, 2025).

This perspective indicates that the precariat within platform economies is far from homogeneous. Social divisions such as class, caste, migration status, and urban inequality shape how insecurity is experienced, negotiated, and managed by workers (ILO, 2021). Gig work culture therefore reflects a layered class structure in which digital inclusion and app-based visibility coexist with persistent economic vulnerability, producing what may be described as a condition of *formalised informality* (Rani & Furrer, 2021).

(e) Consent, Consent Manufacturing, and Cultural Control:

Drawing on Michael Burawoy's theory of *manufacturing consent*, gig work culture can be understood as producing compliance not mainly through direct coercion, but through incentive systems, entrepreneurial narratives, and the promise of flexibility (Burawoy, 1979). Platforms routinely describe workers as "partners" or "independent earners," encouraging them to identify with platform objectives and internalise productivity goals rather than view themselves as managed labour (Wood et al., 2019).

Empirical studies show that incentive schemes, bonuses, and gamified rewards play a central role in sustaining consent even as base pay declines and work intensity increases (Wood et al., 2019; Fairwork, 2024). Workers may be aware of exploitative conditions, yet continue participating due to competitive pressures, future-oriented hope, and limited alternative employment options (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). This cultural dimension of control helps explain why resistance in gig work remains fragmented and episodic, and why algorithmic domination often appears normalised and legitimate in everyday practice (Burawoy, 1979; Wood, 2021).

(f) Surveillance Capitalism and Data-Driven Control in Gig Work:

The dynamics of algorithmic control and precarity in gig work can be further understood through the lens of *surveillance capitalism*, a concept developed by Shoshana Zuboff to describe economic systems that extract value from continuous data capture and behavioural monitoring (Zuboff, 2019). In platform labour, workers' movements, response times, customer interactions, and performance metrics are constantly tracked and transformed into data that platforms use to predict, shape, and optimise behaviour. This data-driven governance aligns closely with gig workers' lived experience of permanent visibility and opaque evaluation, where control is exercised not through direct supervision but through algorithmic inference and behavioural nudging (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Wood et al., 2019).

Sophos, *Vol-3, Issue-1*, (May, 2026)
ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Women's Christian College, Kolkata.
Page No: 87-98, Section: Article

Surveillance capitalism deepens precarity by converting workers' everyday activities into sources of value extraction while simultaneously exposing them to discipline, ranking, and exclusion. As Zuboff (2019) argues, such systems normalise asymmetrical power relations in which those being monitored have little knowledge of, or control over, how data are used. In the gig economy, this asymmetry reinforces economic dependence and insecurity: workers must constantly adapt to shifting algorithmic expectations without transparency, appeal, or collective voice. Surveillance capitalism therefore complements Marxian, Weberian, and Foucauldian readings of platform labour by highlighting how *data extraction itself becomes a central mechanism of domination,* making control continuous, predictive, and deeply embedded in everyday work practices.

Taken together, sociological theories reveal that gig work culture is not merely a response to technological innovation, but a *restructuring of labour power through digital means*. Algorithmic control reproduces classical dynamics of exploitation, discipline, and domination, while precarity becomes normalised through cultural narratives of flexibility and self-management. In Global South contexts like India, platform labour intensifies long-standing informal arrangements rather than replacing them, producing a hybrid regime of digital control and social insecurity. Sociological theory thus shifts the analysis away from individual choice and technological efficiency toward questions of power, inequality, and justice in the algorithmic age.

Conclusion

This review has shown that gig work culture is best understood not as a neutral outcome of technological innovation, but as a *reorganisation of labour power through algorithmic governance*. Drawing on major sociological approaches, the analysis demonstrates that platforms reproduce long-standing relations of exploitation, control, and inequality in new digital forms. From a Marxian labour process perspective, algorithmic management functions as a contemporary mechanism for surplus extraction, fragmenting labour into discrete tasks while obscuring relations of exploitation behind the language of flexibility and independence. Control is exercised indirectly, yet effectively, through ratings, incentives, and automated sanctions that encourage self-regulation and responsibilisation. Weberian insights further reveal gig work as an advanced form of rationalisation, where calculability and technical control replace bureaucratic supervision. However, unlike classical bureaucracy, platform governance lacks transparency and procedural safeguards, producing what can be described as a "*bureaucracy without offices.*" This generates uncertainty and anxiety, as workers must constantly adapt to opaque and shifting algorithmic rules. A Foucauldian lens highlights how continuous surveillance and automated punishment create self-disciplining subjects, embedding power in everyday work practices rather than overt authority.

The concept of precarity helps connect these mechanisms to workers' lived experiences. While Standing's notion of the precariat captures the instability and insecurity of gig work, studies from India and the Global South show that platform precarity is layered onto older histories of informal labour. Gig work does not eliminate informality; it digitally reorganises and often intensifies it, producing a condition of formalised informality shaped by class, caste, migration, and urban inequality. Cultural mechanisms of

consent—such as entrepreneurial narratives and gamified incentives—further normalise algorithmic domination, limiting collective resistance.

Finally, the framework of surveillance capitalism highlights how data extraction itself becomes a central source of power and value, deepening precarity and dependence. Together, these perspectives underscore the need to move beyond narratives of flexibility toward critical questions of power, regulation, and social justice in the algorithmic age, particularly in contexts like India where legal protections remain partial and uneven.

Notes:

1. ***Flexibilisation:*** Labour flexibilisation is the shift towards adaptable employment practices, allowing companies to quickly adjust their workforce size, hours, and conditions to market changes, often through deregulation, temporary contracts, remote work, or outsourcing, aiming for competitiveness but frequently raising concerns about job security, worker rights, and increased inequality. It encompasses both internal (e.g., varied hours) and external (e.g., hiring/firing) changes, but is often linked to precarious work, reduced union power, and rising insecurity for workers.
2. ***Responsibilisation***: According to sociologist Nikolas Rose, responsibilisation is a core mechanism of "advanced liberal" governance, where individuals are encouraged or required to become autonomous, self-governing subjects responsible for managing their own well-being and risks. This involves a shift of responsibility away from the state and onto individuals, families, and communities, often without a corresponding transfer of necessary resources or power.

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Book Review --- In Search of Voice and Identity: Women of Satyajit Ray's Family

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Name of the book: In Search of Voice and Identity: Women of Satyajit Ray's Family
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Reviewer details:

In Search of Voice and Identity: Women of Satyajit Ray's Family is a well-researched book in the field of Gender Studies. The author traces the life and achievements of the key women folks in Satyajit Ray's family across generations. In the Foreword written by Prasad Ranjan Ray, a living member of the Ray family and former Additional Chief Secretary, Government of West Bengal, mention has been made how Tumpa Mukherjee gathered information from occasional writings and references left by the members of the illustrious Ray family and how painstakingly she had conducted the interviews with the living family members and how she has observed, interpreted personal and historical documents through introspection.

The book has a Foreword, a Preface, Acknowledgements, a Glossary where Bengali terms have been explained in English, a note on the Abbreviations used and a Family Tree of the Rays before the Content page. A twenty-page introduction is followed by the accounts of the women's lives which are again categorised under Daughters-in-law, Daughters and Granddaughters. A look at the Content Page gives us the drift and the role which the author wants to ascribe to each of the women in the Ray family. Thus, Bidhumukhi Debi gets her identity as the matriarch, Suprabha Ray is termed as the unvanquished, Bijaya Ray is acknowledged as the pillar behind Satyajit Ray and Lalita Ray gets the identity as the supportive wife After chronicling the lives of the selected women the author in her conclusion situates the Ray family women in the context of Brahmo women in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. The book also has two appendices- i) list of song albums by Suprabha Ray and Bijaya Ray and ii) Family Photographs of the Ray family. A two-page Index makes the book user friendly.

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The Cover Page illustrated by Syed. Abdul Halim utilises a collage of some well known shots of Satyajit Ray and uses five photographs of the better known womenfolks in Satyajit Ray's family, Suprabha Ray, Sukhalata Rao, Leela Majumdar, Malati and Nalini Das.

The Introduction to the book serves as a backdrop and provides a candid picture of the Bengali society in the late 19th century and the early 20th Century with its traditional and conservative social practices The patriarchal dominance, the life in the *antahpur* , the joint family structure, the role of the women shouldering the domestic workload, the purdah system, the women being subjected to strict household norms have all been mentioned by the author to portray the condition of women in the- then Bengal and also to situate the 'Her-Story,' that she would be narrating through the lives of the women in the family of Satyajit Ray, the women who have embraced the emancipatory endeavours of Raja Rammohan Roy and become a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The role of the British missionaries and the social reform movement of the Brahmo Samaj have been traced by the author to give the readers a perspective of the socio-cultural ethos of Bengal She traces the birth of the new woman as the harbinger of social change even when they maintained the traditional stereotyped feminine role of being the mother, wife and daughter. By recovering the stories and silent voices of the women in the Ray family the author has probed into the change taking place over time.

The methodology adopted in this book is rooted in qualitative, interpretive and feminist research traditions, consciously making an effort to move away from positivist linear historical methods. The author being a Sociologist and trained in positivism, explicitly debunks its limitations and employs methodological triangulation. She recognises the fact that no single method can adequately capture the lived realities of women. The study treats qualitative research as a bricolage, where the researcher acts as a bricoleur, combining various tools such as archival research, memoir analysis, oral narratives, visual representation and introspection. Since most women in the study are no longer alive, the author relies on autobiographies, biographies, photographs, family memoirs, letters, etc. to reconstruct the silenced subjectivities. The book draws upon ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, deconstruction and autoethnography to interpret life trajectories not chronologically but through fragments, discontinuities and critical life events. By synthesising individual memory with collective and cultural history, the methodology creates a balance between women's invisible labour and emotional worlds, while maintaining ethical sensitivity and reflexive awareness between the researcher and the subject.

The Ray family is remembered for its towering male figures like Upendrakishore Raychowdhuri, Sukumar Ray and Satyajit Ray. The women in the family were seldom given public visibility and historiographical attention happens to be marginal. The author claims to offer a tribute to the unseen, unheard and the marginalized voices of women of a section of the Ray family who embraced Brahmo religion in this book.

The account with which the author begins her discourse is Bidhumukhi Debi, wife of Upendrakishore Raychowdhury. Coming from a progressive Brahmo family she was educated However, she did not seek a career. She was a homemaker and her life reflects the Brahmo ideal of the educated, morally upright supportive wife. She was a matriarch. an epitome of feminine virtues. A rare strength of character was also exhibited by Suprabha Roy, wife of Sukumar Roy and mother of Satyajit Ray Sukumar Ray's untimely death gave Suprabha Ray an opportunity to exert herself. This is the quest for an autonomous voice which the male

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hegemonic society normally does not allow. Puspalata Ray, the wife of Subinay Ray on the other hand fell a prey to economic dependency and patriarchal norms. Women like Bidkumukhi Deki, Suprabha Ray, Bijaya Ray and Lalita Ray sustained the intellectual. moral and cultural environment by being supportive to their male partners. The dignified, educated and socially engaged bhadramahila within a reformist household portrayed an image of a refined cultural modernity.

The story of the daughters especially the lesser known ones are filtered from memoirs and depicts the life and times of women in conservative families. The Ray family women can be located within Brahmo gender reform which emphasised female education and respectable existence. They were gradually becoming literate, musically trained and culturally conversant. Sukhalata Rao, the daughter of Upendrakeshore, for example, had established her identity as a painter, a writer and a translator and had won several awards as a social activist and author of children's literature. Punyalata Chakraborty, another daughter of Upendrakishore led the life of a homemaker and also wrote in Sandesh. In her writings we get valuable insights about the growth and development of education, of the modern family, early professions and also about nationalism. Malati Ghoshal, the Rabindra sangeet exponent, Madhurilata Mahalanobis, Labanyalata Ray, all nieces of Upendrakeshore balanced between family duties and work life. Madhurilata was a teacher and Labanyalata contributed to Sandesh. Pramadaranjan's daughters Suleka Ray, Lila Ray and Latika Ray were public figures- Suleka retired as Principal of Gokhale. College and Lila Majumdar gained appreciation as a writer of children's literature along with other genres. Latika Nag was also a teacher and she became the Headmistress of Shri Shikshayatan School. The daughters of the Ray family thus were slowly and marginally moving to the public sphere. In the portrayal of the granddaughters of Upendrakeshore,. Kalyani Karlekar and Nalini Das we notice how education and resilience can shape a woman to challenge the societal norms and create a voice of their own to mould the masses.

In her concluding analysis the author remarks that the Brahmo women of the Ray family were all spirited women, independent minded and self confident. Even when they faced hardships in life, they faced challenges and rebuilt their lives. They had created their own niches without denigrating the traditional role of women as wives or daughters. Some could create a voice loud enough to be heard by others while some had faded into oblivion. The author pays a tribute to the oblivious voices and implores us to accept and recognise their contribution in a patriarchal society.

The book stands out not only as a family history but also as a feminist social history, offering an insight into gender, domesticity, education and creativity in colonial Bengal. Some women of Ray's family were active participants in the cultural production, even when they were denied public recognition for their work. They were readers, writers, educators, caregivers and moral anchors, whose steady intellectual influence often flowed invisibly into the works of men they supported. A contrast with the Tagore family of Jorasanko shows that Swarnakumari Devi, Kadambini Ganguly and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani were more familiar with the public intellectual life and accessed political spaces. They extensively edited journals, participated in movements and articulated their thoughts in tandem with nationalist ideologies. Ray's household on the other hand was progressive but culturally inward-looking. The lives of the women and their intellectual spirit

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largely remained confined within the domestic and private. The women were also firmly apolitical, embodying their culture with the feminist detached from mass politics.

A key limitation of The Women of Satyajit Ray's Family lies in its uneven analytical focus, particularly the disproportionate attention given to daughters-in-law in comparison to daughters within the Ray household. While daughters-in-law are examined in considerable depth—as cultural mediators, caregivers, and emotional anchors navigating an unfamiliar and hierarchical family space—the daughters of the family remain relatively under-analysed. This imbalance is significant because daughters occupied a distinct and complex positionality: they were simultaneously insiders by birth and outsiders through marriage, yet their transitions, negotiations of identity, and losses of natal belonging receive limited sustained engagement. The methodological reliance on available memoirs and narratives, many of which were authored by daughters-in-law, partly explains this skew; however, the book does not sufficiently interrogate how archival availability itself produces gendered silences. This gap subtly reproduces the very invisibility the book seeks to challenge, suggesting the need for a more reflexive critique of source hierarchies and a deeper exploration of daughters as historical subjects in their own right within elite Bengali families.

This book however, 'In Search of Voice and Identity: Women of Satyajit Ray's Family' remains crucial in creating a space which foregrounds women's silences, sacrifices and constrained agency during male dominated cultural histories. For scholars interested in gender studies, family studies and looking at the Bengali cultural milieu, this book is not only valuable but necessary.