



SOPHOS

PEER-REVIEWEDE-JOURNALOFMULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Volume-2, Issue-1 (May, 2025)

Content

	Article Title	Authors	Pagination
	Editorial Note	Dr. Ajanta Paul	i
1	Revisiting the Dynastic History of Nalas through the Lenses of Epigraphic and Numismatic Data	Rituparna Chattopadhyay	1-11
2	Governance on the Move: Caravans and State Control in <i>KauṭīliyaArthaśāstra</i>	Soumya Ghosh	12-20
3	Quit India Movement in Manbhum: The Role of Satyagrahis in Selected Police Stations	Nondini Ray	21-26
4	The Forgotten History of An Explorer ; Sarat Chandra Das (1849-1917)	Arnab Bera	27-31
5	Journey of the Goddess into the Domain of Demons and Back: An Integrated Ethno-Social and Psychological Analysis of Artisan Life, Social Organization, Gender Dynamics, and Sustainability in Kolkata's Kumartuli	Sreemanti Laha Priyanka Roy	32-45
6	The Discernible Breakthrough in Bengali Cinema After Independence In 1947: An Analysis in Retrospect	Saptarshi Chakraborty	46-54
7	Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Silence, Speakability, and Yashica Dutt's Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir	Kusumika Dasgupta	55-63
8	Religion and Tradition: Re-constructing the Identity of Women in Twentieth Century Rajputana	Soma Ghosh	64-74
9	India's Concern About China's Rising Role	Piyali Basu	75-82
10	Ethnic and Linguistic Ties Between Northeast India and Southeast Asia: Foundations for Regional Integration and India's Act East Policy	Somdatta Banerjee	83-91
11	The dichotomy between upholding Principles and Foreign Policy: A Study of Indo-Myanmar Relations	Devarati Mandal	92-106



12	Revisiting War Reportage: National Security, Press Reportage and the Legacy of the Sino-Indian Conflict of 1962 for War Publicity in India.	Aritra Majumdar	107-116
13	Role of Media in Democratic Politics in India	Sanchita Chakrabarti	117-122
14	Impact of Pandemic on Different Levels of Education in India	Tapash Das Tarini Halder	123-134
15	COVID-19 Lockdown and Internal Migrants in India: Issues, Vulnerability and Mitigation	Lakshman Chandra Pal	135-145
16	Palash Blooming-A New Trend of Nature-Based Tourism: A Case of Purulia - The Palash Hot-Spot of West Bengal	Purnima Mallick	146-158
17	Examining the Growth and Development of Christian Education and Democracy in India: A Critical Study of George Thadathil's Exploration of the Same in Modern India	Habin Thomas	159-172
18	A Voyage to the Past	Tumpa Mukherjee	173-174



Editorial Note

Dr Ajanta Paul

Editor - in - Chief - Sophos Journal

Address - 6, Greek Church Row Ext, Kalighat, Kolkata-700026

The second issue of *Sophos*, the annual, online, open access, peer reviewed ISSN journal of Women's Christian College is not on any particular theme but reflects a diversity of views and attitudes ranging from ancient Indian numismatics and epigraphy to modern political and educational systems.

Such plurality of thought and approach as befits a multidisciplinary journal is a welcome move in the present climate of exclusionary tendencies where a healthy catholicity of outlook, is by and large, not encouraged.

Sophos is committed to a free and liberal enquiry of truth, adhering all the while, to a rigorous intellectual discipline which ensures that the papers in it are works of scholarly interest and integrity. This issue, I hope, will help establish a wide academic base for the journal, signalling its importance both as an organ of thought generation and dissemination.



Revisiting the Dynastic History of Nalas through the Lenses of Epigraphic and Numismatic Data

Rituparna Chattopadhyay

Assistant Professor, Bankura Zilla Saradamani Mahila Mahavidyapith

Email - rituparna730@gmail.com ORCID ID : [0009-0000-4250-8556](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4250-8556)

Abstract

The Nalas were a minor dynasty who ruled in the ancient south Kośala (comprising of modern Bastar region of Chhattisgarh and some parts of Sambalpur region of Odisha) region during 4th to 8th century. The history of this dynasty is very much little known as there is dearth of properhistorical sources. Nalas were probably a forest tribe who ruled mainly forest tracts of the Bastar region. Later they emerged as a monarchical power and played an important role in the process of state formation of the region. The present article will look deep into the dynastic history of the Nalas on the basis of available epigraphic and numismatic data. The paper will also attempt to evaluate the relation of the Nalas with other contemporary power such as the Vākaṭakas or the Cālukyas.

Keywords: *Nalas, South Kośala, Niśadhadeśa, Vākaṭakas, Cālukyas.*

INTRODUCTION

The historical *Nala* kings claim their descent from the mythological king *Nala* of Niśadha known from epics. The episode of *Nala-Damayantī* finds prominent and repetitive mention in the epics. A critical evaluation of the *Nala-Damayantī* episode in the *Mahābhārata* and other literature may provide us some information to understand the myths and their connection *Nala* dynasty. As far as geographical location is concerned the *Nala-Damayantī* episode is composed in backdrop of the Niśadhadeśa. The name of the country Niśadhaprobably originated from the name of its inhabitants, Niśāda. In *Mahābhārata* Niśādas are described as a tribe who used to live in the mountains and forests (Karve,1951, 135 -138). The country of the Niśāda tribe was mentioned as Niśadha in the epics and its

king *Nala* is described as a famous king of this country. Still now the places which were within the ancient Niśadha kingdom and later came under the historical *Nala* kingdom are mostly populated by the people of Niśāda tribe. One can assume that the historical *Nala* kings claimed descent from the epic hero *Nala* (king of Niśadhadeśa) for the sake of legitimacy.

The earliest accounts of Niśadharegion can be traced in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3:3:2:113). In the *Vanaparva* of *Mahābhārata* (3:53:70) we get the account of *Nala* and *Damayantī*. In that episode *Nala* has been mentioned as the son of Niśadha king *Vīrasena*. His wife *Damayanti* was daughter of king *Bhīmasena* of *Vidarbha*. She was so beautiful that even some gods wanted to marry her, but she married *Nala*. This event wielded few gods to become envious of *Nala* and they put *Nala* in troubles. He had to suffer for a long period in the hills and the forests of Niśadha. *Nala* and *Damayantī* reunited after a long painful separation. This story is present in almost every subsequent literary works.

In the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of *Pāṇini* Niṣadhadeśa is mentioned as an adjacent country of Vidarbha. In the *Vāyu* and *BrahmāṇḍaPurāṇas* it is mentioned that “all the kings of Niṣadha born in the family of Nala, valiant and very powerful will exist till the termination of Manus” (*Naiṣadhahpārthivāḥsarvebhaviṣyantiāmanuḥsayāt/nalavaṃśaprasūtastevīryavantomahābalāḥ*). Pargiter on the basis of Puranic evidences places Nala dynasty in the third century A.D (Pargiter,1982,51). In some other later Sanskrit literature, like *Bānabhaṭṭa'sKādambārī*, *TrivikramaBhaṭṭa'sNalaCarita*, *ŚrīHarṣa'sNaiṣadhacaritam* there are also mentions of Nala kingdom and the great king Nala. The Nalas had their early settlement in the Bastar region and parts of south Kośala, and for some time they also had under their possession portions of Vidarbha which they probably conquered from their principal adversary, the Vākātakas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of the Nala dynasty is not a very well researched area. The book named *Dynastic History of Nalas* authored by C.B. Patel is the only comprehensive study on the history of the Nalas. However, the author has very often misinterpreted available historical sources and wrongfully combined historical sources with local folklores or hearsays (Patel,1990). P.L. Mishra written *Political History of Chhattisgarh* also discusses a little about the Nalas (Mishra,1979). There are few other articles published in various local journals regarding the history of the Nalas, but most of them are devoid of historical facts.

Methodology: It would be interesting to situate the Nalas in a historical frame on the basis of available literary and archaeological data. Though direct sources are very meager and do not help us to fully understand their rise and reign yet, a reconstruction of the history of this dynasty from available sources has been attempted here. Before going into further details, it is important to scan the sources for such reconstruction. Among epigraphic sources we have five records belonging to the rulers of this dynasty, besides these the direct and indirect references to the Nalas are found in the Cālukya and Pallava records. Gold coins issued by the Nalas have been reported from sites in Bastar and Durg. The hoards of such coins and their provenance are given in Table A. Besides the epigraphic and numismatic source material the architectural and sculptural remains at Rajim throw light on the activities of the Nalas and reflect upon their occupation of this portion of South Kośala.

Dating: Scholars are not unanimous in assigning a proper date to the Nalas. V.V. Mirashi stated that chronologically Nala dynasty should be placed in the 4th or 5th century C.E. (Mirashi,1939,29). Dr. B.V.K. Rao had assigned this dynasty to 5th century C.E (Rao,1942,662). C.R. Krishnamacharlu had assigned them to latter half of 5th century C.E (Krishnamacharlu,1985,155). V.D.Jha has commented that the Nalas of Puskari ruled from Bastar during the second quarter of 5th century C.E (Jha,1977,231). According to him Varāharāja was the first Nala ruler. D.R. Bhandarkar holds the view that Nala dynasty emerged in the middle of 8th century C.E (Bhandarkar,1903,48).

Arthapati and Bhava(da)ttavarman and beginning of the Nalarule: The Rithapur copperplates (Gupte,1985,100-104) of Arthapati Bhaṭṭāraka discovered at Amaravati district of Maharashtra, along with a set of copperplates of Vākātakas Queen PrabhāvatīGuptā is one of the earliest known Nala records. The inscription refers to MahārājaBhaṭṭārakaArthapati of Nala dynasty and his father Bhavattavarmanⁱ. V.V. Mirashi opines that Bhava(da)ttavarman was probably the son of Varāharāja (Mirashi,1939,29). The characters of Rithapur plates are of the box headed variety of Brāhmī, paleographically assignable to the latter half of 5th century A.D or first half of 6th century C.E. The record is said to have been actually made for the merits of Mahārāja Arthapati Bhaṭṭāraka's own parents. It is also referred that Arthapati was actually favored by his *Āryyaka*. D.C. Sircar opines that the term *Āryyaka* actually means grandfather (Sircar,1985,13). According to him it can be assumed that Bhava(da)ttavarman was

Arthapati's grandfather. King Bhava(da)ttavarman or Bhavattavarman (as is mentioned in the records) is said to have obtained royal fortune through the blessings of Maheśvara (Śiva) and Mahāsena (Kārtikeya). The Rithapur plates were actually issued from Nandīvardhana, the earlier capital of the Vākātakas dynasty. Later Pravarasena II founded the new Vākātakas capital at Pravarapura. From the Chhamak copperplates of Pravarasena II it is quite evident that the Vākātakas capital was shifted from Nandīvardhana to Pravarapura before 18th regnal year of Pravarasena II. The Chhamak copperplates (Mirashi, 1963, 22-27) were issued from Pravarapura on Pravarasena II's 18th regnal. The Beloōra plates (Mirashi, 1963, 16-21) were the last issued copperplates from the former capital Nandīvardhana. But the actual reason of the shifting of the capital is not quite clear. It is quite possible that there was a continuous tussle between the Vākātakas and the Nalas, although there are no concrete evidences of this tussle. Whether the shifting of the capital was due to the Nala conquest or some other set back is not known from any other source. We get the first real evidence of the contestation between the Vākātakas and the Nalas in the Rithapur plates of Arthapati. We shall discuss it later.

Previously scholars had opined that Bhava(da)ttavarman had defeated the Vākātakas. Dr. Goyal has remarked that there was an alliance between Gupta king Kumāragupta I and the Nala king Bhava(da)ttavarman on the basis of Rithapur copperplate of Arthapati (Goyal, 1967, 274). In the Rithapur plates it is mentioned that Bhava(da)ttavarman had visited Prayāga with his wife to perform sacred rites and on this occasion, he had given a village named Kadambagiri to Mātradyāryya and his eight sons for seeking blessings for a long-lasting matrimonial relationship of king and queen. Goyal considers it as the evidence of the Gupta-Nala relationship. However, the evidence does not indicate any political or bonding otherwise between the Nalas and the Guptas. Prayāga was a tīrtha and merely visiting the sacred places (tīrtha) to perform religious rituals and making donations on such occasions was a very common practice. Secondly the donated land was very much within the boundaries of the Nala kingdom. Thus, the interpretation by Goyal cannot be accepted.

The Rithapur plates were issued on the seventh day of dark fortnight of the Kārtikamonth in the 11th regnal year of the king. The grant records gift of a village, named Kadambagiri to Matryādhyāryya and his eight sons by Bhavattavarman. The regnal year, which has been referred here, is probably of Arthapati. It was written by Rahasyādhiḥṛta Chulla. In the last part of the inscription, it is clearly stated that the gift was originally made by Bhava(da)ttavarman but the grant was issued to continue the possession of the village to the eight sons of Matryā dhyāryya. The grant was issued from Nandīvar dhana, the Vākātakas capital. Rai Bahadur Hiralal has identified it with Nagardhan of Maharashtra (Gupte, 1985, 102). If we take the regnal year referred in this inscription as that of Arthapati then in Arthapati's 11th regnal year Vākātakas capital Nandīvardhana was under his control. In this context it is worth stating that the Keśaribeda plates of Arthapati (Sircar, 1985, 12-17) were issued from Puskari in the 7th regnal year of the king Arthapati. The inscription records a grant of a village named Keśela kagrāma. The grant was also written by *Rahasyādhiḥṛti* Chulla, the composer of Rithapur plates. The expression '*maheśvara-mahāsena-ati-śreṣṭha-rājya-vibhaba*' does also appear in both the inscriptions. If the regnal year mentioned in the Rithapur plates does belong to Arthapati then we can assume that when Keśaribeda grant was issued, i.e. in his 7th regnal year then the Vākātakas capital Nandīvardhana was not under his control, but when Rithapur grant was issued, i.e. in his 11th regnal year then he had already captured and annexed Nandīvardhana. Therefore, a battle between the Vākātakas and the Nalas could have taken place in the interim period.

The Vākātakas king Narendrasena was probably the contemporary contender who was defeated by Arthapati. Arthapati's control over Vākātakas capital probably did not last too long. Narendrasena's son Pṛthivīsenā probably took revenge by defeating Arthapati and even destroyed the Nala capital Puskari. In

the Balaghat plates (Kielhorn, 1985, 267-271) Pr̥thiviṣena claims himself as the restorer of the fortune of his family.

Skanda varmaṇa and the turmoilous phase: After Arthapati we can place (Skandava)rmmaṇa of Podagarh inscription (Krishnamacharlu,1985,153-157). The reading of the first part of the name of the king is not beyond doubt, but most of the scholars restore the effaced words as Skandavarmaṇ. His name is not mentioned in any other record. There is no numismatic evidence that may help to corroborate the supposition. In the inscription the king has been described as the noble son of Bhavadatta, (*nṛpaterbhavadattasyasatputtrenāmyasamsthitam*) who was the foremost of the glorious Nala family and repelled his enemies. Bhavadatta of this plate is seemingly identical with the Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇ of Rithapur plates. The characters of the inscription resemble the Talagunda pillar inscription of Kākutstha varmaṇ, which Prof. Kielhorn assigns to the first half of sixth century C.E.(Kielhorn,1985,31)ⁱⁱPodagarhin scription is the earliest stone record of the Nala dynasty. It records the construction of a Viṣṇu *Pādamūla* (shrine) by the king (Skandava)rmmaṇa. The inscription was written by Janturadāsa the son of Chauli. According to the editor of this inscription C.R. Krishnamacharlu probably Chauli is identical with Chullathe writer of Rithapur and Kesaribedaplates (Krishnamacharlu,1985,157). This further corroborates the chronological sequence and helps in placing (Skandava)rmmaṇa after Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇ.

(Skandava)rmmaṇawas probably the younger son of Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇ. The Podagarh inscription mentions that (Skandava)rmmaṇaascended the throne in a very grievous condition which might bear and allusion to the death of his predecessor Arthapati. It further mentions that (Skandava)rmmaṇarevived his family fortune (*bhraṣṭamākṛṣya-rājarhi-śūnyamvāsya-puskarim*)(Krishnamacharlu,1985,155). He also claims to have repopulated the deserted city of Puskari. An in-depth study of the Nala and the Vākāṭaka records clearly shows that there was a long-drawn struggle between the two dynasties which probably began in the time of Arthapati. It is interesting to note that Vākāṭaka king Pr̥thiviṣenaII in his Balaghat plates claims to have regained twice his fallen family fortune (*nimagna-vamśasyoddhārttuḥ-Vākāṭakanām-parambhāgavatamahārāja-śrī-Pr̥thiviṣenasya*) (Kielhorn,1985,271). It is quite possible thatPr̥thiviṣenaII avenged his father Narendrasena's humiliation by defeating (Skandava)rmmaṇa 's predecessor Arthapati. Podagarhinscription hints that Pr̥thiviṣena II destroyed the *Nala* capital Puskari and (Skandava)rmmaṇahad later restored itⁱⁱⁱ. On the basis of this we can assume that Nalas defeated the Vākāṭakas twice and had to face a defeat once.

Stambha and Nandanraj; Towards decline: After (Skandava)rmmanathe genealogical succession of Nala dynasty is difficult to ascertain due to dearth of evidence. Stambha and Nandanarāja may be placed after (Skandava)rmmaṇa.Few coins of those rulers are discovered along with *Nala* rulers Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇ and Arthapati. From the Kuliya hoard (Jain,1979,108-110) coins of Stambha and Nandanarāja are found. One Repoussé gold coin of Stambha has been found from Kuliya hoard. On the basis of stylistic features of the coins Stambha and Śrī Nandanarāja which resemble the coins of the Nala kings both Stambha and Nandanarāja have been considered as Nala rulers^{iv}. However, there are no epigraphic records or any other source to support or corroborate this succession list. Balachandra Jain has opined that (Skandava)rmman of Podagarh inscription supposed to be identical with Stambha or ŚrīStambha, whose coin have been discovered in Kuliya hoard (Jain,1979,110). It is difficult to accept this view as the coins of Stambha bear the bull motif, which clearly indicates his Śaivaaf filiation. But the issuer of Podagarh inscription has declared his inclination for Vaiṣṇavismin a pronounced manner.

For the reconstructing the history of the reign of Nandanarāja and Stambha we have to rely on the numismatic specimens alone. In the Kuliya hoard one gold coin of Nandanarājahas also been found (Nigam,

1987,157). This coin is almost similar to the coin of Stambha. On the obverse of the coin with in circular dotted border a left facing couchant humped bull is shown on the upper half of the coin and a crescent and a bull are depicted. The coin is divided by a horizontal line. In the lower half there is the legend 'ŚrīNandanarāja'. Some copper coins bearing the legend 'Śrī Nanda' have been discovered from Gandibedha (consists of 147 coins) and Palai hoard (consists of 41 coins)(Rajaguru,1956,157-159). It can be assumed that 'ŚrīNandanarāja' and 'Śrī Nanda' are identical.

Apart from the Nala Vākāṭaka struggle there are evidences of political contestations with the Western Cālukyās. In the Aihole inscription Kirtivarman is described as the night of doom of the Nalas, Mouryas and Kadambas (*nala-mauryya-kadamba-kālarātriḥ-tanayas-tasya-babhumā[va] kīrtivarmā*)(Kielhorn,1985,4). It might be possible that there was a traditional rivalry between the Nalas and the western Cālukyās. This is further supported by the description of the Nalas as an enemy of the Cālukyās in the Yewurinscription (Fleet,1879,11). Further the Kurnool grant of Cālukya king Vikramāditya I mentions a territory by the name Nalavādiviṣaya (Fleet,1940,238). With such evidences, one feels tempted to assume that the Cālukyās had defeated the Nalas and subdued them to the extent that their territory or kingdom was now a viṣaya or district of the Cālukya kingdom. But the term vāḍi here may be a boundary marker and this would indicate that the granted land was situated adjacent to the Nala territory.

Period of obscurity and the ultimate end:Few Nala rulers are mentioned in the Rajim stone inscription (Mirashi,1985,49-58) of Vilāsatuṅga which records the establishment of the Rājīvalocana (Viṣṇu) temple. On paleographical grounds this grant has been assigned to the 7th century C.E. by V.V. Mirashi (Mirashi, 1985, 50). The scribe of the Rajim inscription was Durgahastin who claims to be the son of Jalahastin (*jalahastisuteneyam*). The name of Durgahastin also appears in the Gandheshwar temple inscription of MahāśivaguptaBālārjuna (C.E.762-820)(Rajaguru,1966,102). The latter inscription was engraved by Durgahastin's son (*Durgahastisutaneyam-praśastih*). Considering this point Vilāsatuṅga may be roughly placed around C.E. 750(Rajaguru,1966,102). The characters of the inscription are of proto Nagari type, which are almost identical with the characters of the Sirpur plates of the time of MahāśivaguptaBālārjuna(Mirashi,1985,50).

Rajim inscription mentions Pṛthvīrāja as the grandfather of Vilāsatuṅga (line 7).In the fifth verse of the inscription the Nala dynasty is apparently glorified as it is compared with the Sun. In the sixth verse Nala has been described as one who has surpassed the god of love by his splendid form. It is also referred that Nala's lotus like feet were kissed by the bee like crest jewel of a crowd of hostile kings who submitted to the king (*khyātā-nṛpo – nala-iti-praṇatāricakracuḍāmaṇi-bhramara-cumbita-pāda-padma*). In the seventh verse Pṛthvīrāja has been described as a pious and popular king who served his subjects (*nirmalam-sevya-sarvajanasya*). He is also recounted as Kṣitipati and has been equated with Māndhātā (*māndhātārrājopamā*). D.C. Sircar has identified Pṛthvīrāja with NiṣadhapatiPṛthvīvyāghra of the Udeyendram grant of Pallava king Nandīvarman (C.E. 730-800)(Sircar,1985,233-238). From this grant we come to know that Nandīvarman's general Udaycandra claimed to have conquered the king of NiṣadhaPṛthvīvyāghra (Foulkes,1879,11), who had grown powerful in the north and also performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice. Udaycandra made Pṛthvīvyāghra prisoner from the territory of Viṣṇurāja. From this grant it is evident that Pṛthvīvyāghra was a powerful ruler who performed Aśvamedha sacrifice. If we take Vilāsatuṅga as an almost contemporary king of MahāśivaguptaBālārjuna then Sircar's opinion seems correct.

According to Rajim inscription Virūparāja succeeded his father Pṛthvīrāja. In this inscription Virūparāja is mentioned in the ninth verse. It is claimed that he was very popular among his subjects who praised him in eulogistic terms. He was a famous warrior and skillful general. He is described magnanimous as '*himavanta*'

(*khyātāhimavanta*) and prisoners were praying at his foot (*digvandiṅrdastutam*). He was regarded as the marrow of the truth (*satyānvitastya*). He was very handsome, truthful and was endowed with all great qualities (*pr̥thuraṇevōṣmapratāpena*). It is also mentioned that he dominated his enemies (*śatruḥnātibalena*).

The name of the Vilāsatuṅga appears in the verses 11 to 13, but these verses are very badly mutilated. In verse 20 the king Vilāsatuṅga expresses his wish for the eternal existence of his architectural creation. He also wished that the future rulers would take care of that religious monument (*jābadgandhāvahebintiñcajagattāvatprajātṇādimaṅkīrtināpālayata*).

In the following phase the history of the Nalas is obscure. However, we come across a ruler named Bhīmasenadeva who is styled as 'Mahārāja dhirāja Parameśvara Bhīmasena' in the Pandiyapatharcopperplate (Sircar,1985,233-238). In this plate he mentions his Nala origin (*nala-vamsodbhava-kūla-kamalṅkara-bhū [mahā]rājādhirāja-parameśvara-Śrībhīma-senadevāḥ*). From the title MahārājadhīrājaParameśvara it appears that he was an independent ruler^v. Though Bhīmasena traces his origin from the Nalas but he probably did not any connection with the previously mentioned Nala rulers. Hence while constructing the genealogical chart of this family, we have excluded the case of Bhīmasena.

Conclusion: Reconstruction of this dynastic history has brought to light the first ever claim of a mythical origin of any political power from the epic hero Nala. His association with the forest is attested from the mention of this episode in the *vana-parva*. It was this which attracted the Nalas of Bastar whose domain was located in the enduring landscape of dense daṇḍaka forest. The matrimonial alliance in the Nala Damayantī episode does not resonate in the Niśadha -Vidarbha historical framework. However, the sufferings of Nala due to the Vidarbha connection and the reunion of Nala and Damayantī after a long separation reminds one of the conquest of portions the Vidarbha region by the Nalas and the setbacks to the family fortunes mentioned in the epigraphs and restoration of the same by the royal personages of this dynasty. The present study has brought to light two phases in the history of the Nala dynasty. One early phase and the second later with the Rajim inscription and architectural and sculptural remains at Rajim. It was probably due to the aggression of the Cālukyās that the family had to shift further north and carve out a niche for themselves at the cost of the Paṇḍuvamśins of South Kośala and it is in the heart of their territory that the Nalas built their massive architectural landmark-the Rājīvalocan temple. It may be assumed that the main superstructure of the temple was built at the time of the Nala, but the most of the architectural and sculptural parts of the temple were brought here from the kingdom of the Paṇḍuvamśin's, Sirpur. The clear impact of Vākāṭaka art on this temple indicates that some parts of this temple were certainly created at the time of Nala as the Nalas had a very close association with the Vākāṭakas. Other temples and sculptures created during the time of early Nala rulers also had the same Vākāṭaka influence.

Different evidences of the Nala dynasty hint at the conglomeration of Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta religious ideas. Other dynasties of the south Kosala region contemporary to the Nalas, like the Vākāṭakas, the Śailodbhavas, the Śarabhapurīyās and the Paṇḍuvamśin s were mainly patrons of a single religious ideology. But exceptionally the Nalas gave patronage to Vaiṣṇavsm, Śaivism and Śāktism the three most eminent Brahmanical religious cults.

The early Nala rulers were distinct worshippers of lord Śiva and Mahāsenā or Skanda Kārtikeya. Bhavadattavarmaṅ and Arthapati were known to have dedicated their kingdom to Mahēśvara and Mahāsenā. One of the earliest Nala rulers Varāharāja was also a Śaivite by faith and it is evident from the couchant humped bull (symbol of Nandī, the vāhana of lord Śiva) effigy on the obverse side of his coins. The next known Nala ruler is (Skandava)rmmaṅa . In the Podagarh inscription it is mentioned that (Skandava)rmmaṅa had built a temple of lord Viṣṇu (*pādāmūlamkṛtam Viṣṇurājñāśrīskandavarmaṅena*). Hence,

he was undoubtedly a Vaiṣṇava by faith. The next known group of Nala rulers includes Śrī Stambha and Nandanarāja. From the crescent moon and humped couchant bull representations on their coin it may be deduced that they had changed their devotion in favour of Śiva. Vaiṣṇavism again is manifested by the Nala royal household and this is evident from the Rājī valo can temple inscription of Vilāsatūṅga. The second phase of patronization towards Vaiṣṇavism flourished with the ascendancy of the Rajim group of Nala rulers like Pṛthvirāja, Virūparāja, Vilāsatūṅga etc. The Rājīvalocan temple inscription begins with the prayer to lord Viṣṇu. There are also mentions of Varāha, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, and Rāma incarnations of lord Viṣṇu, which testify the popularity of incarnation worship during the Nala rule. The sculptural panel representing different avatāras in the doorway of the Vāmanaav atāra shrine in the Rājīvalocan temple complex also indicates the same. The sculptures in the Badrīnārāyaṇa temple are mostly Śaivite, Śākta of Tantric association. Perhaps this period was the formative stage of the religious amalgamation and cultural manifestation in this region. Nala kings were great champions of Brahmanical faith and many Brahmanical traits were diffused in the religious culture of South Kosala during their rule.

TABLE 1: Coins and Coin hoards

<u>Name of the king</u>	<u>Number of the coins</u>	<u>Name of the hoards</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Device</u>
Bhava(da)ttavarman	3	Edenga Hoard (1)KuliyaHoard (2)	Gold (Repoussé type), round	The coins are divided in two halves. In upper half of the obverse side there is a couchant humped bull facing right with a crescent moon behind it. In the lower half there is the legend <i>ŚrīBhavadattarājasyain</i> the box headed Brāhmī characters: Reverse – Negative intaglio.
Arthapati	3	Edenga Hoard (2), Kuliya (1)	Gold (Repoussé type), round shaped	Same as above. The effigies are identical with the coins of Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇa. But the legend is <i>ŚrīArthapatirājasya</i> in the same box headed Brāhmīcharacters.

Varāharāja ^{vi} (Mirashi,1939,29)	29(7 larger and 22 smaller)	Edenga Hoard	Gold (Repoussé type), round shaped	On the 6 larger coins and 22 smaller coins there is a couchant humped bull facing left with a crescent front of it and in one larger coin there is a couchant humped bull facing right with a crescent above its back. The larger coins bear the legend <i>ŚrīVarāharāja</i> and the smaller coins bear the legend <i>ŚrīVarāhain</i> the box headed Brāhmī script.
Stambha	1	Kuliya Hoard	Gold (Repoussé type), round shaped	On the obverse side of the coin there is a couchant humped bull facing left with a crescent front of it. The coin bears the legend <i>Stambha</i> in the box headed Brāhmī characters.
Nandanarāja	1 Gold Coin and 188 Copper Coins	Kuliya Hoard (1 Gold Coin), Gandibeda Hoard (147 Copper Coins), Palai Hoard (41 Coins).	Gold (Repoussé type), Copper (Die struck type), round shaped	On the obverse there is a couchant humped bull facing left or right. The gold coin bears the legend <i>ŚrīNandanarāja</i> and the copper coins bear the legend <i>Śrī Nanda</i> in the box headed Brāhmī script.

Table 2: Nala Rulers and their period

Genealogy of the Nala Rulers	
Name of the Kings	Time
Varāharāja	4 th Century C.E.
Bhavadattavarmaṇa	5 th Century C.E.
Arthapati	5 th Century C.E.
Skandavarmaṇa	5 th Century C.E.
Stambha	6 th Century C.E.
Nandanarāja	6 th Century C.E.
Pr̥thvīrāja	8 th Century C.E.
Virūparāja	8 th Century C.E.
Vilāsatuṅga	8 th Century C.E.

References:

Bhandarkar, D.R. (1903 -04). Progress Report of Archaeological Survey of India Western Circle for 1903-04, Delhi. Archaeological Survey of India.

Fleet, J.F. (1879) 'Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscription' *The Indian Antiquary*, VIII, p.11.

Foulkes, T., (1879) 'Grant of Nandivarman Pallavamalla' *The Indian Antiquary*, VIII, p.11.

Goyal, S.R. (1967). A History of the Imperial Guptas. Allahabad. Central Book Depot.

Gupte, Y.R (1985) 'Rithapur Plates of Bhavadattavarmman' *Epigraphia Indica*, XIX, pp.100-104

Jain, B. (1979) 'New Hoards of Repoussé Gold Coins', *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, XL, Parts-I-II, pp.108-110.

Jha, V.D. (1977-78) 'The Early History of Bastar', *L.N. Mishra Commemoration Volume*, p.231.

Journal of Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, (1844 - 1847) II, part-II, pp.225-255.

Karve, I. (1951) 'The Cultural Process in India', *Man*, 51, pp. 135-138.

Kielhorn, F (1985) 'Talagunda Pillar Inscription of Kakutstharman', *Epigraphia Indica*, VIII, p.31.

Kielhorn, F. (1985) 'Balaghat Plates of Prithivishena II,' *Epigraphia Indica*, IX, pp.267-271.

Kielhorn, F. (1985) 'Aihole Inscription of Pulakesin II,; Saka-Samvat 556', *Epigraphia Indica*, VI, p.4.



- Krishnamacharlu, C.R. (1985) 'The Nala Inscription at Podagadh; 12th Year', *Epigraphia India*, XXI, p.155.
- Mirashi, V.V. (1939) 'Gold Coin of Three Kings of the Nala Dynasty', *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, I, pp.29 - 39.
- Mirashi, V.V. (1963) 'Chhamak copperplates of Pravarasena II', *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, V, pp.22-27.
- Mirashi, V.V. (1985) 'Rajim Stone Inscription of the Nala King Vilasatunga', *Epigraphia Indica*, XXVI, pp.49-58.
- Mishra, P.L. (1979). *Political History of Chhattisgarh*. Santiniketan. Visva Bharati.
- Nigam, L.S. (1987) 'Numismatography of Repousse Gold Coins', *Vajapeya (Prof. K.D. Bajpai felicitation volume)*. Delhi. Agam Kala Prakashan.
- Pargiter, F.E. (1982). *The Purāna Text of the Dynasties of Kali Age*. Varanasi. Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series.
- Patel, C.B. (1990). *Dynastic History of Nalas*. Calcutta. Punthi Pustak.
- Rajaguru, S. 'The Gandibedha Copper Coins of Srī Nanda', *The Orissa Historical Research Journal*, V, Nos, 3-4. pp.157-159.
- Rajaguru, S.N. (1966) *Inscriptions of Orissa..I, Part-II*, Berhampur. B.V. Nath.
- Rao, B.V.K. (1942). *History of the Early Dynasties of Andhrapradesh*. Madras. V.R.S. Sons.
- Sircar, D.C. (1985) 'Kesaribeda Plates of Nala Arthapati-Bhattāraka', *Epigraphia Indica*, XXVIII, p.13.
- Sircar, D.C. (1985) 'Pandiapathar Plates of Bhimasena, Year, 89', *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXIV, pp.233-238.

¹ Although the editor of that inscription Y.R.Gupta takes the word 'Arthapati' just as an epithet, which literally means *the lord of the riches*. He also commented that *Bhavatta* might be the Prakritized form of Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇa.

² However, the editor of the Podagarh inscription C.R. Krishnamacharlu opines that the inscription belongs to the second half of the fifth century.

³ Restoration of family fortune has been depicted in the same fashion in the records of the Sātavāhana king Gautamiputra Sātakarṇi and Gupta king Skandagupta. In the Nasik inscription Gautamiputra is said to have regained the pride of the Sātavāhanas. Skandagupta in the Bhitari inscription claims that he regains his family fortune by defeating the Puṣyamitras and pacified the *vicālita kulalakṣmī*.

⁴ On the obverse of the coin there is a circle of dots along the edge. The coin is divided in two parts by a horizontal line, on the upper half there is a couchant bull and below there is the legend 'Stambha' in the box headed character of Brāhmī in early sixth century.

⁵ The grant was issued from Bhīmapura of Khiddirasrṅga maṇḍala. D.C. Sircar opines that Bhīmapura was Bhīmasenadeva's capital. According to S.N. Rajaguru the Khiddirasrṅga mandala situated in between Kalinga mandala and Khinjali mandal. This Khiddirasrṅga maṇḍala can also be identified with the Khiddirasingha of the Madras



Museum plate. He also identifies Bhīmapura with the present Bhīmanagar near Aska of ganjam district of Orissa. The grant was addressed to the feudatory chiefs (*samantyādinām*), the Brāhmaṇas, and the officer-in-charge of an administrative unit called 'rāṣṭra', big and small jagirdars with reference to a district called *kamaṇḍulapaṭṭa* (*kamaṇḍulapaṭṭarvra* [[*hmṇa pu*][*rvva*][*m*]*sāmantādinamrāṣṭ* [[*aku*][*ku*]*tāvri*][*br*]*had bhogi pr*][*a*]*mukhān*). In Pandiyapathar inscription the Bhaumakara era has been used. From this point of view, it can be assumed that he was a feudatory chief under the Bhaumakaras in his earlier life but later he established himself as an independent ruler.

⁶ V.V. Mirashi has opined that Varāharāja was the first *Nala* ruler and Bhava(da)ttavarmaṇsucceeded him. But there is no evidence to support this argument.



Governance on the Move: Caravans and State Control in *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*

Soumya Ghosh

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Women's Christian college

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta

Email - soumya.ancient.hist@gmail.com ORCID ID: [0000-0001-5207-8422](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5207-8422)

Abstract

The *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* identifies *vaṇīkpatha* (trade routes) as one of the *ayaśarīra* – legitimate source of state revenue – highlighting the economic significance of trade in early historic India. This paper explores how the text envisions a model state exercising control over trade routes, city-based markets, and itinerant traders to regulate exchange mechanisms and maximize fiscal returns. As early urban centers, often situated along long-distance trade routes, emerged as pivotal nodes of intra- and inter-regional commercial networks, markets within these cities became principal sites of commodity exchange. Central to this process were the *sārtha-s* (caravans) and *sārthavāha-s* (caravan leaders), who transported exotic regions and state boundaries.

This study investigates the mechanisms suggested in the *Arthaśāstra* for overseeing the movement and activities of caravan merchants and for managing wholesale markets where foreign and regional goods were integrated into local economies. It further examines the state's role in facilitating monitoring, and taxing these transactions without directly engaging in the transfer of goods. Through a close reading of the *Artha śāstra*, the paper aims to reconstruct the state's approach to market regulation, trade surveillance, and revenue generation, shedding light on broader patterns of governance and economic control in early historic India.

Keywords: *State, Revenue, Caravan Trader, Resource Mobilization, Market.*

In the course of socio-economic evolution, the Indian subcontinent witnessed significant and epoch-making changes around mid-first millennium BCE. The gradual introduction of new material culture brought about transformations in production-relations, with surplus production playing a crucial role in driving trade. Alongside this development, there was a notable proliferation of professional groups encompassing agrarian producers, craftsmen and traders of various categories, reflecting an increasingly complex economic structure. In order to appropriate and manage the social surplus generated across different regions, the state machinery, characterized by a hierarchized administrative apparatus and exercising legitimate political authority over people and resources within defined territorial boundaries, began to consolidate its control over regular coercive forces. Simultaneously, early historic cities emerged, evolving into vital nodes within an expanding network of intra- and inter-state commerce and communication. *Jātaka* narratives reveal a network of communication as well as commercial linkage which gradually radiated from city to suburbs to *janapadas* and then beyond it to the *pratyanta* or frontiers and at times even beyond (Cowell, 1995a, pp.1-4; Cowell, 1995b, pp.20-30)ⁱ. Some trading communities had their operations within the limits of the *janapadas* and others operated in the *pratyantaregions* which are reflected in the term *pratyantavanika*. Similarly there are some

merchants who operated in the cities and they have been mentioned as *nagara-vanikasii* (Cowell, 1995a, pp.127-29). There is not much evidence available to understand the interrelationship of these three but they would have intersected while dealing with common zones of interaction. Some narratives reflect the friendship and even partnership among the *nagara-vanika* and *janapada-vanika* (Cowell, 1995a, pp.127-29)ⁱⁱⁱ. Such ententes are quite interesting. Those who travelled beyond the *pratyantas* or across the boundaries of the states and communicated between the cities situated at distant locations, needed to move together to meet the hazards on the way and thus here we find the emergence of the itinerant group of traders, also called *sārtha* (Monier-Williams, 2020, p.1209; Apte, 2015, 1101)^{iv} which literally means a traders' caravan. *Sārthavāhas* (Monier-Williams, 2020, p.1209)^v were the leaders of *sārtha*^{vi}.

Sārtha appeared as a new social phenomenon at the outset of early historic period^{vii} as a direct result of second urbanization and the beginning of long-distance inter-city trade in the middle of first millennium BCE. It is because Caravan merchants traded only between cities and interacted with big merchants of city markets like *nagara-sresthis* who were further linked with producers and/or consumers located in countryside through small traders vis *janapadavanikas* (traders who primarily operated within the limits of countryside), *pratyanta-vanikas* (traders who mainly operated in bordering villages of a state or a region), peddlers and many others. Thus, caravan merchants or itinerant merchants served as crucial links between cities, facilitating the movement of people and resources across intra-regional and inter-regional networks, and playing a significant role in shaping the production-consumption relations of early historic India^{viii}.

The prominence of Caravan trade in the above mentioned period is evident from wide occurrence of the terms *sārtha* and *sārthavāha* in both epigraphic and literary sources. One of the earliest references to such caravan traders is found in *Jātaka* narratives, which provide accounts of traders journeying between various regions, thereby indicating the formation of networks spanning different parts of the subcontinent. Other Pāli Buddhist texts also contain numerous references to *sārtha* and *sārthavāha*. *Arthasāstras* are replete with references to *sārtha* and *sārthavāhas* and the terms which derived from these (Kangle, 2014a, 2014b)^{ix}. The earliest epigraphic reference to *sārthavāha* is available from an inscription datable to c. 1st century CE from the Masharfa, near Kosam, Allahabad District, Uttar Pradesh. Kosam Stone Inscription refers to the donation of a *vedikā* to the temple of *sathavāha Mānibhada* i.e. *Sārthavāha Mañibhadra* (Sahni, n.d., 158-59; Sircar, 1993, 97-98; Sircar, n.d., 1-5).

Purport and Methodology of the Research:

In the present the paper we aim explore what might be the attitude and approach of the state towards caravan traders, especially their leaders – *sārthavāhas*. We examine why and how the state might involve itself in the process of distribution and exchange in an urban market, especially where the ownership of goods imported from outside the country, region, or state would be transferred (albeit indirectly) from external traders to the local ones. Additionally, we investigate how the state, through an overarching mechanism of control and surveillance, could manage to generate revenue from the processes. *Kauṭīliya Arthasāstra* is selected as the principal primary source for this study. Data collected from the text has been critically analyzed, following a thorough examination. Where relevant, the Data collected from the *Arthasāstra* has been corroborated with information gleaned from other contemporary texts. Through this analysis, the research seeks to understand the functioning of a model state in early historic India - particularly in its regulation of markets (especially urban markets, which may have operated as wholesale exchange centers) - and how state control over markets contributed to broader mechanisms of resource mobilization.

Situating Text (*Kauṭīliya Arthasāstra*) in the context:

As *KauṭīliyaArthaśāstra* is considered as the key primary source for understanding the state involvement in trade governance especially the state control over caravan, commodity and market it is necessary to contextualize the text both historically and ideologically. The *Arthaśāstra* is a singular work, unparalleled in the surviving corpus of early historic or ancient Indian literature. When it was first published in the early twentieth century, it was aptly characterized as “perhaps the most precious work in the whole range of Sanskrit literature” (Shamasastri, 1915). This treatise of statecraft is renowned for its pragmatic approach to governance and its emphasis on financial and material concerns (*arthaivapradhānam*) as crucial elements in the administration of the state (Chakravarti, 2016, pp.126-27). The text primarily addresses the issues related to statecraft and governance, encompassing political science in a broad sense, including the legal system, and its material on trade and market is presented within this framework.

The dating of the *Arthaśāstra* remains a continuous issue. The earlier proposition that the text dates back to the fourth-third centuries BCE has been debated. A statistical analysis conducted by Trautmann suggests that the text, in its present form, did not emerge before the first or second century CE and may not be the work of a single author (Trautmann, 1971). However, Trautmann assigns the earliest portion of the text, specifically the *Adhyakṣapracāra* section (which pertains to the heads of administrative departments), to the mid-first century BCE. In his recently published translation of Kauṭīliya's *Arthaśāstra*, Patrick Olivelle dates the original version of the text to the mid-first century CE, while acknowledging that some of Kauṭīliya's sources may trace back to the first century BCE. Olivelle further argues that the central Book Two, *Adhyakṣapracāra*, was likely an independent work from around the first century BCE that was later incorporated into Kauṭīliya's treatise. Additionally, he posits that Kauṭīliya may have lived in the region where Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh intersect. The association of the *Arthaśāstra* with Pataliputra (modern Patna) and the Maurya Empire lacks substantial evidence (Olivelle, 2020; 2022, P.24-26).

Despite the uncertainties regarding its precise dating, it is evident that the ARTHAŚĀSTRA belongs to the early historic period. Although the text is often described as pragmatic and even ruthless in its approach, it remains a prescriptive treatise rather than a descriptive account of the statecraft of any specific polity, whether Mauryan or post-Mauryan. The ideals outlined in the ARTHAŚĀSTRA were not necessarily implemented in the governance of contemporary states or empires. Nevertheless, the text establishes a theoretical model of statecraft grounded in real and material concerns. While the model itself may be hypothetical, its foundations are rooted in historical realities. The principles articulated in the ARTHAŚĀSTRA indicate that political thinkers of the time were actively engaged in addressing the challenges faced by the state in governance and administration. They sought to expand the revenue sources of the state while efficiently managing available resources. The KAUṬĪLIYAARTHAŚĀSTRA provides a framework for regulating the distribution and exchange of commodities by exerting control over caravans (SĀRTHA), caravan merchants (SĀRTHAVĀHA), and trade within urban markets.

State's Interest in The Caravan:

Where there was production of resources there was claim of revenue from the state. As the caravan trade was profitable enterprise, the state's interest to the share of its profit and the claim of revenue on the resources of *sārthas* is quite natural. State's interest in a *sārtha* (a caravan) is beautifully depicted through poetic analogy in the famous Sanskrit play *Mṛcchakaṭīka*, written by Śudraka. The protagonist, SĀRTHAVĀHA CĀRUDATTA, DESCRIBED HIS GARDEN USING A METAPHOR WHERE TRADERS ARE COMPARED WITH PLANTS, GOODS WITH FLOWERS, STATE OFFICIALS TO BEES AND TAXES OR REVENUES WITH

HONEY. THIS IMAGERY SUBTLY UNDERSCORES THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN TRADERS' CARAVAN AND STATE: THE TRADERS CULTIVATE THE ECONOMY, OFFICIALS EXTRACT VALUE AND THE STATE ULTIMATELY REAPS THE BENEFITS. THE REFERENCE EMPHASIZES THE STATE ROLE IN REGULATING AND BENEFITING FROM TRADE, REINFORCING ITS ECONOMIC STAKE IN COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES¹⁰ (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2009, p.331). Recognizing the *sārtha* as a major source of revenue, different political powers sought to draw caravans into their domains by ensuring safe passage, enhancing infrastructure, providing logistical supports, offering advantageous terms of trade, and providing other benefits, neighbouring states even attempted to assert control over the caravan routes that passed through the border regions. The interest of state to control the trade routes and to regulate the business transaction within their territory is reflected in *Arthaśāstra* as well.

State Control over Caravan Merchants, Commodities and Market:

Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra recognizes trade and commerce as one of the fundamental means of achieving prosperity. According to *Arthaśāstra*, *vaṇikpatha* (the trade route) is considered as one of the *ayaśārīrai*. i.e. source of income of the state. The same text also reflects that State usually controlled the trade routes, regulated markets and extracted as much revenue as possible from both internal and foreign traders. Here we would like to reflect on the process of the distribution and exchange in a city-market (which may be considered as a wholesale market) where the caravan traders (here indicating external traders) sold their goods to the local traders and the nature of the state control over the whole mechanism. We can trace some periodical stages through which the whole process was carried on under the overall supervision of state. This is noteworthy that, though there are several references to *sārtha* in the *Arthaśāstra*, reference to the *sārthavāha* is very rare. *Arthaśāstra* uses the term *vaidehaka* in a generic sense to denote traders. Another term *vaṇija* is also found mentioned in the same text.

Stage 1: A *sārtha* on its entry into a state had to meet *antapālas* or the frontier officers after making a thorough checking as well as estimating the quantity of the goods belonging to the caravan the frontier officers certified the traders and issued *mudrā*. They also collected *vartaṇi* as toll tax. The *vartaṇi* is never mentioned as *śulka* thus indicates its distinctness from the *śulka* or the duty.

Stage 2: The sale price of the merchandises or the goods belonging to the caravan was fixed by the officials who were expert in fixing prices and the duties on those goods were estimated and collected by *śulkādhyakṣa* accordingly.

Stage 3: The caravan traders who were the foreign as well, proclaimed/declared the quantity and the price of the goods in an assembly of the traders who had been gathered at the foot or the *dhvajā* or the check post to buy the goods coming in. This provokes us to think of some wholesale markets at or near the check-posts. The purchase price of the goods was settled by an open auction where the local traders might compete each other to secure the goods for their selves by raising the price. Once the price has settled, this could not be changed further.

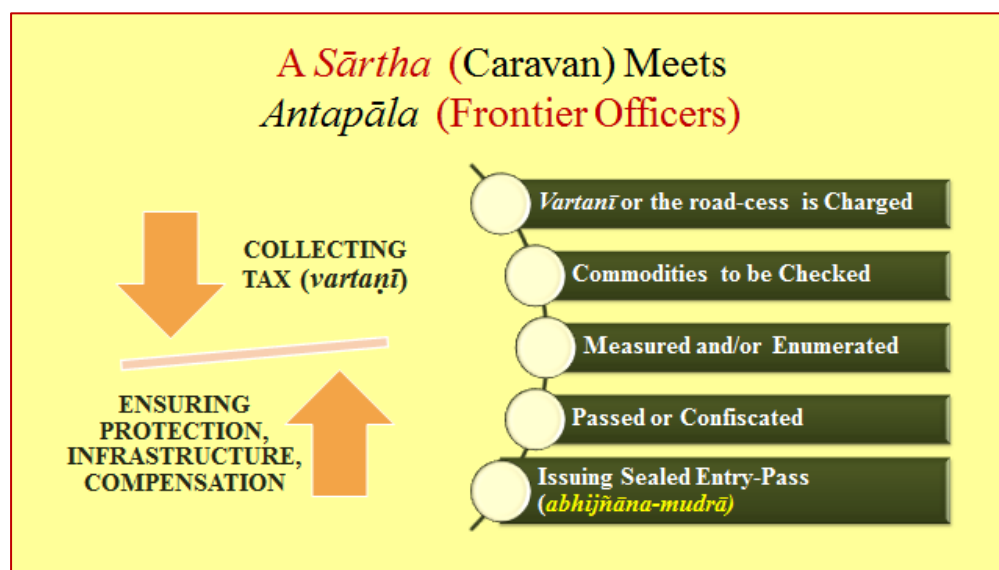
Stage 4: The excess amount or *vṛddhi* on the sale price was collected by the officials. So, the state collected *śulka* and *vṛddhi*.

Stage 5: The profit of the traders who purchased the goods was also mentioned. Thus it reflects that the price at which they would sell the goods probably in the local or retail markets were also controlled by the state.

Here we would like to elaborate the above mentioned processes with reference to *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*.

According to *Arthaśāstra*, a *sārtha* on its entry into a state had to meet *ant apālas* or the frontier officers [*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 2.21.24-6] (Kangle, 2014a, p.74; 2014b, p.144). The *ant apāla* or the frontier officer should charge

vartanī or the road cess of certain fixed rates for the cart load of goods, one hoofed animals, cattle, small animal and one's shoulder-loads [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.21.24] (Kangle, 2014a, p.74; 2014b, p.144). So, all the profitable possessions of the traders carried along with the *Sārtha* caused to be charged with *vartanī*, while entering into the territory of the state. Frontier officer is authorized to confiscate the unlicensed arms and the non-exportable goods carried by the *sārtha*. The same order is echoed by Manu. "The whole property of (a trader) who out of greed exports goods of which the king has a monopoly or (the export of which is) forbidden" [Laws of Manu, VIII, 399] (Buhler, 1998, p.323)^x Then the frontier officer certified the caravan with the *abhijñānam* mentioning about the quantity of the goods/merchandise in respect to the name of its owner and authenticated with his *mudrā* or stamp or the seal and sent them to the *adhyaḥśas* or the concerned higher officials. Thus the pass has been prepared for the trader as well as for the *sārtha* to travel within the state. It is clearly mentioned in *Arthaśāstra* that, "(only) a person with a sealed pass shall be entitled to enter or leave the countryside (*janapada*)" [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.34.2] (Kangle, 2014a, 92; Kangle, 2014b, 179). This is also applicable to the caravan traders. Whether they pass through the pasture lands, or cross a river or reach the custom house they had to show them *mudrā* respectively to the *vivītādhyakṣas* [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.24], *nāvyaādhyakṣas* [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.28] and *śulkādhyakṣas* [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.21]. It is the stamp of *antapālas* which made the *śulkādhyakṣa* come to know regarding the whereabouts of the traders. It reflects that the officials who had been appointed in the frontier to collect road cess were responsible to protect all the above mentioned possessions of the *sārtha* caring on by the frontier ways and if he failed to do that he had to make good those. It is stated that, *ant apālah* had to make good what had been lost or stolen^{xi}. *Antapālas* were also caused to maintain the roads so that, the goods can be carried safely. Next, he is also suggested to make a thorough investigation (*vicayana*) of the goods of high and low values coming along with *sārtha*. Another point, which is worth mentioning, is that the *antapāla* considered the entire *sārtha* or the caravan as a single entity in spite of the fact that the *sārtha* constituted of diverse elements. The entry/exit pass was issued to the *sārtha* as a whole [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.28.19]. So, at the frontier the merchandise of the *sārthas* were checked, measured and passed or confiscated (if not to be allowed within the country). The frontier officers also provided with protection and maintained the roads and collected *vartanī* in lieu of that.



Then traders had to pass through the custom house. This is worth mentioning here that *Kauṭīlyas* suggested establishing custom houses and the flag at the entrance (most possibly be) of the *nagara* or *pattana* or a market [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.21.1]. These can be compared with modern check posts.

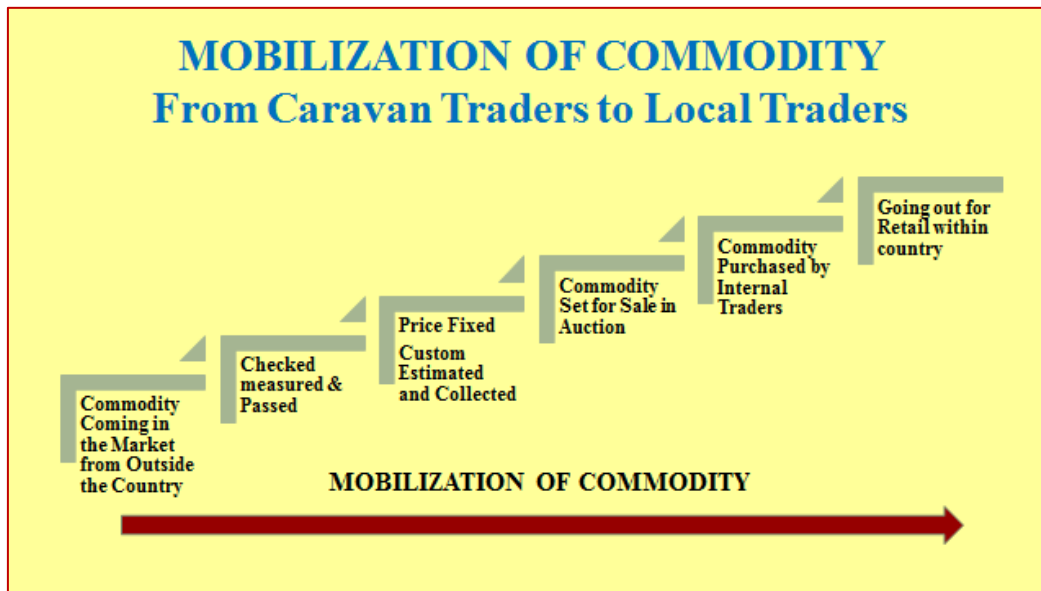
While the *sārtha* arrived at customs-house the *śulka* *ādhyakṣa* on his turn asked for the *abhijñāna-mudrām* (which had been issued by the *antapālas*) [*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 2.21.2]^{xii}. Those who came without *mudrā* or those who broke or forged or changed the *mudrā* were caused to be punished. It is mentioned in *Arthaśāstra* that, “And for goods that have passed beyond the foot of the flag without the duty being paid, the fine is eight times the duty” [*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 2.21.16] (Kangle, 2014a, p.73; Kangle, 2014b, p.143). It is also mentioned that “For those with a forged stamp, the fine is eight times the duty”. [*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 2.21.4] (Kangle, 2014a, p.73; Kangle, 2014b, p.142). Interestingly we have parallel reference in the law of Manu, “he who avoids a custom house (or a toll)... or he who makes a false statement in enumerating (his goods), shall be fined eight times (the amount of duty) which he tried to evade” [Laws of Manu, VIII, 400] (Buhler, 1998, p.324). The fine for the avoiding the custom house or the custom flag in front of the custom house is the same. The punishment for making a false statement in enumerating the goods and the bearing a forged stamp are also same. So, the forging of stamp is probably replaced with making the false statement in enumerating the goods. This again proves that the stamping was related to the enumeration of goods.

This is worth mentioning here that the function of this custom house - *dhvaja* complex was multifold as reflected in *Arthaśāstra*. Apart from checking the *abhijñāna mudrām* which had been issued by the frontier officers, value/rate and the price of the goods was fixed, *Śulkas* were fixed and collected from the *vaidehaka*s according to the price of their goods and trader or *vaidehaka* had to declare the quantity and price of the goods that have arrived at the foot of the flag and set the goods on auction sell [*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 2.21.7-8] (Kangle, 2014a, p.73; Kangle, 2014b, p.142). According to the *Arthaśāstra*, in all these three steps the state played active/seminal role.

In *Jātaka* there is mention of men who were engaged in fixing prices [*aggha-tthapanam-nāma-manussānam -Jātaka, Nipāṭha* 1, No.1] (Fausboll, n.d., p.98) whom the *sārthavāhas* might have to deal with. In the *Arthaśāstra* we get references of *arghavit* the person who were expert in fixing prices. In the case of commodities distant in place and time, he is suggested to fix the price after calculating the investment (*prakṣepa*), the production of goods (*panyanispatti*), duty (*śulka*), interests (*vrddhi*), rent (*avakraya*) and other expenses. R P kangle, while translating, took the term *arghyavit* as an adjective which means the expert of fixing prices and indicates the *Panyādhyakṣa* [*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 4.2.36] (Kangle, 2014a, p.133; Kangle, 2014b, p.262). R G Basak's translation is also same i.e. অর্ঘবিধানে অভিজ্ঞব্যক্তি but he does not mention about *panyādhyakṣa* in this context (Basak, 2016, p.302). This is worth mentioning here that, according to *Arthaśāstra*, the official who was authorized to oversee and control the price of the all merchandise as well as the market is *panyādhyakṣa*. He had to be aware of / conversant with the differences in the prices of *saradraya* (i.e. The goods of high value) and the *phalgu-dravya* (i.e. The goods of low value), the demand of various goods in market, their production, transport, and also the suitable time for restoring to dispersal or concentration, purchase or sale^{xiii}. So, He is authorized to increase or decrease the price if he felt necessary. So, we can think of some persons, who were expert in fixing prices of the goods were appointed on the highways or at or near the vicinity of the check posts / markets to fix the goods to fix the rate and price of the goods under the supervision of certain high ranking officials like market superintendent or the *Panyādhyakṣas* and thus the state attempted to control the price as well as market. So, before they meet the local traders or the purchasers the foreign traders had to come in contact with those persons who fixed the prices and to get the rate of the price of their goods fixed. Earlier we have mentioned that the fixing of the duty of the goods depended upon the price of goods. Now we have seen the duty or the *śulka* is suggested to be counted / accounted in process of fixing price. So, it may be surmised that, there might be some coordination between fixing the price of goods at which the foreign traders (who generally arrived along with the caravan) would sell them and the fixing the duties which they had to pay to the state. The

amount of duty is added to the price and then it was put for the sale in market. In both the cases state intervention is clear.

Now we would like to discuss on the auction which was held under the foot of the flag. According to *Arthaśāstra*^{xiv} traders had to proclaim the quantity and price of the good and ask for the purchaser thrice [*KauṭīliyaArthaśāstra*2.21.7-9] (Kangle, 2014a, p.73; Kangle, 2014b, p.142). When it has been thrice proclaimed he should give it to those who have sought it. So, exchange of goods between the *sārthopayāta-vanija* or the foreign caravan traders and the local traders were ought to be made through an auction held at the vicinity of the *dhvajā* in the presence and control of state officials. Then it is stated that, “in case of competition among purchaser, the increase in price together with duty shall go to the treasury” [*KauṭīliyaArthaśāstra*2.21.9] (Kangle, 2014a, p.73; Kangle, 2014b, p.142). So, it was not the sellers but the state who was the beneficiary of the auction. State intended to control the profit of the purchasers (i.e the local traders) also. It is stated that, “and he should fix a profit for them of five hundred over and above the permitted purchase price in the case of indigenous commodities, ten (per hundred) in the case of foreign goods” and if the traders raised the price even more than that, then the fine will increase accordingly. There is a specific reference to permitted purchase price which is noteworthy. This again proves the state’s control over the price at which the traders purchased. Through fixing the even their profit state actually intended to fix the price at which they would sale in the local market in the homeland. Thus State controlled the price at three levels: firstly it fixed the rate/value of certain commodity at which foreign traders would sell, secondly it controlled and fixed price at which local traders would purchase the same, thirdly the price at which local traders would further sell the same in local retail market to the smaller traders or directly to the consumers. Thus state appears to oversee and control the process through which foreign goods were mobilized from the foreign traders (caravan traders) to the consumers of the state.



Notes and References:

Jātaka, Nipāṭha 2, No. 151, *Jātaka, Nipāṭha* 16, No. 514.

Jātaka, Nipāṭha 2, No. 218.

Jātaka, Nipāṭha 2, No. 218.

The term is also applied to mobile groups such as refugees, beggars, labours seeking work, and even herds. For example, See *Nāmalin gānusāsanam*, 2nd Kāṇḍa, *Simhādivargah*, Verse 105 (Sardesai & Pandhye, 1940, p.87). In the present paper, we intend to use the term *sārtha* specially to refer to a caravan. It is worth noting that the Prakṛt and Pāli lexicons mention the term *satt* derived from the Sanskrit *sārtha* to convey the same meaning (Sheth, 1986, p.862; see also Rhys-Davids & Stede, 1959, p.747). In the *Sangam* literature, the word *cattu* is used to denote a caravan or itinerant trader (Gurukkal, 2010, pp. 140,141,146; Singh, 2013, p.406).

¹*Sārthavāha* literally means the one who carries *sārtha* or in other words the leader or guide of the caravan. In addition to serving as the leader of the itinerant traders, a *sārthavāha* was necessarily a trader himself. In certain contexts, the term is also used more broadly to refer to a trader in general. Interestingly, the term *sārthavāha* and *vanija* are used interchangeably in *Kaṇḍa-Jātaka* (Fausboll, n.d., pp.193-96). In Buddhist literature, the Buddha is also referred to as a *sārthavāha*, as he is seen as the leader of the group of transient human beings on the earth. Relevant portions from *Itivuttaka*, *Tikanipāto*, *Vaggo IV*, *Suttam 5* is worth to be mentioned here as an example: “*Bhagavāsattā-vāho, yathā sattāvāho satthe kantāraṃ tāreti, cora-kantāraṃ tāreti (vāḷakantāraṃ; dubbhikkhakantāraṃ; nirudakakantāraṃ) uttāreti, nittāretikhemanta-bhūmimsampāpeti: evaneva Bhagavāsattāvāho satte kantāraṃ tāreti, jāti-jarā....rāga... uttāreti, nittāreti khemanta-bhūmimatmanāmnibbanam sampāpeti*” (Windish, 1889, p.80). The above passage in the *Itivuttaka* refers to Buddha as *sārthavāho*. He led the disciples to nirvana in the same way as the *Sārthavāha* led and guided the caravan through the difficult terrain and led them to the region of prosperity. The same allegory is found in other texts also like in *Samyutta-Nikāya* (Léon Feer, 1884 (reprint), pp.191-2) and *Visuddhimagga* (Rhys Davids, 1920-1, p.208). It is for this allegory Buddha is often called as *Bhagavā Sātthavāho/Sattāvāho* like in *Mahānidāsa* (Pousin and Thomas, 2001 reprint, p.446), *Cullānidāsa* (Stede, 1988 reprint, p.264) and also in the texts which have been mentioned earlier.

¹For general study on *Sārtha* see works of G. L. Adhya, Atindranath Bose, Maganlal A. Buch, Haripada Chakraborti, Uma Chakravarti, Ranabir Chakravarti, Moti Chandra, V. K. Jain, S. K. Maity, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, and T. W. Rhys Davids (Adhya 1960, Bose 1967, Buch 1979, Chakraborti 1966, Chakravarti 1996, Chakravarti 1415 Vangavda, 2007, Chandra 1953, 1977, Jain, 2001, Maity 1970, Majumdar 1922, Rhys Davids 1901; 1911).

¹c.600 BCE to c.300 CE is considered early historic period in Indian history.

¹Trade, as an economic activity, is primarily concerned with the processes of distribution and exchange, both of which are essential components of the human economic system. Traders are one of the chief actors whose agencies facilitate ‘distribution’ and ‘exchange’ of goods or money in a society especially wherein economy is monetized. Thus they acted as one of the intermediaries between producers and consumers in a human economic system in which “Production... appears as the starting point; consumption as the final end; and distribution and exchange as the middle” (Marx 1904: 274-75).

¹*Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 1.18.9, 3.1.9, 2.21.2, 2.21.26, 2.21.27, 2.21.28, 2.21.29, 3.12.2, 3.12.19, 3.20.18, 13.3.48, 13.3.51, 2.16.12, 2.34.12, 5.1.21, 13.3.48, 4.13.7

¹ The text: “...tathāhivanijāvabhāntitaravahpaṇyānīvāsthitānikusumāni. Śuklamīva sādhaṇtī madhukarpuruṣāḥ pravīcaranti”.

¹ This is also resonated in *Yāgñavalkya Smṛiti*.

¹*Naṣṭāpahṛtāmśca pratividādhyat [Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 2.21.26]* (Kangle, 2014a).

¹ “He should send on to the superintendent caravan from a foreign land after making an investigation as to goods of high and low value and giving them an identity-pass and stamp on goods” (Kangle, 2014a, p.73; Kangle, 2014b, p.141).

¹It is mentioned that “*yaccapanyam pracuram syad tadekikṛtvā arghamāropayet. Prāpteargheva arghāntaramkārayet.*”



Sophos, Vol-2, Issue-1, (May, 2025)

ISSN - 3049-2270 (Online)

Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

Women's Christian College, Kolkata.

Page No: 12-20, Section: Article



Quit India Movement in Manbhum: The Role of Satyagrahis in Selected Police Stations

Nondini Ray

PhD, Vidyasagar University, West Medinipur

Email: dr.nondiniray@gmail.com | ORCID ID: [0009-0002-0425-1766](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0425-1766)

Abstract

The young blood to old women, every single person from all over India joined the Quit India Movement in 1942. Along with the Santals, Sabors, Kherias, Bhumijis, all the tribals, the residents of all classes of villages and cities, shoulder to shoulder, sacrificed themselves in front of the British bullets. Such a big awakening of the people had never happened before. This was the call of every human being to free the motherland from the shackles of oppression. All Congress institutions, meetings and committees were declared illegal by the British government. On August 10, all the leaders were arrested. The 'Shilpashram' was surrounded by the police. Since there was an arrest warrant against the Congress leaders, the residents of the 'Shilpashram' were asked to leave the ashram. But they did not agree. As a result, everyone was arrested. Atul Chandra Ghosh was arrested on his way back from attending the Congress session in Mumbai. Organizations like 'Mukti' press, Shilpashram, Nibaranpalli Shilpo-Sangha, Congress office and ashram were confiscated. This order was in force till 1945. Despite widespread arrests, the movement did not subside. Picketing, processions, strikes in educational institutions, occupation of police stations at various places, destruction of government property and so on did not stop. When one group was arrested, another group came forward. According to the official report sent from Bihar to the Government of India in 1942, there were 442 people arrested in Manbhum and 91 went to jail in this movement. The aim of this article is to explain the role played by the erstwhile Congress leadership and workers of different parts of district Manbhum as Satyagrahi in liberating the motherland.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Movement, Manbhum, Congress*

INTRODUCTION

The decision to 'Quit India Movement' of 1942 was taken on 8th August in Bombay city; in a meeting of the highest committee of the National Congress, the 'All India Congress Committee' (Banerjee, 1995). Incidentally, on the morning of 10th August, the police raided the Congress head office and commune 'Shilpashram' located in Telkal Para of Purulia city. In fact, the police had surrounded the 'Shilpashram'. The ashram was confiscated. But the Shilpashram was actually a home for the men and women residents of the ashram. They had no other place to live. As a result, all of them were sent to jail. The ashram was kept under police guard. During the this Movement in Manbhum, when the front-line Congress leadership was all in jail, the responsibility of taking the movement forward fell on the second-line leaders. Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta's daughter Basanti Roy, son Chittabhushan Dasgupta and Atul Chandra Ghosh's youngest son Amal Ghosh; they were given a manifesto from Gandhi on the 'Quit India Movement'. This manifesto had instructions to paralyze the government through the movement. But they had no idea how non-violent or violent this movement would be. This manifesto stated that satyagrahis should go out to die and not to live by their death the nation will survive (Das, 1979). After hearing the news of the destruction

in Bombay and the destruction in North Bihar, they felt that it was necessary to carry out destruction in Manbhum as well. However, they had no idea to what extent this destruction would follow Gandhian principles, that is, to what extent it would be non-violent and to what extent it would be violent.

Bandowan Police Station during The Movement:

The Manbhum Congress Committee decided that all the records, letters and government office papers of the police station, the liquor store should be burnt. All these works should be done by the workers of their respective police stations. On 1st October 1942, all the workers were ordered to reach Purulia and hold Satyagraha at the court and stop government work. The workers started on the road from the next day to implement the program of capturing the Bandowan police station. The response was very good from the workers. The workers felt that something should be done at the Bandowan police station in the midst of the nationwide movement. Accordingly, on the night of 29th September, the Satyagrahis entered the police station in groups and tied up five policemen. They broke the key of the police station, opened the door, gathered all the papers and set the house on fire. A gun and a pistol were burnt in the police station. Then the liquor store and tax office papers were also burnt. By the morning of 30th September, all the work was completed.

Similarly, the Barabazar police station was also burnt. The tired and hungry workers returned to Bandowan after taking food and water. It was decided that the workers of Bandowan and Patamda police stations would burn the Patamda police station together. Accordingly, the day for burning the Patamda police station was fixed as 8th October 1942. Arrangements were made for food and drink for every family in the surrounding villages. Everyone was asked to leave for Patamda in groups. There was a military depot on the side of the road and the Satyagrahis also set it on fire. At that time, a military jeep stopped, the angry crowd started throwing stones at the vehicle. Five jawans started firing in large numbers, due to which the crowd dispersed. Later, after discussion, the Patamda police station siege program was called off. After the burning of the Bandowan police station, widespread police terror started in the villages. Meanwhile, a letter from Basanti Devi, wife of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, reached Majhihira village (Roy, 1998). It instructed them to stop the movement and surrender to the police. Accordingly, the agitators appeared at the Bandowan police station at a specified time to be arrested.

In the 1942 movement, three police stations in Manbhum district were set on fire by freedom fighters. Among them, Bandowan police station was one of them; the other two were Barabazar and Manbazar. The 1942 movement also had the greatest impact on South Manbhum. Manbazar, Barabazar, Bandowan, and Patamda police stations were without administration for about seven days. Gunfire was fired at Manbazar police station. Many poor people, agricultural laborers, middle farmers, marginal farmers, and the sole earner of their families who sacrificed their lives in the freedom movement participated in this movement. Such self-sacrifice was seen in Bandowan police station, forgetting the distinction between rich and poor, regardless of caste, religion, or caste. Many teachers who were strong supporters of this movement were punished by having their salaries stopped. Later, with great difficulty, they got their salaries back. Jitan village of Bandowan police station was a leading village in the freedom movement. The main planning of the 1942 movement was done in this village on 23rd September.

In the Quit India Movement of 1942, the patriotic people of South Manbhum left their homes and embarked on a fierce struggle to sacrifice their lives. The imprisonment of about 90 people from one police station proves how they sacrificed their lives for the sake of the motherland, making life and death their less important. The freedom movement of Manbhum could not be linked to the mainstream of the Indian

freedom movement (Majumder, 1996). Aversion to propaganda and lack of awareness together kept this movement hidden from the public eye. The way the people of South Manbhum participated in the 'Quit India Movement', regardless of caste or religion, is no less remarkable than any other police station in India. Bandowan police station is basically an area dominated by non-Aryans. The number of employed people was very small. Basically, agricultural and forest dependent people; Inspired by the ideals of Nibaran Chandra Dasgupta, Atul Chandra Ghosh, and Bibhuti Bhushan Dasgupta, they engaged in a vocal struggle against the British Raj, disregarding family, society, and poverty.

Barabazar Police Station:

Barabazar police station played a vital role in this Movement. In a secret meeting in Jitan village, it was decided that on the night of September 29, 1942, all the police stations in the district should be occupied and the official documents as well as the police stations should be burnt. Accordingly, all the policemen of the police station were tied up. All the documents, tables and chairs of the police station were brought out and set on fire. A hurricane was burning in the room. Their rifles were taken away. The sepoys were also tied up. The guns were thrown into the fire. The satyagrahis were very excited and tried to beat the inspector and sepoys, but on the orders of the satyagrahi Bhim Mahato, the rest of the workers restrained themselves. The office was set on fire. The ganja shop was burnt. All the liquor in the liquor store was brought out and burnt. At that time, news reached that shooting was also going on in Manbazar. All the Satyagrahis set out for Manbazar to find out the real facts. They had secretly met and decided that the railway line should be removed and the telegraph wires should be cut. The entire railway line could not be removed, but the railway line was rendered useless. On the other hand, the Congress opponents, along with the administration, formed a peace committee. They kept an eye on all the movements of the Satyagrahis. They tried to get all the information through spies and then resorted to police torture. This terror first started in Barabazar. Only the frontline leadership of the Congress was spared. The 1942 movement ended with the arrest of Satyagrahis in every village.

Protest against Chharra Aerodrome:

In 1942, World War II was raging. In this situation, the Japanese air raids on the metropolis of Kolkata continued, and a decision was made to build an air base by confiscating several hundred bighas of land on the eastern edge of Charra station in Manbhum district from the farmers of the neighboring villages. Girish Chandra Majumdar, the Manbhum district Congress leader, stood on behalf of the farmers who were uprooted from their land. He was known as 'Guru Gandhi' in the district. The farmers got together. The political atmosphere in the district became heated. The Satyagrahis of the district protested for farmers of Charra. The government also adopted various strategies to oppose them. The District Magistrate of the district himself went to Charra and tried to talk to the farmers and convince them. The farmers demanded that they would not allow the fertile soil to be destroyed. Those who were doing the work of throwing stones on the ground also agreed to the farmers' demand and stopped working. The government had increased the wages of the workers, but even then the workers were not joining the work. At that time, confusion arose about the nature of the movement as the frontline Congress leadership of the district was in prison. After informing the workers of Manbazar and Bandowan, a meeting was held and it was decided that protests, picketing and hoisting of the national flag would be held in each police station. These programs were successfully implemented in Barabazar and Manbazar police stations.

The satyagrahis of the district were informed that all the satyagrahis would have to go to Charra to protest; there would be a satyagraha. Satyagrahis from Pancha, Manbazar, Patamda, and Barabazar reached Charra village. The farmers supported them in large numbers. It was heard that the local workers had stopped work despite the increase in wages. At that time, the government imported workers from Bilaspur. They also refused to work. Satyagraha took place. The



farmers' movement reached a very high level with the support of the satyagrahis (Chakrabarty, 2003). Work had also stopped at the aerodrome base camp. During the World War, India was preparing herself for freedom movement in August simultaneously, even which the police did not know about the planned Quit India Movement of 1942, which was being carried out in great secrecy. Their plan was to keep the police's attention focused on that direction by holding satyagrahas, picketing, and hoisting flags. On September 30, 1942, a decision was taken to burn the police stations in the entire district. The police intelligence department did not get a glimpse of this decision. But the brokers' gang was active in the Charra movement. They kept up a counter-movement with the protesting leadership by luring them to increase the price of land and the wages of the workers. At that time, the main leaders of the Charra movement, Girish Chandra Majumdar and Ram Chandra Adhikari, were imprisoned in Purulia on the same day. This almost ruined the movement. The government convinced the farmers on the condition of paying compensation and increasing wages and made them sign a document saying 'I have received compensation'. The government was also able to keep the brokers' gang under their control with money. The Charra movement ended in failure. Consequently British was succeeded to built aerodrome at Charra.

Manbazar Police Station:

It was decided in the Jitan meeting that all the police stations in the entire district would be attacked and burnt to ashes by the morning of September 30th. The leaders of the Manbazar police station did not inform the general members of the date of the attack on the police station. The reason for this secrecy was that if the date somehow got out, the whole plan would be foiled. Everyone was told that no one should be beaten up, no things should be looted. Everyone along with the team set off for the liquor store in Boro village. Upon reaching the liquor store, the workers were asked to come out with their clothes and belongings. When the workers came out, the liquor store was set on fire. The liquor store was burnt to ashes. Then everyone reached the ganja shop. A Muslim man ran a ganja shop. He came out and said that his family lives in this house. The owner was told to throw all the ganja outside. All the ganja was burnt.

The most brutal incident in Manbhum district during the Quit India Movement took place at Manbazar police station. Two Satyagrahis were martyred in police firing, about 70 were injured, and about 15 were seriously injured. Many activist leaders who had to live their lives paralyzed due to police firing were at Manbazar police station. When the march towards Manbazar started, the Satyagrahis came to know that the police had received information; they were prepared; the activists might die. If anyone was in doubt, they should go back home. Everyone started walking towards Manbazar while chanting 'VandeMataram'. Everyone was instructed to remain non-violent. Some of satyagrahis were the first to march towards Manbazar. On reaching the police station, the inspector and other police personnel were seen standing in a row with rifles in their hands. The Satyagrahis said in unison to the police, "We have no anger against you. You move away. We will burn all the government documents" (Goswami, 2011). The inspector also threatened that if the satyagrahis did not move, they would open fire. When the satyagrahis were trying to enter the police station, the police set entire police station on fire. The police station premises were covered in blood. The villagers were agitated and started throwing bricks at the police station. The people became violent. When the satyagrahis who were injured in the bullets came forward to give them water, the police threatened that they would open fire if they gave them water. Satyagrahis Girish Mahato suffered injuries in both his legs. After a few days, on the orders of the leadership, all of them surrendered to the police and were arrested. After their arrest, the Satyagrahis were first kept in Purulia Jail and then transferred to Bhagalpur Camp Jail. All of the satyagrahis were released from the jail after few years.

Conclusion:



During the Quit India Movement of 1942, police terror was unleashed on Congress workers on a large scale. 'Shilpashram', 'Mukti' press, 'Deshbandhu Press' were confiscated. Almost every frontline Congress leaders and workers of Manbhum district were imprisoned unethically. At that time, the Congress had no program. There was despair all around. The organization was dilapidated. There was a shortage of the basic needs of common people everywhere. There was a wave of theft and robbery in the villages. In South Manbhum, theft and robbery had become a major social problem. The Congress Committee informed the district administration in detail about this plight of the people. In a meeting of the Congress leadership with the administration, it was decided that clothes, sugar, and kerosene would be distributed through cooperatives in all the police stations. The cooperation of the people was needed in this regard. Therefore, a committee was formed with one representative from each village in a gathering of people from different villages. The list was submitted to the administration. According to the census report, it was ordered to distribute the goods through the Civil Supply Control Committee. From there, goods like cloth, sugar, kerosene, salu, makmal etc. were distributed eventually. Even in the interest of overcoming shortage, special distribution arrangements were made during special occasions like marriages and festivals. The British government banned the hoisting of the Indian national flag from 1943 to 1944. The Indian National Congress was busy implementing its constructive programme at that time, so it remained silent against the ban, but the Congress workers of Manbhum could not accept this humiliating ban. The then District Congress President of Manbhum, Atul Chandra Ghosh, had sought permission from Gandhi to launch a Satyagraha movement against the British ban and had started a Satyagraha movement in Manbhum with hundreds of workers.

Even after 78 years of independence, the significant discussion of this mass movement is not very visible. If we analyze it, we see that the number of people from the Mahato community was the largest in the movements. The number of people from the Majhi, Bhumij, and Shabar castes was also not less. A Brahmin, a Vaishnava, a Muslim, a few Tantubay, a few Garai, and two teachers participated in this movement and honored the great profession of teaching. Only those two were employees. The number of well-off farmers was comparatively less. Most of them were middle-scale farmers, marginal farmers, landless, whose profession was collecting forest leaves and fruits, and whose livelihood was agricultural labor. It is surprising how such people left their homes for the great ideal of national liberation. That remote, unconnected region surrounded by rivers, forests, and mountains was Bandowan Thana. It was also called the 'Andaman of Manbhum' in the 80s, about which there was a proverb that 'there are 12 rivers and thirteen canals, and beyond it is Kuilapal'. It is amazing how the message of freedom reached us despite that remoteness. 'Mukti' press and the magazine both were confiscated by the ruler during the movement. Since there was no official source of information, confusion arose later when collecting information from the writings. It is worth noting that Chittabhushan Dasgupta's writings were published in a few issues after the publication of 'Mukti' in 1948. The writings of Padak Chandra Mahato, Bhajahari Mahato and Chunaram Mahato were written in the 1980s for the book 'Swadhinota Andolone Rokte Ranga Manbhum' (Mahato, 1995). Although it was written four decades after the movement, there have been different opinions on knowing the real information.

'Nawagarh Anand Ashram' was built in 1929. 'Anand Ashram' once had a very bright place among the Congress Party's approved ashrams in the district. The founder of the ashram was Shrish Banerjee, a senior leader of Manbhum District Congress. The entire Panchakot royal family cooperated tirelessly in building 'Anand Ashram' in Nawagarh; especially Narendra Lal Singhdeo, Deviprasad Lal Singhdeo and his son Rajkishore Lal Singhdeo are particularly noteworthy in establishing the ashram (Chakrabarty, 2007). Patriotic workers used the ashram as a center for the work of the freedom movement, village formation, epidemic treatment and education. Rajkishore Lal Singhdeo used to bear the largest share of the expenses of running the ashram. The women of the village royal family used to provide food to the freedom



movement workers, i.e. the residents of the ashram. In fact, the ashram was used as a place for political propaganda and a hiding place for revolutionaries. The revolutionaries of Nawagarh played a significant role in the 'Quit India' movement of 1942, which has not been discussed in history in the same way even today. The ashram was a place of political consultation, exchange of views, in short, a framework for revolutionary activities. Stick fighting, knife fighting, and wrestling were taught there at night. Many famous revolutionaries used to stay there in disguise. This 'Anand Ashram' has been subjected to contempt, neglect, and disregard and has now completely turned into dust. Only some of its history can be heard from the elders. The site is currently within the boundaries of Rajna wagarh DPM High School and has been transferred to its ownership. No attempt has been made to preserve the history of this place so far. In 1992, a memorial pillar was built on the main ashram land. The memorial pillar attempts to preserve history by mentioning the names of the imprisoned revolutionaries of 'Naw agarh Anand Ashram'. The memorial pillar, dated March 6, 1992, was unveiled by Jaga bandhu Bhattacharya, a prominent Congress leader of Manbhum. The common people of the area are still eagerly waiting for the government to take the responsibility of developing the Anand Ashram premises as a tourist attraction.

References:

- Banerjee, S.K. (1995) *Gandhiji*. Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Basu, A. (1990) *Purulia Parichay*. Purulia: Writers Publishers and Cooperative Society
- Chakrabarty, A.K. (2003) *Beneficiaries of Land Reforms: The West Bengal Scenario*. Kolkata: Spandan
- Chakrabarty, B. (2007) *Smritir Antarale Rajnawagarh*. Purulia: Swadesh Barta
- Chowdhury, S. (2003) *Purulia Porichiti*. Purulia: Piu Prakashani
- Coupland, H. (1911) *Bengal District Gazetteers: Manbhum*. Calcutta.
- Das, B.C. (1979) *Gandhian Democracy*. New Delhi: Asish Publishing House
- Gandhi, M.K. (1947) *Indian India*. in Prakash, Dewan Ram (ed), Lahore: Gandhi Publications League, Bhadrakali
- Goswami, D.K. (2010) *Purulia Jelar Thanagulir Itihash*. Purulia: Bajrabhumi
- Mahato, Bhajahari. (1995) *Sadhinatar Andolane Rakte Ranga Manbhum*. Purulia: Padak
- Majumdar, R.C. (1996) *History of the Freedom Movement in India*. Calcutta: Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd
- Roy, H. (1998) *Manbhumer Katha*. Kolkata: Narayan



The Forgotten History of an Explorer; Sarat Chandra Das (1849-1917)

Arnab Bera

Ph.D. Rabindra Bharati University

E-mail: beraarnab43@gmail.com | ORCID ID: [0009-0003-2797-5924](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2797-5924)

Abstract

In the 19th century, due to the influence of renaissance in Calcutta and Bengal, there was an unprecedented success in Bengali scientific practices in India in accordance with the agitation that was created throughout India. From the renaissance in Bengal, through the efforts of Raja Rammohun Roy, western knowledge and science education first spread in India, especially Philosophy, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, literature and history. Many such people have to be mentioned in the field of map making, has contributed in many ways to map making without actually being a cartographer.

Keywords: *Map making, Tibet, Bengal, Science, Knowledge*

Maps have played an important role in the history of human civilization. Determining the location of different places on the surface of the earth, maintaining communication between different countries by rail, road and air, commercial exchange all these things require proper maps. The word map in Bengali conveys a much more significant meaning than the English word map. As a definition, it can be said that a drawing or a map is drawn according to certain standards or principles and through which a specific visual representation of a country, place or region is obtained, it is called a map. If you review the history, it can be seen that the people of the world have been using maps for their daily life since many years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Along with the development of human life, we notice the discovery of various types of maps on scientific basis.

From time immemorial man's life has been governed entirely by natural influences and later by his practical life activities. At the first stage of civilization, people were nomads. Divided into various groups, they roamed from place to place to collect the basis logistics of life i.e. food. Needless to say, this way of life of humans in prehistoric times was governed entirely by natural influences. To move from one place to another, they had the material provided by nature, such as plants, rocky mounds and natural watercourses. A Spontaneous map of the surrounding area would have been formed in their mind through regular commuting. In fact, it can be called mental map. After staying in one place for some time, if they go to another place, the previous image will be erased from their mind and the image of the new environment will be formed. The creation of these floating spatial images in the mind was based on their natural observational abilities and sense of experience of the environment.

At least, 2,300 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, traces of human attempts to map the world on clay discs have been found in Babylon in the Middle East. One of the major cartographic contributions of this civilization was the division of the entire circle into 360° at the center and the introduction and use of the 60-60-60 principle in angular measurement (Sarkar:2014, p.82). Cartography was actually introduced by the Sumerians. Egyptian civilization developed in the Nile basin. Those who excelled so much in the science of pyramids, that their

excellence in cartography can be easily surmised. The excellence lies in the fact that the later Greek Scientists used the Egyptian astronomical principles, methods and formulas and made them a path in the triumph of science. The maps created by the Aztecs of Peru are considered outstanding works of art. The Eskimos had extraordinary cartographic abilities. This map made of life and life needs is considered as one of the documents of the mental survey of that time (Ibid, p.82). Later, in Greece, the concept of the earth and the methodical technique of its mapping were specially developed by various scholars (Ibid, p.85). Christian Jacob said-

Theory in the history of cartography is not an esoteric option disconnected from the daily practices and thoughts of empirical historians' but an essential aid to understanding the history of maps, globes and atlases. It is a way of accessing some of the complex issues related to these artefacts, their makers and their users, and a tool of self-awareness that extends the range of research questions (Jacob:1996, p.191).

The map of Bengal was first published under the initiative of the first Surveyor General of India, James Rennell (1767-1777), which is still famous as the most valuable informative map of Bengal of that period. The Great revolt of 1857 dealt a major blow to the constitutional structure of India ruled by the then East India Company. Although this rebellion failed due to various reasons, the Parliament of England realized that the responsibility of a large country like India cannot be run by the East India Company. Hence, immediately after the rebellion, the British Parliamentary Monarchy directly took over the administrative responsibility of India. After assuming office, the British rulers realized with practical wisdom that in order to properly exercise their ruling power throughout India, which is vast and geographically diverse, it is first necessary to map the entire region with detailed natural and human data.

In British India, not only the English but also the Indians showed considerable skill in making maps. Nain Singh Rawat, Sarat Chandra Das, Rajendralal Mitra etc. have also presented us with many map data through their works. It would be a big mistake not to mention Radhanath Sikdar in this context. It is to be noted that at a time Bengali mind was full of superstitious attitudes and superstitions, he made many complex calculations using developed machinery and mathematics. Rajendralal Mitra was a pioneer in the practice of knowledge and science in Bengal in the 19th century. He realized the importance of the map of Bengal.

Sarat Chandra Das was born in 1849 in a Hindu Vaidya family in the then East Bengal. He was educated at the Presidency College, Calcutta, where he soon became acquainted with Sir Alfred Front, the then Director of Public Instruction in Bengal. Sarat Chandra Das was his companion in geographical and literary expeditions, and it was mainly because of his acquaintance with the Government of India that Sarat Chandra was able to undertake the expedition to Tibet (Das:1902, p.v).

While still in the engineering department of the college, in 1874 he was appointed headmaster of the newly established Bhutia Boarding School in Darjeeling on the orders of the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell. Shortly after his return the then Government of Bengal published an account of his first expedition, with a forward written by his friend Sir Alfred Crust. In the book now published the route of his first expedition is relegated to a footnote, as he followed the same route in a second and larger expedition in 1881-1882 and this report shows the achievements of his expedition to Tibet in 1879, they seem to have been mainly historical and religious. Complete details of the geographical and cultural castes of Tibet are missing from later full reports (Ibid, p.vi).

Sarat Chandra spent the 1880s sitting his home in Darjeeling documenting the history, religion, culture and folklore collected during the Tibet expedition. These documents, which were valuable to students of oriental studies, were published in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and in the journal of the Buddhist Text Society founded by Sarat Chandra Das in 1892, of which he was the Secretary. In November 1881 Sarat



Chandra set out for Tibet a second time to fulfil his promise to Prime Minister Aying Rinpoche, again accompanied by U gen Gia-t so, who was both secretary collector and surveyor, although much of this survey, even the very important survey up to Lake Palti (Yam do Tso), was completed by the explorer himself. Once again Sarat Chandra established his headquarters at Tehsil hanpo, while he made various expeditions along both banks of the Tsangpo river from Sakya in the West to Samae and in the east to Tae-sang. Fortunately, he even managed to recover from a short trip to Lhasa. Where only two native explorers had been able to go before him. Nain Singh in 1866 and Kishen Singh in 1880, he later made a comprehensive map of the entire city and its surroundings and was also present in the audience at a ceremony at Tell Lama, visited various important monuments of the town, but he was prevented from visiting various places around the town by his commercial spirit. The notes are as primitive as the sages of earlier explorers (Ibid, p. vii).

After a brief visit to the capital of Tibet, Sarat Chandra Das travels to the Yang Basin the Tibet civilization is believed to have been first discovered. He collected all the information in the area he visited. He entered India in January 1883 after an absence of about fourteen months. An account of his journey was published in two parts by order of the Government of Bengal. For many reasons these documents were kept secret by the Government of India until the 1890s(Ibid, p. vii). In 1882 when the Government of India contemplated sending a delegation to Tibet and the now deceased Konan Macke lake was sent to Peking to obtain the necessary permission from the Chinese Government, Sarat Chandra Accompanied him there and spent several months in the early part of that year. During his visit to Peking, Sarat Chandra was attracted to acquire deep knowledge about Tibet. While in Peking, he stayed at the lama's monastery called Si-yangsu outside the An-ting Gate, where all the Tibet merchants stayed during their stay in Peking. He dressed like a Chinese lama at this time and he was known as Ka-Cha-Lama or Lama from Kashmir. But this plan was abandoned and from that time Sarat Chandra Stayed in Darjeeling and devoted all his enthusiasm and energy to the publication of his book on Tibet and to the writing of books on Buddhism, while he also acted as a translator for the Government of Bengal (Ibid, p. viii).

As a reward for the services he rendered to Macke lake while at Peking, on his return to Bengal he was given the title of Rai Bahadur, and was created a company under the orders of the Government of India. In 1887, the Royal Geographical Society awarded him the Black Premium for his geographical research. From this brief discussion of the matter it appears that he devoted himself as much to literature as to geographical research. He joined the school as a teacher in 1874 and worked there till 1878. He then took some gifts to the abbot of that Tibetan lama. During his stay at the Lama monastery in Darjeeling he was trained in the use of various survey instruments which were important for the survey of the border provinces. Evidence of the care with which he did his work through that training and self-effort can be found in the book he wrote.

In 1882 Sarat Chandra measured the exact boundaries and size of Lake Palti, and Sir Albert Croft found this work so important that in June 1883 he sent that Lama to resurvey and examine the same area and complete Babu Sarat Chandra's survey. Lama did this success fully, only by adding to Babu Sarat Chandra's work the description of a small part North-West lake, but his greater task was to establish a perfect survey of the former. He discovered Lobraak (Manas Valley) and again travelled to Lhasa and returned to India via Tang-la and chumbi valleys and reached Darjeeling in December of the same year. A report of this expedition was prepared by the then Colonel Sir Thomas Holditch, which was published in the Trigonometrical Survey of India, Account of the expedition to Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet from 1856 to 1886, and from which many quotations have been made in the present text (Ibid, p. x).

According to W. W. Rockhill, a well-known Tibetan explorer, Sarat Chandra Das was one of the pioneers in the discovery and exploration of Tibet in the 19th century. From 1879 to 1882, when Tibet was a forbidden place

for foreigners, Sarat Chandra visited Tibet twice in the guise of a Buddhist lama and surveyed many places in the Kanchenjunga Hills and Tibet on behalf of the British Government of India. During this journey he traversed a height of more than 20000 feet without the aid of any modern engineering device. According to Frank Smith is recognized as one of the most daring expeditions as record. As a scholar of Tibetan language and Buddhism, apart from his contribution to geographical research, Sarat Chandra collected a valuable information on Tibetan culture and social life, religion and politics (Das:2008, p.7).

To understand the true significance of Sarat Chandra Das' journey to Tibet, a brief discussion of Tibetan politics at that time is necessary. It has already been said that the 19th century Tibet was a forbidden place of foreigners, especially Europeans. Both brave European explorers who ventured into Tibet and Tibetans who helped them were severely punished. As a result, even in the 1860s, the British government in India knew very little about Tibet. The British did not even know the exact location of the capital town of Lhasa and the second largest town of Tibet, Shigats. Like geographical information political information about Tibet, like Russia and China, was not very accessible to British intelligence agencies, who mainly gathered information from missionaries near the border, and local traders. At this time the British government was alarmed by news of the rapid arrival of the Russian Tsar's army in Central Asia, as the British capital Calcutta was only 300 miles from the Tibetan border. The British government realized that it was very useful to bring news from Tibet but at that moment there was no easy solution (Ibid, p.15). In 1863, Captain Thomas George Montgomery, a young Royal Officer trained engineer in the Survey of India, secretly sent to Tibet under the guise of Indians. He advised to carry out survey work there. This seemed a very good proposition to the government as it was probably easier to identify the Europeans and political trouble could be avoided if the Indians were caught by official denial. So, from then on, some selected Indian Buddhists of the Survey of India started entering Tibet in the guise of Buddhist lamas. The prayer wheel drums they carried were used to hold survey notes and sketch maps, thermometers were hidden in the tops of their sticks, and small sextants and telescopes made in the ordinance factory were hidden in the groove's of their tin Trask floors. Instead of 108, the Buddhist rosary in their hands had 100 beads so that they could easily hear their footsteps while walking and understand how far they walked. When in 1879 Sarat Chandra secured an invitation from Shigatse to go to Tashi-Ichanpo, the British government took the opportunity to survey eastern Tibet through him. Both of his Tibetan expeditions were planned and financed by the British government which marked the beginning of his knowledge of Tibet (Ibid, p.16).

Parjanya Sen wrote in this context-

Enthusiastic about Tibetan culture and public life, this foreigner did another remarkable work. He wrote down every mountain, stream and landscape feature on the way, surveying the Chumbi valley (Sen:2017, p.9).

Sarat Chandra Das was honored by the Royal Geographical Society of London for discovering many unknown geographical details of the Himalayas. The Surveyor General of India at that time, wrote about the report sent by Sarat Chandra Das (Ibid, p.10). In fact, the need for a map first becomes very important if one wants to know, to conquer, an unknown, unknown country (Ibid, p.10).

References:

Sarkar, Ashis Kumar,(2014), *Manchitra Bidyar Prachin Itihas*, Kolkata.Bangiyo Bhugol Mancha, p.82.



Ibid, p.84.

Ibid, p.85.

Jacob, Christian, *Toward a Cultural History of Cartography*, Imago Mundi: International Journal for the History of Cartography, London,. Routledge, Vol.48,1996, p.191.

Das, Sarat Chandra, *A Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet*, John Murray, London, 1902, p. v.

Ibid, p.vi.

Ibid, p.vii.

Ibid, p.vii.

Ibid, p.viii.

Ibid, p.x.

Das, Sarat Chandra, (2008) *My Himalayan Journeys*, Kolkata.Monfakira, p.7.

Ibid, p.15.

Ibid, p.16.

Sen, Parjanya, *Pandit Guptocho*, Ananda Bazar Patrika (Rabi Basoriyo), Kolkata,22nd January,2017, p.9.

Ibid, p.10.

Ibid, p.10.



Journey of the Goddess into The Domain of Demons and Back: An Integrated Ethno-Social and Psychological Analysis of Artisan Life, Social Organization, Gender Dynamics, And Sustainability in Kolkata's Kumartuli

Sreemanti Laha

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta

Email: twinka180292@gmail.com ORCID ID : [0009-0006-5087-6336](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5087-6336)

&

Priyanka Roy

M.A. Psychology, Banaras Hindu University

Email: unusmundus0305@gmail.com ORCID ID : [0009-0003-6144-4414](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6144-4414)

Abstract

This paper presents an integrated ethno-sociological and psychosocial analysis of the clay idol artisan community, settled in localities such as Kumartuli and Kalighat Patua Para in Kolkata, West Bengal. It examines two central themes through Psychological, Social and Philosophical lenses. First, it analyses into the socio-economic, ethical and psychological dimensions related with the practice of reuse of the wooden frameworks (used to make idols called Kathamo) observed in this community. Second, it investigates the experiences and the position of the female artisans in the community and how they navigate through a male dominated tradition. Using ethnographic fieldworks, semi-structured interviews, psychological and philosophical theoretical frameworks, this paper explores into themes of evolution of tradition, ethical negotiation, sustainability, socio-economic reorganisation, gender struggle and identifies areas for possible future researches.

Keywords: Kumartuli, Social Psychology, Sustainability, Women Artisans, Cultural Anthropology, Ethnography

Introduction:

Human engagement with art, particularly the creation of sacred imagery from materials like clay, terracotta, stone, and paint, has been present from the very inception of human culture. This paper focuses specifically on the art of the clay within the unique context of Kolkata's renowned idol-making centers: Kumartuli and the smaller Kalighat Patua Para. Kumartuli, the "potter's settlement" ('Kumar' means potter in Bengali and 'Tuli' stands for settlement). It is home to at least 50 households experienced in crafting idols for diverse festivities, specializing in clay artistry passed down through generations. The Kumhars (potters) of Kumartuli engage themselves in making different types of idols as per the requirement and festivities. Kalighat Patua Para, located in the surrounding areas of the famous Kalighat Temple, represents a related but much smaller community.

This paper focuses on two main key aspects related with this community which demand deeper psychosocial and ethical examination:



1. The observed cycle of reusing the wooden frameworks (Kathamo) from the idols of deities post immersion into Ganges and transforming them into ugly looking and fear mongering figures.
2. The status of female artisans in this male-dominated community.

Methodology:

This study utilized an integrated qualitative approach, combining ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews within Kolkata's Kumartuli and Kalighat Patua Para artisan communities. Data collection focused on the socio-ethical dimensions of *kathamo* (idol framework) reuse and the experiences of female artisans. Historical and religious texts provided context for figures like Dākinīs and Yoginīs.

Data analysis involved thematic analysis of field notes and interview transcripts, interpreted through relevant psychosocial (e.g., Moral Disengagement, Emotional Labor, Stereotype Threat) and philosophical (Deontology vs. Consequentialism, Sacred vs. Profane) frameworks.

This integrated analysis aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the community's social organization, gender dynamics, and ethical negotiations surrounding idol-making practices. Standard ethical considerations, including informed consent, were observed.

Part 1: From Divine Structures into Demonic Forms: Dynamics of Recycling, Ethical Negotiation, and Social Categorization.

The cycle of reuse involving the immersed Durga Puja idols (of children deities of Goddess Durga such as Laxmi, Saraswati, Ganesha and Kartikeya) frameworks called Kathamo. These structures, made of bamboos entwined with straw, form the base of the idols. After the immersion ritual (Visarjan) in the River Ganges, as soon as the paint washes away, a set of people dive into the river and bring the structures back. Post retrieval from the Ganges, these structures are transformed into figures of Dākinīs and Yoginīs, often depicted grotesquely or "demonic" in contemporary practice for placement alongside Kali idols during Kali Puja. To have a more in depth understanding of this entire practice and its implications, we need to look into the historical context and the contemporary transformations of Dakini and Yogini figures.

1.1 The Historical Context: Dākinīs and Yoginīs – From Goddesses to Demons.

The first documented use of 'dākinī' in India is found in the Gangadhar Stone Inscription of Visvavarman (likely 5th century CE) from Gangadhar, Jhalawar district, Kota division, Rajasthan. The inscription describes a site:

• Inscription Excerpt & Explanation:

"...mātrṇān ca [*pracu] ditagha nātyart thanihrā dinīnām | tāntrod bhūtapra balapavanod varttitāmbhoni dhīnām | [-----] gatamidam dākinī sampra kīrṇam | veśmatyuggramṇṇ patisacivokārayatpunyahetoh | |"

which translates roughly to "An abode of the mothers whose thunderous cries impel the rain clouds... filled with dākinī-s...". This earliest reference associates dākinīs with the powerful, perhaps fearsome, 'Mothers' (Matrikas) and potent natural forces, not simply as demonic entities.

References to Dākinīs and Yoginīs also appear not only in Brahmanical sources but also in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, as well as Japanese, and Chinese sources. In early dates, Dākinī was associated with the Mother Goddess, often symbolizing formidable female deities representing energy, wisdom, and transformation. However, a significant shift in perception occurred, and this concept gradually changed. The LaṅkāvatāraSūtra, a prominent Mahayana Buddhist scripture, introduced a transformed portrayal, mentioning that those who are excessively attached to meat-eating would give birth to dākas and dākinīs. They were also described as terrible eaters of human flesh. From formidable female deity figures, she becomes the flesh eater, an ugly ghost-like feature.

Yoginī, on the other hand, is the feminine of the Sanskrit 'yogin' or 'yogi'. In the early medieval period, the word Yoginī designates a variety of Tantric goddesses. These historical Yoginīs were complex figures associated with esoteric power, tantric practices, and often depicted in groups as wise figures.

1.2 The market demand for shock element: A case for shock aesthetic economy.

Crucially, it is very important to note that the dākinīs or yoginīs in the present context of Kumartuli and Kalighat are not the same as the ones discussed above from ancient texts. Today, their drapery and form depend on the patrons and market demand. The Kumartuli Samiti informs that some clients demand dākinīs draped in Banarasi sarees, while others want distorted faces, sometimes changed into alien forms, or even skeletons in wedding attire. The focus is frequently on creating terrifying, "demonic" figures, often emphasizing a "shock element" or "ugly" features to evoke the terrifying nature of such figures. This contemporary commodification into market-driven "demonic" figures stand in stark contrast to their multifaceted historical origins, providing a complex symbolic backdrop to the ethical unease surrounding their creation from recycled divine structures. One of the artists interviewed, Samir Pal, revealed that, "more the idols are hideous, the more they are in demand". These aspects birth questions such as "how mainstream consumes spectacle giving rise to "shock aesthetic economy" in Kolkata's idol market?"

Looking into this journey of the God and Goddesses into the world of so-called demons reflects the malleable nature of norms and ethics. As per the human collective need, ethics seems to be a subject of variable interpretation.

This leads to a question about; how much ethics and norms are just tools to conduct and maintain social organisation?

How is this ethical tightrope walked, and at what psychological, social and moral cost?

Is this cost shared by every member of the society, including women?

1.3 The Recycling Chain: Ethnographic Description, Sustainability Claims, and Emerging Social Categories.

In 1990s, in Kumartuli, women and children of artists engaged themselves in the making of the figures of Dakini-Yogini which are sold during Kali puja as subsidiary demonic entities but, gradually, due to the emergence of the new economic chain and the process of recycling involved in it, participation by women,

depleted. This is mainly because the division of labour in this new emerged cycle mitigated the requirement of the family members of artists to be involved in the process of making, even the, subsidiary idols.

Samir Pal, an experienced artist and a prominent member of "KumartuliMritshilpi Samiti" (which is one of the important associations of artists from Kumartuli) informed in one of the interviews, that "after the 'Visarjan' of the idol of Durga with her family, people, especially those residing in the slums by the railway tracks near ganges, engage to collect the straw entwined structures of immersed idols of deities." They sell these at very cheap rates to a second layer of informal artisans, many of whom reside in neighbouring settlements. These self-taught artisans, work with limited resources and guidance, sculpting the fierce forms of Dakini-Yogini, which are considered grotesque by mainstream aesthetic standards as demanded by the market. They sell these to established idol makers and art vendors in the city. These figures are then sold in a packaged form along with the central deity of Goddess Kali in the market, for Kali Puja.

The whole process is described as profitable for everyone involving: people collecting the structures receive their profit; the "sparsely trained" artists who make the associate idols, also benefit by selling them to mainstream artists, approximately for Rs 2000-3000 each and the main artists also get their share, by selling them in the market with a margin of profit, as they acquire the finished product at a low cost. As similar pattern is observed with minor variations in Kalighat market where alongside Kali idol production, ghost models are sold with starting rates such as, Rs 300 a pair as well as higher-end options priced at Rs 2,500, Rs 3,000, and even Rs 5,000. Artisans skilfully layer clay over structures to create terrifying representations with unique features like light-bulb eyes, coloured untamed hair, ghostly teeth, and claws, ensuring no two figures are alike.

This practice not only promote sustainability but also provide livelihoods but a critical assessment regarding the net ecological impact and the fairness of labour practices within this multi-tiered chain is much needed and it makes for an amazing future arena of research. This economic adaptation has clear implications for social organization within Kumartuli. It explicitly creates and reinforces distinct social categories based on perceived skill level, economic role, and the nature of the artistic product handled:

1. Impoverished Collectors.
2. The "semi-trained" Artisans.
3. The Established Mainstream Artists.

This stratification raises questions. Does this division of labour, represent the emergence of a new, stable social category? How permeable are the boundaries between these groups? Although everyone is able to earn their living but will the marginalized section ever get credits for their artistic work?

1.4 The Psychological Burden and Ethical Conflict: Moral Dissonance, Guilt, Fear, and Philosophical Dimensions.

A strange pattern of admission avoidance among some artisans was observed, pointing towards a significant underlying psychological conflict among the artists of this community as moral or ethical dissonance. It can be understood via philosophical frameworks:

- The Core Conflict (Moral/Ethical Dissonance): The dissonance arises from the conflict between the reverence for sacred forms (the kathamo from Durga Puja idols) and the act of transforming them into



'demonic' figures for commercial purposes. This pits religious/moral values against economic/market pressures.

• **Philosophical Dimensions:**

A) Deontology vs. Consequentialism: This conflict reflects a tension between a deontological view (the act of transforming the sacred is inherently wrong, violating a duty of respect) and a consequentialist justification (the practice is acceptable due to positive outcomes like economic benefit for several groups and resource reuse). The reported guilt suggests consequentialist reasoning doesn't fully resolve the deontological unease for some.

B) Sacred vs. Profane: The practice involves a direct, potentially unsettling, negotiation of the boundary between the sacred (the ritually significant kathamo) and the profane (economic necessity, market demands, the 'demonic' figures). The unease likely stems from managing this transgression and the potential symbolic contamination involved.

• **Manifestations:**

a) Reported Guilt: The explicit statements by artists like Mintu Pal and Mala Pal that this practice was "beyond their religious ethics" directly signal towards their moral dissonance and resulting guilt. This guilt appears rooted in the violation of internalized values.

b) Avoidance/Reluctance: The observation that "Numerous artists admit that most of them are part of this recycling process but very few wants to admit about it," especially regarding demonic figures, presents the attempts to reduce the psychological discomfort. This avoidance might also stem from shame and the fear of social judgment, discussed later.

• The Interplay of Guilt and Fear/Terror: While guilt arises from the value transgression, fear is also intertwined.

1) Fear of Consequences: Artisans might fear social disapproval, loss of reputation, or supernatural retribution, amplifying guilt.

2) Existential Fear (Terror Management Theory): TMT suggests violating sacred boundaries can provoke underlying existential terror related to mortality. Transforming sacred symbols potentially threatens cultural worldviews. The reported guilt can thus be seen partly as a resultant of this deeper fear, a signal of the threat posed to the cultural worldview that buffers mortality awareness. However, the guilt is not reducible only to fear; the violation of moral standards itself remains a primary driver

1.4 Managing the Conflict: Justifications and Behavioral Adaptations

Despite the moral dissonance and associated guilt/fear, the practice persists, indicating effective psychological management:

• Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura): Mechanisms like moral justification (sustainability, economically beneficial for all), euphemistic labelling ("a form of moral disengagement where harmful actions are softened

or sanitized by using different language to reduce the perceived moral intensity of the behavior. For example, stating that untrained artists transforms the kathamo into demonic idols"), advantageous comparison (vs. pollution), diffusion of responsibility across the chain allow participation despite ethical concerns.

- System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji): Participants may defend the system, despite flaws, because it provides economic function and predictability.
- Adaptation via Routinization: Repetitive engagement normalizes the ethically charged act, reducing conflict through habituation. Reuse of DākinīYoginī structures themselves further embeds recycling.

Part 2: Women in a Man's World: Psychosocial Dynamics of Gender, Artistic Expression, and Resilience in Kumartuli.

1.1 History, Gender roles, Artistic expression and Women Artist.

The reference to women as sculptors or artisans is quite rare, historically but it doesn't mean they lacked skill as we can see in exceptional cases of brilliant female artists such as: Halahala, a rich potter woman (6th century BCE); Suna Pathuriani, a highly distinguished female stone sculptor/architect receiving payments equal to male sculptors; the 'Vadhu' (daughter-in-law) of chitrakara Sri Satana who made the Mahoba Tara statue; and evidence of women engaged in temple-building. However, women workers were often involved in small-scale work for petty payment (bharanas/gaunis), like pounding stones/filling floor holes.

1.2 Female artists of Kumartuli and their stories.

Our surveys brought to light, mainly three women artists engaged in the mainstream idol making in Kumartuli – Mala Pal, Chaina Pal and Kakoli Pal. They shared about their individual journey navigating through a majorly male dominated sphere, in the interviews conducted.

Let's look into their stories through a Psychosocial-frameworks-

Case 1: Mala Pal

- Dialogue & Reported Experiences: Mala Pal shared her tough journey. She recalled being "fond of making idols" as a child, but her father, also an artist, "did not allow her in his workshop, as she was a woman". Her journey as 'Silpi Mala Pal' began at age 14 after her father's death in 1985. With the crucial support of her elder brother, Gobindo Pal, she got an opportunity to learn colour theory in Delhi. Since then, she has been engaged in making various idols like Durga, Kali, and Tantric gods as per order, specializing in miniature idols. Her art reached beyond the local market, with exports throughout the globe. She manages both her household and workshop, and though lacking a large, well-furnished workshop compared to some male sculptors, her awards signify her success. Concerned about the future of the craft, noting that "future generations of Kumartuli artists are not taking that much interest in this profession" (with only 20% following family tradition according to Sinha), she established a school ("Pathshala") teaching sculpting to around 150 students with no age limit. She observed that although male students initially dominated, "the number of female students is gradually increasing". She is now a prominent member of the KumartuliMrit Silpi Samiti.



- **Psychosocial Interpretation:** Mala Pal's trajectory exemplifies a blend of intrinsic motivation (her early fondness for the craft) and necessity (father's death driving her entry). Her success suggests high achievement motivation, facilitated significantly by crucial social support (her brother). Her perception appears integrative, encompassing artistic craft, business acumen (exports), and generativity (commitment to teaching the next generation). Her artistic expression shows clear agency, specializing in miniatures while also creating traditional forms, thus blending tradition and innovation. Her story highlights how passion, opportunity (even if delayed and requiring external support), and developed self-efficacy (built through mastery experiences like awards, exports, running a school) can enable individuals to overcome significant gender-based barriers. Her membership in the artists' committee signifies achieved status and potential minority influence.

Case 2: Chaina Pal

- **Dialogue & Reported Experiences:** Chaina Pal's story shares similarities. Her father, Hemanta Pal, was also "against of her passion of making idols". After his death, she quit school and took over management of his studio. Now in her mid-forties, she leads a team of about 12 people and has received the 'RajyapalPuraskar' for her work. She reported generally managing her dual responsibilities (workshop and household) smoothly. However, she described intense pressure "at the time of heavy orders and deadlines before Durga Puja". During these periods, dedicating the majority of her time to the workshop meant "The role of being an artist, a mother and housewife has to face tensions to meet the expectations of the family". She recounted how family members "have to cook for their own and do all the household work without Chaina, and this leads to day-to-day conflicts and increasing tensions". Initially, these conflicts "affect her emotionally," but gradually, she "understood how to work like a 'Machine'".

- **Psychological Interpretation:** Chaina Pal's motivation seems strongly driven by necessity (taking over the family studio after her father's death) and role fulfillment. Her perception appears dominated by the demands of the business and the significant work-life conflict, particularly during peak season. Her competence is evident (awards, managing a team). However, her reported coping strategy - learning to work "like a 'Machine'" - is psychologically significant. This likely represents a form of emotional regulation or even dissociation, adopted to manage the overwhelming stress and emotional labor involved in navigating intense professional demands alongside family conflicts and expectations. While potentially effective for productivity under pressure, this strategy raises concerns about its long-term psychological cost, potentially leading to burnout, diminished intrinsic artistic satisfaction, and emotional detachment. Her experience vividly illustrates Hochschild's concept of emotional labour in managing both client/work demands and family tensions. Arlie Hochschild coined the term "emotional labor" to describe the work of managing one's own emotions, particularly those that are required to be displayed in the workplace. It refers to the effort needed to regulate feelings in order to present a specific emotional display to customers, colleagues, or clients, often as part of a job requirement. This can involve deep acting (changing one's inner feelings) or surface acting (controlling outward emotional expressions). We can thereby understand to some extent, what she meant by, working as a 'machine'.

Case 3: Arati Pal

- **Dialogue & Reported Experiences:** Arati Pal shared a story marked by explicit bias and struggle for legitimacy. Circumstances pushed her into the profession after widowhood. Initially, despite being trained, she recalled how first her father, and then her husband, "distanced her from clients and sent her to do the less important 'clay structuration work'," while they handled clients themselves. This reflects the preconceived

notion "that women couldn't handle big orders or communicate with the clients". After her husband's death, she took over the workshop. Due to the lack of male members, she faced "a lot of issues related to handling the clients". She specifically had to face "difficulties in communicating with customers with sceptical temperaments and bargaining". She also endured "socially awkward situations and humiliation at the initial phase of her work".

- **Psychological Interpretation:** Arati Pal's entry was driven by necessity following widowhood. Her experience starkly highlights the impact of gender stereotyping and gatekeeping within the family itself, limiting her initial exposure and role. Her subsequent struggle upon taking over the workshop exemplifies the challenges faced when confronting explicit bias and societal skepticism directly. The "humiliation" she endured points to the powerful role of shame used as a social control mechanism to enforce gender roles, likely inducing significant fear and anxiety (terror). Her perception was initially shaped by these social challenges. Her professional identity had to be forged through a difficult struggle for legitimacy. Her case underscores the immense psychological effort and resilience required when denied initial opportunity and forced to prove competence against entrenched prejudice. Her experiences are a clear example of navigating negative attributions and potential stereotype threat, and the heavy emotional labor involved in managing difficult client interactions under conditions of scrutiny and skepticism.

These individual stories, while unique, collectively illustrate how pervasive gendered structures within Kumartuli shape motivations, filter perceptions of artistic practice, and necessitate distinct psychological adaptations and coping strategies for women artisans.

1.3 Gender roles and Social control mechanisms exerted by society.

Women entering the mainstream violates societal expectations, triggering social control mechanisms:

- **Gatekeeping:** Active discouragement by male family members. Mala Pal's father didn't allow her in his workshop; Chaina Pal's father Hemanta Pal was against her passion. Experienced male artists today still resist female members learning in workshops. Women often allowed only in emergencies (workload, death of male member).
- **Stereotyping:** Preconceived notions about women's capabilities (handling business/demanding work). Arati Pal faced notions that women couldn't handle big orders or clients.
- **Resource Inequality and Devaluation:** Struggles for recognition, financial support (Kakoli failed to get government help). Work framed as domestic extension, not 'professional'. Women often work in peripheral spaces, less visible and valued.

1.4 Emotional costs of navigating bias: Countering social control mechanisms.

Operating within this biased environment imposes emotional burdens, including those related to shame and fear.

- Attribution Theory (Weiner) and Bias: Gender bias likely shapes performance attributions. Women's failures risk internal attribution by others, successes risk externalization, undermining perceived competence. How women counter these biases needs study. Arati Pal's struggle exemplifies establishing competence against bias.
- Stereotype Threat (Steele & Aronson): Documented scepticism creates conditions for stereotype threat, where awareness of negative stereotypes induces anxiety, potentially impairing performance. Arati Pal's initial "socially awkward situations and humiliation" could be partly understood this way.
- Internalized Limitations: Persistent exposure carries risk of internalizing limitations, affecting aspirations, although success stories like these actively counter such aspects resilience. Irrespective, further assessment needed.

1.5 Emotional Labor, Coping Strategies, and Psychological Well-being.

Dual demands, impose burdens:

- Work-Life Conflict & Chronic Stress: Puja season intensifies conflict and stress. Although Long-term impacts need further study. Chaina Pal conveys that she directs her major focus on her art during puja season due to the hefty market demands, dedicating majority time to workshop but this leads to tension with family expectations (members have to do chores themselves), causing day-to-day conflicts.
- Emotional Labor theory (Hochschild): Women continuously manage emotions navigating bias, client demands (artistic expectations), family needs (caregiving and household duties). Such multi-tasking, risks burnout. Chakraborty & Mridha (scholarly works) see it both as empowerment (opportunity to first hand deal with customers) and exploitation (extra stress and burden).
- Coping Mechanisms and Their Costs: "Machine" strategy (as told by Chaina Pal) signifies adaptation and we can infer that they use their work as a measure of escapism from their day to day conflicts. But escaping isn't resolving their issues and hence we can also see it as a coping mechanism used by the female artist in order to deal with their stress.

Although understanding the full range of impact and evaluating long-term effectiveness or costs is essential.

Operating against significant adversity, Kumartuli's successful women artisans demonstrate remarkable resilience, adapting positively and building crucial self-efficacy through their achievements. This success offers potential for minority influence to gradually shift community norms, although progress confronts the underlying Patriarchal Irony and Cultural Dissonance inherent in venerating female deities while restricting female creators – a contradiction demanding further exploration.

Conclusion: Reconciling Paradox in Kumartuli's Future

Kumartuli presents a study in paradox: a place where divine forms emerge from clay, while the remnants of past gods fuel an economy fraught with moral dissonance. This analysis, integrating Sreemanti Laha's ethnographic survey with psychosocial insights from Priyanka Roy, reveals artisans navigating conflicts



between sacred values and survival, evidenced by guilt, fear, and complex social stratification arising from the Kathamo recycling chain. Simultaneously, it exposes the struggle of women artisans against a patriarchal structure that restricts them through bias and shame, even as they demonstrate remarkable resilience and agency. The future sustainability of this vital tradition demands more than economic or ecological focus; it requires confronting these deep-seated psychological and ethical tensions—the internal conflicts, coping mechanisms, and impacts of gender inequality. Only by addressing the human dimensions of guilt, fear, and shame, and fostering genuine social equity and psychological well-being, can Kumartuli hope to reconcile its paradoxes and ensure the integrity of both its art and its community. Ultimately, the goddess's journey reflects the complex human journeys of her creators.

References:

- Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3(3), 193–209.
- Basham, A. L. (1951). *History and doctrines of the Ājīvikas: A vanished Indian religion*. Luzac. (Potential source for context on Halahala, the potter woman associated with the Ajivika sect founder.
- Bentham, J. (1907). *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*. Clarendon Press. (Original work published 1789)
- Chakraborty, Snigdha and Mridha, Sikta.(2024). Exploring Gender Dynamics in Idol Making: Visualising Approach to Identity Formation among Female Idolmakers of Kumartuli through Intersection of Sexual Division of Labour and Emotional Labor. *Studies in Indian Sociology*,1(2), Permanent Blue (URL: <http://www.pbjournals.com/siis> Publisher of Open Access Journals),91-116.
- Eliade, M. (1959). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Harcourt, Brace & World. (Original work published 1957)
- Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India, Vol. XII*. Superintendent Government Printing, India. (Reference for the Gangadhar Stone Inscription)
- Greenberg, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Solomon, S. (1986). The causes and consequences of a need for self-esteem: A terror management theory. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *Public self and private self* (pp. 189–212).
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.
- Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 33(1), 1–27.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* (M. Gregor, Trans. & Ed.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1785)
- LañkāvatāraSūtra*. (n.d.). (D. T. Suzuki, Trans.). Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published ca. 4th century CE).
- Mill, J. S. (2002). *Utilitarianism* (G. Sher, Ed.; 2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Misra, R.N. (2009). *Silpa in Indian Tradition*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study & Aryan Books International, pp. 116-117.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797–811.

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548–573.

Interviews: Personal interviews (with Samir Pal, Mala Pal, Chaina Pal, Arati Pal, Kakoli Pal, Chakraborty & Mridha) are primary data.

PLATES



PIC 1: ARTIST SAMIR PAL AT HIS WORKSHOP



PIC 2: COLLECTED IMMERSED SARASWATI IDOL STRUCTURE



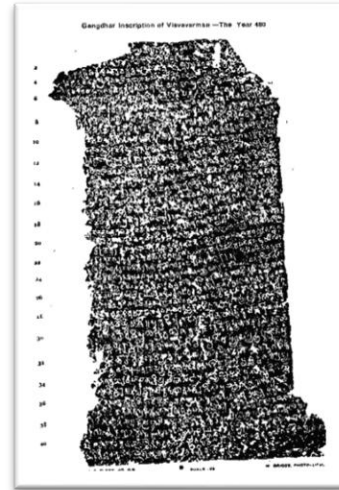
PIC 3: SARASWATI IMMERSSED STRAW STRUCTURE



PIC 4 : OLD STRAW STRUCTURE RECYCLED TO SHIVA-DURGA

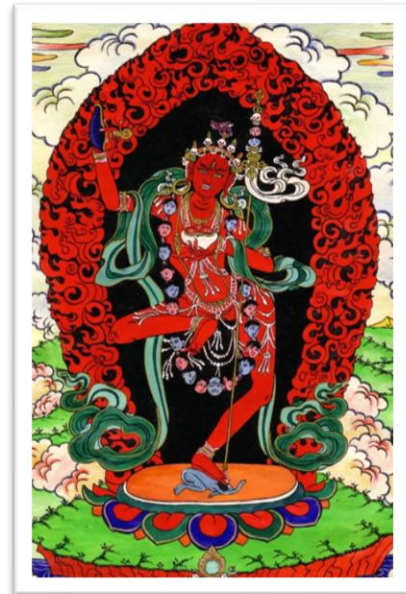


PIC 5: LEARNING ABOUT RECYCLING PROCESS OF STRUCTURES



PIC 6 : GANGADHAR STONE INSCRIPTION OF VISVAVARMAN

Fleet, J.F. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.3



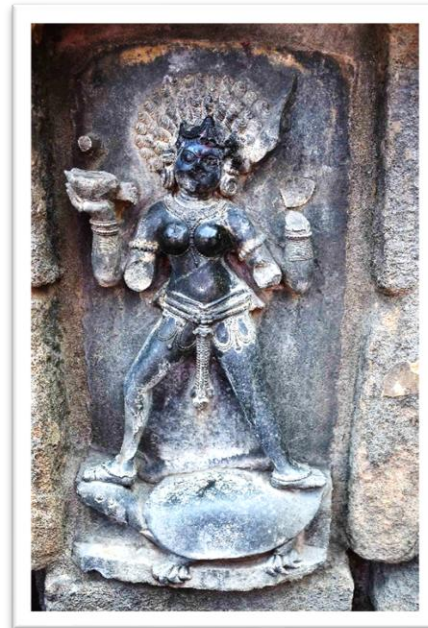
Pic 7 & 8: Different forms of Ḍākinī from ancient texts

Courtesy: [s-11600.jpg \(700x1040\)](#) & [01-679x1024.jpg \(629x949\)](#)



PIC 9: YOGINĪ FROM
 CHAUSATHYOGINĪ TEMPLE,
 ORISSA

Courtesy: warrrior-Yogini-at-chausanti-64-Yogini-temple-hirapur-orissa-india-circa-800ad-david-wells.jpg
 (612x900)



PIC 10: YAMUNA YOGINĪ STATUE

Courtesy: Yogini_Yamuna.JPG (1782x2672)



PIC 11: MAHOBA TARA STATUE MADE BY A
 WOMAN ARTIST, THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW OF
 CHITRAKARA SATANA

Courtesy: [Fig_166_KhadiravaniTara_\(Mahoba\)_The_Indian_Buddhist_Iconography.pdf](http://Fig_166_KhadiravaniTara_(Mahoba)_The_Indian_Buddhist_Iconography.pdf)



PIC12: ARTIST MALA PAL MAKING HER FAMOUS MINIATURE
 DURGA



PIC 13: TANTRIC GODS MADE BY MALA PAL



PIC 14: TERRACOTTA JEWELLERY TO EXPORT BY MALA PAL



PIC 15: SCULPTING SCHOOL, RUN BY MALA PAL



PIC 16: GODDESS KALI, PAINTED BY A SCULPTING STUDENT



PIC 17: A SENIOR AND A JUNIOR STUDENT OF MALA PAL'S SCHOOL



PIC 18: ONE OF THE PRESENT AUTHOR AT KUMARTULI



The Discernible Breakthrough In Bengali Cinema After Independence In 1947: An Analysis In Retrospect

Saptarshi Chakraborty

Faculty, Department of History SACT - I Bangabasi Morning College

Email saptt87@gmail.com ORCID ID: [0009-0004-8374-2874](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8374-2874)

The present paper seeks to establish that it was only after India's Independence in 1947 that Bengali cinema entered an altogether new era of moving into uncharted waters, having made a significant departure from its earlier nature and trends that prevailed during its existence over a total span of 28 years prior to 1947. Further more it would like to argue that this departure was largely engineered by the aftermath of the partition that was incidentally intertwined with India's Independence. Since 1919 when Bengali cinema was born, it was characterized by ingredients within confines of only mythological and devotional plots or classic novels and stories/comedies of Bengali literature in general. But since our Independence in 1947, paradigm shifts in emphasis and features of Bengali cinema became discernible. Of particular significance, it was the dynamics of the post-Independence West Bengal's socio-economic challenges and pressures posed by the partition, which brought in its wake prominently new waves of widening thoughts strong enough to induce these paradigm shifts of Bengali cinema in its contents, emphasis and presentation. Against this backdrop, the present paper makes a humble attempt to articulate and analyze the various aspects of the post-Independence changes in Bengali film making. The analysis is completed in terms of three distinct sections. Section One deals with the gravity of the dismal situation in West Bengal that followed the refugee influx since 1947 and focuses on the resulting socio-economic atmosphere inducing new trends in Bengali literature, drama and music in West Bengal, which, in turn, left a powerful reflection on Bengali cinema. Section Two takes up the task to probe into identifying the variety of the aspects relating to the new trends and shifts noticed in Bengali film making during the first two decades of Independence. Section Three, finally, sums up the important findings and presents the concluding observations.

I

Since the paper rests on the hypothesis that social upheavals and turmoils which may arise from major political events no less than the partition of a country can exert a strong and long-term influence on its socio-cultural aspects like literature, drama, music and film making, the starting point of our probe into the stated task is necessarily the context of India's partition and its far-reaching repercussions. The political event of India's Independence in 1947, intertwined with her accompanying partition unfortunately inflicted on her rather with a mysterious abruptness by a hostile and quitting foreign ruler, taking full advantage of the conflicting urges and views of the freedom fighting leaders of undivided India on key issues and their last-minute haste amidst ongoing communal riots prior to the abnegation of political power by the British in 1947 after a two-hundred-year-long colonial rule here, undoubtedly generated a grisly outbreak of an appalling atmosphere in the country. The result that ensued proved to be quite trying and challenging for India, especially for her domestic economy. The challenges were embodied in a substantial loss of territory along with the resulting loss of minerals possessing regions in the western parts along with a massive loss of jute growing areas in the east, over and above an exceedingly large influx of refugees from both sides. The latter turned to be ghoulish with its resulting pressure on food situation and an inevitable incidence of increased unemployment. However, in particular, for the newborn state of West Bengal, emerging as an essential outcome of the partition, it entailed a direct and immediate brunt with even tougher and more menacing challenges on her society and economy, with threats arising from a chain of overawing range of



newly emerging perils and lurid circumstances to combat. As gruesome consequences, a mammoth influx of refugees in West Bengal brought in its wake untold misery and woes for the destitute refugees plunged abruptly into inordinate anxiety in an unknown land coupled with a distressing state of living and food availability, health, housing and sanitation, resulting in their increased vulnerability to serious diseases, save their immediate access to education or other minimum amenities of human existence. A vast number of the able individuals among these helpless refugees having failed to eke out a living quickly became a matter of concern as a potential threat of social imbalances. It thus changed the very nature of the region's sociological fabric in a measure enough to unsettle the even keel of the society and the socio-cultural harmony. In this context, one can hardly ignore to note a contemporary and significantly powerful development that arose as a sequel to the aforesaid adverse repercussions on West Bengal's society at large. This emerging aspect became markedly discernible in the form of certain prominently new cultural trends that began to surface in West Bengal. These trends were sharply reflected as changes and shifts in the nature and emphasis of Bengali literature, drama and music with a concomitant influence and sharp reflection on Bengali cinema during the 1950s and 1960s. It is this backdrop, against which the present paper seeks to articulate and analyse the post-Independence changes in Bengali cinema in particular.

As is well known, the partition had actually occurred amidst an already prevalent vicious atmosphere characterized by tensions of the freedom struggle coupled with frequent communal riots, over and above a variety of disastrous economic consequences of the Second World War, including acute food shortage, inflation and unemployment. The ills had already started being unleashed by this War upon contemporary India under British colonial rule and on many other densely populated capital-poor countries in Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia, many of them in Africa having remained as colonies of major European powers since the beginning of Neo Imperialism in 1869 onward. All of these colonies including India, after having attained Independence from the prolonged exploitation of their respective colonial masters in the late 1940s in a quick succession, and constituting what is called the Third World countries, faced the immediate urgency of fighting poverty. Thus, the apparent notoriety that the partition actually entailed for India in general and West Bengal in particular was several fold the notoriety that would have otherwise appeared in the absolute absence of the Second World War altogether. With this background, the brunt of refugee influx was more heavily felt in West Bengal for valid reasons amply explained in this paper. While the influx to the newborn Indian state of Punjab happened to be mostly a one-time event of 1947 or at the best continued for another year, the refugee influx into West Bengal continued for years to roll on regularly for as long as two decades and even beyond. During the first 23 years of the partition up to 1970, there was an exodus of 52.83 lakhs people from East Pakistan to India as refugees. Since the government was not at all in any kind of preparedness whatsoever for this suddenly occurring series of refugee influx and that too in continuous waves of massive magnitudes, the distress of the refugees in West Bengal was magnified several folds. These uprooted people badly in need of shelters in West Bengal began to settle wherever they found it possible to do, and in reality they mostly settled in vested lands, including even in swamplands. A small section was rehabilitated to Dandakaranya in Chattisgarh, but the bulk remained in West Bengal.

It must not be forgotten that this abrupt and an alarmingly colossal influx of destitute refugees from the newly created foreign land of East Pakistan occurred under frightfully compulsive circumstances. They along with their families, children and near ones including many sick members and pregnant mothers in the families left their home and other immovables in bare hands and in one attire in an utterly penniless condition, and many people even fled leaving their government or private jobs behind. This dire situation warranted their instant rehabilitation. By the same token, the refugee influx aggravated the State's already prevailing food crisis of a chronic nature. The calamity was heightened by a worsening of the region's housing and sanitation problems of the period in its urban and suburban areas and an emerging pressure of

disbalance on the State's medical infrastructure. The increased misery and rampant joblessness among the newly settled refugees here alongside a general scarcity all around was coupled with a whole host of other social ills, imbalances and restlessness that were incidentally associated with the dreary scenario obtaining. Thus the overall impact of the partition in West Bengal was undoubtedly multidimensional. The hardship became magnified by the jobless refugees all around. The onset of these new shocks brought in its wake marked changes and shifts in emphasis and contents in Bengali cinema by way of inducting far-reaching changes in the socio-cultural scenario in West Bengal including, in particular, in the arenas of education, literature, music and songs. The changes in literature, as analysed in the later parts of the following section, had a specially mighty influence.

II

The post-Independence departure of Bengali cinema during the 1950s and the 1960s becomes unmistakably clear once we look back at the nature of Bengali cinema during the four decades prior to the country's Independence in 1947. As is well known, Bengali cinema began its journey in the form of silent films that had total absence of any sound. As such, the cast had to rely mostly on physical expressions as there was no scope for any audible talk. This silent era of Bengali cinema lasted for nearly two decades up to 1931, mainly remaining concerned with production of devotional films, comedies and films based on classics of Bengali literature. Although at the very beginning of this silent phase, Bengali cinema turned out only documentaries and short films, it saw in November 1919 the appearance of the first silent feature film in Bengali, namely, *Bilwamangal*, produced by Jamshedji Framji Madan of the Madan Theatre Company and directed by Rustomji Dhotiwala. The film, based on the medieval Bhakti poet Bilwamangal, was essentially devotional in character. Incidentally, and curiously enough to ponder, it was a time when Gandhiji, having already attained popularity as a rising star in the stage of Indian politics after his Jalianwalabagh protests preceded by his three earlier Satyagrahas at Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda and after his active support to the then budding Khilafat movement for incorporating the latter in his Non-cooperation movement to follow shortly, was just making his appearance as a significantly prominent national figure in our struggle for independence, that Bengali cinema saw the birth of its first silent feature film *Bilwamangal*.

However, as already stated, the trend of silent drama films continued for Bengali cinema throughout the 1920s as well. The film *BiletPherat* by DhirendranathGanguly, the father of Bengali cinema, was a Bengali comedy feature film released in 1921. Incidentally, many of the silent Bengali films of the 1920s were drawn from the Bengali classics including short stories, comedies and love stories. To name a few, there were cinemas like *Andhare Alo* of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, *Balidan* based on the play 'Bisarjan' and *Giribala* based on the short story 'Manbhanjan' of Rabindranath Tagore. The frontline actors and actresses of the 1920s were Pramathesh Barua, Kanan Devi, Sisir Bhaduri, Fatma Begum, Dhirendra Nath Ganguly, Sushilabala, Dhiraj Bhattacharya and Tinkari Chakraborty.

Coming to 1931, we see there was another Bengali comedy silent film *Jamai Babu* produced by Kalipada Das. However, the 1930s witnessed the attainment of a milestone in Bengali cinema with the appearance of the first Bengali talkie film *Jamai Shashthi* in 1931. Its director was Amar Choudhury. But in spite of being the first Bengali talkie film, it lacked the status of a feature film because it was merely a short film. The audience had to wait till December 1931 to witness the first appearance of a talkie feature film in Bengali cinema under the title *Dena Paona*. This pioneering Bengali talkie feature film, directed by Prem Kumar Atarhi, was based on Saratchandra's classic creation 'Dena Paona'. The film was revolutionary for Bengali cinema as it marked the beginning of synchronised sound recording that enabled the hitherto unable cinema audience to



henceforth both listen and watch the acting. However, the Bengali cinema of the 1930s continued to hover around mythological and devotional literature and the Bengali classics of Bankimchandra, Tagore and Saratchandra. Some of the devotional films of this decade were *Rajrani Meera*, *Vidyapati* and *Chandidas*. The noted films of the 1930s based on traditional Bengali literature included *Kapal Kundala*, *Gora*, *Chokher Bali*, *Palli Samaj*, *Devdas* and *Grihadaha*. The eminent directors of the decade were Pramathesh Barua and Debaki Bose. Another luminary in the sphere of Bengali cinema of this period was Mukul Bose who brought about revolutionary changes in the art of sound recording in Bengali film. The names of K.L. Saigal and Kanan Devi deserve a special mention as frontline film singers of the decade. Above all, talented musicians and singers including Pankaj Mullick, Rai Chand Boral and Krishna Chandra Dey took the Bengali cinema of the 1930s to greater heights. Playback singing marked a significant addition to Bengali cinema achieved by Nitin Bose in his film *Bhagya Chakra* in 1935. His other creations included *Didi* in 1937, *Jiban Maran* in 1938 and *Deshar Mati* in 1938. The feature film *Bidyapati* by Debaki Bose in 1937 turned gorgeous with a stunning performance of its lead actress Kanan Devi. Of significance, K.L. Saigal emerged as a superstar singer with big hits like *Didi* and *Street Singer* (1940). The leading cinema stars of the 1930s were Pramathesh Barua, Kanan Devi, Ahindra Choudhuri, Durgadas Bannerjee, Jahar Ganguly, Chhabi Biswas, Pahari Sanyal, Chhaya Devi, Molina Devi, Tinkari Chakrabarti, Bhanu Bandopadhyay and Chandrati Devi.

The decade of the 1940s brought about a change in the style of acting in Bengali cinema, showing a gradual shift from theatrical to cinematic art. It goes without saying that the Calcutta streets since the onset of the decade of the 1940s began to constitute frequent scenes of commotion and insurrection with a continuous flow of national protests like the Quit India Movement of 1942 as part of the freedom struggle. Apart from the growing unrest of the freedom struggle, a series of luring and sulky developments in Bengal, like the distressing famine in 1943, the protests against the arrest of the INA personnel and the Calcutta riots in 1946 began to leave some perceptible impact on the contents of the Bengali films produced in the 1940s. There was a clear evidence of departure from the earlier films based on devotional themes and elements of traditional literature. However, most of the filmstars of the 30s continued in the 40s as well, with the significant addition of some new talents including Asit Baran, Jahar Roy and Uttam Kumar. Uttam Kumar first appeared in Bengali cinema in Nitin Bose's *Drishtidan* (1948), though he met with success much later since 1952 with his appearance in Nirmal Dey's film *Basu Paribar*. However, the fact remains that Bengali cinema of the 1940s started moving towards a new direction of social realism. The film *Doctor* (1940) by Phani Majumdar and Subodh Mitra, *Shesh Uttar* (1942) by Pramathesh Barua and next *Udayer Pathe* (1944) by Bimal Roy were significant pathfinders in this direction. The films in general began to be more concerned with promoting greater awareness among the public regarding the burning issues of the society, economy and polity.

But coming to 1947, the Bengali cinema underwent sea changes under the influence of the socio-economic shocks of the partition that accompanied Independence. From this period onward, Bengali cinema was influenced by three related factors: first, the socio-economic shocks of the partition; secondly, new trends in post-partition Bengali literature including drama; and, thirdly, a parallel cinema movement under Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha coupled with a simultaneous twist in romantic films mainly nourished by the lead pair of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen, and some other talented actors and actresses, as analysed below in steps.

First of all, the challenges and shocks yielded by the partition as analysed already impacted the contemporary Bengali literature which in turn proved to be a powerful influencing factor on the Bengali cinema of the next two decades. The partition brought in its wake marked changes and shifts in the socio-

cultural scenario of West Bengal including, in particular, in the arenas of education, literature, music and songs. Contemporary Bengali literature began to exert a strong influence on Bengali cinema of the time by way of capturing in a big way the socio-cultural and political background of the time. Quite expectedly, post Independence Bengali cinema derived great inspiration from the contemporary Bengali literature. During this period, the Bengali novels and modern poetry underwent a new mould. The major contents of the Bengali novels after the partition were social realism of the post-partition narratives focusing on the untold miseries of the refugees, feminist thoughts and themes, issues of abject poverty and distress of the marginalised groups. There was an unmistakably discernible stamp of leftist perceptions and thoughts in many of the contemporary novels. The noted Bengali writers and novelists of the post-partition period of the 1950s and the 1960s were Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Ashapurna Devi and Buddhadev Bose. Other heavyweights in the realm of Bengali novels of the post-partition era were Sunil Gangopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar, Mahasweta Devi, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay and Samaresh Basu. Of great significance, Bengali drama in its theatrical form also changed greatly with the origin of what came to be called group theatre led by luminaries like Sombhu Mitra, Tripti Mitra, Utpal Dutta and later Rudraprasad Sengupta. It was rather a movement that became instrumental in upholding social realism by way of using the plays as means to address the various socio-political issues of the time. Presence of social realism was also noticed in Bengali commercial theatre. Moreover, the newly emerging perspectives and thoughts in this period were equally reflected in the Bengali poems as well. The poems of this era reflected on themes including the trauma of displacement, loss of identity, and the pain of leaving homeland. The noted poets of the period were Sukanta Bhattacharya, Bishnu Dey, Jibanananda Das, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Shankha Ghosh, Sudhindranath Dutta, Sunil Gangopadhyay and Nirendra Nath Chakrabarti. The moot point that must not be missed out in this connection is that Bengali cinema from the very beginning of this era received rich insights from the emerging trends in post-partition Bengali culture. As a matter of fact, Bengali cinema of the 1950s and the 1960s displayed a silent but powerful interaction with Bengali literature including its novels, essays, dramas and poems. In some way or other and by no less amount, it had also a silent interaction with the contemporary Bengali theatre as well, because a good number of actors and actresses in both fields were glaringly common.

It is now amply clear from the preceding analysis that the partition of 1947 came to occupy a place of special significance as a divider in Bengali culture. There were major developments in the cultural atmosphere that went a long way in influencing the post-partition Bengali cinema. Incidentally, the post-Independence Calcutta saw the appearance of a group of Bengali intellectuals led by Satyajit Ray and some of his friends including Bansi Chandra Gupta and Chidananda Dasgupta, whose serious endeavour led to the formation of the The Calcutta Film Society in October 1947. Inspired by the cine clubs of Paris, it aimed at producing goods films under what was called New Wave Cinema. It also wanted to promote a wider and healthier viewership of good films of both regional and international categories. Incidentally, the process of the departure of Bengali cinema since Independence worked to progress very steadily over the next two decades through the 1950s and 1960s to constitute.

More specifically, the growth of Bengali cinema during this period came in two forms: first, the aforesaid New Wave Cinema, also called the Parallel Cinema Movement emphasizing social issues in the form of production of partition narratives by Nemai Ghosh and Ritwik Ghatak along with art films of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha, on the one hand, and, secondly, a newly emerging variety of commercial films basically hinging on romance and reality aspects of life, as produced under the sincere efforts of talented directors to be elaborated later.

As regards the first form, namely, the Parallel Cinema Movement, it made its beginning in the early 1950s. It deviated significantly from the mainstream commercial cinema hitherto encouraged and came to emphasise the realities of life, social issues and artistic expressions of the details of nature and of humans. The key figures of the Parallel Cinema Movement being Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Tapan Sinha, Ritwik Ghatak and Nemai Ghosh need to be highlighted more elaborately as under.

Satyajit Ray emerged as an astounding figure or rather as a prodigious talent in cinema production. His *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959) constituted a landmark in Bengali cinema and for that matter these carved out a place of pride for Indian cinema in the arena of international cinema. His maiden film, namely, *Pather Panchali* (1955), was a masterpiece that earned him wide international recognition. This was equally well recognised at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956. Satyajit Ray's novelty features were his realistic portrayal of life, character development with finer and delicate details of nature and human characters and his brilliantly innovative use of sound and camera techniques. These things were never seen before in our Bengali cinema up to the 1940s. He had many other immortal creations that include *Jalsaghar* (1958), *Devi* (1960), *TinKanya* (1961), *Kanchenjunga* (1962), *Mahanagar* (1963), *Nayak* (1966), *Chiriakhana* (1967), *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (1969), *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1970), *Seemabaddha* (1971), *Sonar Kella* (1974), *Joi Baba Felunath* (1979), *Ganashatru* (1989), *ShakhaProshakha* (1990) and *Agantuk* (1991). His *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* as an anti war fantasy adventure comedy film which was based on a children story by his grandfather Upendrakishore Raychowdhury had a world-wide reception, earning him a series of national and international film awards. As a sequel to this film, he produced another one, namely, *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980) which was also widely received.

The other prominent cinema personality appearing in the 1950s was Mrinal Sen. He was equally noted for his active participation in the Parallel Cinema Movement. His masterpiece films included *Raat Bhore* (1955), *Neel Akasher Niche* (1959), *Bhuban Shome* (1969), *Interview* (1971), *Kolkata 71* (1972), *Chorus* (1973), *Mrigaya* (1974) and *Ek Din Pratidin* (1976). His films dealt with the complications of daily life of the middle class Bengalees and also focused on the various contemporary social issues including the lives of the deprived and marginalized communities. He laid a special emphasis on the issues of social and political realism of his past and immediate present. For instance, in some of his productions, he upheld vividly the aspects of the Bengal famine of 1943 (*Akaler Sandhane*) and the Naxalite movement (*Kolkata 71*). His contributions to sound and camera innovations were also exemplary.

The other leading luminary of the post-partition Bengali cinema production was Tapan Sinha. He is noted for mixing art and aesthetic design with commercial film. It was undoubtedly a marvellous novelty in Bengali cinema that earned him high commercial success. He explored diverse aspects of human characters in his films where music and camera played a significant role. Moreover, in several films he adapted from Tagore's classics, as he did in *Kabuliwala* (1957), *KshudhitaPashan* (1960) and *Atithi* (1965). This evinced his profound love for the heritage of Bengali literature as well. Apart from the aforesaid three, some of his other noted Bengali films were *Jhinder Bandi* (1961), *Jatugriha* (1964), *Aarohi* (1964), *Galpo Holey Satyi* (1966), *Hatey Bajarey* (1967), *Apanjan* (1968), *Sagina Mahato* (1970), *Ekhoni* (1971), *Harmonium* (1976) and *Banchharamer Bagan* (1980). To many Bengali film critics and lovers, Tapan Sinha is regarded as the only director to blend art and entertainment with exceptional success.

As mentioned earlier briefly, the leading post-partition film makers upholding partition narratives and vividly projecting the woes of the victims as refugees were Nemai Ghosh and Ritwik Ghatak. The film *Chhinnamul* (1950) by Nemai Ghosh was the first Bengali film that focused on the partition of 1947 and

highlighted the distress of a group of farmers who were forced to leave their homeland in East Bengal to settle in West Bengal after the partition. It was a film based on a book authored by Swarnakamal Bhattacharya and was starred by Gangapada Basu, Ritwik Ghatak and Shova Sen. The film highly impressed a Russian film director who arranged for showing the film in as many as 188 theatres in Soviet Russia. The other Bengali film director emphasising post-partition narratives and contemporary socio-political realities with his unique cinematic artistry was Ritwik Ghatak. Three of his classics delving into the painful consequences of the partition are *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961) and *Subarnarekha* (1962, released in 1965), which are collectively known as his Partition Trilogy. Some other notable films of Ritwik Ghatak are *Nagarik* (1952), *Ajantrik* (1958), *Bari ThekePaliye* (1959), *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973) and *Jukti Takko ArGappo* (1974).

At the other extreme, there were the well-known commercial films of the 1950s and the 1960s. Although a majority of these films were romantic films aimed at entertainment of the mass in a big way, these films also touched upon the varied aspects of the ups and downs and the struggles of life. In short these films focused on the complexities of human characters, and on the possible hurdles in relationships among humans in general and the challenges in romance in particular. The middle class Bengalees at large and those suffering the wrath of the partition of 1947 in particular and especially the women folk in these groups loved to forget about the hard reality of the daily hazards of family problems and crisis by way of spending a couple of hours in the afternoon to remain absorbed in the newly emerging romantic films of the 1950s and 1960s. These films were more often than not based on a rich reserve of Bengali novels of the period. The romantic films starred by the lead pair of the age, namely, Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen came to win the minds of the audience of Bengali cinema from the very first such film, namely, *Sare Chuattar* (1953) down to *Nabarag* (1971). The Uttam-Suchitra films in general had romantic storylines, often displaying a wide range of emotions from tenderness and joy to heartbreaking despair within the constraints of societal rigidities and complexities of societal expectations. Some of the marvellously sensational films of this glamorous pair were *Sharey Chuattar* (1953), *Agni Pariksha* (1954), *Shap Mochan* (1955), *Sagarika* (1956), *Chandranath* (1957), *Harano Sur* (1957), *PatheyHolo Deri* (1957), *Rajlakshmi O Sreekanta* (1958), *Indrani* (1958), *Chaoa Paoa* (1959), *Deep Jweley Jai* (1959), *Saptapadi* (1961), *Bipasha* (1962), *Uttar Phalguni* (1963), *Sat Pake Bandha* (1963), *Grihadaha* (1967), *Kamallata* (1969) and *Nabarag* (1971). Other notable commercial and entertainment films of the 1950s and 1960s, to name a few, were *Adarsha Hindu Hotel*, *Basu Paribar*, *Bhanu Pelo Lottery*, *Parashpathar*, *Nilachale Mahaprabhu*, *Bicharak*, *Datta*, *Ekti Rat*, *Hanabari*, *Indranath-Sreekanta-O-Annadadidi*, *JamalayeJibanta Manush*, *Sabar Uparey*, *Trijama*, *Badsha*, *Lukochuri*, *Maraner Pare*, *Nastaneer*, *Saheb Bibi Golam*, *Shankar Narayan Bank*, *Deya Neya*, *Antony Firingi*, *Chowranghee*, *Nayak*, and *Sanyasi Raja*. The directors of these romantic and commercial films were the Agradoot group, Modhu Bose, Ajay Kar, Bimal Roy, Arabinda Mukhopadhyay, Tarun Majumdar, Salin Sen, Dinen Gupta, Nabendu Ghosh, Asit Sen, Nabyendu Chatterjee and the Agragami group led by Nisith Banerjea. As regards the actors and actresses of the era, the names of Uttam Kumar, Suchitra Sen and Soumitra Chattopadhyay were the uppermost. But it must be admitted that a host of other talents also enriched Bengali cinema of this period in a big way. Among these renowned actors were Chhabi Biswas, Tulsi Chakraborty, Gangapada Basu, Pahari Sanyal, Bikash Roy, Biswajit Chattopadhyay, Tarun Kumar, Basanta Chowdhury, Anil Chatterjee, Kali Banerjee, Kamal Mitra and Utpal Dutta. It would be a grave error in this context to omit the names of some other figures of genius like Bhanu Bandyopadhyay, Anup Kumar, Manu Mukherjee, Satya Banerjee, Satya Bandyopadhyay, Kamu Mukherjee, Nimu Bhowmick, Haradhan Bannerjee, Haridhan Mukherjee, Jahar Roy, Rabi Ghosh, Mithun Chakraborty, Ranjit Mallick and Chinmay Roy. The leading actresses of the period in reference included Sabitri Chattopadhyay, Sumitra Devi, Madhabi Mukherjee, Arundhuti Devi, Kajal Gupta,

Molina Devi, Chhaya Devi, Geeta Dey, Sandhya Devi, Sandhya Roy, Sharmila Tagore and Supriya Chattopadhyay. Some other illustrious cinema talents of the age were Kaberi Bose, Lily Chakraborty, Tanuja Samartha, Sumita Sanyal, Anjana Bhowmick, Nandini Maliya, Aparna Sen, Sumitra Mukhopadhyay and Mousumi Chattopadhyay.

III

Bengali cinema was born in the 1910s as short films in mute form and since 1919 it began its humble beginning as mute feature films. It progressed throughout the 1920s as mute feature films, remaining confined within mythological/devotional plots and some within the classics of Bengali literature. The 1930s however saw an important leap in that the mute films came to be replaced by talkies for the first time in 1931. But despite that fact that 1930s became more chequered with unprecedented unrest of the Civil Disobedience Movement and some major ups and downs in the country's freedom struggle, the films of the 30s continued to remain hovering around the devotional and classical contents alone, with minor exceptions of occasional comedies. Some change of emphasis in contents of the Bengali films became noticeable for the first time in the more turbulent 1940s. But the change became phenomenal or rather revolutionary only since the country's Independence in 1947. There is no gainsaying the fact that the distressing post-partition economic atmosphere arising from the refugee influx and the concomitant socio-cultural changes provided a notably powerful background to induce remarkably new trends in Bengali literature and culture. This had, in turn, led to a massive impact on the cinema of post Independence West Bengal, especially during the first 25 years of the Independence, as analysed above. Bengali cinema during the period underwent a series of far-reaching changes in contents, emphasis, perspectives and technology. The changes were so qualitative and so fundamental that nothing short of the term revolution can adequately describe the phenomenon. It is for this reason that Bengali cinema since Independence up to the mid-1970s is called the Golden era of Bengali cinema. It touched upon every walk of life of the Bengalees belonging to all age groups and thereby it was able to reach the inner core of the mind of a wider audience. The changes are considered highly important as those left a powerful impact on the soul and spirit of the Bengalees at large and exerted a marked influence both on their social life and on their personal lives and attitudes. It thus invariably left a mighty impression on them as individuals belonging to all spheres of life, resulting in a mutually interactive dynamics that essentially worked on the society in a harmonious way.

References

- Banerjee, Sumita(2023), *Modernities and the Popular Melodrama: The Suchitra-Uttam Yug in Bengali Cinema*, , Kolkata: Orient BlackSwan.
- Chandra Bipan, Mukherjee Mridula, Mukherjee Aditya(2000) *India After Independence: 1947 - 2000*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Chowdhury, Maitreyee B.(2013) *Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen - Bengali Cinema's First Couple*,, New Delhi: Om Books International.
- Dasgupta, Dhiman, (2019)
- Cinemas Aaw Aa Kaw Khaw*, Kolkata:Banishilpa.
- Gooptu, Sharmistha (2011)*Bengali Cinema: 'An Other Nation'*, Routledge (Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series).
- Nag, Amitava, (2021),*The Cinema of Tapan Sinha: An Introduction*,New Delhi: Om Books International.



Sarkar, Sayan, (2024) *Celluloid Chronicles: A Comprehensive History of Bengali Cinema with a Little Dash of World Cinema: 1890s to Now..* Chennai: Notion Press.

Sarkar, Sumit. (1983) *Modern India, 1885 - 1947*, New Delhi: Pearson.

Sen, Mrinal, (2018) *Montage, Life, Politics, Cinema*, Kolkata: Seagull Books.

Sinha, Anil. (1998) *Paschimbanger Sharanarthi Samasya (The Refugee Problem of West Bengal)*, Calcutta: Ishan.



Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Silence, Speakability, and Yashica Dutt's Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir

Kusumika Dasgupta

State-Aided College Teacher (Category -1) at the Department of English, Sonarpur Mahavidyalaya.

Email : dasguptakusumika@yahoo.com ORCID ID [0000-0002-0994-8856](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0994-8856)

Abstract

Yashica Dutt is a Dalit Indian writer. *Coming Out as Dalit* is her memoir, published in 2019. Among other accolades, the book has also received the Sahitya Akademi Award, a prestigious award in India. This thesis critiques Dutt's memoir from an intersectional Dalit feminist standpoint. It aligns with the ontological questions relating to the definition of Dalit/ Subaltern and whether or not the subalterns speak, addressing the conceptual monolith that is veritably at the bottom of the issue of an authentic Dalit/subaltern voice in the aggregated scholarly discourse of South Asia and constructing two arguments. One, Dutt, by instituting herself as a voicing subject, dispenses with performing within the influential narrative of subaltern unspeakability, and two, she, in the process of narrating her story, deconstructs the stereotypes essentializing Subalternity or Dalit womanhood. While Yashica Dutt is not the first memoirist to do this, she is indeed one of the most recent of the lot and does this influentially.

Keywords: *Yashica Dutt, Memoir, Unspeakability, Subalternity, Dalit womanhood.*

"Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If... the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 1988; 287)

"The truth is that I don't 'look like a Dalit' – the kind of Dalit we are used to seeing in media, cinema, pop-culture (when we see them at all). But that doesn't change the fact that Dalits – around all 250 million of us – don't look the same. Not all of us live in rural areas, just like not all of us live in the cities. I can look, present, react, respond in any way I want and none of those things make me (or anyone else) any less of a Dalit or my Dalitness any less valid. This is the real danger of the single narrative. It perpetuates this false idea that Dalits only have to be a certain type of person, i.e. possibly uneducated or unable to speak..." (Dutt 2019)

A Dalit/subaltern memoir by New York-based journalist and writer Yashica Dutt is at the core of this work. But *Coming Out as Dalit : A Memoir* (2019), as her work is called, doesn't wholly conciliate with the popular idea of Dalithood. It does talk about the structural violence against Dalits in India though and the fact that Yashica herself was a victim of that widespread ideational injustice. In fact the prejudice cognitively impaired her so much that Yashica required a large amount of time to make peace with her identity and come out. Prior to that, by her own assertion, she was a " closeted" (Dutt 2021 54:34) Dalit. She used to pretend and pass off as an upper-caste person, facilitated by her appearance and urban education. A subaltern death at the University of Hyderabad in 2016 allegedly due to the caste discrimination within university premises, was her guilt trigger.

It allowed her to begin the process of accepting her identity. But by the very act of being a Dalit/subaltern memoir, Dutt's work importantly disputes the social stereotype of Dalit silence, perhaps most influentially theorized by Spivak in 1988. Though Yashica Dutt is not the first memoirist to be at variance (either to the stereotype or the mainstream understanding of Spivak's theorization so to speak), speakability being a major trope in the genre of Dalit memoir, she is one of the latest and certainly influential millennial voices to shove the paradigm.

In *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988), Spivak writes, "The subaltern cannot speak. The representation hasn't withered away. The female intellectual... has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish" (308). In the discourse, Spivak institutes a difference between an elite westernised female scholar and an indigenous woman at the margin, without agency, othered, and incapable of making a social epistemic contribution (Riach 2017; 12), frequently translated in Indian languages and politics as a Dalit woman. She builds this distinction explicitly and influentially, necessitating the figure of a congruent victim who doesn't speak and, even when she does, is certainly not heard. *Coming Out as Dalit : A Memoir* (2019), though not singly but importantly, breaks out of this discourse. It doesn't just institute Dutt within the episteme of speakability and agency but also acknowledges the plurality and intersectionality of Dalit / subaltern experiences.

Dalit, Subaltern, and Dalit as Subaltern :

The word Dalit, deriving from the Sanskrit word Dalita, means exploited. It is a descriptor for a large set of people marked to live at the very edge of Indian society, depending on the traditional Indian caste system. 'Untouchables' and 'Harijan' were the other generic terms previously used. The last was adopted by Gandhi and his followers in the 1930s for articulating their political assimilationism. It is now disused on account of the paternalistic undertones. The word Dalit was perhaps first used by the social reformer Jyotirao Phule in the context of caste oppression in the late 19th-century India. It was popularized by B. R. Ambedkar and thus is articulated with a history of political progressivism (Mendelsohn & Vicziany 1998; 4). Dalit studies as an academic field has started to grow in India and is directional to speculate on the figure of the Dalit (subaltern) as a politico-cultural actor within the Indian society (Rawat and Satyanarayana 2016; ix).

In *Subaltern Studies I* (1982) Ranajit Guha writes that subaltern means "of inferior rank"(vii) and that in the discourse of the Subaltern Collective is extended to mean " the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way"(Ibid).

Despite the scope of this definition, designating the Dalit within this width has been unsure and even often missing. In *Dalit Studies* (2016) Rawat and Satyanarayana write, "In the subaltern studies project... caste inequity was not the core feature" (14). Partha Chatterjee's *Nation and it's Fragments* (1993) is marked for having looked past casteism and the high-powered anti-caste movements in India (Gupta, 7)⁹. In *Subalternities in India and Latin America* (2022) Sonya Surabhi Gupta too quibbles about this absence (Ibid).

However, regardless of this common erasure, this thesis acknowledges Dalits as subalterns without any conceptual hesitation. It sees Ranajit Guha's definition as a premise not just because it chronologically is, but because Guha's definition is inclusive of caste-based marginalisation in India. Also crucially, it doesn't specify unspeakability as a condition of subalternity unlike Spivak's definition. Spivak's definition, according to my understanding without ignoring its' metaphoric condensation, is muteness-specific.

In 2016, a few months after her 'come out - post' on Facebook that eventually transferred into *Coming Out as Dalit : A Memoir* (2019), Dutt, on Tumblr wrote,



"Four months ago, when I decided to 'come out' as Dalit I didn't know I would discover my history hollowed out by systemic oppression and recognize a society that never stopped hating me or my people for being who we are....But I also didn't know that being Dalit would give me my voice.... A voice that I had used otherwise but was never as unfettered, assertive or loudly heard as it was when I used it as a Dalit" (Ibid)

In her 2019 interview with Newslandry in India, Dutt more plainly said that she, as a Columbia University graduate, certainly was more privileged than many upper-caste Indians disadvantaged due to the economy, but that her suffocation as a Dalit was real too though often painfully missed and diluted owing to her otherwise favoured affiliations (Ibid).

"The presumed subject of feminist politics," writes Nivedita Menon in *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader* (2020), "has been destabilised in India most notably by the politics of caste.... The politics of caste... insistently pose a question mark over the assumed commonality of female experience, thus challenging the identity of 'woman'..."(28) ; Dutt's exposure to otherness and the theoretical difficulty in approaching it are, however, due to the discursive experiences of her identity that are not wholly calibratable within the social idea of Dalithood or how, through a high-profile hypothesis of unspeakability, powerlessness, and mediation Subalternity was conceptually woven at 1988 and heavily cited ever since even beyond hardcore educational boundary having obtained support from the homologous para-intellectual framework and praxes though not always sticking to the original lineation. Dalit silence was not a new idea, but Spivak's proposition gave the concept a major theoretical and parasocial pull.

Spivak's Muteness Hypothesis and the Discursive Constitution of the Dait/Subaltern

In her interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean in 1996 Spivak states that more than the actual fact of producing utterances she is concerned about how the utterances are built by "a certain kind of psychobiography", subjected to a set pattern of historic interpretation (291) though certainly coming at the cost of her hypothesis being inadequately understood and literally interpreted (Ibid).

Spivak's intention and presentation in *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) are densely located at the intersections between knowledge, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and patriarchy, and as a "bricoleur" (Riach, 2017; 54), it wasn't perhaps difficult for her to achieve. There are different propositions in the essay that Spivak used as leads to reach her final statement. From the parochial western outlook dominating intellectualism to European paternalism towards the Orient and the brown female body as the site of inscription and her agency still systematically oppressed at the intersections of privilege and oppression in neo-colonial India, Spivak's essay combines all these threads. Despite the fact that perhaps Spivak only tried to magnify attention to the "psychobiography" (Spivak,1996; 291) of subaltern utterances and the process of their misrepresentations even when approached with the best object and the politics of quieting and othering subalterns as epistemic subjects more than their literal silence, Spivak was and continues to be decoded as having influentially attested subaltern unspeakability that has stayed, enhanced, and appears to have a secure afterlife (Ibid), agreeing more with the pre-occurring stereotype diluting Spivak's control to a substantial extent.

Dalit silence is not untrue. But the silence is not the only truth of the community. In her book (2019) Yashica Dutt writes that popular media is more comfortable covering stories about victimized Dalits .

" There were no stories about people like me.... after I came out as Dalit, several expressed amazement that I could speak English. It was almost as if without going through horrific violence or abuse or growing up in extreme poverty in a remote rural area, I couldn't possibly be Dalit"(158).

In *Being a Dalit in Independent India* (2016), Sanghapali Aruna, an anti-caste and digital activist, says that one of her students who came to her for "tuitions" (00:58) was stunned by Aruna's Dalit identity for two reasons: 1. according to the girl, Aruna didn't look like a Dalit, and 2. because she, as a non-Daliti person, never treated Aruna like a Dalit. What is notable here is that the upper caste/mainstream notion of Dalit identity is not just dependent on or a product of birth within a caste-ridden structure but also can be a product of upper-caste gaze and treatment.

These indeed are just two slivers of encounters from the range of experiences tangible for Dalits. But they do not predominantly see representations across the politico-cultural spectrum, genuflecting to the control of silence and sufferance as discursive lenses of description, inversely also adding on to the stereotype.

In *Dalit Cinema* (2018), Suraj Yengde observes that caste and its depictions are mostly absent from mainstream Bollywood and says that whatever Dalit/ subaltern roles are visible in Bollywood are mainly "reduced to those of victims ... and almost invariably played by non-Dalit actors – Saif Ali Khan, Naseeruddin Shah, and Shabana Azmi, among others" (6). In *OTT Platforms and the New Dalit Characters in Indian Cinema* (2022) Harish. S. Wankhede writes that the so-called neo-Dalit characters in contemporary OTT productions, while purporting to be progressive and situated within urban parameters and aspirations, are also created as characters "indifferent to the ideal of social justice" (Ibid) and thus they are metaphorically silenced and without well-formed subjectivities. Likewise, according to Rajiv Thind, the mainstream treatment of Dalit characters in so-called caste neutral literature does not escape politicisation of Dalits in the line of portraying them as "suffering creatures without meaningful agency or as Gandhian Harijans" (Thind, "How are Punjabi Dalits presented in English fiction, especially in novels by upper caste writers") supported by upper caste benevolence.

When an assertion of Dalithood goes past these pre-given paradigms, it becomes incomprehensible and is subjected to ruthless dissections, debates, non-acceptance and online trolling in recent years for being disruptive as caste is still "the invisible arm that turns the gears in nearly every system" (Dutt 2019;10) in India. Female voices from the community are seen as particularly disturbing because ideologues of "brahmanical patriarchy" (Chakravarty, 1993) are doubly offended by their speakability and assertions.

In *Why I finally 'Came Out' as Dalit and What Happened Next* (2016) Yashica Dutt writes,

"A lot of upper-caste Indians, ensconced in their caste prejudice, have evidently had a hard time dealing with my coming out. To see a "lower caste" Dalit woman, a former "untouchable," refusing to be ashamed of her caste, and instead turning it into a narrative of pride has noticeably pricked several egos.... There's been intense scrutiny...that I might not be Dalit at all..." (Ibid).

In *Hypocrisy Of the Mainstream Media: Lessons From the Dalit Asmita Yatra* (2016) Nupur Preeti Alok accuses Savarna media of particularly sidelining and trivializing Dalit women leaders while expropriating the Dalit contribution in general (Ibid).

These expropriations are paradigmatic and extensively exercised, but due to standardization, they are not always explicit or identifiable.

Amidst these conspiracies trying to choke resistant female voices from the Dalit community and politically, socially, and artistically representing them through fragmentations and within a pre-given plot, works like *Coming Out as Dalit : A Memoir* (2019) that celebrate robust Dalit/subaltern assertions while placing the authors – the Dalit women – within the parameters of modern aspirations and anxieties humanising them, are

still quite rare and very apposite to demythify the image of Dalit women as mute creatures helping to realise them in their full humanity capable of diverse involvements and intersectional experiences.

Ontology of Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Yashica Dutt's Speakability and Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir

Intersectionality is a politics of standpoint. It foregoes the representation of broken experiences. It is a validating lens through which the multidimensionality of involvement and participation and the possibility of having many identifications at once are acknowledged. The fact that the simultaneous existence of privilege and alienation is possible within an identity is sanctioned through intersectionality. Having origins in Black Feminism and the theorizations of intellectuals like Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Davis, and Patricia Hill Collins, it concedes the coming together of different correlates, intensifying exploitation at first only of black women but gradually becoming wider, more inclusive, and dispersed in operation.

In India, intersectionality as a way of understanding is especially active in the Dalit/subaltern feminist context. First of all, Indian feminism is divided. "Caste-privileged feminists" purport to speak for all Indian women, while subaltern feminist groups oppose such homogenisation (Arya and Rathore, 2020 : 1) and highlight the crisis of Dalit women who disappear at the crossroads of caste and gender and are either not represented or only under-represented through set paradigms. Secondly, Indian feminism is not reducible to the Savarna vs. Dalit structure alone; there are other equally significant dimensions making it impossible to represent Indian women from scores of different backgrounds and suppressed along different tangents through a single axis of description. Plus, there are many more cracks, layers, and convergences. Dalit feminism or Subaltern feminism is not a monolith; it has its own cracks and most Dalit feminists also reject being subsumed by Indian feminism (Ibid) while from time to time other factions have other difficulties. So, Indian feminism is a fractured site.

Both majoritarian feminists and Dalit feminists in India debate over the suitability of intersersectionality as a frame. Many think it does not resonate with the subaltern Indian context having its origin in western experiences (Arya and Rathore, 2020:5) and posing a threat to agreement-based politics and then there are Dalitists and feminists like Anindita Pan and Mary. E. John supporting the frame and it's validity for Dalit women.

In Mapping Dalit Feminism Anindita Pan writes,

"at the core of Dalit Feminism is the understanding that 'dalit woman'... is located at the intersection of caste and gender. Dalit women are not monolithic entities who can be neatly categorized either as 'women' or 'dalits'... Dalit Feminism highlights how dalit women are erased/ignored by mainstream Indian Feminism and Dalit Politics, and how the constructions of 'woman' and 'dalit' give prominence to savarna women and dalit men. Dalit Feminism addresses these erasures and additions by invoking intersectionality" (23).

According to Meena Gopal, "Dalit women have always been ... (multiply) burdened subjects whose issues can...only adequately be understood within an intersectional framework"(Arya and Rathore 2020 :7) and according to Mary. E. John intersectionality, as an ontological tool, is an identifier of a problem, (and in the South Asian context, particularly Dalit women's problems, so to speak,) and not a solution to that problem (John 2016; 4:54-4:59).

But a prism that can enable us to see the imbricated character of Dalit women's oppression at this stage is enough of a problem solver, especially when, with each passing day, we are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of producing hermeneutical tools and lenses within society to understand different problems and consciously orient towards them. Similarly, statements, campaigns, and different cultural representations like films, literature, and other creative or non-creative expressions constituting epistemic resources that build us

up to see Dalit women beyond the limits of historically overused words such as 'sufferer' and 'mute', without of course rejecting their truths in contexts, are crucial.

Coming Out as Dalit (2019) is a remarkable work of recent times looking at Dalit (subaltern) question(s) from a laudably candid Dalit female viewpoint that is even consistently impertinent. Yashica's journey of coming to terms with her identity and eventually accepting it with pride in a society that camouflages to be post-caste while deep down reeling under casteist and patriarchal prejudices offers a cross-sectional view of a fractured and deeply manipulative setup that has generationally conditioned Yashica and many like her to be embarrassed of their identities and hide them to escape stigma. Yashica writes,

"My grandfather, father and I experienced our Dalitness in vastly different ways. Dad—the son of a revered civil servant—wasn't forced down from his horse, nor was his wedding party disrupted. Two generations of prestigious government jobs and concealed last names had somewhat diluted the obvious markers of Dalitness. But not enough had changed that I could give a straight answer to the question: 'What caste are you from?' My Dalitness still weighed heavy on me; I dragged its carcass behind me through my childhood and into adulthood" (xii).

In the process, Yashica's story intersects with the fragments of different experiences, opinions, and politics of the Dalit community. She becomes a bold voice highlighting issues and setting up links that require understanding and dialogue. For example she writes,

"In 2015, Dr Shashi Tharoor, MP from Thiruvananthapuram, argued at an Oxford University debate that Britain owes India and other former colonies 'colonial reparations'. The entire upper-caste establishment cheered this heartily.... Following this, Tharoor wrote the bestselling *An Era of Darkness* on the same topic. But most Indians failed to see the irony in demanding compensation for nearly 200 years of colonial rule while refusing any reparation for thousands of years of discrimination against their own citizens. If paying collective reparations for collective guilt is appropriate, then how about India "atoning" for thousands of years of its caste system?" (88-89)

And further,

"Not only are Dalits isolated in communities because they are the ones who are forced to undertake the job of manual scavenging, they are further reviled because they eat beef and work with leather. Dalits ... have been singled out for discrimination for decades because they eat beef" (44).

And still further,

"Fashion is rarely ... a reflection of individual taste. The clothes we choose or can afford to wear are often telling signs of our class, and sometimes even caste...In a culture where Dalits are still attacked for flaunting a moustache or wearing jewellery, having style is also a subtle code for being upper caste...With the Internet, how we access and understand style has changed, but it's still a largely elitist interest" (98).

Yashica's story is simultaneously the story of her mother Sashi, a gritty Dalit woman who wanted her children to build their future outside the vicious fetters of caste and tutored them to assimilate while herself secreted it or believed she could secrete it through mimicking upper caste fashion, lifestyle choices, curated expensive birthday parties for her children, and yet, most often than not, was deficient. Her most glaring deficiency, however, was her struggle with the English language. Sashi was an inadequate English speaker. Her husband and in-laws frequently taunted her for not knowing how to speak the language. Though they meant it lightly it only added to Sashi's stress since as an educated woman she was always deeply aware of the cultural catchet



attached to the language in India. As if in an effort to compensate for this deficiency Sashi wanted Yashica to speak fluent English and fought with her husband and in-laws to make sure that Yashica received elite education.

What is notable in Sashi's intersectional subjection to both Brahmanical and intracaste patriarchy is the contrariety of the constitution of her responses to both constructions. While her resistance to Dalit patriarchy came from a realm of moderate understanding and her recognition of it was more or less operative (despite the fact that Sashi's third pregnancy was forced upon her and that she occasionally complied; Sashi actively fought with her husband and in-laws to get her voice heard and her perspective accepted on the majority of occasions), Sashi unsuspectingly collaborated with casteist patriarchy in loathing her identity as a Dalit woman and carefully worked to eradicate it not just for her but also for her children.

Patriarchy almost always dissembles to accord women free choices as subjects. Sashi's broken acknowledgement of agency, intelligibly a product of that simulation, was nothing beyond what it was – limited and only partly understood. But how it panned out in Yashica Dutt's life and what use she put Sashi's fragmented awareness to is notable. In the most significant way possible, it created factors and background for Yashica to ultimately understand and apply her power and narrative as a Dalit woman the way she does – not just by speaking for herself but effectively calling attention to what it means to be a Dalit at present and a Dalit woman at present, deconstructing paradigms and boundaries of shame, un speak ability, silence, and suffering essentializing Subalternity/ Dalithood and more so Dalit womanhood in the course of her memoir.

Postscript

We live in many Indias. In *Many Indias Make One India...* (2015) Dheeraj Sinha writes that in today's India, circumstances are more intense when different cultures from within are juxtaposed together and made to confront each other to achieve their solutions and harmony (56). The present work, of course, does not agree with this hypothesis, or at least believes that the process of achieving intracultural solutions cannot be as smooth.

In *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir* (2019) and elsewhere in interviews, Yashica Dutt recurrently talks of the banality of cultural formulae that she calls the "danger of the single narrative" (158). Dalits are parsed into and discussed through the paradigms of "reservation", "microaggression," and "brutal oppression," but according to Dutt, Dalits occupying the "middle space of relative privilege"(Parajuly 2019 ; 5:04-5:10) of education, assertion, and agency are often circumvented from entitlement to their Dalithood and systemically invisibilized due to a lack of validation from stereotypes.

Indeed we live in many Indias. While this forced invisibilization is a reality, Rohith Verma's death and many such deaths and various forms of Dalit repression happening almost regularly are realities, Yashica Dutt's Sahitya Academi is also a reality, and a nuanced appreciation of her 'coming out' is also a reality. In her interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (1996) Spivak says, "even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act"(291).

It is perhaps redundant to highlight that this explanation of subaltern un speakability does not wholly represent the experiences of Dalit women in current India. It is true that Dalit women are deprived at the cross-section of brahmanism and the stringent patriarchal order, but even if they are continued to be stopped and dissuaded from expressions or only endorsed to express themselves in a certain way, many Dalit women are exponentially pushing boundaries through definite assertions and certainly getting heard more than ever, not as stereotypes but as outraged, resistant, visceral, vulnerable, real women, not apologetic for their stories or for their wokeness.



References:

- Alok, N. P. (2016, August 22). Hypocrisy of the mainstream media: Lessons from the Dalit Asmita Yatra. Feminism in India. <https://feminisminindia.com/2016/08/22/hypocrisy-mainstream-media-dalit-asmita-yatra-chalo-una/>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Arya, S., & Rathore, A. S. (Eds.). (2020). Introduction: Theorizing Dalit feminism. In *Dalit feminist theory: A reader* (pp. 1). Routledge.
- Chakravarty, U. (1993, April 3). Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 28(14). <https://www.epw.in/journal/1993/14/special-articles/conceptualising-brahmanical-patriarchy-early-india-gender-caste>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Dutt, Y. (2016, February 2). Why I finally 'came out' as Dalit and what happened next. *The World*. <https://theworld.org/stories/2016-02-02/why-i-finally-came-out-dalit-and-what-happened-next>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Dutt, Y. (2016, May 24). This can also happen when you are Dalit. *Documents of Dalit Discrimination*. <https://www.tumblr.com/dalitdiscrimination/144838449732/this-can-also-happen-when-youre-dalit?source=share>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Dutt, Y. (2019). *Coming out as Dalit: A memoir*. Aleph Book Company.
- Dutt, Y. (2019, February 25). NL interviews: Yashica Dutt on Coming Out as Dalit [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/KkMRArwLIMU?si=dfDJuE1DmQly19x5>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Dutt, Y. (2019, March 24). 'But You Don't Look Like a Dalit': Yashica Dutt on 'Coming Out as Dalit'. *The Wire*. https://thewire-in.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/m.thewire.in/article/caste/coming-out-as-dalit-yashica-dutt/amp?amp_js_v=a6&_gsa=1&usqp=mq331AQIUAKwASCAAgM%3D#aoh=17112617783880&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&_tf=From%20%251%24s&share=https%3A%2F%2Fthewire.in%2Faste%2Fcoming-out-as-dalit-yashica-dutt. Accessed 24/03/2024.
- Dutt, Y. (2021, April 10). *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/jGtgucs4h8U?si=PxQ2XGvzAueKzmzKH>. Accessed 24/03/2024.
- Guha, Ranajit. *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (Oxford University press, 1982), vii.
- Gupta, Sonya Surbhi. *Subalternities in India and Latin America* (Routledge, 2022), 7.
- John, M. E. (2016, May 27). Dr. Mary John on intersectionality [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/VWhKjM9SgXw?si=iN0haf6LiehmYZw>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Lohitakshi, S. A. (2016, August 15). Being a Dalit in independent India [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/UMPomf7H7Lc?si=Va5ntF8lX4H7yJuA>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Mendelsohn, O., & Vicziani, M. (1998). *The untouchables: Subordination, poverty and the state in modern India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Menon, N. (2020). A critical view on intersectionality. In S. Arya & A. S. Rathore (Eds.), *Dalit feminist theory: A reader* (pp. 28). Routledge.
- Pan, A. (2021). *Mapping Dalit feminism: Towards an intersectional standpoint* (p. 23). Sage.



- Parajuly, P. (2019, October 5). Caste, color, and gender [Video].
YouTube.<https://youtu.be/bj80ck5k3RQ?si=XNLQsbCEV2j68QKI> . Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Rawat, R. S., & Satyanarayana, K. (2016). *Dalit studies*. Duke University Press.
- Riach, G. K. (2017). *A Macat analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Can the subaltern speak?* Routledge.
- Sinha, D. (2015). Many Indias make one: How India's unity is more useful than its diversity. In *India reloaded: Inside India's resurgent consumer market* (p. 56). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak?* In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Macmillan Education.
- Spivak, G. C. (1996). *Subaltern talk: Interview with the editors (1993-94)*. In D. Landry & G. MacLean (Eds.), *The Spivak reader* (pp. 291). Routledge.
- Thind, R. (2023, December 16). How are Punjabi Dalits presented in English fiction, especially in novels by upper caste writers? Scroll.in. https://amp-scroll.in.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/amp.scroll.in/article/1060464/how-are-punjabi-dalits-presented-in-english-fiction-especially-in-novels-by-upper-caste-writers?usqp=mq331AQIUAKwASCAAgM%3D&_js_v=a9&_gsa=1#referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&csi=1&share=https%3A%2F%2Fscroll.in%2Farticle%2F1060464%2Fhow-are-punjabi-dalits-presented-in-english-fiction-especially-in-novels-by-upper-caste-writers. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Wankhede, H. S. (2024, January 20). OTT platforms and the new Dalit characters in Indian cinema. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 57(26-27). <https://www.epw.in/journal/2022/26-27/insight/ott-platforms-and-new-dalit%20characters-indian.html>. Accessed March 24, 2024.
- Yengde, S. (2018). Dalit cinema. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41(2), 6.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2018.1471848>.. Accessed March 24, 2024.



Religion and Tradition: Re-constructing the Identity of Women in Twentieth Century Rajputana

Soma Ghosh

PhD Research Scholar, Department of History, University of Calcutta

E-mail- ghoshsoma879@gmail.com | ORCID ID [0009-0000-0836-2143](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0836-2143)

Abstract

The primary objective of this paper is to establish the connection between tradition and religion and the role it played in the formation of the identity of women in twentieth century Rajputana. I will explore how the identity of women was defined among the Rajputs in that era and how religious symbols played a role in the formation of the identity of Rajput women. I have divided the essay into three parts, the first part focus on the *sati* system in Rajputana exploring the various stories about *sati* and how they played a role for the formation of gender identity and the reaction among the Rajput women about *sati*. The second part discusses about *jauhar*, the most glorified custom among the Rajputs and how the custom which was practiced in medieval times still plays a role in constructing a unique identity for Rajput women. The third part considers the historical characters who were romanticized in twentieth century and their role in the formation of identity of women in twentieth century Rajputana. Interviews, extensive field surveys, existing literature on the subject and archival documents have been used here in support of the arguments. The concluding observations show how in the name of religion and tradition violence against women was glorified as a pious action and connected with the chastity and purity of a woman and was often used as a tool for upwardly social mobility of the caste.

Keywords: Rajput, Sati, Jauhar, Religion, Women

INTRODUCTION

The state of Rajasthan is the largest state in India today. It is situated in north-western India with an area of 3,42,239 sq km. Historically the region was known by various names like *Rajputana*, *Rajwara*, *Raethana*, *Marusthali*, *Marwar*, *Virbhumi*. The distinctive traits and unique contribution of numerous communities have enriched the socio-cultural and political ethos of the state. (Jain and Sharma, 2004, 58) Various communities and castes are present in Rajasthan, these are Rajputs, Bhil, Kalbelia, Garasia, Brahmins, Oswal, Meena, Charans, Jats. (Kealy, 1911) The Rajputs have always had a significant role in the politics of Rajasthan. The Rajputs controlled the political, economic and social life of Rajputana for centuries. In this essay I will focus on how the identity of Rajput women was shaped by religion and tradition in twentieth century.

Harlen Lindsey explores the relationship between caste and gender in the narratives related to Rajput women. (Harlan, 1992) She argues that rituals and tradition shaped what was expected of a Rajput women. Ramya Sreenivasan focuses on how the oldest literary representation of the Padmini saga by the sixteenth century Sufi poet Jayasi was transmitted over time and space and how the narrative was re-imagined and how it crossed regional, socio-political and linguistic boundaries. (Sreenivasan, 2007) Sabita Singh highlights

(Singh,2019) the role of state and community in the regulation of morality within and outside the institution of the marriage in medieval Rajasthan and demonstrates the different dimensions of marital practices across different social groups and deciphers the meaning behind rituals and customs practiced in medieval Rajasthan. Pratibha Jain and Sangeeta Sharma's work (Jain and Sharma, 2004) explores the connection between honour and gender in medieval Rajasthan.

The central point of divergence in this essay from the existing research is how women sexuality and individuality was controlled in the name of religion and tradition among the Rajput society in twentieth century. The twentieth century was the period when reformation related to women was started in Rajputana through various associations like Walter Rajput Hita karini Sabha, (Jaipur Mahakmakash,12) Desh Hiteshini Sabha and also individual efforts were made by some rulers and jagirdars. These included reform activities like abolition of female infanticide,(Ibid,1) abolition of child marriage, restriction on polygamy,(Ibid,11) restriction on *ontyag* system (Ibid,6) (grants given to the Charans and Bhats on the occasion of marriage), promotion of female education. For analysis of the role of religion and tradition on Rajput women various facets like *sati*, *jauhar* and significant historical characters which were idealized in twentieth century will be explored.

Sati Worship and the formation of Gender Identity

According to Hindu mythology, (Noble and Sankhyan,1994,345) the word *sati* related to sacrifice, devotion and bravery. The word *sati* has several connotations, *sati* implies an act of self immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre, literary it means 'a good women' who has become eligible for self immolation. (Harlen, 1994, 79) There are three broad definitions of *sati*, 'as a good woman, an immolated wife (who sacrificed herself on her husband's funeral pyre), a goddess who is source of *shakti* (energy)'.(Vaid and Sangari, 1991, 18) Rajasthan was the major stronghold of *sati* and numerous *chatra*, temple, hand prints are available linked to *sati*.(Noble and Sankhyan, 1994, 345)

Significant research on *sati* were done by many scholars like Harlen Lindsey,(Harlan,1992) Veena Talwar Oldenburg,(Oldenburg,1994) Sudesh Vaid, Kumkum Sangari,(Vaid and Sangari,1989)William A. Noble and Ram Sankhyan.(Noble and Sankhyan,1994) In their research they explore questions like whether *sati* was person or an event, how the practice of *sati* evolved over time and how it was linked to caste. In this essay the focus is on why *sati* was significant in twentieth century Rajasthan. *Sati* was abolished by the British government in1829, but the last recorded *sati* happened in Rajasthan in 1987.(BBC,2024) In the twentieth century significant reforms took place in Rajputana but no serious initiative was taken for *sati*.(41 *Sati* cases officially recorded) In order to trace the answer we need to look at *sati* related narratives across caste lines to understand the socio-political and geographical situation of Rajasthan.

Goma Sati: The narratives about *Goma sati* was that she belonged to a Charan family. (Bharucha, 2003,140) One day robbers stole some cows from her village. Goma saw them and asked them to give back the cows, otherwise she threatened to commit suicide, but they didn't take her seriously, they refused to give back the cows, Goma killed herself with a knife and cursed them before dying. Realizing their mistake the robbers gave back all the cows and apologized. *Goma Sati* is worshipped in the area of Barmer and Jaisalmer not only by the Hindus but by the Muslims also. (Ibid. 2003, 140)

Goma sati is worshipped in western Rajasthan, geographically the region is a desert. There are limited agricultural resources and the main economic activity here is animal husbandry. *Goma sati* is the protector of the economic resources and activity. So even if she did not belong to the Rajput community, she was legitimized by the society and worshipped beyond the community boundaries.

Jhuma sati: Another *sati* narrative in Rajputana is about Jhuma *sati* who was a resident of a very small village named Mithrau. This village which is presently situated in Pakistan, the narrative was spread by her descendants when they came to India and settled down in Barmer district in Rajputana. Many raids were carried out on the Mithrau village by the Balooch people so the villagers proposed that if someone of the village became a *sati*, out of the fear of this *sati* the Balochi raids would stop. But no one wanted to become *sati*. Finally, a women named Jhuma agreed to protect the village by committing *sati*, although her husband was alive, and she had two children. But her eldest son doubted his mother, thinking his mother agreed for this under emotional pressure, that and she may run from the *chita* (pyre). He set up a barricade around the pyre so she would not be able to escape, realizing what was on her son's mind Jhuma cursed her son.

Another version relating to Jhuma *sati* was that in her time, Mithrau village had been predominantly Muslim. Just before dying Jhuma *sati* declared: *Kalse Mithraugaon mein Maszid seko azannahoogi.* (Translation: From tomorrow no call of prayer will be made from the Mosque of Mithrau.)

She was worshipped in the Thar desert area in Barmer district. (Interview, 2024)

If we deeply analyse the narrative of Jhuma *Sati*, we find that it has evolved over time. The Muslim curse was added later, when the villagers had to move out of terror of the Muslims at the time of partition and the Indo-Pak war. Post-Partition the Hindu refugees of Mithrau village set up the temple and shrine of Jhuma in Barmer district and started worshipping her.

Rani Bhatiyani Sati: Rani Bhatiyani belonged to a Bhatti Rajput family and was married to Kalyan Singh, a jagirdar of Jaisalmer who belonged to the Rathor Rajput clan of Jasol. She was the second wife of Kalyan Singh, out of jealousy the first wife of Kalyan Singh, Devri, spread rumors that Bhatiyani was in love with her brother-in-law, Sawai Singh. After hearing the rumors of the affair between his wife and his brother, Kalyan Singh killed his brother and decided to abandon his wife. After receiving the news that her husband was going to abandon her, it is believed that she committed suicide. After her death when her innocence was proved her family claimed her as *sati* and started worshipping her. (Ibid) In western Rajputana we can find various temples of Rani Bhatiyani *Sati* Mata.

If we analyse Rani Bhatiyani's story it shows that even if one is accused of committing a sin like adultery, penance in the form of *Sati* or self immolation opens a way for redemption. This reveals that committing suicide was the preferred choice for women compared to being abandoned by her husband. This story also shows how in the name of social norms and morality a women's sexuality was controlled, as men were sanctioned to establish sexual relation with several women by the society legitimizing the same though polygamy. But a woman has to be devoted to her husband and if she breaks the norm, even allegedly, it was considered as a sin and she has to perform penance for the same, after that she is considered for redemption. Also the concept of caste and clan honour as well as individual honour and male ego is reflected in this story and here women were objectified as a tool of honour and it can be seen that among the Rajputs, honour is important than blood relation.

Sati was mostly practiced by the Rajputs in Rajasthan, but we can find examples of the non Rajput *sati* also and they are even worshipped by their respective castes today. (Plate No 1) In a conversation with Dhapu Kumari, a student of Maharani College, University of Rajasthan, who belongs to the Meghwal community considered a lower caste in Rajasthan, I came to know about the pervasive presence of the caste system in Rajasthan. She told me that to upgrade their status in society they have started adopting the rituals and traditions practiced by the Rajputs who are considered as upper caste, regardless of whether they are right or wrong. Although the legitimization of non Rajput *sati* was not easy. For Rajput women *Sati* was part of their

caste duty, but for the non Rajput women it was to upgrade their family and *Jati* status in the caste hierarchy. (Jaipur Mahakmakash,10) It was very hard for a non Rajput women to legitimize themselves as *sati mata*. For example if we analyse the narrative related to *goma* and *jhumasati*, they were non rajput but the narrative regarding them indicate that economic and socio- political factor played a key role for their legitimization as *sati mata* by the society.

In Rajput tradition the concept of a *pativrata* or pious women was one who fulfilled her husband's personal needs and encouraged him to perform his duty and after his death she accompanied him on his funeral pyre. There are three stages for a *pativrata* transcending to a *sati mata*. First she takes the vow to become *sati*. Then she enters her husband's funeral pyre, it was believed that she develops miraculous powers and her curse is fatal. To commemorate her sacrifice a temple is often built where she is venerated as a Goddess with supernatural powers and is now bound with religion, faith and devotion. Religion plays a unique role in human society and since *sati* is intricately connected with religious beliefs in Rajasthan, so glorification of *sati* is inevitable and may explain why no serious initiative to discourage *sati* took place at Rajputana in colonial times. Same logic can be applied in the case of Roop Kanwar, who was last recorded *sati* in Rajasthan. The head of *Janta Party*, Kalyan Singh Kalvi in Rajasthan passed a statement in an interview on Roop Kanwar case steeped in religious undertones. He said, 'Jains are known to die by fasting. Buddhists are known to immolate themselves. So why apply this law only to us?' (India Today, 1987) Although after Roop Kanwar the government took serious steps to eradicate *sati* but glorification of *sati* still continues. (Plate No ,2)

The concept of Jauhar and constructing Gender Identity

During the twelfth to the seventeenth century *jauhar* was performed by Rajput women it was a ritual in which after a military defeat the Rajput womenfolk would sacrifice their life in a pit of fire called *Jauhar kund* to save their honour. Rajputs were a warrior class and consisted of numerous clans. In the medieval era they continuously fought with each other and later with the Turks and the Mughals. Before the annexation of Rajputana by Mughal emperor Akbar the political scenario of Rajputana was chaotic.

Rani Padmini Ro Jauhar or the Jauhar of Rani Padmini: Ramya Sreenivasan in her work mentioned the *jauhar* of Padmini and described how Padmini is still remembered as an icon of honour.

According to Rajput tradition the *jauhar* of Rani Padmini took place in 1303 at Chittorgarh. The well known narrative was Rani Padmini was the wife of Maharana Ratan Singh of Mewar. After hearing about the beauty of Rani Padmini, Sultan Allauddin Khilji of Delhi wanted to marry her. He sent his messenger with the message to Chittor that he wanted to meet Rani Padmini. In Rajput tradition women mainly covered their face, they never came in front of any men except a few male members like their husbands, brother, father and son. As Allauddin Khilji was more powerful than Mewar, the Maharana was not in the position to refuse his request. For this a special arrangement was made in Chittorgarh. The famous mirror story is well known whereby it is believed that Allauddin Khilji did not directly see Rani Padmini but only her reflection in a mirror. But the fact is that in those days mirrors were not introduced. The story goes on that after seeing the reflection of Rani Padmini in the mirror Allauddin Khilji wanted to marry Rani Padmini. He even attacked Chittor and defeated Maharana Ratan Singh. Rani Padmini with hundreds of women performed *jauhar* to save her honour.

In Rajputana tradition Rani Padmini is still worshipped for her bravery and courageous act to protect not only her honour but also her clan's honour. Every single woman in Rajputana especially in Mewar respects and worships Rani Padmini as divine and is a source of inspiration for them. (Plate No 3) In many families of Udaipur there is a belief that Rani Padmini was the incarnation of Mata Bhawani. Most of the historical facts



cannot be verified in the Padmini story. The narrative of Padmini can be traced in the sixteenth century work *Padmavat* by the Sufi saint Malik Muhammad Jayasi. But in the twentieth century the narrative of Padmini crossed the boundaries of Rajputana and spread across India.(Sreenivasan,2007)

Rani Karnawati Ro Jauhar or the Jauhar of Rani Karnawati: In 1535, Bahadur Shah of Gujrat attacked Chittor and besieged the fort. Rani Karnawati, the widow of Rana Sangha and the mother of Vikramaditya Singh performed *jauhar* with thirteen thousand women to save their honour from the invaders. The *jauhar* of Rani Karnawati is commemorated in Mewar even today.

Chittorgarh Ro Jauhar or the Jauhar of Chittorgarh: In 1568 at the time of Maharana Udai Singh, the Mughal emperor Akbar attacked the fort of Chittorgarh. At that time thousands of women performed *jauhar* to save their honour and their sacrifice is still commemorated. The hand prints of the women in the gate of the Chittorgarh fort are worshipped by the locals.

There are numerous *jauhar* related narratives spread all over Rajputana, like the Ranthambhor *jauhar* (1301), *jauhar* in Siwana (1308), *jauhar* at Jalore (1310). The caste system is still very much enrooted in the society of Rajasthan.(Interview,2024)The uniqueness among the Rajputs were their strong clan ties(vaidya,1924) and their many rituals and customs. In the medieval times *jauhar* was related to the chastity and the purity of the women. When the Rajputs were defeated their women performed *jauhar* which was technically mass suicide to save their honour.

The twentieth century was the period of growth of nationalism and regional symbols , personalities, races were glorified at the national level and were used as tools for building up regional as well as national identity.(Talbot,2000,32-58) James Tod's work on Rajputana (Tod,1920)was used by the nationalist writers and a new sense of glorification was established for the Rajput race from the twentieth century onwards.(Tagore,1946)*Jauhar* which were performed by the Rajput women was glorified in the twentieth century through various literature.(Nahata,2022) A new sense of honour identity was glorified through the narratives of *jauhar*. Through *jauhar* the concept of chastity and purity of women were re-established. It has been psychologically legitimized among the Rajput women that her chastity and purity are her biggest asset and being a Rajput women it is better to sacrifice her life if her chastity was at stake. Although we can see *jauhar* as a silent resistance of Rajput women, that they choose to die instead of being molested and raped by the enemy, doing this they not only saved their personal honour but also saved their clan and community honour. Throughout history we can see there was a tendency to link chastity and purity of the woman with the honour of the community. Through *jauhar* the same sentiments were reflected.The women committed suicide because they wanted to save their community or clan honour, as their body was identified as community or clan honour , they saved it from the enemy through the destruction of their body. But if we deeply analyse the logic behind *jauhar* it was established that if a women loses her chastity and purity by the enemy she would not be accepted by her clan and community. There was no place for a woman who has been dishonored in society. In the twentieth century through the romanticism of *jauhar* these concept was spread among the Rajput women that to protect their chastity is equal to protect the honour of the clan or community and thereby the nation honour .

Role of Symbol and the Construction of Gender Identity

From the twentieth century onwards some historical characters related to the Rajputs were romanticized and glorified in the context of the emergence of nationalism. I will now explore why these characters were significant in the twentieth century and what was the impact of these symbols on the construction of the identity of Rajput women.

Rani Hadi : Rani Hadi belonged to the Hada clan and was married to Rawat Ratan Singh who was the chieftain of Salumbar in Mewar. Ratan Singh belonged to the Chundawat Rajput clan. After his marriage Ratan Singh was called on duty by the Maharana Raj Singh of Mewar. But in the battle field he missed his newly married wife and asked her in a letter to send a memento to him, to motivate him. Rani Hadi felt that she was becoming a distraction for her husband and he was being swayed from the performance of this duty. In order to encourage him to perform his duty she cut her head off and sent it to her husband. Hadi Rani story is still remembered in many parts of Rajputana for the ultimate sacrifice she made to enable her husband to concentrate only on his duty.

If we analyse the story of Rani Hadi we can see that Rani Hadi acted in the manner expected of a good Rajput wife. According to Rajput tradition, a good wife was the one who encourages her husband to perform his duty. In Rajput tradition if a man was incapable of performing his duty, the women especially his wife was to be blamed for this. If a son turned out to be a coward the mother was shamed as '*dudhlajana*', one whose upbringing did not produce a courageous son and if a married man did not meet the standards of bravery in society his wife bore the epithet of *choorilajana*, one whose husband was not courageous enough. (Jain and Sharma, 2004,38) Being a woman it was her duty to encourage her husband and son to perform their duty, if she failed to do so she was considered as a failure in the eyes of society.

Rajkumari Krishna Kumari: Rajkumari Krishna Kumari was the princess of Udaipur and at a young age her father fixed her marriage to the Rao of Jodhpur (Marwar), but the marriage never took place because of Rao's death. Then her father fixed her marriage to the Maharaja of Jaipur (Amber). But a problem arose when the successor of Jodhpur demanded that Krishna Kumari was the daughter-in-law of Jodhpur, while Maharaja of Jaipur also demanded that she is her *mangeter* (fiancé). In the midst of this precarious situation matters were further aggravated when rival factions were supported by the Maratha factions of Scindia and Holkar thereby transforming an inter-personal matter into one of political unrest. To avoid further escalation of hostilities and to save Udaipur (Mewar) Rajkumari Krishna Kumari poisoned herself in 1810. (Tod, 1920, 366, 67, 68)

According to oral tradition before her death Rajkumari Krishna Kumari's last words were as follows-

"Jaha betipaida hone pad ushe maar dalajatahein, (Jaipur Mahakmakash ,01)

Vahaanmeri pitane mujheitnebarsho sepala.

Aajjaabaapnikulri MaryadaRakshanoobakhatayo,

Mein pichheeko nahattsakuhoon

Yeh Marheliye Garbnu Baatsheee

(Translation: In a place where a girl child is killed after birth, my father raised me for so many years. So it is my duty to protect the honour of my clan and my father.)

In the twentieth century, these narratives were commemorated and romanticized in various ways through literature and oral traditions. (Ganguli, 1983, 250-60) Every narrative shows that there was a tendency to objectify women as a tool. The concept of a good woman was nurtured among the Rajput women through these narratives, she was to be devoted to only one man, her body and soul were devoted to him and thus she did not have an individual identity. The concept of a clan based loyalty also emerged through these



narratives. The story of Krishna Kumari projected clan loyalty among the Rajputs and the protection of the clan was more important than the life of a women.

Conclusion:

Throughout history society has always sought to control women through various tools like preventing her from being educated, segregation of sexes and control over her reproductive labour. She was taught specific virtues like devotion to the husband, to the family, to the society and was nurtured to believe that her purity was her biggest asset. An ideal woman is one who fits within this social structure. In Rajput society, if we observe the norms set by the society for women it clearly shows that there was a tendency to control the sexuality of women in the name of religion, tradition and *dharma* (duty) for example the ritual of *sati* reinforces the virtues of devotion towards one's husband, family and clan and has become part of popular religion. Similarly, *jauhar* was connected with tradition; religion and tradition are interconnected. Religion originates from the spiritual and divine sources and tradition originates from cultural, social and historical contexts. These two consciously or subconsciously engage with each other. In this context we find that the customs of *jauhar* and *sati* clearly show the engagement between tradition and religion with the veneration of *sati mata* and Rani Padmini. The concept of *jauhar* conveyed to women that death was better than the violation of her chastity and purity. Although many initiatives took place to upgrade the condition of women among the Rajputs in the twentieth century but at the same time regressive rituals like *sati*, *jauhar* and the historical iconic characters like Rani Padmini, Rani Hadi, Rajkumari Krishna Kumari were also romanticized and even became symbols of national glory and even inspiration for nationalism. There were two fold glorification of Rajput women, on one hand they were glorified as an ideal *pativrata nari* while on other they were glorified as an inspiration for nationalism although the tendency of controlling the sexuality of women and their individuality was prevalent. Even nowadays it is expected that the Rajput women should live her life on these lines.

References

- Jain Pratibha and Sangeeta Sharma, (2004) *Honour, Status & Polity*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, p.58
- E.H. Kealy, *Census of India, 1911, Volume XXII, Rajputana and Ajmer-Marwara, Part 1 -Report*, Ajmer: Scottish Mission Industries Company Limited, 1918
- Harlan Lindsey, (1992) *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives*, Berkeley: University of California.
- Sreenivasan Ramya, (2007) *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India, c.1500-1900*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Singh Sabita, (2019) *The Politics of Marriage in Medieval India: Gender and Alliance in Rajasthan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jain and Sharma, *Honour, Status & Polity*.
- Jaipur Mahakmakash, General 20, Social and Religious, Bag No.12, File No. 20(1), Rajasthan State Archives, Jaipur Branch, Rajasthan.
- Ibid, Bag No. 1, File No. 1, Rajasthan State Archives, Jaipur Branch, Rajasthan.



Ibid, Bag No.11, File No.232,Rajasthan State Archives, Jaipur Branch, Rajasthan

Ibid, Bag No.06, File No 150, Rajasthan State Archives, Jaipur Branch, Rajasthan

William A. Noble and AD Ram Sankhyan (1994) "Signs of The Divine: Sati Memorials and Sati Worshipin Rajasthan", in *The Idea of Rajasthan, Exploration in Regional Identity*, Volume I, ed Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick, Lloyd Rudolph, New Delhi: Manohar, P.345

Harlen Lindsey, (1994) "Perfection and Devotion: Sati Tradition in Rajasthan," in *Sati, The Blessings and the curse, The Burning of wives in India*, ed, John Stratton Hawley, New York: Oxford University Press, p.79

Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari, Institutions, Beliefs Ideologies: Widow Immolation in Contemporary Rajasthan, *Economic Political weekly*, Volume 26,1991, p.WS2-WS18

William A. Noble and AD Ram Sankhyan, (1994) "Signs of The Divine: Sati Memorials and Sati Worshipin Rajasthan", in *The Idea of Rajasthan, Exploration in Regional Identity*, Volume I, ed Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick, Lloyd Rudolph, New Delhi: Manohar, P.345

Harlan, Lindsey (1994) *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives*, Berkeley:University of California.

Oldenburg Veena Talwar (1994). The Roop Kanwar Case: Feminist Responses in *Sati, The Blessings and the curse, The Burning of wives in India*, ed John Stratton Hawley, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994

Vaid Sudesh and Kumkum Sangari, (1989) *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

William A. Noble and AD Ram Sankhyan, (1994) "Signs of The Divine: Sati Memorials and Sati Worshipin Rajasthan", in *The Idea of Rajasthan, Exploration in Regional Identity*, Volume I, ed Karine Schomer, Joan L. Erdman, Deryck O. Lodrick, Lloyd Rudolph, New Delhi: Manohar.

BBC News 19th October 2024.

Before Roop Kanwar 41 Sati cases officially recorded after independence in Rajputana.

Bharucha Rustom, (2003) *Rajasthan an Oral History, Conversations with Komal Kothari*, Haryana: Penguin, P.140.

Ibid

Interview conducted by me of Asha Dhaka, doctoral scholar, Department of Hindi, Rajasthan University on the 14th of February 2024 and Nirmala Singh, undergraduate student, Department of Philosophy, Maharani College on the 24th of February 2024

Ibid

Plate No.1: *Sati Mata* deity of Purniya Kalal Samaj, Udaipur.

Jaipur Mahakmakash, General 20, Social and Religious, Bag No 10, File No.199, Rajasthan State Archives, Jaipur Branch, Rajasthan

India Today, 31st October



Plate No. 2 The worship of *Sati Mata*, Bikaner.

Plate No 3 Temple of Rani Padmini, Chittor

Sreenivasan Ramya(2007) *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India, c.1500-1900*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

¹Interview conducted by me of Asha Dhaka, doctoral scholar, Department of Hindi, Rajasthan University on the 14th of February 2024 and Nirmala Singh, undergraduate student, Department of Philosophy, Maharani College on the 24th of February 2024.

Chintaman Vinayak Vaidya, *History of Medieval Hindu India: Being a History of India from 600 to 1200 A.D. Volume II, Early History of Rajput: 750 to 1000 A.D.*, Poona: The Oriental Book Supplying Agency,1924.

Talbot, Ian (2000) *India and Pakistan (Inventing the Nation)*, London: Arnold Publisher, p.32-58.

Lieut.-Col. James Tod, (1920) *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India in three Volumes*, London: Oxford University Press.

Tagore Abanindranath, (1946.) *Rajkahini*, Calcutta: Signet Press.

Ojha, Gaurishankar Hirachand, (2022) *Rajputane Ka PrachinItihas*, Jodhpur: Rajasthanani Granthagar,

---(2015.)*Udaipur Rajya Ka Itihas (Vol I-II)*, Jodhpur: Rajasthanani Granthagar.

Nahata Bhawanlal (2022) *Padmini Charitra Choupai*,Bikaner:Sadul Rajasthanani Research Granthagar,

Jain and Sharma, *Honour, Status & Polity*, p.38

Lieut.-Col. James Tod, (1920) *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India*, Volume III, p.366-368

Jaipur Mahakmakash, General 20, Social and Religious, Bag No. 01, File No. 01, Rajasthan State Archives, Jaipur Branch, Rajasthan

Ganguli Kalyan Kumar, (1983)*Cultural History of Rajasthan*, New Delhi: Sandeep Prakashan, p.250-260

SELECT GLOSSARY OF INDIC TERMS

Jati, samaj – Endogamous Caste group

Jauhar- Mass suicide performed by the Rajput Women in Medieval times to protect their honour from enemy in the time of war.

Kul- clan, lineage

Pativrata- Devoted service to one's Husband.

Puja- Worship.

Rajput-Generally known as warrior or ruling Class (caste) in Rajasthan.

Sat -The truth or virtue manifested by a woman who becomes a sati.

Sati- A wife who submits to being burned with her recently deceased husband on his pyre so as to join him in death.

Sati dharma- Duty of a pious woman, who is devoted to her husband.



PLATE NO. 1. SATI MATA DEITY OF PURNIYA KALAL SAMAJ, UDAIPUR



PLATE NO. 2 THE WORSHIP OF SATI MATA, BIKANER.



PLATE NO 3 TEMPLE OF RANI
PADMINI, CHITTOR



PLATE NO 4 DEITY OF RANI PADMINI, CHITTOR



PLATE NO. 5 SHRINE OF ROOP KANWAR, DEORALA.



India's Concern About China's Rising Role

Piyali Basu

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Women's Christian College, Kolkata.

Email : piyalibasus1972@gmail.com. ORCID ID [0009-0006-3778-3469](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3778-3469)

Abstract

This research article examines the context of China's expanding global influence, characterized by its rising economic power, military modernization, and broader diplomatic engagements. In response, India's efforts to bolster her military presence along the border, enhance partnerships with nations such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, underscores her strategy to counter China's expanding military capabilities.

Aims of the Study:

1. Analyze China's expanding global influence, particularly her rising naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region with China's expanding and strategic investments in the region.
2. Examine the strategies adopted by India to counter China's growing economic and military presence in neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a key project of China's Belt and Road Initiative, traverses territory in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, a region claimed by India. India is also worried about China's rising influence in Afghanistan, particularly after the Taliban takeover. China has been investing heavily in Afghanistan's infrastructure and natural resources, and has also been engaging with the Taliban leadership, raising India's concerns about China's growing influence in the region and its potential implications for India's national security.
3. Explore potential avenues for collaboration between India and China within the evolving international landscape

Keywords: *Indian Ocean Region; China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; Belt and Road Initiative; Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir; Taliban.*

INTRODUCTION

China's rapid economic expansion, military modernization and expanding diplomatic engagements have significantly altered the global geopolitical landscape. China's growing global presence is marked by her increased engagements in international institutions, regional forums, and bilateral relationships. As China expands its strategic footprint, India has grown increasingly wary of the implications of China's rising global role on her national security, economic interests, and regional influence.

Methodology

The study is based on qualitative research design, focusing on in-depth analysis of India's response to China's rising global presence. The study primarily relies on secondary sources, including: academic journals and books, government reports and documents, news articles and media report, official documents and statements, data analysis, content analysis to examine India's response to China's rising global presence and discourse analysis to examine the power dynamics and ideological underpinnings of India's response to China's rising global presence.

China's Rising Global Role

China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the New Silk Road, is a global project involving 147 countries and two-thirds of the world's population and 40 per cent of its GDP. A significant element of this initiative is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is the largest project within the BRI, with an estimated investment of around \$62 billion aimed at linking China to Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Overall, China's investments in the BRI are estimated to be about \$1 trillion, with some projections indicating that total costs could soar to \$8 trillion in the long run, although estimates differ. Experts view the BRI as a fundamental aspect of Xi Jinping's assertive foreign policy, to create physical infrastructure connecting East Asia and Europe aligning with the Made in China 2025 economic development plan. Over the last decade, it has broadened its scope to include Africa, Oceania, and Latin America, significantly bolstering China's economic and political presence worldwide. For Xi, the BRI serves not only as a counter to the U.S. "Pivot to Asia," but also as a pathway for China to establish new trade links, expand its export markets, boost domestic incomes, and address its surplus production capacity. (McBride, Berman & Chatzky, 2023)

The United States has voiced concerns regarding China's intentions, particularly since the Obama administration's shift in focus towards Asia. In response, the US has made substantial investments in infrastructure and cooperation with low-income countries. During the Trump administration, the Development Finance Corporation was established by combining the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) with parts of USAID, resulting in a \$60 billion investment portfolio. The Build Back Better World Initiative (B3W) launched by President Biden in 2021 alongside the G7 was aimed to provide a competitive alternative to China's BRI. Nonetheless, B3W faced criticism due to its limited funding, with only \$6 billion allocated in its first year, prompting a rebranding to the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. Critics argue that, rather than directly investing in infrastructure projects where China holds a strong presence, the US should focus on strengthening aid-based lending through multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF. (Dutta & Dutta Choudhury, 2024)

While India was initially a founding member of China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the two nations have since diverged in their trade policies. Consequently, the United States has begun to perceive India as a crucial counterweight to China's influence in Asia, pursuing the strengthening of strategic alliances in the region, underscored by the establishment of the IPEF in 2022.

Indian Ocean Region, IOR, traditionally considered India's sphere of influence, is gaining importance due to expansion of Chinese infrastructure and military presence in this region. Stretching from the Strait of Malacca to the Mozambique Channel and encompassing vital maritime routes along with 33 countries that collectively have a population of about 2.9 billion, the IOR is fundamental for the vast majority of international commercial activities. These sea lines of communication (SLOCs) connect critical regions, making them indispensable for

international economic stability. India's reliance on maritime transport for nearly 80% of its crude oil and 95% of its trade (by volume) makes the IOR especially vital (Dutta & Dutta Choudhury, 2024)

India has sought to position the BRI as a strategy for Chinese dominance in Asia. Analysts have described this as a "String of Pearls" geo-economic approach, wherein China allegedly creates unsustainable debt for its Indian Ocean neighbours with the intent of controlling key regional trade routes. New Delhi has been particularly worried about China's long-standing partnership with its historical rival, Pakistan. In response, India has actively engaged in providing development aid to its neighbours, notably investing \$3 billion in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan.

China is ramping up its economic and political involvement in Afghanistan, motivated by security concerns centred on countering terrorism and advancing its BRI. This strategy marks a notable departure from China's earlier hands-off stance, as it increasingly prioritizes Afghanistan and its connectivity with regional partners, including Iran. Additionally, China is striving to build a more constructive relationship with Afghanistan independently of Pakistan, particularly in relation to the Wakhan Corridor project and efforts toward wider regional integration. By capitalizing on the current lawlessness in Afghanistan and the Taliban's strong connections with Pakistan, China aims to extract significant economic, strategic, and security advantages. (Askari & Khalid, 2023)

Meanwhile, China's development of the Kyaukpyu Port in Myanmar is part of its larger strategy to undermine India's naval influence in the Bay of Bengal. India remains cautious about the militarization of Gwadar Port in Pakistan and China's military base in Djibouti, which was established in 2017. Additionally, China has strengthened its diplomatic foothold in Indian Ocean nations, being the only major power with official representation in all six island countries: Comoros, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.

China's 2017 lease of Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, a move made after the country defaulted on its debts to Beijing, has been labelled as "debt trap diplomacy," a characterization that China disputes. Newly elected President Mohamed Muizzu is reorienting the Maldives' foreign policy, prioritizing closer ties with China at the expense of its relationship with India.

India's response:

China's rising global role has significant implications for India's national security, economic interests, and foreign policy. India needs to adopt a comprehensive approach to address these challenges, including strengthening her multilateral engagement, bilateral relationships, and economic diplomacy.

India's Security Concerns

China's rising global role has significant implications for India's border security, particularly in the Himalayas. China's expanding naval presence in the IOR has raised concerns about India's maritime security, particularly in the context of China's "String of Pearls" strategy. China's growing cyber capabilities have raised concerns about India's cyber security, particularly in the context of China's alleged cyber attacks on Indian critical infrastructure. A shift towards a more aggressive foreign policy by China, especially targeting India, has been observed since Xi Jinping assumed leadership. A US Congress report indicates that Xi's government has deliberately not clarified the Line of Actual Control (LAC), hindering lasting peace and worsening border disputes between the two nations. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission noted that Beijing's assertiveness towards India has increased, particularly in



light of strengthening India-US relations, which alarmed Beijing. Since 2013, there have been at least five notable border confrontations between India and China, a significant rise from the previous instance in 1987. China's assertiveness also encompasses broader territorial disputes, including its extensive claims over the South China Sea, despite opposition from several Southeast Asian nations. (Helpful Foundation Study Report, 2024)

India's Economic Concerns

China's growing economic presence in India's neighbourhood has raised concerns about India's trade competitiveness, particularly in the context of China's BRI. China's increasing energy footprint in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is sparking worries about India's energy security, especially considering China's rising reliance on imported energy.

To address this, India should collaborate with Japan and the United States to strengthen support for nations in the IOR. Japan has emerged as the primary provider of long-term infrastructure loans in Asia, exceeding the scale of China's BRI. India would benefit from identifying areas of shared interest with Japan to augment development assistance to countries in the Indian Ocean Region. To counter China's debt trap strategy, India should prioritize sustainable infrastructure that supports local economies and communicate this strategy effectively to countries such as Mauritius, Seychelles, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Comoros, and Madagascar.

India's Foreign Policy Concerns

In the backdrop of China's rising global role, India needs to strengthen her multilateral engagement, particularly in regional forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), her bilateral relationships, particularly with her neighbours, to counterbalance China's growing influence and her economic diplomacy, particularly in the context of China's BRI, to promote her economic interests and influence. The changing global landscape has necessitated several adjustments in India's foreign policy, including the introduction of the Look East Policy (LEP), which has been redefined by the current administration as the Act East Policy (AEP). (Barua, 2020).

India's strategic moves:

Diplomatic strategies

Accepting Mearsheimer's argument that regional hegemony is the best outcome for a great power, New Delhi must pursue a multi-faceted strategy to rebuild partnerships with coastal nations and enhance ties with island neighbors. India should leverage her historical and cultural connections with the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka while strengthening traditional social links. Additionally, Male's increasing skepticism towards Chinese investments due to rising debt, offers India a chance to reconnect with these nations. (Moorthy, 2021).

The adoption of the 'Indo-Pacific' geostrategic framework by India in 2015 signaled a shift in its perception of the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific as an integrated strategic region. The SAGAR doctrine, a vision by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous region, centers on security and growth for all. This vision aligns with the Indo-Pacific strategies of both Canada and the United States.

India has bolstered her involvement in multilateral platforms such as BRICS, SCO, and ASEAN to counter China's expanding influence. She has also prioritized her ties with neighboring nations, including Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka, in an effort to curb China's increasing presence in the region. Additionally, through



her "Act East Policy," India has sought to enhance her engagement with Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam to advance her economic and strategic interests in the area.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi invitation to all heads of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to the inauguration ceremony in 2014, signaled a dedicated move to strengthen relationships with India's immediate neighbours. During his visits to Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, he has intentionally focused on building enduring partnerships, rather than merely using these trips for publicity during SAARC meetings or other summits. Notably, his first foreign trip as Prime Minister was to Bhutan, where he highlighted the "unique and special bond" that exists between the two nations, referred to as the "Bharat to Bhutan" (B2B) relationship. (Srivastava, 2015)

Recent years have witnessed heightened nuclear interactions among China, India, and Pakistan, highlighting the complex interplay of geopolitical competition and nuclear issues. The 2019 cross-border airstrikes and the 2020 Galwan clash were key incidents that brought India and Pakistan dangerously close to military confrontation. India's security concerns are compounded by worries about China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation. Recognizing China as the most critical challenge to her external security strategies in the decade ahead, India must urgently re-examine her China policy to confront the reality of hostile political relations (Aiyar and Khilnani et al., 2021). The trajectory of China-India tensions will be a key factor in determining the future nuclear dynamics among China, India, and Pakistan.

Other Strategies

India has promoted its soft power, as a critical tool for regional engagement including its cultural, educational, and tourism diplomacy, to promote her influence and counterbalance China's growing presence. Indian agencies like the ICCR should study the model of Hanban, a Chinese Ministry of Education-affiliated institution focused on cultural diplomacy through education.

China is considered to have advanced cyber capabilities, with concerns about potential cyber espionage and China has been accused of conducting cyber-attacks aimed at Indian critical infrastructure, including sectors like energy, telecommunications, and transportation. These attacks are believed to involve espionage and disruptions, raising concerns over national security and the potential for geopolitical tensions between the two countries. India has established a dedicated national cyber security agency to coordinate cyber defense strategies and respond to threats effectively. The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) acts as a nodal agency for managing cyber incidents and providing security advisories. National Cyber Security Policy, 2013, outlines the framework for enhancing India's cyber security posture, including measures to protect critical infrastructure and build cyber resilience.

India has pursued space cooperation with other countries, including the United States, France, and Israel, to promote her space program and counterbalance China's growing space presence. The space strategies of India and China, significant actors in the contemporary space race, are demonstrably influenced by their ongoing terrestrial conflicts. While India does not have a dedicated space force like China, both nations possess anti-satellite capabilities and reject the UN resolution banning anti-satellite missile tests. (Sharmin, 2023).

Another point of contention between India and China is the management of the Brahmaputra River, which runs along their shared border. This issue encompasses critical strategic, economic, and environmental concerns. India has adopted several strategies to manage the Brahmaputra river in light of her relationship with China. These strategies include diplomatic engagement for cooperative trans-boundary water

management, infrastructure investment for flood control, collaboration with neighbouring countries on water management, increased monitoring and research, public awareness initiatives, participation in global advocacy for fair river usage, and capacity building in hydrology. Together, these approaches seek to safeguard India's interests while promoting cooperation and sustainable river management.

Opportunities for Cooperation between India and China

- India and China can cooperate on trade, investment, and infrastructure development, manufacturing, and technology. Both countries are members of the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), providing platforms for economic cooperation.
- Establishing dialogue mechanisms, such as regular summits, ministerial meetings, and official visits, can help manage competition and cooperation
- Collaboration between them in multilateral forums like the World Trade Organization (WTO), G20 and developing institutional frameworks, such as free trade agreements, investment agreements, and cultural exchange programs, can facilitate cooperation and reduce competition.
- Both countries can work together to address climate change, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy, and adapting to climate-related disasters and cooperate in areas like renewable energy.
- India and China can cooperate on global governance issues, such as reforming the United Nations, promoting multilateralism, and addressing global challenges like pandemics and terrorism.
- Both countries can collaborate on science and technology, including joint research and development projects, technology transfer, and innovation.
- India and China can enhance cultural exchange through initiatives such as people-to-people interactions, educational collaborations, and cultural events. By focusing on their historical and cultural connections, including Buddhism and ancient trade routes, both countries can also boost tourism.
- There exists an opportunity for collaboration on infrastructure projects, including those under the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). However, sensitivities arise from India's apprehensions regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- Both countries face challenges from terrorism and have expressed commitment to combating it.

Justification of the study:

The Indo-Chinese relationship is an intricate balance of cooperative and competitive forces. While there are significant areas of mutual interest, the relationship is also marked by tensions and challenges, which require careful management through dialogue, diplomacy, and focus on shared goals. Undoubtedly, the future of this relationship will significantly shape the Asian continent and the global order.

Conclusion:

The study suggests a growing strategic rivalry between India and China, with both nations competing for influence in the region. The ongoing territorial disputes along the LAC highlight the complex and contentious nature of the India-China relationship. China's growing military strength, confidence, and assertive approach towards its neighbours are driving India to enhance her military presence along the border, showcasing China's rising global presence. China's confidence in her military capabilities and her increasingly assertive approach towards her neighbours underscore her rising global presence. India and China both consider certain areas close to the LAC as highly important for military strategy, leading to tension and occasional conflict,



especially in regions like the Depsang Plains and Demchok, where both countries claim territory and could potentially launch offensive operations, if necessary.

Despite tensions, the study highlights opportunities for economic cooperation between India and China, which could help reduce tensions and promote mutual understanding. The easing of tensions along the LAC can be attributed to the agreement between India and China, which stipulates the restoration of patrolling rights and the reduction of military presence.

The economic interdependence between India and China creates a complex dynamics, where cooperation and competition coexist. The agreement to ease tensions along the LAC suggests that diplomatic efforts can help reduce tensions and promote stability in the region.

The study emphasizes the importance of effective communication and trust-building measures in managing the complex India-China relationship.

References:

Ahmad, Khan Tanveer (2023). "Limited Hard Balancing: Explaining India's Counter Response to Chinese Encirclement", *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 6(3), March-April, pp. 92-108. Aiyar, Y, S. Khilnani, et al. (2021). "India's Path to Power: Strategy in a World Adrift." <https://takshashila.org.in/research/indias-path-to-power-strategy-in-a-world-adrift> Askari Muhammad Usman and Khalid Talha (2023), "China's Policy Toward Afghanistan and Its Impact on India", *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 9(1-4). pp. 1-20. Barua Taz (2020), "The Look East Policy/Act East Policy-driven Development Model in Northeast India," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 24(1). pp.101-20.

Bozorgmeh, N, Foy, H. (2019). *Financial Times*. December.

<https://www.ft.com/content/3d5a4cf0-288f-11ea-9a4f-963f0ec7e134> Das, Angana (2016). "India's Neighbourhood Policy: Challenges and Prospects", *Jindal Journal of International Affairs* 4 (1). pp.18-37.

Dutta, Suyesha, Dutta Choudhury, Suvolaxmi, (2024), *Balancing Tides: India's Competition with China for Dominance of the Indian Ocean*. <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/balancing-tides-indias-competition-china-dominance-indian>

Dwivedi, Gaurie. (2021). *China's Quest for World Dominance & Its Impact on India and the Region*, November 01 <https://indiafoundation.in/articles-and-commentaries/chinas-quest-for-world-dominance-its-impact-on-india-and-the-region/> Ganapathi, M (2015). "Look East-Act East Dimension of India's Foreign Policy" *Indian Foreign Affairs*, 10(1). pp. 63-73.

Helpful Foundation Study Report, (2024), *India's National security Threat from China*, March 29, <https://helpful.foundation/indias-national-security-threat-from-china/> McBride, James, Berman, Noah and Chatzky, Andrew (2023). *China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative*, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative> Moorthy N Sathya, ORF, July (2021). <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/maldives-india-out-campaign-now-takes-a-personal-turn-with-local-political-implications/> Panda. Ankit (2019). *The Diplomat*, November. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/chinese-russian-south-african-navies-conduct-trilateral-naval-exercises/> Pant, Harsh V. and Super Julie M (2019). "Non-alignment and Beyond", in *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Harsh, V. Pant. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.127.



Roy Chaudhury, Rahul (2018). "India's Perspective towards China in Their Shared South Asian Neighbourhood: Cooperation Versus Competition, Contemporary Politics", 24(1). pp. 98-112.

Sharmin, Farjana (2023), China's Increasing Space Power and India-China Orbital Competitions Implications in the Indo-Pacific with a Focus on South Asia, November 23. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3588334/chinas-increasing-space-power-and-indiachina-orbital-competitions-implications/>

Singh, Swaran and Marwah, Reena (2022). eds., Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: Conceptual and Operational Challenges. London: Taylor & Francis.

Srivastava, Juhi (2015). "Indo-Bhutan Bilateral Relations and Narendra Modi," Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, 5(10). pp.62-68.

Vaughn, Bruce (2018). China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 20.



Ethnic and Linguistic Ties Between Northeast India and Southeast Asia: Foundations for Regional Integration and India's Act East Policy

Somdatta Banerjee

Assistant Professor Department of Political Science New Alipore College

Email: banerjee.somdatta@gmail.com ORCID ID [0009-0007-1659-0024](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1659-0024)

Abstract

Northeast India and Southeast Asia have a rich history of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic connections that span centuries. Their geographical closeness has encouraged migration, trade, and cultural exchanges, resulting in many shared traits among the populations of these regions. The ethnic diversity in Northeast India and Southeast Asia shows notable parallels. Numerous indigenous groups in Northeast India, including the Nagas, Mizos, Kukis, Bodos, and Ahoms, have ancestral ties to ethnic communities in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and other Southeast Asian countries. Anthropological studies suggest that many of these groups can trace their roots back to migration waves from the Sino-Tibetan and Austroasiatic areas of China and Southeast Asia. Linguistically, the Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic families are prevalent in both Northeast India and Southeast Asia. Languages like Bodo, Meitei (Manipuri), and various Naga dialects exhibit structural and lexical similarities with Burmese, Karen, and other Tibeto-Burman languages found in Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos.

This paper will discuss how, by strengthening connectivity and fostering people-to-people interactions, India can leverage these historical ties to create a more integrated and prosperous regional network, and how several challenges hinder deeper integration. Amidst this backdrop, the paper will explore the ethnic and linguistic similarities between Northeast India and Southeast Asia, highlighting how these connections form a solid basis for India's Act East Policy.

Keywords: *Northeast India, Southeast Asia, culture, ethnic, linguistic, connections, India's Act East Policy, regional framework, soft power.*

Since its inception, the Look East Policy has been a significant agenda in India's foreign policy, focusing primarily on forging closer economic ties with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations. After assuming the Prime Ministership, Narendra Modi upgraded the Look East Policy into the Act East Policy in 2014 to focus on the Asia-Pacific region's extended neighbourhood and promote economic cooperation and cultural ties through constant bilateral and multilateral engagements. (Horam: Academia:2024)

The oft-repeated statement that "Southeast Asia begins where Northeast India ends" (Patgiri and Hazarika:2016) captures the essence of Northeast India's vitality to India's eastward engagement and Northeast India and Southeast Asia share a deep-rooted historical bond marked by cultural, ethnic, and linguistic interconnections that date back centuries. The region is characterized by a vibrant mix of ethnic groups and languages, reflecting a long-standing exchange of traditions and historical ties that shape its diverse and intricate social fabric. (Press Information Bureau Website) This point was emphasized in 2007 by



Pranab Mukherjee, who was serving as India's Minister of External Affairs at the time. Speaking in Shillong, he noted that the Northeast holds strategic importance, as its development can be aligned with the objectives of India's 'Look East' policy. (Carnegieendowment.org;2007)

Northeast India in India's Look/Act East Policy

In the annals of Indian foreign policy, Northeast India has always remained a strategic linking point and acted as the frontier between India and its neighbours. Ethnically, this region is distinct from the rest of India and has strong ethnic and cultural ties with Southeast Asia. The northeast region is demarcated by India's international borders with China, Myanmar (formerly Burma), Bhutan, and Bangladesh.

India announced the Look East Policy mainly to strengthen economic relationships with Southeast Asian countries, focusing primarily on increasing trade and investment activities. Through this, India intends to develop close economic and cultural relations with the region and create a cooperative environment along its border areas by expanding its footprint into Southeast Asia. The geographical contiguity between the North East Region and Southeast Asia makes the region central to New Delhi's connectivity projects. India has emphasized maritime and land connectivity to facilitate greater movements of goods and people between the regions. Dr. Sarish Sebastian, Dr. Shalini. B., Dr. Philip Varghes (2022), in their study report titled India's Neighborhood Policy towards the Southeast Asian Region: A Study on Act East Policy, contended that during the early phase of looking east, New Delhi did not give much importance to the Northeast. More so, during the Cold War years, New Delhi lacked any definite East Asia Policy, making this region isolated in its economic and foreign policy domain. This condition has been radically transformed in the context of the New Global Order, following India's announcement of the Look East Policy.

With the announcement of the Act East Policy in 2014 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the new government explicitly emphasized integrating Northeast India into the broader strategy. Modi reinforced this by stating that India's eastern engagement begins at Myanmar's western frontier (MEA Website, 2014). The then Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, while addressing the Governors of India's Northeast region on October 6, 2015, emphasized that the Northeast is a "natural partner" in India's Act East Policy and a land bridge to ASEAN. (Muni and Mishra:2019)

In a parliamentary session on December 23, 2015, Minister of State for External Affairs Gen. V. K. Singh reiterated the policy's objectives—strengthening economic ties, cultural connections, and strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific through continued bilateral and multilateral engagement. He stressed the importance of involving the Northeast through enhanced infrastructure and cross-border connectivity, including roads, airports, telecommunications, and energy links (Press Information Bureau). At a business conclave in Assam in February 2018, Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed the region's centrality by stating that the Act East Policy places the Northeast at its core (ANI News, 2018). Sushma Swaraj also emphasized the "3Cs"—Connectivity, Commerce, and Culture—as the policy's foundational pillars, with Northeast India playing a key role in each. The Act East Policy now envisions Northeast India not just as a gateway but as an active participant in India's engagement with Southeast Asia. It aims to rebuild cultural and historical bonds while advancing regional economic integration. As Luo (2024) notes in the *International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology*, the policy encourages a multi-dimensional role for the region, making it a key stakeholder in India's eastward vision. (Luo: International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology:2024)

To transform the borders (India shares a 5,800-km long land border with Myanmar and Bangladesh extends across Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. (G

Partha sarathy: 2019) from obstacles to opportunity and opulence, India began to surge in connectivity and made efforts to build infrastructure. Key infrastructure initiatives include upgrading the Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road in Myanmar, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (which links Kolkata to Mizoram via Myanmar), and the Rhi-Tiddim road connecting Myanmar and Mizoram. Segments of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, spanning about 1,360 kilometers, further boost this connectivity (Gupta, 2012).

Dr. Sarish Sebastian, Dr. Shalini. B., Ph.D Dr. Philip Varghes (2022), again in their study, India's Neighborhood Policy towards the Southeast Asian Region: A Study on Act East Policy, discussed the potential revival of the Stilwell Road, connecting Assam in India with China via Myanmar. The road passes through Arunachal Pradesh and enters Myanmar at the Pangsau Pass. Moreover, major highways in Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur are now integrated into the Asian Highway network (AH-1 and AH-2). Enhancing connectivity between Northeast India and Southeast Asia, the study report highlighted that New Delhi's aim is twofold. First, they aim to lift the Northeast out of its landlocked and isolated state, enabling greater cross-border trade and people-to-people connections. Second, they offer the region's alternate entrée to the sea and the remaining India through Myanmar. According to the study, these initiatives are part of India's broader strategy to overcome the geopolitical limitations imposed on the Northeast during partition and fully integrate it into its Act East vision.

Challenges to Deeper Integration

Mungreishang Horam, in his article, rightfully highlighted that the integration of Northeast India in the later phase of the Look East Policy was visibly premised on the approach towards resolving the developmental gaps and limited participation of India in the Northeast. India intends to incorporate the region's needs and concerns into the broader framework of the country's neighbourhood strategy. He added that this new approach sought to emphasize opening up and unlocking the potential of the region through improved connectivity, economic integration, and a socio-cultural reconnect with India's eastern neighbours. Northeast India, often referred to as India's 'gateway to the East,' holds a pivotal position in strengthening the nation's ties with its eastern neighbours. Consequently, the Look East Policy evolved to include a stronger focus on the region, positioning it as a central lens through which the policy was implemented. (Horam: 2024)

Hence, Northeast India was included in India's Look East policy when India thought of the region's progress by integrating it as an element of its foreign policy orientation. India also saw the Northeast region as a strategic entry point for fostering economic integration and improving connectivity with Southeast Asian nations. As a result, the integration of Northeast India emerged as a key element of the Look East Policy, and over time, the region assumed a central role in India's outreach to the East. The shift from the 'Look East' to the 'Act East' Policy in 2014 further elevated the strategic importance of the Northeast in India's engagement with its eastern neighbours.

But Northeast India is known for its peculiar complications. It is characterised by the geographical isolation from the rest of India, thereby lacking a cultural and historical connection with the mainland. The region stands apart from mainland India due to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and connectivity, ethnic tensions, insurgency, and issues related to weak governance.

Despite India's efforts to improve connectivity under the Act East Policy, infrastructure gaps, particularly in remote areas of Northeast India, pose substantial challenges. Inadequate roads, limited rail and air links, and insufficient logistical support encumber smooth trade and communication between the two regions.



The geopolitical intricacy of the region, particularly with Myanmar and Bangladesh, presents security challenges that further muddle cross-border cooperation. The region has seen decades of insurgency and is typically characterized as being exceptionally diverse, with a bewildering number of politically salient ascriptive identities. (Lacina:2009) All these States have faced, or continue to face, trans-border terrorist and separatist challenges. Armed separatist groups in India's north-east recently united under the banner of a so-called 'United Liberation Front of Western South Asia', posing a serious security challenge to the subcontinent. Several insurgent groups operate in the region, including the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), the Kamtapur Liberation Organization, and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in Assam.

These insurgents have ignored official borders, finding the remote hills of western Burma, Bangladesh, and Bhutan to be opportune areas to obtain shelter, support, and financing. The Naga, Assamese, and Manipuri (Meithei) armed groups established clandestine networks of jungle training camps, arms and drug trafficking routes, and an elaborate extortion system in the neighboring Burmese Sagaing Division and Kachin State. (Renegaud :2008) Another impediment to the integration of the North East region is the requirement for Indian citizens to obtain Inner Line Permits to travel to protected tribal areas in the Northeast. This convolutes the procedure of visiting and investing in the region.

All these have contributed to hindering the development process in the region. Apart from geographical isolation, policy formulation and execution in the region often lack reflection and inclusion of the realities. Peculiar needs and concerns have impeded the development process of the North East, leading to the perpetuation of political instability and poor governance. Consequently, the geographical detachment of India's Northeast, developmental gap, political complexity, and cultural absolutes have contributed to the region's peripheral nature and isolation from the rest of India. These problems and challenges require attention and hence here ethnic and linguistic similarities between Northeast India and Southeast Asia could facilitate regional integration.

Ethnic and Linguistic Similarities between Northeast India and Southeast Asia

Amb (Retd) Anil Wadhwa at Dr. Harisingh Gaur University, Sagar, M.P. on August 9, 2019, it was stated that India's engagement with Southeast Asia has been rooted in common historical connections, cultural links, and shared. The values and culture of India and Southeast Asia are interconnected, and this is based on contacts through civilizations. There is clear historical evidence of India's contact with Southeast Asia dating as far back as the 3rd century AD, marked by trade relations, the spread of Sanskrit, and the influence of Indian epics.

There is also well-documented evidence of technical innovations between South East Asia and India. "The shared heritage between India and Southeast Asia forms the foundation for strong regional cooperation. These similarities span various cultural dimensions, including values and traditions, social structures, folk heritage, languages, literature, traditional arts and crafts, architecture, performing arts, games, indigenous knowledge systems, myths, rituals, and other living traditions, as noted by the Ministry of External Affairs. (MEASite). Northeast India – comprising the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura – holds a distinct geopolitical and cultural closeness to Southeast Asia, reinforcing its strategic significance in regional engagement.

The Northeast of India is a potpourri of different ethnic communities, home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, with a significant percentage of the population being tribal, primarily in the hills. India has



approximately 635 tribal groupings, of them more than 200 are found in northeastern India. Because of the scattered populations that cross international borders, people in Northeast India have linguistic, cultural, and ethnic ties to their neighbours. There is ethnic overlap and connections between some Northeastern ethnic groups and those in Southeast and even East Asia. Assamese Ahoms are seen as belonging to the broader Tai people, who are dispersed across Southeast Asia. Research has also shown that the Khasis of Meghalaya and the Mon-Khmer people of Southeast Asia have a common language.

The ethnic groups of Northeast India and Southeast Asia have shared roots, primarily traced back to migration waves from the Sino-Tibetan and Austroasiatic regions of China and Southeast Asia. Numerous indigenous groups in Northeast India, such as the Nagas, Mizos, Kukis, Bodos, and Ahoms, share common ancestors with ethnic communities in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and other Southeast Asian countries. Anthropological studies suggest that ancestors of numerous Northeast Indian ethnic clusters moved in a southerly direction from the Sino-Tibetan zone (particularly China and Tibet) and subsequently came in contact with native people of Southeast Asia. The historical record indicates that these were sequential migrations, and in turn, ethnic clusters like the Nagas, Mizos, and Bodos share certain sociocultural features and systems of organization with Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos.

The people belonging to the 'Naga' ethnic tribe are inhabitants of Sagaing and Kachin regions in Myanmar, as well as Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, the Chins of Chin state in Myanmar and Mizos in Mizoram share common culture and history (Singh, 2020). Kukis, who lives on both sides of the border, moves spontaneously to discuss family matters or pay goodwill visits (Majumdar, 2020). The Treaty of Friendship, which came into force in 1952, allowed the indigenous population at the India-Myanmar border a free passage within 40 km on both sides for facilitating local trade and social visits (Trivedi, 2020).

Northeast India and Southeast Asia share common religious practices, agricultural methods, and traditional crafts. The Mizos and the Karen of Myanmar practice identical agricultural traditions like shifting cultivation, also referred to as slash-and-burn farming. Further, the Ahoms of Assam and the Shans of Myanmar have similar societal formations. Their experiences of kingdom building acted as a catalyst for fostering exchanges between them over time. Cultural resemblances exist between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. Different festivals with shared heritage are observed in these two regions for example, Ronagli in Assam, Songkran in Thailand, Laos's Pi Mai, and Arunachal Pradesh's Sangken are festivals that mark the onset of the New Year, and like Songkran in Thailand and Sangken in Arunachal Pradesh, many of them reflect shared cultural traditions and practices. Research by anthropologists and archaeologists has revealed that the Khasi people exhibit cultural parallels with the Mundari and Mon-Khmer communities. These similarities are evident in their use of comparable stone tools and in common funerary customs, such as the practice of setting up memorial stones to honour the deceased. (Tagore, Majumder, Chatterjee, Das: Frontier:2022). This similarity generates a sense of oneness with each other and is a conduit for creating stronger bonds between them. Therefore, these festivals offer an inimitable opportunity for the regions to integrate and form a stronger association based on the common cultural practices and legacy.

Language is a significant means of communication, and linguistic ties between Northeast India and Southeast Asia are significant. Languages spoken in both regions are intensely rooted in the Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic language families. The Austroasiatic language family includes languages spoken by ethnic groups such as the Khasis of Meghalaya, who share linguistic roots with the Mon-Khmer languages spoken in Southeast Asia, particularly in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. These languages exhibit strong lexical and



phonological similarities, signifying that historical connections may have contributed to such linguistic similarities between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. It has been observed that the Tibeto-Burman language is ubiquitous in both Northeast India and Southeast Asia. Languages like Bodo, Meitei (Manipuri), and several Naga dialects exhibit prominent resemblance to Burmese, Karen, and other Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. These languages share phonetic structures, syntactic patterns, and vocabulary. For example, the Meitei language in Manipur shares common grammatical structures and vocabulary with Burmese. Similarly, Naga languages, such as Ao, Angami, and Lotha, have been found to have significant similarities to languages spoken in Myanmar, especially those in the Chin and Kachin regions. All these make it evident that both areas have linguistic commonalities too. The ethnic tribes that are best represented along the boundaries, as we are aware, northeastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram, share a land border with Myanmar and hence have deep historical and cultural ties. Consequently, North East became a crucial 'gateway' to Southeast Asia, both physically and culturally. Hence, pursuing a proactive cultural diplomacy linking the North East Region and Southeast Asia is necessary and strategically significant for India.

Conclusion and Way Forward

Soft power, in the post-Cold War era, is a crucial component of foreign policy, and as the world's largest democracy, with a rich heritage, culture, and ambitious aspirations, India has always relied on soft power diplomacy. Shashi Tharoor observed in his *Pax Indica* (2012) that India is an enthusiastic proponent of soft power. India leverages its diverse cultural assets—such as Bollywood cinema, yoga, Ayurveda, historical tourism, and its flavourful, spice-laden cuisine—as key instruments of soft power in international relations. (Patil: 2022) Amb (Retd) Bhaswati Mukherjee, in her lecture at Pondicherry University, identified cultural diplomacy as an important dimension of a country's soft power. She highlighted the significance of cultural diplomacy and soft power as key tools for fostering both regional and global cooperation, particularly within South Asia. She concluded that culture now plays a vital role in connecting people, strengthening bilateral ties, and mending divisions caused by political conflicts and hostility (MEA Website). Similarly, in 1996, then-Prime Minister I. K. Gujral pointed out that while India and Southeast Asian nations possess rich cultural resources, these remain largely untapped in diplomatic engagement. He emphasized using the strength of cultural relations to enhance economic and political relations. (Chakraborty:2022)

Once regarded as an isolated and conflict-prone region, the Northeast India region is now experiencing a major geo economic transformation due to India's ambitious foreign policy imperatives connecting Southeast Asia. Accordingly, as part of its 'Act East' policy, New Delhi has increasingly recognized the Northeast's strategic role in facilitating connectivity, given its pivotal location at the crossroads of India's borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and China (Nayar, 2021). In the days to come, India must concentrate on enhancing regional infrastructure and address the underdevelopment of road, rail, and air transport infrastructure, to ensure connectivity between these states. Endorsing language and cultural exchanges, though it could appear to be an ambitious project, still strengthening cultural linkages between India and Southeast Asia would promise many benefits, as this would lead to more collaborative initiatives that would foster mutual understanding and cooperation and would bolster In conclusion, with its central role in the Act East Policy, Northeast India is poised to shift from being a marginal region to a vibrant hub for trade and tourism, positioned at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia. India's Look/Act East Policy aims to strengthen economic, political, and cultural ties with Southeast Asia, building on long-established historical connections. It would steer India's initiatives to drive the region towards development, driven by shared cultural ties, with the ultimate goal of enhancing India's influence by leveraging culture as a form of soft power.



Therefore, ethnic and linguistic connections between Northeast India and Southeast Asia could catalyse regional integration and play a significant role in India's Act East Policy. These ties would help to transform the North-East, bolster the Look East/ Act East Policy, and provide an opportunity for India to leverage these historical and cultural links to foster deeper economic, cultural, and political cooperation. Consequently, all these would assist India to emerge as a major Asian power utilising its soft power.

References:

- Act East Policy. (2015, December 23). Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133837>
- Aphun, K. (2024, November 22). India and Southeast Asia: From "Look East" to "Act East." Jawaharlal Nehru University. https://www.sylff.org/news_voices/32125/
- Baruah, S. (2007). Beyond durable disorder: Northeast India and the Look East Policy. In S. Baruah (Ed.), *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (pp. 211–236). Oxford University Press.
- Bhaumik, S. (2014, June). Look East through Northeast: Challenges and prospects for India. *ORF Occasional Paper #51*. Observer Research Foundation. https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/OccasionalPaper_51.pdf
- Chakrabarty, B. (2005). *The ethnic diversity of Northeast India: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. Oxford University Press.
- Chowdhury, H. M. (n.d.). North East India and South East Asia: An amalgamation of culture and heritage. *LinkedIn*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/north-east-india-south-asia-amalgamation-culture-chowdhury>
- Connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia: Interim report. (2013). Asian Development Bank Institute.
- Egreteau, R. (2008). India's ambitions in Burma: More frustration than success? *Asian Survey*, 48(6), 936–957. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2008.48.6.936>
- Graham, J. (2012, August 2). Back in the game: India strengthens political and economic ties with Myanmar. *M-Zine Plus Magazine*. <https://www.mea.gov.in>
- Gupta, A. (2012, February 2). Myanmar's critical role in bolstering India's Look East Policy. *The Hindustan Times*.
- Horam, M. (2024, March). India's "Act East" policy and Northeast India: Prospects and challenges. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 13(3) and Horam, M. (n.d.). *India's "Act East" policy and Northeast India: Prospects and challenges*. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/116049562/Indias_Act_East_Policy_and_Northeast_India_Prospects_and_Challenges
- Haug, D. (2010). Linguistic connections between Southeast Asia and Northeast India. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 65(4), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911810000623>
- Indian Ministry of External Affairs. (2014, November 12). Opening statement by Prime Minister at the 12th India-ASEAN Summit, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. <http://www.mea.gov.in/aseanindia/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/22566/Opening+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+at+the+12th+IndiaASEAN+Summit+Nay+Pyi+Taw+Myanmar>
- Lacina, B. (2009). The problem of political stability in Northeast India: Local ethnic autocracy and the rule of law. *Asian Survey*, 49(6), 998–1020. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2009.49.6.998>



- Lipi, S. India-South East Asia relations in context of North East India & Bay of Bengal: Pre-colonial connectivity and contemporary convergence [Workshop lecture]. MCRG. http://www.mcrg.ac.in/rls_pml/RLS_L/RLS_L_Abstracts/Comments_Lipi.pdf
- Luo, C. (n.d.). *Linguistic diversity in Southeast Asia and its impact on multilingual education*. *International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology*, 6(1), 61–66. <https://francispress.com/uploads/papers/9zk4gQS6kORSnf1LsUc6VvrWxSRtUyOToWmbApkz.pdf>
- Majumdar, M. (2020). Northeast India's critical role in harnessing the three C's: Commerce, connectivity, and culture in the Act East policy. In A. Singh (Ed.), *Northeast India and India's Act East Policy: Identifying the Priorities* (pp. 123–136). Routledge.
- Ministry of External Affairs. (2019, August 9). *India's Act East Policy*. Distinguished lecture at Dr. Harisingh Gaur University, Sagar, M.P. <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?840>
- Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2015, December 23). ACT EAST POLICY. Press Information Bureau. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=133837>
- Muni, S., & Mishra, M. (2017). India's Eastward engagement. In *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast* (pp. 213–234). Routledge India.
- Mukherjee, B. (2019, October 18). India's culture diplomacy and soft power. Distinguished lecture at Pondicherry University. <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?855>
- Nayar, N. (2021, October 11). Paradiplomacy in Northeast India: Assam acts East. *Sambandh: Regional Connectivity Initiative*. <https://www.sambandh.com>
- Patil, S. (n.d.). India's soft power diplomacy in the Modi era. *The Loop*. <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/indias-soft-power-diplomacy-in-the-modi-era/>
- Pattnaik, J. K. (2017). Look East policy and India's North-eastern region: Status of cross-border trade and connectivity. In G. Das & C. J. Thomas (Eds.), *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast* (p. 222). Routledge India.
- Pryor, W. (2017). *Historical migration and cultural interactions between Northeast India and Southeast Asia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Patgiri, R., & Hazarika, O. (2016). Locating Northeast in India's neighbourhood policy: Transnational solutions to the problems of a periphery. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 72(3), 22–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928416654353>
- Saikia, P. (2017). Embracing India's Northeast in BIMSTEC. In G. Das & C. J. Thomas (Eds.), *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast* (p. 198). Routledge India.
- Singh, A. (2020). Introduction. In A. Singh (Ed.), *Northeast India and India's Act East Policy: Identifying the Priorities* (pp. 1–14). Routledge.
- Tagore, D., Majumder, P. P., Chatterjee, A., & Basu, A. (2022). Multiple migrations from East Asia led to linguistic transformation in Northeast India and mainland Southeast Asia. *Frontiers in Genetics*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/genetics/articles/10.3389/fgene.2022.1023870/full>
- Thomas, C. J. (2017). Stillwell Road and the development of India's Northeast. In G. Das & C. J. Thomas (Eds.), *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast* (p. 151). Routledge India.



Trivedi, S. (2020). Connecting the borders: Northeast India and Myanmar. In A. Singh (Ed.), *Northeast India and India's Act East Policy: Identifying the Priorities* (pp. 97–110). Routledge.

Wadhwa, A. (2019, August 9). India's Act East Policy. Distinguished lecture at Dr. Harisingh Gaur University, Sagar, M.P. <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?840>



The dichotomy between upholding Principles and Foreign Policy: A Study of Indo-Myanmar Relations

Devarati Mandal

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, New Alipore College, Kolkata.

Email: devarati.mandal@gmail.com | ORCID ID [0009-0007-3122-3089](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3122-3089)

Abstract

The tapestry of international relations is often intertwined with principle and pragmatism, where states are compelled to steer through the intricacies of values, interest and strategic imperatives. The central paradox that emerges here is -while India, a steadfast proponent of democratic principles whose foreign policy is firmly rooted on the principle of upholding and strengthening democratic values and aspirations, compelled by security imperatives, has concurrently engaged with Myanmar- a nation governed by an authoritarian regime that has repeatedly nibbed the democratic struggles. Initially, India, cognizant of the imperative of upholding democratic ideals, extended support to the democratic struggle and provided sanctuaries along with financial aid to political activists from Myanmar. But eventually, in the post-cold-war scenario being mindful of its enduring strategic imperatives in the region, India, prudently cultivated relations with the military administrations of Myanmar as well. Discernibly, the overarching supremacy of the army has its bearings over the foreign policy outcome and heavily influenced the trajectories of Indo-Myanmar relations. Therefore, India's relationship with Myanmar has been characterized by its dual nature- over time, oscillating between periods of trust and suspicion. This transformative process is not only indicative of the potential for pragmatic engagement with regimes of varying political orientations but also emphasises the degree of instrumental role that security imperatives can play in shaping the contours of bilateral relations. Thus, the apparent incongruity in the ever-evolving dynamics between democratic ideals and engagement with authoritarian regimes, which is evident in Myanmar, demands further exploration.

Keywords: Myanmar, Democratic Transition, Realism, Security imperatives, Military Junta, counter-insurgency.

With a population of over 54 million people, Myanmar is a culturally rich country located in Southeast Asia. The nation's continued struggle for democracy is a narrative of resilience and determination. Myanmar's inconsistent socio-economic situation is characterised by abundance of natural resources in juxtaposition with widespread poverty and inequality that the country has been mired in for decades. With such striking imbalances Myanmar stands as one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia. This volatility in Myanmar's socio-political space had spillover effects on India that exacerbated the security concerns of an already sensitive Northeastern region.

Myanmar is one such country that was apparently being indifferent to any global trend of transition towards 'Democracy'. Since the watershed year of 1988, when Myanmar



witnessed the foremost nationwide democracy uprising, had remained embroiled in a persistent state of political turmoil. The entire political history of Myanmar has been characterized by a relentless tug-of-war between entrenched military authoritarianism and the persistent aspirations of democratic factions, with the former consistently maintaining a position of dominance. Despite making strides towards being a young democracy, Myanmar slides back to the military rule in February 2021. This event accentuates the fragile nature of democratic progress in nations.

Myanmar in India's Geo-political Calculus

Before delving into further exploration of India- Myanmar dynamics as they navigated through the complexities of the 21st century, it would undoubtedly be instrumental to have a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted components that designed the course of their diplomatic and strategic partnership. To start with, the secessionist seeking shelter in Burma, Chinese encroachment, India's increasingly growing interest for natural gas and energy security and the strategic location of Myanmar as the land bridge to ASEAN- all these combined forces had made New Delhi to dance on their tunes.

Situated at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, Myanmar occupies a pivotal geostrategic position of paramount significance. It functions as a buffer state strategically positioned between India and China, with its borders linking Bangladesh, China, Laos, and Thailand and the Northeastern states of India (Rieffel 2012: 212). Its geographical location serves as a bridge connecting the Indian subcontinent with mainland Southeast Asia, rendering it a crucial player in regional politics and geopolitics (Linter, Asia Times: 2007). Its southeastern coast is in close proximity to India's Nicobar archipelago along with the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, and the Strait of Malacca all converge around Myanmar, making it an indispensable gateway for maritime trade routes. Given its strategic location, Myanmar naturally emerges as a state likely to be contested for, by both India and China.

India's Engagement in Myanmar's Democratic Endeavour (1948-1990)

Democratic ideas are not new-fangled to Burma. In the initial years, Myanmar embraced parliamentary democracy under the leadership of U Nu. Both the nations had a promising start where they forged a closer alliance, which was culminated with the ratification of the 1951 Treaty of Friendship. In those early days, when both the nations were navigating through the challenges of their newfound democracies, two overarching elements shaped the contours of their bilateral relationship. Firstly, the warm camaraderie between Prime Ministers Nehru and U Nu and secondly, the Indian diaspora residing in the country for generations; and lastly India, sought to guarantee the continuity of a friendly like-minded democratic regime in the vicinity of the newly independent nation. But unfortunately, this was short lived. Soon Burma's democratic system started waning again after a decade and political situation got further complicated when a military coup was staged; the civilian government was ousted; abolished the 1947 constitution; and democratic apparatus was ultimately dissolved in the year of 1962 (Asraf 2008:226). Then onwards Myanmar endured

more than five decades of military domination. Furthermore, the closer Sino-Burmese axis soured the relationship with Delhi and until 1988 there was virtually no diplomatic contact.

The dynamics further shifted with the struggle for democratisation- a movement spearheaded by students under the leadership of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi who established the National League for Democracy (NLD). This movement held promise for change and progress (Wanger 2009:17). In the course of political upheavals in Myanmar, New Delhi started playing a crucial role in curving out the course of it. Throughout 1980s to 1990s, India staunchly advocated for reinstating democracy in Myanmar and vehemently opposed military's brutal crackdown of the pro-democracy uprising and their subsequent seizure of power (Yhome 2009:1-2). This was apparent when India publicly expressed her displeasure and started providing refuge to the pro-democratic forces in the wake of the "8888 Movement". Reports indicated that India extended comprehensive financial, material, and logistical aid to the democratic factions opposing the military authorities (Muni 2009: 94). This proactive approach yielded positive results; in 1988, General Ne Win was compelled to relinquish power, and in 1990, the League of Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi secured a resounding victory in the general election (Seshadri 2022:3). This enhanced the "people-to-people" relationship, parallel to the radical scaling down of "government-to-government" ties (Trivedi 2017:151). Unfortunately, India's patronage to the democratic struggle proved to be untenable. Before the newly elected government could assume office, the military intervened, General Than Shwe eventually assumed power in 1992- ushering in two more decades of military rule.

Paradigm Shift in Policy in the Post Cold-War Period (1990-2009)

Initially, India adopted a firm stance in support of the democratic movement. India being a compatriot granted asylum to a significant number of NLD activists (Wanger 2009:17). In July 1992, Myanmar's opposition group, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) constituted of the members of the 1990 elected parliament of Myanmar was authorized to open its office on Indian soil (Muni 2009:98). The democratic activists were allowed to operate for advocating democratic reforms in Myanmar, while they were in exile. However, India's support for democratic struggle in Myanmar could not be sustained for long. Such actions on part of India signifies the support extended to Myanmar's struggle for upholding democracy in the country. Explicably, these steps were not accepted on a good note- "Yangon regarded this as blatant interference in Myanmar's internal affairs" (Freedman 2017:94).

Since, early 1990s, there was indeed a paradigm shift in India's policy towards Myanmar. With the launch of India's "Look East" policy, New Delhi felt the necessity to initiate the process of constructive engagement with Myanmar, despite of the existence of military junta in power. This marked the beginning of departure from their long exercised foreign policy practise of extending support to the struggle for freedom and democracy; concurrently it marked the onset of a new kind of a bilateral relation that lasted for long.

Moreover, the persisting internal security challenges emanating from various ethnic- based militant insurgencies in its northeastern states had been a concern for India. Since the 1980s, militant organizations in Burma, such as the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), collaborated with United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), a separatist group in India (Wanger 2009: 17). Insurgent groups like the Nagas and ULFA were receiving tacit assistance

from the Burmese junta. They had operational freedom of functioning from the soil of Myanmar and also received steady supply of arms, ammunitions and narcotics from China, via Myanmar. The military Junta started forging strategic partnership with Pakistan and underwent for procuring arms from them as well (Khanna 2007: 185-186). Thus, India's intelligence service sought to establish connections with the militant networks in the region and engaged with the KIO to combat certain factions of Naga guerillas in India (Muni 2009: 60-63). During this precarious situation India found itself steering through a complex web of geopolitical regional dynamics. This perception emanated from a geopolitical reality wherein India found itself sandwiched between adversarial neighbours. Such a geopolitical conundrum demanded a carefully calibrated response from Indian policymakers. New Delhi adopted a stance characterized by pragmatism, while going against its normative principle.

Eventually, with the change of millennium, as fourth wave of democratization started creeping in the region, India also concurrently started shifting her focus towards human resource development and capacity-building, with the objective of facilitating steady and holistic political transformation within Myanmar. India actively engaged in capacity-building initiatives by sponsoring training programs for civil servants, military personnel and members of civil society (Seshadri 2022:5-6). The training courses conducted both in India and Myanmar served as fundamental pillars for a country's reformation system, which would contribute to the promotion of rule of law, effective governance, robust public administration, democratic principles, protection of human rights, active participation of government officials in decision- making processes, and enhanced transparency in information dissemination. During this period, India and Myanmar embarked on a series of bilateral agreements aimed at bolstering various facets of their relationship. Broadly India's policy stance during this phase was standing on four major pillars.

- Emphasising on enhancing the capabilities of state institutions through human capital development, with a particular focus on capacity building.
- While prioritization grassroot-level endeavours the focus would be on promoting civil society initiatives and undertaking additional developmental initiatives.
- Delivering training to both civilian and military personnel with an intention of forging a connection between democracy strengthening and development.
- Defining the bilateral relation based on the principle of effective collaboration even at the cost of engaging with authoritarian regimes.

The economic sphere also witnessed significant strides, as Indian entities such as ONGC and GAIL were accorded with permission to acquire a stake in the Shwe gas project, situated off Myanmar's coast (Bhatia 2015: 67-69). This development holds significant implications, particularly in the context of the gas pipeline project designed to transport natural gas from Myanmar's Arakan state to India's northeastern state of Assam (Bhatia 2015: 67-69). A notable event took place when General Than Shwe, the head of Myanmar's military government (the State Peace and Development Council), paid an official visit to India in October 2004 when both the countries entered into several pivotal agreements including one crucial declaration that laid the foundation and outlined the plans for enhanced cooperation in addressing non-traditional security challenges. Concurrently India also secured the rights to extract natural gas from the Bay of Bengal (Varadarajan, The Hindu: 2005). This was an



absolute divergence from India's stated principle when India opened its door for authoritarian heads while subverting her normative principle of supporting democratic ideals.

India's pioneering approach towards advancing democracy is exemplified by its provision of comprehensive training programs not only to civilians but also to military personnel, demonstrating a unique and innovative mechanism aimed at strengthening democratic institutions. Apart from engaging in joint military operations, India had actively contributed to the capacity-building efforts of Myanmar's defence officials (Lwin 2013:133- 134). After decades of dialogue by the Indian diplomats and determined engagements finally enabled India to inculcate a certain degree of trust in Myanmar Junta government, whereby after much interface they took part in the special courses offered by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), which included a dedicated program for Myanmar diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and a training course for mid-level military officials at the National Defence College (NDC) (Egretau 2011: 471-472). To make it a successful venture India also offered scholarships to Myanmar military officers for enrolment at NDC. This collaboration involved the training of mid-level army personnel aged between 40 to 50 who are identified as potentially eminent leaders in the military hierarchy (Bhatia 2015: 98-101). These courses offered to them encompasses a wide spectrum of subjects- science and technology; economics, socio-political and international security studies. The NDC serves as an advocate for democratic transition, exemplifying democratic principles through its curriculum. Intriguingly, the syllabus extends beyond the scope of national security, delving into a broader outlook encompassing socio-political dynamics, domestic influence, economic development, environmental concerns, strategic neighbourhood considerations, and multilateralism with an emphasizes on critical areas such as India's Strategic Neighbourhood, Strategies and Structure for National Security and a thorough examination of global issues (Course Brief, NDC, 2022).

Realism and liberalism together, for instance, can generate powerful intuitions that blends both. Indo- Myanmar policy is also a reflection of the perfect blend of realist and liberal elements. India since the 1990s has consistently sought to engage with Myanmar both economically and militarily. Parallel to maximizing its economic interest, India curve out strategy to counter growing Chinese predominance and concurrently stirring progressively towards its normative objective. India's the then strategic approach reflected a pragmatic blend of realism and liberalism, where both 'interest' and 'interdependence' were merged perfectly.

The prevalent understanding had been that both political and developmental strategies could be adopted at multiple fronts. The political approach emphasizes democratisation as a dynamic process involving democratic actors contending with non-democratic forces for state authority. Conversely, the developmental approach perceives democratization as a gradual, incremental journey spanning for decade, characterized by the steady growth in progress. In case of India's policy towards Myanmar, the developmental approach took precedence. Though India strongly believed on principle that the developmental cooperation had the potential of being the most effective means to introduce more tangible democratic governance in Myanmar. By participating in grass-root level



projects, India was intending to contribute for the tangible improvement of living conditions and infrastructure in Myanmar, ultimately fostering an environment conducive for democratic growth (Lwin 2013:133-34). Such unique perspective underlined India's commitment not only to bolster political transformation in its pursuit of democracy but also endorse long-term sustainable development. Apparently, New Delhi distanced itself from the blatantly supporting any Burmese armed movement for establishing democracy. Instead preferred to denote the support or assistance as, what it called the "national reconciliation process and transition to metered democracy in Myanmar" (Routray 2011: 307- 308).

It was noticeable and there was some evidence that Indian policy towards Myanmar was shifting in the direction towards 'endorsing democratic transition' and was no more reluctant to use its voice in favour of expediting the transition process and upholding democratic values (Rajesh, Reuters 2007). Both at the domestic front in particular and international community in general, India had to face severe criticism for its inactiveness, when the military junta ruthlessly suppressed the anti-government demonstrations, in the context of Monk's uprising in September 2007 (Bagchi Times of India: 2007). There was surge of public opinion within the nation to take a more assertive stance and were advocating for a more robust engagement in support of the democratic opposition (Dikshit, The Hindu: 2008). Therefore, with the best interests in mind, the Indian government through continuous dialogue and engagement, strongly advised and persistently pressed the military regime to release of pro- democracy activists like Aung San Suu Kyi; disapproved the military crackdown and repeatedly reminded the military regime for prioritising the restoration of democratic system (The Economics Times: 2007). Persuaded by the country like India to expedite the democratic process, the Myanmar military regime announced the appointment of a Referendum Commission on February, 2008, which in due course avowed the referendum of the new constitution by May 2008 (Wagner 2009:18-19). In reality India navigated a delicate path between balancing international pressure with regional stability and emphasizing the importance of democratic principles while eschewing punitive sanctions.

India's Contribution in Myanmar's Democratic Endeavour (2010-2021)

The transformation in Myanmar, stands out as an atypical instance of a carefully orchestrated transition, wherein the leadership executed measured strides toward democratization while upholding numerous authoritarian features of the preceding regime. They launched this transition as "discipline flourishing democracy" (Clapp 2015: 2). Though it was a significant step, but it's important to note that the proposed new governance structures were still falling short of meeting the standards of a genuine democracy. While this new administration initially expressed its intention to reform the constitutional provisions, failed to take concrete actions towards substantive restructuring (Turnell 2011:88), even after being in power for a substantial period of time.

The bilateral relations between India and Myanmar had witnessed a remarkable upswing, marked by significant diplomatic overtures and collaborative initiatives across diverse domains. At this stage of newly established democracy, India started sharing her

experiences about the parliamentary democracy and facilitated all possible assistance in the national reconciliation. The collaborative initiatives between India and Myanmar had transcended conventional boundaries to encompass sectors such as connectivity, power, trade, defence, culture, and people-to-people relations. Furthermore, India was steadfast for extending a substantial line of credit amounting to US\$ 500 million for developmental projects and there were ambitious plans for strategic economic cooperation and collaboration on maritime security. This were indicative of the depth of New Delhi's commitment of being the partner of Myanmar's sustained progress (Bhatia 2015: 122).

Soon after assuming office PM Modi being mindful of enhancing his 'Neighbourhood First' and geo-economics had given special attention to Myanmar's endeavour towards democratic transition. Indian officials continued being dedicated in assisting the process of political reform (Bhatia 2015: 19). While India had been cautioned in explicitly using the term "democracy promotion," its embassy dynamically affianced political and administrative reforms in Myanmar. The focus was particularly in rejuvenating Myanmar's struggling service- delivery system. Thus, assisting the nation in strengthening institutions was a priority while it was transitioning. The Modi government being mindful of the importance of geo-economics started providing substantial assistance in capacity-building and technical expertise for electoral processes, upgrading information technology and telecom networks; alongside extended infrastructural support and procedural assistance to the education and healthcare sectors. Remarkably, India stands among the selected few nations that had contributed over \$1 billion to fortify Myanmar's institutions and facilitate its developmental progress (News track, IDSA: 2016).

Significant strides had been made in the period between 2016-2020 to extend its support to the Yamethin Police Training Academy and at the Basic Technical Training School aimed at advancing technical training infrastructure (The Economic Times 2020); and thereby further contributing to capacity building in Myanmar's law enforcement sector. A strikingly important trilateral partnership between India, Myanmar, and Japan had been forged, focusing on the upliftment and development of the Rakhine province. This collaboration was initiated with the purpose to develop soft infrastructure for 15 schools (The Economic Times 2020), illustrating a concerted effort to enhance educational facilities and opportunities in the region. Till 2020 India had extended a financial aid amounting to approximately \$1.4 billion (Roy Chaudhury, 2020, Economic Times).

In an era characterized by economic interdependence, a trade-centred approach served not only to spur economic activities along the India-Myanmar border but also cultivated mutual benefits and connections among the people of the two nations. Additionally, this approach served to curtail illicit trade.

Democratic Back Sliding of Myanmar and the Changeover in India-Myanmar Dynamics

In 2021, Myanmar witnessed a deeply troubling event as the military returned back, reasserted its dominance over the country and shattered hopes for democratic progress. On February 1st, a coup d'état abruptly halted Myanmar's fragile transition towards democracy. The elected government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, was deposed, claiming



unsubstantiated allegations of electoral irregularities (Jeffrey 2021: Special Commentary). The coup marked a tragic regression in Myanmar's political trajectory. It brought to an end of a decade of cautiously implemented democratic reforms.

The sweeping victory of NLD and the mere formation of the government didn't confer the complete realization of democracy because the military continued to wield significant influence over the political landscape of the nation. Several ambassadorial positions remained under military control and entrenched bureaucrats with a junta-era mindset continue to hold their official positions. The inexperience and limited capacity of NLD was particularly glaring in matter of peace and reconciliation efforts and were responsible for its inability to tackle the situation more effectively. In the face of a rising tide of Buddhist nationalism and Islamophobia, Suu Kyi's administration was struggling to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingyas- the most persecuted minority group, with inadequate access to healthcare and education, in the country. The most severe test for the new government was ensuring the 'Rights' concerning liberty and citizenship of the minorities.

The return back of the military had not only affected the nation's political landscape but it had garnered larger impact over its neighbours in the region. If we look at from the aspect of security and national interest then undeniable that instability within Myanmar had posed challenges for India at multiple fronts. To begin with, it had prompted the longstanding threat of Chinese predominance in the region.

Clashes between Myanmar's military and the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) had intensified in the western and northwestern regions bordering India. The sudden shift in Myanmar's political landscape had not only disrupted a decade of limited democratic reforms but posed significant challenges to India's regional policies, particularly affected the 'Act East' initiative. Vital projects, instrumental to India's Act East policy, had been stalled. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, aimed at establishing a crucial trade route connecting the Northeastern states with Myanmar's Sittwe Port (Ambarkhane and Gathia 2022: 5) are now under regular air raids and attacks by the military; and completion of these projects is a formidable challenge.

The ongoing military actions in Myanmar since February 2021 have sever spill over repercussions in the Northeastern region. It resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis, leading to a staggering number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the influx of refugees from Myanmar into India's northeastern states particularly, Manipur and Mizoram. This influx included leaders of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), organizers of anti-coup pro- democratic forces, civil servants, defectors from the military and police, educators, and student activists (Yadav and Saha, India Today: 2023). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2023, the total number of IDPs has reached a distressing 1,827,000 of which substantial 53,500 individuals have sought shelter in India from the beleaguered region of Chin province to its bordering Manipur and Mizoram states (UNHCR Report 2023). The UNHCR estimates that over 40,150 individuals have sought refuge in Mizoram and 8,250 in Manipur (UNHCR, Myanmar Report 2023).



This influx had led to embroiling of tensions between district administrations of Mizoram- who had received refugees with open arms and New Delhi- who had mandated not to establish camps or offer assistance. The Indian government was concerned that accepting refugees would strain relations with Myanmar's military regime. The sudden influx of refugees from Myanmar posed substantial challenges to India, including security risks and added burdens on local populations as refugees embark on the arduous journey across India without proper access to essential resources like food and medicine. There was also a concern regarding the potential spread of infectious diseases and incapacity to provide proper medical infrastructure (Marjani, *The Diplomat*: 2023). Moreover, it has strained local resources and infrastructure, which not only heightened social tensions but also created vulnerabilities that has been exploited by various groups, making it a pressing nontraditional security concern for the Northeastern states. There have been documented cases of insurgents from Myanmar establishing operational bases in Mizoram, utilizing the region as a conduit for transporting weaponry and supplies to support their struggle against the military junta. This network extends through regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. The presence of robust ethnic affiliations across the border further facilitates the flow of narcotics, posing a substantial threat to India's overall national security framework.

Manipur, with its deep socio-ethnic links to ethnic communities in Myanmar, has experienced the brunt of this refugee influx, leading to sever ethnic conflict and complicated inter-community dynamics. The outpouring of Chin and Kuki refugees from Myanmar had ignited rigidities among the Meiteis and Nagas in the region. This area has a historical backdrop of ethnic conflicts, compounded by the existing divide between indigenous populations and non-local residents. The arrival of Myanmar refugees further exacerbates the already delicate social dynamics in the region, adding another layer of complexity to an already intricate situation (Marjani, *The Diplomat*: 2023).

The November 13, 2021 attacks by Manipuri Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) on Indian security forces marked as a crucial turning point because it had reinforced the fact that benefits of the counterinsurgency partnership have dwindled. This has been indicative of the fact, it's been high time for New Delhi to reassess the rationale of relationship with Myanmar's military junta. India's engagement with the military junta of Myanmar is underpinned by a strategic calculus aimed at offsetting the activities of certain Indian Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). This partnership built on the premise that Myanmar's military is a crucial ally in their joint counterinsurgency efforts and have the capacity to effectively manage cross-border threats emanating from insurgent elements has been proven fundamentally flawed. Recent developments had revealed the limitations of this approach.

Since the civilian government in Myanmar a significant reduction in insurgency activities in northeast India had been witnessed. It is the testament of combined efforts of the Indian government, pro-activeness of the civilian authority and various stakeholders in the region. The steady escalation of Indian Army's proactive engagements had led to the subsequent decline in recruitment by insurgent factions (Kushwaha 2023:171-172). The Indian Army has undertaken proactive measures to engage the youth of the northeast, offering a range of opportunities in education, skill development, and employment. The initiatives



aimed at engaging the youth coupled with the revocation of AFSPA; promoting community engagement; reduced instances of alleged human rights violations and successful implementation of reintegration initiatives have played a crucial role in diverting young individuals away from insurgent groups; have contributed to a positive shift towards personal and societal advancement; and have brought a change in psyche of the youth, which encouraged them to surrender and get reintegrated with the mainstream society (Philip, The Print:2022). Thus, India's reliance on the Tatmadaw may no longer be deemed essential or strategically advantageous in suppressing insurgency, given the significant success of internal efforts in mitigating violence and fostering stability in northeast India.

India's foreign policy stance of noninterference and its hesitancy to openly criticize the actions of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar stand in contrast to its global commitment to democratic values. India recent interactions with Myanmar's military leadership, contrast to coordinated efforts of the ASEAN countries, may unacceptably jeopardise India's strategy of fostering ties with the ASEAN through Myanmar.

It is an imperative that India recalibrate its approach and adopt a fresh slant that safeguards its security interests, foster regional stability, and continue to advance its economic objectives. A paradigm shift entails public engagement with the National Unity Government (NUG), Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), as well as Myanmar EAOs active in India's borderlands, offers a promising path forward. On the contrary, should India persist in its strategy of offering military aid and backing to the Myanmar army in an attempt to curb China's influence, there is a significant risk of eroding any positive sentiment it may have held with the Myanmar public as well as in the realm of international community. This recalibrated strategy of engaging with pro-democracy forces and addressing humanitarian challenges will enable India to strengthen cross-border ethnic ties in its northeastern states; bolster its reputation among communities collaborating with anti-junta forces; can foster regional stability; forge robust relations with the NUG; lay the foundation for deeper people-to-people relations; and contribute to the emergence of a democratic and prosperous Myanmar. Moreover, it will safeguard infrastructure projects integral to the 'Act East' Policy and pave the way for inclusive democratic and economic initiatives within a federal democratic Myanmar.

New Delhi should actively advocate for a peaceful resolution among all parties involved, with the ultimate aim of quelling the unrest in Myanmar expeditiously. A secure and democratic government in Myanmar would ultimately serve India's interests in the long term; and India should not hesitate in striving towards this objective. It is almost a security imperative for India to collaborate with pro-democracy forces as it offers India an opportunity to play a more influential role in Myanmar's future; position India to counterbalance vis-à-vis China who has been the steadfast support for the military junta; and also aligns with its normative principle of upholding democratic values as envisaged by the global community.



References

- Arnold, M. B. (2019, August 24), "Why GAD reform matters to Myanmar", East Asia Forum, Retrieved from <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/08/24/why-gad-reform-matters-to-myanmar/>
- Aung, S. Y. (2020, March 7), Flashpoints: Myanmar's Eight Most Hotly Contested Constitutional Amendment Proposals, The Irrawaddy.
- Ashraf, F. (2008), "India-Myanmar Relations", Strategic Studies, 28 (1): 223-233
- Abraham, I. (2014), How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics, California: Stanford University Press.
- *Ambarkhane, S., & Gathia, S. V. (2022, May), "Over a Year Later, Myanmar's Military Coup Threatens India's National Security", United States Institute of Peace, Analysis and commentary, Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/05/over-year-later-myanmars-military-coup-threatens-indias-national-security>.
- Bell, D. (2006), Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for East Asian Context. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Barany, Z. (2016), "Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the Tatmadaw", Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/armed-forces-and-democratization-myanmar-why-us-military-should-engage-tatmadaw>
- Banerjee, S. (2022), "The Enduring Challenges to Democratic Transition in Myanmar", Observer Research Foundation, ORF Issue Brief: 541. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/enduring-challenges-to-democratic-transition-in-myanmar/>
- Barany, Z. (2016), "Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the Tatmadaw" Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Special Report.
- Beech, H. (2017, September 25), What Happened to Myanmar's Human-Rights Icon?, The New York Times.
- Banerjee, S. (2022), "The democracy conundrum in Myanmar", Raisina Debate, Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-democracy-conundrum-in-myanmar/>
- Baaré, A., Shearer, D. and Uvin, P. (1999), The Limits and Scope for the Use of Development Assistance Incentives and Disincentives for Influencing Conflict Situations, Paris: OECD.
- Batabyal, A. (2006). Balancing China in Asia: A Realist Assessment of India's Look East Strategy, China Report, 42(2): 179-197.
- Bhat, V. (25 December 2019), How China has stepped up under-sea information-gathering in Bay of Bengal, The Print, Retrieved from: <https://theprint.in/defence/how-china-has-stepped-up-under-sea-information-gathering-in-bay-of-bengal/340335/>



- Bhatia, R. (2015), *India Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours*, New Delhi: Routledge. Bhattacharya, A. (2008), "Linking South East Asia and India: More Connectivity, Better Ties", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, IPCS Special Report No. 50.
- Bashar, I. (2015), "Myanmar: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses", International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, 7 (1): 17-20.
- Bagchi, I. (2007, September 28), "US, EU Want India to Put Pressure on Myanmar", Times of India.
- Banerjee, S. (2022), "The Enduring Challenges to Democratic Transition in Myanmar", ORF, Issue Brief No. 541.
- BBC News. (2012, November 13), Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi begins visit to India. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-20302847>
- Basu Ray Chaudhury, A., & Basu, P. (2015). *Proximity To Connectivity: India And Its Eastern and Southeastern Neighbours*, In *India-Myanmar Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges*, Kolkata: Observer Research Foundation.
- Barany, J. (2016 September 13), "Armed Forces and Democratization in Myanmar: Why the US Military Should Engage the Tatmadaw", Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/armed-forces-and-democratization-myanmar-why-us-military-should-engage-tatmadaw>
- Barany, J. (2016), *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cribb, R. (1999), "Myanmar (Burma): History", In L. Daniel (Ed.), *The Far East and Australasia*, London: European publication.
- *Clapp, P. (2015), "Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition", US Institute of Peace, Special Report.
- Col. Hariharan, R. (retired) (2007), "India-Myanmar-China Relations", *Asian Tribune*, 7 (1). Cohen, Stephen P. (2001), *India: Emerging Power*, India: Oxford University Press.
- Clapp, P. (2015), "Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition", US Institute of Peace, Special Report 369.
- Devi, K. S. (2014), "Myanmar under the Military Rule 1962-1988", *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(10): 46-50.
- Dikshit, S. (2008, February 12), "India Asks Myanmar to Expedite Reconciliation", *The Hindu*. Daniel, F. J. (2012, November 14), Suu Kyi asks India to stand by democracy in Myanmar, Reuters, Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-myanmar-suukyi/idINDEE8AD0CS20121114>
- Egreteau, R. (2003), *Wooing The Generals: India's New Burma Policy*, New Delhi: Centre De Sciences Humaines.
- Egreteau, R. (2011), "A passage to Burma? India, development, and democratization in Myanmar", *Contemporary Politics*, 17 (4): 467-486.



- Egreteau, R. (2016), *Caretaking Democratization: The Military and Political Change in Myanmar*, London: Hurst
- *Embassy of India, Yangon. (2022), HRD Corporations. Retrieved from <https://www.embassyofindiayangon.gov.in/pages?id>
- Fink, C. (2009), *Living Silence in Burma: Surviving under Military Rule*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Gogoi, D. (2007), "Northeast India-Gateway to Southeast Asia", *South Asia Politics*, 6 (7): 14-25.
- Gogoi, D. (2019), *Making of India's Northeast Geopolitics of Borderland and Transnational Interactions*, London: Routledge (India)
- Ganguly, S., & Pardesi, M. S. (2009), "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy", *India Review*, 8 (1): 4-19.
- Ghoshal, D. (2021, March 3), *India treads gently on Myanmar despite escalating violence*, Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/india-treads-gently-myanmar-despite-escalating-violence-2021-03-03/>
- Ichihara, M., Sahoo, N., & Erewan, I. K. P. (2016 October 19), "Asian Support for Democracy in Myanmar", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/10/19/asian-support-for-democracy-in-myanmar-pub>.
- *India-Myanmar joint statement issued during PM's state visit to Myanmar, (2017 September 6), Prime Minister's Office, Retrieved from http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/indiamyanmar-joint-statement-issued.
- India Today. (2023, August 4), *Refugee camps, border issues: Understanding influx of illegal immigrants from Myanmar to Manipur*, Retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/illegal-immigration-from-myanmar-to-manipur>.
- Jolliffe, K. (2019), "Democratising Myanmar's security sector: Enduring Legacies and a Long Road Ahead" *UK Aid: Safer world, Special report (e-book)*.
- Jaffrey, S. (2021, February 2), "End of Myanmar's Rocky Road to Democracy?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/02/02/end-of-myanmar-s-rocky-road-to-democracy>
- Kipgen, N. (2016), *Myanmar: A Political History*, India: Oxford University Press.
- Kundu, S. (2012), "Myanmar: Pangs of Democratic Transition", *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Special Report-130*.
- Kurlantzick, J. (2007 October 10), "Burma's Buddy – India's Craven Appeasement in Burma", *The New Republic* Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2007/10/02/burma-s-buddy-india-s-craven-appeasement-in-burma-pub-19634>.
- Kanwal, G. (2010), "A Strategic Perspective on India-Myanmar Relations", *CLAWS Journal*, 33(1): 134-149.



- Kundu, S. (2012), "Myanmar: Pangs of Democratic Transition", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Special Report 130.
- *Kundu, S (ed). (2016), "Insight South East Asia: Looking Eastwards From New Delhi", Southeast Asia & Oceania Centre (IDSA), 5 (1), Event Report of Delhi Dialogue VIII Retrieved from https://idsa.in/system/files/newsletters/ISA_5_1.pdf
- KoKo, N. (2019), "Democratisation in Myanmar: Glue or Gloss?", Political Change, Australian National University, 1(1): 35-46 Retrieved from https://www.kas.de/c/document_library
- Kushwaha, B. (2023), "India's G20 Presidency and the Death of Democracy in Myanmar", Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, 6 (3): 166-173.
- Kumar, R. (2022, August 2), "India's Response to Sri Lanka and Myanmar Crises Is a Study in Contrast. It Shouldn't Be", Indian Express, Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-response-to-sri-lanka-and-myanmar>.
- Lintner, B. (2021 December 10), India's Dilemma Over Ties With Myanmar Military, The Irrawaddy, Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/indias-dilemma-over-ties-with-myanmar-military.html>
- Lwin, H. H. T. (2013), "India's Democratic Identity and Its Policy towards Myanmar from 1988 to 2010", Journal of ASEAN Studies, 1(2): 122-139.
- Lintner, B. (2015), Great Game East: China, India, and the Struggle for Asia's Most Volatile Frontier, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Maizland, L. (2022), "Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict", Council on Foreign Relations, Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict>
- Mujtaba, S.A. (2007 November 12), India-Myanmar Relations Predicament and Prospects, Indo-Burma News, Retrieved from www.indoburmanews.net/archives/1/2007/november/india-myanmar-relations-predicament-and-prospects
- Mohan, CR. (2007), "India's Outdated Myanmar Policy: Time for a Change", RSIS Commentaries, Retrieved from https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10356/91775/1/RSIS_COMMENT_417.pdf
- Marjani, N. (2023, April), India Faces a Two-Front Challenge From Post-Coup Myanmar, The Diplomat, Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/india-faces-a-two-front-challenge-from-post-coup-myanmar/>.
- *MEA, India (2021 February 5), Lines of Credit for Development Projects, Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/Lines-of-Credit-for-Development-Projects.htm>.
- Philip, S. A. (2022, September 22), Peace in Northeast after Decades Allows Army to Finally Pull Out of Counter-insurgency Ops, The Print. Retrieved from <https://theprint.in/defence/peace-in-the-northeast-allows-army-to-hand-over-counter>



Rieffel, A. (2010), *Myanmar/Burma: Inside Challenges, Outside Interests*, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press.

Routray, BP. (2011), "India-Myanmar Relations: Triumph of Pragmatism", *Jindal Journal of International Affairs*, 1 (1): 299-321.

Rajesh, Y. P. (2007, October 2), India renews pressure on Myanmar, Reuters, Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-india-idUSSP29636320071002>

Roy Chaudhury, D. (2020), India to provide debt service relief to Myanmar under the G20 initiative, *Economic Times*, Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-to-provide-debt-servic>

Turnell, S. (2011), "Myanmar's Fifty-Year Authoritarian Trap", *Journal of International Affairs*, 65(1): 79-92.



Revisiting War Reportage: National Security, Press Reportage and the Legacy of the Sino-Indian Conflict of 1962
Revisiting War Reportage: National Security, Press Reportage and the Legacy of the Sino-Indian Conflict of 1962 for War Publicity In India

Aritra Majumdar

Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Sivanath Sastri College.

Email: aritra9.maj1@gmail.com | ORCID ID : [0000-0003-0364-9078](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0364-9078)

Abstract

The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 was part of a decade in which India had to fight three major wars against her neighbours viz. China and Pakistan. Such exigencies demanded a reorientation of the priorities of the developmental state towards armed conflict. This required a reappraisal of the role of various sections of state and society in the context of the External Emergency. The press, long critical of the inefficient handling of publicity, sought vital changes to how the government sought to sway international opinion in its favour and build public morale at home.

This article seeks to revisit the press reportage and debates during and after the war, on the importance and modalities of wartime publicity. Drawing upon press coverage, archival sources and journalists' memoirs, it will be argued that the difficulties faced by both the press and the government in disseminating information about the conflict resulted in slow but lasting changes to the publicity apparatus of the government and the role of the press in the defence effort. The lessons learnt during the conflict would enable better exchange of information between the press and the government through institutional mechanisms during later conflagrations of 1965 and 1971.

Keywords: War Reportage, Sino-Indian Conflict, Indian state, press freedom, War Publicity.

Following a period of relative calm in the 1950s, the emerging postcolonial state of India found itself confronted with three major external conflicts (and one minor one) within a span of a decade. The emergence of China as a major challenge was an unexpected development that produced lively debates on what the Indian response should be. The question of war reportage and publicity i.e. gathering and disseminating information about the war with a view to moulding public opinion and maintaining public morale within and outside India, became a crucial component of these debates.

Central to these debates were the question of how the press should conduct itself in terms of collection of news, presentation of views and publication of war advertisements. How much access should the press have to the frontlines? What should be the war publicity policy and apparatus?

Unfortunately, debates on the means and ends of wartime publicity and report again a postcolonial context have not received adequate scholarly attention. This article seeks to understand the importance of the 1962 conflict in shaping postcolonial conceptions of war reportage, publicity and press-government relations in the context of war.

In order to pursue these strands of inquiry, the paper shall begin with a study of existing literature, before focusing on the specific background of the Kashmir and Goa conflicts. Thereafter, two discrete but interconnected avenues of inquiry shall take the reader through the development of the debates on reporting and press commentary of the war on one hand, and the reconfiguration of the state's war publicity apparatus on the other. These inquiries shall allow us to arrive at some tentative conclusions about how the 1962 conflict proved to be a major marker in the development of war publicity and the role of the press within it.

Sources and Background

Studies focusing on news gathering and wartime publicity in the subcontinent are relatively rare. While Milton Israel has studied press-state relations in the late colonial context, Auriol Weigold and Philip Wood have studied wartime propaganda in India, US and Britain Devika Sethi and Diya Gupta have brought these strands together in their studies of the press and the radio during the Second World War respectively (Milton, 1994; Weigold, 2008; Wood, 2000; Sethi, 2019). Dinyar Patel and Rotem Geva have studied the discourse through the respective lenses of the India League of America and the journalist D.F. Karaka (Patel, 2021; Geva, 2023).

The postcolonial period has received scant attention. Raghuvendra Tanwar has sought to contextualize the debates on the Kashmir in the light of new material from the contemporary public sphere (Tanwar, 2019). A recent article by Meher Ali looks at the 'virtual warfare' through the building up of conflicting narratives in the public sphere in the context of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war (Ali, 2023). However, these works leave the 1962 conflict largely unattended.

This relative lack of academic attention requires us to seek out the historical context of the growth of war publicity in postcolonial India and situate contemporary primary sources within it.

From Tanwar we learn that the wartime restrictions on access of correspondents to frontier areas continued. Journalists seeking to visit Kashmir and Ladakh were required to obtain permission from the Defence Ministry (Tanwar, 2019, pp. 73-4).ⁱ Despite this, newspapers like the *Statesman*, *Tribune*, *Times of India* and the *Hindu* sent their correspondents to cover the Kashmir conflict and devoted considerable space to it (Tanwar, 2019, pp. 93; Mankekar 1983, pp. 126-8).

In order to revitalize the Kashmir publicity effort, D.R. Mankekar was installed as Director of Public Relations, Armed Forces. He sought to establish a "communication bridge between Kashmir war news and the Indian press." Despite his efforts, however, the military continued to harbour a colonial distrust of the Indian press, as seen during the Hyderabad crisis of 1948 (Mankekar 1983, 146-9).

On the other hand, the civilian publicity apparatus owed its origins to the office of the Chief Press Advisor formed during the War. During the course of the 1950s, the advertising functions of the Advisor were hived off to what eventually became the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, by 1955 (Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity, n.d.).

Emphasis on war publicity declined during the 1950s. This changed from 1959 onwards, when border clashes with China brought the question of military news and reportage back into focus (Verghese, 2010, pp. 68-70). News papers relied primarily on the press briefings by the ministries in New Delhi.ⁱⁱ

Perhaps the only possibility of frontline reporting between the Kashmir conflict and the Chinese invasion came during the brief military action that integrated Goa to India. As it became clear that the Indian forces were poised to liberate Goa, Indian correspondents rushed to the borders of the tiny colony.ⁱⁱⁱ When the Indian forces finally pushed into Goa, however, the Defence Minister, V.K.K. Menon, refused to organize a pool system that would allow journalists to go in with the liberating forces. This allowed the Portuguese propaganda machine to have a field day (Mankekar, 1983, pp.315-6).

Press and Reportage in the 1962 Conflict

From 1961 onwards, the press devoted considerable space to the Chinese activities in Ladakh and NEFA ("Not an Inch," 1961) It found the government unable to differentiate between "what should and should not be considered as essential secrets." This resulted in the Indian journalists being denied access even to official maps of Ladakh housed in the Parliament library ("Well-Known Secrets," 1961).

Conditions remained unchanged even when the Chinese invaded in massive numbers in mid-October 1962. News correspondents bitterly criticized Menon's policy of inviting only news agencies to his briefing about the war ("Newsmen attack Menon," 1962). The *Times of India* and *Indian Express* pointed out that up until October 1962, no correspondents have been allowed to enter the forward areas. The Press Information Bureau (PIB) did not even want to accredit journalists proceeding to Tezpur, which was at that time, far from the frontlines ("Unjust," 1962; "Telling the People," 1962). Newspaper editors Frank Moraes and A.B. Nair held a meeting in Bombay demanding that adequate information be made available to the press ("Obligation of govt. to Press: Moraes' Plea," 1962). The *Tribune* also made a similar protest in early November ("Press Restraint," 1962). The *Hindu* argued that the government should take the press into confidence to combat rumour-mongering ("Telling the People," 1962). Having been denied access to the frontlines or even Tezpur (the Corps Headquarters in Assam), correspondents of major papers like the *Times*, the *Hindu*, the *Indian Express* and the *Tribune* reported the initial phases of the conflict from Shillong and Sikkim ("Heroic Jawans Take Back Strategic Jang Village," 1962).

Eventually, a Press Consultative Committee (PCC) under the chairmanship of B. Gopala Reddi, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, was formed. At its inauguration, the Home Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, argued that the press could help by "creating among the people a sense of urgency, sacrifice and solidarity." Correct news, rather than "half-cooked news" and rumours, should be given wide circulation. He agreed with the editors that dissemination of news had to be quick and correct during wartime and closer contacts between the press and the official machinery was necessary ("Fight Against China," 1962).

The PCC also debated the modalities of war reporting. The government informed the PCC that an advisory organization was in the process of being formed, and in the meantime, the Principal Information Officer would discharge this duty. The editors who participated in the meeting sought greater facilities for the correspondents in border areas and hoped for greater coordination *within* government with regard to war publicity ("Border Fighting Reports: Advisory Body for the Press," 1962).

Despite these assurances, Indian correspondents continued to face difficulties in accessing the frontlines. The *Hindu* complained that the government denied the Indian press information which was freely available overseas. As a case in point, he pointed to photographs and reports of the movement of Indian tanks in British and American journals ("Tell the People," 1962).



From early November, however, newspaper correspondents could report from Tezpur using the Press Camp set up there. Moraes appreciated this change ("The Press," 1962). The government went further and arranged a tour of selected correspondents to the frontlines in NEFA, where they were allowed to take photographs and interact directly with the armed forces ("The War in NEFA," 1962). As one of the correspondents, B.G. Verghese (*Times of India*) wrote, the journalists were hardly reassured at the sight of "ill-equipped jawans in cottons and canvas shoes..." (Verghese, 2010, p.70). The *Hindu* appreciated this tour, noting that this would allow for a welcome change from the dry communiques of the government, while also gladdening the soldiers ("Reporting the War," 1962).

Verghese was one of only two Indian journalists who remained behind when Tezpur was evacuated on 19 November 1962 reporting on how administrative chaos impacted the public morale (Verghese, 2010, p.71).^{iv} Papers like the *Tribune* and the *Hindu*, whose correspondents did not remain in Tezpur, instead acclaimed Assam's high morale in the face of imminent invasion! ("Assam's High Morale," 1962; "Lessons From Tezpur," 1962).

Government Publicity During and After the Conflict

Government publicity - both inside and outside the country, became the subject of adverse comment even before large scale conflict broke out. Early in October 1962, Sudhakar Bhat pointed out from Hong Kong that the Indian government was being outflanked by the Chinese propaganda machinery ("India Bungles on the Propaganda Front," 1962). Similar complaints were made by observers in Ceylon, Kenya, U K and USA ("Poor Publicity by Delhi," 1962; "China Loses African Sympathy," 1962; "Tendency to Blame Both Sides," 1962; Easwar, 1962).

Such criticism was also extended to the various organs of government publicity viz. the All India Radio (AIR), the DAVP and the Films Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The government acknowledged the vital role of the AIR. In a meeting with the States' Information Ministers, B. Gopala Reddi emphasized the importance of using all media (including radio) to the fullest for war publicity (Information Ministers Meet," 1962). In course of the PCC's discussions, members suggested that local editors be associated with air stations in an advisory capacity ("Border Fighting Reports, 1962).

In response to these suggestions, the Ministry informed the Committee that radio receiving sets were being sent to border areas and more listening posts were being established. Public relations officials had been posted in NEFA and Ladakh and the home and external services of AIR were being geared up ("Our Propaganda Must Be Geared Up, Ministers Told," 1962). It was further informed that the AIR had been geared up to serve a three-fold purpose - "to disseminate authentic information on the latest situation to counter false propaganda, to sustain the people's morale and build up confidence in the ultimate outcome of India's fight against Chinese aggression." New bulletins were added and existing ones lengthened. Special weekly features were introduced along with new services in Ladakhi and Tibetan. Existing broadcasts were extended to frontier areas of NEFA and Ladakh ("AIR Steps Up Propaganda to Counter Peking's Lies," 1962). In early December, it was decided that a new radio station would be established in Kohima, Nagaland, and more powerful transmitters installed in Gauhati (Assam) and Kurseong (West Bengal) ("Better Broadcasting," 1962).

Despite these improvements, Verghese reported that on the morning after the unilateral ceasefire by the Chinese, the AIR alone continued to state that the war was ongoing while newspapers and foreign radio stations informed the public about the ceasefire. Indeed, the military itself was reliant upon Radio Peking to learn about the developments on its own front! (Verghese, 2010, p.72).^v The situation outside India was

equally dismal, with complaints about spotty reception coming in from Australia and Africa (Sarathy, 1962; Abraham and Narain, 1962).

Another aspect of the publicity effort involved films. Moraes noted on 18th November that the Films Division had “apparently not so far issued short films showing what mountain warfare is like.” (“Reporting the War,” 1962). By the end of November, however, at least one newsreel had been produced and was being shown in city theatres of Madras (Jagannathan 1962). T. K. Jhuremalani, Public Relations Officer, Films Division, stated that the Division had produced a number of short films or quickies on the war. He went on to name eight of these, with a ninth being released soon. Their prints had been supplied to the Field Publicity Units where rural folk could see them. Universities and other educational institutions were informed about them (Jhuremalani, 1962).

Lastly, the war also brought forth changes in the advertisement apparatus. The government appointed a Central Advisory Committee for the DAVP. Upon its recommendation, four regional offices of the DAVP were established (“Advertising and Publicity,” 1962). B. Gopala Reddi urged newspapers and advertising agencies to provide free advertising space for war publicity and persuade clients to advertise the war effort. By late November, he noted that the response had been enthusiastic and the DAVP was receiving daily offers. A special advertisement campaign entitled “Ask the Jawans” had been started. Posters dealing with rumours, defence savings, control of prices, donation of money and ornaments had been prepared and distributed. Some of these posters had been printed free by various presses. The Publications Division had prepared four pamphlets for educating the public (“Free Space for War Publicity,” 1962).

These activities continued into the succeeding years. In 1963-64, for instance, the DAVP undertook printing of pamphlets highlighting the heroic deeds of soldiers for the Jammu and Kashmir Government, while another proposal for a similar printing task for the Rajasthan Government was under consideration (Ministry of Broadcasting, 1964). Another proposal to run two special exhibition trains highlighting the wartime needs of the country was discussed in 1963, though it is unclear whether the plan was finally implemented (Ministry of Broadcasting, 1963).

Conclusion

Appraising the performance of the government and the press during the 1962 conflict would require one to factor in the short duration of the war itself, as the journalist Chanchal Sarkar warned. However, he noted that the ultraconservative approach to the media continued to be an obstacle to war reporting. To this was added the unfamiliarity of the Indian press with both the conditions of full-scale war and the terrain in which they were being asked to work. At the same time, hunger for war news was great, and both newspaper circulation and AIR listenership grew during the 1962-65 period (Sarkar, 1967, 77-82).

However, notable improvements did occur as a result of the realization that war publicity formed an important part of the effort to build and maintain public morale during periods of conflict. When war broke out in 1965, the press found the government to be more receptive. Correspondents such as Prabha Dutt often accompanied the field units as they moved from one point to another. Such reportage, initially conducted by the journalists on their own volition, was later supported by the armed forces through mechanisms that enabled the journalists to travel to the frontlines and accompany troops without giving away critical operational details such as the ‘order of war’ and the positioning of the troops themselves. (India Foundation).

This process would develop further during the 15-day 1971 war, when Indian press policy would ensure unfettered access for both Indian and foreign journalists. Regular briefings by the military leadership in the critical theatres of war, such as Punjab, Gujarat and West Bengal ensured that the public received reliable information without needing to rely on foreign sources, which could often be biased based on their proximity to the origin of the news. Datelines during the 1971 war indicated that the journalists were reporting on developments in a timely and informed manner. Photographs of troops engaged in frontline combat appeared as front-page highlights, thereby enabling the public to better understand the actual course of the war as it progressed from day to day (Mohr, 1971).

The impetus provided by the war to the development of the government's publicity apparatus also continued with publication of publicity material on Ladakh and Kashmir in 1965 and discussions on setting up of a counter-propaganda organization. The government realized that instead of treating the war reporters as a hindrance and a possible threat to the operational efficiency of the armed forces, they could be used as useful adjuncts to the efforts of the government in keeping the public informed and supportive of the military effort. These could also ensure that there would be less space for 'irresponsible rumours' that may be circulated in the absence of credible coverage of the war. Furthermore, a reliable and unbiased flow of information would build world opinion in favour of India on the global stage, especially in the face of powerful propaganda machinery of China and the USA. Helmed by officials from the ministries of defence and information, as well as veteran journalists, this apparatus proved crucial in maintaining a steady flow of unbiased information that countered the narratives offered by powers hostile to the Indian war effort. (Ministry of Information, 1965a, 1965b).^{vi}

Much later, the 1999 Kargil conflict witnessed the final fruition of the process, though it generated its own controversies. Journalist Barkha Dutt (Prabha Dutt's daughter) would provide 'live' coverage of the conflict, highlighting the heroic actions of leaders like Lt. Captain Vikram Batra ("Kargil Vijay Diwas," 2024; ORF 2024). However, Dutt's reportage was also criticized for providing operational intelligence that, it was claimed, aided the enemy as much as it provided crucial material for the television broadcast channels which, by this time, had become an important part of the Indian media ecosystem (Puri, 2015).

In conclusion then, it may be said that the 1962 conflict reopened the question of war reportage and publicity after the span of more than a decade. In the face of sustained criticism, however, the leaders admitted that their publicity apparatus was woefully lacking compared to that of China, while their approach towards newspapers was unsatisfactory.

This resulted in the gradual opening up of the frontline to war correspondents and photographers. On the other hand, the various organs of publicity were geared towards war propaganda. Together, they marked a growing acceptance of the utility of war publicity and reportage in creating public opinion and maintaining public morale on the part of the government, thereby creating the basis for lasting changes in the relations between government, press and publicity organs in postcolonial India. At the same time, however, questions relating to the extent to which journalists were entitled to cover ongoing military operations in sensitive areas like Kargil in 1999 have been raised by ex-military personnel, thereby highlighting the importance of balancing the necessity of information and publicity with operational secrecy. In sum then, it may be argued that the 1962 war, being the first major reckoning of the Indian media and the state with the possibilities of war reportage and publicity, paved the way for the evolution of the war reporting that we have witnessed in later conflicts, and which continue to shape the approach of the media today.



References –

- AIR Steps Up Propaganda to Counter Peking's Lies. (1962, November 19). *Times of India*.
- Advertising and Publicity. (1962, December 16). *The Hindu*.
- Ali, M. (2023). *Satrah din, satrahhaal: Media, propaganda and virtual warfare in the India-Pakistan War of 1965. South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2023.2262288>.
- Abraham, A.C. and Narain, H.B. Letter to the Editor. (1962, December 1). *The Hindu*.
- Assam's High Morale. (1962, November 25). *The Hindu*.
- Better Broadcasting. (1962, December 16). *The Hindu*.
- Border Fighting Reports: Advisory Body for the Press. (1962, November 7). *The Hindu*.
- China Loses African Sympathy. (1962, November 1). *Tribune*.
- Chinese Patrols in Border Areas. (1962, October 13). *Tribune*.
- Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity. (n.d.). *DAVP - A brief history*. Retrieved October 10, 2023, from http://davp.nic.in/davp_history.htm.
- Free Space for War Publicity. (1962, November 21). *Tribune*.
- Fight Against China. (1962, November 6). *The Hindu*.
- Geva, R. (2023). Torn between the nation and the world: D.F. Karaka and Indian journalism in the Second World War. *Modern Asian Studies*, 57(5), 1459-1494. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X22000452>.
- Goan soldiers have NATO-type arms. (1961, December 7). *Indian Express*.
- Gupta, D. (2019). The Raj in radio wars. *Media History*, 25(4), 414-429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2019.1633911>.
- Heroic Jawans Take Back Strategic Jang Village. (1962, October 31). *Times of India*.
- Information Ministers' Meet. (1962, October 26). *Indian Express*.
- India Bungles on the Propaganda Front. (1962, November 12). *Times of India*.
- Indian Foundation. Women in Indian media (n.d.). <https://indiafoundation.in/articles-and-commentaries/women-in-india-media>
- Israel, M. (1994). *Communication and power: Propaganda and the press in the Indian national struggle, 1920-47*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jagannathan, N. Letter to the Editor. (1962, December 1). *The Hindu*.



- Jash, A. "Medi and the Kargil War: Staging India's first 'live war.'" (2024, August 6). *Observer Research Foundation (ORF)*. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/media-and-the-kargil-war-staging-india-s-first-live-war>.
- Jhuremalani, T.K. Letter to the Editor. (1962, December 13). *The Hindu*.
- Kargil Vijay Diwas: The story of Captain Vikram Batra and 'Yeh Dil Maange More.' (July 26, 2024). *Firstpost*. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/kargil-vijay-diwas-how-captain-vikram-batra-made-yeh-dil-maange-more-and-tagline-the-countrys-national-motto-10956601.html>.
- Lessons of Tezpur. (1962, November 27). *Tribune*.
- Mankekar, D. (1983). *Sheer anecdotage: Leaves from a reporter's diary*. Allied Publishers.
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. (1963). *Defence publicity special exhibition trains* (File No. 33/13/63/ADV). National Archives of India.
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. (1964). *National emergency: Production of publicity material on behalf of state governments* (File No. 42/11/63/ADV). National Archives of India.
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. (1965a). *Proposal for the setting up of a special organization for counter-propaganda and intensive publicity* (File No. 4-1/65-KP). National Archives of India.
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. (1965b). *Publication of a pamphlet on Ladakh* (File No. 8-3/65-KP). National Archives of India.
- Mohr, C. (1971, December 18). Reporters found the Indians helpful in covering war. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/12/18/archives/reporters-found-the-indians-helpful-in-covering-war.html>
- Newsmen attack Menon. (1962, October 21). *Indian Express*.
- No Surrender. (1962, October 27). *The Hindu*.
- Not an inch. (1961, November 22). *Times of India*.
- Obligation of govt. to Press: Moraes' Plea. (1962, October 27). *Indian Express*.
- Our Propaganda Must be Geared Up, Minister Told. (1962, November 16). *Times of India*.
- Patel, D. (2021). "One man lobby"? Propaganda, nationalism in the diaspora and the India League of America during the Second World War. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 49(6), 1110-1140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2021.1950324>
- Poor Publicity by Delhi. (1962, November 12). *The Hindu*.
- Press Restraint. (1962, November 7). *Tribune*.
- The Press. (1962, November 7). *Times of India*.
- Puri, Lt. Gen. M.H. (2016). *Kargil: Turning the Tide*. Lancer Publishers.
- Reporting the War. (1962, November 18). *The Hindu*.



- Sagar, E. Neglect of our Public Relations in US. (1962, December 5). *The Hindu*.
- Sarathy, P.K. Letter to the Editor. (1962, November 16). *The Hindu*.
- Sarkar, C. (1967). *India's changing press*. Popular Prakashan.
- Sethi, D. (2019). *War over words: Censorship in India, 1930–1960*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tanwar, R. (2019). *Be clear Kashmir will vote for India: Jammu and Kashmir 1947–1953: Reporting the contemporary understanding of the unreported*. Manohar.
- Tell the People. (1962, October 12). *The Hindu*.
- Telling the People. (1962, October 29). *Indian Express*.
- Tendency to Blame Both Sides. (1962, October 31). *Tribune*.
- Unjust. (1962, October 24). *Times of India*.
- Verghese, B.G. "Bid to Bring Calm to Tezpur" (1962, November 22). *Times of India*.
- Verghese, B.G. "Tezpur People Feeling badly let down by Authorities" (1962, November 25). *Times of India*.
- Verghese, B. G. (2010). *First draft: Witness to the making of modern India*. Tranquebar.
- The War in NEFA. (1962, November 16). *Times of India*.
- Weigold, A. (2008). *Churchill, Roosevelt and India: Propaganda during World War II*. Routledge.
- Well-Known Secrets. (1961, December 8). *Times of India*.
- Wood, P. (2000). "Chapattis by parachute": The use of newsreels in British propaganda in India in the Second World War. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 23(2), 89-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400008723416>

ⁱⁱ Foreign correspondents were not allowed to visit Ladakh at all.

ⁱⁱ This can be understood from the fact that most of the articles on the China conflict were filed from New Delhi where the press briefings by the Ministry of External Affairs and later, the Ministry of Defence, were given.

ⁱⁱ For instance, the *Indian Express* despatched staff photographer Stanley Fernandes to photograph the Portuguese positions from a distance. See Photograph on Page 1 captioned "Goan soldiers have NATO-type arms." (1961, December 7). *Indian Express*.

ⁱⁱSome examples of Verghese's reports in the *Times of India* from an evacuated Tezpur include "Bid to Bring Calm to Tezpur," published on November 22, 1962 and "Tezpur People feeling badly let down by authorities," published on



November 25, 1962. These were signed articles. It is not possible to verify if additional articles, published under a generic byline, arose out of Verghese's reportage.

ⁱⁱRadio Peking was the state-controlled radio operated by the Chinese.

ⁱⁱⁱThe publication of informative material on India's border areas, especially those prone to future conflict, became a regular feature of the publicity organs of the Indian government from thereon. Covering the later history of such publicity, is however, beyond the scope of the current study.



Role of Media in Democratic Politics in India

Sanchita Chakrabarti

Assistant Professor of Political Science in Hooghly Women's College.

Email chakrabartysanchita@gmail.com | ORCID ID [0009-0009-4512-5994](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4512-5994)

Abstract

The role of media in democratic governance constitutes an important part in understanding the functioning of democracy across the globe. On one hand the traditional form i.e. print media and broadcasting media have been a one-sided form of communication with limited participation from the audience while on the other hand social media is a two-way means of communication between the political leaders and the electorate. Post-independence the 'public sphere' in India was dominated by print media, followed by electronic media in later phases and was state controlled till 1990s. With liberalization, private players brought competition within the forms of media and also between electronic and print media leading to commodification of news. This had huge implications for democratic politics as reflected during elections. The advent of social media in the later period developed a new democratic discourse. This paper traces the journey of media in India after independence, the major transformation it has undergone in the post-reform period along with the advent of social media and its implication for democratic politics in India.

Keywords: *Media, democracy, electorate, elections, political campaign*

INTRODUCTION

In a democracy media plays a powerful role in keeping the people informed and has been often referred to as the 'Fourth Estate' a co-equal part of the government along with executive, legislature and judiciary that keeps government under vigilance. It plays an important role in keeping the elected representatives responsible to the electorate by acting as a watchdog and preventing abuse of power. Freedom of press is quintessential for the functioning of vibrant democracy where ideas can be debated and opinions can be expressed for the betterment of the society. It is an essential part of Fundamental Rights put out in Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution as 'freedom of thought and expression'. Media landscape in India has undergone major changes since independence. The objective of this paper is to analyse the historical evolution of media in India and its contribution to democratic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media's association with democratic politics has been a central part of social science research. In a democracy study shows that Press has performed the role as a watchdog, public forum and facilitator of social reforms (Coronel, 2003). The study revolves around how media has been shaping democratic politics in India and explores the context within which media, state and society operate. For this purpose the study takes into account Jurgen Habermas and Noam Chomsky's concept related to media society, economy and state.

Jurgen Habermas, one of the eminent thinkers from Frankfurt school devised the concept of public sphere for explaining the relation of media, society and state. **Habermas, opines 'public sphere' is "the realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed"**. Here private individuals come together to form a public body and in an 'unrestricted fashion' along with the freedom of expression, form assembly and association, express their opinions on issues of common interest. The precondition of this public sphere is that access is provided to all citizens. The purpose of public sphere is deliberation i.e. mobilize the public for debate and discussion regarding political affairs within the democratic state. Newspapers and magazines, radio and television i.e. media are central to public sphere. **The governmental authority facilitates the existence of the public sphere but is not a constituent of it.** When information is accessible to the citizens through media free from any kind of political control, the citizen's body is able to influence the legislature through criticism and periodic elections, public opinion is formed. According to Habermas the very forms in which public sphere manifested itself underwent changes with the advent of social welfare state. This is largely due to the fact that private and public is blurred as political authorities perform the task of 'commodity exchange' which is the function of the economy and not state and also social powers assume political functions. With the growing elements of economic interest citizens cannot have access to complete information (Habermas, 1974).

Noam Chomsky in establishing the role of the media vis-à-vis the state and economy goes on to say that media is dependent because it is market driven and used for the vested interest of the elite. The political and economic elite use media to serve their interest. Chomsky and Herman in their book first suggested the propaganada model in which money and power are able to screen out news, reduce dissent and allow the government and dominant private players to get their message to the public. Habermas and Chomsky are both relevant in their own way in analysing the role of media in democratic politics in India (Herman and Chomsky 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This research paper includes data collected from secondary sources i.e. books, newspaper articles, research papers etc. **The study investigates the evolution of media in India, as well as its role in democracy.** The desk research methodology and qualitative analysis was used for this purpose.

MEDIA IN INDIA

Media in India is not a post-independence phenomenon as it played a prominent role in India's struggle for independence. The Indian Constitution does not explicitly guarantee independence of press but the Supreme Court in its number of judgments have upheld that freedom of Press is an essential part of freedom of expression and is covered under Article 19 (1) (a). The understanding on Indian media can be divided into two phases; first the Indian media in the late forties when India adopted the state controlled path of development and the Indian media in the post liberalization era. Immediately after independence print media was the only form of media informing people for a considerable period of time. In the later period print media joined hands with radio and electronic media in the form of television which provided information as well as entertainment under the control of the activist state. India inherited the age old British tradition with the privately owned commercial print media and the government control imposed on the electronic media. The primary aim of the electronic media was 'to educate, to inform and to entertain' which was devoid from any form of participation or encouraging the development of critical faculty of the citizens. From the Nehruvian to the Rajiv Gandhi era the same message was reiterated that the state owned media are too immature to be provided autonomy (Dasgupta et. al. 2011). **After independence, the English media**

controlled the national media until the 1990s, when the vernacular media presented a major challenge to the English media in the public realm. Study shows the decline of the one party system in 1967 can be attributed to the rise of regional consciousness created by the vernacular press. The expansion of Hindi newspapers in North India and the vernacularization of public sphere was effective in mobilizing marginalized groups and significantly influenced democratic politics (Neyazi 2011). A major turning point was the imposition of Emergency for one and a half years and the censorship of the Press. The elections of 1977 turned out to be different as no leader opposing the ruling party and the government received so much response from the media as did Jay Prakash Narayan. However it was the same media who were critical of Mrs. Gandhi's policies during the 1977 elections shifted from their earlier stand and supported her during the elections of 1980. However, there was a volte face in the governmental policy towards media after the initiation of the New Economic Policy. The broadcasting media was freed from the clutches of the activist state and opened up to private entrepreneurs. The monopoly of Doordarshan suffered a setback. The broadcasting arena was rapidly occupied with cable and satellite channels. The print media partially remained undisturbed as it already had an entrepreneurial past but there was the fear of foreign control in ownership and the possible competition with foreign newspapers and journals. The entry of private players not only brought in fierce competition within the two forms of media but also between print and electronic media itself.

Accompanying changes at the policy and competition levels spectacular changes occurred in presentation, content and analysis of news. Analysis of news became light and crisp and news came to be viewed as a form of entertainment. It was a merger of information and entertainment which came to be termed as infotainment (Tuchman 2002). Infotainment changed the dynamics of Indian media as it considered citizens more as consumers and merged news with personal views of the news presenter. Another marked change was how the news is presented. In electronic media, the transformation in news delivery came in the form of 'mode of address to the viewers'. News now came to be presented by corporate attired standing anchor persons who were ready to enter the viewer's home, sensationalising news with their opinions in contrast to the subtle and modest approach by news presenters of DD sitting behind the desks. As for the print media magazines became glossier and newspapers took recourse to the tabloid format. Of all the three elements of news making it was content which had gone a disastrous change. 24x7 news channels and a plethora of newspapers and tabloids the lingering question was what is making news? (Tuchman 2002). Indian media entered into an era where news meant high drama quotient backed by huge corporate sponsorship and treating the citizens devoid of critical faculty who would binge on anything served to them. News is burdened with providing information with entertainment and here in debate setting is replaced by drama setting.

Today Indian media comprises of 24x7 news channels (vernacular and national) newspapers, radio, web and the internet and also the alternative media. It is commercially driven and entertainment friendly. Within the backdrop of neoliberal economy it is illogical to argue that mainstream media should eliminate profit but the question raised is whether profit motive should occupy the centre stage in determining news content. In catering to commercial interest media makes content highly superficial and brands such information as truth. At the same time using symbols, images, texts and catch phrases it captures the imagination of the audience severely undermining their critical faculty. It has moved away from its role in generating awareness among the people towards treating people as an amorphous mass who do not possess the ability to reason. This is the reason why the use of media has also created an impact on elections in India. BJP was successful in creating the Brand Atal in media cover ages and the result was decisively in favour of BJP led alliance National Democratic Party (NDA) which lasted a full term. In 2004 and 2009 general elections there was extensive use of print and electronic media for campaigning and this time victory came for the Congress



led UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government which lasted a full term. Study shows in electoral politics the role of meeting and rallies have been declining since the 1970s because of the growing importance of media. Electronic media has played a decisive role in urban electoral politics in India while the traditional forms of campaigning in rural areas (**Sardesai 2023**).

RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEW DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

The advent of social or digital media according to Habermas has broader implications for media's role in democratic politics as it increases the divisions that already exists in the society and therefore has greater ramifications in democratic politics. For Habermas, the new media is transformative as there has been an extension of the public sphere beyond the strict geographical boundaries of the national territory (**Habermas 2023**). Social media has carved a niche alongside traditional forms of media and has provided the viewers the opportunity to express their opinions. It has proved to be more representative than news paper and television and has transformed people from audience to citizen through changes in public communication. The audiences have been empowered through higher level of interaction which was not possible with the print or electronic media. However social media's impact on democracy comes with its own set of challenges. The major concern is the effective circulation of fake news, which erodes the quality of public deliberation and sets up opportunities for manipulation (Chambers 2021). Moreover there has been commodification of political communication as these private media platforms commercially exploit user data and therefore represents a new form of power (Zub off 2019). Such social media companies dominate users as citizens continue to use them as they have no choice but not for the purpose of political action (Aytac 2024). The dominating position of private social media in the public sphere puts forward the question of how it is going to be beneficial for democratic politics and whether there is a need for alternative social media from below (Patburg 2025). Media platforms if are allowed to continue unregulated will lead towards the development of 'post truth democracy' (Habermas 2023).

In the 21st century Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube are influencers and creators of views on politics and there has been tremendous effect on democratic politics in India. Not only for influencing and creating viewer's opinion, social media is also used by political parties to communicate with the electorate. Through social media platforms like Facebook or X, politicians are able to see direct response to their actions. In addition to this, social media campaigns are capable of reaching out to more voters especially the young voters and are playing an important role in shaping democratic politics in India (Roy and Sarkar 2016). The Lok Sabha elections of 2014 were the first general elections in India where social media was used on a large scale for political communication and campaigning (**Jose 2021**). Studies relating to the impact of social media on voting behaviour have shown that the 2014 General elections the electorate had the highest exposure to media in the last two decades and that media exposure influences people's voting behaviour (Verma and Sardesai 2014). Political commentators have argued that the victory of BJP was largely due to its extensive media campaigns and public communication strategy (Sardesai 2023). The success of the Delhi elections of the Aam Admi Party was also due to the impact it created through social media. The 2019 General elections was a one of a kind election campaigning where political parties publicized their ideologies and mobilized public opinion through social media (Mahapatra and Plagemann 2019). The information available on social media helps to form opinions as well as reinforcing existing opinions. Sometimes based on these opinions certain actions are triggered and thus social media has the potential to influence voter's decision at the time of the elections. In the last few years there has been rise in 'fake news' which has become prominent during elections where in political parties and leaders have used social media platforms to spread misinformation and instigate voters. Study shows that although social media did play an important role in disseminating



information there also seems to have a trust deficit among voters with regard to information available through social media. Nevertheless, social media usage and political participation are directly related (CSDS 2019).

The General elections of 2024 also witnessed an unprecedented rise of artificial intelligence, social media and digital platforms for political campaigning. Social media was used to share speeches, campaign matters and press conferences (Singh 2024).

CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be said the study on media's role in democratic politics in India is guided by Habermas and Chomsky's role of media vis- a- vis the society, state and economy where there has been a commodification of news in the hands of political and economic elite.

In India, with substantive powers media has played a vital role in making public participation meaningful. In this light the role of media gains immense significance especially before an election. However this role by media through the dissemination of information leads to wider ideological mediation resulting in various forms of domination. To add to this, media houses are controlled by the market which in turn is controlled by political and economic elite. Moreover with the rise of social media the present situation is not very encouraging in a pluralist society like ours where hate messages and discussions can affect the society at large. **THEREFORE, THERE IS A NEED FOR REGULATING MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN GENERAL.** To ensure healthy democratic process it is necessary that information circulated by media is true and does not affect people's trust. It is extremely important for media organisations whether in print, audio visual, radio or web that professional reliability and ethical standards are not to be sacrificed for creating dramatic news. Apart from these, there is also need to democratize access to the use of media with the development of local media especially in poor and remote areas where native people lead a marginalized social life.

References:

- Aytac, U. (2024). "Digital domination: Social media and contestatory democracy". *Political Studies*, 72(1), pp.6-25.
- Chambers, S. (2021). "Truth, deliberative democracy, and the virtues of accuracy: is fake news destroying the public sphere?" *Political Studies*, 69(1), pp.147-163.
- Coronel, S. (2003). The role of the media in deepening democracy. *NGO Media Outreach*, 1-23. Available at <https://changecommunications.org/web/docs/dibengunpan010194.pdf> accessed on 20.3.2025
- CSDS (2019). Social media and political behaviour. Delhi: Lokniti-Centre for Study of Developing Societies. Available at (https://www.csdsonline.org/uploads/custom_files_new/Report-SMPB.pdf) accessed on 10.4.2025
- Dasgupta, S., Sinha, D., and Chakrabarti, S. (2012). *Media, gender, and popular culture in India: Tracking change and continuity*. New Delhi: Sage Publishers pp. 32-52.
- Habermas, J. (1974). The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964). *New German Critique*, 3, 49-55. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/487737> accessed on 20.3.2025
- Habermas, J. (2023). *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp. 35-43



- Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (2008) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* London: Bodley Head pp 1-30
- Jose J. (2021). The politicization of social media in India. *South Asian Voices*, July. Available at <https://southasianvoices.org/the-politicization-of-social-media-in-india/> accessed on 12.4.2025
- Mahapatra S., and Plagemann J. (2019). Polarization and politicization: The social media strategies of Indian political parties. *GIGA Focus Asia*. Available at https://pure.giga-hamburg.de/ws/files/21579397/gf_asien_1903_en.pdf accessed on 10.4.2025
- Neyazi, T. A. (2011). "Politics after vernacularisation: Hindi media and Indian democracy". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(10), March 75-82.
- Patberg, M. (2025). "What is Social Media's Place in Democracy?" *The Review of Politics*. Available at doi: 10.1017/S0034670524000706 accessed on 12.4.2025
- Roy Dipanwita and Sarkar D. Judhajit (2016) *Social media: The new weapon in Democracy* in Anand Shanker Singh (ed.) *Role of media in Nation building*. Cambridge: Scholars Publishing. pp 98-107
- Sardesai, S. (2023). "Media Exposure and Vote Choice in India, 1996–2019". *Studies in Indian Politics*, 11(2), 317-334.
- Singh, Rimhim (2024). From memes to AI: How digital tools reshaped India's 2024 general elections. Available at https://www.business-standard.com/elections/lok-sabha-election/2024-indian-elections-digital-campaigns-social-media-ai-124123100308_1.html accessed on 11.4.2025
- Tuchman, G. (2013). The production of news in Jenson K.B. (ed.) *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research*. New York: Routledge pp. 90-102.
- Verma, R., and Sardesai, S. (2014). "Does media exposure affect voting behaviour and political preferences in India?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(39), September pp.82-88.
- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: Public Affairs pp.25-35



Impact of Pandemic on different levels of Education in India

Dr. Tapash Das

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol-713340, W.B, India,

Email: tapash.das90@gmail.com, ORCID ID: [0000-0003-4619-0009](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4619-0009)

Prof. (Dr.) Tarini Halder

Professor, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, Kalyani-741235, W.B, India,

Email: thalderku@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0007-8807-7182

Abstract

In India, a nation with wide-ranging socioeconomic and regional inequalities, the COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on educational systems around the world. The article examines the pandemic's complex effects on education at the primary, secondary, higher education, and open and distance learning levels. This article is based on reputed secondary sources. All levels of education in India were severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed structural vulnerabilities and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Children in marginalized areas who had little access to digital resources were disproportionately affected by school closures, which hampered social interaction, cognitive development, and basic learning at the primary level. Due to the difficulties of online learning and disruptions to board exams, learning gaps, dropout rates, and student anxiety have all increased significantly in secondary education. The shift to online platforms in higher education has exposed disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity, especially in rural areas. There have been major delays in academic schedules, examinations, internships, and placements, which have negatively impacted students' career paths. Despite being better equipped to withstand disruptions, open and distance education has faced challenges with infrastructure, inclusion, and student engagement. But it has also shown flexibility and resilience, becoming an important option in times of crisis.

Keywords: *Impact, Pandemic, Primary Education, School Education, Higher Education, Open and Distance Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Unexpected interruptions in education brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic forced a change to remote learning and revealed systemic injustices. Vulnerable groups were disproportionately impacted by these interruptions in India, a nation with millions of students enrolled in higher education and more than 250 million school-age children. The shift to online and hybrid learning presented difficulties at all educational levels and fundamentally changed the nature of education. Around the world, the COVID-19 epidemic caused an unparalleled upheaval in educational systems. In an effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, almost all governments ceased in-person instruction and closed schools between March 2020 and March 2022 (Our World in Data, 2022). Despite efforts by governments and schools to replace in-class lessons with remote teaching approaches, UNICEF predicts that over 1.6 billion children globally lost their education as a result of school closures (UNICEF, 2021). The entire nation has been placed under lockdown because to

the pandemic. 247 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools were impacted by the first wave, which saw 1.5 million schools in India completely closed for more than a year, according to UNICEF projections from 2021.

After the United States of America, India is the nation most impacted by COVID-19 worldwide. Therefore, stopping the COVID-19 epidemic from spreading is the Indian government's challenge. In order to stop the COVID-19 epidemic from spreading, the Indian government implemented a number of measures, including lockdowns and shutdowns, which led to the closure of all Indian educational institutions. All school exams were postponed indefinitely, and classes were suspended. Thus, the majority of students' education is negatively impacted by the lockout. Despite being a unique situation in school education history, the COVID-19 epidemic has opened up numerous opportunities to transition from the traditional classroom teaching approach to a new digital age. Teachers and students now have the opportunity to continue their instructional activities online thanks to the lockdown. The instructors used various apps, such as Zoom, Google Meets, Facebook, YouTube, and others, to conduct live video conferences and distribute homework to students online. The Indian government has built a number of digital projects, including DIKSHA, e-PATHSALA, SWAYAM, SWAYAMPRAVABHA, the National Digital Library, and others, that give students and teachers the chance to continue teaching and learning. However, it creates a lot of possibilities that make it harder for students from underprivileged groups to use any kind of technology to attend online classes.

The effects of the pandemic COVID-19 on Education in India: The education sector in India has been severely impacted by the epidemic, just like every other sector. The researcher also highlighted the government's efforts to deal with the pandemic and provide a suitable environment for those involved in this sector, as well as its advantages and disadvantages (Jena, 2020). Higher education and COVID-19: Present and future implications impact analysis, policy responses, and suggestions that highlight the actions made by many countries worldwide with appropriate statistics and how various stakeholders in this sector have responded to this scenario. Additionally, this report aids in the examination of the global situation. COVID-19 evaluating the effects on the education sector and anticipating the perspectives of stakeholders in various situations and government initiatives that aid in a more thorough investigation of the situation (Parthenon, 2020).

Some faculty members have encountered difficulties using social media to effectively communicate the teachings to their students throughout the transition to online learning and teaching. They also need to implement new methods for assessing the results of online learning. Some kids' dream learning has also been impacted by the lack of reliable internet connections, particularly in rural areas, which will also have an impact on their grade point averages (GPAs). Global transport has also been impacted by COVID-19. International admissions to higher education will also be impacted by this. Therefore, the impact of COVID-19 will make it challenging to pursue a desired job and will cause young students and recent graduates to feel anxious and apprehensive.

Objectives

1. To study the impact of Pandemic on Primary Levels of Education
2. To study the impact of Pandemic on School Levels of Education
3. To study the impact of Pandemic on Higher Levels of Education
4. To study the impact of Pandemic on Open and Distance Education System
5. To analyse the Positive and Negative impact of Pandemic on Education System

METHODOLOGY

This work is an analytical investigation. Its foundation is secondary data. The information was gathered from a various of sources, including national educational policy 2020, books, articles, newspapers, and reflective journals. Additionally, data is gathered from numerous COVID-19-related publications and papers issued by both domestic and foreign organisations.

Discussions

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON PRIMARY LEVELS OF EDUCATION

During the COVID-19 lockdown, schools rashly closed, affecting primary education globally. Almost all of the surveys that were done to find out how COVID-19 has affected pre-primary and primary education aimed at parents and teachers because it is difficult to include pre-primary and primary school students in surveys (Moss et al., 2020; Pensiero et al., 2020; Polydoros & Alasona, 2021; Putri et al., 2020). Studies that did not use surveys focused on modelling academic accomplishment and determining learning gain or loss.

1. **Educational Losses:** Primary pupils, who were especially vulnerable given their developmental stage, had protracted disruptions in their core learning as a result of school closures. Significant deficiencies in reading, writing, and maths were found in studies, especially for kids from underprivileged and rural areas.
2. **Digital Disparity:** Only 24% of rural Indian families had internet connectivity, making it difficult to access online education. Economically marginalised children were further excluded by the lack of digital equipment.
3. **Social-Emotional Development:** Younger kids experienced social isolation, which limited their chances for emotional growth and social contact.
4. **Government Efforts:** By providing televised and digital instructional information, initiatives such PM eVIDYA and Diksha sought to close gaps. However, because of linguistic and infrastructure limitations, their reach remained uneven.
5. **Higher dropout rate:** Between 2018 and the epidemic, the dropout rate more than tripled.
6. **Learning inequality:** As a result of the digital divide, the transition to digital platforms exacerbated learning inequality and forced many kids out of school.
7. **Long-term consequences on nutrition and health:** Children's nutrition and health were negatively impacted for a long time by not attending school.

The pandemic presented previously unheard-of difficulties, but it also acted as a catalyst for changes to India's educational system. Now, the emphasis must be on closing the achievement gap, bolstering the digital infrastructure, and guaranteeing that everyone has fair access to high-quality education.

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON SECONDARY LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Attending school is the best public policy tool available for improving abilities. Children can develop their social awareness and social skills while having fun at school. The primary reason for attending or remaining in school is to improve the child's abilities. Relatively little time spent in education improves aptitude and abilities. On the other hand, skipping class or not going to school will hinder the development of new skills.

The way that education is structured has been impacted by school closures. First, it had an impact on the methods of instruction and evaluation. The small number of private schools that offer online courses have embraced online teaching techniques. Students in those schools are enrolled in online courses. Conversely, low-income government and private schools are shut down entirely and lack access to e-learning resources.

Students' learning is being affected. The shift in teaching methods is causing parents to deal with a number of problems (Tarkar, 2020).

1. Learning Disruptions

- **Extensive School Closures:** For months, secondary schools were closed, which seriously disrupted academic schedules and delayed curriculum completion.
- **Learning Losses:** Secondary school students experienced significant learning losses, especially in disciplines like science and maths that call for conceptual knowledge.
- **Exams and Assessments:** Due to the cancellation or postponement of board exams, alternate means of evaluation were used. Parents and pupils experienced stress and confusion as a result.

2. The Growing Digital Gap

- **Limited connection to Online Learning:** A significant portion of students in high school did not have reliable internet connection or devices. Students from under-represented groups and girls were disproportionately impacted.
- **Quality of Online Education:** Due to a lack of interactive techniques and inadequate instructor preparation, online education frequently fell short of in-person learning, even for those who had access.

3. Effects on the Psychosocial Level

- **Mental Health Issues:** Due to loneliness, pressure to perform well in school, and uncertainty about the future, adolescents experienced elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and despair.
- **Social Development:** Students' social skills and emotional development were hindered by their lack of engagement with teachers and peers.

4. A Rise in Inequality

- **Financial Difficulties:** Many families experienced financial difficulties, which compelled students—especially older ones—to leave school in order to provide for their families. Early marriages were more likely to happen to girls.
- **Disparities in Educational Outcomes:** Students in urban areas who had greater access to resources were able to adjust more successfully than those in rural areas, which exacerbated already-existing disparities.

5. Changes in Teaching and Learning

- **Transition to Digital Platforms:** For virtual instruction, governments and educational institutions used programs like Google Classroom and Zoom as well as technologies like SWAYAM and DIKSHA.
- Teachers faced difficulties because many had no prior experience with online pedagogy. Teachers had to juggle their teaching obligations with pandemic-related tasks.
- **Parental Involvement:** Due to their own lack of knowledge or technological skills, parents, especially those living in rural areas, frequently found it difficult to assist their children's education.
- **Effect on Tests and Career Advancement**

- **Board tests:** Students' academic preparations were disrupted when important tests, such as the Class 10 and 12 boards, were cancelled or rescheduled.
- **Admission to Higher Education:** College applications were influenced by unclear exam schedules and alternate evaluation standards.
- **Skill Development:** At the secondary level, practical learning and vocational training were essential, but they were interrupted.

7. Interventions by the Government of India

- **Bridge Programs and Remedial Classes:** After schools reopened, states implemented programs to reduce learning losses.
- **Mental Health Support:** To address the psychological difficulties faced by students, certain governments established counselling programs and helplines.
- **Updated Curricula:** To lessen the workload for pupils and prioritise important subjects, curricula were modified.

8. Curriculum Gaps: Critical test years like Grades 10 and 12 were impacted by inadequate curriculum resulting from interrupted schooling. Exams at the national level, including entrance exams and CBSE board exams, were either rescheduled or administered in unusual ways.

9. Dropouts: As families put home duties or early weddings ahead of education, financial stress increased dropout rates, especially among girls.

10. Digital Adaptation Challenges: Teenagers had trouble adjusting to online learning settings, and their inability to communicate with peers and teachers decreased their effectiveness and level of involvement.

11. Mental Health Issues: Secondary school students experienced higher rates of anxiety and depression as a result of academic pressure and social isolation.

Although the epidemic revealed weaknesses in India's secondary education system, it also spurred innovation, especially in the area of technological integration. Reducing disparities, promoting mental health, and preparing kids for an increasingly digital and uncertain future are all necessary to meet these issues.

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Students' academic performance has also been impacted by university closures. One urgent step is necessary to guarantee the continuation of institutions and universities. The online teaching style is used to run the lesson efficiently. Universities use open-source digital learning solutions and learning management software to conduct online courses (Tarkar, 2020).

A key factor in determining the nation's economic destiny is higher education, and the epidemic has had a major impact on this sector as well. A large number of Indian students attend universities overseas. It is anticipated that the demand for international higher education will decline as a result of the closure of institutes and universities around the world.

The impact of the pandemic on employment rates is the primary concern that everyone is thinking about. Recently graduated grads are afraid that corporate employers may withdraw their job offers due to the current situation. The lockdown in India has also brought about changes in the way education is delivered in colleges and universities. New technologies have replaced the outdated chalk-talk model. In this regard, e-learning solutions are enabling teaching and learning; however, one significant problem with e-learning is

engagement. Policymakers are working to address the digital divide and student engagement issues. A multi-pronged approach is needed to address the problems in the Indian education sector.

An effective education and well rounded practices are needed in India to build the capacity of young minds in this time of crisis. To ensure the overall progress in India, It will drive employability, wellbeing, health and productivity through the development of skills.

1. Disruption of Academic Activities

- **Campus Closures:** Universities and colleges were closed for extended periods, halting in-person classes, research, and extracurricular activities.
- **Delayed Academic Calendar:** Admission processes, examinations, and graduation timelines were delayed, creating uncertainties for students planning higher studies or careers.

2. Transition to Online Learning

- **Adoption of Digital Platforms:** Classes shifted to platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) through platforms like SWAYAM and NPTEL gained traction.
- **Limited Practical Training:** Courses requiring hands-on experience, such as engineering, medicine, and lab sciences, faced significant challenges.

3. Mental Health and Well-being

- **Psychological Stress:** Prolonged isolation, academic uncertainty, and reduced peer interaction caused stress and anxiety among students.
- **Lack of Counselling Support:** Many institutions were ill-equipped to provide adequate mental health support during the crisis.

4. Research and Innovation

- **Interrupted Research Work:** Laboratories and research facilities remained closed, delaying ongoing projects and dissertations.
- **Focus Shift:** Research pivoted towards COVID-19-related studies, sometimes at the expense of other disciplines.

5. Economic Impact

- **Financial Strain on Institutions:** Reduced revenue from tuition fees, hostel fees, and other sources affected many private institutions. Funding cuts impacted public universities and their ability to sustain quality education.
- **Impact on Students:** Many students dropped out or deferred their studies due to financial hardships. Limited part-time job opportunities and internships compounded economic pressures on students.

6. Inequality and Access

- **Digital Divide:** Urban students adapted better to online learning compared to rural and underprivileged students. Gender disparities worsened as many female students faced additional domestic responsibilities or lack of access to digital tools.
- **Access to Resources:** Libraries, laboratories, and study spaces were inaccessible, limiting learning opportunities.

7. Examinations and Admissions

- **Examination Reforms:** Exams were postponed, canceled, or moved online, leading to alternative assessment methods such as internal evaluations or open-book exams.
- **Admission Delays:** Competitive exams like JEE, NEET, and university entrance exams faced delays, affecting students' academic progression.

8. Skill Development and Employability

- **Challenges in Skill-Based Learning:** Courses requiring internships or practical training, such as engineering, medicine, and management, faced major disruptions.
- **Employment Uncertainty:** Fresh graduates faced reduced hiring, delayed joining, and a freeze in campus placements, particularly in sectors like hospitality and aviation.
- **Rise in EdTech:** Platforms like Coursera, Udemy, and BYJU'S saw increased enrollment as students sought to enhance their skills during the lockdown.

The pandemic disrupted higher education in unprecedented ways but also catalyzed innovation and transformation. To build a resilient system, India must address issues of equity, mental health, and quality, while embracing technology to enhance access and learning outcomes.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

For many years, pedagogical and psychological research has examined distance learning in great detail (Palatovska et al., 2021). The transition from primarily asynchronous interactions to synchronous techniques made possible by the Internet, such as chat rooms and videoconferencing services, is one significant development in remote education. Digital platforms have also seen a significant shift in asynchronous content exchange (Virtic et al., 2021). A novel approach to communication and education is represented by distance learning. Under this strategy, a teacher may observe and communicate with pupils via chat as needed rather than broadcasting live. In distance learning, technological resources like online tests, simulators, movies, and audio podcasts are essential. In order to shape each student's unique learning path, it is also crucial to carefully monitor their performance.

Distance learning uses a computer game model, where new levels are unlocked only after finishing previous ones, although online learning attempts to mimic traditional classroom approaches (Bakhov et al., 2021). Due to its many advantages, such as the removal of time and location restrictions, quick access to resources, schedule flexibility, and cost effectiveness, eLearning has drawn more attention from educational institutions in recent years. The beneficial effects of eLearning on student outcomes have been shown in numerous studies, which highlight the significance of active student engagement, sometimes known as "active learning" (Aldossary, 2021; Altun et al., 2021). Frequently mentioned disadvantages include a lack of courses,

communication, and internet connection; lower teaching quality; difficulties teaching practical subjects; and technology issues that result in system unavailability (Altun et al., 2021).

1. Increased Demand for ODL Programs

- **Growth in Enrollment:** Traditional educational institutions' shift to remote learning blurred lines with ODL, leading to increased interest in flexible learning programs. IGNOU and other open universities reported higher enrollment figures, especially for skill-based and professional courses.
- **Awareness and Accessibility:** The pandemic raised awareness about the flexibility and affordability of ODL programs, attracting a more diverse demographic, including working professionals and rural learners.

2. Role of Technology in Enhancing ODL

- **Digital Learning Platforms:** Learning management systems (LMS) like SWAYAM and MOOC platforms became central to ODL, offering video lectures, e-books, and interactive assessments. The availability of government-supported platforms such as the National Digital Library expanded resource access.
- **Live Classes and Virtual Interactions:** Integration of tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom facilitated live interactions, fostering a sense of community among ODL learners.
- **Innovations in Assessment:** Online proctored examinations and project-based evaluations replaced traditional exams, ensuring academic integrity and flexibility.

Challenges Faced by ODL During the Pandemic

1. Digital Divide

- **Infrastructure Issues:** Limited access to reliable internet and digital devices excluded many learners, especially in rural and remote areas.
- **Regional and Socio-Economic Disparities:** Learners from marginalized communities struggled to benefit from ODL due to language barriers and limited digital literacy.
- **2. Institutional Preparedness**
- **Scalability Issues:** Institutions faced challenges in scaling up infrastructure to meet the surge in enrollments and online activities.
- **Faculty Training:** Many educators lacked training in delivering online content effectively, leading to gaps in learning outcomes.

3. Learner Challenges

- **Self-Motivation and Discipline:** Distance education demands high levels of self-regulation, which many learners found difficult without traditional classroom structures.

- **Mental Health Concerns:** Isolation and lack of peer interaction adversely affected the mental well-being of many ODL students.

4. Quality Assurance

- **Content and Engagement:** The rapid digitization of content sometimes compromised quality, with limited focus on interactive and engaging material.

Innovations and Responses in ODL

1. Hybrid Learning Models:

- Combining ODL's flexibility with traditional education's structure, hybrid models emerged as a viable post-pandemic solution.

2. Government Initiatives

- **SWAYAM and SWAYAM PRABHA:** The government expanded these platforms, offering free access to quality content for learners across the country.
- **PM eVIDYA Initiative:** This initiative aimed to provide multi-modal learning solutions, integrating television, radio, and digital platforms.

3. Institutional Strategies

- Open universities adopted adaptive technologies, such as AI-based personalized learning and analytics, to enhance student engagement.

4. Community-Led Solutions

- Local initiatives, such as digital hubs and mobile classrooms, addressed the digital divide in underserved regions.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION SYSTEM

Positive impact of Pandemic on All levels of education system:

Indian educational institutions have accepted the challenges and are doing everything in their power to provide students with seamless support services during the crisis, despite the COVID-19 pandemic's many negative consequences on education (Rawal, 2021). The opportunity to switch from a traditional to a modern educational system was granted to the Indian educational system. The following are examples of positive effects.

- **Increased digital literacy:** As a result of the pandemic, more individuals are learning how to use and understand digital technology.
- **Enhancement of teamwork:** There is a chance for collaborative teaching and learning to take on new shapes.
- **Encourage the use of soft copy learning materials:** Most students used soft copy materials for reference because they were unable to retrieve hard copies of study materials during a lockdown.

- Increase in online meetings: The pandemic has seen a significant increase in the possibilities of teleconferencing, virtual meetings, webinars, and e-conferencing.
- Growing demand for open and distance learning: Most students prefer this type of training during the pandemic because it encourages independent study, provides access to a variety of resources, and enables customized instruction depending on the needs of each student.
- More effective use of electronic media for information exchange: Students can now share course materials more quickly and their related inquiries can be resolved through email, SMS, phone calls, and social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp.
- Improved time management: Online learning helps students better manage their time during pandemics.
- Global exposure: Teachers and students have the chance to engage with peers from all over the world. Students adjusted to a global society.

Negative impact of Pandemic on All levels of education system:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the all the levels of education (Rawal, 2021). It has had many detrimental effects on education, Educational activity is hindered: Classes have been suspended and schools have been closed. In India, some boards have already delayed the entrance exams and yearly exams.

- Lack of preparation on the part of teachers and students: Teachers and students were not prepared for the abrupt shift from in-person to online instruction.
- The role of parents: While some educated parents in urban areas are capable of providing guidance, others do not possess the necessary education to instruct children at home.
- Technology: Since many students, especially those in rural regions, have little to no access to the internet and might not be able to afford a computer, laptop, or appropriate mobile phone for their homes, online education may cause a digital divide among students. Many reports claim that the lockout has had a significant negative effect on India's poor children, as most of them are unable to research internet education.
- Make a Difference: This online teaching-learning method greatly divides students from wealthy and impoverished places, as well as those from urban and rural locations.

Conclusion

The pandemic has had a significant and varied effect on Indian education, promoting innovation while escalating preexisting disparities. Going forward, these effects can be lessened and a more robust educational system can be ensured by emphasising inclusive policies, investing in digital infrastructure, and using holistic approaches to learning. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on India's education system. Even though it has brought about a lot of difficulties, it has also led to a number of chances. In order to address the current COVID-19 dilemma, the Indian government and several education stakeholders have investigated the potential of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by implementing various digital technologies. India lacks the necessary resources to use digital platforms to spread education throughout the country. The current selection of digital platforms will hurt kids who aren't as fortunate as the others. However, the Indian government and institutions are working tirelessly to find a solution to this issue. Integrating digital technology should be the top goal in order to give India's millions of young pupils a competitive edge. In order to be prepared for scenarios similar to COVID-19, educational institutions urgently need to improve their knowledge and IT infrastructure.

References:

- Aldossary, K. (2021). Online distance learning for translation subjects: tertiary level instructors' and students' perceptions in Saudi Arabia. *Turk. Online J. Distance Educ.* 22:6
- Altun, T., Akyıldız, S., Gülay, A., and Özdemir, C. (2021). Investigating education faculty students' views about asynchronous distance education practices during COVID-19. *Psycho Educ. Res. Rev.* 10, 34–45.
- Amiruddin., Soy, S.S. (2022). Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on higher education in india: an analytical study. ANALYTICAL STUDY. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366595746_IMPACT_OF_THE_COVID-19_PANDEMIC_ON_HIGHER_EDUCATION_IN_INDIA_AN_ANALYTICAL_STUDY
- Arora, A.K. and Srinivasan, R. (2020). Impact of pandemic COVID-19 on the teaching – learning process : a study of higher education teachers. *Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 43-56.
- Bakhov, I., Opolska, N., Bogus, M., Anishchenko, V., and Biryukova, Y. (2021). Emergency distance education in the conditions of COVID-19 pandemic: experience of Ukrainian universities. *Educ. Sci.* 11:364. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070364>
- Barad, K., Parida, S.K., Nayak, K. (2022). Impact of covid-19 pandemic on school education in India: challenges and opportunities. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*. 8(1), 251-255. <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra9403>
- Gyamerah, K. (2020). *The impacts of COVID-19 on basic education: How can Ghana respond, cope, and plan for recovery?* <https://schoolofeducation.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2020/03/31/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-basic-education-how-can-ghana-respond-cope-and-plan-for-recovery>
- Jena, P.K. (2020). Challenges and Opportunities created by Covid-19 for ODL: A case study of IGNOU. *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Filed*, Volume-6, Issue- 5, Pg. 217-222. <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.39209.07.2020>
- Jena, P.K. (2020). Impact of pandemic COVID-19 on education in India. *International Journal of Current Research*, 12, (07), 12582-12586. <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.39209.07.2020>
- Moss, G., Allen, R., Bradbury, A., Duncan, S., Harmey, S., & Levy, R. (2020). *Primary teachers' experience of the COVID-19 lockdown—Eight key messages for policymakers going forward*. London, UK: UCL Institute of Education.
- Our World in Data, 2022. Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19). Published online at OurWorldInData.org
- Palatovska, O., Bondar, M., Syniavska, O., and Muntian, O. (2021). Virtual mini-lecture in distance learning space. *Arab World Engl. J.* 1, 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid.15>
- Parthenon. (2020). COVID-19 Assessing the impact on the education sector and looking ahead.
- Pensiero, N., Kelly, A., & Bokhove, C. (2020). *Learning inequalities during the Covid-19 pandemic: How families cope with home-schooling*.
- Polydoros, G., & Alasona, N. (2021). Using E-Learning to teach science in Covid-19 era at primary education level. *Journal of Research and Opinion*, 8(6), 2964–2968.



- Putri, R. S., Purwanto, A., Pramono, R., Asbari, M., Wijayanti, L. M., & Hyun, C. C. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on online home learning: An explorative study of primary schools in Indonesia. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(5), 4809–4818.
- Rawal, M. (2021). An analysis of COVID-19 Impacts On Indian Education System. *Educational Resurgence Journal*. 2(5), 35-40. <https://coed.dypvp.edu.in/educational-resurgence-journal/documents/jan-2021/35-40.pdf>
- Sheetal. S.K., Raj, R. (2023). The impact of covid-19 on the learning of the students in higher education. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Commerce, Management & Social Science (IJARCMSS)*. 6(1), 45-51. <https://inspirajournals.com/uploads/Issues/173125775.pdf>
- Tang, K.H.D. (2023) Impacts of COVID-19 on primary, secondary and tertiary education: a comprehensive review and recommendations for educational practices. *Educ Res Policy Prac*, 22, 23–61. Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-022-09319-y>
- Tarkar, P. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Education System. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*. 29(9s), 3812-3814. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352647439_Impact_Of_Covid-19_Pandemic_On_Education_System.
- UNICEF, (2021). COVID-19: Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost a full year. says UNICEF. UNICEF press release 02 2021
- Virtic, M.P., Dolenc, K., Sorgo, A. (2021). Changes in Online Distance Learning Behaviour of University Students during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak, and Development of the Model of Forced Distance Online Learning Preferences. *European Journal of Educational Research*. 10(1):393-411. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.10.1.393>
- WHO. WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int/>



COVID-19 Lockdown and Internal Migrants in India: Issues, Vulnerability and Mitigation

Lakshman Chandra Pal

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Bidhan Chandra College, Rishra, Hooghly

Email: lcpalgeo@gmail.com | ORCID ID [0000-0002-9565-962X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9565-962X)

Abstract

India was one of the worst COVID-19 disease-affected countries in the world. This situation impelled the government to implement a nationwide lockdown for a period of sixty-six days. All the sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, construction, trade, and commerce, were closed, jeopardizing the livelihood of the nation during that time. Millions of informal sector workers lost their jobs. Migrant workers, especially the daily-wage labourers, dropped into a vulnerable situation. Many of them started walking or bicycling towards their hometown or villages. Hundreds of them died of hunger or from meeting with an accident on their journey. To alleviate the situation, the Government of India took a number of important measures, like arranging trains, free rationing, free food and shelter, free treatment, job openings, direct cash transfer for their livelihood, and so on. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the issues and vulnerability of India's internal migrants faced during their return journey, the steps taken by the government, and recommendations for the way forward.

Keywords: *Pandemic situation; COVID-19 lockdown; Migrant workers; Internal migration; Vulnerability;*

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 *disease*, caused by the corona virus, was first identified in *Wuhan City* in China in December 2019 (Singhal 2020; WHO 2020a). Along with other countries, the pandemic spreads gradually all over India on and after 27th January, 2020. This situation impelled the government to implement a *lockdown* with strict restrictions on mobility and transportation from 25th March for a period of 21 days (Das, R., & Kumar, N. 2020). Thereafter, the lockdown was extended gradually, phase by phase, up to 30th May, 2020.

COVID-19 disease and the associated lockdown prohibited the people from stepping out of their homes and impacted the nations across the world by disrupting the lives, economy, and societies. During this period, all the sectors of the economy, including construction, manufacturing, trade, and commerce, were closed in India (Gopinath, G., 2020). The suspension of economic activities instantly cracked the earnings of common people, especially of informal and migrant labourers. A huge number of informal sector employees, particularly migrant workers, lost their jobs. In the *no work, no money* situation, they faced multiple hardships in the new places. Job loss, food insecurity, economic vulnerability, and uncertainty about their future become the frightening reality for millions of migrant workers and daily wage earners. They simply wanted to exit the station because they were worried about getting infected with the virus. But, due to the lockdown situation, all the means of transportation were closed. In these circumstances, thousands of workers started walking or bicycling hundreds of kilometers to return to their native villages or towns (Jaiswal P., 2020).

But returning to their homes was not at all an easy task; rather, it was really an expedition. During their journey, they faced multiple hardships on the way. They walked for weeks for a destination, some with their family and children. *The most vulnerable among them were women, children, and the elderly.* They slept on tracks, railway stations, or adjoining villages. Many of them were arrested for violating lockdown principles. One hundred and ninety-eight (198) migrants died by accident or due to exhaustion during lockdown (Dutta A., 2020).

To cope with the situation, the central and state governments **took** different steps. A sufficient number of *SHRAMIK SPECIAL* trains **was** arranged for them. Some state governments arranged bus services for returning home. A large number of *relief camps* with medical facilities were arranged to house the migrant workers at different points on their way. A huge amount of funds was allotted by the central government for their free rationing, housing, direct cash transfer for livelihood, health and employment openings, and so on. In this light, the present paper is an attempt to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown on the issues and vulnerability of India's internal migrants faced during their journey towards home, the steps taken by the government, and recommendations for the way forward.

An Overview of Internal Migration in India

In a vast country like India, a huge number of people are forced to migrate elsewhere, leaving their wives, children, and parents behind due to a lack of employment opportunities, low wage rates, agricultural crises, small landholdings, low productivity, and *low income* in the native areas (Keshri and Bhagat 2013). They move towards the towns and cities or elsewhere within the district or beyond the districts and states in search of better living opportunities. Bulk share (70%) of the internal migration (83% for female and 39% for male) in this country is intra-district in nature, and it is due to the reasons of marriage, education, or family shift with variations between male and female migrants (Rajan, S.I., and M. Sumeetha, 2019a). Records from the Economic Survey (2016-17) show that there were **sixty** million migrations between states and **eighty** million migrants between districts. (Government of India 2017 a). The World Economic Forum estimated that there are around **one hundred and thirty-nine** million migrants in the country, the majority of whom are daily-wage labourers working in the sectors of manufacturing and construction (Nair S. *et al.*, 2020). Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are the leading *suppliers* of migrant workers, while Maharashtra and Delhi are the largest *recipient states*. Categorically, Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, etc., are the *net in-migrant states*, whereas the states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Assam are known as *net out-migrant states* in the country. According to the study of the National Sample Survey Organization, during 2007-08, the volume of interstate migrant workers was about **eighty** million, which was about 29% of the total workforce. They were engaged mainly in the construction sector (about **forty** million), domestic work (about **twenty** million), the textile sector (about **eleven** million), brick manufacturing work (about **ten** million), agriculture, mining and quarrying, and the transportation sector ([IIPS, 2001](#)). Generally, such migrants belong to the youth category and stay in the destination for a period of only **two to twelve** months. Actually, they belong to the marginalized section of society. They have low but varying degrees of education and skills and varying profiles in terms of caste, religion, age, and other characteristics. But in reality, they are the rural food producers, city-makers, urban manufacturers, and service providers who nourish the nation, take care of the citizens in their homes, and look after its health and nutrition (Srivastava, R. 2011). The bargraph clearly indicates that, number of intra district migrant is always larger in our country followed by inter district and interstate migrant.

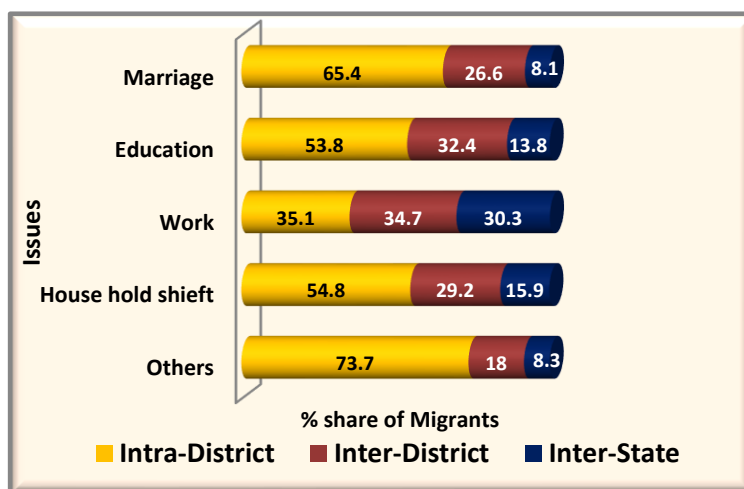


Fig-1: Category wise movement of internal migrants (Source-Census of India: 1991, 2001, 2011)

Issues Faced by Migrant Labours

The most vulnerable working groups in society are migrant laborers. They, in most cases, have no social security and no basic rights at the workplace (Government of India 2017b). They have low wages, late wages, financial shortages, and unreasonable rents in slums. They are often exploited by the agents because there are no enforceable agreements regarding the wages or working hours or other benefits and no commitments regarding regular provision of work. They have to go through a variety of problems like poor working conditions, long working hours, lack of safety equipment, forced labour, and so on. In many cases, they are absorbed into the labour market in less favorable ways than the local people. The migrants in the new places always feel weaker social networks as compared to non-migrants. All these make them acute difficulties in establishing claims and entitlements in their workplaces (Srivastava R., 2020). They have not enough living quarters and sanitation facilities, and, in most cases, they have to live in factory dormitories or shop pavements or in open areas in the city (Nair S. *et al.*, 2020). This further enhances their vulnerability and harassment by the police and other local authorities. The COVID-19 disease and associated lockdown added a new dimension to these problems.

One of the core issues of the migrants in the destination is proving their *identity*. In many cases they cannot produce valid and original address proof documents in new areas, and so they have to suffer from the lack of civic identity and civic citizenship. Also because of the lack of local identity, they are often deprived of the government-provided benefits like free *rations, health services, subsidized food, or fuel* in the destination area. The accompanying bar graph makes it evident that among the issues that migrants deal with, the majority experience unhealthy housing, which is followed by more work, lower pay, local disturbances, and so forth.

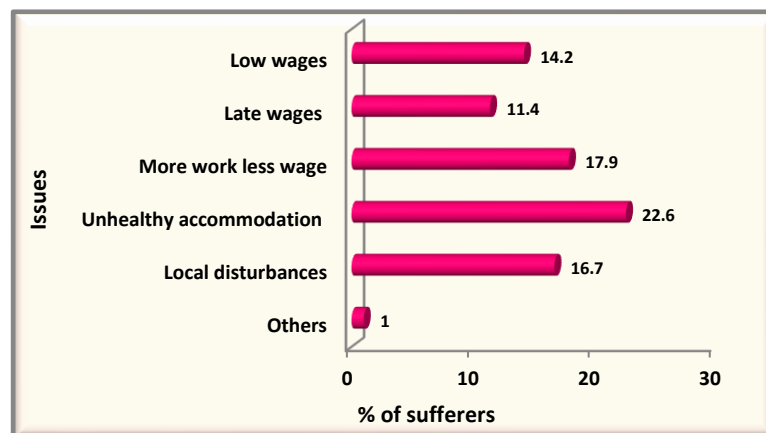


Fig-2: Problems faced by the migrant workers at their destination.

(Source-<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/internal-migration>)

Vulnerability of the Migrant Workers during Lockdown

India is one of the worst COVID-19 disease-affected countries in the world, and so it experiences a prolonged economic deceleration during the pandemic. The long-term nationwide lockdown has adversely impacted all the sectors of the economy of the country, jeopardizing the livelihood of the people. All the migrant workers and a large number of informal sector employees become jobless. A study shows that more than **one hundred and forty** million workers have lost their jobs across the country during the lockdown (CMIE 2020). This made the country's unemployment rate (24.95%) graph suddenly attain its peak in April 2020, which is cleared by the following figure.

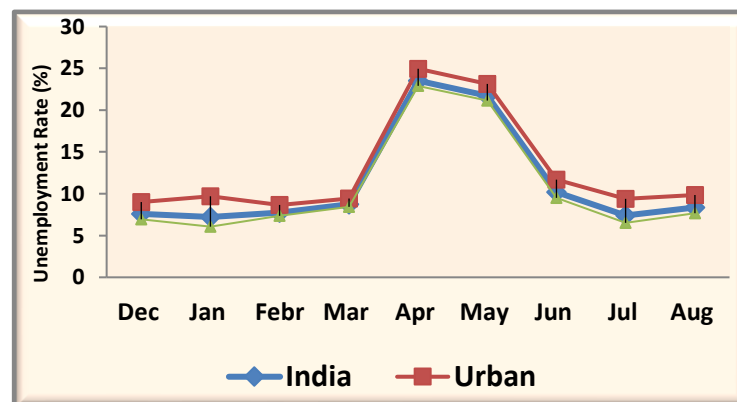


Fig-3: Rate of unemployment in India from Dec 2019 to Aug 2020. (Source- CMIE Pvt. Ltd)

The state of lockdown caused widespread *panic* among migrant workers. They did not know how long the lockdown would stay. They were *trapped* in sealed cities with empty pockets and so were at a great risk of falling deeper into. In this situation, they had no alternatives but to deal with the loss of their meager savings, food shortage, and uncertainty about their future. This situation of uncertainty, starvation, and eagerness to reach their home triggered the movement of thousands of migrant labourers to their homes. The panic created by fake news regarding the nature and duration of the lockdown added a new dimension to the exodus (Chatterjee M., 2020). Keeping these in mind, a large number of migrant workers started the journey towards their home (Sharma, S., & Khanna, S. 2020). But, due to the suspension of the public transport system,

thousands of migrant workers, some with their families and children, found *walking or bicycling* hundreds of kilometers along the roads (Slater, Joanna, Masih, Niha 2020). They slept near tracks, railway stations, or adjoining villages.

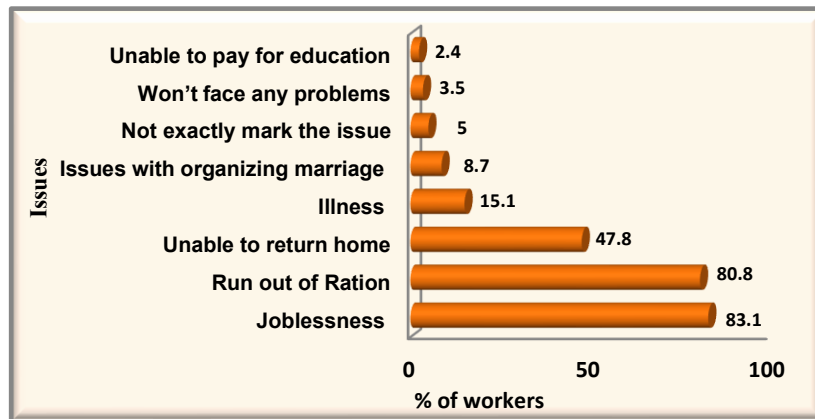


Fig-4: Problems faced by migrant workers during lockdown (Source- JanSaahas Survey 2020).

The bar graph clearly indicates that the majority of the migrant workers suffer during the pandemic from joblessness. A larger number also ran out from the rationing system, followed by problems like uncertainty of returning home, illness, and so on.

From a survey conducted by *Jan Saahas* with **three thousand one hundred and ninety five** migrant workers across Northern-central India from March 27 to March 29, it has been found that 80% of the migrant workers feared the shortage of food and joblessness during the lockdown period, 94% of them got below minimum wage, and 49% of them got no ration in spite of having their **Aadhar Card and bank account** in most cases with them (Jan Saahas Survey 2020). It was difficult enough for most of them to avail themselves of the benefit of the relief package and free ration declared by the **central** government. The study also shows that more than 60% of the workers did not know about the emergency relief measures, and 37% of them did not know how to access the package provided by the Central and State Governments (Ibid.).

During their journey, many of them were *arrested* for violating the lockdown principles imposed accordingly by the local government. Some of them *died* in *accidents* or *exhaustion* (Elsa E., 2020). It is reported that around **three hundred** deaths occurred while traveling back home (Mohanty D., 2020). According to the report made by the NGO *Save Life Foundation*, **one hundred and ninety-eight** migrant workers *died* in road accidents as of June 2, 2020 (Dutta A., 2020). During their journey on *SHRAMIK SPECIAL* trains, they also face hardship in different ways. There was no sufficient food or drinking water or hygienic toilet facilities or social distancing in the trains. All these called death for a number of migrant workers in the trains (Srivastava P., 2020). Also, after returning home, the migrants in many cases were treated with either *fear* or a "*class bias*" in their hometowns and villages. The local people treated them as a '*corona carrier*.' In many cases they faced assault and harassment by the people of their native areas (Kumar, C., & Mohanty, D., 2020). The *women and children* were the most vulnerable section among the migrants, especially from the exploitation and violation point of view (Bhatt 2009). A number of cases of *sexual assaults* had been reported in different parts of the country during that time (Madaik 2020).

The Mitigation: The Government actions

To lessen the vulnerability of the migrant workers and millions of others, the **Government** of India as well as different state governments adopted a number of crucial measures from time to time during the lockdown (Press Information Bureau, 2020b). These include –

Free Food Distribution

The Government of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare instructed state governments to set up relief camps with provisions for food, sanitary facilities, and medical care by April 1, 2020. The finance minister on May, 14 announced that under the second tranche of the *AATMA NIRBHAR BHARAT ABHIJAN*, free food grains would be provided to **eighty** million migrant workers and their families without ration cards.

who do not have a ration card. Around 7.5 million people, mainly migrants, were being provided food across the country in food camps run by the **non-governmental organizations**. Different state governments also provided free food to the hungry workers.

Setting up of Relief Camps

The Home Ministry on March 28, 2020, authorized the states to use their National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to provide accommodation for traveling migrants by setting up relief camps with medical facilities at different points along the highways. Up to April 12, 2020, **thirty-seven thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight** relief camps had been set up across the country to house lakhs of migrants. In Delhi, the number of camps was over **five hundred** (Mathur A., 2020). The Kerala government, in many cases, provided recharge facilities for phones as well as other medical essentials like masks, sanitizers, and medicines for the migrant workers in the camps. 3. On March 29, 2020, the central government ordered landlords to refrain from collecting rent from migrant workers.

Transport Arrangements

The most important problem faced by the return migrants during the lockdown was the lack of any means of transportation. To alleviate the situation, Indian Railways launched *SRAMIK SPECIAL trains* on and from May 1, 2020. Between May 1 and June 3, **four thousand one hundred and ninety-seven** trains were operated for transporting more than 5.8 million migrants. To take them back to their state for free, the Uttar Pradesh government arranged buses from Delhi's Anand Vihar Bus Station in late March. Up to the 4th week of March, about **forty** lakh migrants had traveled to their homes by bus (Jha, S., 29 March 2020).

Arrangement of Quarantine Centers

All the state governments opened thousands of quarantine centers to house the returned migrants and imposed strict measures for them to follow. Some states imposed mandatory institutional quarantine (Singh, S., & Sheriff, M., 2020). For counselling the migrant workers, the Bihar State Health Society (BSHS) started a mental health program as '*UMMEED*' in the isolation centers (Sopam R., 2020). In Karnataka, around **twenty-one thousand** migrant workers had been counselled. Twenty-one states are currently operating mental health counselling help lines (The Hindu 2020).

Financial Assistance

During lockdown, the Government of India allotted a bulky amount of money for the poor, including migrants, farmers, tiny businesses, and street vendors (Press Information Bureau, 2020b). On March 26, a

spending plan of Rs 22.6 billion was announced mainly to ensure food security and direct cash transfer to them (Srivastava, S. 2020). Again, on April 3, 2020, Rs 11 billion was released for the states and UTs under the National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF) for the arrangement of their food and shelter (MOHA, GOI, 2020, April 3). Daily wages under the Mahatma Gandhi *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (MGNREGA) scheme were increased from Rs 182 to 202 from April 1, 2020. The PM CARES Fund allocated Rs 1000 crores to migrant workers on May 13 (Sharma, A. *et al.*2020). 2. On May 14, an additional Rs 35 billion was allocated for free food grains for 80 million migrant workers. For facilitating the street vendors, the allocation was INR 500 billion (Press Information Bureau 2020b). A rural public works scheme, *GARIB KALYAN ROJGAR ABHIYAAN*, was launched on June 20, 2020, for 116 districts in 6 states to help the migrant workers, for which Rs 50000 crores was allotted. To help 91.3 million farmers countrywide by direct cash transfer, the PM KISAN scheme was introduced. Some state governments, like Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, etc., also announced a one-time direct cash transfer for returning migrant workers.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

India is a vast country with a huge population base. More than 65% of its populace lives in villages. It has diverse people, different cultures, and a mixed type of economy, although the lion's share of its population is engaged in agriculture and related activities. Small holdings, low productivity, traditional farming, mass poverty, low levels of literacy and income, high rates of unemployment, poor nutrition, and health status, etc., are the main features of the rural population in this country. There are huge numbers of marginal, poor, and distressed people living in every corner of the country. They live hand to mouth. They have no work in their hands for a large part of the year. Keeping in mind this socio-economic scenario, different *long-term* measures can be adopted to ensure the rights of the *basic needs* like food, shelter, and health for them, including the migrant workers. But for this, what is to be done first is to prepare a *comprehensive database* for migrant and other unorganized sector workers, which is essential for the formulation of any economic plans. In a country like India with millions of migrant and informal workers, there is no such authentic database. This situation had adversely affected the policies adopted for helping the workers during lockdown. The following measures may be taken to have a firm economic base in the countryside areas, which will bring down the flow of migrants elsewhere.

1. Implementation of a *standard and equal wage rate* policy for equal work for daily workers across the country. It has been found that there are great variations in the wage rate of workers of the same category in different states. In this situation, the states with high wage rates attract the workers from the states paying low wages. It causes migration. This should be abolished. More work opportunities must be created by initiating different government schemes in the *net out-migrant and densely populated* states.

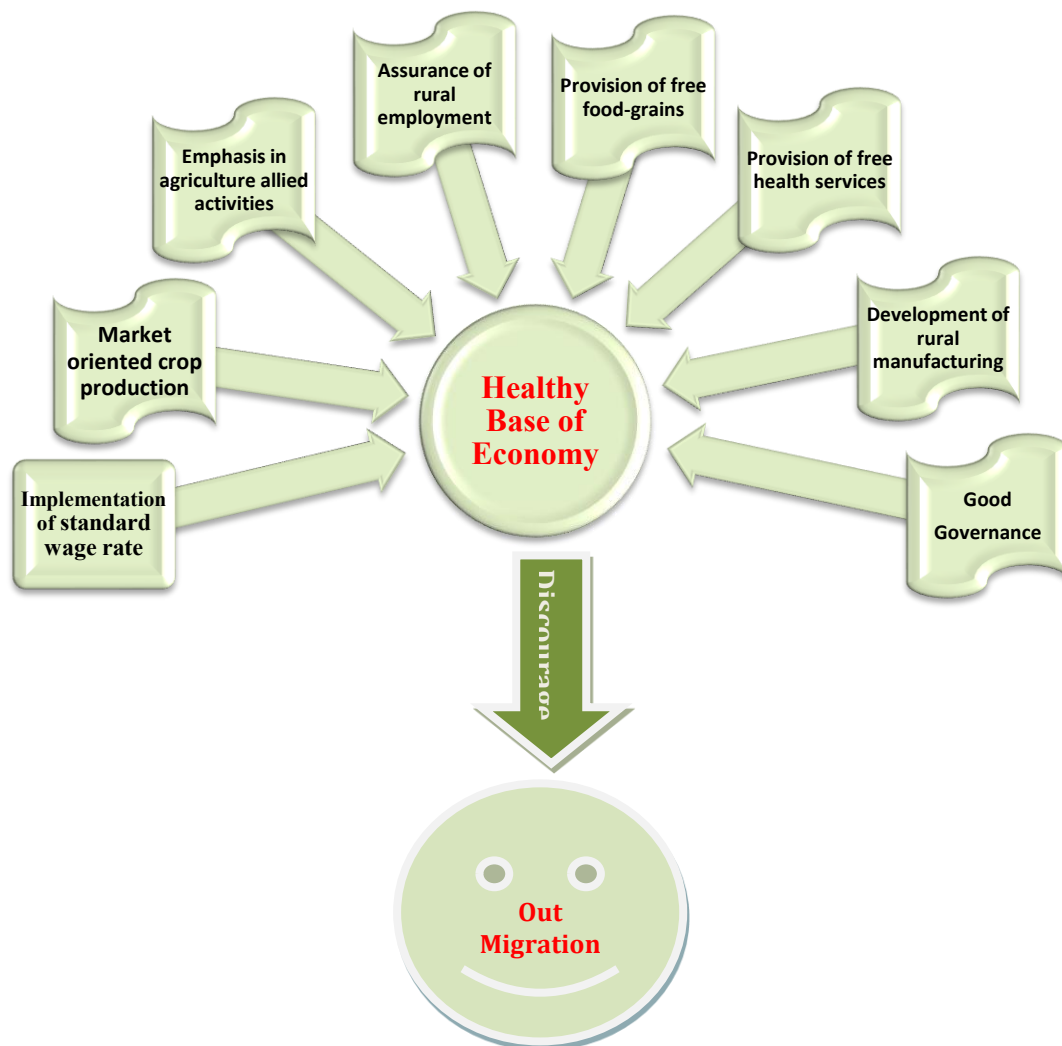


Fig-5: Potential strategies for making healthy economic foundation and less out-migration.

2. Motivation of the farmers to adopt *market-oriented crop production* instead of traditional farming. These highly demanded crops will ensure and increase the earnings of the farmers. But for this, the government should provide irrigation, fertilizers, and farm implements for the small and marginal farmers. Increase of profits will encourage the farmers to engross themselves in agricultural activities, which in turn will reduce the number of out-migrants. Farmers in different states in India are forced to sell the crops after harvesting due to a shortage of cash in their hands or for maintaining farm operations. To stop such *need, sell* the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme; PM KISAN may be more popularized and extended countrywide. There must be a standard *supportive price* for each crop across the country. The middleman system in vegetable marketing needs to be eliminated.
3. *Encouragement of the rural youth for the participation in agriculture allied activities* like dairy farming, poultry farming, apiculture, horticulture, sericulture, mushroom cultivation, floriculture, and fisheries instead of traditional farming. This will pledge the earnings of the people, which may discourage them from moving elsewhere in search of jobs. The rural youth may be trained for this purpose.

4. Provision *and assurance of rural employment* for at least **two hundred** days for the people living below the poverty line (BPL) by expanding the MGNREGA scheme or by increasing government spending on local public works. At present, the *100 DAYS WORK project* is running under this scheme in which poor people in the country have the opportunity of getting **one hundred** days' work in a calendar year. But in reality, they are employed only for 50-70 days per year. Also, it is influenced by local political parties. Along with this, all the homeless should be provided with adequate houses. *The PRADHAN MANTRI AWAAS YOJANA (GRAMIN)* scheme may be extended for this program.
5. Assurance of *getting free food grains* through the Public Distribution System (PDS) for the vulnerable section of society, including the migrant workers anywhere in the country, by adopting the *One Nation, One Ration Card policy*. More and more care must be taken in making divisions of *social classes* like APL (Above Poverty Line) and BPL.
6. Provision of *free health services* for the poorer section of the society, especially in remote villages, by extending the infrastructure of the rural health sub-centers. In most cases, there are not at all modern health facilities in rural India. A larger number of doctors and nurses should be provided there for 24-hour services along with free medicines, ambulance service, etc.
7. Encouragement *for the development of rural manufacturing* like handicrafts, small-scale industry, rural crafts, cottage industries, and other allied economic activities in the rural areas. Due to lack of funds and marketing facilities, this type of production in India is always neglected. The government should take initiatives to provide financial support and marketing for the products. The stakeholders should be provided a loan with *the easiest mode of recovery and subsidy facility*. lockdown, direct cash may be transferred to them to carry on the business.
8. Implementation of *good governance* with an accurate idea of the extent of the problem. Depending on the geographical situation, availability of local resources, quality and efficiency of local people, and the density of the population, a proper development plan should be adopted. Proper implementation of all these strategies will build a *solid economic base* in rural India, which in turn will stop the movement of the rural youths to other areas.

References:

- Bhatt, W. (2009). The gender dimension of migration in India: The politics of contemporary space in Orissa and Rajasthan. *Development in Practice*, 19(1), 87-93.
- Chatterjee, M. (Sep 15, 2020). Covid-19: 'Panic due to fake news' led to migrant exodus, no record of number of deaths, govt says. *The Times of India*. Retrieved on April 21, 2022.
- CMIE (Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy). (2020) Retrieved from <https://unemploymentinindia.cmie.com/>
- Das, R., & Kumar, N. (April 8, 2020). Chronic crisis: Migrants Migrants and India's COVID-19 lockdown. Retrieved from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2020/04/08/chronic-crisis-migrantworkers-and-indias-covid-19-lockdown/> on April 21, 2022.
- Dutta, A. (2020). 198 migrant workers killed in road accidents during lockdown: Report. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved, on April 11, 2022.



Elsa, E. (2020). The human cost of India's coronavirus lockdown: Deaths by hunger, starvation, suicide and more. *Gulf News*.

Government of India, Ministry of Finance (2017a). India on the Move and Churning: New Evidence. (n.d.). *Economic Survey*.

Government of India (2017b). Report of the Working Group on Migration. *Ministry Report of the Working Group on Migration. Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation*.

Gopinath, G. (2020). The great lockdown: The worst economic downturn since the great depression. Retrieved from <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/> on April 29, 2022.

IIPS . (2001). Major net migration flows. Indian Institute of Population Sciences.

Jaiswal, P. (2020). Coronavirus update: A long walk home on empty stomachs for masked migrants. In *Hindustan Times*.

Jan Saahas Survey, (2020). Lockdown is only the beginning of misery for India's migrant labourers. *Quartz.com*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/india/1833814/coronavirus-lockdown-hits-india-migrant-workers-pay-food-supply/> Google. on April 21, 2022.

Jha, S. (2020). Fighting Covid-19: After the long walk, jobless migrants head home by bus. In *Business Standard India*.

Keshri, K., & Bhagat, R. B. (2013). Socioeconomic determinants of temporary labour migration in India: A regional analysis. *Asian Population Studies*, 9(2), 175–195.

Kumar, C., & Mohanty, D. (2020). Migrant workers battle stigma, bias back home. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved, May 29, 2020

Madaik, D., (June 18, 2020). Odisha: woman migrant worker found dead near COVID-19 quarantine centre, 19th such death in state. *The Logical Indian*. Retrieved from <https://thelogicalindian.com/news/woman-migrantworker-dies-of-suicide-21770> on April 11, 2022.

Mathur, A. (2020). Delhi lockdown: Over 500 hunger relief centers set up for 4 lakh people. *The Times of India*.

Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. (2020, April 3). Press Information Bureau. (n.d.). Retrieved 7 April 2025, from <https://pib.gov.in/>

Mohanty, D. (2020). 56-year-old migrant dies on road to home, another dies after police lathi charge. *Hindustan Times*.

Nair, S., & Verma, D. (2020). A Policy Framework For India's Covid-19 Migration. *Bloomberg Quint*.

Press Information Bureau. 2020b (N.d.-a). Finance Minister announces short term and long-term measures for supporting the poor, including migrants, farmers, tiny businesses and street vendors Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in> on April 21, 2022.

Rajan, S. I., & Sumeetha, M. (2019). Women workers on the move. In S. I. Rajan & M. Sumeetha (Eds.), *Handbook of internal migration in India* (pp. 408–414). Delhi: Sage.

Sharma, A., & Prabhu, S. (2020). *Rs 3,100 Crore From PM CARES Fund Allocated For Ventilators, Migrants*.



Sharma, S., & Khanna, S. (2020). India's migrant workers face long walk home amid coronavirus lockdown. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-healthcoronavirus-india-migrant-labo/indias-migrant-workers-face-long-walk-home-amidcoronavirus-lockdown-idUSKBN21D2O0> on April 28, 2022.

Singhal S., Matto M. (2020), COVID-19 lockdown: a ventilator for rivers DownToEarth. In: Somani M., editor. Vol. 11. 2020. p. 00491. Retrieved from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/covid-19-lockdownventilator-for-rivers-70771> on April 21, 2022.

Singh, S., & Sheriff, M. (2020). Next challenge for Odisha and Bihar: Virus coming home with migrants. *The Indian Express*.

Slater, J., & Masih, N. (2020). In India, the world's biggest lockdown has forced migrants to walk hundreds of miles home. *The Washington Post*.

Sopam, R., (2020). In Bihar, 14,000 migrants seek counselling to overcome lockdown blues. Hindustan Times. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-bihar-14-000-migrantsseek-counselling-to-overcome-lockdown-blues/storyjxQmhahb6CU0gpqKN5jjkL.html> on May 11, 2022.

Srivastava, P. (2020). Migrant on Shramik Express dies hungry. In *The Telegraph. Kolkata*.

Srivastava, S. (2020). India Unveils \$22.6 Billion Stimulus Plan to Ease Virus Pain. *Bloomberg Quint*

The Hindu. 2020. Outdated census data deprives over 10 crores of PDS: economists. The Hindu. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/outdated-census-data-deprives-over-10-crore-of-pds-economists/article31350648.ece> on April 21, 2022.

WHO (2020a). WHO announces COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. Retrieved from <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid19/> on June 21, 2022.



Palash Blooming-A New Trend of Nature-Based Tourism: A Case of Purulia - The Palash Hot-Spot of West Bengal

Purnima Mallick

Assistant Professor Department of Geography Deshbandhu College for Girls

Email ID: purnimamallick222@gmail.com | ORCID ID : [0009-0001-7182-3149](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7182-3149)

Abstract

Sustainable development through nature-based tourism is become a concerning issue today, which helps to conserve resource and preserves local cultural traditions. Nature-based tourism increases financial mobility in a positive way over its multifaceted impact and in real sense, it helps to conserve the nature. There is a scope to increase diversified income opportunities without hampering the local indigenous culture that reduces the negative impact on the environment.

The natural landscape of Purulia district of West Bengal is extensively popular for its rich indigenous cultural heritage woven with a wide range of natural produces. Fiery red Palash (scientific name- *Butia Monosperma*) flower blooming in spring season in Purulia district is one of the main attractions of the nature lovers. Acquitted, hospitable and welcoming residents of the district possess the trustworthy appeal and enthusiasm to greet visitors during Palash blooming season. The study analyses the likelihoods of embryonic nature-based tourism activity in the Palash blooming areas of Purulia district. This paper also tries to explore the opportunities of economic development of the local tribal people by means of alternative livelihood through the nature-based tourism.

After quantifying various attributes collected in the form of primary information through structured questionnaire, descriptive statistics has been calculated to know the status of different parameters considered for the study. Cartographic techniques have been used for diagrammatic representation of the various attributes. The study finds that the nature-based tourism may help the local communities of the area to fast-track their living standard. Protecting and managing the forest resources and to ensure benefits arising from the use of biodiversity should be the prime focus of the promotion of tourism activity by natural way in Palash flower flourishing parts of Purulia district.

Keywords: *nature-based tourism, sustainable tourism, tribal people, economic development, alternative livelihood.*

Introduction:

Tourism is the most prominent industry of the world through which regional development can be accelerated utilizing the philosophies of sustainable tourism. According to the Tourism Organization of the World (2004), ideologies of sustainable tourism refer to the ecological, financial and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development. Important thing to realize that the environmental setting, demographic structure, socio-cultural atmosphere, commercial and political background of any place for developing nature-based tourism (one of the branches of sustainable tourism) which impacted the rural community in both optimistic and adverse way. It will not only generate employment for the local people but it can also

nurture social cultural and educational values. The fundamental idea behind nature-based tourism is to aid the local residents through entrepreneurial ventures, generating income, job creation opportunities, promoting the conservation and advancement of rural arts and crafts, investing in infrastructure improvement and safeguarding the area's natural setting and cultural legacy. The superior authority must motivate private initiatives to endorse nature-based tourism in country side. Local people are the pivotal protagonist for the successful implementation of developing nature-oriented tourism. The rural atmosphere, anthropology, socio-culture, fiscal and dogmatic contextual of that place should be taken into consideration before promoting nature-based tourism.

Objectives:

This paper explores the economic significance of developing nature-based tourism emphasising its advantages and disadvantages for overall progress. It also indicates that there are numerous scopes for investment in the infrastructure, edification and hospitality services by the administration or other organizations, given the vast potential for advancing nature-based tourism components.

This study deals with these subsequent objectives:

to study the pattern of today's tourism state of affairs of Purulia district.

to explore the potentiality of evolving nature-based tourism in Purulia District focusing Palash flower blooming.

to explore the opportunities for fiscal development of the local tribal residents.

Methodology:

This research work has been carried out in the Purulia district with participants tourists from various social background. Data has been gathered to assess the potential for nature-oriented tourism program me and an alyse its effects on countryside's particularly in terms of eco-friendly, monetary and socio-cultural angles.

The survey has been executed by means of the expedient specimen collection method. For this study purposive field survey has been conducted in selected localities from where red-hot fiery Palash blooming is visible. Primary data have been collected from 100 tourists through a comprehensive question naire. The secondary data have been gathered from diverse sources like Government reports, books and journals both from print and electronic media. For this particular study twelve nature-based resorts from three tourism circuit of the district have been selected. Opinion has been taken from 100 tourists through a five-point Likert Scale, who availed the resorts (table no. 1) and enjoying the Palash blooming session there in the month of March, 2025. Pearsons Co-relation Co-efficient has been considered to show the relationship among the variables for the purpose of finding out the possibility of income generation of the local people through the promotion of nature-based tourism. Descriptive statistics has been considered to an alysed the overview of high or moderate perception.

Table No: 1 Sample Design for Primary Data Collection

Zone	Tourism Circuit	Name of the Eco-resorts	Sample Size
------	-----------------	-------------------------	-------------

1	Ajodhya Hill Circuit	MurugumaMohulbani Resort	7
		Palash Bitan (Eco) Jungle Hut	10
		Bon Palashi	10
		Palash Blossom Estate	8
2	Garh Circuit	Kalyan Lake View Resort	10
		Palash Bari Eco Resort	10
		Adelfa Retreat	7
		Futiyari Retreat	8
3	Jhalda Circuit	Bon Palashi Eco-stay	10
		Palashboni Family Resort	10
		Palash Bari	5
		Barodi Eco-village	5

Source: Compiled by the Author, March, 2025

1. Study Area:

As a part of Chottanagpur plateau, located at the extreme west of the State of West Bengal, Purulia district is famous for its natural beauty. The geographical extension of the district is between 22°43' N to 23°42' N latitude and 85°49' E to 86°54' E longitude, comprising the area of 6,259 sq.km. In this land of less fertile soil, the heaved landscape is characterised by the occurrence of numerous residual hills and knolls, slender river channels, isolated forest patches consisting mainly Sal, Mahua, Palash etc.

2. Results and Discussion:

Purulia district of West Bengal is famous for its rich cultural heritage consisting of world-wide famous dance Pata, originated in this district. Another popular dances like Bhadu and Tusu are also well-known internationally performed by the tribal communities Kurmi, Sabars Santals etc. This district is significant in terms of its geographical location, which is the gateway of two other states Jharkhand and Orissa. Apart from this, the celestial beauty of Purulia is increased immensely in the month of March to April due to blooming of Palash flower and added the natural beauty of the land thousands of times. Jhumur song is the intrinsic part in the lives of the tribal people which gives immense pleasure to the internal and far-off tourists.

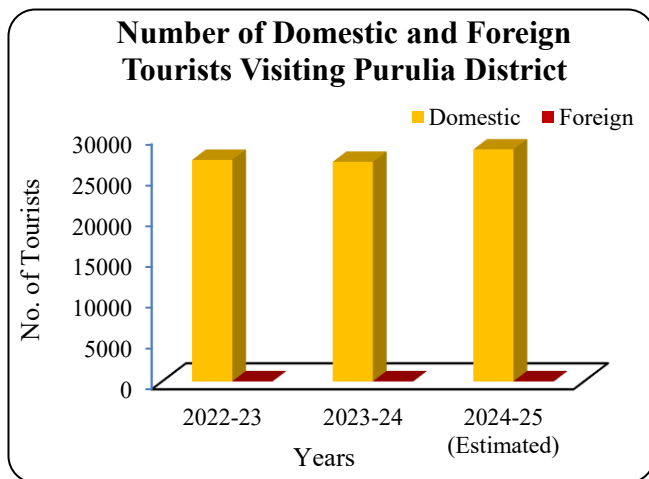
The soil of this region is barely helpful for agricultural activities so the rain-fed agronomy is limited only to one cropping session mainly in the month of July to October of the year. Generally, this agricultural activity is conducted in the rainy season at the low land areas. Except a few urban centres, the rest of the district is parsimoniously backward so the craving for food and malnourish mentare not sporadic.

2.1. Present Tourism Scenario of the District of Purulia

The state flower of Jharkhand Palash, scientific name *Butia Monosperma* looks very pretty, blooms in different colour red, yellow and orange. Palash flower is prevalently used in a very popular festival among Hindu community, Saraswati Puja. In Purulia one can witness numerous blooming of Palash in the month of March

and April which related with the beginning of Spring season. The road and rail tracts seem to be surrounded with the red and yellow carpeting which welcomes nature lovers to experience the beauty of the nature. A possibility may create to promote nature-based tourism based on Palash blooming in the district, from where the local people may be benefited through financial benefit. The local government may take initiative for the regional economic development.

Dig. No. 1



In the previous three financial years i.e. 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25 (Estimated), approximately 27133, 26895 and 28415 (estimated) domestic tourists visited the district in the month of March-April. In the same time frame 27, 21 and 32 foreign tourists were there to observe the Palash blooming (Dig. No. 1). This trend of tourist inflow reveals that the area has the potentiality to attract inside-outside tourists to enjoy Upper and Lower dam, Chandli dam, Bagmundi and Charida village of Ajothya Hill circuit. Apart from these, the wanderlust tourists can explore Garhpanchakot archaeological sites, Jaychandi hill, Chemtaburu hill, Murguma, Khairabera, Kuki and Layek Dam respectively from Garh circuit and Jhalda Circuit.

Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Tourism, 2023-24

1.1. Potentiality of Evolving Nature-based Tourism in Purulia District focusing Palash flower blooming

Primary data collected from the tourists in a form of their perception regarding promotion of nature-based tourism is significant and statistical technique has been adopted to examine the significance by using SPSS software.

Table No: 2 Descriptive Statistics for Identification of Significance

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Accessibility	100	1	5	3.13	1.461	2.134
Commu	100	1	5	3.79	1.274	1.622
Road	100	1	5	3.82	1.313	1.725
Naviga	100	2.000000000000 0000	5.000000000000 0000	3.580000000000 0000	.880796497004 729	.776
Accommodation	100	1	5	2.88	1.465	2.147
Commer	100	2	5	4.14	.888	.788
homestay	100	1	5	3.96	1.171	1.372

Ecostay	100	2.6666666666666667	5.0000000000000000	3.6600000000000000	.726259114080942	.527
Environment	100	3	5	4.33	.842	.708
Spring	100	1	5	3.23	1.483	2.199
Palash	100	1	5	3.94	1.262	1.592
Cleanliness	100	2.6666666666666667	5.0000000000000000	3.8333333333333333	.690646178342291	.477
Culture	100	1	5	3.33	1.436	2.062
Ind_Culture	100	1	5	4.02	1.015	1.030
Cuisine	100	1	5	4.01	1.096	1.202
Chhau_dance	100	2.6666666666666667	5.0000000000000000	3.7866666666666666	.739338740557019	.547
Economic	100	1	5	4.53	1.150	1.322
Income_gen	100	1	4	3.57	.844	.712
Alt_livelihood	100	1	5	4.26	1.307	1.709
Employ_gen	100	1.3333333333333333	4.6666666666666666	4.1200000000000000	.898333661288147	.807
Valid N (listwise)	100					

Source: Computed by the Author, 2025

Table no.2, brings the summary statistics (mean, standard deviation, and variance) for various socio-economic and tourism-related indicators. For example, the mean score for *income generation* is 3.57 (on a scale of 1 to 5), indicating a moderately high perception of income benefits. The highest mean is found in *economic* (4.53), suggesting strong economic potential or awareness among respondents. Other high-scoring variables include *alternative livelihood* (4.26), *employment generation* (4.12), *cuisine* (4.01), and *individual culture* (4.02), reflecting cultural and livelihood assets. In contrast, *accommodation* scored lower (mean = 2.88), indicating a need for improvement in this area. These statistics provide an overview of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the surveyed regions in terms of expansion of tourism based on nature.

1.1.1. Analyse the Possibility of Promotion of Nature-Based Tourism

Purulia is a land of celestial beauty. Tourism activities can be popularized keeping the natural beauty of the district intact. Dense forest and beauty of Ajodhya and Jaychandi hills may be the significant impact on the tourism activities. Peaceful environment, relaxed ambience, friendly attitude of the common people increases the value of the spot in terms of tourism development.

Table No: 3 Computation Table on the Possibilities of Promotion of Nature-Based Tourism

	Distan ce	Ro ad_ Co ndi tio n	Navi gabil ity	Acce ss_A vg	Hom estay _Pre f	Eco_ Stay _Pre f	Sta y_ Av g	Spri ng_S easo n	Sum mer_ Seas on	Cle anli nes s	Cleanl iness_ Avg	Indi geno us_C ultur e	Uniq ue_C uisine	Chha u_Da nce	Culture_ Avg	
1	Pearson Correlation	1	.210*	-0.05	.629**	.282**	0.092	.369**	0.168	-0.01	0.015	0.125	-.233*	-.342**	-0.001	-.308*
	Sig. (2- tailed)		0.036	0.62	0	0.005	0.365	0	0.095	0.917	0.88	0.215	0.02	0	0.994	0.002
2	Pearson Correlation	.210*	1	.273**	.734**	0.053	.204*	0.1	-0.086	-0.19	0.187	-0.03	-0.133	-0.137	.305**	0.002
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.04		0.01	0	0.6	0.042	0.32	0.392	0.059	0.063	0.806	0.187	0.173	0.002	0.984
3	Pearson Correlation	-0.005	.273**	1	.601**	0.082	.199*	0.076	0.12	-.266**	0.036	0	0.064	0.109	0.057	0.12
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.62	0.006		0	0.415	0.047	0.45	0.234	0.008	0.722	1	0.527	0.281	0.571	0.236
4	Pearson Correlation	.629**	.734**	.601**	1	.222*	.248*	.290**	0.111	-.229*	0.116	0.057	-0.161	-.201*	0.175	-0.11
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0	0	0		0.026	0.013	0.003	0.272	0.022	0.249	0.57	0.11	0.044	0.081	0.275
5	Pearson Correlation	.282**	0.053	0.08	.222*	1	.326**	.717**	0.044	-0.08	0.179	0.11	-0.116	-0.059	0.071	-0.067
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.01	0.6	0.42	0.026		0.001	0	0.661	0.452	0.075	0.277	0.251	0.559	0.482	0.508
6	Pearson Correlation	0.009	.204*	.199*	.248*	.326**	1	.522**	-0.076	-.294**	0.019	-0.16	0.08	-.203*	-.236*	-0.158
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.37	0.042	0.05	0.013	0.001		0	0.452	0.003	0.852	0.107	0.429	0.043	0.018	0.117
7	Pearson Correlation	.369**	0.1	0.08	.290**	.717**	.522**	1	-0.139	-.305**	0.062	-0.19	-.198*	-0.032	-0.034	-0.159
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0	0.32	0.45	0.003	0	0		0.167	0.002	0.54	0.063	0.048	0.753	0.739	0.111
8	Pearson Correlation	0.107	-0.086	0.12	0.111	0.044	-0.08	-0.14	1	.254*	-.311**	.630**	.220*	-0.184	-0.175	-0.028
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.1	0.392	0.23	0.272	0.661	0.452	0.167		0.011	0.002	0	0.028	0.066	0.081	0.778
9	Pearson Correlation	-0.001	-0.018	-0.05	-.229*	-0.076	-.294**	-.305**	.254*	1	0.152	.681**	0.168	-0.114	0.128	0.12

	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.92	0.059	0.01	0.022	0.452	0.003	0.002	0.011		0.131	0	0.095	0.258	0.205	0.236
10	Pearson Correlation	0.02	0.187	0.04	0.116	0.179	0.019	0.062	-0.311**	0.152	1	.448**	0.1	0.025	.366**	.257*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.88	0.063	0.72	0.249	0.075	0.852	0.54	0.002	0.131		0	0.321	0.808	0	0.01
11	Pearson Correlation	0.13	-0.025	0	0.057	0.11	-0.16	-0.19	.630**	.681**	.448**	1	.287**	-0.163	0.149	0.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.22	0.806	1	0.57	0.277	0.107	0.063	0	0	0		0.004	0.104	0.139	0.065
12	Pearson Correlation	-0.233*	-0.133	0.06	-0.16	-0.116	0.08	-0.198*	.220*	0.168	0.1	.287**	1	0.162	-0.13	.657*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02	0.187	0.53	0.11	0.251	0.429	0.048	0.028	0.095	0.321	0.004		0.108	0.196	0
13	Pearson Correlation	-0.342**	-0.137	0.11	-.201*	-0.059	-.203*	-0.03	-0.184	-0.11	0.025	-0.16	0.162	1	.254*	.688*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.173	0.28	0.044	0.559	0.043	0.753	0.066	0.258	0.808	0.104	0.108		0.011	0
14	Pearson Correlation	-0	.305**	0.06	0.175	0.071	-.236*	-0.03	-0.175	0.128	.366**	0.149	-0.13	.254*	1	.526*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.99	0.002	0.57	0.081	0.482	0.018	0.739	0.081	0.205	0	0.139	0.196	0.011		0
15	Pearson Correlation	-0.308**	0.002	0.12	-0.11	-0.067	-0.16	-0.16	0.028	0.12	.257**	0.185	.657**	.688**	.526**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.984	0.24	0.275	0.508	0.117	0.111	0.778	0.236	0.01	0.065	0	0	0	

Source: Computed by the Author, 2025

This comprehensive correlation matrix examines how various environmental, cultural, and infrastructure factors are interrelated, to assess the feasibility of promoting nature-based tourism. *Access_Avg* (average accessibility) is absolutely and meaningfully correlated with *commutable distance* ($r = .629, p < .01$), *road condition* ($r = .734, p < .01$), and *navigability* ($r = .601, p < .01$), highlighting the importance of transport infrastructure. *Stay_Avg* (accommodation quality) is strongly associated with *homestay* ($r = .717, p < .01$) and *eco-stay preference* ($r = .522, p < .01$), suggesting that better and preferred lodging options are vital for tourism. Cultural variables such as *chhau dance*, *unique cuisine*, and *indigenous culture* are also strongly interrelated and show significant correlations with *culture_avg*, reinforcing their collective potential for tourism branding. In summary, both infrastructure and cultural offerings are integral to the success of nature-based tourism in this province.

5.2.2 Prospects for Getting Financial Advantages of the Local People

In case of opening a nature-based tourism in a justifiable manner, there is a genuine scope of making employment of the local communities particularly the tribal people growing in the natural environment. This type of tourism activities formed based on the natural beauty of a particular area help to regional development in terms of financial strength. Among the main attractions of the tourists, the promotion and publicity of *Palash* blooming season, *Chhau* dance, *Bhadu-TusuPorob* regionally may generate additional prospect of work in the district. With the progressiveness of local administration, job opportunity may be secured in the form of tour attendant, hotel administration, making handicraft goods and in transportation sector. Countryside marginal individuals can be busy in hospitality services, transport facilities, small scale entrepreneurship.

Table No: 4 Computation table for Correlations between Different Parameters on Economic Development through Nature-Based Tourism

Correlations										
		Alt_Livel hood	Employ ment_Ge n	Commutable Distance	Road_Con dition	Homesta y_Pref	Eco_Sta y_Pref	Ev_n_Av g	Accomoda tionAvg	Income _Gen
Alt_Livel hood	Pearson Correlation	1	.551**	.324**	.047	.256*	.207*	.233*	.275**	.435**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000	.001	.644	.010	.039	.020	.006	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Employ ment_Ge n	Pearson Correlation	.551**	1	.278**	.057	.142	.093	.135	.143	.485**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000		.005	.571	.158	.360	.180	.155	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Commutable_Dist ance	Pearson Correlation	.324**	.278**	1	.210*	.282**	.092	.274**	.240*	.241*
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.001	.005		.036	.005	.365	.006	.016	.016
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Road_Co ndition	Pearson Correlation	.047	.057	.210*	1	.053	.204*	.685**	.342**	.118
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.644	.571	.036		.600	.042	.000	.000	.242
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

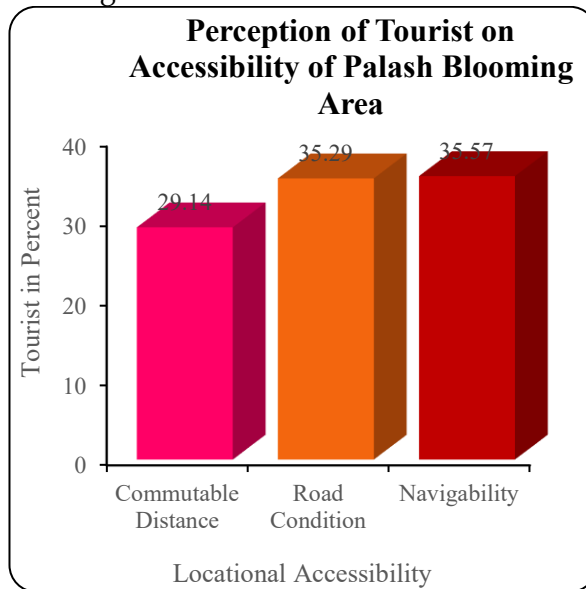
Homestay_Pref	Pearson Correlation	.256*	.142	.282**	.053	1	.326**	.587**	.728**	.134
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.158	.005	.600		.001	.000	.000	.183
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Eco_Stay_Pref	Pearson Correlation	.207*	.093	.092	.204*	.326**	1	.755**	.864**	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.360	.365	.042	.001		.000	.000	.330
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Evn_Avg	Pearson Correlation	.233*	.135	.274**	.685**	.587**	.755**	1	.919**	.169
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.180	.006	.000	.000	.000		.000	.093
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
AccommodationAvg	Pearson Correlation	.275**	.143	.240*	.342**	.728**	.864**	.919**	1	.154
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.155	.016	.000	.000	.000	.000		.126
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Income_Gen	Pearson Correlation	.435**	.485**	.241*	.118	.134	.098	.169	.154	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.016	.242	.183	.330	.093	.126	
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).										
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).										

Source: Calculated by the Author, 2025

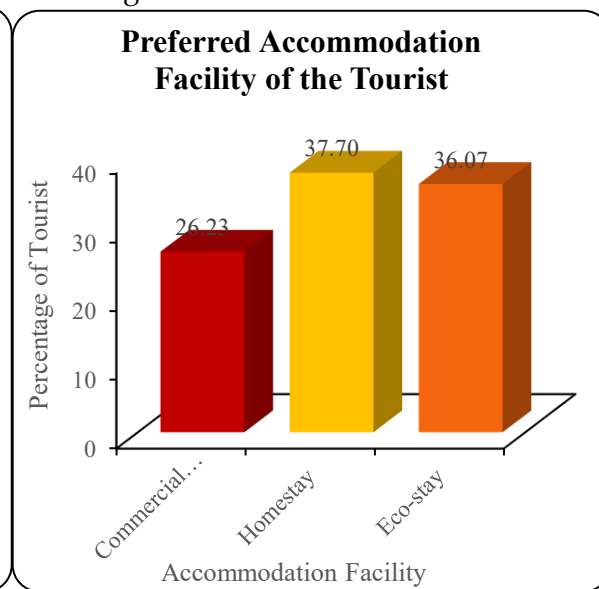
From table no. 3, it is seen that there is close association amongst various autonomous variables (like alternative livelihood, employment generation, commute distance, road condition, etc.) and the dependent variable, *income generation*. The Pearson correlation coefficients show the strength and direction of linear relationships. Significant positive correlations were found between income generation and alternative livelihood ($r = .435$, $p < .01$), employment generation ($r = .485$, $p < .01$), and commutable distance ($r = .241$, $p < .05$), suggesting that

improvements in these areas are likely to enhance income opportunities. Other variables such as homestay preference, eco-stay preference, environmental quality, and accommodation also show mild but statistically non-significant or marginal correlations. Overall, the findings indicate that employment-related and accessibility-related factors are more strongly linked to income generation.

Dig. No. 2



Dig. No. 3

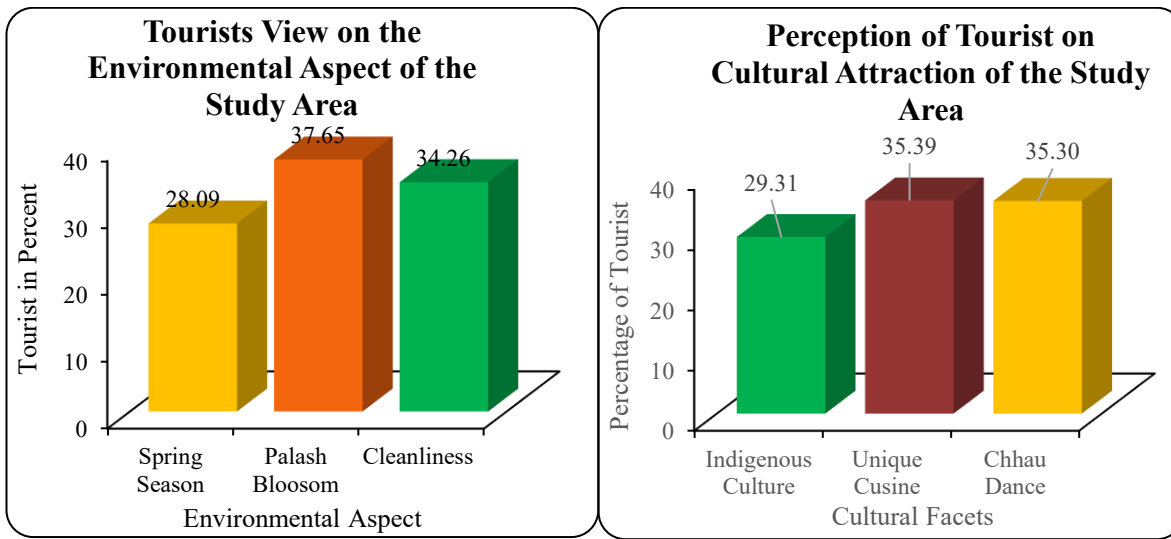


Source: Primary Survey, March, 2025

The study also reveals that 35.57 percent tourists opined that Palash flower blooming areas are navigable for good road condition (Dig- No. 2). According to them nature-based tourism is travelling to nature, tour to an ecosystem, visiting natural places having beautiful landscape while it helps to become aware about sustainable tourism in developing human concern to protect nature and ecosystem which helps to increase employability of the local people too. This section of the visitors (37.70 percent and 36.07 percent respectively) is in favour of promotion of homestay and eco-stay in the virgin places of Purulia district which may stimulate diversified livelihood opportunities to the local villagers through sustained employment prospects and revenue sharing among local stakeholders (Dig. No. 3). Such an effort may strengthen the organizational supervision for effective running of the nature-based tourism activity in the areas where Palash flower spreads its beauty in spring season. T The State may popularize and add this form of tourism in the State tourism map.

Dig. No. 4

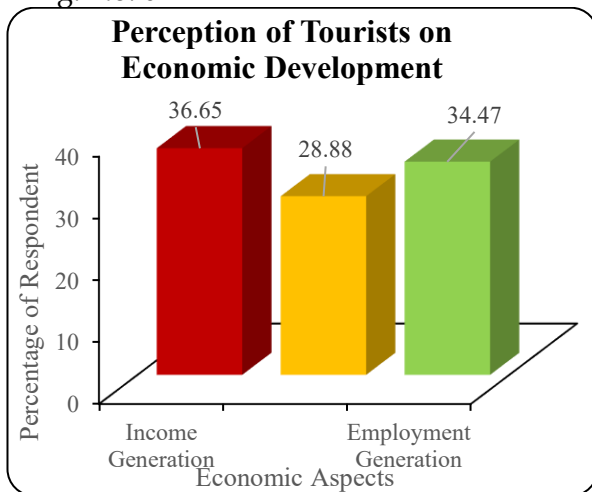
Dig. No. 5



Source: Primary Survey, March, 2025

Tourists (37.65 percent) expressed their views on environmental attraction which pull them to Purulia to explore the Palash flower blossom places like Jajuhatu, Kuhuburu, Barabti, Bhalu *Pahar*, Futiyari etc. Some of them (34.26 percent) also opined that they visited this place for its cleanliness (Dig. No. 4). 29.31 percent tourist opined that the indigenous culture of this district is appealing to them (Dig. No. 5). The tourists are in general contented with the facilities and services provided to them by the existing tourism spots but they want more eco-stay which may abide the natural law of this area.

Dig. No. 6



Source: Primary Survey, March, 2025

Travellers (36.65 percent) opined that the local stakeholders and an attitude of cooperation between them leads to promotion of nature friendly tourism may provide income generation (Dig. N-. 6). As per their view, nature-based tourism will provide job opportunity for the rural people and generate revenue from them. The country dweller will be able to deliver good food and descent education for their children, engage the rural youth section in service sector, escalation in their level of income, stimulate overseas business, mandate for other

goods and services, upgrading the public service sectors, generate revenue for the government after modernizing the agricultural and other rustic activities, local small businessman will also be benefited.

The transformation of livelihood pattern and the exchange of culture between them make the relation healthier. Moreover, community-based nature-tourism suggests that a civic society is taking care of their natural capital in order to earn profits through operating a tourism enterprise and utilizing returns for betterment of their standard of living.

1. Suggestions and Recommendations

Promotion of nature-based leisure industry in Purulia has a optimisticim pending, as it not only offers beautiful environmental surroundings but also the native ethnicities, customs and traditional diets. Interaction between guest and the local people may be another attraction of this place to rejoice the local culture. Every small village has some unique cultural story to construe, inimitable ethnicities to offer to the visitor. Therefore; nature-based tourism should avoid mass marketing rather it should formulate diversified approach for different sector to make it effective. Adjusting to accommodate the mass would become non replenishable mistake. The achievement of nature-based tourism entirely depends on the excellence of facilities offered to the tourists. Without the active participation of the local communities, it is impossible to form sustainable tourism. Road network, Railway services and other communicative infrastructures should be developed further and financial supports should be provided to the beneficiaries so that they may explore alternative livelihood out of it. Priority should be given to diagnose the status of rural tourism by the local experts. The administration should try to generate facts for decision-makers and investors for utilizing human resources in dignified manner, make sat is factory facilities and appropriate infrastructure like fooding and lodging, transport network and communication linkages and other in dispensable facilities for the establishment of tourism.

2. Conclusion

Nature-based tourism will appear as a significant mechanism for justifiable an thropological growth together with eradication of poverty, engagement of local community in various services, conservational activities and advancement of isolated areas. If this tourism is promoted the rural economy can be vibrated and the scope of transforming the urban resources to the rural. A rural tourism development framework may be initiated starting from the planning stage to the implementing stage. Monitoring, implementing and execution are the three import antterms in between planning and finalisation of the tourism framework. Proper planning for achieving the long and short-term goals, implementation of policies and monitoring overall activitiesare vital for avoiding any kind of disastrous situation in the rural backdrops. Conservational management planning, involvement of local stakeholders, sound legislation, justifiable marketing strategy and accurate forecasting are vital for the progress of nature-based tourism in rural canvas. The Government should endorsethis type of tourism ventures to safeguarddelicate economic affairs.

References:



Government of India, Ministry of Tourism, Annual Tourism Report of West Bengal, 2023-24, Kolkata.

Electronic media:

https://www.wbtourism.gov.in/Eco%20Tourism/details?template_id=1&id=63da5916171e967049012c2d accessed on 7th March, 2025

www.westbengaltourism.gov.in accessed on 19th March, 2025.

<http://www.westbengalforest.gov.in> accessed on 19th March, 2025.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/tourism> industry of Purulia district accessed on 15th February, 2025.

<https://in.explara.com/e/palash-utsav> retrieved on 1st March, 2025

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4HiqaKkzQw> accessed on 28th February, 2025



Examining the Growth and Development of Christian Education and Democracy in India: A Critical Study of George Thadathil's Exploration of the Same in Modern India

Habin Thomas

Aeronautical Engineer and a Talent Acquisition professional

Email - thomashabin@gmail.com | Orcid - [0009-0000-2296-8272](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2296-8272)

This book is a collection of scholarly papers edited by George Thadathil,¹ including a couple of his own works. The commentary is made from the perspective of a Catholic, a beneficiary of Christian education, who believes in its potential to nurture change agents. As noted by Rudolf C Heredia, if contextualization sets the framework for understanding a discussion, then where one positions oneself sets the context for the remarks'.² I have placed myself on the inside, albeit on the periphery, in making this commentary.

India's tryst with modernity coincided with its introduction to formal education formats; designed and implemented by western missionary educators. Thadathil's compilation deals in considerable detail with the motivations, intentions and the manifested vision of the early pioneers of western education in India. The Company-administration and later the colonial government were keen to have indigenous staff, capable of running the administration at various levels. They may at best have required such Indian staff to have functional knowledge of their language and administrative practices. The elementary schools that were established in the hundreds by the 18th century and the limited resources for secondary education should have been enough to meet the requirement. What then explains the centres of excellence that came up after the Charter Act of 1833? The obvious reasons seem to have been to spread the 'Word of the Lord' to the privileged, and their hope of engaging with the intellectually inclined to bring about a sympathetic environment for Christian teachings. Nevertheless, even the most committed of those missionaries realized by the late 19th century, the appalling cost-benefit ratio they were achieving. The colonial administration distanced itself from missionary work and adopted a secular stance as early as the turn of the 18th century.

Peter Ronald DeSouza, who wrote the foreword for the book, talks about the idea of 'Christian Mission 'in' and 'for' India', which is compelling.³ There are the underlying intangibles in the mission work of the early Christian missionaries that go beyond the obvious motivations for their efforts. The missionaries while combating the superstitions, of course, governed by their own notions of civilized life, were also moved by a compassion and neighbourly love for the underprivileged of their host land. It led them to conclude that education alone could improve the lot of the indigenous people. It was their Christian faith that inspired them to endure the opposition they faced and compelled them to stay the course, with hardly any numerical advantage or significant outcome to show for it. They continuously rewrote their playbook over the decades to remain true to the Christian mission as well as to the service they were rendering, imparting liberal progressive ideas and Christian values. They also were alive to the aspirations of the countrymen and hence most of them came to accept and encourage Indian nationalist

¹ George Thadathil (ed). Christian Education and Democracy in India (Kolkata: Penprints, 2024, ISBN: 978-81-966577-4-1, 489 pages, ₹900)

² Rudolf Heredia, *Christian education and modern India*, 447

³ Peter Ronald DeSouza, *Foreword*, xiii



sentiments. This idea of the Christian mission, says Peter DeSouza, remains under-explored by secular educationists.⁴

The Macaulay's Minute often draws flak for its role in the colonization of the Indian mind. English education is still variously hailed and condemned in India depending on the spirit of the occasion. The experiment that began three centuries ago by the missionaries still continues to be debated for its merits and deficiencies, with no tenable alternative emerging so far. The form and quality of the average Indian mind at the turn of the 18th century as developed till then, by the Gurukul and Pathshala systems of education, must be held in perspective while examining the impact of the missionary system of education in India. The minimal and exclusionary learning doled out as largesse, depending on the magnanimity of the various rulers of the land until then, had by no means paved the way for the opening of the Indian mind to liberal and democratic values. Nor was there a unifying philosophy or public consciousness which succeeded to engender, preserve and promote a monolithic Indian culture. Evidently, this was by no means due to the lack of originally created knowledge or philosophies indigenous to India. The knowledge created by the great minds of the time could barely have been disseminated through the social and religious barriers erected by those who stood to gain from the prevailing order. Most of such knowledge-creation remained theoretical or discursive exercises, with hardly any tangible benefits in uplifting the lives and minds of the common populace. One could point to the renowned Buddhist centres of learning of ancient times, however, when reconciling the impact, they had on the socio-cultural landscape of the time, one is likely to come up short. Hardly any social transformation towards more egalitarian societies had come about from the ancient learning systems except by those rare initiatives driven by the fancies of the respective rulers.

Thadathil describes the book as an exploration of the impact of Christian education in India from the perspective that guided the making of the Constitution of India. He, in his joint work with Kuriala Chittattukulam, provides a comprehensive overview of the framework of Christian education, evolved over the decades, through schools and colleges in India. They elaborate upon the collaborating and coordinating efforts that are made by various denominations, towards presenting a monolithic and integrated façade, to the edifice that is built by the efforts of Christian educators in India.

In the introduction to the book, Ambrose Pinto and the editor touch upon the contributions and impact of CEIs (Christian Educational Institutions) on higher education and their attempt to promote Christian and liberal values including egalitarianism. They also address a few staple criticisms regularly levelled at Christian institutions. The missionary work could not have waited for the socio-economic climate prevalent in India during the colonial period to turn conducive for the introduction of Christian values. Missionaries hit the ground running, forming alliances and creating allegiances where possible. They were convinced that the social conditions could be improved only by those affected by such circumstances and that the best way to achieve it would be to offer them the tools for facilitating change. The privileged were shown the way by example and attempts for inculcation of egalitarian values through education. The disadvantaged were provided with the tools of learning and awareness of the tenets of social justice, enabling them to communicate, organize and stand up to their oppressors and even demand their rights on occasion. With hardly any support from the colonial administration, the missionaries relied on the power of Christ's teachings and their own convictions, to connect with the vast expanse and populace of the host country.

⁴ Ibid, xv



The introductory chapter also discusses the caste system, its internalization, its cultural connotations and the vested interests maintaining an oppressive social order. Thadathil and Pinto explain the part CEIs played in ushering in socio-cultural modernity. They speculate upon the reasons for the appeal of CEIs to the Indian middle class, without isolating any. They do credit the trailblazing by the CEIs in creating a model of education that enabled a new class of people without the baggage of the past and the burdens of traditional problems to emerge. These new entrants are focused on upward social and economic mobility in an India connected to the world and they cannot wait to discard the traditional forms of inspirations and methods of doing things. At the same time a caveat is issued by the authors, noting the decline of values in recent times.

The constituency that the CEIs traditionally catered to be an eclectic mix from different class and caste strata and religions. The CEIs did contribute to affirmative action by way of educating students from the poor and unprivileged sections of society. As discussed earlier, the motives for establishing Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in urban areas was to engage with the upper and privileged classes in the hope that they, having imbibed the values of social justice and egalitarianism from the Christian teachings and environments, would then be encouraged to be agents of social change. It is quite clear from the rejoinders of the early pioneers of Christian Higher Education (CHE) that they did not place much stock in converting the upper classes to Christianity. Additionally, they realized that their hope of the upper and privileged classes enabling any trickle-down phenomena of social change was not going to pay much dividend either. The privileged beneficiaries knew the motivations of the Christian educators well enough; not that the missionaries were subtle about them; and armoured themselves against being swayed. They were in it for the temporal benefits afforded by western education which helped to cement their position and thereafter were assiduous in jealously guarding such privileges.

Joseph Bara, in his brilliantly researched and lucidly articulated paper gives a detailed and nuanced account of the missionary manoeuvres in India in the 19th century. He explains the complexities of the social realities of the time and the opposition faced by the missionary efforts from the administration as well as the social elites. The paper tries to understand the missionary mind and traces the strategies they used to respond to the challenges and keep up with the ever-shifting Indian soil they were hoping to cultivate. The objectives of the missionaries as traced by the paper, evolved or varied through the decades; they started out with the hope for direct evangelization of the population, tempered the expectation to spreading Christian influence in the society, was prepared to be content with the preparation of soil and training of church leaders, resorted to inculcating scientific temper in the masses by attempting to demonstrate the absurdity of superstition and certain types of religious ritualism, tried the silent evangelization of the upper castes and finally resigned to the upliftment of the poor and the marginalized. They experimented with the language of instruction, beneficiary groups and classes, and the methods of learning. The paper closely follows the evolution of CEIs over a century, painting a clear and moving picture.

The missionaries were aware that the locals who benefitted from Christian education, especially the dominant castes, did not care to be influenced by the Christian ethics and merely wished to benefit from the English education, with their core being protected consciously from being touched by the Christian values being imparted. The Indian middle class assiduously ignored the intellectual and spiritual appeal to consider Christian teachings and was perfectly content with the temporal benefits that Christian education afforded. They remained well insulated to the uplifting themes of Christianity. The missionaries were convinced that “the problem behind the youth’s disinclination towards Christian teachings lay on the quality of the receiving soil, i.e. the audience and not on the seed of the word” (page

122).⁵ If anything, that soil is at its most barren today. Miller's⁶ 'great preparatory work' for ChristianIndia, barely made progress beyond the confines of the institutions. As he had feared, Christian institutions to some extent did turn into 'guilds for the worldly welfare of its sons'.⁷ With the colonial government maintaining a cautious stance and the educators themselves keen on being seen as nationalists, it can be said that the CHE colleges were effectively hijacked by the Indian colonial society. The agenda was lost, in the education-by-degree system and the 'English mania', by the 1880's. This begs the question; what has changed in Indian society since; what new evidence compels CHEIs today to consider that the agenda is intact and push ahead with more colleges and not secondary education?

In this context it is profitable to further examine and criticize the claims of higher education towards promoting democratic ideals. Can Christian HEIs claim a legacy that is independent of those CEIs imparting primary and secondary education? Character formation occurs progressively, and crystallization happens due to the experiences that the young adult student garners during the course of study while pursuing higher education. A publicly funded institution would be hard-pressed to claim a significant contribution to characterformation in higher education, especially in an era where adult consciousness evolves and behaviour patterns crystallize at lower ages. If the seeds are sown and cared for, and the process taken care of during secondary education, the quality of the fruit may be refined in the later years owing to the influence of higher education. However, the range of possibilities of the fruit itself is likely to be defined by the early years. Rev. Thomas Gardiner remarked in 1860, that "the positive attitude of students on Christianity at the high school level evaporated as one of indifference in the college",⁸ which is seen even today in more vivid detail and significant numbers. There is hardly any effective remedy to this except perhaps strengthening the roots, focusing on primary and secondary education.

Trying to impart Christian values through higher education alone could be like fertilizing the grown tree, in the Indian context. It could be argued that the current achievements of the community in terms of Christian identity and influence are results of a long period of imparting primary and secondary education. In 1907, Bishop Whitehead came to the conclusion that "The Christian colleges were, in the circumstances, less and less possible means of Christian influence".⁹ Joseph Bara notes that, the Catholic missionaries of the time also "found the college impact on non-Christians negligible, the high schools rather offered 'more promising ground' for the missionary purpose". The Cottonian model, including their 'Monitorial system' being followed up by the later military and public schools, is further testimony to this. Though the authors do make a case for increased attention on university/tertiary education and Christian presence in the area of higher education, a critical evaluation of this strategy would not be misplaced.

⁵ Joseph Bara, *CHE & Missionary manoeuvres in India, 1818-1910; 122 (The report of the deputation of the Free Church of Scotland, 1889-90)*

⁶ Ibid, 128 (Dr. Miller's view of the function of the colleges)

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid, 117 (Conference of missions held in 1860)

⁹ Ibid, 135 (Whitehead,H., *Our Mission policy in India*)



In his seminal paper, 'Education and community development', Jose Kalapura gives a longitudinal view of the growth of Bettiah Christian community in Bihar. It may be argued that the Bettiah story reflects the significant and disproportionate influence of primary and secondary education on community building and progress, over Higher Education. It can be seen that the community achieved uniform prosperity for the members through basic and skill-oriented education. The members found employment by migration, due to the favourable aspects of learning English, teacher training, knowledge and internalization of moral values, liberal ideas and Christian ideals. These favourable factors, combined with the confidence and open mindedness they gained from Christian influence placed them in demand for service jobs, teaching jobs, clerical jobs, government employment and the like. The study shows strong correlation between Christian education, evidencing causation, and the upward social mobility of the Bettiah Christians. Parallels could be drawn with the Christian communities of Kerala who were similarly welcomed in other states and countries owing to their work ethics and liberal values, which they imbibed through Christian upbringing, especially through primary and secondary schooling afforded by Christian educators and institutions.

There are active and relentless forces planning and executing measures to curb the space available to the minority communities. There are direct threats and attacks on institutions reported now and these forces have all but proclaimed that inclusive, liberal Christian ideals are inimical to their regressive designs for the country. It is worth noting that most of the serious designs targeting the influencing of the minds and themore nuanced attacks are affected on the secondary school curriculum, which means that these forces have identified the strong roots provided by Christian education to be unusually resilient to propaganda in the later years. 'Catch them young', seems to be the accepted credo by all. The growing population and the rising religious and ethno-nationalistic fervour will increasingly serve to nullify the impact of CEIs. Proactive, long-term yet flexible approaches are required to withstand such an onslaught, rather than being reactionary or defensive.

Queeny Pradhan Singh, in her paper titled 'Novitiate in the hills - Reproduction of imperial ethics', dwells in detail on the intent and motivations of the early pioneering educators. She does not reconcile the purported intentions with an objective assessment of the outcome and seems a bit unsure about what to make of it, thereby leaving a few questions unanswered. The school system created by the missionaries did continue to influence the local and Indian outlook towards education, in the later period. The intentions of the colonial administration vis-à-vis educational grants may not have been purely altruistic; however, the missionaries were genuinely committed to their purpose of spreading Christ's message. Their efforts were not lacking, albeit the standards of outcome expected from the initial schools for the colonizers and those for the colonized were different, for reasons articulated in the paper.

In his paper titled 'Missionaries and education - genesis and development in British Bengal', Sandeep Sinha, discusses the personalities and their varied approaches towards education. Alexander Duff's approach, though might have been more hawkish and radical, had it been followed through, may have had a comparatively more enduring impression on the culture of India through better assimilation of Christian ethics and western influence.¹⁰ Push for the vernacular education seems to have left the mission stranded, due to the strong religious and cultural roots and symbolisms inherent in the classical and

¹⁰ Ibid, 108.



vernacular languages.¹¹ Though this is a counter-factual argument, it appears that the missionaries had in fact, some inkling of this difficulty.¹²

Praveen Perumalla, in his paper 'Dalit appreciation of Christian education', explores the trajectories of the work of CEIs and Dalit struggles, to evaluate interactional intersections. He rejects the portrayal of such interactions as mere charity by which depictions; the Dalits were further objectified as incompetent dependents. He also refuses to see such interactions as products of the machinations of the missionaries to achieve religious conversions alone. He appears to be suggesting that the interactions the Dalits had with the missionaries were on their own terms and wherever the values of each other intersected, such interactions were promotive. Dalits did realize that Christian education would serve to empower them. It could impact the future of their children and the future of their relationship with the Dalit lands. The ownership of land or the lack thereof, is the most rudimentary layer or theme in the multilayered saga of Dalit struggles in India. The commitment of Christian missionaries to the Dalit children and the Dalit lands seems to be the crucial factor in the appreciation of missionary work and its outcome, with regard to the state of the marginalized in India. One would hope that Christian education can facilitate the achievement of Dalit aspirations in this regard, and moreover, that this relationship is more profound, going beyond temporal aspects.

Was the engagement of early Christian missionaries with the marginalized castes, Dalits, incidental? Missionary educators as early as 1907 had given up hope on a possible trickle-down phenomenon in education. From the perspective of the missionaries, it was imperative to make the indigenes; the Hindus, realize the futility or waywardness of their superstitions, idolatrous worship and religious practices. When they realized that these religious practices were situated on the bedrock of caste consciousness and traditions, it was determined that they first needed to upset this dynamic. However, the missionaries knew what they were up against and also were quick to accept that they were ill equipped for this task. Against the backdrop of such apparently insurmountable difficulty, do the altruistic and charitable notions of caste upliftment and emancipation take form. It is clear that they were not fully able to make up their minds about how to direct or approach evangelization in this context. Hence the varied attempts and apparatus ranging from direct invitation to conversion, to spreading Christian influence through education of the indigenous people. It is true that every approach faced resistance or opposition from all caste groups at some point or the other, overmanner or intent.

The paper by Perumalla and the reflections thereon serve to highlight several questions. Is the marginalized benefitting from a value-based education or are the CHEIs only seen as relatively stable, safe environments where good results alone are coveted? Have they too come to look at CHEIs in the same way as upper classes/elites? Is the endeavour of the Christian educators to emancipate Dalits from caste identification or from the repression and discrimination that follows caste identity? Is it within the purview or sphere of influence of Christian education to facilitate autonomy from social imperatives and caste identity for the marginalized? Do the scheduled castes/Tribes wish to continue to be identified as caste Hindus, remain within the framework, sans the discrimination? Is it possible to acquire such dignity with caste identity and the rest of the caste super structure intact? And finally, is the calculated distance maintained by the marginalized castes with regard to Christian influence working out in their favour?

¹¹ Joseph Bara, 105

¹² Ibid



George Thadathil and Terence Mukhia, in their joint work, examines the role of higher education in democratizing people, with a focus on the early missionary work in Darjeeling, in the areas of education, healthcare and economic activity. The paper discusses the possible impact of a Christian education institution in a local community. The missionaries are credited with awakening the political consciousness and enabling the subaltern to challenge the feudal power centres. The examination of missionary work on the hill town of Darjeeling throws up a few interesting questions and observations. The hill people, due to their practical orientation and a positive work ethic, were found to be suitable for some professions, more than others. Are some demographics more suitable to assimilate Christian education? Of all the hill communities in Darjeeling, the Lepchas and sections of Nepalis responded most favourably to Christian ideals. Could it be that one social group is more amenable to evangelization than others? Have the political / religious / cultural climate of the locale favoured CEIs more in some places than others? Rudolf Heredia mentions the 'good soil' (pg. 455) which has deep connotations. Indiscriminate use of models without reference to the recipient community and culture is unlikely to be effective and at times counterproductive.

George Plathottam discusses the Promotion of language and Christian education in Bengal by the early missionaries. The outcome report reads as if it were written today (on education, social reform, women empowerment, girl children). It forces the reader to wonder about the reach and permanency of the effects of the change catalyzed by the missionary work in various fields. Though the missionary institutions survived and continued their work post the missionary era, the momentum achieved during the early years may have withered subsequently. There is no doubt that their work made an impact on the respective communities, however its extent and the sustainability it achieved remain to be critically evaluated and acknowledged.

Evolution of languages and often their extinction are organic processes. If a minority community is scattered or displaced due to social and economic forces and migration, leading to change in their culture and way of life, its language may not be protected without an interactive and close-knit group continuing its use. Unlike a cultural aspect which could be recorded and preserved for posterity, the language, unless in active use, may be as good as lost. As the person adapts and survives in the new environment, their language also is likely to metamorphose or be replaced. External interventions are not likely to prolong the natural life of a language. There is no reason to believe that the language or cultural tradition of a minority community would be superior to one that is willingly and pragmatically adopted by the members of such a displaced community and deserves to be specially protected. This is not to endorse predatory practices or imposition of the culture or language of one social group over another, but the natural order that dictates the evolution and at times metamorphosis of cultures, languages and even communities should be taken in stride. The lament which may be born out of sentiment for the quaint and the old is not entirely justified.

The book, after having discussed the historical framework, seeks to evaluate in the later part, the continuing work of the CEIs from a contemporary perspective.

Tom Kunnumpuram, in his paper, 'Empowering marginalized communities - ODL and vocational training', discusses the benefits of ODL programmes and their positive impact on students from marginalized and remote communities. Apart from the congratulatory platitudes and assertions, there seems to be hardly any evidence of the MOOC and ODL formats significantly facilitating skill and knowledge acquisition by students. It is true that a lot of degree certificates are being handed out and the enrollment numbers are growing by the year. The number of students who enrolled for or completed the programme alone may not be evidence enough of the quality of the programme, as there are several



factors that lead to the choice of a distance programme, in India. The ODL departments even in public universities are currently adjunct entities. Mostly, the resources available at the colleges are just sufficient to cater to the regular students, enrolled to maximum capacity. For all the enthusiasm generated, the current digital infrastructure in India does not support the need at this time with respect to reach, quality and reliability. The ODL system in India still mostly relies on the format of assignments and paper-pencil examinations, with hardly any interactions between the students and the teachers, which were to have been seamlessly and at scale facilitated with internet technologies. Any significant ODL resources will have to be separately allocated, for which specific budgetary provisions, clear and declared intent and objectives, and a sense of purpose are necessary.

A cursory exploration showed hardly any leading CEIs that offer meaningful ODL programmes that are actively promoted. Even Assam DBU - DBU Global, offers a few generic courses as per their website, and currently most of their efforts are focused on their stated objective of decreasing the physical separation between the educator and the student. However, according to Stephen Mavelly, ADBU has an ambitious plan to enroll 3 lakh students online, in the immediate future. Comprehensive programmes would have to be offered to generate interest and subscription, rather than uploading subject specific lectures alone, which would then meet the twin objectives of learning and exerting Christian influence. ODL is popular among urban demography as well, therefore the target population should be well defined. In order to popularize ODL in vocational fields, a network of practical training shops, apprenticeships and workshops in specific industries would have to be created, all of these weaved together to follow a curriculum with specific coursework. These would have been proved to be effective only when the students turn employable. The paper remains more of a call to action than an outcome study. CEIs may need to look at task forces and special/hybrid programmes that target specific populations and regions with restricted access to regular programmes with a Christian influence.

Charlotte Simpson-Veigas, in her paper; 'Jesuits of Calcutta and modern Democratic India', examines the contributions of Jesuits towards education and social action in Bengal. 'Ambedkar exhorted the nation to make Indian political democracy a social democracy; a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity, as the essential principles of life'.¹³ How far the national consciousness accepted this call is a matter of reflection. The project at times feels all but abandoned as fault lines across communities and groups are likely widening. The author cites NR Narayana Murthy, who in his 2010 book, 'A Better India - A Better World', wrote that quality higher education institutions in India are limited to a few islands of excellence.¹⁴ Murthy also lamented then, the lack of leaders who could push capitalistic ventures and facilitate an environment that maximises profit making. It appears that his wish was granted soon enough. A complaint against these centres of excellence would be that their contributions to the continued efficacy and vibrancy of democracy in India amount to precious little. A measure of such contribution would be their graduates displaying social consciousness and responsibility in their respective areas of influence.

India has been an independent democracy for almost eight decades. It is no revelation that democracy as practiced in India is at best flawed. It would also not be unfair to state that there is hardly any vibrant and objective public reasoning. Yogendra Yadav recently discussed (The Indian Express)¹⁵ the decline of

¹³ Charlotte Simpson-Veigas. *The Jesuits of Calcutta (Bengal) and Modern Democratic India*, 363

¹⁴ Narayana Murthy, N.R. *A better India, A better world* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009)

¹⁵ Yogendra yadav. "The poverty of political imagination needs remedy, not mourning". 01 Sep 2024.



political imagination and reasoning in India. It is interesting how the trajectory of ascent and decline of such capacities, as traced by him, coincide with the trajectory of Christian influence in Indian higher education. The capacity of the Indian society for critical thinking and reasoning has diminished visibly. The mainstreaming of the agency and voice of the marginalized in the public sphere is still a work in progress. The various organs of the government have continued to retain the vestiges of colonial authoritarianism to varying degrees. Educated elite, over the years, have contributed significantly to perpetuating this deficiency. The Jesuits were able to identify and acknowledge the problems of Indian education; especially that of it being hijacked by elites and interest groups, early on. Remedial measures were contemplated and implemented to some extent. The author mentions the Jesuit Social action agenda, drawn up in 1973, towards preparing agents of social change.¹⁶ The intent and the road map were well defined and clear; however, the pursuit of the objective may have languished, mired in practical difficulties.

Simpson-Veigas invokes Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, who in 2010 described the challenges posed by the future, networked world. He highlighted “‘The globalization of superficiality’; where one can copy and paste without the need to think critically, write accurately or come to one’s own well-thought-out conclusions. This leads to the superficiality of thought, vision, dreams, relationships and convictions”.¹⁷ This scourge is already upon us. Generations of learners are graduating with nothing but superficial and incomplete knowledge, pedestrian reasoning abilities, undeveloped critical thinking skills and a stubborn refusal towards independent application of mind. Christian education and ideals can help retain objectivity, and clarity of thought, if the institutions insist on these as learning outcomes and actively encourage learning methods that promote critical thinking. Simpson-Veigas acknowledges the question of the status quo; i.e., CHEIs being instrumental in perpetuating the status quo. She also addresses the charge of Jesuit institutions Europeanizing Indians and that of perpetuating elitism. The new social elites and upper class retain their position and power to a large extent due to their octopus hold on educational opportunities. An honest appraisal, which if undertaken universally by CHEIs, can go a long way towards a reassessment of objectives and course correction. The author calls for continued evaluation of institutions, to better understand whether the structures and policies reflect their overall mission. It is indeed reassuring that the Jesuit Society is seized of the challenges and is continually trying to address those.

Stephen Mavelly, the founding Vice-Chancellor of Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU), Guwahati, explains the rationale behind the project, the vision of the University and the efforts being made to achieve the mission. Mavelly highlights with a tinge of regret, the transformation of universities into mere agencies trying to ensure employability of their graduates. He discusses the hindrances and pressures faced by Christian educators and the problem of ‘invisibility’ of CHEIs in the 21st century.¹⁸ However, while grudgingly acknowledging the transformation driven by the market, the author suggests that, in order to remain relevant, CEIs must effectively respond to the fast-changing scenario, and stay in the race.

www.indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/yogendra-yadav-writes-the-poverty-of-political-imagination-needs-remedy-not-mourning-9534618

¹⁶ Charlotte Simpson-Veigas. *The Jesuits of Calcutta (Bengal) and Modern Democratic India*, 367

¹⁷ Ibid, 377. & Nicholas, A. *Speech of the Superior General* (Kolkata: St.Xaviers college, 2011)

¹⁸ Stephen Mavelly, *Assam Don Bosco University*, 410



The paper describes the significant infrastructure development plan of ADBU. Assam is currently embroiled in inter-community tensions and is constantly being pushed to the edge by political brinkmanship. It must be acknowledged that the changed political climate indicates continued turbulence for minority institutions in the immediate future. While recognizing the fact that the autonomous route is the way of the future, it must also be kept in mind that such high-value investments can easily be sieged and held hostage to unreasonable demands. In the face of significant economic and political hurdles, there is not likely to be much manoeuvring space. This is not to discourage large investments in higher education, however, to reclaim the high ground hitherto held by Christian institutions, it may have to be demonstrated to the public and the nation at large that the ethos of Christian teachings remains undiminished. In order to demonstrate unyielding resolve and commitment to democratic values, sacrifices may have to be made, or a 'kenosis undergone',¹⁹ as characterized by Heredia, in the confrontation that will ensue. I doubt that such large projects can take such risks. The muzzling of Ashoka University is a case in point. Mavelly hopes for Christian universities and institutions to be at the forefront of new global thinking and expects a 'two-way' movement of students between the first and the third worlds. ADBU is off to a great start with an admirable vision and a challenging mission. One hopes to witness its radiance as a beacon of liberal Christian ideals in the country.

Pius V Thomas, in his paper, 'The Christian Educational Institutions and the Christian Identity'; which is a part of the summations of the book, echoes Stephen Mavelly as he points out the crisis in Higher education in India. This crisis, according to him, emerges from the pressure to promote a system making cheap HR for labour markets and also from the failure to facilitate a rights-based, liberal and democratic educational and social climate. He flags the decontextualization of knowledge, commercialization of education, and disincentivizing of critical thinking and liberal ideas. Education is no longer the lynchpin that supports our social economy. Peter DeSouza also calls for an objective evaluation by the CEIs to reconcile their current trajectory with the definitive objectives of their Christian mission.²⁰

Thomas discusses the interdisciplinary dimension of education while criticizing²¹ the changed stance of educational institutions towards merely market-oriented knowledge creation and dissemination, while ignoring research-oriented education. Stephen Mavelly does attempt to clarify the position of CEIs to some extent, by explaining the need and efforts to balance the scale while at the same time negotiating the rapidly evolving global scenario. Thomas says that the true nature of knowledge is inherently interdisciplinary and makes the case for developing interdisciplinary competence through higher education. He argues for the facilitation of interdisciplinary knowledge creation and dissemination, and charges CEIs with the responsibility to lead the efforts. This concept is indeed gaining traction in the country at this time with new policy initiatives. CEIs should anticipate demand from the environment and reposition themselves correctly. The influence or lack thereof of CEIs in policy formulation assumes significance in this regard.

CEIs are accused of disregarding their educational ideals by the minority rights guaranteed by the constitution and of their perceived lack of responsiveness to social justice concerns. How CEIs reconcile secularism and minority rights concerning agency and identity is called into question. This issue may

¹⁹ Rudolf C Heredia, *Christian education and modern India*, 447, 466

²⁰ Peter Ronald DeSouza, *Foreword*, xvi

²¹ Pius V Thomas. *The CEIs and the Christian identity*, 422



have come into sharper focus with their venturing into self-financing professional educational institutions. CEIs should consistently reconcile the vision and motivations behind such projects with the measured outcomes. While discussing agency and identity, Thomas encourages CEIs to help in evolving a democratic Christian identity. He also discusses secularism and nationalism, highlighting different perspectives in the debate, in the Indian context. He calls for a democracy that facilitates secularism aligned with ethical religiosity and the development of a democratic identity. The argument is compelling. The concept of the public sphere as introduced by J Habermas is discussed to evaluate application in the context of the current reality.²² According to Habermas, "large economic and government organizations took over the bourgeois public sphere (social spaces where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power), while citizens became content to become primarily consumers of goods, services, political administration and spectacle, dedicating themselves more to passive consumption and private concerns than to issues of the common good and democratic participation".²³ One can see how this may resonate with contemporary Indian socio-political scenarios.

The concept of counter-public as an alternative to maintain the Christian democratic identity and take forward the dialogue in an alternative discursive arena created by the marginalized, as proposed by Thomas, feels like a retreat, a defensive manoeuvre. The loss of direct engagement in the public sphere, the loss of discursive space, may be catastrophic, and irretrievable in today's fast-evolving social economy. Dominant forces opposed to Christian ideals are strong and persistent enough to wipe and rewrite the collective consciousness of the nation. While social dialogue is imperative, it needs to be acknowledged that the issue faced by Christian identity is not that of a lack of understanding of other cultures or unwillingness to engage in dialogue. It is the lack of space for such engagement, of marginalization and exclusion from the public sphere and policy discussions. Rudolf Heredia states unambiguously the opposition and hostility towards Christian presence in education in India, even by secular rationalists.²⁴ The intercultural counter public as explained in the context of Kerala may have run its course, finding its democratic identity in the self-affirming phase, as concluded by the author. Hence forceful promotion and maintenance of identity-affirming public sphere intent, as the author suggests, should enable ethical interventions to defend and protect minority rights. He encourages the CEIs to attune their educational intent to this frequency, to initiate a constantly renewing, self-reflecting dialogue to contribute to strengthening Indian democracy. We have to trust that CEIs are seized of this imperative and substantial investments are being made to foster, nurture and carve out spaces, which will help in influencing the public imagination and the discourse on democracy in India, such as being done by ADBU and many others. It is the challenge to which CEIs and the Christian community in general must rise.

'Christian education and modern India - Hermeneutical reflections or reorientation' is the last chapter of the book, effectively summing up its arguments and insights. The paper by Rudolf C Heredia, attempts to call out and tackle issues within the community and emphasizes the need for innovation and rising up to the current challenges. Heredia calls out the hostility of the secular rationalists and the

²² Ibid, 431

²³ Ibid, 439 & Juergen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. (Trans:Thomas Burger, 1998)

²⁴ Rudolf Heredia, *Christian education and modern India*, 447



majoritarian agenda while at the same time warns the minority communities against the traps of exclusivity, reactionary isolation and minorityism. He invites the minority communities to introspection and calls for sensitivity towards other communities. Heredia points out how the CEIs may be losing the plot, by sticking to past practices and refusing to innovate, thereby inviting marginalization.

The convent school model is mentioned by Heredia and other authors. It may be worthwhile to evaluate the success of the convent education model and the reasons for its popularity in 20th century India. The conservative elites and upper castes identified with the strictures and cloistered format of a convent, though they were largely unconcerned about the faith and mission of the nuns. They found the ostentatious discipline appealing, approved of the exclusivity and sanitized spaces, afforded by the model, which helped to promote class consciousness and status quo. Add to this the lure of English language education as imparted by these institutions, seen as somehow more authentic, because of the identification of Christianity as a western religion. Convent schools and CHEIs were tranquil oasis within chaotic Indian cities and towns, where higher and nobler pursuits were possible, undisturbed by the sights and sounds of pedestrian India. CEIs may have played into the hands of conservative Hinduism, while largely failing to influence the constituent societies positively. It would be fruitful to examine why they may not have helped significantly in introducing egalitarianism where none existed in the first place or how they fared in dealing with caste/class identities. Heredia mentions "the reverse influence the constituencies may have had on the providers";²⁵ a notion which has significant importance for CEIs. The convent school model may have been imitated poorly, deceiving the gullible, but the imitators hardly can achieve the genuineness of these institutions. The life-long, selfless commitment and dedication of the nuns are but impossible to be replicated by fleeting business interests. The convent schools were revered because they were true to form and intent. Their imitators can compete only if the originals are corrupted. It may not be their model of pedagogy that attracted the populace, but the visible form and the virtues attached to it. Heredia seems to acknowledge this and exhorts CEIs to innovate and reclaim lost space.

Heredia warns against the tendency to rest on past laurels and calls for mining inspiration from the past and creatively innovating to shape the future. He discusses the dichotomy in the functions of education and how to decide the best in the Indian context, considering contemporary challenges. He laments the breakdown of Nehruvian consensus and the ascent of majoritarianism, which had been waiting in the wings all along, and the resultant capture of spaces for knowledge creation and dissemination, along with the deepening of class divisions affecting educational institutions. He is convinced that the only solution is a pluralistic approach where diversity takes centre-stage in any policy debate. The debate needs to be framed as an issue of diversity and social transformation with development, employability and social mobility, with CEIs entering the discussion, influencing the discourse and the policy sphere.

CEIs are accused of reinforcing the status quo in the Indian social sphere where they had some influence, not without substance. Creating economic value and establishing legacies must stop becoming priorities as these are temporal investments which may have to be protected with compromises. The Christian values and ideals that the institution seeks to impart must not become collateral damage in the fight for survival. An institution surviving on compromise is not adding value to society, it is churning out timid tools of production thereby perpetuating the status quo and associated evils it started out to combat. Apeksha Yadav (Delhi University), in her recent article in *The Wire*,²⁶ says that the upper castes have

²⁵ Ibid, 456

²⁶ Apeksha Yadav. "Why the pedagogy of dissent is explicitly prohibited in India academia" (*The Wire*, 22 Aug 2024). www.thewire.in/livewire/why-the-the-pedagogy-of-dissent-is-explicitly-prohibited-in-indian-academia

cornered the academic spaces and attempt to delegitimize any knowledge produced by others. The institution normalizes and promotes the 'common sense' or conventional 'truth' which is all too often nothing but the imposed conventions of hegemonic groups; as characterized by Heredia, that legitimizes the hegemony of the oppressors and undermines democratic ideals. Have CEIs, over time ceded space and surrendered the right to create and disseminate knowledge to the dominant groups?

The author calls for a shift in the way the dilemmas and contradictions are viewed and calls for innovative responses that may help create a new institutional model. The contradiction between the proclaimed vision and the adopted practices points to structural dysfunction, according to Heredia, and must be addressed courageously. In the current scenario, is it possible to find a balance, a dialectical go-between? The closing of the Indian mind has been centuries in the making. The notions of merit and talent being held as cover for inadequate training should be called into question and redefined. If incremental progress is what is being aimed for, with powerful forces in opposition, regression is likely in the offing. Paying lip service to the ideals pursued by the pioneers, while cynically adopting a policy of exclusion or favouritism will only help to further mediocrity. In essence, CEIs cannot afford to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

Heredia also explores the practical possibilities for future institutional models. "The Christian community is too small to change Indian education with any pretense of quantitative input",²⁷ Heredia acknowledges. But a qualitative impact with a niche model with seed value will be possible and shall certainly be emulated by some part of the mainstream due to a subconscious or normative acceptance of the virtues CEIs stand for. Individual level influence is significant as CEIs have demonstrated with its distinguished alumni. Christian education needs to identify the good seeds and fertile soil, which can be achieved through proper selection of potential agents of social change through innovative processes and by empowering them with the tools for societal transformation. CEIs have run some of the best residential schools and colleges in India and should be able to draw from their experience. ADBU, with its vision of constant contact with the student, may be able to successfully resurrect this model.

Strategic course correction, with a drawing-board level review, needs to be undertaken. There is likely to be a reflexive aversion to this seemingly conservative or fundamentalist pivot. Every reversion to first principles need not be necessarily fundamentalist. CEIs need to shed the baggage acquired over the last half-century; imposing edifices and comfortable classrooms must not come at the cost of the deserving; legacies and continuity matters less than the values imparted. There is no competing with the private-industrialist-educator except in the arena of content and quality of education. "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible to implement radical educational reforms which threaten the existing social structure or run counter to its imperatives",²⁸ as Heredia quotes. This calls for the courage and confidence of the early Christian pioneers. The struggle for the preservation of Indian secular democracy and the legacy that paved the way for its institution, as Peter De Souza says, is for everyone who has been a proponent or beneficiary of it, to be a part of.

According to Rudolf Heredia, "the saga of Christian education has been told in bits and pieces and has yet to develop into a credible narrative in our public consciousness".²⁹ This book is a significant step

²⁷ Ibid, 459

²⁸ Ibid, 462 & Citizens for democracy, Education for our people, (Mumbai: Allied Publishers, 1978)

²⁹ Rudolf Heredia, *Christian education and modern India*, 450



in that direction. It is also testament to the fact that academic treatment of esoteric pedagogical issues apart, the scholars and experts of Christian education are seized of the matters that seem pedestrian, yet of vital interest to the layperson. The editor succeeds in weaving together apparently distinct threads to provide a comprehensive and contextualized account of the impact of Christian education introducing and nurturing democratic and liberal values through Christian ideals, along with all its symmetries and contradictions.

A Voyage to the Past

Tumpa Mukherjee

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Women's Christian College, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Email tumpamakherjee5@gmail.com | ORCID ID - [0000-0003-0768-2246](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0768-2246)

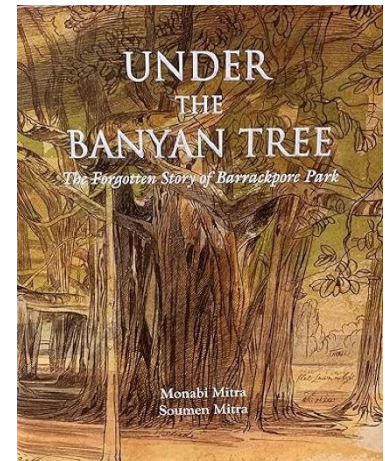
Book Name: *Under the Banyan Tree: The Forgotten Story of Barrackpore Park*

Author: Monabi Mitra and Soumen Mitra

Publisher: Aakar Books

Year of Publication: 2019

ISBN: ISBN 10: 935002621X ISBN 13: 9789350026212



The book 'Under the Banyan Tree. The Forgotten Story of Barrackpore Park' written by academician Monabi Mitra and police officer Soumen Mitra documents the forgotten social history of the Government House and Barrackpore Park. The pages of the book unfurled me to an era when technology had not crept in our everyday social existence. The book makes the nineteenth and twentieth century's come alive in our imagination. In this bare brown earth, marshy lands dotted with mud huts built on the banks of meandering rivers, our colonial masters-the British, engaged in their "civilizing mission". Even though there were no motor, electric lights, lanterns lit the bungalows, the moon casts its magical spell on Government House and the Barrackpore Park. The picturesque landscape, cool breeze of the river made it a romantic place, in spite of the afternoon heat.

In the book, the authors mention Emily Eden pointing out, 'there was a lonely moon and the Hooghly, is a handsome bit of river and we floated about an hour and then went to bed'. The place emerged as a retreat for the British lords even before Shimla, Darjeeling. As the lords engaged in the issue of governing the brown natives, try to stall disturbances to establish their regimes, the lady sahibs engaged in drawings, sketching, gardening, trying to keep 'alive' their memories of the English county...the rolling gardens, manor houses, where they spent their childhood and adolescence. They try to replicate their English lifestyle in Barrackpore. They went for picnics, organized lunches in the garden under the banyan trees. The personal diaries, letters, memoirs are testimonies of their lives in Barrackpore. The Barrackpore menagerie was developed during this period and consisted of innumerable animals, some of which were taken home in England or gifted to aristocratic families. The book documents the cultural acculturation that took place among few Englishmen as they carried the Indian architectural heritage back home in England. The authors have mentioned in their book that Warren Hastings had created a villa at Daylesford, near Adlestrop, using Indian design templates complete with onion dome. Hasting's house was neo-classical with a large number of Indian features including



a dome and Indian figures carved around the fireplace. Later Colonel Robert Smith of the East India Company built Redcliffe House in Devon, also using a mixture of Indian and Italian styles.

However with the passage of time and events, the popularity of this place waned. Not only is the book written in lucid languages, but the photographs, paintings in the book give the reader a visual pleasure. In the end the book documents a comparative photographic voyage from ruination to conservation...finally being declared as a heritage zone. Our present is built on our past. The book makes an effort to trace the history, the 'lived' experiences of the by-gone era, but is 'sensitive' in not glorifying the gory deeds which might hurt the nationalist sentiments. It is a fair representation of our past. As the book cover aptly mentions there is a need to look back in order to move forward. It is a must read for anyone interested in history, local history, cultural studies, art history, architecture, conservation. The readers will not only learn about the socio-cultural evolution of Barrackpore but will also experience ethereal peace and happiness of the by-gone era.