

UNDERSTANDING GENDER

Meaning, Concepts & Key Theories

Edited By

Dr. Madhurima Dasgupta

Academic Director- India

ASHADI WISDOM CAMPUS, SRI LANKA

...

**Hod, Department Of Gender Studies And Social Studies,
ASHADI WISDOM CAMPUS, SRI LANKA**

...

**Post-Doc Research Fellow,
ÅBO-AKADEMI UNIVERSITY, FINLAND**



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Understanding gender is essential to building a more inclusive and equitable society. This book offers a clear and comprehensive overview of gender—its meaning, key concepts, and major theories.

About the Book

- **Purpose:** To challenge assumptions, promote empathy, and deepen awareness about gender.
- **Target Audience:** Students, academics, and anyone interested in gender studies.

Key Highlights

- **Multidisciplinary Insights** from sociology, psychology, philosophy, and related fields.
- **Accessible Language** that simplifies complex ideas.
- **Diverse Perspectives** representing varied identities and experiences.

Key Takeaways

- Gender is a social construct, separate from biological sex.
- Understanding gender strengthens efforts toward equality and inclusivity.
- The book lays a strong foundation for further study and dialogue.

As the Editor of *Understanding Gender: Meaning, Concepts and Theories*, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to *VerseWave Publishing* and *Ms. Tanisha Banerjee* for their constant support. Though this is my first edited book with VerseWave, I am confident it will serve as a valuable academic resource in Gender Studies and Sociology of Gender. I sincerely thank all contributing authors for their timely and insightful chapters. I hope this book leaves a lasting impact and inspires progress toward a more just and egalitarian society.

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Women and CSR Practices in India: Some cases and reflections

Dr. Indranil Bose¹

Associate Dean and Professor, School of Business, Adamas University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Dr. Monika Bhatia²

Assistant Professor-School of Management, MIT University of Meghalaya, Shillong, India

Dr. Madhurima Dasgupta³

Academic Director, India- Ashadi Wisdom Campus, Sri-Lanka | HOD, Department of Gender Studies and Social Studies, Ashadi Wisdom Campus, Sri-Lanka | Post-Doc Research Fellow, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Abstract: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly recognized for its role in linking business ethics with societal needs. In India, CSR has roots in philanthropy and Gandhian trusteeship, where business leaders, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's ideals, supported charitable and social causes during and after independence. This research examines CSR initiatives focused on women's welfare and empowerment in a country that continues to face gender disparities. Using a mixed-methods approach—literature review, statistical data, and case studies—the study evaluates how Indian companies address women's issues and the effectiveness of their efforts.

Findings show that while many corporations undertake CSR activities for women, results vary widely. Key areas of focus include skill development, healthcare, childcare, and gender-sensitivity programs, all of which positively influence women's employment and quality of life. The study emphasizes the need for gender-inclusive CSR practices and highlights that companies must strengthen implementation, transparency, and impact assessment to fully realize CSR's potential.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Companies Act (2013), CSR towards Women*

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility, a term widely recognized in contemporary society, was fundamentally conceived in the 1800s, during a time when the world presented a complex image of the contrasting realities of philanthropy practiced by the affluent and upper classes, who, awash in wealth, sought to alleviate their conscience through contributions to society, while simultaneously, the working conditions for laborers were deteriorating, with individuals toiling tirelessly, their sweat and blood marking their labor, yet deprived of any semblance of time. These individuals resembled Oliver Twist, pleading for an additional bowl of soup; their requests for reasonable working hours and improved conditions were often met with derision and a profound lack of awareness. As the adverse effects on businesses became increasingly apparent, numerous employers opted to manifest their benevolence by reducing labor hours and enhancing working conditions, thereby laying the groundwork for a responsible corporate entity that prioritizes the welfare of individuals alongside its profit-driven objectives—an endeavor to underscore the significance of human capital in realizing organizational aspirations, for without them, corporate existence would be untenable (Bowen, 2013).

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility was first introduced in 1953 when American economist Howard Bowen released his book, 'Social Responsibilities of the Businessman.' In this work, he thoroughly explores and seeks to elucidate the intricate relationship between the choices made by business leaders regarding their enterprises and the—whether implicit or explicit—effects these choices have on society. Bowen meticulously unravels the interconnected threads that signify the fundamental relationship between corporations and their influence, whether tangible or intangible, on the social landscape of the world. He posits that every decision made by a businessman carries at least a minimal degree of impact in altering the existing state of affairs in their environment (Bowen, 2013).

The introduction to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly becoming indulgent in today's contemporary

society, highlighting the eloquence of the verbose nature of social justice and elevating its significance; its goodwill extending beyond Indian borders and dismantling the absurd and trivial divisions prevalent in this community. The practical idea of societal duty by organizations in India is not a new phenomenon. Traditionally, CSR echoes as a deeply rooted custom, enriched by the wealth of a well-regulated conscience and embellished with a rich ¹ (CSR Report, 2024).

The integration of industry and society stems from the severe consequences of worker exploitation and poor working conditions, worsened during the British colonial era. The independent India is actively working to address this issue through impressive initiatives. Gradually, societal attitudes towards women's intellectual capabilities are evolving, promoting equity and reducing gender disparity (Rathore & Kaur, 2023).

A brief overview of ongoing corporate initiatives:

The ongoing challenges are familiar to the demographic that has engaged with a multitude of vigorous discussions surrounding these issues and beyond. Therefore, highlighting the exploitations as a central focus may lead to stagnation. Consequently, directing attention towards the advancement of equity, along with the strategies and methods utilized to attain it—specifically in relation to this paper, a contribution from the corporate sector—and exploring additional actions that can be taken, will promote a more progressive outcome. This will be examined and demonstrated through an analysis of the reality of the concept as it has been executed by two Fortune 500 companies—namely, Reliance Industries Limited and the Tata Group—and a government-owned entity, IOCL (CSR in India, 2018).

Initiatives by Tata group: The Tata Group, a leading player in the business landscape, has consistently shown its commitment to fostering societal progress through its extensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. A key area of focus for the conglomerate is the empowerment of women. The Tata Group firmly believes in the principles of gender equality and inclusive development, which is reflected in its diverse array of initiatives

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designed to uplift and empower women across various facets of life. Recognizing the vital contributions women make to societal growth, the Tata Group's CSR efforts are meticulously designed to promote women's empowerment through avenues such as education, skill enhancement, healthcare access, entrepreneurship, and economic participation. These initiatives aim not only to provide opportunities but also to cultivate a nurturing environment that supports the holistic development of women, allowing them to realize their full potential. By leveraging its resources, expertise, and vision, the Tata Group addresses the multifaceted challenges that women, especially in marginalized communities, encounter. Through sustainable interventions and partnerships, the group strives to elevate women, enabling them to become catalysts for change within their families and communities. The Tata Group's dedication to women's empowerment goes beyond mere philanthropy; it is intricately woven into its corporate ethos, reflecting a deep-seated responsibility to foster a more just and inclusive society. With a legacy of impactful initiatives and an unwavering commitment to social advancement, the Tata Group continues to spearhead transformative efforts in its CSR objectives aimed at empowering and uplifting women globally. Under the Tata group, various significant CSR initiatives aimed at empowering women have been launched by Tata Power and Tata Steel. These initiatives include 'Power Her Up' project, which includes initiatives like 'Dhaaga', 'Abha', 'Saheli', and 'Udyamee' from Tata Power; while Tata Steel BSL has implemented a prominent program such as 'Tailoring Training for Women' (Women and Entrepreneurship in India: Governance, Sustainability and Policy, 2021).

Under the 'Power Her Up' initiative, Tata Power demonstrates a robust commitment to the empowerment of women, which it considers a crucial issue. The organization has been providing indirect support for this cause through various initiatives, including education, assistance to Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and vocational training⁵. This component of the CSR initiative has been established as a primary focus area of the 'Power Her Up' initiative by Tata Power. The 'Dhaaga' initiative represents a significant women-

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centric CSR effort within the 'Power Her Up' project by Tata Power (CSR in India, 2018).

The Tata Power ABHA initiative, which stands for 'Astitva Being Humane and Artisan,' empowers women in rural areas by promoting sustainable livelihoods and enhancing skill development. It encourages entrepreneurship and financial autonomy through training in crafts such as handloom and traditional arts, while also linking women to various markets and sales platforms. In the JJ Clusters of Delhi, the 'Earn while you Learn' program assists women following their literacy training, enabling them to access government initiatives like insurance and de-addiction programs. Additionally, ABHAs advocate for energy conservation through the Ujjala Scheme, market LED lights, manage payment collections, and contribute to Self-Help Groups. On September 16, 2023, the 'Abha Sakhi Sehat Camp' held in Mumbai trained over 100 women as 'Sehat Mitras' to enhance community health. This camp, conducted in Kandivali, focused on menstrual hygiene, nutrition, maternal-child health, and sanitation, distributing sanitary pads and providing support to pregnant women. Tata Power's dedication extends across the nation through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) such as 'Abha' in Delhi and 'Abha Shakthi' in Odisha, promoting financial empowerment and championing initiatives like energy conservation. The ABHA initiative has positively influenced approximately 1300 women by providing them with an income of Rs. 8000 per month across seven locations, projected until 2024 (CSR, 2024).

Tata Group's corporate social responsibility initiatives focused on women's empowerment encompass education, vocational training, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. These programs are designed to promote economic independence, gender equality, and community involvement. By equipping women with skills, education, and support, Tata Group reaffirms its dedication to fostering a more inclusive and equitable society (Gender Equality and Responsible Business: Expanding CSR Horizons, 2017).

Initiatives by Reliance Industries Limited: In the timeframe of 2022-23, Reliance Industries adopted a strategy centered on

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harnessing passion and purpose to advance their initiatives. The foundational tenet, known as the 'We Care' philosophy, acted as the pivotal influence, directing their goals and strategies aimed at improving individual lives and enhancing overall quality of life. This guiding principle directed their initiatives towards cultivating hope and empowering individuals to reach for higher aspirations. According to the integrated Annual Report of Reliance Industries Limited, the Total Value Added (TVA) for the fiscal year 2022-23 amounted to an impressive ₹3,57,668 crore, which encompassed various categories of expenditures incurred by the company, including Reinvestment in the group for the Maintenance and Development of Operations (Operational Expenses), Purchase/Consumption of Materials and Services, Employee Benefits, Dividends Payable, and Contributions to National Exchequers. Notably, the Contribution to society for the financial year 2022-23 was ₹1,271 crore (CSR, 2022-23).

By nurturing collaborative synergies, they aimed to amplify their impact and results in accordance with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This collective endeavor was vital in propelling progress towards these global sustainability objectives, thus making a significant contribution to both societal and environmental health. In their unwavering quest to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and solidify their status as a leader in India's social sector, Reliance is firmly dedicated to their mission. They have outlined ambitious plans, aiming to utilize their vast expertise and plentiful resources to cultivate a society marked by equity and inclusivity. The Reliance Foundation's commitment to aligning with the UN SDGs is apparent in their diverse approach to empowering women. Through initiatives designed to enhance leadership skills, provide digital literacy, create job opportunities, and develop competencies, they seek to uplift women across various domains. In alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, the Reliance Foundation is devoted to supporting women through a variety of initiatives. These initiatives include activities aimed at enhancing leadership capabilities, improving digital literacy, generating employment opportunities, fostering skill development, promoting women's

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health, and expanding their involvement in education, sports, and the arts. The Reliance Foundation remains unwavering in its dedication to improving the lives of women and girls. This is accomplished through a diverse range of empowerment initiatives that are integrated into programs such as Rural Transformation, Education, Health, and Sports for Development, showcasing their comprehensive approach across various sectors to elevate women (Gender Equality and Responsible Business: Expanding CSR Horizons, 2017).

The launch of the WomenLead India Fellowship highlights the significant influence that promoting women's leadership can exert on creating lasting and sustainable transformations in their lives, communities, and organizational environments. To support and empower women leaders who are actively involved in tackling urgent economic and social issues within the country, Reliance Foundation, in partnership with Vital Voices Global Partnership, established the inaugural WomenLead India Fellowship in October 2022⁶. Over the course of the 10-month Fellowship, 50 dynamic women leaders from India's social sector are nurtured across various domains, including education, sports, the arts, culture, and rural development. These Fellows are divided into categories such as Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship, Social Sector Leaders, and Changemakers, and they receive customized offline and online training aimed at enhancing their leadership skills. In December 2022, the WomenLead India Fellows began their Fellowship in Mumbai, participating in engaging sessions that draw from a wide range of backgrounds. The program is designed to strengthen leadership abilities and promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Gender Equality and Responsible Business: Expanding CSR Horizons, 2017).

Her Circle, a rapidly expanding digital platform designed for women in India, achieved a remarkable milestone of 310 million users during the fiscal year 2022-23. In its second year, the platform concentrated on cultivating a network among women to enable meaningful collaborations and connections⁴. Through a variety of social experiments, expert interactions, and inspiring stories of women, the platform continues to address the essential need for

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women to participate in discussions regarding issues that significantly impact them. With a vast outreach of 310 million users and registration figures exceeding 225,000 entrepreneurs, the initiative has made a notable impact on the digital landscape. Furthermore, in 2023, Her Circle expanded into multilingual offerings with the launch of Her Circle Hindi. Commemorating its one-year anniversary, Founder-Chairperson Mrs. Nita Mukesh Ambani introduced the Hindi platform, broadening its reach to further assist and empower women (De Jonge, 2022).

Launched on International Women's Day, the EveryBODY Project by Her Circle seeks to promote body positivity and diversity by presenting genuine stories and short films that highlight women who challenge traditional beauty norms and societal expectations. Led by founder Mrs. Nita Mukesh Ambani, this initiative aspires to motivate women to emphasize self-care and foster a wider community centered on compassion and well-being². 'Her Circle' undertook a social experiment named #HasMyBack, which sought to illuminate gender conditioning, societal views on gender, and existing stereotypes. This was followed by an online campaign encouraging women to share their stories of receiving support and solidarity³. 'Her Circle' has embarked on an initiative aimed at increasing awareness regarding the issue of water scarcity in India, with a specific focus on its disproportionate impact on women. In their first social insights series, they shared the poignant narrative of women from a village in Denganmal, Maharashtra. Over the course of 30 days, 30 remarkable women shared their powerful stories of resilience and empowerment, with the intention of inspiring and guiding other aspiring female entrepreneurs. Members of 'Her Circle' gain valuable insights from professionals at HN Reliance Hospital, who provide expert advice on a range of topics including health and nutrition, counseling, finance, dermatology, neonatology, pediatrics, gynecology, as well as rehabilitation and sports medicine. In addition, 'Her Circle' offers job opportunities from various sectors and organizations, aiming to connect users with roles that align with their skills and interests. (Leadership, Gender, and Organization, 2023).

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The initiative in Jamnagar has been actively supporting Swashray, an organization dedicated to financially empowering rural women and encouraging their involvement in income-generating projects. Women receive assistance in marketing and selling a variety of products, including snacks, clothing, handicrafts, and other items, at Reliance Greens Township and Reliance Smart Mall in Motikhavdi, Jamnagar. This support has inspired rural women to establish their own workspaces for these activities, affectionately named "Tapasthal" or the Swashray Centre, which was officially opened on Women's Day in 2023⁷. The researcher would like to highlight that she has personally witnessed the operations of Swashray outlets in Reliance Greens Township, Jamnagar, and they are currently expanding their reach into the digital space through the social media platform Instagram (Leadership, Gender, and Organization, 2023).

Initiatives by Indian Oil Corporation Limited: Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IndianOil) stands as a beacon of commitment to women's empowerment through its extensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. With a strong focus on fostering gender equality and improving the status of women, IndianOil has launched a diverse array of programs and initiatives. These efforts include education, skill development, healthcare services, entrepreneurial opportunities, and community engagement, all aimed at uplifting women across different sectors of society. The CSR initiatives of IndianOil not only seek to empower women but also to cultivate an inclusive community where women play vital roles in driving progress and societal development. Among the notable initiatives are IndianOil Vidushi, which supplies cotton wick making machines to tribal women in Narmada, Gujarat; the Assam Oil School of Nursing for women in Digboi, Assam; and Project Garima, along with the IndianOil Medha Chhattravritti Yojna, among others (Parliament of India. The Companies Act 2013, 2017).

IndianOil's Vidushi initiative, launched in 2018, offers targeted coaching and mentoring to disadvantaged girls post-Class XII for engineering entrance examinations. In spite of the COVID-19 restrictions during 2020-21, online classes facilitated the education

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of 120 girls. From a total of 532 enrolled students, 58 gained admission to IIT, 120 to NITs, and 206 to various other engineering institutions. IndianOil finances coaching, accommodation, and provides scholarships of ₹5,000 per month for IITs/NITs and ₹4,000 per month for government engineering colleges, positively impacting approximately 200 scholars. Additionally, IndianOil has fostered rural entrepreneurship among tribal women in Chikda village, located in Dediyapada Taluka, an Aspirational District within Narmada, Gujarat. This initiative supplied 100 Cotton Wick Making Machines to 100 Sakhi Mandal Members (SMM). In the academic year 2022-23, 30 students commenced the GNM program, while 22 enrolled in the B.Sc. (Nursing) course. To date, 526 students have successfully completed the GNM course, and 145 have graduated from the B.Sc. (Nursing) program, all achieving an impressive 100% placement rate. Another important project, The IndianOil Medha Chhattravritti Yojna acknowledges and assists exceptional female students across the country, granting awards to 75 top performers from 30 state and national educational boards for their academic achievements. Over the past two years, 3490 girls have benefited from this program, with 1884 girls from the 2021-2022 academic year receiving scholarships in 2022-23. This initiative seeks to diminish dropout rates, enhance women's involvement in higher education, and promote the overall advancement of the nation. Through these initiatives, Indian Oil plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality by enhancing women's participation in education and the labor market. This commitment not only empowers women but also supports the overall development of the nation, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society (Gender Equality and Responsible Business: Expanding CSR Horizons, 2017).

Comparative analysis of the above practices:

A thorough examination of these sectors has been instrumental in pinpointing the significant contributions made by each. This analysis not only highlights their initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality and empowering women through various opportunities but also indicates that there is still room for further

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development in these efforts. Regarding ethical considerations, while caution may temper expectations, a deep understanding of the capabilities of these corporate leaders provides a hopeful perspective. This will be investigated through a three-part framework, which will include a corporate-specific comparative analysis and suggest ways to enhance these initiatives, as there is always potential for improvement. To begin, a comprehensive evaluation of the Tata groups collectively demonstrates how each sector has made notable progress in advancing gender equality and inclusivity by creating pathways for women's empowerment across India. It is essential to acknowledge that Tata Power, Tata Steel, and Tata Trust each have significant potential to amplify their contributions. Although Tata Trust has made commendable strides in addressing violence against women—a pressing concern—it does not measure up to the efforts of Tata Power and Tata Steel. It would be beneficial for Tata Trust to broaden its initiatives to provide affordable and accessible education for girls and women, as well as to promote skill development in areas of India that are still underserved by the other Tata sectors. This suggestion is made specifically to comply with the third item in Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 (Parliament of India. The Companies Act 2013, 2017).

Conclusion:

A comprehensive analysis of these organizations reveals a multifaceted approach to fostering women's empowerment through a wide range of initiatives. These initiatives span critical areas such as education, skills development, healthcare, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. The tailored programs they offer include scholarships, training opportunities, maternal health services, business support, and advocacy efforts. By addressing various barriers, these organizations promote gender equality and contribute to the creation of a just society. By confronting systemic challenges, they uplift women both economically and socially, ensuring sustainable development and inclusivity across diverse communities (Gender Equality and Responsible Business: Expanding CSR Horizons, 2017).

Endnotes:

1. *Corporate Social Responsibility:* CSR was first introduced in 1953 when American economist Howard Bowen released his book, 'Social Responsibilities of the Businessman.' In this work, he thoroughly explores and seeks to elucidate the intricate relationship between the choices made by business leaders regarding their enterprises and the—whether implicit or explicit—effects these choices have on society.
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3. *#HasMyBack:* Her Circle' undertook a social experiment named #HasMyBack, which sought to illuminate gender conditioning, societal views on gender, and existing stereotypes. This was followed by an online campaign encouraging women to share their stories of receiving support and solidarity.
4. *Her Circle:* Her Circle, a rapidly expanding digital platform designed for women in India, achieved a remarkable milestone of 310 million users during the fiscal year 2022-23. In its second year, the platform concentrated on cultivating a network among women to enable meaningful collaborations and connections.
5. *Power Her Up Initiative:* Under the 'Power Her Up' initiative, Tata Power demonstrates a robust commitment to the empowerment of women, which it considers a crucial issue. The organization has been providing indirect support for this cause through various initiatives, including

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education, assistance to Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and vocational training.

6. *WomenLead India Fellowship*: The launch of the WomenLead India Fellowship highlights the significant influence that promoting women's leadership can exert on creating lasting and sustainable transformations in their lives, communities, and organizational environments. To support and empower women leaders who are actively involved in tackling urgent economic and social issues within the country, Reliance Foundation, in partnership with Vital Voices Global Partnership, established the inaugural WomenLead India Fellowship in October 2022.
7. *"Tapasthal" or the Swashray Centre*: The initiative in Jamnagar has been actively supporting Swashray, an organization dedicated to financially empowering rural women and encouraging their involvement in income-generating projects. Women receive assistance in marketing and selling a variety of products, including snacks, clothing, handicrafts, and other items, at Reliance Greens Township and Reliance Smart Mall in Motikhavdi, Jamnagar. This support has inspired rural women to establish their own workspaces for these activities, affectionately named "Tapasthal" or the Swashray Centre, which was officially opened on Women's Day in 2023.

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Gender in the Indian Context: From Patriarchy to Performativity

Dr. Koel Mitra ¹

Associate Professor, English & Literary Studies, Brainware University

Abstract: The article prefigures intersectionality as a crucial critical tool, thus shedding light on the interventions of Indian performative feminism, which is critical of the hierarchical blindness of mainstream Indian feminism. It also discusses how queer and transgender communities, especially the *Hijra practice* and the legitimacy provided by the NALSA judgment of the Supreme Court (2014), have pushed the limits of gender identity.

The theoretical input of existentialist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, with her understanding of becoming and feminist performance theorist Judith Butler, with her notion of performativity, are placed with the Indian voices of Uma Chakravarti and Nivedita Menon, who place gender within the framework of caste and community.

The chapter is an attempt to draw the three strands of theoretical, historical and activist views to argue that gender in India is not a given category, but is a lived, negotiated practice through both local struggles and global discourses. The chapter attempts to comprehend gender in India; there must be an appreciation of its plurality, its interplay with caste and class, and its reconfiguration that is in endless response to resistance and reform.

Keywords: *Gender in India; Patriarchy; Intersectionality; Performativity*

Introduction: Locating Gender in the Indian Discourse

From the perspective of the evolution of critical thought and contemporary discourse, the concept of gender has long advanced from a social characteristic to a legitimate field of study and academic discipline. Gender, for long, has been considered to be a social marker and a positionality in a system of social stratification, and is also a marker of identity of a very complex nature. In the context of the Indian

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subcontinent, this is also extremely multifaceted. Religion, patriarchy, caste, class and postcolonial modernity are all interwoven when it comes to the gendered experience of any region of the subcontinent. The Indian society has mythologised and rationalised the integration of gender within the kinship systems and social practices of a society that is socially and culturally organised to prescribe 'certain' roles to people as 'appropriate', depending on their biologically-assigned sex. The social system has been described by Sylvia Walby as the "systemic structuring of gender relations" (Walby 4).

In India, the complexity of the interactions of the various structures of geopolitics and multi-layered gender in India provides a rich context in which to situate the feminist frameworks that have emerged in the country. Thus, for historiography, the concentration of attention and focus is, perhaps, the most pivotal from reformist movement(s) figures like Pandita Ramabai and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain to historiography which engages with the primary question of intersectionality. It is in this context that Kimberlé Crenshaw's theorizations of intersectionality of gender, class and caste, and religion and sexuality are critical, as those identities constitute a system of oppression and privilege that is interdependent and mutually constitutive. For the sake of historical documentation of feminist movements in India,

This dialogue has been enriched by global feminist theories today, which regard gender as performative and existential, as opposed to considering it as a stable essence. Existential feminism and the performative theory of Judith Butler, together, disrupt the essentialist view of women. Gender to Beauvoir is a 'project of becoming' (267) as she argues, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", which positions it as an act of self-definition that is within the bounds of culture. This is radicalised by Butler, who argues that gender is rather a performance; a reiterative enactment of the socially defined (191).

To comprehend manifestations of gender and how performance intersects with embodiment requires further probing into the existentialist and poststructuralist philosophy within the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, who are, ultimately, the most important, distinct, yet complementary thinkers on the reception of gender. To unearth the body and the perception of it as gendered is the primary philosophies of Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, who is arguably the first existentialist phenomenologist of the body in *The Second Sex*, where in 1949 she coined the phrase, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," which does not simply challenge biological determinism, but is a paradox surrounding

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the woman question. Beauvoir conceptualises womanhood not as a status, but rather as a process. It is a process of negotiating the unbridgeable dichotomies of facticity and transcendence. In social formations, a woman is always considered to be *the Other* and, by the hierarchies of social order, is immanently trapped¹. Most of Butler's works contain some of the finest breakdowns of these cultural scripts, and the most poignant, for many purposes, is the one where she states that reiteration enables transgression. Nonetheless, Butler's theoretical framework cannot attend to the particular sorts of hierarchies that structure the relations of gender in India. Moreover, there are female scholars like Uma Chakravarti and N. Menon, who also locate performativity in the frameworks of caste and community. Chakravarti's notion of 'Brahmanical patriarchy' argues that the dominant control of women's sexuality is a condition to be able to sustain vegetarian caste silence and caste purity (Chakravarti 43). The answer given by Beauvoir, Butler, and several Indian feminists today indicates that, regarding gender, to become and to enact or redefine it are also forms of activeness. It is a claiming of a lived identity which is made possible through the different, and sometimes contradictory forms of domination. In the context of India, gender is not simply to be framed as resistance or mimicry; it is a complex, layered performativity, located in dominations and control.

Indian Feminist Interventions: History, Caste, and Community

Understanding Indian Feminism also requires knowledge of the Movement of Feminism and the relevant Ideology in the Indian Context. However, it needs to be acknowledged that Indian Feminism does not develop sequentially, but rather simultaneously with regards to the reformist, nationalist, socialist and postcolonial. Each of these intervals also had distinct spatial political conditions. Indian Feminism also presented itself as a conscience in reaction to the suffragist and legalist discourses of the First Wave in the West. This was, perhaps, mainly as a result of the opposition to colonial rule and the social reform movements of the time, which focused on Child Marriage, Widowhood and Education. The predicament was also a result of the impulse to modernise caused by colonial Modernity and the backlash of patriarchal conservatism.

The ambivalence in *Sati* and widow re-marriage debates may further be illustrated by Feminist historians Lata Mani and Tanika Sarkar, who interpret and advocate the abolition of *Sati* in 1829, from the perspective

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, "The Second Sex," 2011, p. 267.

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of Western humanitarianism, and rationalism, only to be seen as colonizers, capturing and, morally, circumscribing the *Sati* abolition as humanitarian the same way Indian reformers, abolitionist Roy, the first rationalizer and interpreter of Hindu texts, and *Sati* as a religious discipline, sustained *Sati* to be non-humanitarian as against a religiously defined humanitarian oppression². Even in widow remarriage and *Sati*, the widow was not seen as a self-contained, autonomous entity. This explains the interlacing of Western liberalism with Indian Feminism in this regard, which, in the Indian context, explains the debates with Indian Feminism. As a result of national movements and in recognition of the women's complex political roles, women were politically reconceptualised as representatives of the newly emergent political concretisation of the nation. '*Bharat Mata*' and the spiritual motherhood, as discourses, while politically trivialising women's subjectivity, 'elevated' women's symbolic status. It was during this time that the All India Women's Conference (AIWC, 1927) and many other first such organisations were also founded, which took the initiative to articulate their demands and planned campaigns for advocacy of politically representational and legally reformative actions.

Post-Independence Feminism and the Question of Caste

In the aftermath of independence, India attempted to assess the forms of subordination that remained after the Constitution promised equality. Incited by the Mathura rape case of 1972, the women's movements of the 1970s and 1980s began as a shift from reform to resistance. Movements that demonstrated the abuse of women by the state and the economy, and their violent and systematic 53). The second wave of feminism in India was sparked by the 1974-75 report of the Government of India, *Towards Equality*, which documented the disparities among women in access to education, employment, and politics (Government of India 42).

Gender, Community, and the Politics of Difference

The factors of class, religion, and community in India indicate that feminism is going to be multi-dimensional and hence going to create some ripples in the secular disposition of the post-colonial state due to varying personal laws that govern marriage, inheritance and the family. Menon is one of the feminists who claims that such laws cause women to be "community subjects" whose rights are only dictated by the religion that

² Raja Rammohan Roy, "Abolition of Sati," 1829.

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affects them (Menon 47). An example that clearly illustrates one's confrontation of Gender Justice and Minorities is the Shah Bano case (1985). The balance of what Menon calls the "universalism of rights and...the particularism of community" (Menon 49) is, in Menon's words, what offers some of the most unique characteristics to India and Indian feminism in particular, to be a little different.

Intersectionality and the Plural Feminist Present

Feminism in India was the first to apply the theory of intersectionality. Activists and scholars recognise the variation in ways gendered oppression works in relation to one's urban or rural location, Hindu or Muslim faith, upper caste or Dalit status, and cis or trans identity. Nivedita Menon's description of 'to see like a feminist in India today is to see difference, not sameness ' is most appropriate (Menon 3). It is in this context that the collaborative combination of queer activism and feminism, and of Dalit and Labour activism, has crossed social and economic justice to include gender justice.

In India, the virtual, legal, economic, emotional, etc., intersect and inform Indian Feminism, which, as a praxis, readjusts and reconsolidates with Indian Feminism and other forms of integrative and negotiating practices. Indian Feminism, as a praxis, does not desire closure, and more paradoxically, flourishes without it. With each new right, more and more terrains close off/in. Each new lexeme of emancipation demands a new iteration. The flight, from a reformist/ moralistic position to an outsider position to the intersecting coalitions, reveals Indian Feminism as having moved through the borders of essentialism and performativity to a more complex pluralism. The objective, as Chakravarti and Menon explain, can neither, nor should ever be to "locate" and "fix" the "Indian Woman" but instead to outline the perimeters of this construct as it unfolds richly at the nexus of caste, class and power. To address the issue of gender in India does not address a thing, but rather a space, a dynamic territory, where the multiple oppressions meet a multitude of resistance, and it is that confluence that is the basis of Feminist Solidarity.

Queer and Transgender Voices: Hijra Identity and Legal Recognition

The complexities of social constructions of gender in India must consider the social struggles of queer and trans communities since they exist outside the prevalent male-female binary system. Within these communities, some members of the Hijras hold a specific socio-cultural position of social derision and social idolization, a unique position to hold. The Hijras have

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been a part of India's social and cultural life since the pre-colonial period, receiving idolization and derision interchangeably. Modern conceptions of the Hijra, however, as an organised unit with a politically consolidated identity, and diversified forms of activism, aimed to keep social and economic covert performances within developed and subjugated activism of the marginalised sub civilians of the integrated hegira escape/sanctuary, is a contemporary development.

Performativity, Ritual, and Survival

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler elaborates the ideas surrounding the subversion of the performance of the self with the strategic exclusion of the Hira customs and traditions. Butler recognises performance of femininity (which in Butler's case also includes the category of gender), "it is a stylised repetition of acts" (191). Because the Hira embodies the ritual, the repetition in the formation of their identity is unquestionable. For the public performance of civility and social award, Hira was crowned, which social ritualisation of the dance and song, and civility.

The physical form of *Hijras* serves to illustrate the social boundaries of power and powerlessness in Indian society. It is a body that is what Reddy says is 'sacred and obscene at once', and whose body is the 'sacred body', as she says, is 'the space where power and resistance are played out' (Reddy 57). The Hijras, as we discussed in the prior chapter, are where the discourses of gender in India are not static but are about the lived experience as a negotiation. The Judgment in *The NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) in the Supreme Court is a landmark decision on India's transgender rights. NALSA made a distinction between the means of self-identification as a 'transgender person' and whose testimony was embraced by the Court, without any medical or surgical transition. The NALSA verdict in recognising a gender identity resonates with Butler's concept of performativity in that it is a recognition that gender identity is not assigned at birth and is not inscribed in one's body, but is a social and internal construct. The Court, self-identification, the NALSA verdict, and the Court's emphasis on self-identification constitute, in legal language, a 'performative' act of self-identification to Third Gender.

From Margins to Movements: Queer Politics and Intersectionality

There was and is queer activism through the intersection of sexuality, class and human rights, even before the NALSA verdict and equally thereafter. The Naz Foundation case against the NCT Delhi Government was the

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initiating point of the protracted struggle to legalise same sex relationships³. The Koushal case was overruled by the Supreme Court of India and was subsequently overruled in the case of Johar (2018), thereby reversing the ruling. Such legal or otherwise developments define sexuality as an attribute that is central, primary, and integral to one's identity, existence, and being.

Thus, *Hijra* activism calls for, and is entrenched in, performance, politics, and resilience. Describing this public space 'usage', Butler, in the context of 'blessings' (protests) and (Pride) marches, uses the phrase 'repetition with a difference', to denote the dominant, yet festive, use of public space, where, Butler states... the 'iteration of (a) gender... [is] both disruptive and self-regulating' (Butler 198). Here, to celebrate the non-normative body, public space is dominantly shifted from festive performance to profound transformation.

Reclaiming Citizenship through Performativity

The public acknowledgement of the *Hijra* community has shifted the private/personal understanding of one's gender to a public one, and one now claims this as their citizenship. Ratna Kapur, reflecting on post-colonial erotic justice, has this scenario where she speaks of justice incorporating desire and the fulfilment of that desire (Kapur 119). The *Hijra* community has been able to and continues to educate the citizenship and the public sphere on their artistry and on their laws and citizenship, on the fact that one does not only include citizenship when one meets the thresholds of conformity; citizenship includes the right to difference in expression.

Visibility has, and will continue to be, a double-edged sword. The media portrayal of the biographical *Taali* (2023), along with the inclusion of transgender women as regional news anchors, although controversial, is a small step towards the right direction⁴.

Contemporary Negotiations: Media, Body, and Resistance

Almost as if from a historical point of view, at the very beginning of the 21st century (2000-2009) in India, there are negotiations around the intersections of gender in the context of a global socio-communicational environment characterised by an unprecedented, prolonged exposure to/

³ Naz Foundation, "Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi," 2009, p. 105.

⁴ Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, "Taali," 2023.

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saturation of various techniques of mass media. There are new, differentiated performances of gender (and polarised, rival performances of gendered bodies) that frequently traverse the intersections of the stage. The assumptions and the conclusions built on the bodies that are both politically and economically subjugated are a focal point of socio-political defiance.

Cinema and the Gendered Spectacle

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has branched off into various multifaceted interpretations and representations of gender, more specifically, gender roles. Nation-focused films, particularly *Mother India* (1957), retrospectively foreground the construction of the nation as a theatre celebration and sacrifice of the Mother. The later decades of the twentieth century produced the vamp-virgin dichotomy, where films produced and perpetuated the notion of female virtue, with an unattained ideal in the domestic sphere and sexual autonomy, but were ultimately defined by a bed with morally dangerous consequences (Virdi 62). While the so-called 'feminist films' displayed the 'power' of female protagonists, the users of family and redeeming narratives restored and recuperated the agency of the films.

Digital Media and Hashtag Feminism

Advocating from the lens of feminism may take multiple forms depending on the specific social media platform at hand. In particular, young, female activists reflected on their experiences during the harassment walks, relating to the appropriation of both physical and digital canvases of space during the campaigns of #MeTooIndia, #PinjraTod, and #Whyloiter. These movements embody the sentiment expressed by Nivedita Menon when positing that feminism has the unique ability 'to travel without keeping its local moorings' (Menon 101). While it may be true that there is a gap in mobilisation for certain forms of activism, the digital realm tends to counter this weakness by providing a sense of permanence. In this sense, hashtags represent digital manifestations of free speech.

The social divides that exist in the real world also, unfortunately, exist on social media. Dalit and queer social media users have critiqued the upper-caste, English domination of online feminism, and some have addressed the inaction of public activism that Paik describes as enduring the public gendered violence of the caste system. Paik describes this violence as the public inaction surrounding the online counteractivism. The digital world provides the marginalised with both a platform and a space where they can be trolled, doxxed, and surveilled. Udupa critiques

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this as the commodification of dissent, wherein the so-called affective economies of outrage commodify resistance and outrage. New technologies have, however, expanded the visibility of Trans influencers, even as Nitasha Bisht, Meera Sakti, and Dr Trinetra Haldar Gummaraju use Instagram and YouTube to document their transitions, healthcare, everyday life and resilience. This is a testament to Butler's theory of performativity in its contemporary iteration. Gender, as a digital performance, is created and reproduced in the snaps, captions and comments of the audience. The algorithmic gaze is a replacement of the patriarchal, and as a result, there are unregulated performances of pride that are otherwise highly structured. Embodiment, Fashion, and Consumer Culture.

Conclusion: From Category to Practice

In India, unlike other countries with other cultural specificities, the viewpoint on gender solely as an identity needs to be revised, as gender is better understood as a complex set of practices that are made and remade over a period of time through the crystallisation and rearranging of power resistance structures. Hierarchical structures of kinship and caste give rise to and are the basis of other forms of gender, including the enactment of citizenship's queerness. The chapter has therefore tried to explore the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir and other contemporary thinkers, encompassing the performative theorization of Judith Butler, the feminist scholarship of Uma Chakravarti and Nivedita Menon, and the various other forms to which it is expressed to contest and challenge the claimed problems of social stillness and belonging that are imposed to be controlled, and the belonging that is imposed to be controlled and is claimed to be belonging or used.

The movement from patriarchy to performativity is not linear; it is cyclical and recursive. This is why in new systems of patriarchy, neoliberal tokenism, state surveillance, and digital harassment, structures emerge. With new forms generation after generation, there is rearticulated resistance. India is a plural phenomenon wherein gender is also constituted of modern rights discourses, digital activism, ritual embodiment, and mythic archetypes. It is a still-fluid language, a choreography of dissent and belonging, and is still in the process of definition.

Realising that gender can be understood as practice means realising that gender can be understood as practice in an abstract, non-heteronormative, and non-identity, but in a legal/moral sense. This understanding encapsulates the immensely uplifting potential of Indian feminism. The capacity to transcend the dualisms of the East and the West, the old and

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the new, the masculine and the feminine, entails the pluriversality of becoming. In the ceaseless acts of defiance and resurgence, gender is and will always be.

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Swami Vivekananda on Women Empowerment: Rethinking Gender and History in Colonial India from a sociological perspective

Ananya Ghosh¹

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Sister Nivedita University

Abstract: The interplay between gender and history in colonial India highlights the challenges faced by women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women's lives were restricted by child marriage, limited education, social constraints, and minimal public roles. Although colonial reforms such as the abolition of sati and the introduction of widow remarriage sought to improve women's conditions, they often portrayed women as passive and in need of protection. Indian reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Dayananda Saraswati advocated women's upliftment, but their efforts largely remained protective rather than transformative.

In contrast, Swami Vivekananda offered a more progressive vision. He emphasized fearlessness, independence, and education as the foundations of women's empowerment. He encouraged women to take leadership roles and believed that no society could progress without gender equality. Affirming spiritual equality, he argued that men and women are like two wings of a bird—both essential for societal harmony.

Keywords: *women education, empowerment, Swami Vivekananda, colonial India*

Objectives

1. To examine Swami Vivekananda's ideas on women's empowerment within the socio-historical context of colonial India.
2. To analyze how his vision challenged dominant gender norms and contributed to emerging discourses on equality and women's agency.

INTRODUCTION

The study of gender and history in colonial India provides deep insights into the structural inequalities, ideological contestations, and socio-religious debates shaping women's lives between the nineteenth and early twentieth century's. This was a period marked by patriarchal customs, colonial interventions, and reformist efforts targeting the "woman question" 1(Chatterjee, 1989; 5Forbes, 1996). Women were largely excluded from education, trapped in child marriage, subjected to domesticity, and denied public participation 2(Basu, 2016). The British colonial state framed many reforms as "civilizing interventions," arguing that Indian women were oppressed because of indigenous culture, an approach that scholars argue reinforced colonial power rather than promoting genuine agency 3(Mani, 1989; 6Burton, 1998).

Parallel to this, Indian reformers attempted to reshape gender norms, motivated by a desire for social upliftment and national regeneration 4(Sarkar, 2002). However, reformers often viewed women as symbols of tradition and purity rather than as independent individuals deserving autonomy 1(Chatterjee, 1989). This placed women at the center of political and cultural struggles, but rarely as participants in their own liberation. It is within this contested landscape that Swami Vivekananda emerges as a distinctive voice advocating not merely protection but empowerment. By promoting spiritual equality, self-reliance, and women's active leadership, he challenged rigid gender norms and broke away from both colonial paternalistic attitudes and traditional Indian patriarchal structures. (7Bhattacharya, 2013; 8Nanda, 2003). Vivekananda emphasized that empowerment must be grounded in education, fearlessness, and the awakening of inner strength (9Vivekananda, 1955–1997). His stance reflected both continuity with earlier reformers and a sharp break, he refused to see women as passive beneficiaries of reform and instead viewed them as active agents of social change.

This paper examines Vivekananda's ideas on women's empowerment through a sociological lens, situating his views within the broader gendered history of colonial India. Using feminist historiography, sociological theory, and textual analysis of Vivekananda's writings, this study aims to demonstrate how his thought contributed to a transformative rethinking of gender roles.

Historical Context: Women and Gender in Colonial India

Patriarchal Constraints and Social Practices

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The nineteenth century in India was marked by deep-seated patriarchal norms regulating women's lives. Practices such as child marriage, purdah, limited property rights, and the denial of education systematically restricted women's autonomy (5Forbes, 1996; 10Chakravarti, 1993). Feminist historians argue that women in this period were confined to domestic spaces and valued primarily as wives and mothers, not as individual citizens 4(Sarkar, 2002). Social norms were reinforced by Brahmanical patriarchy, which emphasized female chastity, obedience, and domestic service (10Chakravarti, 1993).

Education for girls was almost non-existent, especially among upper-caste Hindus who feared that education would corrupt female morality 2(Basu, 2016). Lower-caste and tribal communities allowed relatively more public participation for women, but these women faced economic exploitation and caste discrimination (19Rege, 1998). Thus, across caste and class, gender oppression manifested in varied yet structural forms.

Colonial Policies and the “Civilizing Mission”

During British rule, the colonial state enacted reforms such as the abolition of sati (1829) and the Widow Remarriage Act (1856), positioning itself as the moral savior of Indian women (3Mani, 1989). However, these policies were embedded in colonial discourse that portrayed Indian men as barbaric and Indian women as passive victims, thus legitimizing imperial rule (6Burton, 1998).

Scholars argue that colonial reforms did not aim to empower women but to assert social control (5Forbes, 1996). Furthermore, colonial education policies were designed to produce clerks for administrative work and did not prioritize women's education (2Basu, 2016). Thus, although reforms appeared progressive, they did not significantly challenge gender hierarchies.

Indian Social Reformers and the Woman Question

Indian reformers such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Dayananda Saraswati attempted to address social evils affecting women (11Chakrabarti, 2001). While their efforts marked important developments, scholars argue that these reformers often viewed women through a patriarchal or moralistic lens, focusing on protecting them rather than promoting independence (1Chatterjee, 1989). Thus, although reform movements initiated important conversations, they did not fundamentally shift women's status from passive recipients of reform to active agents of change.

Swami Vivekananda's Conception of Women and Empowerment

Spiritual Equality and the Universal Self

Vivekananda's philosophy was rooted in Vedantic thought, which holds that the same divine Atman exists in all individuals regardless of gender (9Vivekananda, 1955–1997). Unlike many contemporaries, he asserted that women were not inferior but equal manifestations of divinity. He rejected biological determinism and social hierarchies, emphasizing that “the soul has no sex” (9Vivekananda, 1955–1997). Scholars observe that Vivekananda's articulation of spiritual equality offered a powerful critique of gender-based discrimination and provided a strong philosophical foundation for women's rights (8Nanda, 2003; 7Bhattacharya, 2013).

Education as the Foundation of Empowerment

Education forms the backbone of empowerment because it provides individuals with the understanding, abilities, and awareness needed to shape their own lives. Through education, people learn to question injustice, think critically, and make choices that improve their social and economic conditions. It opens doors to employment, strengthens independence, and builds confidence to participate actively in society. More importantly, education helps individuals recognize their rights and develop the courage to claim them. In this way, education becomes a transformative force that enables both individuals and communities to overcome exclusion and move toward a more just and equal world. For Vivekananda, empowerment was inseparable from education. He argued that education should promote physical strength, moral courage, and intellectual independence (9Vivekananda, 1955–1997). He claimed that “it is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved,” identifying women's education as essential to national progress (7Bhattacharya, 2013).

Swami Vivekananda viewed women's education as an essential prerequisite for building a just and progressive society. He argued that without improving the status and condition of women, no nation could achieve meaningful social transformation, famously remarking that “there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved” (12Vivekananda, 1958/2020, Vol. 7). His perspective on women's empowerment was deeply inclusive and far ahead of his time, stressing that women must have full access to higher education, scientific training, and vocational skills in order to achieve self-confidence and independence.

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Vivekananda advocated not only for intellectual development but also for cultivating qualities such as strength, fearlessness, and self-respect among women, believing that these attributes would enable them to contribute actively to national reconstruction. Importantly, he recognized women as spiritual equals, rejecting notions of dependency and subordination perpetuated by patriarchal traditions. His close association with Sister Nivedita, whom he encouraged to establish educational institutions for girls and women, stands as a concrete demonstration of his commitment to women's inclusion in education and nation-building (13Nivedita, 1911). Through these efforts, Vivekananda envisioned an India where women would emerge as strong, educated, and self-reliant agents of social transformation.

Education for the Poor

Vivekananda also placed significant emphasis on the education of the poor, grounding his philosophy in the belief that service to the marginalized was equivalent to worshipping the divine. Referring to the impoverished masses as Daridra Narayana, he asserted that one's duty lay in uplifting those suffering from deprivation and ignorance. He forcefully stated that "so long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who... does not help to educate them" (15Vivekananda, 1958/2020, Vol. 4). This moral urgency shaped his educational vision, which stressed that learning must be practical, skill-oriented, and connected to the material realities of the working poor. Vivekananda rejected systems focused solely on literary or book-based learning and instead championed vocational education, technical training, and hands-on experience in areas such as agriculture, crafts, and engineering. He believed that such training would cultivate self-reliance, enhance economic independence, and break the cycle of poverty.

His call for the establishment of industrial schools and training centers reflected his conviction that education should empower individuals to secure livelihoods and contribute productively to society. Through this inclusive framework, Vivekananda's educational thought sought to democratize knowledge, reduce structural inequalities, and bring marginalized communities into the mainstream of national development. He strongly believed that "If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him."(16Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 5) Unlike other reformers who emphasized domestic education, Vivekananda insisted on a broad curriculum including science, philosophy, and leadership skills (4Sarkar, 2002). Feminist scholars argue that

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Vivekananda's emphasis on mental strength challenged stereotypes of women as weak or dependent (2Basu, 2016).

Fearlessness and Self-Reliance para

Fearlessness and self-reliance are essential qualities that enable individuals to rise above limitations and confront challenges with confidence. Fearlessness empowers people to question oppressive norms, take bold decisions, and stand firm in the face of adversity. Self-reliance, on the other hand, nurtures inner strength by encouraging individuals to trust their abilities, take responsibility for their actions, and carve their own path. Together, these qualities cultivate resilience, independence, and a sense of agency, allowing individuals to overcome social pressures and strive toward meaningful change. In essence, fearlessness and self-reliance transform individuals into active participants in shaping their own lives and contributing to society. Vivekananda consistently encouraged women to develop inner courage and self-confidence. He urged women to reject dependence on male protection, stating that true empowerment must come from within (9Vivekananda, 1955–1997). His emphasis on fearlessness aligned with feminist critiques of patriarchy that highlight emotional and psychological dimensions of oppression (17hooks, 1984).

Women as Leaders and Nation-Builders

When women participate in leadership, whether it is in education, politics, social reform, or community initiatives, they bring diverse perspectives that strengthen decision-making and promote social justice. Their leadership challenges patriarchal structures, expands opportunities for future generations, and ensures that progress is more equitable and sustainable. As nation-builders, women contribute not only through formal positions of power but also through everyday acts of care, organization, and innovation that hold communities together. Recognizing women as leaders is, therefore, essential for fostering a balanced, progressive, and truly democratic society.

Vivekananda believed that nations rise or fall depending on the status of women (8Nanda, 2003). He viewed women not as dependents but as essential contributors to social, cultural, and national development. His mentorship of Sister Nivedita demonstrated his commitment to developing women's leadership (14Spivak, 1997). Thus, Vivekananda envisioned a society where women actively shaped political, social, and spiritual life.

Vivekananda's Reform Initiatives and Practical Engagement

Role in Women's Education Movements

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Swami Vivekananda played a pioneering role in promoting women's education by inspiring institutions that integrated intellectual growth, vocational skills, and spiritual training. His influence contributed to the establishment of girls' schools, women's training centers, and educational programs led by female instructors—an approach that challenged the male-dominated structures of the time (7Bhattacharya, 2013). Through the Ramakrishna Mission and his mentorship of Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda emphasized the importance of building women's institutions that blended modern scientific knowledge with India's cultural and spiritual heritage (4Sarkar, 2002). This vision reflected his belief that true education should foster self-confidence, economic independence, and moral strength, enabling women to participate fully in societal development. By encouraging female-led educational initiatives, Vivekananda contributed to redefining women's roles not only as learners but also as teachers, leaders, and agents of reform. Support for Women's Leadership

Vivekananda's support for women's leadership represented a radical shift in the reform landscape of colonial India. His guidance of Sister Nivedita—whom he encouraged to pursue independent work in education, social service, and nationalist awakening—demonstrated his conviction that women should lead their own movements rather than simply assisting male reformers (14Spivak, 1997). This approach departed significantly from the paternalistic tendencies common among many nineteenth-century male reformers, who often sought to "protect" women rather than empower them. In contrast, Vivekananda's ideology aligned with emerging feminist principles emphasizing autonomy, self-expression, and institutional leadership (17hooks, 1984). By positioning women as central to national regeneration, he advanced a model of reform that recognized women's potential as intellectual and social leaders capable of shaping India's future.

Rejecting Patriarchal Constraints

A significant aspect of Vivekananda's reformist thinking was his outspoken rejection of oppressive social customs that restricted women's freedom. He consistently criticized practices such as early marriage, female seclusion, and moral surveillance, arguing that these norms undermined women's dignity and hindered their personal development (9Vivekananda, 1955– 1997). Instead, he advocated for women's right to make autonomous choices regarding education, marriage, career, and spiritual life. His writings and speeches repeatedly emphasized that social progress could only be achieved when women were liberated from

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restrictive patriarchal structures and allowed to cultivate their abilities freely. By challenging both colonial stereotypes and indigenous patriarchal norms, Vivekananda articulated a reformist vision that positioned women's freedom as fundamental to national advancement and ethical progress.

Sociological Analysis: Rethinking Gender and History

Challenging Colonial Narratives

Swami Vivekananda's reflections on women played a crucial role in countering colonial constructions that portrayed Indian women as inherently weak, passive, and oppressed. British colonial discourse often emphasized the "civilizing mission," claiming that Indian culture was uniquely degrading to women and therefore required Western intervention (6Burton, 1998).

Vivekananda directly challenged these narratives by highlighting women's intellectual abilities, moral courage, and spiritual capacities, arguing that Indian civilization had historically produced strong and capable women (8Nanda, 2003). His reinterpretation restored women's agency and disrupted the colonial tendency to view them solely through the lens of victimhood. By reclaiming the historical strength and autonomy of Indian women, Vivekananda undermined imperial claims of cultural superiority and asserted an indigenous framework for understanding gender.

Critiquing Indian Patriarchy

While opposing colonial misrepresentations, Vivekananda was equally critical of patriarchal norms within Indian society. He condemned gender inequalities rooted in caste hierarchy, religious orthodoxy, and restrictive customs that curtailed women's mobility and autonomy (10Chakravarti, 1993). His insistence on strength—both physical and moral—represented a sharp departure from dominant reformist ideologies that idealized women's purity, gentleness, and domesticity, particularly within upper-caste Hindu households (1Chatterjee, 1989). By rejecting this idealized "bhadramahila" model of femininity, Vivekananda sought to redefine womanhood beyond domestic confinement and moral regulation. His critique exposed the limits of nineteenth-century reform movements, which often reinforced patriarchal control in the guise of protection. Thus, Vivekananda's thought can be seen as a sociological intervention that located women's subordination within broader structures of power and social control.

Contributions to Feminist Thought

Although Vivekananda did not explicitly identify with feminist movements, his ideas intersect with several principles of liberal feminist theory, particularly those related to equality, education, and individual autonomy. His repeated emphasis on women's right to knowledge, self-reliance, and professional participation resonates with feminist demands for dismantling gender-based barriers (17hooks, 1984). Moreover, his insistence on recognizing women's agency and rejecting social practices that constrained their potential aligns with contemporary analyses of gender inequality (8Nanda, 2003). Consequently, Vivekananda's philosophy can be understood as contributing to early feminist discourse in India by promoting a vision of gender justice rooted in empowerment rather than protection. His ideas, when viewed sociologically, reveal a framework that advocates structural change alongside personal transformation, anticipating many themes later articulated in feminist scholarship.

Contemporary Relevance

Women's Education and SDGs

Vivekananda's advocacy for accessible, holistic, and value-based education continues to hold significant relevance in contemporary global development debates. Vivekananda's call for women to receive the same intellectual, vocational, and ethical education as men closely reflects the aims of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 on ensuring quality education and SDG 5 on advancing gender equality. Both goals emphasize the need for inclusive educational systems that bridge gender gaps, enhance women's capabilities, and remove structural barriers to learning (18UNESCO, 2020). Vivekananda's perspective anticipates these international frameworks by underscoring the transformative potential of education in reshaping gender relations and advancing national progress. His philosophy thus provides an early normative foundation for modern policy initiatives focused on equitable learning opportunities.

Digital Divide and Modern Inequalities

In the current era of technological transformation, Vivekananda's emphasis on self-reliance and empowerment acquires renewed relevance, especially in understanding the digital divide affecting women in India. Despite advancements in digital infrastructure, significant gender gaps persist in access to technology, digital literacy, and participation in

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technologically driven labor markets (2Basu, 2016). These disparities reflect deeper socio-economic inequalities that limit women's educational and employment prospects. Vivekananda's call for practical knowledge, independent thinking, and skill development aligns closely with contemporary efforts to promote digital inclusion and enhance women's technological capabilities. His educational principles thus offer an important lens through which to analyze and respond to modern forms of exclusion shaped by digital and economic inequalities.

Women's Leadership in Public Life

The growing global demand for women's leadership across political institutions, corporate spaces, and civil society resonates directly with Vivekananda's belief that national advancement is inseparable from women's active participation in public life. His insistence that women must not only be educated but also encouraged to lead independently challenges persistent gender biases that restrict women's representation in decision-making roles (7Bhattacharya, 2013). Today, as debates on gender quotas, workplace equity, and inclusive governance intensify, Vivekananda's vision underscores the importance of nurturing women leaders who can contribute to social transformation. His ideas continue to inspire contemporary feminist and developmental discourses advocating for structural reforms that elevate women's voices in the public sphere.

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda emerges as a transformative figure in the history of gender discourse in colonial India. By grounding equality in spiritual philosophy, advocating education, encouraging fearlessness, and supporting leadership, he presented an empowering and progressive vision that challenged both colonial paternalism and Indian patriarchy. His ideas continue to hold significant relevance for contemporary debates on gender justice, inclusive education, and women's empowerment.

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Between Bhadralok Heritage and Viral Masculinity: From Netflix's 'Adolescence' To Bengali Masculinities, and Algorithmic Aesthetics

Ms. Sayantani Ghosh¹

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, CDOE, Sikkim Manipal University, Gangtok, Sikkim, India.

Abstract: In the algorithmically curated spaces of the twenty-first century, masculinities are increasingly performed, circulated, and consumed as digital aesthetics. Among the most viral typologies of contemporary manhood are “hyper-alpha” and “sigma” masculinities—an archetype valorising stoicism, detachment, dominance, and self-reliance while claiming resistance to feminism and “weaker” masculinities. These scripts thrive across YouTube podcasts, Instagram reels, and meme cultures, often mediated by fitness influencers and hustle ideologues. By locating Bengali masculinities at the intersection of gender, media, identity, and digital economies, the paper highlights how adolescent subjectivities are co-produced by global algorithmic cultures and local vernacular traditions. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates in gender theory, feminist studies, and cultural sociology on how masculinity is being reconfigured under neoliberal digital capitalism.

Methodologically, this study combines qualitative discourse analysis of Netflix's *Adolescence* with meme ethnography and social media text analysis, treating both streaming content and its online fragments (memes, hashtags, reels, GIFs) as cultural texts. In line with digital humanities approaches, these are read as datafied cultural artifacts¹⁵ whose aesthetics and meanings are shaped by algorithms, remix practices, and audience engagement. Historically, Bengali masculinity was anchored in the *bhadralok* ideal i.e. an educated, refined, and moral middle-class identity that emphasized intellectual capital over muscularity (Chatterjee, 2007; Banerjee, 2018). Today, however, this legacy coexists with hypermasculine aesthetics imported through algorithmically amplified global media.

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Building on Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and Butler's (2015) concept of gender performativity as fundamental theories, the chapter argues that alpha/sigma masculinities represent "*platformed masculinities*": branded, replicable, and optimized for digital attention economies. The adolescent audience becomes a crucial site of inquiry. The chapter argues that Bengali masculinity in the digital age is marked by a paradox: it aspires toward the hyper-visibility and aesthetic capital of global sigma/alpha scripts yet remains haunted by the intellectual-cultural weight of *bhadralok* heritage. This dual negotiation further highlights the paradox of viral masculinity-endlessly replicated and consumed. Ultimately, by juxtaposing the drama '*Adolescence*' with the socio-cultural realities of Bengali masculinity, this study illuminates how digital media narratives resonate across contexts while simultaneously highlighting the distinct pressures, performances, and negotiations of masculinity within urban Bengal.

Keywords: *Bengali masculinity, Adolescence, Bhadralok, Sigma/alpha male, Gender and Media, Digital Culture, Algorithmic aesthetics*

INTRODUCTION

Bengali masculinity has been historically defined through the figure of '*the bhadralok*' i.e. the educated, middle-class, and morally refined man, which has long stood as a counterpoint to muscular nationalism. *The bhadralok* ideal privileged intellectual capital, civility, and cultural accomplishment over physical aggression or material success. Rooted in colonial modernity, it signified both cultural superiority and social restraint, emerging as a distinctive model of gendered respectability in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Bengal (Chatterjee, 2007; Banerjee, 2018). However, the onset of neoliberal globalization, the digital economy, and algorithmically driven media cultures has begun to transform this legacy. The Bengali man is now positioned at an intersection- between the inherited moral-aesthetic ethos of the bhadralok and the seductive hyper-visibility of globalized "viral masculinity."²¹"

In the twenty-first century, masculinity has increasingly become a mediated, aestheticized, and algorithmically curated phenomenon. The contemporary structure of masculinity has continually been reshaped by shifting social, economic, and technological conditions. The historical foundations of modern masculinity were forged in the crucible of industrial capitalism, colonial modernity, and nation-building; contexts

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that equated manhood with discipline, rationality, and productivity (Connell, 2005). While these models were once reproduced through institutions such as the state, family, and education, the contemporary phase of neoliberal digital capitalism has transformed the terrain of gender identity.

To understand how these global masculine templates intersect with Bengali subjectivities, it is essential to trace the colonial genealogy of masculinity formation in Bengal. The nineteenth-century British Raj constructed a racialized hierarchy of gender in which the colonizer's self-image as the "*manly Englishman*" was defined in opposition to the "*effeminate Bengali*" (Sinha, 1995). Mrinalini Sinha's influential analysis in *Colonial Masculinity* (1995) reveals how colonial discourse not only feminized the colonized male but also used this trope to legitimize imperial domination. Effeminacy became both a moral and political category: it justified colonial rule as a "*civilizing mission*" aimed at producing disciplined, rational, and masculine subjects. This colonial binary profoundly shaped the formation of modern Indian and Bengali masculinities.

Therefore, what once circulated through traditional cultural institutions such as the family, school, or nation is now co-produced within the attention economies of digital media. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Netflix are no longer limited to reflect masculine ideals but also generate and drive their very construction. The algorithmic mediation of masculinity enables specific forms of visibility, virality, and aspiration, privileging hyper-stylized performances of dominance, stoicism, and self-reliance. Within this landscape, archetypes such as the "*alpha male*" and "*sigma male*" have emerged as dominant narrative models, promoting a neoliberal ethic of competitiveness, control, and emotional detachment. These viral masculinities are not only consumed globally but are also localized and re-signified through regional and cultural contexts, including the Bengali milieu (Ging, 2019; Luger, 2024).

Within this global terrain, "*digital masculinities*" emerge as networked cultural phenomena—spread through YouTube podcasts, Instagram reels, and fitness vlogs that enable and glamorize stoicism, dominance, and entrepreneurial self-making (Ging, 2019; Luger, 2024). These have resulted into construction of archetypes, such as, the "*alpha*" and "*sigma*" male: contemporary icons of autonomy and resistance to perceived feminization. These figures inhabit what Connell (2005) describes as '*hegemonic masculinity*' but recalibrated for an attention economy²⁰, where identity and influence are bound to metrics of followers, likes, and algorithmic reach. Thus, masculinity itself becomes datafied, measured,

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and branded. The concept of “platformed masculinity” captures this transformation. It refers to a digitally mediated form of manhood that is produced, circulated, and consumed within platform logics- those computational systems that reward repetition, virality, and engagement (Markelj, 2024). Unlike earlier ideals rooted in physical strength or moral character, platformed masculinities are designed for performative consumption. They thrive on aesthetics (visual, emotional, and affective) thereby, transforming identity into content. As Chun (2016) argues, digital culture sustains itself through habitual visibility: updating to remain the same. The “alpha” and “sigma” archetypes, endlessly remixed and shared, epitomize this habit of repetition that fuels contemporary gender discourse.

In contrast, Bengali masculinity historically evolved through a very different trajectory. The colonial encounter in nineteenth-century Bengal produced a distinctive masculine ideal in the figure of the ‘bhadralok’: an educated, cultured, and morally refined middle-class man who embodied intellect over muscularity (Chatterjee, 2007; Banerjee, 2018). This ideal signified the moral and cultural superiority of the Bengali elite, grounded in intellectual capital, emotional restraint, and domestic virtue. The bhadralok model became the moral template of modern Bengali identity, contrasting sharply with both the colonial stereotype of effeminacy and the emergent nationalist emphasis on martial Vigor. Yet, in the contemporary era of algorithmic globalization, this intellectual and aesthetic masculinity now confronts new performative demands.

Herein, lies the central paradox that animates this paper: Bengali masculinity today oscillates between the inherited refinement of the bhadralok and the aggressive virality of global “alpha/sigma” scripts. The former privileges intellect and restraint; the latter thrives on visibility, competitiveness, and affective display. Together, they produce a hybrid form of digital-bhadralok masculinity, i.e., intellectually aware yet algorithmically performative, localized yet global in aspiration. This duality reveals how global digital cultures are not merely imported but actively negotiated within local moral economies and cultural histories. This paper situates Bengali masculinities within the circuits of digital capitalism, asking how algorithmic infrastructures reshape local gender imaginaries. To examine this negotiation, the paper delves into Netflix’s *‘Adolescence’*: a globally distributed drama exploring the coming-of-age of young men navigating desire, ambition, and social validation. Though produced within a Western pop-cultural milieu, *Adolescence* provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding how masculinities are mediated through streaming platforms. Its narrative, saturated with tropes

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of alienation, peer competition, and digital self-fashioning resonates with the emotional landscapes of contemporary youth, including those in urban Bengal. The series becomes significant not as a literal representation of Bengali masculinity but as a cultural template through which algorithmic masculinity travels, is localized, and is re-signified.

By combining discourse analysis of Adolescence with digital ethnography of its online afterlives (memes, reels, GIFs, Bengali series, etc) this study treats both streaming content and its fragments as datafied cultural artifacts¹⁵ (Chun, 2016). This approach highlights how global media narratives intersect with local experiences of class, gender, and aspiration, revealing how Bengali masculinities are now being reconfigured through algorithmic aesthetics¹⁸. This study intends to argue that the Bengali male subject, once defined by intellectual modesty and moral restraint, is increasingly drawn into the spectacle of global virality. Within this shift, masculinity becomes both a product and performance of platform economies measured not by virtue or intellect but by engagement metrics and digital resonance. The Bengali bhadralok thus stands at a cultural crossroads: navigating between heritage and hypervisibility, intellect and influence, restraint and algorithmic excess.

Review Of Literature

Masculinity has long been a central analytic category within gender studies and sociology, offering insight into how power, embodiment, and social norms interact to produce gendered hierarchies. The evolution of this discourse from industrial modernity to digital capitalism reflects both continuity and transformation in the ways masculinities are imagined and lived. R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity remains foundational for understanding how certain forms of manhood become culturally dominant while subordinating others. Connell conceptualizes masculinity as relational and hierarchical, structured around power and complicity. Hegemonic masculinity, she argues, embodies an ideal that legitimizes patriarchy by linking authority, heterosexuality, and moral dominance. Although hegemonic masculinity is historically contingent, it continually adapts to socio-economic change. In late modernity, this adaptation has occurred within neoliberalism's emphasis on autonomy and productivity, producing new configurations of competitive, individualized manhood (Waling, 2019). Judith Butler's (2015) framework of gender performativity further deepens this understanding by viewing gender not as an essence but as a reiterated performance sustained through social norms and repetition. For Butler, performativity is not merely theatrical but ontological: subjects come into being through repeated acts of

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gendered expression within normative regimes. Applied to digital cultures, this lens highlights how masculinity today is enacted through algorithmically mediated gestures- likes, posts, reels, and visual self-curation. Digital platforms not only stage gender performance but also script it through their architectures of visibility and engagement. The Bengali context adds an additional layer, where historical models of moral and intellectual masculinity intersect with globalized digital scripts of affective and aesthetic performance.

Contemporary studies have identified the emergence of “platformed” or “algorithmic” masculinities: forms of gender performance mediated by computational infrastructures and attention economies. Ging (2019) traces how communities within the “manosphere” (including “alpha,” “beta,” and “incel” identities) mobilize networked platforms to circulate narratives of male entitlement, self-improvement, and resistance to feminism. These digital subcultures thrive on emotional intensity and virality, converting affect into attention. Further, Luger (2024) expands on this by theorizing algorithmic aesthetics as a mode of visual and affective representation shaped by platform metrics. In his study of online fitness cultures, Luger demonstrates that the male body becomes both spectacle and commodity, optimized for algorithmic visibility. Similarly, Markelj (2024) describes the “masculinity economy” of social media, where virality operates as a new form of symbolic capital. Here, masculine authority is less about institutional power and more about the accumulation of digital visibility.

Interestingly, Verma and Khurana (2023) introduce the idea of “vulnerable masculinities,” showing how even discourses of mental health and emotional openness among male influencers are strategically packaged within the aesthetics of self-control and productivity. Thus, contemporary digital masculinity oscillates between vulnerability and virality- an ambivalence central to this paper’s argument about Bengali male subjectivity in the algorithmic age. Following Chun’s (2016) argument that “updating to remain the same” is the logic of digital culture, masculine scripts are endlessly recycled, aestheticized, and normalized through repetition. The “alpha” and “sigma” figures are not new archetypes but computationally amplified reassemblies of older patriarchal scripts. The bhadralok ideal prioritized intellect, restraint, and moral superiority as counterpoints to both colonial effeminacy and the aggressive militarism of Western masculinity. As Banerjee (2018) notes, this ideal also re-inscribed patriarchal control over women, casting female sexuality and domestic virtue as the moral anchors of male respectability.

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Retracing the colonial impact, Sinha's (1995) analysis helps reveal that the bhadralok was not merely an indigenous invention but a product of colonial negotiation: a hybrid masculinity²³ formed within the dialectic of domination and resistance. This intellectual-moral model became the defining feature of Bengali modernity and persisted as a cultural template throughout the twentieth century, rendered hyper-visible in the networked age. In the neoliberal and digital age, however, this bhadralok masculinity faces a new kind of challenge. As Srivastava (2017) argues, post-liberalization India has witnessed a shift toward consumerist and performative masculinities, characterized by bodily display, competitiveness, and media visibility. Within this context, Bengali masculinity appears as a site of tension: while rooted in intellectual heritage, it is increasingly drawn toward algorithmic modes of self-fashioning that valorize virality over virtue.

Thus, the colonial construction of effeminacy and the bhadralok's moral reformulation continue to reverberate within the digital present. The Bengali man must now perform himself within attention economies that reward engagement, aesthetics, and spectacle.

Building on these trajectories, this paper conceptualizes platformed masculinity¹⁶ as a contemporary rearticulation of hegemonic masculinity within algorithmic media environments. Platformed masculinity draws from Connell's (2005) and Butler's (2015) insights to describe a digitally mediated gender formation. This synthesis also resonates with Sinha's (1995) historical insight: just as colonial power once constructed masculinity through representational hierarchies, platform power now constructs it through algorithmic hierarchies. The "manly Englishman" was the imperial ideal of order and control; the "alpha/sigma" male of today is the neoliberal ideal of autonomy and dominance. Both rely on visibility; whether in colonial discourse or on digital platforms to consolidate authority. For Bengali men, this produces a distinctive paradox. They remain heirs to the bhadralok ethos of intellectual modesty yet participate in globalized digital spaces that reward self-promotion, bodily display, and affective aggression.

From Sinha's (1995) colonial analysis to Connell's (2005) structural theory and Butler's (2015) performative model, the concept has evolved to account for shifting terrains of power. The advent of digital capitalism adds a new layer to this genealogy: algorithms now function as the mediators of gender performance, producing a new hierarchy of visibility. Bengali masculinity provides a distinctive vantage point for this inquiry-shaped by colonial effeminization, reconstituted through bhadralok moralism, and now refracted through digital virality, it exemplifies the

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historical layering of masculine discourse. Integrating feminist, postcolonial, and digital cultural perspectives, this study situates “platformed masculinity” as a critical framework for understanding how gender, technology, and cultural memory intersect in the age of algorithmic mediation.

Discussion

1. From Bhadralok Ethos to Platformed Masculinity

The bhadralok ethos has historically defined Bengali manhood through moral refinement, intellectual labour, and self-restraint (Chatterjee, 2007; Banerjee, 2018). This colonial legacy, grounded in Mrinalini Sinha’s (1995) opposition between the “manly Englishman” and the “effeminate Bengali,” positioned the educated Bengali male as morally superior but physically subdued. His power lay in intellect, not aggression; his virtue in modesty, not dominance.

Netflix’s *Adolescence* (2025) dramatizes a parallel global crisis of masculine becoming: its protagonist is intelligent, sensitive, soft-spoken, and reflexive traits that mirror the bhadralok disposition. Yet, through social media platforms depicted in the show, his worth is continuously measured through visibility, popularity, and digital desirability. In Bengali digital spaces, this same shift is visible. The bhadralok man who once derived validation from intellect now adapts his identity to the aesthetic rules of virality. *Adolescence* shows how young men learn that being “a good man” no longer brings cultural capital unless it is performed visually captured through reels, curated profiles, gym-filtered aesthetics, or motivational masculinity. Thus, the series illustrates a transition from moral bhadralok masculinity to platformed masculinity¹⁶ i.e. a masculinity that must be seen to exist. Offline dignity becomes less valuable than online visibility. This aligns directly with Connell’s (2005) argument that hegemonic masculinities transform to fit shifting power structures; in the digital age, that structure is algorithmic circulation.

In the twenty-first century, the bhadralok ideal collides with algorithmic cultures that reward performance, visibility, and affect. Masculinity, once performed through moral discipline, is now enacted through digital metrics of attention (followers, likes, and engagement). This transition marks the emergence of what Connell (2005) might call a platformed hegemonic masculinity- hegemonic not by social status but by algorithmic reach. For the modern Bengali man, the bhadralok’s restraint becomes an obstacle to virality. As a result, cultural capital is repackaged as aesthetic capital: intellect is stylized through Instagram captions, philosophical references, or the visual grammar of “intellectual cool.” This shift from

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moral masculinity to marketable masculinity represents the neoliberal reconfiguration of the bhadralok subject into a performative, datafied persona optimized for visibility.

2. *When Algorithms Teach to ‘Be Men’: The Bengali Masculinity and the Algorithmic Aesthetics of ‘Adolescence’*

Adolescence is a British television psychological crime drama created by Jack Thorne and Stephen Graham and directed by Philip Barantini. It centers on a 13-year-old schoolboy, Jamie Miller (Owen Cooper), who is arrested after the murder of a girl. The series traces Jamie’s transformation from an awkward, emotionally withdrawn teenager into a figure haunted by both guilt and the gaze of media spectatorship. The murder investigation unfolds not only through the lens of crime but through the mediated process of moral learning: Jamie’s understanding of masculinity, responsibility, and violence is continually shaped by what he consumes online. Jamie’s story literalizes the argument that algorithms teach masculinity.

“Alpha” and “sigma” masculinities are central motifs in *Adolescence*. The protagonist is repeatedly confronted by hypermasculine social media influencers whose aesthetics, men with gym-built bodies, stoic silence, wealth display who dominate his feed. These influencers are portrayed as algorithmically privileged: their videos autoplay, their reels auto-suggest, and their popularity becomes aspirational. This dramatizes what Chun (2016) calls ‘habitual new media’ arguing that algorithms don’t just reflect masculinities; they teach them through repetition. *Adolescence* is one of the first mainstream dramas to show how teenage boys learn masculinity not from fathers, teachers, or peers but from platforms.

For Bengali adolescents, this global template is already visible. YouTube shorts and Bengali meme pages remix “sigma rules” with local humour, Rabindra sangeet captions, and gym-culture Bengali slang. The show helps explain why this aesthetics feel compulsory: algorithms make sigma/alpha masculinity appear natural, inevitable, and universally desirable. Thus, masculinity becomes a viral aesthetic- reproducible, branded, endlessly consumable. *Adolescence* visualizes this process cinematically; Bengali boys live it daily through reels, shorts, and meme culture.

Adolescence demonstrates how masculinity is not simply felt or embodied, rather, it is algorithmically taught. The drama captures the pedagogy of the algorithm; young men learn how to be “masculine” through the content that platforms push toward them. Masculinity becomes visual, branded, and optimized for repetition. Similar shifts can

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be traced within the Bengali digital culture shows- Platforms like Hoichoi, Addatimes, and Zee5 have begun privileging hyper visible, emotionally controlled male protagonists mirroring global sigma/alpha architectures: Web series such as Byomkesh, Feluda Pherot, Mandaar, Mahabharat Murders represent male protagonists through stylized visuals- monochrome palettes, slow-motion shots, cigarette smoke close-ups, clenched jaws, random slangs and calculated silence. Even characters historically rooted in intellectual bhadralok sensibilities, such as Byomkesh or Feluda, are remade into “visual masculinity”²². On Bengali reels and meme pages, these scenes are remixed with English sigma captions, Bengali fonts, or Tagore’s melancholic poetry, creating a hybrid aesthetic where global sigma masculinity finds local emotional texture.

Kolkata-based gym influencers, lifestyle vloggers, and motivational accounts further reinforce this trend by posting black T-shirt gym shots, minimalist stoic captions, and “silent grind” videos that algorithmically outperform softer, conversational masculinity. Even parody, such as memes turning Uttam Kumar or Anirban Bhattacharya into “original sigma males” keeps the aesthetic in circulation, proving Butler’s (2015) argument, that repetition sustains gender norms. Seen together, Adolescence offers a cinematic metaphor for this cultural shift: masculinity becomes a visual product, engineered for virality, where emotional depth is acceptable only when transformed into aesthetic sadness or stylish resilience. In both global and Bengali contexts, the algorithm rewards stoicism, visibility, physical control, and spectacle, making viral masculinity²¹ not simply a cultural preference, but a platform-driven logic of survival. Edits of Byomkesh, Feluda, or even Uttam Kumar are recast as early “sigma males” retrofitted into a viral template. Reels remix the protagonist of Adolescence with Bengali indie music (Anupam Roy, Iman Chakraborty) to produce an aesthetic of stylish sadness. Even parody reinforces the form. Butler (2015) argued repetition, even humorous keeps a gender script alive. Thus, meme culture becomes a vehicle of masculine pedagogy.

3. Adolescence, Desire, and the Global Script of Becoming

Adolescence frames its male protagonist as emotionally conflicted, desiring connection but pressured to appear detached, successful, and invulnerable. This represents what Waling (2019) calls reflexive masculinity¹⁹, where young men are hyper-aware that gender is a performance yet feel compelled to perform it anyway. The adolescent crisis in the show resonates strongly in Bengali contexts because traditional Bengali masculinity valued emotional depth, like, Tagore’s

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melancholy, Ray's introspective men, Satyajit Ray's Apu or Pratidwandi's Siddhartha. But in the digital age, emotional openness can appear "weak" unless stylized into motivational aesthetics. In Bengali Instagram and TikTok spaces, this contradiction appears in reels where men quote Tagore or Gulzar with moody visuals- performing sensitivity as aesthetic, not vulnerability. *Adolescence* shows exactly this: hurt is filtered, desire is curated, sadness is made photogenic.

In both *Adolescence* and the Bengali context, desire is not repressed; it is reformatted. The male subject learns that emotion, to be legible, must be mediated through stylized restraint, photographic sadness, or motivational posturing. Waling's (2019) notion of *reflexive masculinity* thus takes on a digital dimension: men are aware that they are performing, yet their only mode of authenticity is performance itself. The result is a recursive loop where the awareness of artifice becomes the very marker of realness. In *Adolescence*, desire functions not merely as an effect but as a site of surveillance. Jamie Miller's yearning for intimacy his awkward attachments and fragile need for recognition is continually mediated through screens and quantified by the metrics of digital attention. Every post, comment, and message becomes simultaneously confession and performance, transforming emotion into data. The algorithm learns Jamie's affective rhythms more intimately than any human relationship, rewarding stoicism while amplifying aggression. As Chun (2016) observes, digital systems cultivate "habitual new media" practices in which repetition becomes pedagogy. Through this logic, *Adolescence* visualizes how masculinity is algorithmically taught; its emotional codes automated through recursive visual cues and platform reinforcement. This convergence can be traced in Connell's (2005) 'digitally reconstituted hegemonic masculinity', i.e. hegemonic not through physical dominance or institutional power, but through algorithmic reach. The global script of masculine becoming now unfolds within an affective economy where visibility equals value. Whether through Jamie's controlled silence or the Bengali influencer's melancholic reels, masculinity is learned as an aesthetic pedagogy: to desire is to perform, to feel is to filter, and to survive is to remain visible.

Consequently, the politics of desire in the age of algorithms reveal masculinity as both spectacle and survival strategy. The performance of restraint becomes the price of recognition. And as these global scripts are vernacularized through Bengali meme culture and digital aesthetics, they generate hybrid masculinities that are at once global and local, expressive yet disciplined, vulnerable yet performative.

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4. *The Afterlife of the Bhadralok: Masculine Respectability in the Age of Platforms*

As Chatterjee (2007) and Banerjee (2018) note, the bhadralok man was not simply a class marker but a moral category, embodying cultural sophistication as resistance to colonial stereotypes of effeminacy. This masculinity privileged intellect over physicality, moderation over aggression, and civility over spectacle. Rooted in nineteenth-century Bengal's reformist and nationalist movements, the bhadralok ideal positioned the educated male as custodian of both reason and virtue, a figure through whom Bengali identity sought respectability under colonial gaze (Sinha, 1995).

The neoliberal restructuring of identity through media and markets has produced what Srivastava (2017) describes as “consumerist masculinities” where visibility, style, and self-promotion replace restraint and introspection as masculine virtues. The “beta” or “sigma” scripts circulating online present seductive alternatives of masculinity coded as stoic, entrepreneurial, and visually assertive. On social media, this generational negotiation is acutely visible. What was once moral capital becomes aesthetic capital (Markelj, 2024). Young Bengali men curate versions of themselves that retain the bhadralok’s intellectual tone but package it for digital virality. Intellect becomes a brand, restraint becomes style, and introspection becomes content. Platforms such as Instagram and Hoichoi thus produce a hybrid masculine²³ figure- educated yet performative, emotionally literate yet algorithmically optimized.

This shift represents what Connell (2005) might call a “rearticulation of hegemony,” where older forms of masculine respectability adapt to survive within new systems of value. The younger generation inherits the bhadralok ethos but reinterprets it through visual media and market logic. In this sense, the bhadralok no longer disappears but mutates: his moral quietude becomes digital poise, his intellect becomes aestheticized, and his restraint becomes strategic self-branding. The bhadralok ideal emphasized inner virtue, while platform masculinity demands external visibility. The younger Bengali man thus inhabits a paradox: he must appear effortless while constantly performing effort. This dual inheritance of moral depth and aesthetic virality reveals the ongoing tension between cultural heritage and algorithmic modernity. It suggests that Bengali masculinity today is not a linear evolution but a palimpsest, layered with the residues of colonial modernity, postcolonial aspiration, and digital selfhood.

Conclusion

The politics of desire in the age of algorithms reveal masculinity as both spectacle and survival strategy. The performance of restraint becomes the price of recognition. And as these global scripts are indigenized, translated, and memified, they produce new hybrid masculinities that are culturally specific yet globally intelligible, emotionally expressive yet affectively contained. This study has examined how Adolescence and Bengali digital cultures reveal a shared global grammar of masculinity—one written, repeated, and reinforced by algorithmic systems. By tracing the journey from Jamie Miller’s mediated coming-of-age to the Bengali bhadralok’s reconfiguration under digital capitalism, it demonstrates that masculinity today is less a social inheritance than a platformed performance.

The bhadralok ideal, with its emphasis on intellect and restraint, lingers as an ethical echo within these viral masculinities. Parody, nostalgia, and irony open small apertures for reflexivity, moments where the performance reveals its constructedness. These fissures gesture toward what might be called a post-algorithmic masculinity: a form of gender consciousness aware of its mediation and capable of resisting it. Ultimately, the convergence of Adolescence’s digital violence and Bengal’s meme-born masculinities underscores a critical truth: in the age of algorithms, masculinity is not merely learned, rather, it is coded, circulated, and constantly performed. Understanding its mechanics is therefore essential to any feminist and cultural sociology that seeks to imagine gender beyond the metrics of virality.

End Notes:

1. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). Sinha’s work is foundational in theorizing how colonial discourse constructed gendered hierarchies that continue to shape postcolonial masculinities.
2. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Chatterjee’s analysis of the bhadralok class provides the historical grounding for understanding Bengali masculinity as a moral and intellectual formation.
3. R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity underpins the analysis of shifting masculine ideals in both colonial and digital contexts.

4. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). Butler's theory of performativity is extended here to digital spaces, where gender is enacted through algorithmically mediated repetition.
5. Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 638–657. Ging's work is crucial for understanding the rise of digital subcultures that valorize hypermasculinity and resist feminist critique.
6. Luka Markelj, "Platformed Masculinities: Algorithmic Aesthetics and the Attention Economy," *Digital Culture & Society* 10, no. 1 (2024): 45–67. Markelj's concept of "platformed masculinity" is central to this paper's argument about the datafication of gender.
7. Anirudh Sridhar, "Sigma Male: The Meme, the Myth, the Market," *The Swaddle*, March 2024. This article provides a popular cultural lens on the sigma male archetype and its circulation in South Asian digital spaces.
8. Sanjay Srivastava, *Masculinity, Consumerism and the Post-National Indian City* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2017). Srivastava's work contextualizes the shift from moral to consumerist masculinities in post-liberalization India.
9. Anirban Banerjee, "The Bhadralok and the Body: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Bengali Middle Class," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2018): 345–362. Banerjee's analysis of the bhadralok's embodied politics informs the paper's reading of Bengali masculinity.
10. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016). Chun's concept of "habitual new media" is used to theorize how algorithmic repetition shapes gender norms.
11. Jack Thorne and Stephen Graham, *Adolescence*, dir. Philip Barantini, Netflix, 2025. The series is analyzed as a cultural text that dramatizes the algorithmic pedagogy of masculinity.
12. Steven Roberts and James Waling, "Reflexive Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Future Directions," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 1 (2019): 114–133. Waling's notion of reflexive masculinity is applied to the aestheticization of vulnerability in digital spaces.
13. See also: Raka Ray, "Masculinity, Higher Education, and the Crisis of the Indian Male," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 14 (2016). Ray's insights into the crisis of masculinity in Indian higher education resonate with the paper's focus on adolescent subjectivities.

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14. For a discussion of Bengali meme culture and digital remix practices, see: Sayan Bhattacharya, “Memes, Masculinity, and the Bengali Internet,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 58, no. 3 (2023): 22–26.
15. The term “*datafied cultural artifact*” is used here to describe how media fragments (memes, reels, GIFs) function as both aesthetic and analytical units within digital humanities research.
16. The term ‘*Platformed masculinity*’ refers to digitally mediated masculinity produced and circulated within platform economies. It is optimized for visibility, repetition, and engagement, privileging aesthetics of stoicism, dominance, and self-reliance (Markelj, 2024).
17. “*Sigma/Alpha male*” refers to Popular digital archetypes valorizing autonomy, emotional detachment, dominance, and resistance to feminization. These figures are central to influence cultures and meme circuits (Ging, 2019; Sridhar, 2024).
18. ‘*Algorithmic aesthetic*’: Visual and affective styles shaped by platform algorithms that prioritize engagement and virality. These aesthetics influence how gender is performed and consumed, often privileging stylized stoicism and curated emotional restraint (Luger, 2024).
19. ‘*Reflexive masculinity*’: A term from Waling (2019) describing masculinity performed with self-awareness. In digital cultures, this reflexivity is stylized vulnerability becomes aestheticized rather than subversive.
20. ‘*Attention economy*’: A digital economic model where visibility, engagement, and virality are the primary currencies. Masculinity within this economy is performed for metrics (likes, shares, and followers) rather than moral or intellectual validation (Markelj, 2024).
21. ‘*Viral masculinity*’: A mode of masculinity that thrives on digital replication and aesthetic appeal. It is not defined by institutional power but by its ability to circulate widely and resonate emotionally across platforms (Ging, 2019).
22. ‘*Visual masculinity*’: A stylized representation of manhood through curated imagery, gym bodies, stoic expressions, monochrome palettes- used in digital media to signify strength, control, and desirability (Luger, 2024).
23. ‘*Hybrid masculinity*’: A fusion of global and local masculine scripts. In this paper, it refers to the Bengali male subject negotiating between bhadralok heritage and global sigma/alpha aesthetics, producing a culturally layered masculine identity (Banerjee, 2018; Srivastava, 2017).

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Beyond the Crossroads: A Comparative Critique of Eurocentric Intersectionality in the Global South via Dalit Feminism and Afro-Brazilian 'Amefricanidade' Theory

Aravind R S¹

3rd Year, B.B.A L.L.B (Hons), Christ(Deemed To Be)University, Delhi Ncr Campus

Abstract: This paper conducts a transnational structural comparison to analyse the persistent inadequacy of formal equality principles in addressing compounded oppression at the intersection of caste/race and gender. The central thesis posits that two distinct, yet functionally analogous, national ideological frameworks—Brahmanical Patriarchy in India and the Myth of Racial Democracy in Brazil—operate as state-sanctioned systems that institutionalise asymmetric harm, thereby necessitating a substantive anti-subordination jurisprudence.

The analysis is grounded in a jurisprudence of testimony, prioritising the lived experiences found in the narratives of Dalit autobiographers and the decolonial theories of Lélia Gonzalez. In the Indian context, the paper examines how the logic of Brahmanical Patriarchy shapes contemporary governance, leading to the selective application of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the co-option of anti-trafficking policy, thereby obscuring the multi-scalar discrimination faced by Dalit women.

The comparative lens then shifts to Brazil, utilising Gonzalez's concepts of Amefricanidade and Pretuguês to deconstruct the Racial Democracy Myth. The study specifically investigates how structural racism manifests through state-directed policy, including urban spatial segregation and decolonial gentrification, which disproportionately impact Afro-Brazilian women and limit their access to justice and property rights.

By establishing this structural parallel, the research demonstrates that both legal systems rely on the strategic concealment of historical stratification. The paper concludes by advocating for a shift to a reparative constitutionalism model that moves beyond remedial distribution to

actively mobilise law for the deconstruction of epistemic and structural violence embedded in judicial review and legislative design.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Decolonial Theory, Dalit Feminism, Brahmanical Patriarchy, Amefricanidade*

INTRODUCTION

“Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire that prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind”

- B. R. Ambedkar(2014, p. 78).

The Jurisprudence of Structural Absence

The foundational challenge for transnational feminist theory is no longer merely identifying multiple sites of oppression, but confronting the structural jurisprudence that renders certain forms of inequality invisible. While Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) provided the necessary analytical instrument to critique the single-axis flaw of anti-discrimination doctrine, its global application has revealed a critical methodological deficit. This deficiency is rooted in its tendency toward the intra-categorical approach (McCall, 2005)—a focus highly effective at detailing compounded disadvantage within a specific legal context, yet structurally inadequate for analysing systems governed by ritual-ideological or concealment-based mechanisms.

The subsequent analysis proceeds in four parts: (I) Deconstructing the methodological limitations of the U.S. model; (II) Establishing Brahmanical Patriarchy as an inter-categorical doctrine of ritual control; (III) Establishing Amefricanidade as an inter-categorical doctrine of ideological erasure; and (IV) Synthesising the findings to propose a decolonised structural jurisprudence for transnational feminist inquiry.

Problem Statement and Thesis

The central problem stems from the observation that while Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is foundational in identifying compounding disadvantage—a necessary critique of single-axis legal doctrine—it risks becoming an 'empty signifier' (Nash, 2008) when detached from its U.S. context. This analytical deficiency arises because the model primarily diagnoses where systems fail, but rarely articulates how distinct systems of structural control are maintained.

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The thesis asserts that the indigenous theoretical doctrines of Dalit Feminism (India) and Amefricanidade (Brazil) provide superior structural jurisprudence by successfully executing an inter-categorical analysis^[1] (McCall, 2005) that reveals the specific, enduring mechanisms of oppression: Brahmanical Patriarchy and the myth of Racial Democracy.

Methodology

Methodology: Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis (CCDA)

The paper employs CCDA to deconstruct and compare the doctrinal texts systematically. This method focuses on the language, concepts, and power relations embedded within the three theoretical corpora. The process is three-fold: 1) Deconstruction of the U.S. model's legal and methodological limits; 2) Construction of the structural logic of the indigenous doctrines (e.g., *Purity/Pollution* vs. *Racism by Omission*); and 3) Synthesis of findings to demonstrate that the local theories offer a more precise explanation of system maintenance than the global framework.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, first articulated in *“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”* (1989), represents a transformative intervention in antidiscrimination jurisprudence and feminist legal thought. Crenshaw identifies the failure of the legal anti-discrimination model as the central mechanism through which structures of domination are maintained. United States equality law, particularly under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, operates through what she terms a single-axis framework, analysing claims either as race-based or as sex-based, but never as simultaneously both.

This rigid categorisation, rooted in the liberal-legal ideal of an abstract, unitary subject, prevents the recognition of harms experienced by individuals positioned at the intersection of multiple axes of subordination. Crenshaw illustrates this through landmark cases such as *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* (1976), *Moore v. Hughes Helicopters* (1983), and *Payne v. Travenol Laboratories* (1982), where courts rejected plaintiffs' claims of combined race-and-gender discrimination. By insisting that Black women fit within pre-existing categories—either “women” or “Black persons”—the judiciary effectively erased their unique experience as Black women, revealing the law's incapacity to conceptualise interlocking oppressions.

The primary mechanism of control identified here is thus not overt discrimination but rather structural invisibility—the law's epistemic design that renders intersectional harms unrecognisable.

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Antidiscrimination doctrine, premised on comparative analysis between similarly situated individuals, fails to apprehend how social power operates simultaneously through race, gender, and class. This results in what Crenshaw calls a *politics of exclusion*, wherein the most marginalised—those subject to multiple vectors of domination—are excluded from both feminist and antiracist remedies.

The explanatory advantage of intersectionality lies in its ability to reveal the phenomenon of compounding disadvantage. Crenshaw's metaphor of the *traffic intersection* illustrates that discrimination flows from multiple directions and that harm occurs precisely at their point of convergence—“where the bodies pile up.” Intersectionality, therefore, reconceptualises equality as an analysis of *simultaneity* rather than separation, and of *mutual constitution* rather than addition.

The foundational paper "**The Complexity of Intersectionality**" by **Leslie McCall**

The paper explains that much intersectional scholarship defaults to the Intra-Categorical approach, which studies complexity *within* a single, highly specified group (e.g., Black women's compounded disadvantage in U.S. anti-discrimination law). This is highly effective for detailed, situated analysis but is doctrinally weak when exported. The research leverages this to argue that the U.S. model, focused on compounding disadvantage, fails to analyse the structural maintenance mechanisms essential to the Global South.

Establishing the Inter-Categorical Necessity (Parts II & III)

The core relevance lies in the Inter-Categorical approach. McCall defines this as the strategic use of categories to analyse relationships of inequality between large-scale groups. This is the legal-academic justification for your comparison.

Relevance to Dalit Feminism: The paper allows you to frame Uma Chakravarti's Brahmanical Patriarchy as a definitive inter-categorical doctrine. It specifies the precise relationship—the control of gender (female sexuality) is the functional mechanism required to maintain caste purity (structure). This is a doctrinal analysis of system maintenance, not just a disadvantage.

Relevance to Amefricanidade: Similarly, Lélia Gonzalez's Amefricanidade is framed as an inter-categorical ideological critique. It analyses the specific relationship between Black identity and the state's ideological apparatus (Racial Democracy), demonstrating that oppression

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functions via concealment and denial, demanding an epistemic counter-theory beyond legal challenge.

Annihilation of Caste (Ambedkar, 1936)

B. R. Ambedkar's seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*, provides the indispensable theoretical and structural foundation that governs all subsequent Dalit Feminist critique. This text serves as a non-negotiable precedent of indigenous jurisprudence, validating the claim that the structural analysis of oppression in India predates and is conceptually distinct from Western intersectional discourse.

The Redefinition of Caste as Ideological Jurisprudence

Ambedkar's most critical intervention is the re-framing of caste from a social or economic problem—which might be solved by minor reforms or legal quotas—to a problem of ideological law. He rigorously dismantled the apologetic defence that caste merely constitutes a beneficial "division of labour," proving instead that it functions as a rigid "division of labourers" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 86).

Crucially, Ambedkar located the site of caste's maintenance not in physical barriers but in the mental and spiritual conditioning imposed by Hindu religious texts (the Shastras). The definitive statement, "Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind" (p. 78), shifts the scholarly focus from tangible discrimination (the focus of U.S. legal critique) to structural enforcement by ideological jurisprudence.

This analysis provides the essential structural mandate for the Dalit Feminist project. Since the oppression is consecrated by "religious notions," its dismantling must target the core ideological structure, not just its resulting social outcomes. Ambedkar's work thereby legitimises the entire doctrinal shift toward analysing system maintenance—the key differentiator between the Dalit model and the U.S. model. He mandates that the solution requires "annihilation" of the structure itself, demanding a critique far more radical than one concerned with mere legal remediation. Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy (Chakravarti, 1993)^[ii]

Uma Chakravarti's work provides the necessary inter-categorical mechanism that completes Ambedkar's structural critique, connecting the ideological architecture of caste to the functional control of gender. This doctrine directly answers the research question regarding the specific, embedded structural mechanism of oppression in India.

Caste and Gender as Functionally Interdependent Structures

Chakravarti's core thesis is revolutionary in its simplicity and structural power: "caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organising principles of the brahmanical social order and are closely interconnected" (1993, p. 579). She transitions the historical analysis of women from the "status of women" (a limited analysis of legal rights) to the "structural framework of gender relations," focusing specifically on the nature and basis of subordination (p. 579).

The critical argument is that the maintenance of *varna* (caste) purity and hierarchy is fundamentally dependent on the effective sexual control of upper-caste women (p. 579). The woman's body is redefined as a site of ritual and social enclosure—a gateway through which caste lineage is either preserved (through rigid endogamy and sexual confinement) or contaminated (through *varna-sankara* or caste mixing). The system of Brahmanical Patriarchy—enforced through specific norms regarding marriage, widowhood, and seclusion—is thus the direct, functional mechanism ensuring the integrity of the caste system as a whole.

Establishing the Dalit Feminist Standpoint: Epistemology from the Margins-Sharmila Rege

In "*Dalit Women Talk Differently*" (1998), Sharmila Rege constructs one of the most significant epistemological interventions in contemporary feminist thought: the Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS). Doctrinally, this standpoint asserts that the Dalit woman's location at the intersection of caste, class, and gender hierarchies provides a unique and authoritative perspective from which to critique both Brahmanical Hindu society and mainstream Indian feminism. For Rege, the Dalit woman does not merely *occupy* a position of marginality; she embodies an *epistemic vantage point*—a site from which power, knowledge, and resistance can be re-theorised.

From 'Difference' to Standpoint: Rege's Central Critique

Rege begins by problematizing the notion of "*difference*" as used in Western postmodern and Indian feminist discourses. She argues that liberal and postmodern feminist frameworks treat difference as diversity of experience, rather than as a relation of power. This results in what she calls a "politics of pluralism" that recognises multiple voices but fails to interrogate the structural bases of inequality (Rege, 1998, p. WS-39).

According to Rege, Indian feminism—dominated by upper-caste and middle-class women—has internalised this pluralist mode, reducing Dalit women's struggles to *another difference* among many. She writes that

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such recognition “relegates the struggles of Dalit women to the margins of feminist discourse, while the upper-caste woman’s experience continues to function as the unmarked universal” (Rege, 1998, p. WS-40).

Thus, Rege’s first major doctrinal claim is epistemic invisibility: Dalit women’s lived realities are systematically excluded from feminist theory, producing a distorted understanding of gender itself. To address this, she calls for a *standpoint epistemology*—one that grounds feminist knowledge in the material and historical experiences of Dalit women rather than in abstract universal categories.

The Dalit Woman as Epistemic Subject

Drawing on feminist standpoint theory, as developed by Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Sandra Harding (1991), Rege reconfigures the framework for the Indian context. Standpoint theory posits that knowledge is situated and that oppressed groups possess a more comprehensive understanding of social reality because they experience the effects of domination firsthand. Rege Indianizes this claim: she argues that Dalit women—positioned at the lowest rung of caste, class, and gender hierarchies—occupy a *triple subaltern location* that yields epistemological authority. She writes, “A Dalit feminist standpoint is emancipatory since the subject of its knowledge is embodied and visible—thought begins from the lives of Dalit women, and these lives are present and visible in the results of the thought” (Rege, 1998, p. WS-45).

This statement establishes the core doctrinal principle of the Dalit Feminist Standpoint: *embodied experience as the foundation of theory*. Unlike universal feminist epistemologies that speak *about* women, the Dalit standpoint speaks *from within* the matrix of oppression, thereby converting lived experience into theoretical insight.

Rege’s methodological innovation lies in her claim that epistemic privilege arises from oppression. The standpoint does not romanticise suffering but treats it as the site of *critical consciousness*. The Dalit woman, through her lived experience of caste violence, domestic labour, and sexual exploitation, becomes the truth-teller of Indian patriarchy—exposing the Brahmanical, feudal, and capitalist relations that mainstream feminism leaves intact.

Standpoint and the Critique of Hindu Patriarchy

The Dalit Feminist Standpoint grants epistemological authority to critique the Hindu social order in its totality. Rege draws explicitly on Dr B. R. Ambedkar’s analysis of caste as a system sustained through endogamy and women’s control. She situates Dalit feminism within this Ambedkarite

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lineage, stating that “to adopt a Dalit feminist standpoint is to adopt an Ambedkarite position that views caste as the material base of Indian patriarchy” (Rege, 1998, p. WS-42).

From this vantage point, Hindu patriarchy appears not as a simple hierarchy of men over women, but as a ritual-ideological system of sexual regulation that maintains caste purity. Dalit women’s experiences—of being sexually available to upper-caste men, denied ritual purity, and exploited through labour—make them uniquely positioned to perceive the structural unity of caste and patriarchy. Their standpoint, therefore, is epistemically privileged for understanding the total system of Brahmanical domination.

Rege’s doctrine thus transforms the Dalit woman from an object of pity into a producer of knowledge. By listening to Dalit women’s testimonies, autobiographies, and activism, she constructs an epistemic archive that critiques Hindu society from within its margins. This archive functions as a counter-epistemology to Brahmanical and Western feminist knowledge systems alike.

The Ethical and Political Function of the Standpoint

Rege emphasises that adopting the Dalit Feminist Standpoint is not only an academic exercise but an ethical-political commitment. She urges upper-caste feminists to engage in reflexive transformation—“to reinvent ourselves as Dalit feminists” (Rege, 1998, p. WS-46). This call rejects token inclusion or allyship and instead demands epistemic humility: recognising that feminist knowledge itself has been complicit in reproducing caste privilege.

The standpoint, therefore, operates as both a method and a morality. It enjoins scholars to disinvest from Brahmanical frameworks of knowledge and to build solidarities grounded in *shared critique rather than shared identity*. In doing so, Rege transforms standpoint epistemology from a descriptive theory of knowledge into a prescriptive ethics of research—an instruction on *how to know justly*.

Periyar, Caste, Gender, and Epistemic Self-Respect: Locating an Indigenous Structural Critique

Patriarchy as the Logic of Caste

In *Why Were Women Enslaved?*, Periyar rejects the naturalisation of gender inequality and identifies the enslavement of women as the foundation of caste purity. He asserts that “women were enslaved so that man might protect his caste and his religion, which depend entirely on

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controlling the womb of woman" (Periyar, 1976, p. 42). By linking chastity (*karpu*) to lineage and ritual purity, Periyar anticipates Chakravarti's (1993) argument that the caste system depends on the ideological regulation of upper-caste female sexuality. What he calls "the virtue of chastity" is not a moral value but "a noose placed around the neck of a woman to guard the purity of caste" (p. 47).

Periyar situates this ideological control within material relations. Denying women property, education, and public visibility, he argues, ensures obedience: "A woman who owns nothing and knows nothing will obey the man who owns everything" (p. 53). Gender domination, in his view, is therefore not incidental but constitutive of the caste economy, uniting ritual authority with property and labour.

Religion and Knowledge as Instruments of Control

Periyar extends this critique to epistemology itself. In *The Ramayana: A True Reading* (1959), he reinterprets Hindu myth as a political text that sanctifies female subservience and caste obedience. "Sita is praised not for wisdom or courage but for obedience to her husband; such tales are written to make women slaves in the name of virtue" (Periyar, 1959, p. 12). Through such readings, Periyar exposes how religious literature functions as ideology, transforming social hierarchy into divine order.

His analysis of Sanskrit learning and priestly authority similarly anticipates later discussions of epistemic inequality: "They called themselves learned and others ignorant, because they alone wrote the laws that kept others ignorant" (Periyar, 1976, p. 68). For Periyar, caste endures not only through law and labour but through control over who may define truth. This epistemological critique parallels Rege's (1998) claim that Dalit women must "talk differently" to reclaim the authority of experience against Brahmanical knowledge.

Law, State, and Ideological Power

In his *Collected Works* (1972), Periyar broadens his critique to the realm of law and governance. He contends that the state and its legal apparatus function as instruments of Brahmanical ideology: "The law that says women must obey their husbands and men must follow their caste is not divine law; it is Brahmin law written for slaves" (p. 218). By exposing law's complicity in ritual hierarchy, Periyar anticipates Chakravarti's thesis that early Indian statecraft institutionalised patriarchy through *Dharmashastric* norms. His dismissal of "custom" as the vocabulary of oppression—"They call it custom when men enslave women and tradition when Brahmins enslave Sudras" (Periyar, 1976, p. 66)—extends the

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analysis of domination beyond the secular assumptions of Western feminist jurisprudence.

Intersection of Caste and Gender: A Proto-Intersectional Vision

Although the vocabulary of “intersectionality” was unavailable to him, Periyar’s work embodies its substance. He draws a direct comparison between caste and gender subordination: “Women suffer worse than the untouchable, for her bondage is praised as virtue” (Periyar, 1976, p. 49). In this formulation, ideological consent replaces coercion; subordination is internalised through the sanctification of virtue. Unlike Western intersectionality, which treats social categories as intersecting yet distinct, Periyar demonstrates that caste produces gender, and gender, in turn, reproduces caste. The two are not parallel axes but mutually generative systems.

His perspective, therefore, reveals the limitations of universal intersectionality: oppression in caste society is not only social or economic but also ritual and ontological, maintained through belief and purity codes that lie outside liberal legal recognition.

From Periyar to Dalit Feminism

Periyar’s structural, ideological, and epistemic critiques establish the intellectual foundation upon which later Dalit feminist theorists build. Ambedkar (2014) formalises Periyar’s insight by locating caste’s endurance in endogamy; Chakravarti (1993) theorises it as *Brahmanical patriarchy*; Rege (1998) rearticulates *self-respect* as a *standpoint epistemology* derived from Dalit women’s lived experience. The continuity across these frameworks demonstrates how Periyar’s radical ethics of reason evolve into a broader Dalit feminist epistemology, linking social justice to the politics of knowledge.

Lélia Gonzalez’s Doctrine of Amefricanidade: Reclaiming Epistemic Authority from the Afro-Latin Margins

Situating Amefricanidade

Lélia Gonzalez (1935–1994), a Brazilian anthropologist, philosopher, and activist, is the foremost architect of *Amefricanity*. Emerging from her writings in the 1980s—especially “A Categoría Político-Cultural de Amefricanidade,” “Por um Feminismo Afro-Latino-American,” and “Nanny: Pilar da Amefricanidade”—the concept offers a political-cultural and epistemological category that redefines Latin America through the

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perspective of its African and Indigenous descendants (Gonzalez, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c). Doctrinally, Gonzalez establishes that the Afro-Latin woman's position at the intersection of racialised labour, sexual domination, and colonial marginality produces an epistemological standpoint capable of critiquing both colonial modernity and Western feminism. *Amefricanidade* is therefore not simply a cultural identity but a method of knowing, a structural critique, and a political project.

The Afro-Latin Woman as Epistemic Subject

At the core of Gonzalez's doctrine is the claim that the Afro-Latin woman occupies a unique social and intellectual position from which to understand the structural totality of oppression. She identifies the Black woman as "a categoria síntese da opressão nas Américas"—the synthetic category of oppression in the Americas (Gonzalez, 1988b, p. 134). Through slavery and its afterlives, Black women were positioned at the convergence of productive and reproductive labour, sexual exploitation, and cultural reproduction. As domestic workers, wet nurses, and caregivers, they sustained the economies and moral orders of colonial and post-colonial societies. Yet this same position grants them privileged epistemic access to the contradictions of those orders.

For Gonzalez, the Afro-Latin woman's experience is not merely an instance of "intersectionality" but the foundational location of knowledge about colonial modernity. Her lived reality exposes how racial capitalism fuses labour, sexuality, and ideology. "A mulher negra," she writes, "carrega em seu corpo e em sua cultura a memória viva da resistência amefricana" [the Black woman carries in her body and culture the living memory of Amefrican resistance] (Gonzalez, 1988b, p. 135). Thus, she transforms what the colonial gaze rendered abject—the Black female body—into a repository of historical and theoretical insight.

Cultural Memory and Epistemic Reclamation

Gonzalez grounds her theory in cultural memory, treating African-derived practices not as folklore but as alternative epistemologies. She valorises "saber-fazer afro-americano" (Afro-American ways of knowing), encompassing language, music, religion, and everyday survival strategies. Through *pretuguês*—a hybrid Portuguese enriched by African linguistic structures—she demonstrates how Black speech it encodes resistance to colonial linguistic domination (Gonzalez, 1988, p. 77). Language, for Gonzalez, is not a neutral medium but a site of epistemic insurgency: each creolised idiom, each rhythm, each culinary and spiritual practice constitutes a living archive of counter-knowledge.^[iii]

Theoretical Synthesis: Race, Gender, and Labour

Doctrinally, *Amefricanidade* is a synthetic theory linking race, gender, and labour through colonial history. Gonzalez rejects additive intersectional models, arguing that colonialism created a unified matrix of domination in which racialization and sexualization are inseparable processes. The exploitation of Black women's bodies—biologically and economically—was the mechanism by which colonial societies reproduced themselves. Consequently, racial, gender, and class hierarchies in the Americas are not intersecting axes but co-constitutive relations.

She elaborates this through labour analysis: Afro-Latin women were central to both domestic reproduction and informal economies, yet their contributions were rendered invisible through ideologies of femininity and servility. In this invisibility lies the continuity of the colonial order. Hence, Gonzalez turns the lens of analysis: instead of asking how race and gender intersect, she asks how coloniality itself is gendered and racialised. Her doctrine thus moves from identity politics to a historical-structural epistemology, aligning with your research methodology's comparative and decolonial framework.

Amefricanidade as Feminist Method

In "Por um Feminismo Afro-Latino-Americano," Gonzalez explicitly frames *Amefricanidade* as a feminist methodology. She critiques Latin-American feminism for reproducing Eurocentric models that centre white, middle-class experiences while marginalising Afro-descendant and Indigenous women. "Nosso feminismo deve partir das experiências concretas das mulheres negras e indígenas," she writes—our feminism must begin from the concrete experiences of Black and Indigenous women (Gonzalez, 1988b, p. 136). This echoes Rege's call for a Dalit feminist standpoint but extends it transnationally: *Amefricanidade* becomes the theoretical bridge connecting the decolonial South.

Methodologically, Gonzalez proposes that knowledge be reconstructed through dialogue among oppressed communities, integrating oral history, cultural performance, and collective memory. Feminism must therefore become a transcultural praxis grounded in solidarity rather than assimilation. Such a method not only decenters Western feminism but also transforms the very criteria of epistemic validity—privileging experiential truth, collective narration, and affective knowledge.

Decolonising the Epistemic Order

Gonzalez's project is a form of epistemic decolonisation. By identifying how the colonial legacy continues to structure academic disciplines, she insists that theory must be rewritten in the idiom of the colonised. "A Amefricanidade é antes de tudo um processo de descolonização do pensamento" [Amefricanidade is above all a process of decolonizing thought] (Gonzalez, 1988a, p. 80). This involves reversing the direction of knowledge: the periphery becomes the site of theoretical production, and Europe becomes the object of critical scrutiny. For Gonzalez, the act of theorising from the margins is itself a political practice, dismantling epistemic hierarchies that equate universality with Westernness.

In doing so, Gonzalez anticipates and exceeds later Latin-American decolonial theorists. She grounds her theory not in abstract geopolitics but in the lived corporeality of Black women, whose bodies bear the historical inscriptions of slavery, domestic servitude, and resistance.

The Unified Black Movement: From Cultural Identity to Political Doctrine

Situating the MNU within the Genealogy of Amefricanidade

The Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU)—the Unified Black Movement, founded in 1978 in São Paulo, Brazil—represents a decisive moment in Latin America's Black intellectual and political history. Lélia Gonzalez's 1982 essay, "*The Unified Black Movement: A New Stage in Black Political Struggle*," written during the early consolidation of the MNU, marks the point where *Amefricanidade* evolved from a cultural-theoretical concept into a political doctrine of collective rights.

Gonzalez's contribution to the MNU was not confined to rhetoric or representation. She functioned as the principal theoretician, translating the lived struggle of Afro-Brazilians into an analytic framework that revealed the colonial, racial, and gendered structure of Brazilian modernity. Her 1982 essay, published amid Brazil's re-democratisation process, established that the struggle for racial justice was inseparable from epistemic and social transformation.

Doctrinally, this text positions *Amefricanidade* as a political praxis—a collective struggle for recognition, rights, and cultural self-determination that simultaneously redefines what counts as politics, citizenship, and nationhood.

Women, Labour, and the Internal Contradictions of the Movement

Gonzalez's participation in the MNU was defined by her insistence on gendering the analysis of race and class. In her 1982 essay, she warns that the Black movement cannot reproduce patriarchal hierarchies while claiming liberation: "The Black woman carries the triple burden of racism, sexism, and class exploitation, and yet she is the foundation of our culture and community" (Gonzalez, 1982, p. 25).

This passage anticipates her later argument that the Afro-Latin woman is the *synthetic category of oppression*. Within the MNU, she demanded that gender issues—particularly domestic labour, reproductive rights, and violence—be treated as central rather than secondary. Her intervention thus expands the MNU's agenda beyond racial justice to intersectional structural reform, nearly a decade before the global feminist discourse on intersectionality emerged.

By identifying the Black woman's labour as both material and cultural—caretaking, cleaning, and sustaining Afro-Brazilian cultural forms—Gonzalez links political economy and epistemology. She asserts that women's lived experience embodies the continuity of resistance: "In every home where a Black woman works, she carries with her the memory of our collective survival" (Gonzalez, 1982, p. 26). Here, political doctrine fuses with epistemic recognition.

Cultural Politics and Counter-Hegemony

Another major contribution of the 1982 essay is Gonzalez's theorisation of culture as a terrain of political struggle. She rejects both cultural assimilation (the whitening ideal) and folkloric containment (the exoticization of Black culture) as modes of co-optation. Instead, she posits *Black culture as counter-hegemonic praxis*. Samba, Candomblé, and linguistic hybridity (e.g., *pretuguês*) become, in her words, "the languages through which our people speak their truth and assert their humanity" (Gonzalez, 1982, p. 28).

For Gonzalez, reclaiming culture is not aesthetic pride but political insurgency: by affirming Blackness as the norm rather than the deviation, the MNU subverts the cultural logic of white supremacy. Thus, the essay positions *Amefricanidade* as an *ideological weapon*—a way to read, produce, and transform meaning itself.

Conclusion: Decolonising the Structural Analysis of Oppression

Eurocentric Intersectionality framework against the indigenous theoretical formations of Dalit Feminism and Lélia Gonzalez's Amefricanidade. The findings conclusively resolve the research question by demonstrating that

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these non-Western doctrines not only reveal the epistemological limitations of the universalist model but also propose more precise and politically effective structural jurisprudences for analysing oppression rooted in unique colonial and caste hierarchies.

The primary limitation revealed is methodological inadequacy: Universal Intersectionality, constrained by its origins in U.S. anti-discrimination law, focuses on intra-categorical description (documenting compounded harm). This descriptive focus prevents the crucial inter-categorical analysis (McCall, 2005) required to isolate the functional mechanisms of system maintenance—the key to effective political intervention (Nash, 2008).

The indigenous models offer superior, decolonial structural models by reframing oppression as a problem of ideological law, rather than merely one of social practice:

The Dalit Feminist Model (India): Challenges Intersectionality by structurally prioritising the mechanism of Brahmanical Patriarchy (Chakravarti, 1993). This model proves that sexual control of women is not an *additive* oppression, but the *necessary precondition* for the entire Caste system's survival. The Dalit Feminist Standpoint (Rege, 1998) validates this as the only perspective capable of delivering the complete critique and mandates structural annihilation of religious authority (Ambedkar, 2014; Ramasamy, 2005).^[iv]

The Amefricanidade Model (Brazil): Challenges Intersectionality by prioritising ideological concealment. Gonzalez's doctrine exposes the Myth of Racial Democracy as the apparatus of Racism by Omission (Gonzalez, 1983).^[v] By positioning the Afro-Latin woman as the synthetic category of oppression (*categoría síntese*), Amefricanidade transcends descriptive intersectionality to offer a historical-structural epistemology that is decolonised through the political language of Pretuguês (Gonzalez, 1988).

Ultimately, the limitations of global Intersectionality are exposed when it attempts to transpose concepts rooted in overt racial segregation onto systems built on ritual transparency (India) or ideological invisibility (Brazil). The findings conclusively argue that theory must follow the structural laws of the land.

The future of critical analysis demands a decolonisation of the epistemic order, where the Global South becomes the definitive site of theoretical production. Dalit Feminism and Amefricanidade provide the robust,

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context-specific, and politically coherent methodologies that move the mandate of feminist scholarship from merely describing who is hurt to precisely defining how the hierarchy is maintained and prescribing its structural destruction.

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ⁱ Leslie McCall (2005) outlines the inter-categorical approach as one that focuses on the complex, mutually constitutive relationships between categories (e.g., how the legal structure of caste fundamentally shapes the operational structure of gender), contrasting it with intra-categorical analysis, which merely documents differences *within* a category.

ⁱⁱ The term Brahmanical Patriarchy refers to the theoretical mechanism asserting that the ritual purity of the *varna* (caste) system is structurally dependent on the rigorous control of upper-caste female sexuality (often referencing texts like the *Manusmriti*), making gender control an institutional necessity for caste maintenance (Chakravarti, 1993).

ⁱⁱⁱ Pretuguês (a portmanteau of *preto* [Black] and *Português*) is Lélia Gonzalez's linguistic tool for decolonizing thought. It is the intentional re-coding of Portuguese using African and Afro-Brazilian vernacular, serving as a political act that asserts a sovereign, counter-hegemonic cultural identity (Gonzalez, 1988).

^{iv} The Self-Respect Marriage movement (founded by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy) was a radical political intervention designed to attack the Brahmanical order by removing the need for a priest to sanction marriage, thereby transforming it into a secular, self-respecting contract and directly confronting the caste-purity mechanism (Ramasamy, 2005).

^v Racism by Omission (*Racismo por Omissão*) is Lélia Gonzalez's term for the strategic denial of race as a relevant social category in Brazil. This ideological tactic, predicated on the Myth of Racial Democracy, renders racial discrimination invisible and theoretically inadmissible, thereby preventing unified political action.

6 **Inclusive Education**

Sritoma Ghosh¹

Graduated in Bachelors in Business Administration (Hons.) with specialization in Digital Marketing, The Neotia University
Pursuing Bachelors of Library and Information Science, Netaji Subhas Open University

Abstract: This paper examines how gender shapes the effectiveness of inclusive education. Drawing on social constructivism and intersectionality, it explores how stereotypes, biases, and resource gaps limit equal access and participation. A review of global studies, including UNESCO reports, shows that girls with disabilities face multiple layers of exclusion while boys are constrained by rigid gender norms. Case studies from India, the United States, and Sweden illustrate challenges and successful interventions. The paper highlights the need for gender-sensitive teacher training, curriculum reform, and strong policy implementation. It concludes that integrating gender equality into inclusive education is essential for reducing disparities and promoting equitable learning environments.

Keywords: *Gender, Inclusive Education, Intersectionality, Educational Equity*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education feels like a fresh start for schooling, inviting students of all backgrounds into regular classrooms to build real equity and connection. The concept is rooted in international agreements such as the 1994 Salamanca Statement and purports to tear down barriers tied to disabilities, finances, and other areas. But add gender to this equation, and it becomes multi-layered: think about how societal expectations are deeply ingrained, molding the experiences of boys and girls, often at the expense of visibility for non-binary students.

There has been an increasing emphasis on gender in inclusive education since the early 2000s, a recognition that old-school inclusion models failed to take account of how gender intersects with other identities (Reay 12–15). For instance, girls with disabilities are often subjected to "double

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discrimination," excluded due to both their gender and abilities, while boys may suppress their emotions because of the need to appear tough (UNESCO, Overcoming Exclusion 45). According to UNESCO's 2020 report, the completion rate for girls with disabilities in primary school is one-third lower compared to that of boys in poorer countries (UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 67).

Laws such as the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and India's Right to Education Act of 2009 provide a framework, combining disability rights with gender protections. However, important gaps persist, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated these disparities by providing unequal access to online learning tools (World Bank 23).

This paper explores gender dynamics through research, case studies, and real-life examples. The aim is to provide practical insights into the aforementioned issues for educators, policymakers, and anyone concerned with equity in education.

Background of the Study

Inclusive education has evolved as a global movement to ensure that all learners regardless of gender, ability, or social background can learn together in supportive environments. Historically, education systems separated children with disabilities or those from marginalized groups, limiting opportunities for shared learning and growth. The 1994 Salamanca Statement and UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative reframed inclusion as a right rather than a privilege, urging schools to adapt to students' diverse needs rather than the other way around.

In India, policies such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) and the National Education Policy (2020) have emphasized inclusive schooling as a cornerstone of equality. However, gender-related barriers continue to affect how inclusion is practiced. Girls with disabilities often face limited access due to safety, sanitation, and cultural expectations, while boys encounter social pressures that discourage emotional openness or learning support. Non-binary and transgender students frequently experience invisibility within traditional frameworks.

It is against this backdrop that the issue of gender in inclusive education is very critical. True inclusion transcends the physical integration of children through to addressing deep-rooted gender norms, emotional well-being, and equal participation.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this study, therefore, rests on responding to an important research and practice gap: the gendered experience of inclusion. While there is a growing momentum in inclusive education globally, it tends to neglect how gender intersects with access, participation, and learning outcomes. Girls with disabilities are still subjected to the "double disadvantage" of gender and ability; boys are likely to be stigmatized due to emotional vulnerability; and LGBTQ+ students find prejudice at the level of peers and institutions.

Understanding these complexities is essential to making inclusion genuinely transformative. By examining global and local examples, this paper aims to show how gender-responsive approaches can reshape inclusive practices empowering both students and educators to challenge stereotypes and create environments where all learners can thrive.

This has practical relevance as well: to assist policymakers, teachers, and development organizations in designing interventions that are inclusive in policy and equitable in practice.

Case Study Method

The case study method provides the possibility to explore in depth specific instances of practices related to inclusive education, underlining challenges and successes. This paper draws upon three illustrative cases from different cultural contexts:

1. Pratham Education Foundation's Inclusive Program in Rural Uttar Pradesh (India) – addressing gender and disability-based gaps in participation.
2. Transgender Inclusion Initiative in a Chicago Public High School (USA) – demonstrating how institutional policies and peer programs can foster inclusion.
3. Emotional Inclusion Framework in a Stockholm Primary School (Sweden) – reflecting on gender-neutral approaches to emotional well-being.

These cases were selected purposively to represent varied socio-economic and policy environments. Each example provides insight into how gender-responsive practices can influence educational outcomes.

Data Sources and Analysis

The study is solely based on secondary data, including academic literature, organizational reports by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Pratham Foundation, and government documents. The paper, through thematic analysis, identifies recurring patterns pertaining to gender bias, teacher preparedness, policy implementation, and classroom interaction.

Cross-case comparison helps to reveal commonalities and unique innovations that inform the practical strategies outlined later in this paper.

Literature Review

Whereas such research in the field of inclusive education has expanded from recognizing solely disabilities in the past two decades to embracing the full tapestry of social and cultural influences, according to Reay 3, it is befitting to note that such development would really drive us closer to the human aspect of learning. Therefore, here are some key works blending theory with real-world findings:

The gender factor is, therefore, a major one in UNESCO's 2009 report entitled Overcoming Exclusion through Inclusive Approaches in Education, with stories in Africa and Asia testifying to this fact. The report indicates that girls with disabilities enrol at rates 20-30% lower than their boys in inclusive settings, often due to family biases and school attitudes. Yet, the report calls for policies that weave gender awareness into inclusion, reminding us that small changes can make a big difference.

Diane Reay's 2015 book, Gender and Inclusive Education, offers a compassionate look at UK classrooms, using social constructivism (inspired by Vygotsky) to explore how everyday teaching reinforces gender roles, like giving boys more attention in STEM subjects (Reay 78-90; Vygotsky). Her insights reveal the vulnerability of students with disabilities, especially girls who get less support because of assumptions about what they're "supposed" to do. It's a reminder that our classrooms mirror society's biases.

According to the National Centre for Education Statistics in the U.S., girls in special education are often less confident owing to stereotypes, whereas boys face more discipline, which is all connected to pressures that discourage them from showing emotions, a concept known as "toxic masculinity" (NCES 112; Connell 45). This research provides conclusions that make us reflect on how we can work and study in spaces that are safer for everyone.

Indian studies also point out the cultural reasons, such as the 2017 report by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, which focuses

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on rural schools. The report uses vignettes from 50 schools to highlight how gender roles result in girls with disabilities dropping out of school because they have to perform housework or other domestic chores. Much hope is offered by community-level initiatives.

Add depth with feminist voices: bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (2003) confronts patriarchal norms in education, encouraging us toward the empowerment of silenced voices (hooks 89). Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 idea of intersectionality helps us see how gender crosses with race, class, and disability (Crenshaw 139-67). A 2021 review in *Gender and Education* points out gaps in supporting LGBTQ+ students, inspiring us to do better (Holloway and Kehily 200).

Cross-country studies offer optimism. A 2019 piece in the Scandinavian *Journal of Educational Research* praises Sweden's model, with gender training keeping dropout rates under 5% for students with disabilities (Herbert and Westin 567-82). Post-pandemic reports, like the World Bank's 2022 analysis, show how online learning worsened gender gaps, with girls struggling more for tech access (World Bank 30). Together, these works urge us to blend gender into inclusion, through better teacher training and policies (UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report* 78). This foundation sets the stage for our deeper dive into challenges and solutions.

Gender Issues in Inclusive Education

The challenges of gender in inclusive education touch every aspect of school life: how students participate and even feel about themselves. Stereotypes, unequal access, and expectations of behavior create real hurdles in the way that influence the well-being of all.

Stereotypes shape what subjects' kids pursue and how much support they get. Boys are often pushed toward math and science, while girls lean into arts and humanities this gap widens for students with disabilities (Australian Inclusive Education Research Group 15). A 2016 study surveying 200 teachers found 60% had unconscious biases, leading to unfair resource sharing (Australian Inclusive Education Research Group 20). It's tough to see how these assumptions limit potential.

Access issues have hit girls hardest, particularly in the most under-resourced settings. Inadequate infrastructure, for instance, a lack of bathrooms, is a big barrier to education for girls with mobility impairments. According to UNICEF's 2020 report, the participation of girls in inclusive programs was 30% lower in sub-Saharan Africa due to concerns about safety and stigmatization. For boys, exclusions are more subtle: tracking them into vocational streams when their impairments

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conflict with ideals of masculinity. These stories remind one of the human cost.

Behavioural norms add to the pain. The boldness of boys masks their emotional needs, while frustrations in girls can all too often lead to misdiagnosed issues. A 2019 UK study indicates that 40% of boys in special education slip through the net in gaining access to social-emotional support. For LGBTQ+ students, bullying is rampant: GLSEN's 2021 survey reports 70% of transgender kids facing harassment. It hurts to envisage the isolation this creates.

Teachers are not always ready for this challenge; in the European survey conducted in 2018, only 25% felt prepared for gender-diverse classrooms, hence causing more misunderstandings. Family pressures add to this in India, a report by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, says that as many as 15% of girls with disabilities leave school early to attend to home duties.

Health and safety vary too: girls with disabilities risk exploitation, while boys avoid mental health support due to stigma. According to WHO's 2021 data, there is an estimated 258 million out-of-school children worldwide; girls are overrepresented, so are children with disabilities. OECD's PISA 2018 results confirm ongoing gender gaps in math confidence. At the same time, intersectionality amplifies these, as gender mixes with race and class. But targeted efforts-as we shall see in our case studies-can turn things around.

Case Studies: Empirical Illustrations of Gender in Inclusive Education

To make these issues real, we've picked three case studies from real-world programs. Each one presents context, what was tried, and what happened - struggles and successes alike.

Case Study 1: Inclusive Education Program in Rural Uttar Pradesh, India

In rural Uttar Pradesh, Pratham Education Foundation launched a 2019 program in 20 village schools for 1,500 students, focusing on gender and disability barriers (Pratham Education Foundation 50). Girls with learning disabilities attended at just 60%, versus 85% for boys, due to cultural preferences for educating sons (Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability 45). It was heartbreakingly to see these families' priorities, but the program stepped in.

Teachers were trained in gender-sensitive pedagogies, while visual aids were also provided. A series of workshops for 300 parents helped to break

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down some age-old barriers. Girls' attendance rose by 35% by 2020, while the gains in learning also increased by 20% accordingly (Pratham Education Foundation, Impact Evaluation 12). Funding hiccups were a challenge, but dropouts fell to 10%, proving local, culturally sensitive approaches work wonders.

Case Study 2: Transgender Inclusion Initiative in a Chicago Public High School, United States.

In 2021, a Chicago high school of 1,200 students, backed by GLSEN and Title IX, approached transgender inclusion for students with disabilities (GLSEN 50). Surveys showed that 70% of transgender kids with ADHD were being bullied (Chicago Public Schools 30). We can only imagine the fear and isolation.

They created a Gender Support Team, individualized IEPs with affirming accommodations, and peer assemblies. By 2023, grades for these students rose 30%, and school-wide harassment dropped 25% (Chicago Public Schools 35). Initial staff pushback was tough, but the 20% drop in absences shows policy and teamwork can create safe havens.

Case Study 3: Emotional Inclusion Framework in a Stockholm Primary School, Sweden

In 2018, a Stockholm school for 400 students adopted a framework under national guidelines, supporting boys with autism emotionally (Swedish National Agency for Education 20). 40% showed withdrawal, tied to norms against vulnerability (Herbert and Westin 570). It warmed our hearts to see efforts to change that.

Workshops taught gender-neutral emotional tools, like group talks, and involved parents. A 2019 follow-up noted 40% better social skills, matching low national dropouts (Herbert and Westin 575). Urban-rural gaps persisted, but the systemic focus offers hope for boys everywhere.

These narratives describe common barriers and thoughtful interventions that can help shape our strategies going forward.

Strategies for Gender-Inclusive Education

Drawing from our case studies and research, we have outlined strategies that focus on both big-picture reforms and classroom tweaks. Let us create a more equitable future together.

Teacher training is paramount. Canada's 2020 program trained 5,000 educators in recognizing biases and making inclusive adaptations, increasing girls' engagement in STEM programs by 20% (Government of Canada 10, 15). Ongoing support will continue to keep the momentum.

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Curriculum changes count: the 2019 revisions in South Africa included the addition of diverse role models, utilized in 1,000 schools. These enhanced the levels of confidence for students with disabilities, according to the Department of Basic Education, South Africa 25, 30. It is heartwarming to witness how real life is reflected in these materials.

Mixed groups and student-conducted rules in the classrooms reduce exclusions, such as in Brazil, by 35% - Brazilian Ministry of Education. Feedback loops allow children to express their needs.

Community ties combat external biases. Pratham's India workshops raised girls' enrolment by 25%, according to the Pratham Education Foundation. U.S. ally programs extend that warmth.

Policies need teeth: gender audits for IEPs, better facilities, and funding, like Sweden's, boost retention 15% (Swedish National Agency for Education). Tech tools bridge post-COVID gaps (World Bank).

Resource limits are real, but phased plans and sharing successes help. All of these steps together can make truly gender-equitable inclusive education a reality.

Conclusion

As we have seen through research, challenges, stories, and ideas on inclusive education concerning gender, the need for full integration is clear. Stereotyping and other access barriers continue to cause problems, but our examples have shown ways forward.

We recommend embedding gender training in teacher preparation, requiring inclusive curricula, and establishing monitoring with community input. Fund programs such as those of Sweden and India, and let UNESCO lead in global sharing.

Ultimately, gender-inclusive education heals divides while nurturing resilient kids and societies. Let's commit to that; that is how we create a world for everyone.

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Gendered Pathways to Power: Women's Agency and Adversity in the Political Arena of Sokoto State

Ms. Saudatu Tukur Umar¹

Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Abstract:

Background: The north west geo political zone of Nigeria in where religion, traditions, norms and illiteracy have intersected, continue to record alarmingly low representation of women in politics and governance. Despite challenges, few numbers of women have defied the odds to assume political leadership roles. This study examines the lived experiences of female elected officials and political appointees in Sokoto State, exploring how they navigate adversity and exercise agency within unique sociopolitical contexts.

Methods: Utilizing a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews consisting of IDI, and KII were conducted with 25 respondents. Thematic analysis revealed key insights into how women who are already in power navigate decision-making and adversity and how they sustain their presence within the complex male dominated structures.

Results: Most respondents reveal that women rely on networks of patronage, moral legitimacy and negotiation to access and sustain political power, yet remain structurally marginalized in formal decision-making. the study found that there are no women in elected position in the state but only nominated, women leaders and councilors are usually nominated by the political parties to women who can be easily influenced and dance to their tunes. Because of the socio-cultural context of the region women active in politics faces challenges such as harassment, family crisis and lack of support party leaders and from even the womenfolk. This have contributed in stopping them to rise in politics. The study further highlights that women have the capacity to make good initiatives, influence decisions and make positive impacts but they are not given much opportunities to make decisions or influence political outcomes in Sokoto state. Majority of women are assigned to soft areas such as women affairs

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or education board that are seen as most fitting for them. The study found that women in appointed positions face challenge in the male dominates spaces such as been downgraded less of a man, left behind in meetings and decision making. the study highlights that women take strategies such as loyalty to party, moral framing, informal diplomacy and symbolic representation to sustain their presence and gain legitimacy.

Conclusion: Findings contribute to contributes to broader debates on how women in power particularly in deeply traditional societies negotiate political legitimacy without outrightly confronting entrenched patriarchy. This research provides localized experience based- knowledge for policymakers and practitioners working to support women representation in unique socio-cultural settings and context.

Keywords: *Women Representation, Women Agency, Political Power, Gender, Political Participation*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the inclusion of women in decision-making processes is now recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance and sustainable development. The United Nations and international feminist movements have repeatedly emphasized that governance structures devoid of women's perspectives risk reproducing inequality and undermining social justice[i]. In Africa, countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda have demonstrated that increasing women's descriptive representation often translates into more inclusive governance practices[ii].

In Nigeria, however, the gap between normative commitments and political reality remains stark. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and the adoption of progressive frameworks like the 35% Affirmative Action policy, women's representation in political offices has remained very low since 1999[iii]. The situation is particularly pronounced in the predominantly North-West region of the country, where socio-religious norms, patriarchal political structures, and economic dependency intersect to limit women's access to political power[iv].

Studies have shown that there is no single female in elected position in Sokoto state. While there have been individual appointments of women to executive positions, such as commissioners, and permanent secretaries, these instances are exceptions rather than the norm and do not significantly alter the overall landscape of female political representation in the state. Even in career positions such as directors and heads of ministerial

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departments and agencies, women's career progression is highly limited and undermined by certain socio-cultural and political challenges unique in the region. Impliedly, women's public participation in the region particularly in formal politics has historically been constrained by misinterpretations of religious texts, gendered access to education, and the dominance of male patronage networks. Yet, within this restrictive context, a number of women have defied the odds to assume political leadership roles, navigating complex terrains that often demand a balance between exercising agency and negotiating patriarchal resistance.

In Nigeria, while some research focused on women's political marginalization at the national level, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding the day-to-day realities, coping strategies, as well as overt and subtle forms of resistance employed by women who have managed to navigate the system. Existing literature often overlooks the voices of women who are not just participating, but are actively engage in routine duties and responsibilities for shaping power structures at the sub-national level. The absence of localized, experience-based knowledge contributes to the persistence of challenges and policy failures. There is therefore the need for a study that centers on the voices and experiences of women in power particularly in the Northwest region, being one of the most conservative regions with very low women representation in the country. This study aims to:

1. Investigate the pathways to power for women in leadership positions in Sokoto state.
2. Explore the capacity of women to exercise agency in corridors of power in Sokoto state.
3. Identify the formal and informal challenges confronting women in political leadership roles.

Women are often underrated in their capacity to exercise agency and navigate decision-making especially in male-dominated structures of politics and governance. This further explains some of the challenges faced by women in leadership roles such as gender stereotypes, family relationships, and the intersection of religion and cultural norms in the conservative region of Sokoto state. This study further investigates how, despite the odds, the strategies adopted by women sustain power and gain legitimacy in the political arena of Sokoto State. This study therefore is set not merely to examine why women are underrepresented in politics, but how those who have gained access to power navigate and survive in a region where social institutions are deeply embedded in patriarchal and religious traditions that define gender roles and leadership legitimacy. In exploring this, the paper centers the lived experiences of women in

appointed and elected positions in Sokoto State. By documenting their experiences as well as trends that underscore their assertion to power, the paper contributes to broader debates on how women in deeply traditional societies negotiate political legitimacy without outrightly confronting entrenched patriarchy.

2. Methods

Qualitative method was adopted for the study. The study specifically adopted phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of women in political power in Sokoto State. The methods are particularly suited to capturing the in-depth, contextualized perspectives of participants, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how individuals make meaning of their experiences within social and cultural contexts[v]. The study employs semi-structured, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews to gather detailed insights into participants' experiences and perceptions. This approach allows for flexibility in probing relevant topics, ensuring that participants can express personal experiences that may not surface in more structured formats.

3. Study Context and Demographic Patterns of Women Representation in Sokoto State

The Northwest geopolitical zone presents a compelling context for studying women representation, characterized by its conservative socio-cultural norms and religious values where socio-religious norms, patriarchal political structures, and economic dependency intersect to limit women's access to political power⁴.

According to a 2023 report by Agora Policy, Northwestern states such as Sokoto, Kebbi, and Zamfara had no female representation in their State Houses of Assembly for both the 2019–2023 and 2023–2027 legislative tenures⁶. In this, Sokoto state provides a distinctive yet revealing context for understanding these dynamics as a predominantly Muslim state where social institutions are deeply embedded in patriarchal and religious traditions that define gender roles and leadership legitimacy. Studies have shown that as at 2025, no woman holds an elected position in the state whereas for appointed positions, only 11% of women hold executive positions in the core agencies and ministries while men hold 89% of the executive positions in the state. This clearly demonstrates the extremely low level of women representation in corridors of power in Sokoto state.

4. Participant Selection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with a focus on women holding elected and appointed positions in Sokoto State. Although women's representation in the state remains very low, women in appointed positions were relatively accessible and provided critical insights into governance and decision-making processes. In light of the scarcity of women in elected offices, the study concentrated on the lived experiences of women in appointed roles, recognizing their significant influence in policy and administrative matters. Additionally, the study included women who had previously contested political offices but were unsuccessful, in order to capture their narratives and experiences regarding political participation, representation, and the challenges confronting women in the political arena. Participants were approached through formal introduction letters and acquaintances, based on trust. This purposive method was chosen to ensure that participants possessed the specific socio-cultural, religious, and positional power experiences relevant to the study's focus. Criteria for participation included currently or formerly being in elected or appointed positions in Sokoto state from 1999 to 2025. A total of 23 women consisting of commissioners, permanent secretaries, women leaders, councilors, executive secretaries, directors, prominent female politicians, and two men including party chairmen from the two major political parties in the state (APC and PDP) participated in the study. This is a good sample size considered sufficient for reaching thematic saturation in qualitative studies on focused contextual topics.

5. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Hausa, the participants' native language, to promote comfortable and open dialogue. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Interview questions were designed to explore three primary areas: sexual health challenges, decision-making processes, communication strategies, and health practices, particularly in relation to sexual health. This structure allowed for consistent data across interviews while also providing flexibility for participants to elaborate on culturally sensitive issues.

6. Data Analysis

Although a phenomenological approach guided data collection by focusing on lived experiences, thematic analysis was used to code and interpret recurring patterns within those experiences systematically. The audio-recorded interviews included Hausa and English. The Hausa audio-

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recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into English by bilingual researchers familiar with Hausa/Sokoto dialogue. Analysis involved coding transcripts for recurring themes. To enhance analytic rigor, two researchers independently coded a subset of the transcripts and compared codes to establish inter-coder reliability; discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, ensuring consistency and trustworthiness of the thematic framework. NVivo (version 14) was used for the data analysis. Moreover, data interpretations were solely from participants' raw narratives.

1. Results

Table 1 shows the demographic data of the respondents. The table reveals the study consisted of a group of men predominantly from the Hausa ethnic group in Nigeria, reflecting the cultural

TABLE 1 Demographic profile of respondents ($N = 25$)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)
Ethnicity	Hausa and Muslims	25
Age range (years)	44–50	12
	50–55	8
	56–70	5
Education level	Quranic education only	0
	Primary	0
	Secondary	0
	NCE	4
	B.Sc Degree	18
	M.Sc Degree	3
Position	Permanent Secretary	3

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Commissioners	3
Executive Directors	4
Executive Secretary	3
Special Advisors	3
Party Women Leaders	2
Prominent Female Politicians	2
NGO	1
Traditional Leaders	1
Religious Leaders	1
Party Chairman	2

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The study comprised 25 participants, predominantly from the Hausa ethnic group and practicing Islam, reflecting the cultural and social context of Sokoto State. Respondents' ages ranged from 44 to 70 years, with the majority falling between 44 and 50 years. Educational attainment was generally high among the respondents, with 4 respondents holding NCS, eighteen (18) respondents holding a Bachelor's degree and three with a Master's degree. No respondents had only Quranic, primary, or secondary education, highlighting the professional and educated nature of the sample and the importance of education for women to attain a high position in the society.

The participants occupied diverse positions within government, political parties, and civil society. This included permanent secretaries, commissioners, executive directors, executive secretaries, special advisors, party women leaders, prominent female politicians, NGOs, traditional and religious leaders, and party chairmen. The range of roles ensured that the study captured multiple perspectives on women's political participation, influence, and governance within Sokoto State.

The findings of this study are organized around four major themes that emerged from the interviews: (1) pathways to power, (2) women agency (3) formal and informal barriers. Together, these themes illustrate the

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complex interplay between structure and agency that defines women's political experiences in Sokoto State.

Table 2: Coding Table: Women's Political Experiences in Sokoto State

Node (Theme)	Sub-Node (Sub- Theme / Pattern)	Coded Text / Illustrative Quotes
Pathways to Power	Patronage Networks	“You must have somebody to introduce you to the men who decide things, even if you are qualified, nobody will hear you without that connection.” — 52years, NCE
	Grassroot Mobilization	“In this part of the country, it is very difficult for a woman to get into politics without starting from somewhere, you have to know a very influential person that can take you in unlike men who are very free to start from anywhere.” —Councilor, 46 years, NCE
	Professional Credentials	Respondents noted that their qualifications and competency contributed to appointments as commissioners, accountant general, permanent secretaries, and directors. —Commissioners, Executive Directors, 45-50 years, B.Sc
Women Agency	Respectful Femininity	Several participants adopted strategies like modest dressing, invoking religious identity, and framing leadership as service rather than competition. — Special Advisors, Executive Secretary, Women Leader Directors, 50-70 years, NCE/B.Sc

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	Decision-Making Influence	“Yes, women have the capacity to influence decisions but only if the woman realize the potentials in her. Here, when the male counterparts know that you are firm and decisive, some of them will feel you are trying to compete with them but they would still consult you in decision making...” Permanent Secretary, 60 years, M.Sc
	Symbolic Maternalism	“For me, I always make sure that I stay firm and present in every stage of decision making and to speak with substance. I make sure I present myself morally and culturally well also in other to be well respected.” — Special Advisor, 47 years, NCE
Formal and Informal Barriers	Formal Constraints	“Candidate selection is often determined by male political godfathers and you as a woman will even feel less of a qualified and competent candidate to come out and contest.” NGO Women advocate, 43 years, M.Sc
	Informal Constraints	“Any woman that venture into politics must have faced some kinds of harassment and moral scrutiny. In this part of the country, religion is usually misinterpreted to discourage us from participating...” —Prominent Female Politician, female political aspirant, women leader, councilor, special advisor and commissioner- 46-58 years, NCE
	Double Marginalization	“We do not have support of our women counterparts because of pull her down syndrome.” Female political Aspirant, 46years, B.Sc

Source: Field Survey, 2025

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Table 2 above shows the coding for lived experience of women in power in Sokoto state. under the pathways to power the entry of women into politics in Sokoto State followed multiple, though intersecting, routes shaped largely by networks of patronage and grassroot mobilization. Most respondents emphasized that access to political positions was not necessarily through party structures but rather through networks of patronage.

However, on the part of appointed positions, professional credentials and reputational capital also served as legitimate entry points. Some respondents who were commissioners, Accountant general of the state, permanent secretaries, directors and executive secretaries noted that their qualifications and competency have made them to be where they are. The findings thus reveal that pathways to power for women in Sokoto are negotiated spaces where social credibility intersects with male approval. This hybridity mirrors what^[vi] conceptualizes as *nego-feminism*; the art of balancing self-assertion with strategic accommodation within patriarchal boundaries.

Under women agency, while the public narrative often frames women in politics as passive beneficiaries of male patronage, the interviews reveal a more nuanced picture of women agency. Respondents demonstrated considerable resourcefulness in navigating exclusionary structures while maintaining social legitimacy. For instance, several participants consciously adopted “respectful femininity” as a political strategy such as dressing modestly, invoking religious identity, and framing their leadership as service to community rather than competition with men. This echoes^[vii] argument that agency in conservative societies is not necessarily oppositional but may be expressed through embodied practices that align with, rather than reject, social norms. Thus, it could be argued that women agency in Sokoto state also has limits. Many respondents noted that their influence was often “consultative rather than decisive.” While they could contribute to discussions, ultimate decision-making remained in male hands. This asymmetry illustrates^[viii] third dimension of power which is control over agendas and definitions of legitimacy which remains a major obstacle for women’s substantive representation in Sokoto politics.

The literature on women’s agency highlights the importance of not only gaining access to power but also exercising power effectively once in office. Women agency here, has to do with capacity of women to strategically act on issues that concerns them or of interest to them. It also has to do with the capacity of women to independently exercise power and influence policy making decisions. [ix],[x] argue that real empowerment

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involves the capacity to influence decision-making, rather than merely occupying political positions.

On formal and informal challenges faced by women in power, respondents particularly involved directly in politics described bitter experiences of verbal hostility, subtle ridicule, and moral scrutiny. Some were told outright that “politics is not for decent women.” Social expectations about women’s domestic roles, coupled with fear of reputational damage, discouraged many from continuation of active political engagement. In addition, religion was also frequently mobilized as a justification for exclusion, though interpretations varied.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, formal and informal challenges intensify due to entrenched patriarchal norms, weak gender-sensitive legal frameworks, and political party structures that marginalize women show that even in countries like Rwanda (with over 60% female parliamentarians), women often lack real power due to elite control and patriarchal political norms[xi]. In various African states like Uganda studies have shown how women appointees are sometimes tokenistic and isolated from policymaking decisions, reinforcing symbolic rather than substantive representation.[xii]

In Nigeria, while there has been some non-manifesting increase in the appointment of women to government positions, formal challenges include faced by women in power include lack of legal quotas at national and sub-national levels. Patriarchal party structures that rarely support women’s leadership and limited control over budgets and policy direction, especially in male-dominated cabinets. Informally, women in positions of power encounter social and religious expectations that undermine authority[xiii]. Informal challenges faced by women in power in Nigeria include exclusion from decision-making cliques, stereotyping and delegitimization by male colleagues and the media[xiv]. A recent study by [xv] found that female commissioners and legislators in Nigeria often face “double marginalization” having to constantly prove legitimacy to male peers while also fulfilling culturally expected feminine roles

2. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study explicitly underscore that women’s political engagement in Sokoto is shaped by a dual reality, pervasive adversity and resilient agency. While institutions remain structurally patriarchal, women’s adaptive strategies to get access to power and demonstrate agency is relational and contextually grounded. Contextually, pathway to power for women is determined by gender. That is, the pathways to power is different for men and women. Findings have revealed that women enter

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into politics through network of patronage and must work twice as hard as a man to gain legitimacy within the male dominated structures. Furthermore. The few women who have defied the odds to be in power positions have experienced adversities. This however, do not to some extent affect women in appointed position compared the women who are directly involved in politics either by contesting or a position or actively being involved in politics. This have further explained the fact that currently, there is no single woman in an elected position in the state but rather nominated position in politics. This could be attributed to the fact women who contest for elections are seen as unchaste and highly exposed as against the traditions and culture of the society.

The study also found that women in power uses survival strategies to gain legitimacy and sustain power. Strategies used are moral framing, symbolic representation, and informal diplomacy. While coalition building is very important, majority of the respondents have complained bitterly that coalition building is non-existent in the state. This also plays a major role in promoting “the pull her down syndrome” and lack of support from womenfolk in the state. Thus, women’s participation in Sokoto politics could be argued to be constrained yet transformative. The fact that women although not in a satisfying percentage have started to occupy positions of power compared to previous times where extremely few numbers of women are in appointed positions. Their experiences illuminate how gendered power operates not only through exclusion but also through the everyday negotiations that sustain women limited but significant presence in political life.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the gendered pathways through which women in Sokoto State access, negotiate, and sustain political power within deeply patriarchal institutions. The findings reveal that although women’s formal inclusion in politics remains minimal, their presence however symbolic signifies complex forms of agency exercised within constraint. Rather than outright resistance, women’s political agency in Sokoto manifests through negotiation, moral legitimacy, and strategic adaptability.

Women navigate institutional and cultural barriers by leveraging personal networks, invoking religious and moral authority, and engaging in quiet diplomacy. These strategies enable them to survive in a political culture that remains resistant to gender equality while subtly challenging entrenched norms from within. The study therefore underscores that agency in patriarchal contexts should not be measured solely by overt

contestation, but also by the capacity to rework existing structures in ways that expand women's participation over time.

The implications of these findings are both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of women's political participation in Northern Nigeria, moving beyond deficit narratives to highlight resilience, negotiation, and incremental change. Theoretically, it affirms the relevance of feminist institutionalism as framework for analyzing gendered power relations in conservative societies.

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Gender inclusivity in corporate workplace and an agenda for sustainability

Dr. Sritama Chaudhuri¹

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Asutosh College, Kolkata

Abstract: Recently under the broad umbrella of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) dialogue, gender equality as a concept has regained fresh momentum from corporate leaders, policy makers and researchers. Even though the idea has a rich sociological genealogy and multidisciplinary historicity, its relevance remains constant as the matters of negligence are still persistent. As nations in general and organisations in particular are striving to opt for more sustainable ways of conducting business, it must be reiterated that the 'human factor' in the midst of ecological concern is pertinent. Gender equality is one of the cornerstones of the human factor. Existing literature stresses the positive relationship between gender equality and organizational success and yet it also highlights the lacuna and road blockages in women thriving in corporate business world. Sociologist Joan Acker (1990) highlighted the concept of gendered organizations which uproots the idea that organisations are inherently neutral and de-gendered and bias is just an individual's malice. According to the theory, the positioning of de-gendered organisations and work relationships ultimately benefit the industrial capitalists societies that are itself built upon a system embedded with gender difference.

The objective of this chapter is to describe the importance of having gender inclusivity as an important sustainability strategy of corporate houses. Methodologically, it uses content analysis and case studies to delve deep into the subject matter. The subject has varied policy implications as it solidifies the dire need for gender inclusive corporate policies and reinforces the fact that effective diversity management lead to the making of successful sustainable corporate brands in the turbulent emerging markets.

Keywords: *Corporate Gender inequality, corporate sustainability, DE&I*

INTRODUCTION

Often in colloquial parlance, the ‘office’ has been seen as the site of multiple gender inequalities manifesting in the forms of gender wage gap, lack of women in leadership positions, and slow rate of promotions (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015) [16]. This workplace discrimination often led to the poor socio-economic condition and status of women. The reality of lesser pay, status, and prospects at work, and the subjective lived experiences of being perceived and treated as an inferior, disturb women’s psychological and physical health (Borrel et. al, 2010). Gender discrimination is sometimes highlighted through blatant sexist HR policies (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015) [16]. Human resource procedures that are fundamentally prejudiced against a group of people solely because of their biological sex, irrespective of their job-related acumen and competence like skills, abilities, and overall performance can be deemed as an institutional discrimination (*ibid*). This type of institutional and structural discrimination against women can happen in any type of workplace and organisation. It may take place in any of the stages like during recruitment and selection of an individual, through her role assignments and performance evaluation, training, pay and promotion, and termination. Therefore, concrete steps are needed to mitigate this unfair practice.

Recently under the broad umbrella of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) dialogue, gender equality as a concept has regained fresh momentum from corporate leaders, policy makers and researchers. Even though the idea has a rich sociological genealogy and multidisciplinary historicity, its relevance remains constant as the matters of negligence are still persistent. As nations in general and organisations in particular are striving to opt for more sustainable ways of conducting business, it must be reiterated that the ‘human factor’ in the midst of ecological concern is pertinent. Gender equality is one of the cornerstones of the human factor. The Brundtland Commission and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the fact that sustainability must have inclusive growth and equitable world systems. Sociological perspective and corporate sustainability emphasise that organisations internalise normative social conditioning and thus, gender inclusivity becomes an indispensable part of sustainable corporate governance. It influences how companies define ethical labour relationships, stakeholder outlooks, and long-term survival.

In spite of multiple policy reforms, organisations belonging particularly to global south economies still exhibit deep rooted structural inequalities

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in terms of equal access to leadership positions. Statistical reports show determined gender inequality in the workplace for an instance, existence of an almost 11.5% gender pay gap, with meaningfully lesser representation of women in senior leadership roles, discrepancies in labor force participation and unpaid work (Sunita, 2025)[17]. In 2023, the gender wage gap was 11.5% in the OECD, while a 2024 McKinsey report disclosed women make up 29% of C-suite spots, an increase from 17% in 2015. Women also perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work in their families, which restricts their capacity to partake in professional life fully and develop their careers (ibid).

The objective of this chapter is to describe the importance of having gender inclusivity as an important sustainability strategy of corporate houses. Methodologically, it uses content analysis and case studies to delve deep into the subject matter. The subject has varied policy implications as it solidifies the dire need for gender inclusive corporate policies and reinforces the fact that effective diversity management lead to the making of successful sustainable corporate brands in the turbulent emerging markets.

Review of literature and theoretical framework

Existing literature stresses the positive relationship between gender equality and organizational success and yet it also highlights the lacuna and road blockages in women thriving in corporate business world. Sociologist Joan Acker (1990) [1] highlighted the concept of gendered organizations which uproots the idea that organisations are inherently neutral and de-gendered and bias is just an individual's malice. According to the theory, the positioning of de-gendered organisations and work relationships ultimately benefit the industrial capitalists societies that are itself built upon a system embedded with gender difference. Further, Judith Butler's work on gender performativity (Butler, 2015)[2] and Zimmerman's theory of doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987)[19], highlight how individuals 'perform' their gender based on socially laid out expectations and structures. Gender relationships in workplaces are socially created and institutionally strengthened. The existing forms of gender inequality like pay parity, unfair recruitment processes and masculinised leadership roles are also part of this society's role in doing gender. Society assumes women to expect less than men and perform their gender-based expectations by being obedient to inferior treatment. Similarly, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977)[10] theory of tokenism also contextualise the case of gender discrimination in workplaces. Since,

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women normally constitute a minor position due to their numerical strength, they become what she termed as a 'token'. These tokens are minorities whose scrutinization of work becomes magnified due to their increased visibility because of less numerical strength. Shelly J Correll (2004, 2007) [5,6] a professor of sociology at Stanford University and the director of the Clayman Institute for Gender Research focuses on the institutional structures that reproduce and maintain gender inequality in the workplace. Her research includes groundbreaking studies on the concept of "motherhood penalty," indicating how mothers are often regarded as less competent and committed than non-mothers in an organisation, affecting their mental health, confidence, remuneration and opportunities. Another sociologist, Paula England (2010) [3] who is professor of sociology at New York University has examined the phenomenon called "gender revolution," highlighting that even though women have entered the workforce in larger numbers compared to past, but occupational segregation and the gender wage gap still linger. Her work stresses on an important area of concern which is that women till date are continuing to enter lower-paying, or popularly perceived as "female-dominated" occupations, a phenomenon she describes elaborately in her research. This often results from faulty gender socialisation, lack of confidence and lack of familial and societal support system.

Gender inclusiveness as Corporate Sustainability Strategy

The sophisticated idea of corporate sustainability strategy is a long-term proposal that mixes environmental, social, and economic considerations into a company's business operations besides finance to create long-term value for society. It focuses on responsible/judicious resource use (both human and technological), ethical practices, and positive influence on stakeholders and the planet. Corporate sustainability strategy comprises of targeting science-based goals, dipping environmental carbon footprint, safeguarding fair labour practices in offices and supply chain processes, and aligning with governance principles and checkpoints (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007) [8]. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is now an integral part of modern business strategies. Simultaneously, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are increasingly deemed as pertinent for corporate culture, organizational effectiveness and overall social development. Many researches indicate that CSR programs pointedly promote diversity through gender empowerment as women form a significant valuable part of any organisation. Diversity in workplace enhance CSR innovation and credibility by bringing different agendas and

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lived experiences to focus. However, obstacles such as tokenism, resistance to behavioural/organizational change, and feeble accountability hinder effective integration.

Researches on Chinese firms show that diversity in terms of gender and culture has positive effect on the corporate social responsibility quotient of a firm, which in turn strongly influences a firm's goodwill, customer base and future investments (Sun et. al, 2023) [18]. The research shows that businesses situated in regions with higher cultural inclusivity initiate multiple social responsibilities, signifying the goal of corporate's role in humanistic care, human development, ethical capital and environmental awareness. Furthermore, the effect of cultural and gender inclusivity is more apparent in big firms and state-owned enterprises. Additionally, the results indicate that geographical regions of firms with better exposure to cultural inclusivity incline to display more features of "gender equality" and lesser instances of "power gap/glass ceiling", which have a strong correlation with corporate social responsibility. Hence, they shed light on the power of cultural and gender inclusivity on corporate governance and strive to explore the informal institutional factors influencing the sustainability developments at the geographical/regional/local level (ibid). Gender gaps in labour force participation reduce national productivity and reinforce structural inequalities. Corporate gender inclusivity therefore contributes to macro-level sustainability by enabling economic independence, reducing dependency burdens, and mobilising a wider talent pool. In India, for instance, women's labour participation remains low (below 30%), highlighting the urgency of organisational intervention.

Gendered culture in corporate workplaces: a pervasive glass ceiling

There exists a culture of implicit bias towards women. Corporate work settings often encourage masculine characteristics like competitiveness, risk taking, emotionless and assertiveness with great deal of enthusiasm. However, when women exhibit these traits, they are often treated with contempt, deemed to be 'too ambitious' for their gender and ultimately face backlash. This double standard proves Goffman's theory of stigma and the cultural reproduction of gender roles that mimic the mainstream society. Male-dominated leadership positions having decision making powers frequently promote individuals, majorly other men, from their own inner circle of clout and rapport, mirroring their own identity and in turn solidifying homosocial reproduction. This acts as a glass ceiling for deserving female candidates and also hinders organisational diversity which is essential for sustainability and long-term survival (Purcell et al,

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2010)[13] David Wick and Patricia Broadshaw's (1999)[20] research on Canadian organisations highlight that organisational cultures often reward men and women differently, contributing to a bigoted environment that makes women feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. This sexist attitude makes multiple organizational change endeavours challenging. Further, sexual and mental harassment act as a structural barrier to organisational diversity and gender parity. Compliance based policy frameworks like the POSH Act (India) often behave as administrative checkpoints rather than transformative instruments (Saluja et. al, 2020)[14]. Also, salary disparities echo the gendered social construction of value which reiterates the undervaluing of the women's labour and intellect and continue long-term inequality, opposing social sustainability goals.

Corporate sustainability through gender empowerment: case studies

There exist multiple examples of companies developing gender employment policies to enhance their corporate sustainability quotient. For an instance, Unilever's gender-inclusive policies illustrate how gender inclusion strengthens their CSR performance (Dissanayake et. al, 2024)[7]. They try to uplift the condition of women at their workplaces, across their extended supply chains and also in their brand promotions and marketing. By using advertising and marketing strategies they try to change gendered social customs and draw attention to the evils of the adverse stereotypes, sexism, and harassment. They invest in advocacy and industry collaborative action to fast forward changes and promote best practices. Further, they also deploy purpose-driven skill enhancement programmes to train women with latest in-demand skills and resources to boost confidence and prepare for leadership roles. The case study of Unilever shows a commitment towards holistic development. Similarly, IT companies like TCS, IBM, Amazon etc. have launched their 'return to work' programmes. These programmes aim to train professionals, especially women, who wish to return to work after career gaps. Women in Indian society are seldom pressurised to either balance both professional and personal life or sacrifice the professional life to cater to personal life. Married women often end up taking career gaps post marriage to take care of children or offer care giving services to family members. Unfortunately, even in contemporary times, care -giving within the institution of family and marriage has largely been a gendered activity. Therefore, women automatically lose in efficiency, focus and time-management compared to their male counterparts. These return-to-work programmes strives to bridge the gap and reskill them in required fields so that they can continue

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their career journey (McLaren et. al, 2017) [11]. Another case study is that of Patagonia, an American apparel company, doing their corporate sustainability enhancement through gender inclusivity initiatives like childcare facilities, clear pay packages, and women-led environmental activism (Meenan, 2022) [12].

Sociological implications for corporate sustainability

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in sociology discusses the need to have ethical frameworks steering companies and organisations to function in ways that take into account the social, environmental, and economic bearings of their actions on all stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, local communities and ecology (Timms, 2016)[18]. Historically, businesses have evolved from small entities commissioned to benefit the public good into powerful institutions mostly fixated on profit maximization, often at the cost of larger societal interests. The sociological need to develop corporate sustainability have many dimensions. Gender inclusion in workplaces create ethical capital which is a moral resource imperative for strengthening organisational legitimacy, goodwill and brand value, customer base and stakeholder trust. An organisation that values women create examples for larger societal structure and normative cultures. Key parameters like lesser income inequality, higher workforce participation, and intergenerational empowerment align with sociological perspectives of sustainability as a continuous socio-cultural process (ibid). Moreover, inclusive organisations and social institutions are agents of social change having the power to influence families, labour markets, consumer product designs, urban spaces, and socio-cultural standards.

Conclusion: agenda for gender inclusive sustainability

To move forward, gender inclusion must translate into concrete action rather than just symbolic gestures. Some of the needed changes include determined shift from masculine leadership norms to collaborative, participatory, inclusive and empathy-based leadership. The leadership must encourage gender sensitive communication practices and gender-neutral language. There should be institutionalisation and normalisation of zero-tolerance cultures when it comes to sexual harassments and microaggressions. There should also be policy specific structural reforms like merit-based hiring and promotion benchmarks. Policies across different organisations should realise the universal nature of parental childcare leaves which is not restricted to maternity leave alone. The more we realise the role of father in the process of child rearing and caring, the

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easier it will be for mothers to fulfil their career obligations as well. Some offices have on site childcare centres like creche and hybrid work model. These avenues help mothers to do efficient time management. Further, in today's cutting-edge technology, a key concern remains identification of biased patterns in hiring through AI tracking devices, and henceforth, designing evidence-based interventions. Inclusivity cannot be women's responsibility alone and therefore companies must create programmes that encourage men to willingly voice any injustices given to their fellow female colleagues. Workplaces must also understand the reality of intersectionality ie. that women vary in caste, class, disability, sexuality, region and religion (Cho et. al., 2013)[4]. Meaningful corporate sustainability comprises of equal work spaces and training programs for Dalit women, queer personnels, trans individuals, women with disabilities, and not just upper-class, urban, corporate women.

Gender inclusivity in corporate workplaces is interlinked with the bigger goal of sustainability. Sociologically, gender functions within the structural, cultural, and symbolic system determining organisational behaviour, social interactions, power pyramids, and labour relationships. Sustainable development frameworks mandate not only environmental protection but also the renovation of social institutions and social wellbeing. A gender-inclusive work atmosphere practice ethical governance, economic productivity, innovation, and collective well-being enhancing both employee happiness and sustainability.

The sustainability target cannot be achieved without disassembling gendered institutional inequalities that limit labour force participation, leadership diversity, and organisational flexibility. Thus, gender inclusivity is not just a diversity performance indicator but it is the bedrock of a sustainable and equitable society.

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Juvenile Delinquency And India: A Gender-Based Approach

Projjal Gupta¹

Assistant Teacher, Economics, St. Claret School, Barrackpore, WB

Abstract: No one is born a criminal; the various circumstances and the society make a criminal. Children are the very base of our society. Often, they are referred to as the “building blocks” of our nation. The society in turn, must ensure safe and secured environment to them for their growth and development. Unfortunately, everything is laid down only in pen-and-paper but not in reality. Now, the questions which arise out of the fact are summarized and interrogated below-

- The detailed meaning of Juvenile Delinquency
- The background to the rise of Juvenile Delinquency
- The possible factors that promote Juvenile Delinquency
- The various types of Juvenile Delinquency
- How's India going through this social evil
- The possible government policies in this regard
- Any gender disparity in this regard
- The impact of Covid-19 on Juvenile Delinquency in India

It's high time we address this issue as the rate of juvenile delinquency is getting increased day-by-day. This matter requires substantial attention of all the readers, being a very sensitive issue. Another question which arises that has gained an appreciable momentum is- Can we classify the juvenile who has committed a delinquency as a criminal or a minor? Noteworthy to mention, poverty has played a key role in this regard. The “want” for a male child has led to the formation of large families which often put the young ones to get absorbed in the hazardous job market. It is recently been observed that the rate of juvenile delinquency has increased substantially over the years in developing nations. As the developing nations are making their shift from agricultural sector to that of the industries, and the dependency follows the same, this might be one of the possible reasons or ways for the social evil to make its room. Social evils always act as a

hindrance in the path of progress and often cripple the economy from the very inside. This paper has therefore addressed the grave issue of Juvenile Delinquency among various genders between the Pre- Covid 19 Pandemic Period and Post- Covid 19 Pandemic Period.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Poverty, Illiteracy, Juvenile Justice System, Juvenile Justice Board, Child Labour

INTRODUCTION

The word “Juvenile” has been derived from the two Latin words- “iuvénilis” which means “to belong to the category of youth” accompanied by “iuvénis” which symbolizes a “younger person”. “Delinquency”, on the other hand, has been vividly defined by Coleman in the year 1981 as “an unacceptable behavior to the society committed by youths belonging to the age group below 18 years”. Juvenile Delinquency is therefore defined as an act by the under-aged characterized by behavior which is considered to be anti-social which is beyond the control of the parents and is therefore subject to legal actions. The juveniles are therefore kept in Juvenile Jails or Correction Homes. There, various corrective measures are taken to rectify their behavior as well as to develop a positive direction in oneself. It is observed that the rate of juvenile delinquency is increasing with the increase in population as well as culture’s complexity. The severity of the crime varies from one person to another and generally goes omitted until and unless it becomes a social concern. Juvenile Delinquency is therefore a judicial term which envelops a variety of acts with their varying societal outcomes, ranging from a minor misbehavior till heinous crimes. Population explosion is by far, the most appropriate cause for the ever-hiking rate of Juvenile Delinquency in India. It is often said that large family doesn’t necessarily imply poverty; it’s the poverty that leads to the formation of large families. The want for a male child is yet another reason for the exacerbation of the situation. Infront of the upsurging population, job vacancies are very limited which in-turn is forcing the young ones of the families to dropout from their schools and join the labour market. Noteworthy to mention, these young fellows are getting themselves placed in hazardous industries where they are severely exploited and, in some cases, used for the employer’s own benefits (which may be an unethical act too). On one hand, the pressure on land because of population

explosion and on the other hand, these social evils i.e., child labour and juvenile delinquency is crippling the Indian Economy, making it paralyzed with each passage of days. Developing country like India in recent years, has witnessed a substantial hike in the rates of juvenile delinquency 6.7% in 2020 to 7% in 2021 (according to IJFMR). Lack of parental control over their wards, is another important reason for the increase in the rates of juvenile delinquency.

Literature Review

Shailza (2022) has focused on the grave issue of juvenile delinquency with its causes and talked about various laws as well. There are already many pre-existing laws to fight with this social evil but those are not properly implemented and regulated. Everything demands a proper regulation to take its shape with the passage of time. But before that, if we give up, the issue will eventually accelerate instead of getting decreased. Various preventive programmes have also been mentioned in this paper like psychotherapy, environmental programs to make it even better for the juveniles. Gautam and Sharma (2025) have listed certain current cases of juvenile delinquency. Various NCRB reports have firmly stated the increasing number of male juvenile delinquents as compared to females and various other suggestive measures to be implemented in future. Agarwal (2018) has conducted a doctrinal research by consulting various articles and journals to address the issue of juvenile delinquency along with the various prepositions given by different research scholars to understand the problem theoretically. This paper got something different as it has devoted a separate section to discuss on the dependence of socio-psychological studies on the mental instability of the adolescents that forces them to evolve as a juvenile delinquent. Certain amendments have also been discussed in Juvenile Justice Act like Malvika Tyagi (2016) has also vehemently demanded for state intervention after looking at the ever hiking rate of juvenile delinquency. Often children who've lost their parents go into either of the two paths. Either they become a wonderful person, working passionately on oneself to emerge as a successful human or go into the wrong path where peer influence forces one to commit a crime. Due addiction to cigarettes, alcohol, drugs make one fully indulged into those abusive substances, taking him/her away from the main stream of life. Vasishta (2024) has talked about the historical context to the emergence of Juvenile Delinquency and the various policy shifts as well.

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Much importance has been given on Rehabilitation Paradigm as well as gender disparities in terms of juvenile delinquency. Irrespective of the papers, the authors have demanded for such a society where not only the government is held responsible to bring back all those children who have committed a crime to the main stream of life but also all the members of the society must work together, joining hands in a cooperative way so that the goal can be achieved in no time and the future becomes even more brighter for the children as well as for the generations to come.

Research Methodology

As we know that the present is always the result of the past, viewing the current scenario isn't enough to address the issue. For this, various causes also need to be addressed which are the reasons behind this grave issue to upsurge like- poverty, illiteracy, financial instability, large families, not being properly regulated, given full independence before the appropriate time has arrived, etc. Let's discuss the path of movement of this paper in terms of research methodology which are enlisted below-

- Descriptive Research has been conducted for this paper as it has systematically focused on the grave issue of Juvenile Delinquency, its various causes of happenings and the various suggestive policies that could be met out to overcome this issue.
- Secondary data has been used for the paper mainly National Crime Research Bureau (2017-2021).
- The period of 2017-2021 has been considered i.e., the pre-covid 19 pandemic period and post-covid 19 pandemic period. This period has been taken to interrogate the issue between the two periods and also to check the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Juvenile Delinquency.

Is Juvenile Delinquency a uni-dimensional or a multi-dimensional approach?

Juvenile Delinquency is not a uni-dimensional approach rather a multi-dimensional one as it views the same as a complicated issue that has many interconnected reasons behind it. It envelops within itself a wide range of factors like- societal influences, family issues and individual characteristics. Effective interventions can be met out by- psychological counseling, combination of legal reforms, social support thereby focusing

on prevention, rehabilitation and path finding the same in its true sense. The key dimensions are enlisted below-

- **Societal Pressure-** Poverty, unemployment, lack of educational and job opportunities, association with toxic peers and pressure from them, etc.
- **Environmental Factors-** Factors like lack of engagement, getting exposed to violence, crime are also responsible for the same.
- **Upbringing-** Nowadays, parents are very reluctant about the mistakes of their children. Their fight with others' instead of rectifying their ward's mistakes, paves the way to perform whatever they feel like.

Therefore, acknowledging the complicated issue of juvenile delinquency and interrogating its various factors, more effective prevention can be discovered and implemented if people from various walks of life, irrespective of caste, creed, gender, region, religion, colour, come together and contribute in a cooperative way, thereby protecting the youths of this generation and the upcoming generations from performing any crime.

Factors that promote Juvenile Delinquency

Every year, thousands of minors (under the age of 18) commit crimes and are sent to juvenile jails. As we are well aware of the fact that a child is the outcome of his/her family's upbringing and the type of society one is thriving in; now the question that arises is "What circumstances are responsible for a juvenile to commit a crime"? This question demands substantial attention as it will prevent the same thing from happening in future which might even turn into a bigger crime, if not stopped today. Some of the probable causes that promote Juvenile Delinquency are enlisted below-

- **Domestic Violence-** One of the most important factors that promote Juvenile Delinquency is Domestic Violence. A family determines how a child will grow up into. It shapes its characteristics, way of behaving with others', dealing with various situations and so on. Those children who encounter domestic violence at his/her place of residence, often behave very rudely to others' and even at times grow up to be a selfish and violent person. Such children often develop an "I don't care, it doesn't bother me" attitude. It should be rectified at the very first instance and necessary steps need to be taken so that a child gets a

healthy environment at his/her family to grow up in a happy and joyful way.

- **Lack of Quality Education**-Getting quality education always depends upon the type of school in which one is gaining knowledge and education. Often schools with regular checks, parents-teachers meet-ups provide up-to-the mark quality education. A good school pays more attention to the discipline of its students and under no circumstances tolerates any kind of unlawful acts done on the part of the students. These regular checks done by good schools often develops a sense of accountability among the students as they're well aware of the fact that interrogations will be done regarding their progress.
- **Peers Pressure**- After one's family, it's the peer circle that shapes one's personality and character trait. There are two possibilities that are quite often seen in this regard. First, if the parents are too controlling, the child finds freedom among his/her peers and often feel comfortable upon breaking rules. Second, if the control of parents over their wards is absent, they prefer to be in a social circle to get the feeling of being controlled and protected. Often, it is evident that to become a part of a group, the child gets adapted to the wrong-doings like- addiction to drugs, alcohol, etc.
- **Absence of Moral Guidance**-Absence of moral guidance is yet another very important factor that promotes Juvenile Delinquency. The difference between right and wrong is taught at one's place of residence provided proper nurturing of the child takes place. A child always possesses a role model like whom he/she wants to be upon growing up. If the system gets hampered because of lack of moral guidance then such crimes get committed as they don't get to know about the difference between right and wrong and often does which is exciting without predicting about its consequences. Noteworthy to mention, media also plays a very vital role to exacerbate the situation thereby turning a juvenile into a born-criminal.
- **Substance Abuse**- Many a times, a juvenile gets addicted to an abusive substance without the accessibility of which, often leads the juvenile to commit a crime. Children in this regard, demand counseling to re-establish their sense of well-being and self-esteem.

- **Monetary Crisis-** In many cases, juveniles are taking wrong steps because of financial instability, so as to improve their status in terms of finance. Crimes caused by these under-aged trace back because of the lack of resources. They start to engage themselves in heinous crimes like smuggling of narcotics so as to get money easily which will eventually make their financial status better.

Scenario of Juvenile Delinquency in India

India is experiencing a constant increase in the rate of Juvenile Delinquency over the years because of some of the following constraints-

- Lack of money to fulfill one's needs.
- Lack of attention and regulation because of the very busy life of the parents.
- A hyperactive child always takes fast decisions and reacts impulsively which gets wrong often.
- Illiteracy is yet another very important constraint. The thirst of becoming rich quickly without doing hard work among the underaged, often forces the child to commit crimes.
- Getting bullied by schoolmates and classmates make the victim's personality harsh and rude to the outer world.

The number of juvenile delinquents involved in various offenses in 2021 has been tabulated below-

<i>Offences</i>	<i>Number of juvenile delinquents</i>
Murder	78
Causing hurt	227
Assault on women with the intent to outrage their modesty	103
Kidnapping and abduction	17
Rape	68
Theft	1069
Offences against property	1510
Information Technology	13

[Source: NCRB report Juveniles in Conflict with Law, 2021]

How is India dealing with Juvenile Delinquency?

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India is dealing with Juvenile Delinquency via a special legal framework which is based on rehabilitation instead of punishments on the basis of Juvenile Justice Act. The system mainly focuses on restoring one's conscience instead of punishing and also focuses on diversified approaches like counseling and community service. The various processes are described in details below-

Legal Framework

- **Juvenile Justice Act-** The law mainly interrogates on rehabilitation and restoring the juveniles back to the main stream of life and the society as well.
- **Privacy-** The names and identities of the juveniles are being kept private from the entire society so as not to encounter public shaming thereby protecting their future.
- **No Life Imprisonment-** A juvenile offender can never be imprisoned for the rest of the life or be sentenced to death. Instead, a maximum punishment of three years that too in a reform facility is provided so that the juvenile can be brought back to the main stream of the society.

Process of Rehabilitation

- **Diversified Programs-** Various programs are not only given prioritized but also got implemented like- community service, counseling process as well as mentorship to trace back the root cause of all these happenings.
- **Special Homes-** Observation homes are created for the under-aged accused during the time of inquiry or for rehabilitation.
- **Education added on with recreation-** Education in a recreational way is given so that the juveniles can come out from that mentality and trauma thereby helping them to lead a normal life like others.

Serious crimes and Modifications

In terms of modifications, a juvenile aging between 16-18 years should be tried like an adult on the basis of maturity and the intention behind committing the heinous crime. Although no one is being either sentenced to death or given life imprisonment, a maximum of three years can a

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juvenile be held back in observation homes for reform facility thereby get released upon probation.

Gender and Juvenile Delinquency in India

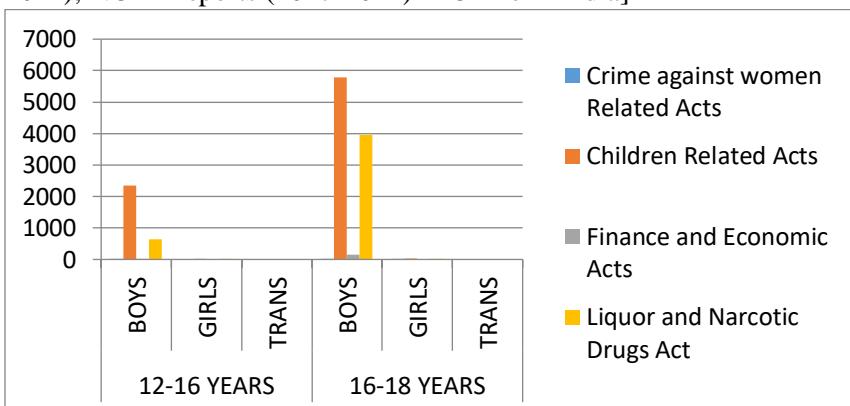
Gender and Juvenile Delinquency are the two most discussed topics that go hand-in-hand and require substantial interrogation to resolve such matters in the upcoming future. Most literatures have clearly pointed out that the rate of juvenile delinquency is higher among males than in females. Males are more in number in observation homes than females. Most of the male juveniles commit crimes due to their own needs and peer influences whereas female juveniles commit crimes because of their own safety, survival, getting themselves protected from trauma and domestic violence or sexual abuse. Gender Justice in the Juvenile Justice System needs to be essentially fair, protective and perfect for rehabilitation for all the juvenile delinquents. It was observed in the year 2018, in one of the rehabilitation homes in Uttar Pradesh, female juvenile delinquents were exposed to sexual abuse in the same. Although young female juveniles are not being considered as delinquents, young females do encounter various gender-linked barriers to rehabilitation and justice. The gender disparities that can be seen in juvenile justice systems lack gender sensitization as well. The sole reasons for this include- people's indifferent behavior towards the same i.e., they prefer to remain unaware of the grave issue accompanied by lack of resources and funding. The following table shows juvenile delinquency rates among males, females and transgenders (2017-2021)-

AGE IN YEARS	12-16 YEARS			16-18 YEARS		
	BOYS	GIRLS	TRANS	BOYS	GIRLS	TRANS
Crime against women Related Acts	1	0	0	17	1	0

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Children Related Acts	2350	19	0	5781	22	0
Finance and Economic Acts	6	0	0	149	0	0
Liquor and Narcotic Drugs Act	636	6	0	3956	11	0

[Source: Categorization of Age wise gender based SLL crimes (2017-2021); NCRB reports (2017-2021) in Crime in India]



It is clearly visible from the above table and the graph that the male adolescents mainly become delinquents. It is mostly because of their friend circle and the influence from the same along with their own needs. On one hand, it is shocking to see the adolescents becoming delinquents, like what could be the most appropriate reasons behind it and on the other hand, it is a matter of becoming dumbstruck that the rate of juveniles who are residing with their parents are far greater than those who are not. The following table supports the afore-mentioned fact-

YEAR	LIVING WITH PARENTS	LIVING WITH GUARDIAN	HOMELESS
2017	33694	3513	3213

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2018	32433	3432	2391
2019	32359	3724	2602
2020	29285	3742	2325
2021	31757	3496	2191

[Source: NCRB reports (2017-2021) in Crime in India]

If this is the case, then it can firmly be said that children are learning all such antisocial activities from their families and surroundings. It can clearly be seen that the rate of juvenile delinquency has reduced in the post-covid 19 pandemic period in comparison to the prior years. Covid 19 has therefore put a detrimental impact on the ever-hiking rate. Although the rate is getting reduced, it is a matter of great shame on the part of parents that inspite of remaining present, their wards are getting involved in heinous crimes i.e., either their influences are diminishing or they are themselves allowing their children to do the same.

Conclusion

Therefore, it can be said that- poverty, illiteracy, lack of supervision, poor parenting, academic misconduct and so on are the reasons behind Juvenile Delinquency in India. India has always taken stern actions in terms of Juvenile Delinquency to safeguard its youths in the days to come from committing heinous crimes due to which the country's juvenile justice system is getting better with the passing of days. Noteworthy to mention, the Juvenile Justice System of India has been vehemently shaped by external forces. The turning point in this regard is the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child that got ratified in the year 1992, which focused on protecting children's rights thereby pursuing justice in a very child-friendly way. From the facts that we have discussed in this paper, the various concepts of rehabilitation and prevention must be given utmost priority. Multidisciplinary approaches must be implemented and community involvement too is desirable so as to make the movement even more effective. It is not only the responsibility of the government to protect its youths but also that of the society as a whole. Therefore, we must all come together and join hands so as to combat the same thereby protecting our youths from getting engulfed by unlawful activities. India can establish a healthy and supportive environment for its youths by early intervention and community networking.

Future Implications

As it is evident, if the issue of Juvenile Delinquency is kept unaddressed, it will eventually increase the rate of crimes and the number of criminals over the years. Therefore-

- Proper evidence based programs and policies are commendable to devise.
- Gender sensitization programs must also be implemented in the curriculum of institutional education.
- Sex education must also be given priority.
- Counseling sessions must be held for providing mental and moral support to the adolescents.
- Parents should regulate the actions of their wards and must show the right path as well. They must give proper attention to their children. They should not fight amongst themselves in front of their children and must not use abusive words or do certain unlawful actions also, as children learn a majority of things from their parents and families.
- The period of adolescence is a very hyper-active time span and children often take wrong decisions while taking in haste. Therefore, children must be admitted to yoga and meditation classes. Initially, they'll not be ready to continue as it is against the trend of the youngsters, eventually it'll help in the long run.
- Nowadays, children don't eat vegetables and parents also don't make them eat the same. Infact, in some cases, parents don't cook at home as both are working. In such a scenario, outside food is the only option which is totally unhygienic for anyone. Parents must make their children understand the importance of having vegetables in one's diet. Instead of having soft drinks outside, homemade lemonade, lassi should be prioritized. The ultimate motive to say all these things is to make the children's body and mind cool. A cool mind and body will eventually help children a lot in the long run.
- Nowadays, children don't focus much and always have a tendency to skip any tough situation. In this case, children must inhibit the habit of reading books as it increases one's level of concentration. Concentration is the ultimate key to one's success, so its achievement

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is not that easy also. Nothing is impossible, one's passion and termination can definitely help one to achieve the zenith of success.

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From Paper to Practice: Protection of the Female Unborn Child; Analysis of the PCPNDT Act

Riddhi Khurana¹

3rd Year, B.B.A L.L.B (Hons), Christ(Deemed To Be)University, Delhi NCR Campus

Abstract: Female Foeticide remains one of the most disturbing manifestations of gender discrimination in India, where deep rooted son preference and patriarchal traditions continue to dictate the value of a child's life. The Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Act, 1994, enacted over three decades ago intended to curb sex determination and prevent sex selective abortions. While the Act may appear strong on paper, weak and inconsistent enforcement has resulted in a prevailing sex ratio gap. Its enforcement has been largely hindered by deep rooted patriarchy, procedural hurdles, corruption, and stigma against women who challenge these social norms. Studies emphasize that cultural son preference, dowry practices and misuse of technology are some of the main reasons of female Foeticide. There are still gaps in the PCPNDT Act in tackling these root causes and ensuring deterrence through successful conviction. Therefore, this book chapter critically analyses the reasons for the gap between the Acts legal framework and its implementation has failed to achieve the desired outcome and suggests reforms such as stricter enforcement of the laws in place, mechanisms of social accountability for the people involved, supportive mechanisms for complainants, including gender-sensitive approaches to the integration of policies, in order to ensure that the law is genuinely effective, in terms of protecting the rights of the unborn girl child.

Key Words: *Female Foeticide; Gender discrimination; Son preference; Patriarchy; PCPNDT Act; Sex determination; Sex-selective abortion*

INTRODUCTION

Female Foeticide is still one of the worst aspects of modern India that reflects the deep rooted cultural preference of sons over daughters. It is usually used to describe the act of terminating the life of a female foetus after it has been identified as female. This is usually done through the means of ultrasound, other imaging forms, or similar instruments. Because of societal biases regarding gender, what originally were medical technologies, have come to be used as simple methods of gender identification of unborn child.

For numerous reasons like cultural, social, and financial, the birth of a son is seen very differently than the birth of a daughter in Indian culture. In order to solve this issue, the Indian government enacted the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, or PCPNDT Act in 1994. The Act came into effect from January 1, 1996, and its objective was to eliminate the use of diagnostic techniques for sex determination and to prohibit sex-selective abortions as well. The aim of the Act was to ensure the respect and dignity of women and the use of medical technology to foster health and not discrimination. The factors leading to female foeticide are multi-faceted. They require a deeper understanding of the entire social and cultural context wherein they take place. The Health and Family Welfare Ministry, in the report of 2006, mentioned that "the social, cultural, and religious fabric of India is mainly patriarchal which overall leads to the secondary status of women."

The PCPNDT Act is one of the main legal protection around this act, but changing the law does not alter the basic sense of attitude that people have. So, the fight against female foeticide is a legal, moral and cultural fight that requires empathy, change and shared responsibility by all members of society.

Statement Of Problem:

Although this Act has been in place for over three decades, numbers of cases filed are very few. Also unlawful sex determination and sex selective abortions are still being performed which is the opposite of the act's intent. The case of Dr. Mitu Khurana, the first woman to file a complaint under the law herself shows both the hope for justice and the many challenges people face when fighting for their rights in cases of gender discrimination before birth. Her case reveals systemic barriers like poor enforcement, procedural hurdles in the legal system, and strong social stigma against those who fight against these traditions long withstanding in India. As a

result, the planned protections of the Act have failed to safeguard vulnerable women and discourage the violations effectively.

Research Questions:

1. What is female Foeticide in India?
2. What are the reasons for female Foeticide being a problem even today in India?

Research Objectives:

1. To Examine the concept of female Foeticide in India.
2. To explore the social and cultural reasons for the prevailing issue of female Foeticide in India.

Research Methodology:

The research will take the form of qualitative research using secondary data analysis. It will analyze legal documents, academic articles, and media coverage relating to the PCPNDT Act and female Foeticide. The research will examine patterns, complexities, and failures in the experience and implementation of the law. The methodology involved: Document analysis; Literature review and Media and Report analysis. This approach helps in the understanding of the gap between law in text and law in practice, making it suitable for evaluating socio-legal issues like female foeticide.

Literature Review:

1. NHM Meghalaya/UNFPA (2013) “Compilation and Analysis of Case Laws on PCPNDT Act” (Dr. Shalini Phansalkar Joshi):

Focus/Findings: This paper does a comprehensive review and analysis of judicial decisions under the PCPNDT Act. It also covers Supreme Court and High Court rulings and explores why violations happen or how gender bias plays out in society.

Gap: The focus is mainly on higher court judgments and misses personal stories or lived experiences behind the legal battles. Little discussion on whether the law is effective.

2. BBC (2015) - “India Activist to Fight Sex Determination Ruling” (Vineet Khare):

Focus/Findings: It focuses on Dr. Mitu Khurana’s story and her legal battles and highlights how Indian mentality and patriarchy make it difficult for women to assert their rights, even with legal protection.

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Gap: It offers limited legal analysis of why her case was dismissed despite documented evidence. It doesn't fully explore how enforcement of the PCPNDT Act varies across India or what structural reforms are needed and there is no discussion about Female Foeticide as a concept.

3. IJCM&PH (2016) - "A study of attitude, awareness and practice on female feticide of pregnant women in Udaipur city of Rajasthan, India" (Ritu Bala)

Focus/Findings: It focuses on the awareness of such practices by research done at a hospital in Udaipur and aims to identify the effect of increased awareness on their attitudes towards having a girl child.

Gap: Does not explore the reasons for these practices. Limited to only one hospital in the city of Udaipur, making it harder to generalize.

4. PMC (2017) - "Stopping Female Feticide: Failure and Unintended Consequence of Ultrasound Restriction" (Sheida Tabaie)

Focus/Findings: Focuses on the continued decline in the sex ratio after the enactment of the PC PNDT Act and highlights its failure. Also highlights how the bans implemented by this Act may have negative consequences and connects with anesthesiology.

Gap: Does not propose alternatives to the regulations of this Act or address the enforcement issues.

5. Financial Express (2018) - "PCPNDT Act Implementation Poor in Several States: Report" (PTI)

Focus/Findings: Cites the reasons for low conviction rates.

Gap: Does not consider victim mentality, social and cultural norms.

6. Press Information Bureau (2018) - "Laxity in Implementation of PC and PNDT Law" (MV/LK)

Focus/Findings: Discusses the various steps taken by the MOHFW for removing the gap of Child Sex Ratio.

Gap: No details on the reasons for the gap in sex ratio and for low convictions.

7. IJCM&PH (2018) - "Awareness and perception regarding female foeticide among adolescents in rural community of Nalgonda district, Telangana"

(Kishore Yadav J, Praveena Ganapa, Joanna P., Fernandes, Sreeharshika D., Ramesh S.)

Focus/Findings: Focuses on awareness and perceptions among health workers and women. Finds awareness growing but social stigma and practices persist.

Gap: Only quantitative research is done. No focus on the qualitative aspects of female foeticide.

8. Legal Desire (2018) - “It’s a Girl: Dr. Mitu Khurana’s Fight” (Apoorva Sinha)

Focus/Findings: Focuses on Dr. Mitu Khurana's journey and the facts of her case. Highlights the struggles women like her must face in our legal system and by society.

Gap: Is case focused and does not relate with the ongoing traditions in India, the related laws or compare with other such cases.

9. Rostrum Legal (2019) - “Female Foeticide in India: A Socio-Legal Study” (Afkar Ahmad, Sarfaraz Ahmed Khan)

Focus/Findings: Discusses various factors leading to female foeticide and the various judicial approaches to it.

Gap: No policy recommendations on the same.

10. Wiley (2019) - “Sex Selection in India: Why a Ban is Not Justified” (Aksel Braanen Sterri)

Focus/Findings: Argues that bans may worsen discrimination and that social biases must be confronted.

Gap: Theoretical argument, little empirical evidence on effects of bans.

11. IJLRP (2021) - “Female Foeticide in India – Social Legal Stigma” (Kamal)

Focus/Findings: Explores the main reasons and effects of female foeticide in India with case laws.

Gap: No policy recommendations and is primarily sociological.

12. İlköğretim Online (2021) - “Judicial Stand On Problem Of Female Foeticide In India Under Other Laws A Critical Study” (Dr. Geeta Shrivastava and Ms. Nimisha Sinha)

Focus/Findings: Examines how patriarchal norms, dowry practices, son preference, and the misuse of technology like ultrasound contribute to the declining child sex ratio. Reviews how related legislations are applied in such cases from a legal point of view.

Gap: Lacks any statistical data, case law outcomes and mostly theory based. Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online, 2021; Vol 20 (Issue 1): pp. 4092-4099

13. Sciencepub (2022) - “A Study on Female Foeticide in India” (Raman Nehra and Dr. Balasasheb Garje)

Focus/Findings: Highlights how cultural son preference, dowry expenses, and misuse of technologies like ultrasounds have driven gender-selective abortions. Details how even educated communities exploit medical advances to avoid having daughters.

Gap: Mainly descriptive and relies heavily on secondary sources. Also overlooks enforcement effectiveness of laws like the PCPNDT Act, and personal stories.

14. SSRN (2024) - “Female Foeticide in India: A Bitter Truth of the Modern Society” (Sakshi Sharma)

Focus/Findings: Highlights what female foeticide is and its primary and secondary causes. Links patriarchy to the declining sex ratios and legal inefficiency despite legal frameworks such as the PCPNDT Act and the Medical Termination of pregnancy act.

Gap: Focused mainly on causes and not on the reasons for the convictions being so low or impact on the life of a woman who decides to come forward.

15. BIO Web of Conferences (2024) - “Analysis of the Skewed Sex Ratio and Female Foeticide in India” (Anu Mittal, Ruchi Kohli and Amit Mittal)

Focus/Findings: Relates skewed sex ratios with weak law enforcement and patriarchal norms. Reviews legislative interventions.

Gap: Mainly uses statistical data. Only a quantitative analysis with no qualitative analysis. No analysis of the impact of the legislative interventions mentioned in the paper.

16. International Journal of Law (2024) - “Constitutional remedies against female foeticide: Evaluating the effectiveness of the PCPNDT act in India” (Bindu Variath)

Focus/Findings: Focuses on laws enacted for prevention of these acts, their loopholes and legal review of landmark judicial decisions.

Gap: No quantitative analysis and research. No causes or outcomes of these laws are mentioned.

17. Vikaspedia (2024) - “Female Foeticide and Female Infanticide” (Sakthi Vel)

Focus/Findings: Focuses on the role of Panchayat members in preventing these practices.

Gap: No evidence or statistical analysis. No analysis of whether the role played by the Panchayat members has an impact on female foeticide.

18. JETIR (2025)- “A Study to Assess Knowledge on Female Foeticide Among Women, 2025” (Ms. Vanitaben Vinodkumar Parmar, Ms. Payal Dabhi)

Focus/Findings: Knowledge and attitudes about female foeticide and gender preference by women in a village in Gujarat.

Gap: Analysis only limited to one village.

19. Dekoder (2025)- “Female Infanticide and Foeticide in India: A Crisis That Needs Immediate Attention” (Dekoder, Sangeeta Cheetu)

Focus/Findings: Discusses laws, social awareness campaigns, and women’s empowerment as key to combating female foeticide; evaluates ongoing challenges.

Gap: Mostly descriptive; lacks primary data, especially on the impact of recent initiatives.

20. Shodhgangotri - “Review of Literature”

Focus/Findings: Does a comprehensive literature review about female foeticide and its rates in both rural and urban areas and highlights it increasingly becoming a rural issue.

Gap: Lacks the causes of the increasing rate in rural areas and no suggestions regarding policy initiatives to bring change. Mainly focuses only on rural areas.

Analysis and Discussion:

The PCPNDT Act, while it was enacted two decades back, has still not really been used in practice. The non-application of the Act in its intended manner was due to a variety of causes, such as the inadequacies of the law, the lack of proper enforcement, and the influence of the prevailing conservative, male-influenced culture, among others.

1. **Implementation Failures:** Numerous reports have mentioned that proper monitoring mechanisms are missing and due to this the conviction rate is still very low. According to the Financial Express (2018)¹, the very low rate of convictions is due to such reasons as lack

of witnesses, insufficient evidence, and out-of-court settlements, while the others mention the various methods adopted by the MOHFW to close the gap of Child Sex Ratio, but concedes that enforcement is poor. They also further reinforce the argument by saying that the numbers continue to reflect a shrinking of the sex ratio, and thus indicate a failure in proper enforcement, though the Act has been in force for two decades.

2. Patriarchal Barriers: Preference for sons and gender inequality continue to be the main factors that contribute to the failure of this Act and the dwindling sex ratios. Nehra and Gajre (2022)² point to dowry practices and social norms that consider daughters as a liability. Others also draw a parallel between technology misuse and patriarchal pressures arguing that the latter exacerbates the former.
3. Procedural Hurdles: The case of Dr. Mitu Khurana is perhaps the most striking example of the many ordeals that the victims must face despite the protective provisions of the Act. Her story, as reported by the BBC (2015)³ and Legal Desire (2018)⁴, illustrates how victims are subjected to extended litigation, lack of witness protection, and dissuasion from taking the legal recourse to justice. Variath (2024)⁵ also notes that judicial remedies might exist in theory, but they are not available in practice due to a plethora of procedural hurdles such as the above.
4. Stigma Attached to Society: Both Yadav et al. (2018)⁷ and Bala (2016)⁶ point out that although the public has become more cognizant of the female foeticide issue, the stigma and the negative attitudes of society towards the women who fight against the practice have not lessened. Women who oppose the customs associated with their gender run the risk of violence, rejection, etc.
5. Gaps in the Law: Tabaie (2017)⁹ and Sterri (2019)¹⁰ argue that the legislation prohibiting foetal sex determination may even have unintended repercussions such as the emergence of underground practices. Ahmad and Khan (2019)⁸ point out that while there are judicial remedies, enforcement agencies are not accountable. Variath (2024)⁵ also points out the shortcomings of judicial remedies that decrease the deterrent effect.
6. Lack of Awareness and Training: A great factor contributing to the failure to implement the PCPNDT Act effectively is a complete absence of awareness and training among the people who responsible for enforcement, that is, medical practitioners, radiologists, the police, etc. The National Health Mission Report of 2021 mentions that in certain districts some authorities do not know the required record-keeping, registration, and reporting procedures for the Act. This

situation leads to poor documentation, weak evidence gathering, and procedural lapses in court cases.

7. Tech Innovations and Loopholes: Rapid technological development has made it still more difficult to enforce the law. For instance, it has become very hard to monitor ultrasound machines and telemedicine for illegal sex determination use because of the portable ones that are easily moved around and the practice of calling patients in other states or countries). Many say that digital and cross-border consultations give doctors a good chance to pollute their practices as many procedures are done informally and without documentation. The proposal of a central system to track ultrasound machines' location and use made by MOHFW in 2019 has not yet been implemented, which means enforcement is still weak.
8. Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors: Socio-economic factors are the major reasons besides legal and procedural issues. Nehra and Gajre (2022)² points out how the economic burden that parents have to support their daughters has given rise to the practice of favouring boys because of dowry, restricted property rights, and limited economic opportunities. Rural households generally consider sons not only as their heirs but also as their security against poverty in old age. This inequality of structure gives rise to a cultural support for the sex-selective practices and the legal opposition cannot change it alone.
9. Inadequate Role of Media and Civil Society: The media has focused on individual instances such as Dr. Mitu Khurana, but consistent advocacy and public engagement are still missing. Public campaigns like “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” have been of little measurable impact because they are merely symbolic and event-based without developing sustained grassroots mobilization.

Need for Policy Integration and Holistic Approach: According to experts, the PCPNDT Act should not function independently but be tied to larger gender equality and reproductive rights policies. If the Act was linked with activities like POSHAN Abhiyan, National Health Mission, and Women’s Economic Empowerment Programs

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The cruel practice of female foeticide, which points to gender bias in India, still occurs and is one of the major human rights violations. The incidence of sex-selective abortion, which is done with the help of medical professionals, continues in spite of the passing of the Prohibition of Sex Selection Act in 1994 and other laws aimed at banning it. The whole thing does not only concern the law, it unearthed the entire system of patriarchal

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values, economic factors, and cultural beliefs that consider sons as having a greater value than daughters. Medical technology is being misused, law enforcement is ineffective; and there is no accountability, which has all contributed to the Act having less of an effect than what was intended.

The issue is still serious as evidenced by the steadily declining sex ratio, the latest 2011 Census indicating only 914 girls per 1,000 boys in the 0–6 age group. It is generally accepted that laws cannot change peoples' attitudes that have been formed over generations. Among the educated and urban population practices such as dowry, lack of financial independence, and social stigma linked to the birth of daughters still push families toward such gender-based choices. Only when the society and the administration are on the same path will real progress be made.

The proper and frequent monitoring of the law is among ways to strengthen its impact like the digital tracking of the ultrasound machines and the strict audits of diagnostic centres.

Faster and more effective judicial processes along with greater transparency through making data on inspections and convictions available would bring about a step towards better accountability. The legislation must not only banish the scheme of Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, and POSHAN Abhiyan to reap the fruit of permanent social transformation at the grassroots level.

In the end, the elimination of female foeticide is not just a matter of law. It requires a good deal of acceptance and understanding of the people. When the birth of a girl child is greeted with the same happiness as that of a boy, India will be closer to the actual parity and will fulfil its promise of respect and justice for all.

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From Conformity to Empowerment: Gender Transformation in Indian Cinema- A Comparative Analysis of *Thappad* and *Hum Aapke Hai Koun*

Priyanka Tamang Lama¹

PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of North Bengal

Abstract: Cinema, as a powerful cultural medium, reflects and shapes societal perceptions of gender, power, and identity. This chapter offers a comparative analysis of two influential Bollywood films—*Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (1994) and *Thappad* (2020)—to trace the transformation of gender norms over nearly three decades. Positioned within differing socio-cultural contexts, the films present contrasting depictions of familial power relations, femininity, and masculinity.

The study examines how women's autonomy, agency, and representation evolve across time, highlighting the shift from the 1990s' idealization of women as self-sacrificing and family-oriented (*Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*) to contemporary narratives that question patriarchy and assert women's consent and independence (*Thappad*). Using qualitative comparative content analysis and thematic examination of key scenes, dialogues, and visual symbols, the research draws on feminist theory, gender performativity, and hegemonic masculinity to understand how films construct or challenge gender norms.

The chapter concludes that Indian cinema not only mirrors social change but actively reshapes cultural norms and gender identities. The comparison underscores the significant role of media and popular culture in both reinforcing and subverting patriarchal structures, offering crucial insights into the dynamic relationship between gender representation and societal progress.

Keywords: *Gender representation, Patriarchy, Feminist theory, Indian cinema*

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of cinema, it has functioned as a powerful cultural institution, representing and revealing societal values, identities, and power relations. In India, Bollywood occupies a unique socio-cultural position by not only entertaining but also constructing collective consciousness around gender, family, and morality. Over the course of history, Bollywood films have been portraying conventional female virtues rooted in patriarchal norms, emphasizing sacrifice, obedience, and conformity within marriage. Women's representation in Indian cinema is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies, showing them as emotional, self-sacrificing, and guardians of ethical standard of tradition. Such portrayals function not merely as reflections but as active agents normalizing gender inequalities.

However, socio-economic changes, notably the liberalization in the 1990s, introduced new commercialistic desire alongside the onset of feminist consciousness, challenging these traditional norms. The comparative analysis of the films *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) and *Thappad* (2020) is done to explore how cinematic narratives construct, reinforce, or challenge gender norms over time. The study relies on Feminist Theory, Gender performativity (Judith Butler, 1990), and hegemonic masculinity (R.W. Connell, 1995), the study adopts a qualitative, thematic content analysis. In *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* women's decision-making power within the family and recognizes the importance of domesticity. *Thappad* emerges from a socio-political context which is influenced by feminist discourse, and cinematic advancement, that gives prominence to women's decision-making power against domestic violence.

The chapter highlights how these films construct, reinforce, or contest gender norms, focusing on women's agency, consent, and identity within domestic and social spaces. By positioning these films within their socio-historical contexts, this chapter demonstrates Bollywood role in creating and redefining gender roles tracing a shift from traditionally defined female roles toward complex representations of female empowerment and self realization.

Review of Literature

Indian cinema plays a major role in shaping cultural and gender identities. The representation of women in Indian cinemas has also been transforming in the last few decades. India ranks first globally in film production through which we can say that it is one of the cinema enthusiast

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nations (Dagnaud & Feigelson, 2012), with Bollywood navigating a multicultural landscape to reach diverse audiences domestically and internationally it has been able to reflect, refract and at the same time reconstruct the political and social realities of the nation. Bollywood transcends entertainment by articulating social anxieties and aspirations, often reflecting patriarchal values that confine women to domestic roles and idealize self-sacrifice and cultural preservation (Bhati & Sushma 2024; Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). Historically, Indian cinema evolved from silent films pioneered by Dadasaheb Phalke the “father of Indian Cinema” whose silent films laid the foundation for talkies, theatres and innovation in art, music and dance. Indian cinema originated in 1896 with Lumiere Brothers first screening in Mumbai. From the 1980s onward, commercial family- centric narratives dominated, later integrating literary adaptations and technological advances in the 2000s. Contemporary scholarship argues that films shape public consciousness and reinforce cultural values. Women’s representation remains stereotypical, often limited to nurturing mothers, self-sacrificing wives, or romantic objects, marginalizing women’s perspectives (Jamwal & Semwal, 2020; Devi Mohan & Balakrishnan, 2025).

Broadly, the literature frames Bollywood as a questionable arena, in clarifying perspectives of gender and power which is shifting over recent decades from celebrating hegemonic femininity toward recognizing female agency and individuality. This chapter builds on this foundation by examining the two films within their distinct socio-cultural contexts.

Theoretical Framework

To understand how women are represented in the Indian cinema, the study adopts Feminist theory which offers a critical lens through which issues of gender inequality and representation can be interpreted. It helps us to understand the patriarchal domination and norms, gender power relationship, and women’s agency. Tong (2009) argues that the Feminist theory challenges and deconstructs how societies define, regulate, and sustain gender disparities. She adds that society also reinforces narrative that women lack intellectual capabilities and are physically not so strong as compared to men. Salzinger and Gonsalves (2024) are of the opinion that the feminist theory is an intellectual project that interrogates the gender binary and the relations of domination embedded within it. Feminist theory draws our attention to how societies perceive, define, regulate and perpetuate gender inequalities. In the context of cinema, it helps us to understand how women are represented, the roles they are allowed to play in the films and the broader ideological context from

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which it emerges. The perspective helps us to understand how patriarchal notions and structures are portrayed in the film in a subtle way are treated as normal in the society without making an extra effort. The feminist theory also allows us to understand and emphasize women's subjectivity and agency and examine how female characters either accept or resist societal expectations.

When applied to the context of Indian cinema it helps us to understand the structural inequalities which are embedded in gendered narratives. In *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* the characters like Nisha and Pooja perform duties and roles which is shaped by the family even the marriage is decided by the elders, self-sacrificial nature of women is portrayed that limits women in domestic spheres, as a dutiful wife, preserver of culture which was prominent for maintaining families solidarity, and in contrast we can accentuate from the Movie *Thappad* where a female character Amrita refuses to treat domestic abuse as normal in her marital life, questioning her self-worth, personal identity thereby challenging the concept of women as just a care givers in the society. Therefore, In *Hum Aapke Hai Koun*, female characters such as Nisha perform roles shaped by domesticity, familial loyalty, and self-sacrifice, reflecting patriarchal ideals. In contrast, *Thappad* challenges these norms when Amrita refuses to tolerate marital abuse. Applied to cinema, it explores how women's roles sustain or contest patriarchal norms by glorifying care-giving and self-sacrifice while restricting autonomy.

This study further is supported by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which provides a critical lens for understanding how cinematic narratives construct, reproduce, and challenge gender norms. Butler, (1990, 1993) mentions that gender is socially constructed and it is not a stable identity which is produced through repeated acts that align with culturally accepted ideas of femininity and masculinity. These repeated acts are rooted in everyday rituals, gestures, bodily expressions, and verbal patterns which steadily progresses into what society views as traditional roles. Thus, gender is not something one is, but something one does.

Applied to *Hum Aapke Hai Koun* (1994), Butler's framework reveals how femininity is constructed through ritualized domestic task and emotional labour. The character Nisha's identity is shaped by consistently performing roles of caregiver, obedient, modest. Her repeated performance naturalises the patriarchal ideal of the "good Indian woman." The film's emphasis on weddings, celebrations, familial duties, and women's emotional labour exemplifies Butler's argument that gender norms are sustained through socially approved repetition. In contrast,

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Thappad (2020) provides a site of resistance within this ritualized structure. Amrita initially performs the conventional role of the self-sacrificing wife, but an act of violence disrupts her gendered routine. Her refusal to perform the expected role of patience, silence, and tolerance becomes act of resistance that reveals the constructed and unequal foundations of marital patriarchy. Butler asserts that gender norms become vulnerable when individuals withdraw their participation in them. Amrita's refusal thus becomes a transformative moment where gender performance is renegotiated and redefined. Therefore, in *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, femininity is constructed via repeated acts, portraying self-sacrifice as an ideal trait and Thappad disrupts these norms through Amrita's refusal to endure domestic violence, enabling redefinition of gender performance. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to dominant male ideals legitimizing female subordination (Connell, 1995). *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* depicts benevolent, uncontested male authority sustained by women's self-sacrificial nature. Thappad frames male violence as embedded privilege, contesting patriarchal authority and aligning with contemporary gender discourses. Together, these frameworks reveal Bollywood films as sites where gender norms are continuously produced, contested, and transformed, reflecting socio-cultural shifts in India.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing thematic content analysis to examine how women are represented in two Bollywood films; *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) and *Thappad* (2020). Qualitative analysis is especially suited for analyzing the subtle meaning, depiction of characters, and film embedded narrative structures. The major aim being how these cinematic texts construct, negotiate, and challenge gender identities through their depiction of women. The data selection involved multiple comprehensive viewings of both films. From each, six to eight scenes were purposively selected based on their significant thematic relevance to women's agency, domestic power relations, expressions of consent, and gender role enactment. These scenes focused on ritualistic performances, confrontational moments, domestic negotiations, and pivotal shifts in character development, ensuring rich material for thematic comparison. The analytic process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous six-step framework for thematic analysis. Initially, the films were repeatedly viewed to achieve thorough familiarization with narratives, dialogue, and interpersonal dynamics. Open coding was then conducted to identify recurring symbols, gestures, verbal exchanges, and relational patterns. These initial codes were grouped into broader categories

representing themes such as domesticity, sacrifice, entitlement, autonomy, and resistance. Subsequently, overarching themes were developed to draw comparability between the films while highlighting continuity and transformation in gender portrayals. Throughout the analysis, close attention was given to the socio-cultural and historical contexts influencing the films' production and reception. As this study utilized publicly accessible films and involved no direct human subjects, ethical approval was not required. Limited use of dialogue excerpts adheres strictly to fair use standards and serves purely analytical purposes. This methodological approach enables a robust, comparative interrogation of gendered cinematic narratives and grounds findings within broader sociological discourses on Bollywood and gender.

Analysis

The comparative thematic analysis yielded four primary themes that elucidate Bollywood shifting gender discourse over almost three decades.

Subtle Integration of Patriarchal Norms in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun and Thappad*

In *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*, patriarchal norms are subtly embedded through everyday interactions. The opening cricket scene frames gender hierarchy when a character Rita despite playing with the male characters is relegated to a secondary role. Her line, "Hamesha mujhe fielding keliye bhej dete ho" ("You always send me for fielding"), reinforces the naturalised belief that women are less capable and their participation does not shape outcomes. The film further marks modern, outspoken women as "improper." Bhagwanti, who displays agency and modern behaviour, is deemed "uncultured" and "not self-sacrificial"; her husband even claims, "Iski wajah se humare koi bachche nahi hue" ("Because of her nature we never had a child"). Her views on marriage are dismissed when he adds, "Uski baton mein dhyan mat dijiye, humein to seedhi-saadhi aur pyari si bahu chahiye" ("Don't pay attention to her; we want a simple and obedient daughter-in-law"). These scenes collectively illustrate how 1990s Bollywood normalised patriarchal femininity and positioned marriage decisions firmly under male authority.

In *Thappad* (2020), patriarchal ideals continue to operate, though in more explicit form. Amrita's husband and others around her expect her to forgive a public act of marital violence, framing it as an acceptable lapse. The dialogue in the film "Tanne Marne k liye licence chayiye mujhe? (Do I need to have a licence to beat you up?). The film also presents other women the maid, the lawyer who endure everyday gendered injustice

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reflecting the persistence of culturally sanctioned tolerance towards women's suffering.

Women's Identity reduced to domesticity as nurturers and primary bearers of moral responsibility

Hum Aapke Hain Koun reflects a socio-cultural context emphasizing family, marriage, and collective identity which is free from contemporary feminist or social media critiques. Women in the film are depicted as the emotional and structural core of the family unit, responsible for maintaining cohesion through acts of care, sacrifice, and emotional labour. Hence this normalized domestic space is richly complemented by ritualistic celebrations, notably a wedding sequence where female characters meticulously execute ceremonies; perform songs and dances, and everyday ritual. The celebrated labour of women is portrayed as fulfilling and natural, that reinforces identities through relational roles as daughters, sisters, wives, and daughters-in-law. During a pivotal scene, the character Nisha in expresses readiness to subordinate personal aspirations in favour of family welfare. Such dramatizations naturalize the alignment of women's desires with collective interests, reaffirming patriarchal family structures as benign and harmonious. Female agency as depicted operates strictly within these boundaries of familial obligation. The film actively sustains traditional gender performances, associating femininity with selflessness, emotional maturity, and emotional labor. Male authority hence remains uncontested which constructs an ideological image of patriarchy as comforting and consensual rather than being oppressive. Even in the contemporary movies like Thappad Amrita sacrifices her own desires and ambition to perform the ideal of a devoted wife managing all the domestic chores, from waking her husband, preparing breakfast and coffee to organizing his belongings for the day illustrating how women are confined and reduced to domestic spaces.

Violence and Assumed Consent

In Hum Aapke Hain Koun and we can see how women's consent is assumed rather than asked for which is quietly absorbed into expectations and they agree because compliance is naturalized. The soft invisible control becomes a form of symbolic violence where women's silence is mistaken for acceptance. In stark juxtaposition, Thappad critically interrogates the taken-for-granted normalcy of patriarchal power within marital domains. When Amrita's husband slaps her during a party the close-up shots shows her silence and stunned expression; the film intensifies the emotional gravity of this incident, marking the onset of her

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assertion and refusal to tolerate violence. Amrita in one of the scenes tells her mother: “Bas ek thappad tha, par nahi hona chahiye tha” (“It was just one slap, but it should not have happened”), setting out a moral limit against violence hidden behind pressure to forgive.

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Hum Aapke Hain Koun supports conformity to gender norms as primary to domestic duties. The character Nisha portray that collective harmony is normal, with desire shaped by social expectations rather than personal choice. Men, caring yet authoritative, occupy decision-making positions which is unquestioned. Patriarchal order operates comfortably through consensus. There is absence of conflict in the film that masks persistent inequality, making evident in the film’s investment in harmonious traditionalism. Conversely, Thappad reconstructs femininity around agency, consent, and dignity. Amrita’s journey from compliance to self-assertion reframes endurance as a contested, not given, expectation. Her departure from the marriage is framed not as rebellion but a moral claim to personhood, articulating an emergent feminist ethos. This contrast marks broader cultural reconfigurations in notions of autonomy and resistance, recasting traits once glorified as silence and accommodation into burdensome demands obscuring systemic injustice.

Discussion

The comparison of Hum Aapke Hain Koun (1994) and Thappad (2020) shows a major shift in Bollywood’s portrayal of women, underscoring socio-cultural change in India over three decades. Hum Aapke Hain Koun presents a collectivist view where women’s identities are rooted in familial roles. Femininity is idealized through nurturing, sacrifice, and emotional labour, treated as duties rather than constraints. The absence of conflict in the film reflects a normative acceptance of subtle patriarchy that maintains traditional gender inequalities with emerging consumerism. In contrast, Thappad is situated in a socio-political context marked by women’s awareness on rights and feminist activism. The film challenges the acceptance of a physical abuse by focussing on women’s interior and emotional experiences and emphasizing on maintaining personal boundaries. Amrita’s refusal to tolerate violence disrupts what society constructs as normal by prioritizing individual dignity. Her journey from conformity to autonomy denotes contemporary feminist discourses promoting self-worth and fortitude. The films connect to reflect a transition from celebrating hegemonic gender roles toward critically questioning the everyday violence. This shift in cinematic narratives

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indicates broader changes in Indian society's understanding of women's role, dignity, and rights within domestic spaces.

Conclusion

The comparative study of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) and *Thappad* (2020) illustrates how Bollywood's portrayal of women mirrors India's sweeping socio-cultural changes. *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* maintains an idealized domestic order rooted in sacrifice, conformity, and emotional labor, while *Thappad* disrupts this by championing a woman's right to dignity, consent, and self-definition. This marks a substantive ideological shift from celebrating normative femininity to questioning entrenched patriarchal entitlement. Positioned nearly three decades apart, the films trace a transition from uncritical normalization of traditional gender roles to nuanced, examination of everyday patriarchy. This evolution underscores Bollywood's dual role as both a mirror of social dynamics and as a mediator of social change. Contemporary cinema moves from silence to articulation, compliance and self assertion, and family duty to personal agency, reaffirming the importance of film as contributors to feminist conversations in India and as a sociological text, poised to uncover and reshape cultural understandings of gender and power relations in Indian society.

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Womb for Rent: A Critical Analysis of Surrogacy Laws in India

Manya Tyagi¹

3rd Year, B.B.A L.L.B (Hons), Christ(Deemed To Be)University, Delhi NCR Campus

Abstract: Surrogacy is often related as a reproductive gift to a woman where the surrogate mother carries the child for the couple or an individual.¹ Once the “surrogacy capital” of the world India outlawed commercial (paid) surrogacy in 2021 and now permits only altruistic (unpaid) surrogacy which is heavily restricted under the auspices of regulations to protect poor women from exploitation.² The intention of this legislation was to protect poor women from exploitation but in practice has opened up possibilities for even more issues striking at very protections and intentions.³ Many marginalized communities, such as LGBTQIA+ groups, single parents, and those who do not meet the regulations to qualify have been left out. At the same time, supposedly outlawing paid surrogacy has not stopped the practice from occurring inappropriately, but just taken in underground leading to illegal clinics and instances of baby trafficking on the rise. The research inquires whether the current surrogacy legislation is protecting women’s best interests or further exacerbating issues that put women at risks.³ The research aims to study the adequacy of the current surrogacy laws in protecting surrogate mothers’ interest.⁹ The aim is also to study how through surrogacy we can provide the feeling of being parent to different people.

Keywords: *surrogacy; reproductive justice; altruistic surrogacy; commercial surrogacy; constitutional equality*

INTRODUCTION

Surrogacy is an option for many individuals and couples who are struggling to achieve pregnancy through typical means and have provided a pathway to parenthood for many years.¹ Surrogacy is a complex intersection of science, ethics, law and emotion -- allowing some

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to experience the joy of parenting while also raising serious considerations of bodily autonomy, coercion, and social justice.. India became known as the “surrogacy capital of the world,” as it became an international destination for commercial surrogate arrangements, due to its affordable medical facilities, surplus of willing surrogates, and lack of regulation.¹ Concerns regarding incidents of exploitation of women in economically precarious situations, unethical medical practices, and the commodification of reproduction led to a significant change in law.³ The Government of India passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act in 2021, prohibiting commercial surrogacy but allowing only altruistic surrogacy - which means medical expenses and insurance coverage are allowed, but not any other compensation.² Although the legislative stated purpose was to protect women who could be exploited for childbearing, and to outlaw the commercialization of childbearing, much debate has taken place surrounding the effects of the legislation.³ Critics base their arguments on the premise that the law, in being protective, has created new barriers—most notably excluding an entire range of groups from surrogacy consideration, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, single parents, and live-in couples.⁴ Moreover, prohibiting commercial surrogacy in India has not prohibited unethical practices. It has been reported that it has simply moved the practices underground, resulting in illegal clinics and unregulated practices, and instances of trafficking infants.⁵ This leads to a critical inquiry:

Does the existing surrogacy law safeguard women, or does it simply shift the needs of surrogate mothers into detrimental and underground practices?³ Through this paper, I deliberately reflect on the sufficiency of India's surrogacy law to safeguard the rights and well-being of surrogate mothers while also exploring the ethical and emotional considerations in surrogacy as a vehicle to fulfill the universal human drive to parent. The objective of this inquiry is to examine whether prohibiting commercial surrogacy has reduced exploitation rather than simply changing the venue, the consequences of preventing marginalized individuals from lawful surrogacy, while advancing an inclusive and equitable framework to better navigate the tensions between safeguarding and reproductive autonomy.

Statement of problem

Surrogacy and India has been a side by side partner since the beginning weather it being the largest industry of surrogacy but surrogacy in india

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has always been a questionable whether it be taking advantage of poor women or exploiting them.³ to put a ban on this Surrogacy regulation act was made to ban paid surrogacy and only permit the free surrogacy under bounded rules²

While this act was made to protect the interest of people, it is unjust to some people like couples LGBTQIA+ and others.⁴ The main goal is to find the proper balance between women and protecting and respecting their rights and their children. While the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 is well-intentioned, it is not without its own set of complications. The Act seeks to safeguard impoverished and vulnerable women from exploitation but, in doing so, creates another set of disparities and difficulties.. Excluding couples from the LGBTQIA+ community, live partners, and single parents from the Act, have raised concerns about fairness and inclusivity in reproductive rights. Many people who do not fit the traditional understanding of a "married heterosexual couple" are being denied the chance to parenthood through surrogacy; something that can be construed as discriminatory and not in line with the principle of equality guaranteed in the Constitution of India.

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate whether banning commercial surrogacy has decreased exploitation or whether it has created new forms of illegal exploitation.³
2. To highlight the issues by excluded groups , like LGBTQIA couples,single men/women and live in couples.⁴
3. To propose a more egalitarian and fair legal framework that will protect but will also fairer outcomes for all families .⁶

Literature Review

1. In the book socio-ethics of Surrogacy in India and Reproductive Justice (2018) Author:Raymond, Eileen; Corea, Gena; Rudrappa, Sharmila talks about, on the basis of fieldwork, how women in India are exploited, based on a visit to Gujarat, and how poor the conditions are in which these women live, with no proper life.Gap: the study is pre-2021 and does not assess how the Surrogacy Act reshaped exploitation patterns.
2. In the book The Indian Ban on Commercial Surrogacy MANYA GUPTA AND SHIROMI CHATURVEDI(2020) talks about the commercial surrogacy its implications on women its impact on poor women and it focus on banning commercial surrogacy also includes that

how it might exploit poor women Gap: the paper lacks field-based evidence on post-ban underground markets and offers no model for regulated compensation.

3. In the book Regulating the international surrogacy market:the ethics of commercial surrogacy in the Netherlands and India (2020)Author :Jaden Blazier & Rien Janssens compares the surrogacy situation in India and in Netherlands and how also focus on paying surrogate mother will make commercial surrogacy better Gap: the paper does not provide India-specific implementation pathways or surrogate-level empirical data.

4. In the book Critical analysis of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 (2023)- Author :Rohini More talks about banning commercial surrogacy will exploit ore women and better option would be compensated surrogacy Gap: exclusion of LGBTQIA+/single/live-in intending parents is not adequately discussed.

5. In the book CRITIQUE OF THE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS OF WOMEN VIŠ-A-VIŠ THE SURROGACY (REGULATION) ACT, 2021 AND THE ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT, 2021 (2024)-Author : Sruti Sikha Maharana The author says that shift towards altruistic surrogacy would only increase exploitation of women and also take this matter underground Gap: no concrete proposal for lawful compensated surrogacy.

6. In the book Surrogacy and Women's Right to Health in India: Issues and Perspective(2024) Author : Akshansh (LLM), ICFAI Law School, The ICFAI University, Deh talks about the rise of surrogacy in india and about all the medical issues societal issues exploitation of women Gap: surrogate consent and legal rights are not examined in sufficient depth.

7. In the book Exploring the legal landscape of surrogacy in India: Rights, risks, regulations and challenges Dec 2024 Author:Shivani Luthra Lohiya and Nitin Saluja talks about how India used be the hub of surrogacy and later on private clinic started misusing this and exploiting women Gap: lacks empirical evidence on the scale and mechanisms of emerging illegal markets.

8. In the book India's Surrogacy Law: Protecting Rights Or Creating Roadblocks author:Adv. Sunil Kumar(2024) talks about how women carries the baby in her womb how she carries the baby of different families and there difficulties about how the custody gets transferred it also talks about little bit about ivf which makes surrogacy more complex Gap:

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minimal engagement with the 2021 Act, poverty, and commercial vs altruistic distinction.

9. In the book Surrogacy and the Right to Privacy: Analyzing Recent Court Rulings Author Author- Vidhika Chaudhary, a student at Gautam Buddha University(2024) talks about ivf and all about the women's privacy and there rights difference among different surrogacy in india Gap: does not integrate the 2021 law nor address LGBTQIA+/unmarried access.Gap: provides no data on beneficiaries and ignores non-heterosexual/live-in/single exclusion.

10. In the book Opinion: New Surrogacy Rules Offer Hope, Though Scope Can Be Widened Author : Bharti Mishra Nath (2024) talks about the surrogacy act new amendments which make couples to use the donneer sperm or eggs if one partner is medically unfit this article talks about how good it is for the childless couples who cannot have the babies Gap: provides no data on beneficiaries and ignores non-heterosexual/live-in/single exclusion.

11. In the book Navigating the Ethics and Legalities of Surrogacy in India: A Critical Analysis of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act of 2021 (2025)Author:Aparna Singh,Vidhi Krishnan focuses on restricting commercial surrogacy and altruistic surrogacy. Gap: financial realities for surrogates are under-analyzed.

12. In the book Surrogacy in India Law: Constitutional Challenges and Legislative Progress(2025) Author:foresights offices india talks about how surrogacy exploits women and also aims that while preventing exploitation the Act raises constitutional concerns under Articles 14 (equality) and 21 (personal liberty).Gap: surrogate lived experiences are thinly developed.

13. In the book The Inside Story of India's Rent a Womb Industry Author:Yash Patil talks about how india commercial surrogacy but later it got ban Now only altruistic surrogacy is allowed, and only for married Indian heterosexual couples Gap: lacks comparative context with countries allowing compensated surrogacy.

14. In the book Surrogacy In India: A Baffling Legal Construct Author:Siyal Nayal Talks about how this article provides a deeper analysis that how India has evolved it overall journey from first ivf journey to surrogacy and different types of surrogacy it also includes cases like Baby Manji Yamada also focuses on the women's right and legal protection Gap: does not address LGBTQIA+/unmarried access and post-partum health.

15. In the book The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 :An Overview of India's New Surrogacy Laws (legal affairs) talks about how the act was made to protect women's right and and stop the misuse of surrogacy how it only allows altruistic surrogacy and not the compensated one Gap: mental-health and compensated-surrogacy debates are missing.Gap: mental-health and compensated-surrogacy debates are missing.

16. In the book Surrogacy Laws in India: A Critical Analysis of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 Author: Fiza Haque a student at J.B Law College (2025) talks about the whole journey of surrogacy in India. Its evolution from commercial surrogacy to strict surrogacy and its implications affects it also throws light on the reproductive rights and autonomy etc .Gap:There is no data from the fieldwork no real life examples no input for the officials like doctors or lawyers there is no input on about how successful is law implementation in india is for surrogacy Gap: no fieldwork, stakeholder interviews, or assessment of enforcement success.

17. In the book Surrogacy abroad:Legal pathways and challenges for Indian couples seeking parenthood beyond bordersAuthor: Poorvi Chotani (2025) talks about surrogacy for Indians and NRI couples under surrogacy regulation act how the law restricts surrogacy to heterosexual married Indian couples after 5 years of marriage, excluding NRIs, OCIs, LGBTQ+ individuals it also discusses global effects and impact on surrogates child born nationality Gap: No empirical data no real life examples no input on the struggle of children born with surrogacy no input on the laws that could help inculcate foreign couples Gap: lacks empirical accounts of children's and surrogates' struggles.

18. In the book Telangana to take up high level probe into ivf ,surrogacy clinics and alarming surrogacy gaps (2025)This article talks about how telangana government ran a survey on the situation of ivf in the state and came out to be harsher reality of trafficking baby cruelty clinics selling infants born to unknown women this article also mentions where an infant was sold for 35 lakh Gap:No real victims voices or interviews no review of how many clinics where there in total no mention of laws to regulate this sector no remedies

19. In the book Stringent surrogacy rules behind rise in baby trafficking Author: Ajay Tomar (2025): This article put shadow on how the strict law for surrogacy in india is having close relative as a surrogate and long process of having baby gives rise to illegal activities underground

surrogacy and other unjust exploitation of women also add the ruling of supreme court that the rules are too harsh and need to be reviewed Gap:No input on how the new rules will actually stop the surrogacy illegally and no real life problems voices of victims

20. In the book New Laws in India Regulate Assisted Reproduction and Surrogacy(2022) This article talks about the surrogacy act and the reproductive rights of women how these acts protect women and the baby it also includes how it need more inclusion in it for unmarried couples and live in relationship couples which makes the rules to strict and not accessible to poor people Gap: Limited research on the ban of commercial surrogacy and how it affects women and there income this article does not talks about the exploitation of women ground reality etc.

Analysis and discussions

The concept of surrogacy in India has experienced significant transformation over time. India was until recently dubbed the "surrogacy capital of the world" and attracted many couples (domestic and international) in their pursuit of hope for parenthood.¹ Yet what developed as a successful industry had a hidden exploitation side to it; it implicitly produced an exploitation of poor and vulnerable women.³ In response, the 2021 Surrogacy (Regulation) Act was introduced to prohibit this exploitation and provide for altruistic (non-remunerative) surrogacy and to prevent commercial surrogacy. However, as many researchers note, it has created new challenges.³ Countless studies, including Raymond, Corea, and Rudrappa (2018), demonstrated the exploitation of surrogate mothers and the living conditions of surrogate mothers in Gujarat,³ where they were treated as "baby-producing machines." Still, the paper concentrated on the previous (old system) of surrogate mothers prior to the new legislation and neglected to consider how the 2021 Act affects surrogate mothers in India and the climate of surrogacy. Manya Gupta and Shiromi Chaturvedi (2020) discussed the rationale behind banning commercial surrogacy, which was to protect women, but again, no one has studied what the ban on commercial surrogacy would mean to surrogate mothers entering an underground.³ market for surrogacy.

There is a space in the research that is lacking field based research to study what happens after the ban.In their comparative analysis, Jaden Blazier and Rien Janssens (2020) argue that in countries such as the Netherlands, regulating commercial surrogacy is a better alternative than

imposing a total ban,⁶ as possibly allowing surrogate mothers to receive proper compensation for their services is a better method of protecting them.. These authors argue for "compensated surrogacy," where surrogate mothers have safeguards such as fair payment and contractual stipulations, as a more enduring solution. All of the papers thus far, simultaneously point to the discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals, single men and women, and live-in couples, who are simply not afforded the option to enter into surrogacy agreements, reflecting dated views of family that are no longer relevant in societies with more diverse social structures.

Akshansh (2024) and Shivani Luthra Lohiya & Nitin Saluja (2024) provide examinations of serious medical and social issues surrogate mothers experience during surrogacy, such as health complications, stigma, and lack of mental health support. They point out that prohibiting commercial surrogacy has forced the whole thing underground into unregulated, unsafe clinics. The Times of India (2025) indicates that out of Telangana, baby trafficking and illegal IVF clinics proliferate, suggesting that exploitation will occur irrespective of the ban, just in a less visible manner. Aparna Singh and Vidhi Krishnan (2025) point out that the Act is completely separate from the financial realities facing surrogate mothers. The decision to shift to altruistic surrogacy assumes women will act exclusively out of love and compassion, but many women are poor and rely on this form of income to provide for their families; this reality around women's emotional and financial realities is largely ignored. In a similar vein, Foresight Law (2025) notes that the Act is likely to violate women's guaranteed constitutional rights to both equality (Article 14) and liberty (Article 21), while founded on the basis of preventing exploitation. Writers such as Sunil Kumar (2024) and Bharti Mishra Nath (2024) are increasingly concerned with the human element - how surrogacy supports couples in experiencing parenthood and the new amendments which allow families to bring childbearing into their family using donor sperm or eggs where one partner is infertile. However, these papers did not provide real-world narratives or statistics surrounding how many people benefitted from these changes. While at the same time, Poorvi Chotani (2025) describes how the laws have pushed many Indian and NRI couples abroad for surrogacy, especially to countries where compensated surrogacy is legally operational. This does not only become more expensive,¹⁰ but also

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adds legal ambiguity about the child's nationality, as well as rights of the child born abroad.

Across the majority of the papers, one consistent theme emerged - India has gone from commercial surrogacy to altruistic surrogacy and this is not being done to reduce exploitation. In fact, the evidence demonstrates it has excluded marginalized groups, further limited women's economic independence, and provided space for covert markets to develop. Articles,^{7 8} such as Ajay Tomar (2025) and The Times of India (2025) assert that stricter regulations have led to an increase in baby trafficking, which was precisely the opposite effect intended by law. Although intended as a statute to protect women, the act represents a profoundly gendered conception of motherhood and family.

Conclusion

Studies indicate that surrogacy in the Indian context is a multifaceted issue in terms of legality, gender, ethics, and social-cultural aspects. The decision to ban commercial surrogacy was on grounds of exploitation; however, the effects of the ban are mixed. Many women who used surrogacy to aid their families with financial resources have lost this income and independence. Moreover, the narrow conceptualization of family within the text of the law excludes families that include LGBTQIA+ individuals, single parent(s), and live-in partners, which preserves traditional gender roles and limits the deconstruction of family designation. Another alternative approach is to enact a regulated compensated surrogacy, where women are compensated fairly and given legal protections, as opposed to relying on women's role as caregivers solely based on emotional altruism. A key part of disputing the antiquated gendered stereotype that caregiving is undertaken by women for free, rather than in exchange for the labor she committed, is to view reproductive labor as work. A gender-neutral and equal accountability ethic could also address women's autonomy, consent and decision making, and paternalistic principles to support parental rights independent of gender or sexual orientation.

Endnotes

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Child Marriage and Mental Health Outcomes: A case study of Adolescent Rural Girls.

Jeevika Papneja¹

3rd Year, B.B.A L.L.B (Hons), Christ(Deemed To Be)University, Delhi NCR Campus

Dr. Khusbhoo Malik²

Professor at School of Law, Christ (Deemed To Be University), Delhi NCR, Campus

Abstract: Child marriage is a social problem that affects adolescent girls, particularly as it subjects those girls to a variety of risks. Although many aspects of child marriage have already been addressed on a social, cultural, and economic level, their psychological and emotional impacts have been relatively unexplored. The author, through this research, aims to fill that gap by studying the consequences of early marriage among adolescent girls, particularly in terms of how the early onset of adult responsibilities can produce psychological ill-being.

Child marriage tends to subject the girls to adult-like roles and responsibilities; this includes becoming a mother and entering into domestic settings at times when they cannot emotionally or intellectually cope with them, especially in rural communities. These shifts increase their vulnerability to psychological disturbances like anxiety, depression, and risk of long-term trauma. In addition to this, their powerlessness and increased risk of being victims of domestic and societal exclusion are direct contributors to their vulnerability, resulting in a cycle of mental health issues that extends as they grow up.

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Relevant literature, case studies, and available assessments in the field of psychology are used to reinforce the argument that child marriage needs to be perceived as a major determinant of mental health. Such findings can help policymakers, health practitioners, and social workers to develop relevant legislations about the hidden psychological costs of early marriage. The study ultimately highlights the relevance of implementing a multi-dimensional treatment that will combine legal, educational, and psychological interventions to minimize the long-term effects of child marriage and promote resilience of the affected girls.

Keywords- Adolescent girls, Child Marriage, Mental Health, Psychological Trauma, Social Exclusion.

INTRODUCTION- THE GLOBAL CRISIS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

We commonly understand Child Marriage as a direct contributor to human rights violations. Child marriages compel children during their adolescence into roles of adulthood, even before they are prepared to even understand the said roles. The global existence of child marriage is shocking, with approximately 12 million girls married each year before they reach the age of majority⁵, and the concentrated regions of the world are South Asia, which hosts around 45% of the world's child brides; that is estimated to be around 290 million women⁶. This data poses a need for centered research and action in South Asia pertaining to child marriage.

The psychological impacts of child marriage can be enduring and profound. It robs adolescent girls of their sense of security and identity. Being stuck in the shackles of adult-like roles makes them

⁵ UNICEF India, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Mapping: India 2024* (New Delhi: UNICEF India), 14.

⁶ UNFPA India, *Child Marriage in India: Key Insights from NFHS-5 (Analytical Brief)* (New Delhi: UNFPA India, 2022), 6.

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prone to a variety of risks, such as anxiety, trauma, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Additionally, they face a loss of educational opportunities and social interaction with peers their age, leading to social exclusion and awkwardness. Several child brides struggle with feelings of low self-esteem and powerlessness, living in relationships where they lack support. This trauma leads to emotional pain, gender inequality, and mental health issues across generations within a family or a community.

The choice to marry a child is rooted deeply in social norms, tradition, and economic disadvantages. The ritual of child marriage is largely scattered among young girls facing socio-economic disadvantages, which is often because of geographical remoteness. The geography of the marrying age reflects extreme sub-national inequalities; these areas include Bhilwara, Ajmer, Gaya, and Nawada (rural regions of Rajasthan and Bihar where child marriage is prevalent). Girls from poor households, often with less or no schooling, and living in rural settings, are often more prone to getting married before they turn 18 years of age.

In rural settings, child marriage arose from the complicated link between financial necessity and societal norms and expectations. Additionally, social gauge is imperative for the development of parents' thinking about getting their daughters married at a young age. Families with financial restrictions often perceive their daughters as a burden, and getting them married is considered a shield for them or simply a way to reduce the strain on the family. Efforts by both governmental and non-governmental bodies demonstrate that ending child marriage requires both legal deterrence and community interference.⁷

The paper utilizes and evaluates literature based on systematic reviews published in peer-reviewed journals. The research aims to

⁷ UNICEF and the International Center for Research on Women, *Reducing Child Marriage in India: A Model to Scale Results* (New Delhi: UNICEF, 2015), 11-12.

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provide evidence on whether poor mental health is a result of the history of child marriage.

Statement Of Purpose And Research Objectives

Previously, the research surrounding child marriage was only concerned with educational, economic, and social aspects. The consequences for mental health, despite its seriousness, were widely ignored. The main argument in this paper relates to early marriage of adolescent girls who are married off in their childhood will have an increased risk of experiencing severe emotional and psychological distress and mental health issues in comparison to those who marry in adulthood. It is imperative to make this analysis, as poor mental health has adverse effects that perpetuate vulnerability across generations.

This research has some clear objectives-

- To analyze the mental health outcomes, such as depression, trauma, and anxiety, among rural adolescent girls subjected to child marriage.
- To evaluate case studies and existing literature that link child marriage and psychological trauma.

Literature Review

According to the text by *Le Strat (2011)*, a greater number of women who were married at an early age had a 12-month prevalence of psychiatric disorders in comparison to those married as adults.

The survey in *Gage (2013)* enumerates that adolescent who are married or are receiving marriage requests in their adolescence were highly likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempts. The article associates exposure to child marriage with suicidality during adolescence in a resource-deficient country.

The authors in *John NA (2019)* use a large population sample to demonstrate the worst psychological well-being across roles in the case of early marriage. Emotional isolation is very prevalent in child brides.

The text in *Gupta S. (2020)* presents a cross-sectional study of an urban slum in Delhi, comparing married and unmarried girls aged 16-19. It was observed that 85.6% of married adolescent girls were at a greater risk of mental disorders and trauma.

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The study reported in *Fan S (2022)* demonstrates that mental health is dominant in young brides, which makes the resulting research provide insight into the subject matter.

The authors in *Aggarwal (2022)* identified that baseline depression is encouraged by early marriage, and in new marriages, when it becomes abusive, depression is encouraged in later years.

The brief in the *UNFPA India (2022)* has consolidated data on recent surveys that display child marriage, and it is being correlated to poverty, destitution, lack of education, and teen pregnancies.

The article in *AP News (2023)* focuses on the emotional fallout of child brides. In such cases, households are destabilized, which leaves small girls and infants in extreme poverty.

Authors in *Patel P (2024)* describe the existence of depression among currently married adolescents. Models that associate depression with violence, dowry abuse, and early pregnancy outcomes were used in two high-burden Indian states.

The *Nijut Moina 2.0 (2025)* scheme of Assam provides educational subsidies to unmarried girls in the state to delay matrimony by enhancing their academic journey and restoring their economic freedom.

According to the *UNICEF India (2025)* report, India stands in a very poor situation regarding child and adolescent mental health consequences.

Research Methodology

The author uses a doctrinal approach by delving into the functioning of the legal and constitutional framework of child rights. This is further supplemented by an extensive review of peer-reviewed literature and notable surveys (Example- UNICEF, UDAYA, etc.) The amalgamation of legal jurisprudence and medical evidence provides a structured rationale for how child marriage is conceptualized as a failure of both protective laws and health policies.

Legal Landscape Of Early Marriage In India.

1. The Constitution of India establishes a firm basis for child rights, subjecting them to special protection as a vulnerable section of our society. Additionally, Articles 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23, and 24 guarantee fundamental rights to equality, protection, and liberty. Furthermore, Article 39 requires the State to ensure that children

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are given fair opportunities and apparatus to develop healthily and stably in conditions that are free of exploitation and destitution. Even though the enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was a success, the implementation remains inconsistent across several rural areas.⁸ Child marriage is, hence, one of the major contributors that undermine a child's development and hampers their future as an adult.

2. The history of legislation in India prohibiting Child marriages begins with the Sarda Act, 1929, which was then amended in 1978, increasing the age limit for marriage of girls from 15 years to 18 years and 18 to 21 years for boys. Today, the operative law is the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006. According to this act, child marriage is a non-bailable offence. The act further clarifies that under certain circumstances, the marriage is void ab initio, i.e., void from the beginning. The circumstances include when a child is taken, sold, or trafficked for immoral purposes. Such cases are quite common in rural settings where early marriage involves sexual coercion and violence against the brides.
3. When a child marriage includes sexual violence, it fits the elements of being for an 'immoral purpose' or includes 'coercion'. The burden of a violent relationship falls on the adolescent girl, whether emotional or economic. This uncertainty influences psychological distress in the adolescent girl from the day of marriage. Studies further reflect that socio-economic inequality and family-driven poverty are significant contributors to the rise of child marriage.⁹

Aside from the doctrinal confusion, there are major implementation challenges. The absence of a national law forbids this practice in our country, making it difficult for the judiciary to enforce rules that criminalize the social practice of early marriage of adolescent girls.

⁸ Ministry of Women and Child Development (India), "Status of Child Marriage in India: National Policy Brief," Government of India, 2024.

⁹ Binu, V.S., et al., "Determinants of Child Marriage in India: A cross-sectional analysis of 15-17-Year-Old Girls" *Children and Youth Services Review* 145 (2022): 6

Geographical Profile- The Rural Context

The geographical context of child marriage lies in the cases of South Asia, including countries like Bangladesh and Nepal demonstrate extremely high prevalence. In India, the prevalence of child marriage is 23%, but it shows extreme variation state-wise, ranging from 40% in West Bengal, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Tripura. Uttar Pradesh also adds to this list, as the state has experienced a high concentration of child brides. Rural areas continue to illustrate high rates of child marriage due to cultural norms and poor enforcement.¹⁰

The risk quotient for early marriage strongly correlates with geographical and socio-economic factors. In rural areas, the rate of marriage before the age of 18 is 31.5%, as compared to the urban areas, which round off to 17.5%. Furthermore, economic status is a primary factor, affecting the psyche of child brides. Education plays a crucial role, with a high percentage of child brides being found among those girls who have access to little or no education. Hence, the evidence supports that a girl living in a rural community with poverty represents a high risk of mental disturbances as an outcome of child marriage.

The Intersection Between Child Marriage And Mental Health

1. Investigations into the association between child marriage and mental health demonstrate an increased risk of mental illness. Systematic reviews highlight that an adolescent girl marrying before adulthood carries high risks of psychological distress when compared to women marrying in adulthood. Psychological distress is a concept of experienced symptomatic overlap commonly found in illnesses like depression, chronic anxiety, trauma, and even PTSD.¹¹ This vulnerability is induced due to child marriage, which also imposes gender-based risks such as social exclusion and postpartum depression. These conditions are found to accelerate mental health risks and cases of self-harm or even suicide. Clinical literature illustrates that early marriage

¹⁰ World Bank, “Poverty and Marriage Practices in India’s Rural Belt,” *World Bank Policy Insights*, 2023

¹¹ The Guardian, “India’s Child Brides Are Struggling with Invisible Mental Health Trauma,” *Global Development Desk*, July 12, 2024.

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triggers long-term trauma responses similar to those found in conflict-affected areas.¹²

2. In light of these effects of child marriage, depression is the most commonly referred mental health diagnosis. This association is backed by cohort studies, including the UDAYA (Understanding the Lives of Adolescents and Young Adults) study in high-prevalence states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In the UDAYA cohort, married girls were more likely to report depressive symptoms when compared to unmarried girls. Additionally, these girls were also subjected to domestic violence followed by prolonged depression. Referring to the UDAYA report, adolescent mothers experience a violent and adverse pregnancy, which could lead to depression.
3. Child marriage is connected with an increase in psychological distress and trauma, that leads to the emergence of trauma-related disorders. Systematic evidence reflects that child marriage is directly connected with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). An analysis conducted in South Asia concluded that ‘married adolescent girls were more likely to report anxiety as compared to their unmarried counterparts.’ Stress, which is both clinical and emotional, is a direct negative source of child marriage. Several studies suggest that the absence of emotional support and loss of individuality are key contributors to long-term psychological distress.¹³ The most extreme outcome of child marriage is suicidality, which includes both attempts and suicidal thoughts. Studies show that child marriage in the context of sexual abuse is often associated with suicidal thoughts and attempts.

For example, girls who were either promised or received requests were more likely to report suicidal thoughts. Evidence points to the loss of personal autonomy and forced union before the onset of marriage, leading

¹² Walker, Judith, “Trauma Pathways in Early Marriage: A Clinical Review,” *Journal of Social Psychiatry* 45, no.2 (2022): 133-142

¹³ Nhampoca, J.M., et al, “Early Marriage, Education and Mental Health Outcomes: A Qualitative Approach,” *Frontiers in Global Women’s Health* 5 (2024).

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to profound psychological demands that ultimately contribute to self-harm.

4. Investigating data in the UDAYA cohort study presents an important complexity regarding causality, highlighting that child marriage in India continues to persist despite decades of policy interventions and legal restrictions.¹⁴ In the UDAYA study, unmarried girls showed fewer symptoms of depression as compared to married girls. News investigations have highlighted that despite recent legislation and deterrence, thousands of underage marriages continue annually in India.¹⁵ This certainly does not mean that child marriage is not a clear cause of trauma and depression; it rather contributes to psychological vulnerability, which could be a result of poverty, family stress, or lack of educational opportunity. Families facing extreme poverty may find themselves taking action to either protect a vulnerable daughter or secure improved finances by marrying off their daughter. The complexity revealed here necessitates programming that treats mental health issues as a consequence of child marriage.
5. Recent global monitoring reports identify India as one of the countries with the highest concentration of girl brides.¹⁶ A different facet of this intersection is the long-term implications of emotional deprivation and the future psychological health of women. The period of adolescence is often viewed as a time of development, independence, and building a socially fulfilling life. The experience of child marriage replaces this journey and binds her to a lifetime of commitment and obligation that is forced upon her. Furthermore, lack of an emotional support system leads to the creation of conditions where feelings like worthlessness start to come into the picture. Over time, this

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “India: Child Marriage Persists Despite Laws,” *HRW Report*, February 2023.

¹⁵ Reuters India Bureau, “Child Marriage Still Widespread in Bihar and Rajasthan Despite Law Enforcement,” *Reuters Investigative Report*, April 19, 2024.

¹⁶ Girls Not Brides, “India: Child Marriage Overview,” *GirlsNotBrides.org*, last modified 2024.

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emotional stagnation leads to chronic instability concerning mental health and the overall self-esteem of a woman.

MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES



Depression



Stress



Anxiety



PTSD

FIGURE 1

Case Study Analysis

The link between child marriage and mental health consequences has often been regarded as a socio-legal concern in literature; however, these emerging cases from Idia and South Asia demonstrate a pervasive crisis. While the literature has shown an empirical link between early marriage and poor mental well-being, these cases further enumerate the extent of emotional and mental repercussions for adolescent girls who marry early. Furthermore, these cases illustrate that while child marriage is traumatic, the trauma is impossible to separate from the combination of gender bias, poverty, and mental illness, all of which contribute to hindering the development of a young girl.

The following are the city-wise case study analysis-

1. Rajasthan

In Rajasthan, mostly in the districts of Bhilwara and Ajmer, research by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in 2021 found that adolescent brides were twice as likely to get symptoms of anxiety and PTSD. While interviewing young married girls, it was evident that parental pressure and cultural bindings were the sole reasons behind the marriage. Our collective beliefs about honor and family reputation are often valued more than any psychological costs that are inflicted on the

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girls. A 16-year-old girl from a community in Ajmer reported frequent panic attacks and nightmares after a forced arranged marriage at the age of 15. She further described experiencing constant fear and a feeling of suffocation when she is near her husband or in-laws. Counselors present during the fieldwork also confirmed that the lack of awareness and social stigma in rural settings prevents the young girls from seeking help.

2. Bangladesh

An identical study from Bangladesh highlights the pervasive nature of the psychological effects of child marriage across South Asian contexts. In 2020, a field study in the Rangpur division presented a 16-year-old girl's experience of child marriage at the age of 14. She struggled with acute anxiety and panic attacks as a result of her child marriage. The husband and in-laws restricted her mobility and social contact with others, which meant a complete cut-off from her friends. The mental health effects inspired Gage's 2013 study in Ethiopia, where early married adolescents reported suicidal thoughts due to social exclusion and restricted autonomy over trivial decisions. Cases documented from the rural communities in Bangladesh and India reveal similar emotional patterns of trauma, abandonment, and forced dependence.¹⁷ Bangladesh and India share similar socio-economic conditions, making this comparison useful. Both societies are patriarchal and view early marriage as a socially accepted practice. Thus, the case of Bangladesh supports the Indian theory that early marriage is both a symptom and cause of mental health vulnerability among adolescent girls.

Policy Contexts And Gaps

India has established a comprehensive legislation, like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, yet implementation lags in rural settings where child marriage among adolescent girls is widely accepted. Experts argue that legal reform must be accompanied by accessible health programs to address the long-term psychological effects of early marriage.¹⁸ Additionally, social and psychological interference does not provide a check on legal barriers laid down by the polices and legislations. For

¹⁷ UNFPA South Asia, "Dependent, Deprived: Child Brides Share their Stories," UNFPA Regional Report, 2023.

¹⁸ World Health Organization, *Mental Health and Forced Marriage: Evidence Review* (Geneva: WHO, 2024), 9-10.

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instance, the Assam government's Nijut Moina 2.0 initiative of 2025 argues to postpone early marriages for girls by giving out educational stipends to unmarried girls. Similarly, UNICEF's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Mapping Report (2024) emphasized that only three percent of adolescent-targeted programming in India was inclusive of mental health outcomes. These examples indicate that even though we have a legal framework that acknowledges the social harms of child marriage, the mental health aspects remain untouched. The lack of trained schools and health centre counsellors in rural areas continues a vicious cycle of emotional disregard. Hence, the challenge for policy is not only to outlaw child marriage but also to include psychological and counselling aspects to it.

Conclusion

Evidence from the literature and case studies collectively reinforces that child marriage violates the mental well-being of adolescent girls. The mental anguish these girls experience is never limited to just a moment; it shapes their entire course of life and psychological state, for example, educational stress, maternal stress, and social exclusion. The study directs that not only does the law fail to protect adolescent girls from the shackles of child marriage, but it also fails to protect their mental health. A multi-faceted approach that includes deterrence, education, and access to mental healthcare is imperative. The literature demonstrates that when emotional trauma remains untreated, it leads to a cycle of inequality and anger for generations. Editorial responses emphasize the need for child marriage legislations to link with mental health policies, primarily in India.¹⁹ So, policy, law, and mental health practice must come together to secure the dignity and lives of adolescent rural girls who have been bound in the shackles of child marriage, aligning to protect their freedom, right to education, life, liberty, and dignity, in both letter and spirit.

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The Tightrope Of Identity: LGBTQ+ Rights And Social Realities In India

Dr. Aswathi Sukumaran¹

Assistant Professor, VISTAS, School of Law, Chennai

ABSTRACT: In 2018, the Supreme Court of India decided a historic decision called *Navtej Singh Johar v. The Union of India* case represents a significant milestone in the evolution of constitutional law and the protection of human rights within the Indian legal framework. The ruling not only invalidated the antiquated Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code but also established the precedence of constitutional ethical standards over the prevailing social norms that had dominated for an extended period. This research examines the trajectory of LGBTQ+ rights in India in the aftermath of this ruling. It asserts that while the groundwork for the legal and moral framework of equality was established by *Navtej Singh Johar*, the period following 2018 has been marked by a complex and challenging endeavour to broaden this framework from the internal realm of decriminalization to the external domain of affirmative civil rights. Subsequently, the research explores a detailed examination of subsequent developments, including significant legal battles concerning marriage equality, the legislative response embodied in the Transgender Persons Act, and the evolving case law, ultimately leading to recent judicial and policy measures enacted in 2025. This paper concludes that the current post-*Navtej* landscape reveals a judiciary grappling with the ramifications of its own precedents, facing the challenge of ensuring that the promise of dignity and equality extends beyond mere existence to encompass full, participative citizenship. It is to be noted that the LGBTQ+ journey in India is not a straight line from oppression to freedom, but rather an ongoing balancing act where every step forward is a struggle to address both constitutional rights and sociocultural constraints.

Keywords: *LGBTQ+ rights, Fundamental Rights, Decriminalization of homosexuality, Legal Process.*

INTRODUCTION

The law constitutes a complex framework that governs human behaviour within the societal context. The notion of law pertains to a coherent and interconnected framework of regulations. A thorough comprehension of the law is essential, as it requires attention not only to specific regulations but also to the intricate legal relationships that underpin the entire system. As we all are aware that the highest court of the nation has upheld the principles of human rights since 2009, yet the struggle for societal acceptance appears to be ongoing. The inquiry at hand pertains to the extent to which society comprehends or embraces “them” as part of the collective identity. The entitlements of those who deviate from the norm are characterised as merely a manifestation of an urban elite trend, while their pleas for recognition are conspicuously disregarded by both society and governmental entities. The LGBTQ community in India has been engaged in a protracted struggle to assert their rights as citizens of the nation since the time of its independence^[1] (Abhishek 2023). Their struggle commenced during the British colonial period, characterized by the oppression of their identity, which resulted in the denial of a normal existence. The existence of homosexual or transgender identities was criminalized, further exacerbating their plight^[2] (Anonza 2022, 2).

The ongoing affirmation of their rights by the Supreme Court is catalysing a cultural transformation that society appears ill-prepared to embrace^[3] (Pratik 2020, 1012) The inadequate treatment of the LGBTQIA++ community calls for a collective societal effort, extending beyond merely the guardians of marginalized individuals, to fully address these disparities^[4] The right to live with dignity is acknowledged as a fundamental entitlement for every citizen of this nation, ensuring the enjoyment of a quality of life that exceeds mere survival^[5] (Dr. Showkat 2024, 1) The evolving trajectory of the Supreme Court incites a debate between societal norms and constitutional principles^[6] (Dr Showkat 2024, 2). It is anticipated that the case involving Supriyo @ Supriya Chakraborty, which challenges the conventional understanding of family as solely comprising a man and a woman, will serve to shed light on the extent to which existing legislation accommodates contemporary societal norms, potentially paving the way for necessary legislative reforms.[7] (Dr Showkat 2024, 4).

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GENDER IDENTITY FROM AN ANCIENT INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Mahabharata, ascribed to the sage Vyasa, stands as a monumental epic within ancient Indian literature, providing deep reflections on numerous facets of existence, such as ethics, responsibilities, and interpersonal dynamics^[8] (Kanishka 2025,3). The narrative of Sikhandini within this epic serves as a significant examination of gender and sexuality, illuminating ancient Indian viewpoints on these subjects^[9] (Kathleen 2003,329). Sikhandini serves as a crucial figure in the Mahabharata, recognized for her transformation in gender identity. This transformation transcends a mere narrative mechanism; it actively interrogates and broadens the comprehension of gender roles within the context of ancient Indian society. Sikhandin's transition from female to male underscores the fluid nature of gender, indicating that identity may surpass the confines of biological determinism^[10] (Kathleen 2003,329). This facet of the Mahabharata encourages an examination of the intricate dynamics of gender and the prevailing societal conventions associated with it. The Mahabharata was created at an era characterized by strict gender norms^[11]. The incorporation of Sikhandin's narrative reflects a sophisticated comprehension of gender identity. The epic candidly portrays same-sex love and relationships, shown by the interactions between characters such as Arjuna and Sikhandin. This depiction indicates that ancient Indian literature acknowledged and embraced many manifestations of love, even those that challenge traditional heterosexual conventions^[12].

PRE-COLONIAL ERA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER IDENTITY

Prior to the 1950s, conversations regarding gender and gender identity were largely absent from mainstream discourse, as prevailing notions posited that an individual's gender was intrinsically connected to their assigned sex at birth^[13] (Kanishka 2025,4). Prominent figures in psychology, such as Kagan and Money, have championed this perspective, emphasizing the influence of social norms in shaping gender roles and identities. Nevertheless, the examination of gender identity experienced a profound evolution from the 1960s to the 1980s, signifying a departure from previous conceptions that closely linked gender to the biological sex assigned at birth^[14] (Milton 2004,591). Prominent figures in the field, including Richard Green, Robert Stoller,

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Harry Benjamin, and Sandra Bem, played a pivotal role in reshaping our comprehension of gender and its intricacies^[15](Kanishka 2025,3). Sandra Bem's research underscored the detrimental effects of societal pressure to adhere to conventional gender roles, illuminating its role in perpetuating social inequality. In contrast, Benjamin, Stoller, and Green put forth arguments that emphasize the role of biological factors in shaping gender identity, rather than psychological influences. Their research demonstrated significant benefits in medical procedures and clinics, providing valuable insights into the relationship between gender identity and role^[16] (Kanishka 2025,3). Their collaborative endeavours and contributions culminated in broader acceptance and liberation from various unfounded assumptions.

THE INFLUENCE OF COLONIAL-ERA LEGISLATION

The British rule in India and its discriminatory practices towards transgender individuals were profoundly evident in the legislative framework and regulations established during that period. The implementation of laws during the colonial period is clearly illustrated by the Criminal Tribes Act of 1873^[17] (CTA). Under this legislation, individuals who identify as transgender were designated by the profoundly pejorative label 'eunuchs'. They were compelled to register with local authorities and encountered numerous restrictions, including prohibitions on assuming guardianship of minors, executing gifts or wills, and adopting sons. Individuals identifying as transgender were historically restricted from publicly expressing their gender identity through attire such as sarees and jewellery^[18]

The Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1949; however, its repeal did not lead to significant changes, as other discriminatory and derogatory laws continued to exist, aimed at surveilling transgender individuals^[19] (Jayna 2025,184). The Telangana Eunuchs Act of 1919, also known as the Andhra Pradesh (Telangana Area) Eunuchs Act 1329F, provides a comprehensive account of the 'eunuchs' as outlined in the Criminal Tribes Act^[20] (Mogli). According to Section 4^[21] (of this Act), individuals identifying as transgender may face arrest without a warrant for presenting themselves in women's attire or performing dance in public settings. In a similar vein, the Karnataka Police Act of 1963 incorporated provisions in Section 36A (Power to regulate) ^[22] that mandated surveillance and presupposed criminality concerning 'eunuchs. The enactment of these laws not only rendered

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transgender identities as criminal but also imposed significant limitations on their freedom of expression and engagement in public life, echoing municipal ordinances in the United States dating back to the 1850s and beyond. Such laws prohibited individuals from expressing their gender identity through clothing and appearance associated with the opposite sex.

THE LEGIALATIVE GROWTH

The Indian Supreme Court's decision to finally make homosexuality lawful in 2018 was the end of a long fight to have sexual minorities, especially gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, recognized by the law.^[23] (Pratik Dixit 2020, 1012). For over ten years, the destiny of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code hung in the balance due to three seminal verdicts. *Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation*^[24] (Koushal) argued that the law applied to specific sexual acts “against the order of nature,” overturning the 2009 Delhi High Court decision in *Naz Foundation v. Govt. NCT of Delhi* [25] (Naz) that decriminalized homosexuality^[26] (Shamnad Basheer 2009, 433).

The matter continued to be unresolved, notwithstanding the submissions and remedial petitions presented by advocates for LGBT rights. The 2017 judgment in Justice *K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India*^[27] (Puttaswamy) which addressed India's biometric identity scheme, Aadhaar, marked a significant moment in the potential for the Supreme Court to reconsider the widely criticized Koushal verdict. The recognition of privacy as a fundamental right within the Indian Constitution, as articulated in Puttaswamy, set a significant precedent for the eventual decriminalization of §377 in the case of *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*. This landmark decision arose from a petition brought forth by the distinguished dancer Navtej Singh Johar, alongside other respected members of Indian society, before the Supreme Court.^[28] (Navtej Singh Johar).

While studying at global framework governing same-sex laws is undergoing significant transformation at an accelerated pace^[29] (Siddharth Narrain, 2017). In the United States, while sodomy laws remained in effect until 2003^[30], (Lawrence) the establishment of marriage equality has recently emerged as a prevailing standard across the nation^[31] (Obergefell). On May 22, 2015, a referendum in the Republic of Ireland resulted in the legalization of same-sex marriage, overcoming the resistance posed by the Catholic Church^[32] (Martha

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2010). In Luxembourg, same-sex marriage was legalized on January 1, 2015, marking a significant milestone. Prime Minister Xavier Bettel made history as the first EU leader to publicly celebrate a same-sex marriage by marrying his partner Gauthier Destenay in May 2015.^[33] (Martha 2010). In Korea, it is noteworthy that while sodomy has not been criminalized, individuals identifying as gay or lesbian face significant stigma and hostility. Furthermore, the prospect of same-sex marriage remains unlikely in the foreseeable future, primarily due to the considerable influence exerted by conservative Christian churches. In India, although the Delhi High Court decriminalised sodomy in 2009, the Supreme Court has recently reinstated the criminal statute. Every nation, in essence, possesses its unique narrative. Due to my enduring emphasis on Indian constitutional law.^[34] (Martha 2010).

TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) Act 2019

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act^[35] (Act 2019) serves as the fundamental legal framework in India, ensuring the protection and welfare rights of transgender individuals. As of 2025, this law continues to serve as a vital and essential framework that forbids discrimination against transgender individuals across education, employment, healthcare, and public services.^[36] (Dr. Achina 2025, 5572). The Act further provides formal acknowledgment of transgender identity and mandates the implementation of government welfare measures and protections, which encompass rescue and rehabilitation programs, vocational training, and initiatives aimed at fostering inclusion. The essential stipulations include the prohibition of discrimination in the realms of education, employment, healthcare, and access to public goods and services.^[37] (M. Michelraj 2015, 18).

Recognition of transgender individuals through the issuance of identity certificates. Entitlement to reside in domestic settings or rehabilitation facilities when familial support is insufficient for caregiving. The formation of a National Council for Transgender persons is essential to ensure effective oversight of implementation and the promotion of welfare initiatives. The penal provisions concerning offenses such as sexual abuse or denial of services entail penalties that may include imprisonment.^[38] (Ministry: Social Justice and Welfare) The status 2025 mentions that the legislation remains bolstered by governmental initiatives, including capacity building programs and

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national campaigns designed to diminish stigma and foster the inclusion of transgender individuals. Recent regulations, including the Delhi Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules 2025, have been established to enhance enforcement at the local level. These rules focus on critical aspects such as identification, provision of shelter, and ensuring non-discriminatory access to various facilities^[39] (PIB Headquarters) The Supreme Court of India has reaffirmed the right to self-identification for transgender individuals without the requirement of mandatory surgery, thereby expanding protections based on gender identity^[40] (PIB Headquarters).

The welfare initiatives such as SMILE and Garima Greh facilitate the empowerment of transgender individuals, while also ensuring access to healthcare services, including gender-affirming surgeries through programs like the Ayushman Bharat TG Plus Card^[41] (Piyush 2025) In conclusion, the Transgender Act serves as the primary legal framework for the rights of transgender individuals in India, bolstered by enhanced implementation strategies and supportive judicial rulings through 2025, thereby ensuring continued protections and welfare for transgender citizens.

CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

The prevailing ideology in India is one that prioritises heterosexuality. This fosters a heteronormative perspective and marginalises, invalidates, and generalises LGBT identities^[42] (Showka 2024, 12). This regulates societal standards to exclude those who do not conform and to embrace those who do. The articulation of these ideals is evident across various domains, including the media, educational institutions, religious organisations, and, most significantly, within the framework of the legal system. The articulation of queer issues becomes increasingly challenging when a legal framework, ostensibly designed to ensure equality, perpetuates heteronormative perspectives. Furthermore, the legal framework in India supports heterosexual norms, thereby facilitating overt discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, a reality that is already widespread in society. This results in notable disparities related to gender and sexual orientation, marginalising queer individuals as deviations within a predominantly heterosexual framework. It is essential to implement legislation addressing LGBT issues and to incorporate inclusive language in existing laws. The Indian legal system possesses significant, yet

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underutilized, potential to advance social equality. It is essential to identify and rectify heteronormative inclinations present in various legislative frameworks.^[43] (Showka 2024, 18).

The interplay of collective consciousness and prevailing notions of morality poses significant challenges to the principles of equality, as well as economic and political rights, resulting in considerable ambiguity within the highest judicial bodies. Following the Navtej verdict, there has been a degree of recognition regarding the gender identities of LGBTQIA+ individuals; however, this progress remains insufficient to eradicate the prevailing stigma.^[44] (Showka 2024, 19). In light of the principle of separation of powers, the Supreme Court has frequently extended the rights to equality and non-discrimination to those who have been wronged through broad interpretations. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of social rejection has rendered such assessments outdated. The constitution stipulates that the Supreme Court possesses equivalent authority to that of parliament in instances of inaction.^[45] In appeal, the Supreme Court ought to elevate Constitutional Morality over Popular Morality, thereby safeguarding the interests of minority groups. The Court has set a significant precedent in the Sikkim old settler's case^[46], affirming equal rights for marginalized groups.

Despite certain progressive legislative and judicial advancements, LGBTQ+ people in India still confront several legal obstacles. In its 2025 ruling on transgender rights, the Supreme Court upheld the right to self-identify as gender non-necessary to medical or surgical evidence. It also required that transgender people be classified as a socially and educationally backward class, with reservations in employment and education. However, the Transgender Person Protection of Rights Act 2019 has come under fire for weakening the concept of self-identification by demanding a proof of identity from the District Magistrate.

Significant obstacles persist, including implementation gaps, the absence of standardized guidelines for workplace inclusion, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms. The judiciary and numerous committees have called upon the government to enhance enforcement measures, revise current legislation for improved protection, and implement compulsory gender sensitization training for public officials, educators, and healthcare providers to mitigate stigma and discrimination.

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Furthermore, the Madras High Court recognized that same-sex couples have the capacity to establish familial bonds independent of marriage, thereby reinforcing the notion of chosen families. Nevertheless, the absence or ambiguity of legal recognition concerning adoption, inheritance, and spousal benefits for LGBTQ+ couples persists. Comprehensive legislative reforms are essential to guarantee equal rights, which includes the revision of family law to acknowledge diverse unions and the elimination of legal barriers to adoption and surrogacy for same-sex couples. The persistent issues of social stigma, violence, and the absence of robust anti-discrimination legislation in sectors such as employment, education, healthcare, and housing serve to further marginalize LGBTQ+ individuals. This underscores the urgent necessity for the establishment of more inclusive and enforceable legal frameworks in India.

RECOMMENDATIONS: THE WAY AHEAD

To improve LGBTQ+ legislation in India, essential reforms involve amending the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 to allow self-identification of gender without district magistrate certificates, in accordance with the NALSA judgment, while instituting stringent penalties for discrimination and creating welfare boards. A comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation must be established to prevent prejudice based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics throughout work, housing, education, healthcare, and finance, including both public and private entities. Family legislation, such as the Special Marriage Act, should acknowledge gay unions via civil partnerships or deeds of family associations, while also eliminating impediments to adoption and surrogacy for LGBTQ+ couples.

Sector specific changes encompass horizontal reservations for transgender and intersex individuals in employment and education, the establishment of gender-neutral facilities, healthcare sensitization accompanied by prohibitions on conversion therapy, and the provision of queer-affirmative services under Ayushman Bharat. It is imperative that housing and finance policies eradicate discrimination in tenancy and banking practices, thereby facilitating joint accounts and inheritance rights for queer families. The execution of this initiative necessitates the establishment of a national committee tasked with oversight, incorporating insights from queer civil society. This

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approach should mirror successful frameworks, such as the policy in Tamil Nadu, alongside judicial enforcement and awareness campaigns aimed at guaranteeing equitable rights.

CONCLUSION

The advancements made by India's LGBTQ+ community, exemplified by landmark judicial decisions such as NALSA and Navtej Singh Johar, highlight significant progress. However, ongoing challenges, including delays in ID certifications under the Transgender Act and societal prejudices resulting in harassment, emphasize the critical need for effective enforcement measures. Addressing the challenges of police insensitivity, familial rejection, and obstacles to fundamental rights such as next of kin designation necessitates a collaborative effort among various stakeholders to transform legal victories into tangible equality in everyday life. The ongoing engagement of civil society at the state level in addressing stigma and access will be crucial in achieving constitutional dignity for all. This effort is essential to ensure that India's progress in human rights aligns with global standards, particularly in the face of persistent challenges such as mental health crises and discrimination.

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Representation of Women in Contemporary Gorkhaland Literature: A Feminist Reading of *Gorkhaland Diaries* by Satyadeep S. Chhetri and *Faatsung* (*Song of the Soil*) by Chuden Kabimo

Saroja Rai¹

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sikkim Alpine University

Abstract: The literature arising from the Gorkhaland Movement offers a powerful reflection of cultural identity, belonging and political struggle. Despite the engaging socio-political discourse, the narratives remain dominated by male perspectives. This paper seeks to explore the representation of women within these pre-dominantly male-centered stories revolving around the Gorkhaland movement by providing a feminist reading of two significant novels- *The Gorkhaland Diaries* by Satyadeep Chhetri and *Faatsung* by Chuden Kabimo. The main objectives are to examine how women characters are portrayed and positioned within the narratives and how their participation in the movement has been represented; to interpret the absence and marginalization of female voices that reveal deeper patriarchal and gendered political hierarchy; to study the depiction of violence against women at both physical and psychological level at times of conflict; to explore women's acts of resistance, emotional resilience and endurance during the movement. The study employs a feminist theoretical framework based on the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Chandra Talpande Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It incorporates a qualitative research design, relying on a hermeneutic and interpretive approach to analyze the selected texts through a feminist perspective. In both *Faatsung* and *The Gorkhaland Diaries*, women characters are mostly on the periphery but this itself is a representation of their gendered exclusion within the Gorkhaland movement. The texts highlight the cases of violence against women and suppression of

Representation of women in contemporary Gorkhaland Literature female voices during such conflicts leading to a discourse at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and politics. Thus the study shows that contemporary Gorkhaland literature, though mostly centered on male experiences, still contains a profound female narrative of suffering, resilience and survival.

Keywords: *gender, marginalization, female voices, Gorkhaland movement, violence, resistance*

INTRODUCTION

The Gorkhaland movement emerged out of long-lived struggles of the Indian Gorkha community, especially in Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Doars regions for recognition, identity, and a distinct state within the India nation. The demand for a separate state gained momentum in the 1980s, reaching its pinnacle during 1986, with phases of violent agitation. It finally reached a negotiated settlement with the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). Another wave of the movement started again in 2007, under a new leadership which also later settled with the formation of another semi-autonomous body known as the Gorkhaland Territorial Association (GTA). While these administrative measures sought to contain the unrest, they did not completely resolve the deeper questions of belonging and cultural identity. These political upheavals not only created a deep socio-historical record but also gave space for rich literary expressions.

Gorkhaland Literature refers to this emerging corpus of literary works based on the conflicts of the Gorkhaland movement and the experiences of the people involved. *Gorkhaland Diaries: Even Dreams, Uneven Lives* by Satyadeep S. Chhetri and *Faatsung* (translated into English as *Song of the Soil*) are two significant novels in this corpus.

Even though the Gorkhaland movement was essentially male centric, there was a gradual increase in the involvement of women, especially during the second wave of agitation. However, the participation of women and their contributions in socio-political histories remain less acknowledged. There are gendered exclusions and limitations to their roles. Similarly, their representation in literature is also mostly

Representation of women in contemporary Gorkhaland Literature marginalized and female voices are often silenced. Yet women still show quiet resilience, resistance, strength.

This study seeks to explore the representation of women in Gorkhaland Literature through the study of *Gorkhaland Diaries* by Satyadeep S. Chhetri and *Faatsung (Song of the Soil)* by Chuden Kabimo. The participation of women is overshadowed in both political scenarios and literary imagination. Hence the study examines the gendered dimensions of the movement which has often been narrated through male experiences.

Literature Review: Gorkhaland Movement and Gorkhaland Literature

Gorkhaland Movement is the movement by the Gorkhas living in and around Darjeeling and the Dooars region for a separate state of Gorkhaland (Rana, 2016). Articles and research on the Gorkhaland Movement focus mostly on questions of ethnic identity, political recognition, and the historical marginalisation of the Indian Gorkha community. Foundational works by Subba (1992) argue that the demand for Gorkhaland emerges from issues surrounding belonging, citizenship, and cultural legitimacy in a political landscape where Gorkha identities have often been rendered invisible. Scholars further highlight how collective memory, trauma, and intergenerational silence continue to shape the social fabric of the Darjeeling hills, with the movement becoming a powerful site of identity-making and resistance. The movement is mainly an expression of the desire of the Gorkha populace to assert their ethnic individuality against the allegations of displaced identity (Rana, 2016). However, mainstream political analyses focus overwhelmingly on male leaders and political negotiations, often overlooking the everyday efforts of ordinary people, particularly women.

In recent years, feminist scholars have begun to address this gap by examining women's roles within the movement. Lama (2014) shows that women participated actively as protestors, community organisers, and political agents in the Gorkhaland movement. Accounts from the hills reveal that women marched at the forefront of rallies, guarded villages during curfews and provided refuge and food to activists, yet their contributions remain inadequately documented in mainstream narratives. Tamang (2018) details the contributions of women during the second phase of the Gorkhaland agitation, asserting their

Representation of women in contemporary Gorkhaland Literature empowerment in a political arena which was basically patriarchal. Hence as the movement transcended from the first phase (1986) to the second phase (2007), it saw an increase in the participation of women. They were now recognized as powerful agents but the primary structure and leadership was mostly patriarchal.

The emergence of Gorkhaland Literature has opened a new space for understanding the emotional, social, and historical dimensions of the movement through the literary aspect. Writers such as Chuden Kabimo and Satyadeep S. Chhetri craft narratives that foreground lived experiences of fear, hope, displacement, and longing within the tumultuous political environment of the hills. Sharma (2023), in her article talks about a 'bold new wave' of books based on the Gorkhaland movement. These books might be fictional but they function as an alternative archive of the socio-political history. Sharma (2023) also makes an attempt to compare the perspectives of outsiders and locals. However, despite the richness of these narratives, the representation of women remains limited, with female characters often appearing as marginal figures rather than fully realised political subjects. This literary marginalisation reflects the broader socio-political erasure of women in the movement and reinforces the need for feminist readings that bring hidden gendered experiences to the forefront.

Representation of Women in Socio-political Movements in South Asia

Research across South Asia consistently shows that women play crucial but often unacknowledged roles in political movements, uprisings, and civil resistance. Jayawardena (1986) shows that women were historically active in anti-colonial and nationalist struggles in South Asia, yet their contributions were absorbed into patriarchal and capitalist narratives that fostered male leadership. Yuval-Davis (1997) similarly argues that women are constructed as biological, cultural, and symbolic reproducers of the nation, which frames their participation in movements as extensions of family or community duty rather than autonomous political action.

Butalia (1998) and Menon & Bhasin (1998) reveal how women's suffering, displacement, and trauma during events like Partition are memorialised, but their political voices are largely absent in formal histories.

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Postcolonial feminist theorists such as Spivak (1988) argue that the “subaltern woman” remains doubly silenced, first by colonial or state power and second by indigenous patriarchy. Mohanty (2003) emphasises that women’s political participation must be understood within local histories, class structures, and cultural norms rather than generalised through a universal feminist lens. These theoretical perspectives frame South Asian women’s participation as structurally constrained even when they are visibly active.

Within this broader regional pattern, the Gorkhaland Movement aligns with similar gender dynamics. Women in Darjeeling’s agitation, like those in many South Asian movements participated in protests, provided support, endured militarisation, and sustained families under political instability. Yet their experiences remain marginal in dominant narratives and are underrepresented in literary portrayals.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in key feminist theories that examine the ways women are marginalised, silenced and suppressed within patriarchal and political narratives. Central to this framework is Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of woman as the “Other.” In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that women are positioned as secondary, peripheral, and defined in relation to men. This idea is crucial for understanding how female characters in *Faatsung* and *Gorkhaland Diaries* occupy subordinated roles within male-dominated revolutionary narratives.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory of the subaltern also shows that the voices of marginalised women in colonial and postcolonial contexts are often overshadowed by dominant male voices. This framework helps illuminate how women in Gorkhaland Literature are present but their voices are often silenced and less acknowledged. Their perspectives rarely shape the movement’s core decisions and their stories show the condition of the “subaltern woman” whose experiences are narrated through others rather than by themselves.

The study also draws on Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s postcolonial feminist critique, which warns against homogenising women’s experiences and emphasises how local histories, cultures, and political contexts shape gendered oppression. Mohanty’s ideas allow this research to show the representation of women within the specific socio-political environment of the Darjeeling hills, highlighting how

Representation of women in contemporary Gorkhaland Literature ethnicity, class, and regional struggle influence gender roles in the movement.

Additionally, Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity provides insight into how women in these narratives are constrained by socially prescribed roles of caregivers, fragile participants and supporters, rather than recognised as vital political agents. Butler's ideas support the idea that these roles are culturally produced and reinforced within the revolutionary setting.

Together, these feminist perspectives create a comprehensive theoretical framework for analysing how women are represented, marginalised, silenced, and symbolically deployed within Gorkhaland Literature.

Research Gap

The Gorkhaland movement has given rise to a remarkable emerging corpus of literary texts. However, these texts are often analysed through socio-political lenses, exploring the themes of culture, identity and regional heritage. The gendered dimensions of the movement are often overlooked and feminist readings of the texts are not provided. *Gorkhaland Diaries* and *Faatsung* are two significant novels based on the movement, which have often been studied for their rich socio-political narratives but the representation of women in these novels have not been emphasized in scholarly discussions.

Research Methodology

As the study seeks to explore the representation of women within the emerging corpus of Gorkhaland literature, it uses a qualitative and interpretative analysis of the selected novels, i.e. *Gorkhaland Diaries* by Satyadeep S. Chhetri and *Faatsung* (translated into English as *Song of the Soil*) by Chuden Kabimo. It focuses on textual analysis and interpretation along with thematic and contextual analysis.

The historical and socio-political background of the novels are explored through contextual analysis, studying the major Gorkhaland agitations of 1986 and 2007, while also examining the roles and participation of women. This helps to place the novels within the lived experiences of the women of Indian Gorkha Community.

Textual and thematic analysis of the selected novels have also been done by exploring the characters, plot, symbols and patterns. This throws a significant light on the representation of women and

Representation of women in contemporary Gorkhaland Literature expression of gendered voices in the context of the Gorkhaland movement and literature.

Major Analysis and Findings: Marginalised roles of women

Though women participated in the Gorkhaland Movement, particularly during the second phase, their roles remained limited within the male-dominated structure of the movement. In *Faatsung*, which is particularly based on the agitation of 1986, female characters often appear at the margins of political action, offering refuge, food and support to the male revolutionaries. Even when characters like Rachela attempt to step into action, her role is brief as she is brutally killed and her contribution is overshadowed by larger masculine narratives. Other characters like Poonam and Ripandi also appear at the periphery but provide emotional anchoring.

Similarly, in *Gorkhaland Diaries*, which spans through both the phases of agitation, the narrative is mostly through male experiences. Characters like Sarala is shown as a supporting figure to her husband Yogesh who is involved in the political sphere. Kavita is an embodiment of violence and trauma against women during the movement. Yet she silently navigates through her pain and suffering. Even the wife of the leader is referred to as ‘the unnamed queen’ of the hills considering her invisible role in the movement or political sphere and her social status relying absolutely on the position of her husband.

This gendered exclusion of women is a defining pattern in both the socio-political arena and its literary expression. Although women played significant roles in the emotional, cultural and domestic sustenance of the movement, the female characters remain mostly absent from the political core, mirroring the broader social dynamics of the movement.

Violence against women's body

Women have often suffered at the intersection of social, political and gendered upheavals. This suffering is not just mental or emotional but also physical. Numerous cases of physical abuse and atrocities against women have been recorded, during times of conflict. Kavita in *Gorkhaland Diaries* is a character who has been gang raped by men in uniform and her brothers brutally killed, when they tried to save her. Even the police refused to register her complaint and as the author writes, “Kavita was just one of them”.

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In *Faatsung* there is no explicit depiction of physical abuse against women but remain ever present in the minor narratives of women being kept as mistresses in the camps by men from their own community. There is a constant threat for women and their bodies being violated during such conflicts and upheavals.

Passive participation, waiting and emotional suffering

In both the novels, women are positioned in roles of waiting and emotional endurance which reflects the gendered expectations placed on them during the Gorkhaland movement. Even though most women were excluded from active participation in the movement, they suffered the consequences of the turmoil by losing their loved ones or facing displacement and stress. They appear as characters who wait for their loved ones to come back and silently bear the pain. This is shown through the character of 'Budathoki's daughter', whose own name is not mentioned but she is known from her father's name or as the widow of Ram Prasad. As she waits for her husband, who never returns, she silently suffers emotionally and mentally till the grief and trauma lead her to tragic end and she drowns in the river. Hence the sufferings of female characters appear in the background, where they wait and offer refuge and care while anticipating the outcomes chosen by men.

Female Resilience, emotional endurance and survival

Despite occupying marginalised roles and restrained participation in the movement, the female characters depicted in *Faatsung* and *Gorkhaland Diaries* display remarkable strength and resilience. Kavita in *Gorkhaland Diaries* survives brutal violence, rebuilds herself as a lawyer and fights for human rights. Rachela in *Faatsung* participates in the movement by escaping the domestic boundaries and becomes a martyr. Ripandi becomes the mother of a son who represents the continuity, hope and survival of a community.

Even other female characters who provide food and shelter to the revolutionaries show courage in everyday acts of care and support. Women become the symbols of emotional endurance, sacrifice and survival. Even though the narratives are mostly male centric but they become the backbone of cultural and emotional aspects of the movement.

Conclusion

This study examines the representation of women in *Gorkhaland Diaries* and *Faatsung* by offering a feminist reading. It shows how female voices and experiences suffer gendered exclusion in both socio-political and literary spaces. The Gorkhaland movement like many other socio-political movements, was essentially male dominated and the roles of women were often considered secondary and their representation in literature is over shadowed by male centric narratives. Despite this, the study also shows the emergence of female characters in the novels as symbols of quiet resilience, strength and endurance where they still play an essential role.

The study remains limited to just two primary texts and relies only on qualitative and interpretative analysis. However, the findings underline the basic representation of women in Gorkhaland literature which can further expand to other texts in this corpus and the entire archive of women's narratives within the socio-political histories of different other movements.

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Whose “Desi-ness”? South Asian Women’s Representation and the Politics of Visibility in Western Media

Diksha Malhotra¹

Undergraduate, Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University

Abstract: The term "desi" has penetrated the market economy and is embedded in the praxis of cultural identity assigned to South Asian women. Originally derived from Sanskrit, the word today projects a sense of sameness across the diverse landscape of the subaltern, particularly native-izing an outline of what a desi woman should be. This paper navigates this mischaracterisation of "desi" as a pan-South Asian term through a critical analysis of the representation of South Asian women in Western media. Examining the desi women across different genres in movies and TV shows, Kate Sharma in Bridgerton (2022), Lalita Bakshi in Bride and Prejudice (2004), and Kamala Khan in Ms. Marvel (2022) an exploration of how South Asian women navigate the contested terrain of representation, is undertaken. With focus on the commodification of their "desi-ness" for global audiences. This paper further interrogates the paradox of visibility where, the orientalist framing and labour of cultural translation leads to "desi" mutating into alien status for most of South Asia. Bhabha's proposed theory of cultural negotiation between the colonized and colonizers is utilized to examine the hybridity of representation of this otherized desi woman, where a continuous negotiation of erasure and exoticization contests with the moral reasoning of how many vague ethnic symbols can be attached to the character before the audience alienates her. Further, through an analysis of interviews, promotional materials, and audience reception, this paper reveals how "desi-ness" has evolved into a settlement between authenticity and marketability, with progressive inclusion underlining the commodification of South Asian women. Orientalism, though subtle, still prevails in the visibility discourse, as

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representation has to be photoshopped into culturally palatable versions of identity.

Keywords: *Desi, Representation, Commodification, Visibility, Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

The word “desi” is imbued with a complex genealogy, originating from the Sanskrit word “desha” meaning country²⁰. It has historically functioned as a marker of belonging for those who trace their roots in South Asia. The ambiguity of the term is embedded in this racial construction that has transformed the word as a reference point for Western audiences and devolved into racial profiling. This ambiguity is significant since it utilizes popular images and social cues linked to race and homogenizes it for a global audience. It is proportional to the positioning of individuals within a larger group structure and is subject to situational changes over time.

While Bollywood has undeniably influenced and helped shape “desi” as a cultural reference point, the niches that structure the same lose their visibility within the irresolute identity formation of Western adaptations. Therefore, in its contemporary usage, the term “desi” has evolved into an inclusive term for a particularly diasporic community with a history of contestations and identity politics. It paradoxically flattens the diversity of South Asia into a monolithic culture that is then utilized as a selling point for an audience willing to buy a curated experience.

As “desi” trends and South Asian women become increasingly visible across screens, their representation have to be interrogated within the context of diversity, inclusion, and marketability. As Hollywood designs to broaden its content, a commodification of “desi” has followed, complicating advocacy for South Asian communities across structures of power that have historically oppressed them.

The media has shaped cultural cues and shifts that create dominant perceptions about individuals and groups. The ideological function of the same cannot be understated when Western re-imagination and

²⁰ Vinay Harpalani, “DesiCrit...,” *New York University Annual Survey of American Law* 69, no. 1 (2013): 92.

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orientalist discourse, according to Bhabha, mandates the appropriation of the East as a bizarre space of barbarism, exotica, chaos and spirituality²¹. With the advent of new media and the rising marketability of and to the South Asian diaspora, Bhabha’s insight seems prophetic. The epistemic foundations of racial myths gets dismantled when the realisation of them being self-serving narratives becomes unavoidable²² should theoretically open space for authentic self-representation. However, Bhabha’s “third space” of cultural hybridity has itself been colonized by market forces, introducing capital as a negotiator, allowing “desi” to become calibrated for market consumption.

A textual analysis of Lalita Bakshi in Bride and Prejudice (2004), Kate Sharma in Bridgerton (2022) and Kamala Khan in Ms. Marvel (2022), maps the negotiated performances of desi women, characteristic of anti-racist consciousness and neo-liberal multiculturalism. As we traverse through confrontations and inclusions of South Asian women into historically western spaces within these stories, their construction is analyzed to reveal the labor of cultural translation required to render South Asian identities tolerable to Western audiences. Culture is beyond singularities, categories and subjectivities; however, the presence of these women on the screen is often accompanied by an articulated list of cultural differences. These contested spaces are chasms of cooperation and conflict that shape the new philosophy of representation.

“Desi” For Sale

The visual medium of films has historically used South Asian iconography for its vaguely Eastern depictions. Efforts have been made to communicate authentic cross-cultural stories; however, stereotypes persisted in the likes of Apu from The Simpsons (1990) and Raj Koothrapali from The Big Bang Theory (2007). The racial caricatures that reinforced the “otherness” of the forever immigrants were

²¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.101.

²² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.1

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challenged with the emergence of Indian liberalisation and anti-racist consciousness. Bollywood’s imagination and appeal, in particular, has been instrumental at illustrating the purchasing power of the new middle class within and outside of India. This has bridged the cultural and monetary exchange between urban India and industry, and has transformed “Indian-ness” from a punchline to an introspective site of cultural redefinition. As Desai illustrates, “the development of communication and technology within globalisation has greatly affected the transnational distribution of cultural products”.²³

This growing popularity has led to distribution networks expanding into an exchange of knowledge. Code switches within language to appeal to the metropolitan elites, the showcase of lavish “global” Indian weddings, and the integration of Western actors and bilingual productions have transformed Bollywood into a transnational cultural force²⁴. When adopted by Western media productions, these images aestheticise the “desi” into a consumable visual library. The bindis, lehengas, mehendi and marigolds convert the diversity of India into one market-friendly representation. The twice commodified “desi-ness” is sold as a part of global “ethnoscape,” where cultural elements circulate as decontextualised artefacts²⁵.

The term “desi” not only centres the hegemonic categories of society i.e. the upper-caste Hindu, North India, within Bollywood but also the Western media marketplace. While the names and experiences of the characters seem diverse, the aesthetics of celebration and struggle remain recognizable. Generational conflicts, arranged marriages, Bollywood dance sequences and ceremonies are sold to audiences that wish to engage with the orient without its complexities. This transformation of an identity to a marketable brand has sanitized the politics of South Asia. Even when structural struggles are

²³ Jigna Desai, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 40.

²⁴ Suresh Rachamalla, “Influence of Liberalisation & Globalisation on Indian Cinema: A Study of Indian Cinema and Its Diasporic Consciousness,” *Journal of Advanced Research in Journalism & Mass Communication* (Advanced Research Publications), <https://doi.org/10.24321/2395.3810.201804>

²⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547675>

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acknowledged, they are rendered palatable through narrative strategies that contain their disruptive potential. Each character that is placed within the Western context, while retaining facets of their “desi-ness”, has to then negotiate the demands of authenticity and marketability in distinct ways. The desi woman is an edifice of the changing landscape of representations and constraints that trend within the zeitgeist. She is not a stable being, but a responsive concept that reflects aesthetic diversity that is legitimised by the Western media complex.

Kate Sharma: The Politics of Colourblind Casting

Bridgerton is a period drama series set in London during the Regency Era of 1811-1820. Julia Quinn started writing the books in 2000, and in 2020, the show debuted on Netflix. It follows the affluent and noble Bridgerton family, applying 21st-century logic to the 1800s world with contemporary dialogue, classical compositions of pop songs, and themes like feminism, gossip, agency, scandal, and desire.

It is extravagant and fantasises the London high society (ton) as inclusive. The unique appeal of the show surrounds its adoption of colour-blind casting, i.e. “the process of excluding racial identities from character descriptions”²⁶. Bridgerton endeavours to transform the Ton (elite society) into a liminal space where diverse ethnicities occupy status and prestige. Each season epitomises the interracial relationships between the Europeans and the assimilators. This technique of casting used to challenge dominant ideologies of racial representation in a period drama, instead represents post-racial racism²⁷ within a society that tries to convince its audience that it has solved racism within the reign of King George III. Slavery and colonial expansion that fund the wigs, balls and parties of Bridgerton are renounced in the name of vibrancy and creative expression.

The media conglomerate Netflix has faced backlash for using cultural diversity to fulfill racial quotas, while reproducing an Americanized homogenization within the series²⁶. Shonda Rhimes,

²⁶ Stephanie L. Hanus, “Interracial Romances and Colorblindness in Shondaland’s *Bridgerton*,” *Media, Culture & Society* 46 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437231198440> p.2

²⁷ Hannah Adriano, “Coloring History: A Critical Analysis of Racial Representation in *Bridgerton*,” *The Motley Undergraduate Journal* 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.55016/ojs.muj.v2i1.78789>

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the producer of the show inculcates representation by casting the Sharma family in Season 2 of the show, supplanting the original Sheffield family from the books. The family is portrayed by South Indian actors, who claim a vague North Indian history. Their lived experience as racialised ‘others’ highlights the ways in which social mobility and visibility construct an aspirational mode of belonging within the reconfigured Regency world.

Simone Ashley, a Tamil-English actress, plays Kate Sharma, the eldest sister of the family. The character, throughout the eight episodes, acknowledges racial differences that motivate her character decisions, but lives in a world where racial hierarchy isn't pronounced. She is positioned as a spinster and protective older sister to Edwina Sharma, played by Charithra Chandran, who is pronounced, “the diamond of the season” as an aspirational category for the desi woman. This exoticization is swift, where the Sharma sisters, as daughters of a Bombay clerk, mediate a love triangle with the aristocratic Viscount Anthony Bridgerton, who objectifies and weighs the pros and cons of each sister according to their respective utility in fulfilling his obligations. He mirrors neoliberal choice discourse, which infuses racial diversity into dominant institutions to update existing hierarchies²⁸. Though marketed as “groundbreaking,” the women are narratively constrained by the male gaze.

Kate Sharma’s character is truly fascinating; the show invokes her South Asian heritage with ambivalence, yet refuses to elaborate, rendering most of these elements as decorative rather than substantive. Stripped of an actual colonial history, her backstory is a reproduction of naturalised oppression within a utopia. Her memories are non-real, and her presence is an aesthetic. The desi-ness she wears as fabric patterns, paisley embroidery, her sister’s ability to speak Hindustani and strum the sitar, her disapproval of English tea, and jhumkas: are hollow. Bridgerton’s colourblindness creates a reality where Kate Sharma is more “desi” than Indian. In attempts to challenge dominant narratives and solve racism by including a diverse cast, Bridgerton ultimately misrepresents marginalised communities²⁷. As remarked upon by Salsabila, “the portrayal of diversity in Bridgerton [is] purely

²⁸ Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (New ed., University of Minnesota Press, 2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsrj6>

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to maintain the cultural diversity image Netflix has, as a market and a trend to the 21st century demand"²⁹. The portrayal of the Sharmas' being pan-Indian ties representation to vagueness.

Netflix's promotional apparatus packages this as cheerful rather than political. The article published by them on April 5th, 2022 titled "*The Sharma Sisters Spread Desi Cheer*"³⁰ is emblematic of Netflix allowing its audience to purchase a nostalgic experience. The elements pronounced as "desi" within the show essentialize the stereotypes that surround South Asians. The Sharmas' existence is curated for white spectatorship with relatable images and objects. The haldi ceremony exemplifies this commodification: a religious ritual becomes a scenic set-piece, its spiritual significance translated into anthropological trivia, its visual elements extracted and "scaled down" (Canale's telling phrase) to fit within Regency aesthetic³⁰. The mention of Ghalib, who would be 16 at the time of the show, and the references to Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham embody "desi" as a spectacle of Bollywood cinema conventions and obscure references. They affirm the identity of diaspora viewers, comfort the natives and pacify the outlanders. Simone Ashley has expressed her pride in representing South Asian women in the universality of Kate's romantic journey. This reliance on universal relatability underlines the anxiety that audiences abandon characters whose experiences and identities are too different from their own. The selective escapism of Bridgerton is therefore an effective marketing strategy that paints culture as something to be "brought in," "spread," and "celebrated" from the position of those incorporating diversity rather than those whose cultures are being incorporated.

Lalita Bakshi: Bollywood and Jane Austen

Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) is a transnational film that transposes Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to contemporary India. Our Elizabeth is Lalita Bakshi, played by Aishwariya Rai, while Martin Henderson plays Mr Darcy. The movie opens with "Bole So

²⁹ K. Salsabila, "Netflix: Cultural Diversity or Cultural Imperialism?"

Rubikon Journal of Transnational American Studies 8, no. 1 (2023): p. 23

³⁰ Neha Vaswani and Julia Beckman, "All Edwina and Kate's Desi Moments in Bridgerton Season 2," Netflix Tudum, April 5, 2022, <https://www.netflix.com/tudum/articles/all-edwina-and-kates-desi-moments-in-bridgerton-season-2>.

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“Nihal Sat Sri Akal” being sung against the backdrop of the Golden Temple, shifting soon to establish agrarian Amritsar as a substitute for Regency England. Will Darcy, within the story, is a wealthy American businessman, and he confronts the developing world as a prospect to establish hotels in. He dismisses Amritsar as “bedlam” and spends much of the movie confronting his prejudices not through self-reflection but through Lalita’s persistent, pedagogical labour, positioning the brown woman as responsible for educating the white man out of his racism.

Chaddha excels at utilising generic conventions to establish the distinct desi-ness of her female protagonists. Aishwarya Rai embodies a particular vision of the modern South Asian woman: educated, independent, proud of her cultural heritage, fluent in Western cultural codes and English literature. As Lalita, she critiques both the patriarchal traditions within her own society and the cultural imperialism of the West, as she enters into an interracial romance. The conversation between Lalita and Darcy, where she calls out his capitalist motivation to create an experience in India “without Indians,” is essential to the conception of desi within this world. Lalita oscillates between being Indian enough to be recognisable, yet Westernised enough to be sympathised with when juxtaposed with her archetypal family. Chaddha reflects the continuous reconstruction of diasporic communities while utilising Bollywood tropes within her movie.

The film employs musical numbers that create a visual and dynamic landscape where the musical motifs of Hindi films are juxtaposed with English to Hindi code switching, with English dominating linguistically for comprehension by Western audiences. The cultural practices of arranged marriages and female autonomy are discussed in songs like “A Marriage Has Come to Town” and “No Life Without Wife”. The performance of these elements seems rudimentary; however, they function as textbook accounts for the uninitiated viewers. Lalita takes offence to the orientalist constructions of the East being inferior to the West, while simultaneously imagining herself in a white wedding gown, leaving her own family and adopting Wickham’s culture. She is exoticised as an object of beauty and a challenge for Darcy that resists orientalism while aligning her desires towards the West. Her outbursts are punctuated by eastern musical motifs that stereotype her temperament. Her anti-imperialist rhetoric becomes a part of her appeal, as her political consciousness is romanticised. While

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she translates her entire culture, Darcy learns to appreciate its aesthetic differences.

This film is an unabashed attempt at packaging the South Asian identity as simultaneously exotic and accessible, authentic and entertaining, specific and universal - the very contradictions that would come to define "desi" as a market category. Gurinder Chadah's filmography establishes the template for selling "desi-ness", which is refined over time but never fundamentally challenged. Kate Sharma's appeal is categorically the same as Lalita Bakshi's: the defiant oriental woman. The vibrant wedding ceremonies, with spontaneous choreography, the golden hour lighting, sarees, colours and visual spectacles are created to convey the maximum amount of "desi-ness" within consumable images.

The song "India Can Set You Free" packages the subcontinent into a spiritual commodity for sale. While Lalita critiques Mrs Darcy's assertion of India being an exportable good, she also bursts into song with shopkeepers and workers on the street who can sing in perfect English. She is simultaneously educating about the material conditions of Indians while executing dance numbers across bazaars with the impoverished. She is conscripted as a cultural ambassador; however, we don't know if Mr Darcy, her subject, redistributes his economic power and divests the same. While Western consumers (both diegetic and extra-diegetic) need only be receptive, only allow themselves to be entertained and educated, the South Asian woman becomes their keeper and product.

Bride and Prejudice is a masterclass at packaging "desi-ness" and selective political outrage for an external audience. It demonstrates the profitability and exemplifies the formula of celebrating hybridity while constraining its subversive potential. Aishwariya Rai plays a politically conscious heroine who discusses the lived experiences of Indian women but is ultimately non-threatening. Her identity has brand value, and Rai's media presence is "cosmo-national,"³¹ i.e. local enough to authenticate Indian cultural content while being global enough to appeal to Western audiences. She is a pre-existing brand that has been vetted and deemed commercially viable to articulate the "desi" existence.

³¹ Priya Jaikumar, Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India (2005), https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_625239

Kamala Khan’s Ms. Marvel: The New Age of Representation

In 2022, Marvel Studios released its live-action TV mini-series about the superhero Ms. Marvel. It follows Kamala Khan, played by Iman Vellani, a Pakistani-American teenager who gains powers from a bangle, or more specifically, ‘Quantum Bands’. She navigates the challenges of superheroism and adolescence as the first Muslim character to headline her own series. From the first scenes, Kamala is established as a character who looks up to her superhero idols. The series broaches the subject of the partition and immigrant struggles with Kamala’s grandparents and parents. Commandably, Ms. Marvel’s production deliberately included extensive collaboration with Pakistani, Pakistani-American and broader South Asian-American communities³². Sara Amanat, the co-creator of the series, emphasised that Kamala and her struggles are inspired by her own experiences growing up³².

A mainstream Marvel and Disney production focusing on a Muslim teenager is admirably as evidence of a progressive evolution from post-9/11 terrorism and religious oppression rhetoric. Hanifah et al. (2024) argue that the series successfully portrays "moderate Islam" that "constructs an opposition to Islam's negative stereotypes in the United States media"³³. Born out of Disney’s industrial complex, Ms. Marvel engages in platform capitalism that refines her “desi-ness” to maximize Disney+ subscribers. The show becomes a site of contestation between the lived trauma of first and second generation immigrants, but also the market strategies to “sell” Ms. Marvel to an audience.

Kamala Khan is interesting because she is a superhero, and she also happens to be Muslim. She doesn’t engage with active participation to sell her identity as desi; rather, visual elements are used to incorporate her history and create her uniquely Pakistani-American identity. The spectacles of mainstream superhero CGI disrupt the formula of desi representation. To commercialise the superhero, Kamala Khan opposes

³² Saadia Farooq and Anna DeGalan, “The Change Is Here, and the Change Is Her: Pakistani American Representation in the Disney+ Series Ms. Marvel,” *Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress* 8 (2024): 248–269, <https://doi.org/10.32674/j4m0nb38>

³³ Anisa Hanifah, Lili Awaludin, and Hasbi Assiddiqi, “The Portrayal of Moderate Islam Representations in *Ms. Marvel* (2022) TV Series,” *Journal of English Development* 4 (2024): 112–126, <https://doi.org/10.25217/jed.v3i01.4099> p. 112

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negative stereotyping by mediating between the two identities. She wears a hijab selectively and often sports fusion costumes. The object that grants her powers is her great-grandmother’s bracelet, inscribed with Urdu script that she is told unlocks her “noor” or divine light. Her world is a testament to this hybridity with Hulk kurtas, and the music selection of old Bollywood mixed with emergent Indian hip hop, translating an audio-visual narrative of her “desi-ness”. She is muslim enough to count, while being secular enough to avoid triggering Islamophobic anxieties³⁴.

Her hijab is optional, situational and containable with its normalisation requiring constant negotiations. The suit she wears is a synthesis of compromise: ethnic but, ultimately referencing the all-American Captain Marvel. The series relies on the modesty principle to decontextualise this hybridisation and place her within an already robust universe where her reference groups do not display overt categories of otherization. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity illuminates Kamala’s character well as she wrestles with multiple facets of her identity, modelling a form of post-colonial subjectivity³⁵.

The identity politics that surround Kamala’s grandmother are significant as they impart a quasi-history to Kamala herself since her powers are generational. The series dedicates space to exploring the trauma of displacement and violence from the Partition, acknowledging it within Western popular culture. This discussion, however, underlines an important question: how can this trauma be sold in a superhero show? This atrocity is discussed to demonstrate the show’s seriousness and garner critical acclaim; however, it is supplanted by the time-travelling powers that allow her to “fix” this history. This narrative choice is revealing as the Partition transforms into a backstory for the symbols she carries, changing the event into a reservoir for emotional stakes that are historical and expendable for quips and gags.

Kamala Khan speaks to the “ABCD” (“American Born Confused Desi”) experience. Hanifah et al. note that Muslim representation functions as a marketing strategy in celebratory discourse³⁴. Ms. Marvel exemplifies this logic, positioning its progressive framing to

³⁴ Hanifah, Awaludin, and Assiddiqi, “The Portrayal of Moderate Islam Representations,”

³⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. p. 8-9

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insulate the criticisms Disney and Marvel receive from the third world. It straddles genuine representation and market exploitation that transforms desi as an achievement and corporate asset.

Conclusion

The three case studies examined above illuminate one conclusion: visibility does not always translate to meaningful inclusion or present a challenge to existing power structures. Though visible, South Asian women witness parts of their identity being managed and circumscribed as a commodity for diversity credits, aesthetic interest and market differentiation. Though different in their execution, Kate Sharma, Lalita Bakshi and Kamala Khan have one thing in common: they have to constantly justify their presence and make cultural references for exposition. They receive a hypervisibility where they are exoticised as being “different” while the audience is condemned for not expecting them to be. They are depoliticized and their inclusion across the genres of period pieces, romantic comedies and science fiction is minimized with the refusal to address their lived and intersectional histories. Their in-betweenness is a challenge where commercial viability and audience comfort often supersede advocacy and progressive inclusion. Moving towards more ethical and meaningful representation requires acknowledging these constraints and working to dismantle them. A reliance on familiar “desi” symbols stresses the existence of South Asian’s as tools of explanation. Though equity remains a utopian concept, the South Asian women the Western media uses as a reference, should evolve from commodified visibility.

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Rights in Theory, Barriers in Practice: A Socio-Legal Study of Inclusive Education in India

Sangita Sau¹

(Third Year, B.A L.L. B(Hons), School of legal Studies, The Neotia University)

Abstract: Education is one of the most crucial elements of building up and evolving a society. The Constitution of India provides for the Right to Equality and the Right to Education, but the authority of the powers is diluted when issues of gender, caste, and geographical discrimination are implemented practically. To fight such matters and bring about an equal society, the government of India created the National Policy on Education in the year 1986, subsequently evolving as the idea of inclusive education. According to UNICEF, inclusive education is the principle where all the children, no matter what their background is or what their ability is, or whether the child is disabled, all learn together in the same classroom. Despite liberal legislation like the Right to Education Act (2009), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the National Education Policy (2020), equal chances to learn are not achieved yet. As per the report by the Ministry of Education (2024–25), almost 1.17 million children are still not going to school, most from Uttar Pradesh. This paper analyzes to what extent India's policy and laws affect inclusive education and what are the societal, economic, and structural problems that stand in the way of enforcing the same. The methodology of the present text is to examine how India's policy and laws affect inclusive education and ways of enforcing the same. The methodology of the present research was developed using secondary data, studies on laws, policy documents, and education reports. The paper also reviews the issues of lack of finance, lack of teachers' training, and societal stigmatization. The paper makes the inference that inclusive education is achievable only when India makes laws promising the same but also initiates

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reforms by way of permanent changes in expenditures, modes of teaching, and monitoring mechanisms so that every child learns together and grows together.

Keywords – Inclusive Education, Policy and Laws, Right to Education Act, Teachers' Training, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.

INTRODUCTION:

"Education" is just not a word; rather, it is an entire world that tries to nourish, shape, and raise a society—a tree whose roots go deep into the soil, while its branches and leaves narrate several different stories. Education, in this way, supports the growth of an entire community. However, the question is, when it comes to education in India, certain obstacles or challenges suddenly appear and interrupt this whole natural process of upbringing.

Where the law promises equality, many children continue to face exclusion. While the policies speak of inclusion, the classrooms across the country tell a different tale, one where children are still being kept out on account of caste, gender, disability, and geographical disadvantage. In response, the Government of India promulgated the National Policy on Education in 1986, which then gave way to the concept of inclusive education aimed at having all children, irrespective of ability, background, and disability, learn together in one classroom.

But after all these efforts, around 1.17 million children in India are still out of school.³⁶ A recent report in 2024 showed that only 61% of children with disabilities aged 5–19 years were enrolled, which is way below the national enrollment average.³⁷ These numbers show one clear reality of legislation like the Right to Education Act, 2009; the

³⁶ Ministry of Education, UDISE+ 2023–24: Report on Unified District Information System for Education Plus (New Delhi: Government of India, 2024), 18–20.

³⁷ UNICEF India, Status of Disability and Inclusion in Education (New Delhi: UNICEF, 2023), 7.

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Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; and the National Education Policy, 2020, not achieving their goals yet.³⁸

In view of the demographic growth of India, related to equity, international human rights commitments, and the economic cost of exclusion, there is an imperative need for the adoption and effective implementation of an inclusive education framework for future generations. This paper looks at issues related to poor implementation, a lack of trained teachers, infrastructural gaps, social stigma, and administrative underfunding. It analyzes existing legal frameworks, assesses their functionality in the real world, identifies the obstacles that still prevail, and outlines ways through which inclusion in India's education system can be brought about.

Ultimately, this study underlines the continuing mismatch between constitutional promises and ground realities, the difficulty of translating policy intent into classroom practice, and the urgent need for legal and administrative reforms to build a more equitable and developed society for the coming generations.

Research Methodology: The research methodology on which this study is based depended on secondary data that was based on census information, government reports, academic articles, UNESCO/UNICEF publications, and some were based on legislation, such as the Right to Education Act, 2009, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and the National Education Policy, 2020.³⁹ This study also utilizes a socio-legal and qualitative research approach to verify how India's laws on inclusive education really function in natural

³⁸ UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education (Paris: UNESCO, 2020), 45–47.

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (India), §§ 3, 8.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (India), §16.

National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education, Government of India (New Delhi: Government of India, 2020), 9–12.

³⁹ Census of India 2011, “Data on Disability,” Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner (New Delhi: Government of India, 2011).

UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education (Paris: UNESCO, 2020), 45–47.

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reality. The content and thematic analysis from the other side help in identifying key issues like poor implementation of policies, lack of trained teachers, infrastructural gaps, social stigma, and administrative under-funding of this sector. Toward the end of this study, compare the actual objective or goal of inclusive education policies with the enrollment rate and implementation data to identify gaps.

Objectives: Some of the objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To verify the gap between the legal promises and the actual practice of inclusive education in India.
2. To verify how India's primary education laws and policies promote inclusive education.
3. To understand the socio-economic and structural barriers that affect access to education for disabled and marginalized children.
4. To discuss some of the major challenges pertinent to the implementation of inclusive education in India.
5. To study how the legislation influences the effectiveness of pertinent laws in providing equal opportunities for learning.
6. To understand the challenges and problems, including social stigma and cultural factors.
7. To propose appropriate legal and administrative reforms needed to bring inclusive education into practice in India.

Literature Review: The academic discourses of inclusive education in India have gradually moved from viewing the issue as a welfare concern to recognizing it as a constitutional, human rights, and developmental mandate. For example, early scholarship, as found in the work of Jangira (1996) emphasized that Indian classrooms were never designed to accommodate diversity and that exclusion is not incidental but constitutes systemic negligence.⁴⁰ His work underlined how schooling normalizes segregation of “mainstream learners” and “special needs learners”, laying the foundation for more recent arguments that India lacked both pedagogical capacity and administrative will for meaningful inclusion.

⁴⁰ Jangira, N. K., “Special Needs Education in India: The Past, Present and Future,” *Indian Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation* 5, no. 1 (1996): 21–33.

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Later, the work of Singal (2004, 2010) attained influential status, arguing that inclusive education in India remains policy-rich but practice-poor. The training modules for teachers appeared to recognize the principle of inclusion; however, actual classroom interaction rarely showed this.⁴¹ Her fieldwork also established that children with disabilities often remain “present but not participating”, thereby bringing out the difference between enrollment numbers and actual learning outcomes.⁴²

A socio-legal perspective is reflected in the work of Nambissan (2009), who primarily explored issues related to caste, gender, and poverty. She has held the view that exclusion is not single-layered but encompasses a bundle of structural inequality and institutional bias.⁴³ Indeed, her analysis brought into sharp focus how Dalit, Adivasi, and minority children face discrimination that silently operates through teacher expectations, classroom seating patterns, and linguistic barriers.

Literature that emerged in the years following the Right to Education Act, 2009, has been more legally institutional in nature. For example, Bajpai (2013), in assessing how the Act frames inclusion yet falls short on providing mechanisms that can be legally enforced, states that the constitutional promises of equality (Articles 14, 15, and 21A) are strong on paper, but grievance redressal mechanisms remain underdeveloped and hence offer relatively limited avenues of redress when exclusion occurs.⁴⁴ Sharma & Deppeler (2016) also express similar sentiments, where they say that policies create obligations

⁴¹ Singal, Nidhi, “Developing Schools for All: Inclusive Education in India,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 52, no. 4 (2004): 417–432.

⁴² Singal, Nidhi, “Disability, Education and Equity in India,” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14, no. 7 (2010): 643–660.

⁴³ Nambissan, Geetha B., “Exclusion and Discrimination in Schools: A Sociological Examination,” in India’s Social Development Report 2009, ed. Council for Social Development (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124–139.

⁴⁴ Bajpai, Rochana, “The Right to Education Act: Constitutional Foundations and Challenges,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 30 (2013): 62–68.

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without creating capacity in teacher preparation, infrastructure development, and financial allocation.⁴⁵

Be it the completion rate, attendance, or participation, children with disabilities trail behind their peers, as several reports in recent times, including those by UNESCO in 2019 and NITI Aayog in 2023, have shown.⁴⁶ Yet, these reports also argue that inclusive education is not just a social compulsion; it makes economic sense. They believe that the cost of exclusion is more than the investment required for inclusive reform. Taken together, a similar direction would appear to be suggested by the literature: there is an articulated commitment from constitutional values and statutory frameworks to inclusion, but weak implementation, deep-seated social prejudice, and fragmented administrative structures promote a growing chasm between policy intent and classroom reality. As this review so aptly highlights, for inclusive education to thrive, legal reform must accompany social transformation. In this way, meaningful learning will become accessible to each child, whoever they are, whatever their identity or ability.

Findings: The study suggests that there are striking gaps between India's legal commitments, which are visible. And its legal protections and actual inclusive education on the ground. While India has put in place a robust legal framework guaranteeing equal opportunity and education, there are mechanisms of execution that give those freedoms. But life has remained underdeveloped, creating significant barriers for disadvantaged children.

Even as the Act of Fundamental Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, 2009, guarantees admission, non-discrimination, age-appropriate learning, and equal opportunities for every child in the age group of 6–14 years, data from the Ministry of Education for 2024–2025 shows 1.17 million out-of-school children.

⁴⁵ Sharma, Umesh, and Anuradha Deppeler, “Barriers to Inclusive Education in India,” *Asia Pacific Disability Journal* 24, no. 2 (2016): 59–78.

⁴⁶ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2019* (Paris: UNESCO, 2019).

NITI Aayog, *School Education Quality Index: Analytical Report 2023* (New Delhi: NITI Aayog, 2023).

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This is one of the key findings when analyzing the Act.⁴⁷ This means the Act's Sections 3 and 8 have been poorly implemented. According to the report, the education institutions usually interpret inclusion superficially, which restricts the consequence of inclusion to attendance only without genuine participation in learning, even though the law provides for eligibility and prohibits refusal of admission.⁴⁸ Lack of effective school management committees, according to Section 21, in a maximum number of states, compromises public oversight and accountability.⁴⁹

Another major issue affecting inclusive education includes the RPwD Act of 2016. Specifically, Section 16 insists that governments and schools provide children with disabilities inclusive education, adequate modifications, and personalized support.⁵⁰ National surveys reported, however, that only more than a third of children with disabilities in the age group of 5-19 years received adequate educational resources, and only 61% attended school. The study reported that even though being readily demanded, requirements like barrier-free infrastructure, a shortage of special educators, and inclusive lessons are often excluded, particularly in rural and economically weaker districts.⁵¹ It reflects an apparent gap between administrative competency and legal benchmarks.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Education, UDISE+ 2024–25: Provisional Data Release (New Delhi: Government of India, 2025), 10–12.

⁴⁸ Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (India), §§ 3, 8.

⁴⁹ Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, §21.

⁵⁰ Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (India), §16.

⁵¹ UNICEF India, Status of Disability and Inclusion in Education (New Delhi: UNICEF, 2023), 7.

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The National Education Policy of 2020 foresees a holistic and inclusive educational system through resource center's, interdisciplinary instruction, and adaptable learning pathways.⁵² However, despite strengthening the conceptual foundations for inclusion at the policy creation level, NEP structural reforms have yet to be implemented by several states, including educational complexities along with training educators. Put simply, policy ambition has outrun institutional readiness.

According to the legal findings, a sound constitutional framework to support inclusive education is provided for in Article 14 on equality before the law, Article 15 on nondiscrimination, Article 21A on the right to education, and Article 46 on the promotion of educational interests of weaker sections.⁵³ While this is provided in the constitution, caste exclusion is rampant and was more pronounced in districts with sizeable populations of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Seating, peer interaction, and teachers' behavioral patterns typically violated the spirit, if not the letter, of Articles 15 and 21A, according to field-level reports. This brings out once again the continuing mismatch between social attitudes and constitutional ideals.

Economic analysis strengthens this argument. Various budget analyses show that the amount allocated for inclusive education, specifically for disability support, infrastructure modification, and teacher training, remains inadequate.⁵⁴ States such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, and Odisha, which already have poor socio-economic indicators, have the most challenging timeframe to meet the provisions under the RTE Act and the RPwD Act.⁵⁵ The results depict the way

⁵² National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Education, Government of India (New Delhi: Government of India, 2020), 9–12.

⁵³ Constitution of India, arts. 14, 15, 21A, and 46.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Finance, Union Budget Analysis for Education 2023–24 (New Delhi: Government of India, 2023), 55–60.

⁵⁵ NITI Aayog, State Expenditure on School Education 2023 (New Delhi: NITI Aayog, 2023), 23–27.

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differences in income create differences in education, even when laws are uniform across this country.

The study underlines systemic governance issues, such as the divided responsibility for implementing inclusive education among education, social justice, disability welfare, and local government departments, leading to insufficient coordination. Most states lack adequate mechanisms to verify whether people comply with Sections 16–17 of the RPwD Act or Sections 8–9 of the RTE Act.⁵⁶ This fragmented governance structure has resulted in slowing down the process and causing wide variation across states.⁵⁷ In sum, the findings indicate that India has a sound socio-legal foundation for inclusive education, but the system for translating it into practice, teacher preparedness, administrative coordination, infrastructure capacity, and community attitudes is still very weak. The gap between the intent of policy framers and actual practice in schools will continue to widen. The constitutional guarantee of equitable and inclusive education will remain an aspiration rather than a fact. In sum, the findings indicate that India has a sound socio-legal foundation for inclusive education, but the ecosystem towards its implementation—teacher preparedness, administrative coordination, infrastructure capacity, and community attitudes—remains very fragile. For this reason, the gap between what policymakers intend to happen and what goes on in the schools is expanding. Unless more effective strategies to implement the law, increase financial resources, and sensitize societal problems are developed, the Constitution's pledge for equitable and inclusive schooling will continue to be a dream rather than a reality.

Conclusion: This research verifies the fact that India has a productive legal framework that supports inclusive education, but its practice is spotty and different across states. The legislation, from the RTE Act, 2009, to the RPwD Act, 2016, and the NEP 2020, guarantees equal opportunities; however, quite many children, particularly from

⁵⁶ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Implementation Status Report of RPwD Act 2016 (New Delhi: Government of India, 2022), 14–18.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Education, “Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2022–23,” Government of India, 2023.

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marginalized communities and children with disabilities, still face barriers in accessing meaningful learning. Out-of-school children's data and low enrollment of children with disabilities indicate that rights granted through law would not be sufficient.

The key challenges are weak teacher training, insufficient infrastructure, low funding, and persistent social stigma. These gaps are shutting out the realization of the constitutional vision under Articles 14, 15, and 21A. Inclusion in many schools is understood as admission, not actual participation.

Thus, the results show that while inclusive education is a legal obligation in India, it is not yet a reality.⁵⁸ Closing this gap will require stronger implementation, better-trained teachers, accessible infrastructure, and community awareness. Indeed, developing a system of inclusive education is not only a binding obligation at the level of the law but also one for socio-economic development.

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⁵⁸ UNESCO, *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2009), 11–12.

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The Social Construction of Gender: Theories, Misconceptions and Contemporary Relevance

Dr. Aratrika Bhattacharya¹

Assistant Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, St. Xavier's College, Burdwan

Abstract: This chapter provides a critical analysis of the social construction of gender, delving into foundational sociological theories, common misconceptions, and its significance in modern discussions. It draws upon essential theoretical insights from scholars like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Candace West and Don Zimmerman, tracing the development of the understanding of gender as a socially constructed and institutionally reinforced identity rather than a fixed biological characteristic. The chapter examines the roles of language, media, education, and policy in perpetuating gender norms, while also addressing the conflicts between essentialist and constructivist viewpoints. It clarifies misunderstandings related to the term "social construction," particularly the erroneous belief that it suggests the non-existence or trivial nature of gendered experiences. The chapter underscores how these misconceptions obstruct meaningful conversations about gender issues, particularly in divided socio-political contexts.

Moreover, the chapter evaluates contemporary significance by engaging with global discussions on gender identity, non-binary recognition, and the effects of gender fluidity on social institutions such as family, workplace, and legal frameworks. It emphasizes that viewing gender as a social construct provides essential tools for challenging inequality, enhancing inclusivity, and transforming prevailing gender paradigms. The chapter concludes by highlighting the necessity of sociological literacy in navigating the complexities of gender in the 21st century and advocates for a nuanced, intersectional approach to both theory and practice.

The Social Construction of gender

This contribution is intended to serve as a foundational yet progressive analysis for students, researchers, and practitioners interested in gender studies and social theory, offering clarity on a frequently cited but often misunderstood concept.

Keywords: Gender construction, Social theory, Identity, Intersectionality, Gender Norms

INTRODUCTION

The idea that gender is a social construct has become fundamental to modern sociology and gender studies. This chapter critically explores this idea: firstly by examining core sociological theories, secondly by addressing frequent misconceptions, and thirdly by appraising the contemporary significance of gender construction in our fast changing society. The main goal is to demonstrate how considering gender as socially produced and institutionally reinforced rather than as a fixed biological reality creates avenues for inclusion, critique, and change. The term 'gender' refers to the socially created roles, behaviours, identities, and expressions that societies assign to people based on perceived sex (male/female) and other intersecting indicators. Crucially, considering gender as socially created does not imply that gendered experiences are unreal or insignificant; rather, it indicates that social processes, not only biology, are the source of these feelings.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, a review of theoretical traditions: the sex-gender dichotomy, the turn to constructionist and performative theories (for example, the work of de Beauvoir, Butler, and West & Zimmerman). Second, we will address prevalent misunderstandings regarding the social construction of gender, namely the notion that 'constructed' equates to 'unreal' or that acknowledging construction diminishes the tangible experience of gender. Third, we interact with the present significance of gender construction: how media, education and policy reinforce gender norms, how acknowledgement of non-binary and fluid identities challenges institutions, and how social transformation is enabled by the constructivist view. Finally, the chapter finishes by underlining the necessity for sociological literacy of gender and the importance of an inter-sectional approach.

Theoretical Foundations

The Sex/Gender Distinction and Early Feminist Thought

The distinction between sex (biological characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs) and gender (socially assigned responsibilities, behaviours, and expectations associated with being male/female) is a good place to start. Simone de Beauvoir wrote, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" in her seminal essay *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 1949/2010: 283).⁵⁹ This claim suggests that 'woman' is a socio-historical concept created through acculturation rather than just a biological fact. According to De Beauvoir, femininity is socially and historically imposed, and women are formed as the 'Other' in relation to men—men as the subject, women as the object.

As a result, de Beauvoir established the foundation for considering gender as something that is done or becoming rather than something that is determined solely by nature.

Doing Gender and Institutional Interaction

Building on this tradition, West and Zimmerman's (1987) article "Doing Gender" is another key contribution.⁶⁰ They believe that gender is not only a role one chooses but an ongoing achievement in social interaction – a routine accomplishment woven into everyday discussions, actions and institutional procedures (West & Zimmerman, 1987). People's gender is not something they are, but rather what they do. This draws attention to the ongoing social labour of gender: how actors perpetuate gendered categories through interaction, hence upholding gender inequality.

West and Zimmerman emphasize that gender is situational and contextual: in every interaction, individuals are accountable for doing their gender appropriately according to normative standards. If they deviate, they are subject to pushback or sanction. Their notion helps us see how institutions like schools, workplaces, families are not just the

⁵⁹ For further reading see de Beauvoir, S. (1949, 2010).

⁶⁰ For instance, see, West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125–151.

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backdrop but actively produce gender through every day practices (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Performativity and Post-Structuralist Theory

While the aforementioned theories highlight how gender is constructed through social practice, Judith Butler's approach may be the most radical.⁶¹ Butler contends that gender is performative rather than merely constructed. To put it another way, gender is defined by the very behaviours that exhibit it; our activities create the appearance of identity rather than a "pre-existing" gender identity (Butler, 1999). As one analysis puts it, "gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Felluga, n.d.).⁶²

For Butler, then, gender is not a fixed essence; it is a constant process of stylized repetition of acts, gestures, speech and bodily comportment within regulatory norms (Butler, 1999). Gender is both manufactured and policed since these behaviours are governed by societal standards of what constitutes "man" or "woman" (as well as other categories beyond the binary) (Butler, 1999). Thus, subversive behaviours (drag, non-binary expression, Trans embodiment) can undermine the conventional frame and highlight the contingency of gender.

Synthesis: From Essentialism to Constructivism

According to traditional essentialist perspectives, gender, and occasionally even gender-related roles, was universal, biologically determined, and natural. The constructivist viewpoint, on the other hand, contends that gender is socially constructed, subject to historical and cultural variation, and entwined with power dynamics. This is furthered by the performative turn, which demonstrates how social meaning, discourse, and normative repetition shape gender. Together, these theories provide a path from Butler's post-structural performativity to West & Zimmerman's interactional 'doing gender'

⁶¹ Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

⁶² Felluga, D. (n.d.). *Modules on Butler: On performativity*. Purdue University.

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and de Beauvoir's existential feminist critique of biology. Together they give a comprehensive framework for understanding gender as socially produced, contingent, and politically charged.

Common Misconceptions about the Social Construction of Gender

Misconceptions persist despite the 'social construction' terminology being widely used in gender studies. To ensure that the idea is used correctly and effectively, it is essential to make them clear.

Misconception 1: 'Social construction' means Gender is Unreal or Trivial

One prevalent mistake is that labelling gender "socially constructed" means it has no genuine impact or is only an illusion. This is not the case. Gender construction does not make gendered experiences worthless; on the contrary, it emphasizes how gender is created by institutional and social processes and is hence malleable. The constructionist stance continues to recognize very real material effects, such as prejudice, inequality, identity development, emotional life, and embodiment. Acknowledging construction places reality in the social and historical sphere rather than denying it (Felluga, n.d.).

Misconception 2: Construction means Infinitely fluid, arbitrary and entirely Individual Choice

Another misconception is that social rules become meaningless if gender is manufactured because one can pick any gender (or switch at will). Constructivism does not advocate for completely free or limitless choice, even while it stresses contingency and changeability. Institutions, rhetoric, bodies, and people's possibilities are moulded (though not entirely defined) by gender norms (Butler, 1999). Butler emphasizes that while gender norms can be disputed, they are nonetheless compulsory: there is no "outside" of gender totally, because the regulatory frame legitimates some acts and invalidates others.

Therefore, the constructivist perspective emphasizes both the limitations of normative systems and the potential for subversion and change, rather than just 'everything goes' relativism.

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Misconception 3: Construction implies Biology is irrelevant

Another myth is that the social construction of gender completely rejects biological sex or views biology as unimportant. While acknowledging the existence of biological sex (insofar as bodies, hormones, and reproduction exist), the more nuanced constructivist viewpoint contends that the significance and ramifications of sex are socially mediated and interpreted. Culture and institutions turn biological distinctions into socially significant categories (male/female) (de Beauvoir, 1949/2010). The idea is to highlight that gender is not solely determined by biology, nor to reject biology.

Misconception 4: Construction is same for all Cultures, Times, and Places

Lastly, the idea that social construction of gender is a single, universal process that occurs everywhere in the same way is misguided. In actuality, gender constructs differ among countries, eras, and situations due to substantial differences in institutions, cultures, and historical circumstances (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Acknowledging this makes comparative sociological analysis possible and helps prevent ethnocentric presumptions.

Why clarifying these misconceptions matter is because these misunderstandings prevent productive conversations regarding gender issues. For instance, if people feel gender construction means gender isn't "real", they may dismiss gender-based discrimination as insignificant. If they presume infinite choice, they may disregard the institutional limits that limit agency. If they reject biology totally, they may fail to engage with the bodily experiences of individuals. Additionally, they might ignore intersectional intricacies and cultural distinctiveness if they treat construction as consistent across settings.

Gender Construction in Social Institutions: Language, Media, Education, Policy

Having introduced fundamental theories and cleared misconceptions, we turn to how gender formation occurs in real life via social institutions.

Language and Discourse

Language has a crucial role in gender creation. Terminology like "man," "woman," "male," "female," but also "boy", "girl", "he/him",

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“she/her”, as well as adjectives and verbs connected with gendered qualities, all impact social expectations. In the performative framework, naming a newborn “girl” or “boy” contributes in the construction of a gendered subject. As Butler emphasizes, we participate in “the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions” (Felluga, n.d.). Additionally, commonplace phrases like “boys don't cry,” “be a man,” “girls are caring,” and others reinforce normative gender categories and their presumed stability. Gender acts are repeated as a result of these discourses becoming internalized and self-regulating.

Media and Popular Culture

Gender norms and expectations are significantly shaped by the media, which includes television, movies, advertisements, internet platforms, and social media. Media routinely perpetuate stereotyped notions of masculinity and femininity (strong, autonomous male; caring, docile female) and so legitimize them as ‘natural’. Social construction theory emphasizes how these pictures work as instructional scripts for social behaviour. People internalize gendered practices and adjust their self-regulation as a result of being repeatedly exposed to these norms. This reveals the institutional dimension of gender construction: media are not neutral; they are cultural tools that replicate, stabilize and naturalize gender norms hence contributing to the perpetuation of gendered inequality.

Education and Socialization

Schools, families, peer groups and extracurricular activities also play key roles in socialising gender. From early childhood, children are taught what is suitable for girls or boys (toys, clothes, games, roles). These mechanisms promote the gender binary, gendered features (e.g., assertiveness vs. passivity) and the expectation of conformance. Through socialization, gender becomes embodied: children not only learn to perform their gender but to become their gender, that is, to think of themselves in gendered terms, to invest emotionally in those roles, to control their bodies appropriately.

Policy, Law and Institutions

Additionally, gender construction occurs at the institutional, legal, and policy levels. Legal systems codify duties, rights and obligations along

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gendered lines (e.g., maternity/paternity leave, gendered labour markets, access to education, reproductive rights). Institutional processes (in workplaces, healthcare, public services) generally presuppose binary gender norms and may marginalize those who deviate. Understanding gender as socially constructed allows us to challenge and change these practices by exposing the normative presumptions that underpin them. For instance, the presumption of a fixed male/female binary is challenged when non-binary categories or gender-fluid identities are acknowledged in legal policy.

Contemporary Relevance: Gender Construction, Identity and Social Change

The social construction of gender is still very much important in the twenty-first century as discussions about gender identity, non-binary recognition, workplace inclusion, family structures, and legal frameworks become more heated.

Globalization, Fluidity and Non-Binary Identities

One of the significant modern changes is the increased prominence of non-binary, gender-fluid, transgender and gender-nonconforming identities. These call for reconsidering institutional and societal structures that date back to a previous era and challenge rigid binary gender categorization. This demonstrates how gender categories itself are socially constructed and historically conditioned from a social constructionist standpoint.

As Butler's theory implies, if gender is constructed through repeated acts and normative frames, then modifying existing frames or introducing new acts can destabilize them and open possibilities for change (Butler, 1999). For instance, legal acceptance of 'third gender' categories in some jurisdictions shows institutional change in response to developing understandings of gender.

Globalization, digital media, migration, feminist and queer activism, and other factors are causing gender standards to change in many nations. These changes have an impact on the construction of gender in particular contexts, such as India, where gender diversity takes both traditional and contemporary forms. The social-construction viewpoint helps scholars and practitioners to comprehend and participate with these shifts.

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Impacts on Family, Workplace and Institutions

Viewing gender as socially constructed enables critique of institutions such as the family, employment market, education system, and legal systems. Here are a few significant ramifications:

- **Family:** Traditional family roles (male earner, female carer) originate from longstanding gender conceptions. By seeing these roles as socially created, governments might foster alternative family formations and challenge gendered division of labour (for example, paternity leave for fathers, acknowledgement of same-sex parents, or gender-diverse care giving arrangements).
- **Workplace:** Normative gender constructs are the foundation of gendered expectations of conduct (aggressive men versus cooperative women), salary disparities, the ‘glass ceiling,’ and gendered occupational segregation. By identifying gender prejudice in hiring and promotion, rethinking job positions, and validating various gender expressions, a constructivist viewpoint makes it possible to re-design organizational cultures to be more inclusive.
- **Rights and legal frameworks:** Recognizing that gender categories are neither static nor universal is necessary for the legal acceptance of transgender rights, non-binary/gender-fluid identities, and protections against discrimination based on gender.

Intersectionality and Multiple Axes of Identity

A further current significance comes from the intersectional turn: gender does not act in isolation but connects with race, class, sexuality, caste (in South Asia), disability, religion and other social categories. Understanding how gender norms interact with these axes to create intricate patterns of identity and disadvantage is made possible by acknowledging gender as socially created. For example, the notion of “femininity” for a middle-class urban woman may change substantially from that for a rural Dalit woman; consequently gender formation must be analyzed contextually (Crenshaw, 1989/2015)⁶³.

Gender treatments that disregard class, caste, or race may unintentionally perpetuate privilege, making this intersectional approach essential for practice. Constructivism and intersectionality,

⁶³ See, Crenshaw, K. (1989/2015). *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum.

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therefore, offer the means for more inclusive and sophisticated theory and practice (Atrey, 2019).⁶⁴

Challenging Inequality and Transforming Gender Paradigms

The possibility of gender change is arguably the most significant practical consequence of considering gender as socially constructed. Gender norms can be altered if they are created. This is a potent response to fatalistic or essentialist perspectives that consider gender inequities as natural or immutable. By making visible the normative assumptions underlying gender arrangements, scholars, activists and governments can intervene to destabilize them.

Because gender regimes are variable, historically located, and subject to contestation, the constructivist framework is not just descriptive but normative, offering a foundation for social transformation.

Conclusion

Through three primary movements, i.e., foundational theories, dispelling myths, and current relevance, this chapter has offered a critical critique of the social production of gender. The theoretical segment showed how the sex/gender distinction, interactional theories of performing gender, and post-structural performativity intersect to support the view that gender is not simply ‘given’ but actively generated and reinforced. In particular, the dangers of trivializing gender, neglecting limitations, rejecting biology, or asserting universality were addressed in the section on myths or misconceptions. The theory was then placed in the context of ordinary life and current discussions in the institutional and contemporary portions. These discussions included language, media, education, policy, and global changes related to intersectionality and non-binary identities.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of sociological literacy about gender for students, researchers, and practitioners in gender studies and social theory. Understanding gender construction enables us to challenge conventional wisdom, comprehend the

⁶⁴ For more information, see, Atrey, S. (2019). *The theory: Outlining the intersectional framework*. In *The theory of intersectionality* (pp. 32–77). Oxford University Press.

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diversity of gender experiences around the world, and participate in practices and policies that support change and inclusivity. The chapter eventually argues for a nuanced and intersectional approach: gender must be analyzed as socially constructed, institutionally established and historically dependent; but always in relationship with other social categories and power relations. In conclusion, seeing gender as socially created does not lessen its importance; rather, it strengthens our ability to comprehend, analyse, and alter gendered situations. It opens the path to more inclusive gender paradigms, stronger scholarship and real social reform. As gender standards continue to alter in the 21st century, the constructivist framework remains vital.

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A Historical Study and Development of Feminism and Feminist Ideology in 19th Century India: *An Overview of Her-Story.*

Ms. Ashwini Rai¹

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Sikkim Alpine University,
Namchi, South Sikkim.

Abstract: “One is not born but becomes a woman.” – Simone de Beauvoir.

History must be studied through a multidimensional lens, yet traditional narratives have long prioritised men, pushing women’s experiences to the margins. For centuries, women were treated as secondary, bound by rigid gender norms, confined to motherhood, and denied autonomy. Their dissent remained unheard, resulting in a long phase of social and moral paralysis.

In India, this subjugation persisted for centuries until the 19th century, when colonial influence and the rise of the Bhadralok spurred debates on oppressive customs such as Sati, child marriage, dowry, and widow restrictions. Male reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotiba Phule championed women’s education and upliftment. However, the reform space remained largely male-led, portraying women mainly as victims in need of rescue.

Amid this, remarkable women—Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde and others—challenged patriarchal authority, questioned male-dominated reform, and asserted their own agency. Their writings and activism marked the true beginnings of feminist thought in India.

This paper aims to trace the emergence of feminism in 19th-century India by examining the contributions of these women and analysing their literary works as early feminist historiography. It highlights how their resistance, self-representation, and critique of male intervention reshaped women’s roles and reclaimed their rightful space in history.

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Keywords: Women, Social Reforms, 19th century women, Feminism, Feminist Historiography.

INTRODUCTION

The 19th century India witnessed a wave of social reform movement that was committed towards the removal of social evils like satipratha, child marriage, ban of widow remarriage and gender inequality. The social and moral degradation of Indian society at the face of colonialism restricted India to move forward towards modernism. The social evils were directed towards the women of the Indian society irrespective of their social or economic background. This degeneration of women happened due to restrictive patriarchal norms imposed upon women. There was a long social conditioning on the part of the men who imposed gender norms on Women. Thus, a woman's identity was given meaning by the men of the society.

The condition of women in 19th century India was regressive in nature. As Sekhar Bandyopadhyay puts it, Indian civilization was despised because it assigned such a low status to women. Women faced centuries of subjugation and there was no remedy for this social ostracization until the colonial forces of so called Modernism started to take its roots in the already distraught society. The act of reforming the society was thus adopted to modernize the Indian society along the colonial lines and for that the removal of all forms of social evils and inequalities needed to subside. In this regard women became an object of exploration and there was an urgency to reform women's condition in society as an act of Modernising India. The identification of the women folk as victims to social degradation was as natural as men claiming to be the patrons of the society. The task of reformation was taken up by the new emerging class of 'woke men' called the Bhadralok class who with their invigorating spirit started to question the age old traditions of Indian civilization that according to them prevented Indian society to progress. The explicit disregard towards women and their basic rights often dictated by the Hindu scriptures like the Manu smriti and the Vedic Corpus were often scorned and were questioned with an exception of some men who tried to reform the condition of womenfolk based on the claimed progressive nature of the Hindu scripture with growing concepts like 'Going back to the Vedas' during the 19th century India.

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The men led reform movement also profoundly emphasized on Women's education anticipating social upliftment. Modern English Education were thought to be of high quality and since women were thought to have no voice at all or even have a sheer ability to be outspoken the moral responsibility of improving the women condition were taken up by the educated men like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotiba Phule and others who now looked towards the society rationally. According to Faga Jaypal Rambhai , *Women were often perceived as needing male intervention for survival , a notion that continues to undermine their autonomy.* The attitude of the Renaissance men taking upon a responsibility to better the condition of Women to achieve modernism in India stemmed out from the Eurocentric view of *Civilising the Uncivilized* as a part of their moral duty taking perhaps the colonial construct of White Man's Burden seriously.

In History and historical discourse , the Proactive Approach ⁶⁵of feminist historiography is often faced with sharp criticism by the Retroactive model as the former failed to truly capture the real essence of Feminism that didn't historically contribute for the emancipation of women and liberate them from their traditional structure. While it is a complicated task in history to trace the origin of feminist ideology in India but we can mark 19th century India as the pinnacle of feminist activities and rise of feminist ideology. Women like Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde and others not only countered the feminist approach of the Proactive Men but also stood on the grounds of true feminism. These women leaped beyond the patriarchal norms and strove to make their own identity.

The Proactive Men – Early Male Feminist of the 19th century Colonial India.

⁶⁵ The Proactive Model of Feminist Historiography relates to emancipation of women in the 19th century from a subjective approach . The task of liberating women from social abjection came under the purview/domain of Men. It was an attempt to emancipate women not considering actual plight of women's discontentment and failed to encourage women to emerge as individual identities.

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The colonial period in India was perhaps a turbulent time in Indian History that came with its own complications. The Indian society before the colonial intervention was already entrenched in social degradation and there was hardly any attempt to transform and revive the evil stricken society. It can be approved that the colonial forces like English Education served as a catalyst for the transformation of the 19th century India along with the efforts of the educated Indian men. B.T. McCully argues that “the English education brought the native youth in contact with a body of thought which openly questioned many of the fundamental assumptions upon which the fabric of traditional values rested. More precisely, we may identify this new body of thought as post Enlightenment rationalism, which came to define “modernity” for a select group of educated Indians.”⁶⁶ The men of the *Bhadralok* class or the *male intelligentsia* took upon themselves a moral responsibility as a *Rationale* being to revive the society and root for the development of Modern India. These section of Men were educated person, a man of culture, a reformer and someone interested in rescuing the nation from foreign rule.⁶⁷ Through the glasses of Utility, reason, justice and progress a select group of individuals began to explore the nature of their own society.⁶⁸ The first and generous exploration done on the part of the Bhadralok men was the social emancipation of the women folk possibly to save them from ‘social paralysis’ during the colonial rule. The first campaigns, public debates and fierce controversies about women and their status initiated by men (Indian, British, Missionary etc.) stretched across the nineteenth century and set in notion a new vocabulary under colonial rule.⁶⁹ As Mary E. John puts it, *Notions of ‘social’ thus turn out to be critical indices of intelligibility for women’s*

⁶⁶ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India*. Orient Black Swan, 2015.

⁶⁷ Parimal Ghosh. *What Happened to the Bhadralok*. Primus Books, 2026.

⁶⁸ Dr. Sanjeev Kumar. “Socio religious reform movements in British colonial India”, 2020.

⁶⁹ Anu Aneja ., ed. *Women’s and Gender Studies in India Crossings*. Routledge, 2019.

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issues, and vice versa- a social became quintessentially a women's issue.

The status of women during 19th century India was severed on the basis of strict moral conduct often dictated by the Hindu scriptures, regressive customs, tradition and Patriarchy. To achieve modernism the social evils had to be uprooted and removed and the task was first to emancipate the condition of Indian women. It can be argued that the degrading status of Indian women was reinforced by the colonial forces at the wake of modernism however it was during the Colonial period that the social evils directed towards Women were identified, debated and anticipated for reform. The emergence of the male gentry class striving as a patron to reformation, revival and also alleviate the social standing of Indian women can possibly be narrowed down to the upheaval of nascent Feminist movement and rise of feminist ideologies or making women as a subject of inquiry by the New Men of the 19th century India. In this regard the contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy is worth mentioning as the so called 19th century 'Renaissance Movement' remains incomplete without assigning due credit to him. Saumyendranath Tagore describes him in the following words ,

"It was indeed the darkest period in modern Indian history. Old society and polity had crumbled and the ruins of an old social order lay scattered on all sides. As yet there was no force which could clear the debris and there was no attempt made to rebuild on the ancient foundations. Dead traditions, fossilised customs and irrational bigotry had choked the life-stream of the nation. Knowledge had been lost. It was a period of unrelenting darkness. At that moment of barrenness and drought came Rammohun Roy". He initiated his reform movement first with the criticism towards superstitious belief system, idolatry, priest craft and polytheism. His attention directed towards reforming Hinduism was influenced by his exposure to Christian learning of Unitarianism and democratic principles of Islam as he adamantly encouraged monotheism.⁷⁰

Raja Rammohan Roy not only vehemently rejected the orthodox character of Hindu religion but also equally resented a woman's place

⁷⁰ Monotheism was also advocated within the Hindu belief system , primarily in the writings of Upanishads and the principle was later reinforced through the philosophy of Vedanta.

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in a Hindu society. A woman were often expected to live an ideal life as a daughter, wife and a mother. The upbringing of many Indian girls emphasised the concept of pativrata (woman and chastity) as the only way for a woman to merit heaven.⁷¹ One of the most vicious tradition that a Hindu woman had to follow- was the practise of Sati- *self immolation of a wife in the funeral pyre of her husband*. This system was deeply entrenched in the Hindu society and followed diligently as an approval of a woman/wife as an ideal dedicated wife so there remained no scope to question the immoral stance of the act, as in the words Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Woman were socially dead after the death of their husbands and were thought to be polluting*. Ram Mohan Roy objected this kind of treatment of woman and as Kanai Lal Chattopadhyay, saw in their depressed condition , the root cause of social immobility in India. Thus started his efforts to uproot the systems like Satipratha that set dreadful expectations to be met by a Hindu woman. Ram Mohan Roy first justified his sharp opposition towards Sati by citing the Ancient Hindu Scriptures and Shastras and claimed that a woman's right to live post their husband's death was granted by the shastras and he also argued that the act of Sati was an act of inferior virtue. The same approach was initiated by Vidyasagar who advocated for widow remarriage. The widows in general were not allowed to remarry because this was also not a sign of an ideal women or the devoted wife. Accordingly attempts were made to better the condition of the women who were the natural victims of the society. The male advocates in collaboration with the Colonial government in alignment with their Utilitarian views were to some extent successful in humanizing the *de-humanizing* social evils imposed on women in India.

The Colonial execution of social reform movement in the 19th century can be seen as the reform from above rather than below. Indeed , in the early nineteenth century as a series of social reforms followed, being namely reform from above through government fiat. And as expected , these reforms remained on paper in most cases, as there was never any

⁷¹ Priya Soman. "Role of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Abolition of Sati System in India", 2017.

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attempt to develop a modern consciousness from below.⁷² The reforms rather vividly exposed societal nuances gripped with unfair imposition on women and hardly any changes or reform was witnessed in the actual sense. The British fiat of liberation of women folk through extensive passing of laws in some sense did try to annul social injustice imposed on women in collaboration with the Proactive Indian men, like the abolition of **Sati in the year 1829** the **Sati Regulation Act of XVII** that made Satipratha illegal and a punishable crime. Also **Female Infanticide Act** was passed in **1870** along with the passing of **The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act** in the year **1856**.

Additionally the social reformers like Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar advocated the need for Education and Educating women of India. Education meant empowerment and a saving grace to redeem the already evil stricken society. Reformers such as Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar championed women's education arguing that schooling would uplift the society and align with rational modernity. Yet the prevailing vision of empowerment was narrowly scripted: education was promoted as a means to produce women who excelled in household management , moral instruction and ideal domestic skills rather than fostering independent public or professional identities.⁷³ This hollow empowerment was reinforced by missionaries and British administrators who tolerated formal literacy only when it served patriarchal or administrative goals treating women as beneficiaries rather than equal participants.⁷⁴ The role of these Proactive men in an attempt to sensitize women issue left a huge gap that needed to be identified by not men but by women themselves. The male centric narrative created contradictions, Flora Annie Steel highlighted this

⁷² Shekhar Bandyopadhyay. From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India. Orient Black Swan,2015.

⁷³ Mimansa Bharti, "Engendering Education and Organisation : The Women's Reform Movement in India", 2025.

⁷⁴ Clare Midgley, "Mary Carpenter and the Brahmo Samaj of India: A Transnational Perspective on Social Reform in the Age of Empire, 2013.

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contradictions emphasising that authentic reform required women's own voices to challenge regressive institutions.

The Retroactive Women- The Rise of true Feminism in 19th century India.

The criticism of passive reforms initiated by the Proactive men of the 19th century came from a section of women who somehow was able to acquire some education. These women were trained doctors, some teachers , writers well equipped with education , scholars suggests that many women were able to write and publish their critical views on the place of women in society significantly. As Shekhar Bandyopadhyay suggests, 'Voices of protest from within the Indian womanhood against such public stereotyping were rare, but not altogether absent'. As discussed earlier education for women was designed to suit with the narrow pursuits of male reformers to modernise Indian womanhood or the creation of new woman. In the words of Geraldine Forbes, 'in the nineteenth century as the women's question became a part of the discourses of the progress and modernity, a movement for female education started as a part of the colonized males search for the new woman. At the outset, the missionaries took up the cause of educating women, as a way of enlightening the poor, heathen women. However, indigenous forces represented by the educated Indian male reformers later on took up the cause of women's education and worked towards its proliferation. Rachna Chakroborty states, 'the British government also responded by setting up a host of new schools and institutes of higher learning for the women of Bengal; but it primarily corresponded to the gendered construction of womanhood and the dicta of traditional prescriptions, i.e., the 'good mother', 'good wife' models'. This hollow empowerment came under the direct scrutiny in the writings of the women of the 19th century India , feminists like Rassundari Devi , Pandita Ramabi , Savitri Rao Phule , Taraba Shinde and others sharply identified the narrow male narratives and criticised likewise. Their writings enlightened people with a completely new perspective concerning woman and womanhood , their role and identity , that was able to garner much attention as well as influence in the public diaspora. These writings came under the broad prospects of feminist writings that paved the way for the development of a new school of thought in History that is - women historiography.

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Early feminist agency is evident in the writings of Tarabai Shinde's *Stree Purush Tulana* (1882) hailed as the first modern Indian feminist text that simultaneously attacked patriarchy and Brahmanism.⁷⁵ Others like Rassundari Devi in her autobiography *Amar Jiban* (1876) wrote about caste, gender inequality and male privileges and gender discrimination directed towards women , Pandita Ramabai in her writing *High Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) depict the harsh social conditions endured by a Hindu woman focusing on the lives of upper caste women , widows and also written sharply about gender norms and injustices often dictated by Hindu scriptures which according to her was oppressive especially towards women. Pandita Ramabai was a social reformer and organized her reform activities by founding a widow's home at Poona (Arya Mahila Smaj) to provide shelter to the widows and empower them by taking up economic activities and acquire Education which was given utmost importance. In her last chapter Ramabai writes , "We, the women of India, are hungering and thirsting for knowledge; only education under God's grace, can give us the needful strength to rise up from our degraded position." For the women in 19th century Education was considered to be empowering and liberating for women, it wasn't a demanding task as the Proactive men designed it to be. It was through education these women were able to find their voices and completely be independent of the male constructed expectations of how a woman should act or be. In this spirit Tarabai Shinde in her exemplary work unveiled regressive directives to be followed by women challenging patriarchy and patriarchal roots. The moral dilemma that a woman has to face throughout her lifetime is also questioned in her book, she has also challenged the societal norms that a woman has to endure especially after the death of her husband. She protested against the fact that in new colonial society men enjoyed all rights, opportunities and benefits of change, while women were blamed for all evils and were still bound by the old scriptures of pativrata(duty to husband). ⁷⁶ The dutiful wife was to cater to the needs

⁷⁵ Khusboo Shrivastava, "Plight AND Psyche of Women in 19TH Century India: A reading Of Tarabai Shinde "Stree Purush Tulna" Translated by Rosalind O'Hanlon", 2018.

⁷⁶ Shekhar Bandyopadhyay. From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India. Orient Black Swan,2015.

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of her husband and this projection of women as an ideal women was compulsive rather than a her choice. The women were tied to a husband's identity and after the husband's death she herself lost one. In a society where a woman was never considered as equal to men and women always obliged to live under the shadow of men and her existence totally undermined after her husband's death, Shinde poses a serious and sharp question - Isn't a woman's life as dear to her as yours is to you? It's as if women are meant to be made of something different from men altogether, made from dust from earth or rock or rusted iron whereas you and your lives are made from the purest gold. Tarabai Shinde's work is a glaring example of how women in the 19th century chose to outline the grave situation woman had to face. A woman was in a constant dilemma regarding perceiving herself as a separate entity her male counterpart and the obligatory role of her being associated with men only after fulfilling her duties a daughter, a wife and a mother she could think of her individuality.

The stress on *Individuality* and the importance of *Women Identity* was endorsed in the writings of educated women in the 19th century which was given direction with the development of feminist ideology. Women chose to write about themselves often in retaliation to the male perspective of women and the secondary status allotted to them. In this sense Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Sultana's dream is worth mentioning, Hossain satirically presents a Utopian world where men is subordinate to a woman and the gender roles are reversed. Hossain's far fetched imagination of women taking the lead or women excelling in every field (be it in scientific advancements, public life and intellectual pursuits) in the 'Lady Land' is a witty charge on men occupying every space in the Public domain excluding woman from participation and visibility. Sultana's Dream a visionary story written by a well educated Muslim woman , disregarding gender norms like Purdah system , reflected the possible aspirations of 19th century Indian woman through a symbolic 'dream' narrative giving a hard taste of reality that a full-fledged woman emancipation of taking over the role of a man was exceptionally rare and inconceivable in her time, that woman could outshine men could only exist in the realm of woman's imagination. However by suggesting that a woman living in a dystopic

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patriarchal world dreams of matriarchy , challenging everyone to think beyond what exists , beyond even what seems thinkable.⁷⁷

Yet another empowered woman responsible for pioneering Feminism the 19th century colonial India was Savitri Rao Phule. Her contributions for woman empowerment through education is unparalleled in the Women History , Savitri Phule not just advocated for girls education but also equally became the spokesperson of the marginalised Dalit woman. Dhananjay Keer remarks, there is hardly any parallel example in the nineteenth century that can be compared to Savitribai's noble life devoted to the cause of the uplift of the Indian woman . Savitri Rao Phule belonged to a Mali caste and throughout her life she became the victim of Caste prejudices and struggled everyday against the deeply entrenched caste system in India. However caste restrictions remained secondary for her and her husband Jyoti Rao Phule and entirely dedicated themselves towards the social emancipation of women especially Dalits. Unlike the women belonging to fairly high caste /class society like Pandita Ramabai , Tarabai Shinde , Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain , Savitri Rao Phule came from a marginalised section who not only had to challenge the in seeping patriarchal norms but also fight Caste restrictions. As some scholars suggest , Phule's activism was rooted in the lived experience of both gender and caste oppression. According to Shailaja Paik, this intersection produced a distinct Dalit feminist stance: Dalit women's agency is framed by the “the caste gender nexus”, which cannot be reduced to the gender only analysis applied to high caste reformers. As an influential and pioneering teacher and a reformer Phule irrespective of caste boundaries engineered emancipation of the marginalised and downtrodden woman in a completely different fashion, her argument of woman emancipation was given weightage by her actions by opening up schools for girls and different Mahila seva mandals perhaps making her the true feminist of her times. Phule founded Mahila Seva Mandal and Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha⁷⁸ to support

⁷⁷ D Mookerjea- Leonard. “Futuristic Technologies and Purdah in the Feminist Utopia: Rokeya S. Hossain’s ‘Sultana’s Dream’ , 2017.

⁷⁸ A childcare centre and a shelter home to prevent female infanticide. Phule provided refuge to pregnant widows and women victims of sexual assault.

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women's right , widows of sexual violence.⁷⁹ Apart from being a social reformer , Savitri Bai Phule was also a poet , her poems ranges from the constant questioning of caste and gender norms which has been presented in the most rational sense. Lalitha Dhara writes, Savitribai was a trailblazer and a social activist who raised issues pertaining to caste and gender through her writing and speeches, as well as through direct intervention. Her book of poems Kavya Phule (1854) emerges as a radical stance not only towards superstitious and redundant traditions but is also against regressive social structures upon which the 19th century India was based upon. Phule's words in the poem is sharp, direct and unapologetic and is continuously in a rational dialogue reflecting her social anxiety towards the narrow societal structures. Dhara remarks , she castigates the exploitation inherent in the system. Her language is direct, sharp and unsparing whether it raises the caste or gender question.

Retroactive model of feminist historiography gives due credit to all the mentioned women who through their writings and their actions laid the actual framework for Feminist discourse and the study of female narratives regarding Women Empowerment , Emancipation Visibility and Reprsenatation. The 19th century India saw the birth of feminist zeal among both men and woman however True feminism was successfully advocated by women refusing themselves to be seen as a *subject of inquiry* rather than an *objects of inquiry*. As women were seen as the passive recipients of a more humanitarian treatment to be given by western elite males. ⁸⁰ In opposition to this male centric ideology 19th century India saw active patterns of the independent stance led by mostly educated women like Ramabai, Shinde , Savitri Bai Phule and others. So, the carefully curated male version of feminism in the 19th century faced resistance as the female centric Feminism considerably evolved to become an anti-thesis to the male defined thesis of women's upliftment.

⁷⁹ Bidyut Chakrabarty. Indianizing India: Thinkers Whose Ideas Shaped a Nation. Routledge,2025.

⁸⁰ Rekha Pande. "The History of Feminism and Doing Gender in India," 2018.

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CONCLUSION

The feminist ideology was given impetus by Education in the 19th century colonial India , it was the educated section of Indian society who identified faults and addressed the issues that possibly made the hitherto Indian society stagnant in terms of progress. It has already been discussed how the Proactive men took up the responsibility not just to uproot the social stigmas imposed upon women but also educate them. Education thus became the Emancipation Project led by Elite male during the 19th century colonial India. However education for girls was not meant to equip them to be self sufficient independent and emancipated and train them to follow some profession but to be good housewives, the mistress of the home and the hearth.⁸¹ Contradictory to this approach , realizing the importance of Education women in the 19th century themselves decided to take up the role of educating themselves truly influencing other women(marginalised section) who had not enough resources to acquire even informal education. The class of Indian Educated women felt the need to emancipate women folk that could possibly only be achieved through Education. Savitri Bai Phule in her work Kavya Phule expresses the importance of Education for girls, thus she writes –

*Be self-reliant, be industrious
Work, gather wisdom and riches,
All gets lost without knowledge
We become animal without wisdom,
Sit idle no more, go, get education.....*

The recorded voices of protest captures the essence of True Feminism, educated class of women defied gender norms and patriarchal institutions and took up the responsibility to emancipate women radically and actively. The passive assistance of the gentry class to emancipate and empower women was paradoxically designed – on the hand the social reform movement directed towards woman was to achieve progress and modernism and on the other hand set limitations and boundaries on the widening horizon of women Emancipation. As Rekha Pande remarks, the social reform movement did not radically

⁸¹ Ibid.

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challenge the existing patriarchal structure of the society or question gender relation. They picked up reform only those issues which the Britishers were pointing out as evidence of degeneration in the Indian society. Additionally Indian society was despised because it assigned such low status to women. This gender question was key issue for James Mill condemning Indian Civilisation. So, the Indian intelligentsia also responded to this civilisational critique by advocating and supporting reforms to improve the status of women in Indian society. Bandyopadhyay further adds that the great reformers of the nineteenth century were not concerned about the welfare of women. The women in question was treated as subjects of their modernising project and could not imagine them to be their conscious equals claiming agency for their own emancipation.⁸²

The conscious acts of woman re- claiming their position as separate from their male counter parts and reclaiming their narrative is an integral part for the development of Feminist Movement in India. The earliest patterns of defiance were seen during the nineteenth century an era that witnessed the resolute attempt to correct/rectify century old Gender prejudices imposed upon women. The maintenance of the Gender status quo was ardently promoted and encouraged through the action of both male and women social enthusiasts yet the latter significantly stands out, if we are to trace the emergence of early Feminist patterns in the India.

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Mainstreaming The Marginalised

Sofia Bhattacharya¹

Head of the Department, Social Science, Sushila Birla Girls' School,
Double M.A in International Relations and English,
Kolkata, India

Abstract: The discourse on gender has evolved from a biological distinction between men and women to a complex social construct that shapes identities, opportunities, and access to resources. Contemporary gender theories—ranging from Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism to Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity—highlight how social structures and cultural practices reinforce gendered hierarchies. Within this framework, education emerges as a powerful site for both the reproduction and transformation of gender norms. Inclusive education, grounded in principles of equity, diversity, and participation, challenges the systemic biases that marginalize learners on the basis of gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and ability.

This paper explores inclusive education as a crucial lens for understanding the meaning and practice of gender equality in educational settings. It examines how gender intersects with other identities—such as caste, class, and disability—to shape access to learning and participation. Drawing on feminist pedagogy, intersectionality theory and post-structuralist perspectives, the study argues that inclusive education must transcend tokenistic gender representation to actively dismantle patriarchal and heteronormative structures within curricula, pedagogy and institutional culture. The analysis further considers policy frameworks, such as India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020), that emphasize inclusivity but often lack a critical gendered perspective in implementation.

By situating inclusive education within broader gender theories, the paper aims to reimagine classrooms as transformative spaces where equity, respect and diversity are practiced. Ultimately, it contends that true inclusivity in education is achievable only when gender is

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understood not as a binary but as a spectrum of identities and experiences deserving equal recognition and empowerment.

KeyWords: *Gender, Feminism, Intersectionality, Patriarchy, Heteronormative, Bias, Justice, Performativity, Equity, Diversity, Empowerment, Inclusion, Pedagogy, Curricula, Transformation, Marginalised, Disability, Caste, Class, Access, Policy, Act, Gap, Training.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender has undergone a profound transformation from its early association with biological determinism to its recognition as a social and cultural construct shaped by power, discourse and identity. Historically, gender was understood through the binary lens of male and female, where roles, expectations, and hierarchies were dictated by patriarchal structures. However, modern gender theories—rooted in feminist, post-structuralist and intersectional frameworks—have illuminated the constructed nature of gender and its entanglement with broader systems of oppression. Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”¹ and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity² underscore that gender is not a static identity but an evolving set of roles and behaviours continually reinforced by social norms. Within this theoretical understanding, the sphere of education becomes a critical site for the construction, negotiation and contestation of gendered identities³⁴.

Education has long been recognized as a powerful instrument for social change. Yet, paradoxically, it has also served as a mechanism for perpetuating inequality through the reproduction of gender biases and exclusionary practices. The notion of inclusive education seeks to challenge such inequities by promoting access, participation and empowerment for all learners, irrespective of gender, class, caste, or ability. It extends beyond physical inclusion to encompass pedagogical, curricular and cultural transformations that acknowledge and celebrate diversity. When viewed through the lens of gender, inclusive education is not merely about integrating girls or marginalized genders into mainstream schooling but about restructuring educational environments to be genuinely equitable and participatory⁵⁶⁷⁸.

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In contemporary times, global and national frameworks—such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)⁹ and India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020)¹⁰—emphasize inclusivity as a cornerstone of educational reform. However, these policies often remain limited by gender-neutral assumptions that overlook how structural inequalities and patriarchal norms shape access to learning.¹¹ An inclusive education system, informed by critical gender theories, must therefore interrogate the underlying power relations that govern both educational spaces and knowledge production.¹²

This paper examines inclusive education as a transformative approach to achieving gender justice. It explores how feminist and intersectional perspectives can inform inclusive pedagogies, reshape institutional cultures and reimagine classrooms as sites of equality and respect.¹³ By situating inclusive education within the broader theoretical discourse on gender, the study seeks to demonstrate that genuine inclusivity is achievable only when education recognizes gender as a fluid, intersecting and socially situated identity deserving of equal dignity and opportunity.¹⁴

In keeping with the central argument of this paper, *Mainstreaming the Marginalised*, a focused case study has been included to illustrate how educational institutions can play a transformative role in promoting gender equity.¹⁵ The example of Sushila Birla Girls' School has been selected for its long-standing commitment to nurturing an environment where every girl is encouraged to realise her full potential.¹⁶ By examining the school's philosophy, practices and sustained efforts towards inclusive and gender-sensitive education, the article seeks to demonstrate how institutional ethos can meaningfully contribute to mainstreaming those historically positioned at the margins.¹⁷

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Gender

The theoretical development of gender studies can be traced through several key phases—liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, post-structuralism and intersectionality—all of which have contributed to shaping contemporary understandings of inclusion and equality in education.¹⁸

Early feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill argued for women's access to education as a means to achieve

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equality in rational and moral development.¹⁹ This liberal feminist perspective viewed education as a pathway for women's empowerment within existing social frameworks. However, Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949) marked a shift from biological determinism to existential and social analysis.²⁰ Her assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" challenged naturalized gender roles and emphasized that societal expectations, rather than inherent traits, define femininity and masculinity.²¹ This idea provided the intellectual foundation for examining how education systems reinforce gendered behaviour through social conditioning.²²

Radical feminism in the 1970s extended this critique by locating gender inequality in patriarchal structures that control reproduction, sexuality and labour.²³ Thinkers like Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millett highlighted that educational institutions often reproduce these hierarchies through gendered curricula, teacher expectations and hidden forms of discrimination.²⁴ The focus shifted from mere access to education to the transformation of educational content and pedagogy to challenge patriarchal values.²⁵

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (1990) argued that gender is not a fixed identity but an ongoing performance constituted by repeated acts within a regulatory framework.²⁶ This theoretical turn destabilized the binary understanding of gender and opened up possibilities for recognizing diverse gender identities within educational discourse.²⁷ In this light, inclusive education must not only accommodate differences but also challenge the very norms that define what counts as 'normal' or 'acceptable' in the classroom.²⁸

Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), added a critical dimension by showing how gender intersects with other social categories such as class, caste, race and disability to produce layered forms of oppression.²⁹ In an educational context, this means that a girl from a marginalized caste or a transgender child may face multiple, overlapping barriers that cannot be understood through gender alone.³⁰ Intersectional theory thus calls for inclusive education policies and practices that are sensitive to these intersecting inequalities rather than treating gender as an isolated variable.³¹

In the contemporary global context, feminist pedagogy has emerged as a practical extension of these theories.³² It advocates for participatory, dialogic and reflective teaching methods that dismantle hierarchical relationships between the teacher and the learner.³³ By

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valuing students' lived experiences and promoting critical thinking, feminist pedagogy aligns with the principles of inclusive education—creating learning spaces where all identities are acknowledged, respected and empowered.³⁴

Therefore, gender theories provide more than conceptual clarity; they offer a transformative framework for reimagining education itself.³⁵ When applied to inclusive education, these theories challenge the idea of equality as mere access and instead emphasize the redistribution of power and recognition.³⁶ They compel educators to question whose voices are represented in textbooks, whose identities are validated in classrooms and whose experiences are silenced by dominant discourses.³⁷ A theoretically grounded understanding of gender thus becomes indispensable for designing truly inclusive educational practices that move beyond accommodation towards social justice and liberation.³⁸

Inclusive Education: Concepts and Global Frameworks

Inclusive education represents a paradigm shift from traditional models of teaching and learning that emphasize uniformity to those that celebrate diversity as a strength.³⁹ At its core, inclusion is both a philosophical and practical approach aimed at ensuring that every learner—regardless of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality—has equal access to quality education in a supportive environment.⁴⁰ The idea of mainstreaming the marginalised goes far beyond physical integration—it identifies and puts forward systematic transformation that challenges exclusionary ideologies, pedagogies and institutional practices.⁴¹

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) first articulated education as a fundamental right.⁴² These frameworks were further strengthened by UNESCO's *Salamanca Statement* (1994), which defined inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increased participation and reduction of exclusion.⁴³ In this global discourse, inclusion is not treated as a remedial strategy but as an ethical and social imperative for justice.⁴⁴ Inclusive education, when examined through the lens of gender theories, becomes a transformative tool for social justice.⁴⁵ Feminist and intersectional frameworks reveal that education is not a neutral process but one mediated by power, privilege and ideology.⁴⁶ A truly

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inclusive school must therefore interrogate whose knowledge is valued, how gender roles are represented in curricula and how institutional cultures reinforce or resist patriarchal hierarchies.⁴⁷ Post-structuralist perspectives, particularly Judith Butler's notion of performativity, help in understanding how classrooms themselves are sites where gender identities are produced and contested.⁴⁸ Teachers, consciously or otherwise, participate in this process through expectations, language and assessment practices.⁴⁹ Inclusion, then, requires re-educating the educators—cultivating awareness of how their actions and attitudes shape gendered experiences of learning.⁵⁰

In the Indian context, policy initiatives such as the **National Policy on Education (1986)** and its subsequent **National Education Policy (NEP 2020)** have progressively acknowledged the importance of inclusivity. NEP 2020 emphasizes “equitable and inclusive education” as a guiding principle and advocates for the inclusion of children from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.⁵¹ Such patterns reveal that inclusion cannot be achieved without a critical engagement with gendered power relations that shape access, participation and success in education. Recognizing these allows educators and policymakers to design targeted strategies that respond to complex realities rather than generalized assumptions.⁵²

Globally, the movement towards inclusive education is increasingly linked to the promotion of human rights, diversity and democracy. Yet, inclusion is not a finite goal but an ongoing process of reflection and reform. It challenges educators to transform classrooms into equitable spaces where all learners are valued and empowered to express their identities without fear or stigma.⁵³ When informed by critical gender theories, inclusive education thus transcends its procedural dimension and emerges as a transformative vision—one that redefines both the purpose of education and the meaning of equality itself.⁵⁴

Beyond Access: Policy, Power and the Girl Child in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education, when viewed through the prism of gender theories, is not merely an educational reform but a transformative social process that aims to dismantle the hierarchies sustaining inequality. It challenges the binary understanding of gender, redefines pedagogy through feminist principles and reimagines classrooms as democratic spaces that value every learner's identity and voice.⁵⁵ While global and national policies advocate inclusive practices, their true realisation

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depends on how educational institutions internalize and apply gender-sensitive perspectives within their structures, curricula and interactions.⁵⁶

At the heart of gender-inclusive education lies **feminist pedagogy**, which shifts the focus from hierarchical, teacher-centred instruction to participatory, reflective and collaborative learning. Rooted in the work of scholars like **bell hooks**, **Paulo Freire** and **Ira Shor**, feminist pedagogy calls for critical consciousness among both teachers and students, enabling them to question the power dynamics embedded in education.⁵⁷ By valuing the lived experiences of learners and encouraging dialogue, it transforms the classroom from a site of passive knowledge consumption to one of co-creation and empowerment.⁵⁸ For instance, teachers who consciously integrate examples of women scientists, writers and leaders into lessons help students see gender equity as both attainable and normative. Moreover, feminist pedagogy acknowledges emotional labour, empathy and care—often devalued as “feminine”—as essential components of learning, thereby broadening the definition of what constitutes valid knowledge.⁵⁹

The implementation of inclusive education through a gender lens requires robust policy frameworks that go beyond gender-neutral rhetoric. In India, the National Education Policy (2020) explicitly emphasizes “equitable and inclusive education for every child,” recognizing the need to bridge gender and socio-economic gaps.⁶⁰ True inclusivity requires the recognition of gender as a spectrum and the integration of affirmative measures for all gender identities.⁶¹

Other initiatives—such as **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**, the **National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education**, and **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas**—have sought to improve girls’ access to education.⁶² However, these schemes often focus on enrolment rather than transforming pedagogical attitudes or school environments. Inclusion cannot be achieved through infrastructural expansion alone; it must be accompanied by cultural change within schools. Gender sensitization workshops for teachers, gender audits of institutions and participatory curriculum reviews are critical steps towards embedding inclusivity into everyday practices.⁶³

Teacher training plays a pivotal role in this transformation. Educators often carry unconscious gender biases, shaped by their own upbringing and socialization. Pre-service and in-service teacher

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education programs must therefore include structured modules on gender sensitivity, intersectionality and inclusive pedagogical methods.⁶⁴ Encouraging teachers to use gender-neutral language, to avoid reinforcing stereotypes in classroom tasks, and to create safe spaces for dialogue around identity can significantly improve the learning environment. UNESCO's 2021 framework on gender-responsive education highlights that teacher capacity-building is one of the most effective interventions for improving gender equity in schools.⁶⁵

In this broader landscape of policy commitments and pedagogical shifts, it becomes essential to examine how individual institutions translate these frameworks into lived practice. While national and global directives lay the foundation for gender-inclusive education, the real transformation occurs within schools that consciously adopt and sustain gender-empowering cultures.⁶⁶ When we look at all these big promises and new teaching ideas about gender inclusion, the key question is: What does this actually feel like for the people inside the school? National and international policies set the stage, but the true magic—the real shift that touches a student's life—only happens when schools, principals and teachers work every single day to create a culture where everyone feels respected and empowered.⁶⁷

Case studies across India and beyond demonstrate the transformative potential of gender-inclusive approaches. The **Balika Shivir** program in Rajasthan, for instance, provided residential learning spaces for adolescent girls from marginalized communities, combining academic learning with discussions on gender, health and rights.⁶⁸ Similarly, the **SEHER** program in Bihar introduced gender-sensitive modules into school curricula, resulting in improved attendance and greater gender awareness among both boys and girls.⁶⁹ Outside India, Scandinavian countries have pioneered gender-neutral preschool education, where toys, pronouns and classroom activities are deliberately designed to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes.⁷⁰ These models illustrate how inclusive education can become a lived reality when institutions challenge the norms that dictate what boys and girls “should” learn or become.⁷¹

From Policy to Practice – Case Study: Operationalizing Empowerment

The fundamental shift from large-scale policy to personal experience

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means that real transformation hinges entirely on the institutions that consciously adopt and sustain gender-empowering cultures. Sushila Birla Girls' School (SBGS), with its long-standing ethos of nurturing confidence, independence and leadership among its students, offers a compelling, tangible example of how these inclusive principles can be actualized at the institutional level, ensuring that every girl's potential is fully realized. The school's initiatives demonstrate that through gender-sensitive pedagogy, affirmative policies and a deeply supportive environment, they create concrete, meaningful opportunities for the holistic empowerment of the girl child, making policy a daily reality.⁷² This case study will now explore how Sushila Birla Girls' School embodies these ideals through its practices, programmes and everyday interactions.⁷³

The Dual-Track Commitment: An Intersectional Approach to Inclusion

The Dual-Track Institutional Commitment at Sushila Birla Girls' School (SBGS), a renowned educational institution in central Kolkata, can be rigorously framed through the lens of Gender and Disability Theory, demonstrating a powerful, intersectional strategy for mainstreaming the marginalized.⁷⁴ This commitment moves beyond simple compliance to actively address the systemic oppression faced by young women and specially-abled students (CwSN), operating on distinct yet mutually reinforcing tracks.⁷⁵

Track 1: Institutional — Dismantling Gendered Barriers

This track is an explicit application of Feminist Institutionalism and Social Learning Theory, focusing on challenging deeply entrenched gender norms and power structures within the school environment.⁷⁶

Gender Empowerment Theory in Practice: The school's motto, "Empowering the girl child," translates directly into policies designed to counter the historical and systemic disadvantage faced by women. By fostering confidence, safety and leadership, SBGS is actively dedicated to revolutionizing the status of women in society. It has dedicated counseling programs that create a secure, supportive environment.⁷⁷ This aligns with the feminist concept of bodily autonomy and psychological safety, both of which are foundational requirements for female students to fully exercise their rights and focus on their education, as advocated by NEP 2020.⁷⁸

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Challenging Gender Stereotypes: Providing equal opportunity in all leadership roles and actively encouraging participation in clubs like Archery, Robotics and Skating is a form of institutional consciousness-raising. This practice aims to dismantle the "hidden curriculum" of gender socialization by normalizing female competence and presence in technical and authoritative spheres.⁷⁹

Track 2: Infrastructural — Realizing the Right to Access

This track is grounded in the Social Model of Disability and the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), recognizing that disability is often a product of an inaccessible environment, not an inherent deficit of the individual.⁸⁰

The Social Model of Disability: The focus is on removing environmental and attitudinal barriers. The school's adherence to CBSE guidelines and its commitment to follow the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act mandates a shift from a medical/charity model (fixing the person) to a social model (fixing the environment).⁸¹

Physical Accessibility: The provision of ramps, accessible washrooms and barrier-free access to all key areas (classrooms, laboratories, activity centers) is a direct application of UDL principles. It ensures that the built environment is flexible and adaptable, guaranteeing physical participation as a fundamental right.⁸²

Pedagogical Accessibility: The Special Education Needs (SEN) team and the use of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) are essential components of this track. IEPs provide the differentiated instruction required to ensure equity—where students with differing needs receive the specific support required to achieve the same outcome.⁸³ Nurture rooms provide socio-emotional support, recognizing that learning is holistic and intertwined with well-being, thus challenging the narrow, deficit-focused view of disability.⁸⁴

Intersectionality in Practice

This dual strategy is fundamentally intersectional. It acknowledges that a specially-abled student is also a young woman and her experience of marginalization is compounded by the simultaneous operation of both gender and disability biases.⁸⁵

By dedicating one track to the systemic barriers of gender (Track 1) and the other to the structural and pedagogical barriers of disability (Track 2), SBGS ensures that neither form of oppression is overlooked.⁸⁶

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The resulting commitment is one where a physically accessible, barrier-free school (infrastructure) also operates within a culture that actively elevates female leadership and confidence (institution). This integrated approach is how SBGS ensures its broad inclusive policies translate into tangible, equitable daily practices for all its students.⁸⁷ Thus, inclusive education through a gender lens must be understood as an evolving process of critical engagement. It requires educators, policymakers and communities to reflect continuously on how gender shapes every aspect of schooling—from curriculum design to classroom conversation.⁸⁸ By integrating feminist and intersectional theories into educational praxis, institutions can move beyond mere integration of marginalized groups to the creation of equitable spaces that affirm all identities.⁸⁹ Inclusion, in this sense, becomes not a goal to be achieved but a collective commitment to transforming education into a domain of liberation, respect and shared humanity.⁹⁰

Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite progressive policies and growing awareness, the realization of gender-inclusive education continues to face significant structural, cultural and institutional barriers.⁹¹ The challenge lies not only in bridging gender gaps in access but in transforming the deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes that govern educational systems.⁹² Inclusive education, when viewed through a gender lens, reveals the persistence of inequalities that are often masked by the rhetoric of equity.⁹³ A primary challenge lies in the implementation gap between policy and practice. While frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) and UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 advocate inclusive and equitable education, their translation at the grassroots level is inconsistent.⁹⁴ Gender-neutral policies often fail to address the nuanced realities of students who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.⁹⁵ The absence of disaggregated data on gender minorities—such as transgender and intersex learners—further limits effective planning and resource allocation.⁹⁶ Without clear accountability mechanisms, inclusivity risks remaining a symbolic ideal rather than a measurable outcome.⁹⁷

Another critical barrier is the lack of gender-sensitive teacher training and institutional culture. Educators frequently enter classrooms without adequate understanding of gender theory, intersectionality or inclusive pedagogy.⁹⁸ Consequently, unconscious

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biases are reproduced in everyday classroom interactions. Many schools continue to enforce gendered dress codes, segregated seating and discriminatory disciplinary practices that marginalize learners who do not conform to binary gender norms.⁹⁹ Moreover, the underrepresentation of women and gender-diverse individuals in leadership and decision-making positions perpetuates an environment where gender concerns are sidelined rather than mainstreamed.¹⁰⁰

Socio-cultural resistance further undermines efforts towards inclusivity. In many communities, patriarchal values continue to prioritize boys' education over girls', while transgender children face familial rejection and social ostracism.¹⁰¹ The persistence of gender-based violence, early marriage and menstruation stigma creates an atmosphere of fear and withdrawal from schooling, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged contexts.¹⁰² Efforts to introduce gender education or sexuality education are often met with opposition on moral or cultural grounds, revealing a broader discomfort with discussions of gender diversity.¹⁰³

The digital divide presents another layer of exclusion in the era of technology-driven learning. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, access to digital devices and internet connectivity became essential for educational continuity. Studies show that girls are significantly less likely to own mobile phones or have access to the internet, particularly in rural India.¹⁰⁴ This gap underscores how technological innovation, unless guided by inclusive principles, can deepen existing gender inequities rather than bridge them.¹⁰⁵

Moving forward, a multifaceted strategy is essential. Educational institutions must undertake gender audits to identify and address discriminatory practices, while curriculum developers should embed intersectional perspectives across subjects.¹⁰⁶ Continuous teacher capacity-building programs on gender inclusivity, empathy and cultural responsiveness should be institutionalized rather than treated as occasional workshops.¹⁰⁷ Establishing safe spaces and counselling support systems within schools can empower students to express their identities without fear of judgment or harm.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, inclusion must extend beyond classrooms—engaging families, communities and local governance structures in sustained dialogue to transform attitudes at the societal level.¹⁰⁹

Finally, the redefinition of inclusion itself is crucial. Rather than perceiving it as a remedial measure for marginalized groups, it should

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be seen as a collective commitment to equity and dignity for all.¹¹⁰ An inclusive education system informed by feminist and intersectional thought recognizes diversity not as a challenge but as a resource that enriches learning.¹¹¹ The way forward, therefore, lies in transforming education into a space of mutual respect, critical reflection and social justice—where every learner, irrespective of gender or identity, can realize their fullest potential.¹¹²

Conclusion

The discourse on gender and inclusive education reveals that the pursuit of equity in learning is far more complex than ensuring access or representation.¹¹³ It requires a fundamental reimagining of education as a transformative, justice-oriented process. Gender, as contemporary theory illustrates, is not a fixed or biological category but a socially constructed and performative identity shaped by intersecting structures of power.¹¹⁴ When this understanding informs educational practice, inclusion evolves from being a policy aspiration into a living philosophy that redefines relationships, pedagogy and institutional culture.¹¹⁵

Throughout history, education has both mirrored and challenged prevailing social hierarchies. Feminist and intersectional theories have demonstrated that schooling can serve either as a site of reproduction of patriarchy or as an instrument of liberation.¹¹⁶ The framework of inclusive education offers a means to transform classrooms into democratic spaces where learners of all genders, backgrounds and abilities are equally valued.¹¹⁷ However, inclusion cannot be achieved through tokenistic measures or gender-neutral rhetoric.¹¹⁸ It demands critical engagement with the invisible biases embedded within curricula, textbooks and teaching methods, as well as sustained institutional commitment to reform.¹¹⁹

In the Indian context, policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mark important steps towards equity, yet their effectiveness depends on how deeply they integrate gender-sensitive approaches.¹²⁰ The recognition of non-binary identities, the creation of safe learning environments, and the training of educators to challenge stereotypes are essential components of genuine inclusivity.¹²¹ Moreover, community participation and local-level advocacy play indispensable roles in changing the social attitudes that continue to restrict gender equality in education.¹²²

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Ultimately, inclusive education through a gender lens envisions more than integration—it calls for transformation. It seeks to cultivate empathy, respect and collaboration as guiding values of pedagogy.¹²³ In doing so, it aligns with the broader humanistic goal of education: not only to impart knowledge but to nurture critical consciousness and ethical responsibility.¹²⁴ When educational spaces become truly inclusive, they cease to be instruments of conformity and instead emerge as catalysts for equity and empowerment.¹²⁵ The realization of such an education system is, therefore, both a moral imperative and a necessary step towards building a more just and humane society.¹²⁶

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Queer'in Narratives: Education and awareness through museums about India's queer community, enhancing inclusivity and diversity

Abhinav Sharma¹

Archivist, Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, New Delhi

Abstract: The ICOM's definition lays the foundation for defining museum's functions as an institution. It establishes its identity as an institution which shape society's identity. The definition approved and adopted in 2022 general assembly highlights their open access to public hence, making museums responsible to create accessible and inclusive space while fostering diversity. In today's world where definition of gender and sexuality is expanding and there is a pressing need to expand the boundaries for creating inclusive spaces for marginalized sexualities, it has become necessary to provide them representation not only in jobs but also to their narratives embedded in history. The queer community in India has existed for ages but their experiences and presence were either neglected or just marginally given space. For a country as vast and culturally rich like India it is very hard to believe that queer community or individuals never existed. Thus, it has become even more necessary for people bring to the fore queer histories which were overlooked or never touched upon. The society and the queer community specifically have the right to know about their past. Museums are public spaces which helps in shaping ideas and course of discussion within the society about different subjects, providing space for interaction to the public regardless of their racial, national, gender, religious etc. identities. By engaging visitors with complex issues such as of sexuality, the challenges faced by them historically are brought forth to the public leading to possible solutions. They can also provide them with a space for representation.

Objective:

- To emphasise the importance of discussing gender and sexuality in museums and to promote meaningful engagement with queer communities.
- To analyse how museum activities can effectively engage visitors with complex and sensitive social issues.
- To identify the outcomes and institutional benefits museums gain from engaging with subjects related to gender, sexuality, and queer narratives.
- To examine the challenges museums encounter when addressing difficult or sensitive topics within their spaces and programmes.

INTRODUCTION

The ICOM's definition lays the foundation for defining museum's functions as an institution. It establishes its identity as an institution which shape society's identity. The definition approved and adopted in 2022 general assembly highlights their open access to public hence, making museums responsible to create accessible and inclusive space while fostering diversity.

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.”¹

In today's world where definition of gender and sexuality is expanding and there is a pressing need to expand the boundaries for creating inclusive spaces for marginalized sexualities, it has become necessary to provide them representation not only in jobs but also to their narratives embedded in history. The queer community in India has existed for ages but their experiences and presence were either neglected or just marginally given space.

For a country as vast and culturally rich like India it is very hard to believe that queer community or individuals never existed. Thus, it has become even more necessary for people bring to the fore queer histories

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which were overlooked or never touched upon. The society and the queer community specifically have the right to know about their past. Museums are public spaces which helps in shaping ideas and course of discussion within the society about different subjects, providing space for interaction to the public regardless of their racial, national, gender, religious etc. identities.

By engaging visitors with complex issues such as of sexuality, the challenges faced by them historically are brought forth to the public leading to possible solutions. They can also provide them with a space for representation.

The questions looming over is, why gender and sexuality, why museums should engage with them and how? Are museums really benefiting from engaging with the discourse? Etc.

Museums: Gender and Sexuality

The fundamental responsibility of museums is to program historical consciousness with contemporary epistemic intention. They are responsible for exhibiting and contextualizing artefacts for visitors. Their curatorial practices are defined by contemporary societal outlook, but these practices are dominated by majority viewpoints which tends to purport popular ideologies reserved by governing bodies of museums and political functionaries. These operators play a pivotal role in influencing museum's regular functioning, picturizing its intercession for a particular school of thought.

Advocating for operationalizing feminist and queer theories in museums, Amy Levin, an American scholar on museums and gender studies, postulates that feminist theories provide a framework for understanding historical and contemporary situations which facilitated or contributed to discrimination towards women and gender minorities. With differentiating between sex and gender as two separate categories where gender is a social construction comprising of stereotypes built on historical and cultural traditions, forming hierarchic ranks where men leverage advantage above women and queer community. Further, she illuminates upon the privilege that a male-binary gaze has received in museums overshadowing the queer contexts whether in exhibiting or collecting practices.²

The male gaze looms over conceptualization of the queer community because their outlook has either clutched narratives in what and how an

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object will be displayed or governance structures which have favored them.

Subjectivity is a perspective which allows humans to explore, think, deflect, and relate with a certain theme or philosophy. Similarly, is the idea of gender which necessitate existence of a defined identity as a socially constructed human need while subjectivity is a social requirement for society to function thus, the idea of fixed identity is unnecessary.³

Anna Conlan, an American museum professional, emphasizes that visibility, representation, and recognition could help museums to attract more visitors and innovate with their programs, besides nurturing equality. Museums adopting an inclusive approach stirs nuanced discussions and debates within society for subjectivity in practice. For example- in 1990, Museum of London's exhibition *Pride and Prejudice* was received well by the audience where 95% of the visitors supported the museum in organizing such an exhibition and 85% opined that LGBTQIA+ history should be integrated into museum's permanent collection (Robenalt, Queer Museology: Building an LGBTQ+ Museum Theory 2024, 35).

The museums must adopt a subjective viewpoint for queer inclusion, contravening binaries of male and female. Such an approach will allow them to evolve as space for free and tolerant perspectives. Development of museums and their practices in 21st century is not occurring in isolation rather under a liberal purview assisted by democratic structures, in the light of issues related to human rights which comprehend concerns such as representation of suppressed minorities, creating inclusive space for physically disabled people, addressing the racial, and class biases etc. functioning with ethical and moral principles affirms their character as an institution, along with creating a professional space for its employees to work liberally.

The categorizations caused by social mechanisms needs to be repaired for retribution purpose for the communities who had suffered any social injustice. Acknowledging categorizations and injustices meted out to any community and singling them out and gives the opportunity to develop and maintain their identity. This emancipatory approach brings attention to the many political dynamics, and museums presently are serving the cause, being institutions for retribution balancing the socio-political dynamics.⁴

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Richard Sandell, contextualize queer inclusion through a human-rights lens where he argues that ethical and moral issues are embedded in museum work. Sandell accentuates museums' ability to indorse certain knowledge, cultures and, objects. Museums can build narratives which can help contest hostile inhibitions and prejudice.

"The museum's capacity to build awareness and understanding of human rights relies, in large part, on its potential to engage audiences in a collaborative process of thinking through challenging moral and ethical issues that are undeniably complex and subject to a variety of legitimate views." (Robenalt, Queer Museology: Building an LGBTQ+ Museum Theory 2024, 32)

The necessity for queer inclusive narratives stems from the tunnel vision and experiences which are prominent about the community presenting myopic views about the community which sometimes hinders the society to visualize them as multi-faceted usual beings. For example- an exhibition organized by Museum of London called 'Queer Is Here' in 2006 relied heavily on the enigma of liberation oppression faced by them. It reflected upon. but failed to underscore trans- issues, nuances of race and class as factors which makes lives of queer people difficult. Such dominating notions overshadow daily lived experiences of the queer individuals where implicit particulars are vested.

The museums have been identified as public forum for social change and intersectional activism, who can garner support and contextualize various themes which have shaped queer community's identity such as colonialism, class, and racial privilege etc. these nuances help the visitors to understand the historical discriminatory frameworks which led to contemporary prejudiced societal views against the community. Hilde Hein postulated that museum's rules and conventions allows them to propagate a representational system. The exhibitions they design have effect on people's values, thoughts, and beliefs their means they employ whose persuasiveness has less to do with truth or accuracy than with emotive force and aesthetic potency.⁵

Museums are spaces where informed discussions which are prejudiced and requires deliberation could happen. Their role as institutions of consensus is elicited from Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory which encouraged museum scholars and professionals, redefining museum's role for 21st century, speaks about privileged institutions such as museums for harmonically listening and take

collaborative action for political change across the globe, while cautioning them to speak for 'Others'.⁶

Memorialization in the purview of musealization has been situated as a feminist act or interpreted through a feminist perspective. Historically women and queer community were suppressed and marginalized, their experiences and narratives were not represented contemporary museums are dealing with sensitive subjects such as women rights, violence, and LGBTQIA+ community. Arguing for feminist theory in museums, Neha Khetrapal emphasize memorial museums articulating their moral, pedagogical, and social objectives where they deflect from their conventional practice of musealizing. Citing museums in India such as Conflictorium, Partition Museum, and Remember Bhopal which is now closed she highlights how these museums are providing space for often overlooked narratives within our history and contemporary times. The feminist theory allows museums to engage with stories and objects which are common as institutions where knowledge is not simply produced with a rarefied view.⁷

Similarly, signifying how neglecting marginalized communities represent 'symbolic violence' through enforced structures, Rogerio Neves defines museums as sites of 'cultural memory' and 'historical continuity'.⁸ Such historical continuity intensifies and validate marginalization, antagonizing forces which are against suppressed communities.

For queer community around the world, challenges such as representation, discriminatory social, political, and legal approach are strained issues. Although there is a growing awareness about them but many nations around the world still criminalize LGBTQIA+ community, which stems from colonialism and ignorance towards their culture originated from it. Platforms such as museums are even more necessary where legitimate knowledge and information is the guiding principle. Public platforms help to dispense adverse narratives. Thus, it is necessary for museums to advocate for their cause because they serve as institutions which are accessible for visitors of all age groups, without any social, racial, gender, and class discrimination. Museums could play a pivotal role in providing the audience a kaleidoscopic view about of the community and not just highlighting the prominent notions of marginalization, violence, and coming out.

Methods to build inclusive space and challenges

Many scholars have positioned museums in much comprehensive roles, especially in 21st century where the concept of rights have evolved in democratic setup and museums have been poised as spaces to deliberate complicated societal issues. Museums are traditionally not the institutions equipped to serve the purpose of social justice, but they have the mechanisms to promote the cause. Through storytelling, exhibitions and serving as centers for reconciliation they can further social justice principles and encourage diversity.

Museums are spaces for communication and they have different mediums for communicating with its audience through exhibitions, guided tours, and publications etc. and communication is the key to create awareness about queer community. Eleanor S. Armstrong, a research fellow at University of Leicester, initiated a program at Science Museum, London called 'Queering the Science Museum' in 2018 where she used to conduct tours of museum galleries, contextualizing the exhibits and personalities at the museum in a queer frame. The tours intended to highlight scientists and scientific theories which narrate community's scientific history. She argues that heritage whether scientific or otherwise is a practice, something which is action, such as curating where the institution decides which knowledge is worthy of delivering to the visitors, defining contours of knowledge, and which information a visitor will view. Sharon Macdonald theorized museum's work as sites of 'civic education' as where visitors learn national identity and progress. Such pedagogies she argues, is a 'detached representation' of 'scientific and political certainty' and placing object in gallery does the same. Queer theory urges to challenge this stability and certainty because it causes unidirectional communication, perspective, and leaves no space for critique.²⁰

Queer guided tours in museums are necessary to promote active learning, and engagement with existing power structures. Including dissenting narratives, the interventions highlight the exercises of power, (re)inscription of cultural hegemony, and the ideas of 'truth' in the museum.

The British Museum, released a leaflet categorizing fifteen objects from its collection under the theme of 'Desire, love, identity: LGBTQ+ Histories trail' (2019). The trail has been made available on various audio platforms such as YouTube, Spotify etc. The website of the

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museum provides information about the object trail with open access to the leaflet, transcript, and other required information.²¹



British Museum’s leaflet screenshot

INCLUSEUM, a project aimed at promoting queer narratives and designing strategies, educational materials for museums to engage visitors with queer histories and make museum space queer friendly. INCLUSEUM is a way to explore new ways of being a museum through communication, dialogue, and collaborative practices, as their mission states. The INCLUSEUM questions the fundamental of museum programs and structures of governance, providing ways to inculcate change, fostering inclusivity. The project emphasize dialogue to understand the challenges, enact measures, and participation from different sections of the society.

Challenges

Violence and Vandalism

Homophobic elements in the society tends to damage museum spaces or any space which represents the community. Violence and

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vandalization is an act which disrupts the important functions of institutions working for the community. Physical acts to terrorize not only deem to cause dismantle the space but also propagate misinformation and hate against the community. Museums around the world have faced vandalism such as Schwules Museum, Germany had been vandalized in 2023 many times, there property been damaged. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe mention “this violence sits alongside increasingly extreme anti- LGBTQ+ and particularly anti- trans- rhetoric stemming from far- right ideologies and many conservative political parties in the West.” (Robenalt, Introduction 2024)

Such disturbing and sometimes life-threatening events create even more stronger case for museums to engage with and represent LGBTQIA+ community, their stories, and histories because visibility, representation, and recognition in museums can be urgent and life-giving.

Political Suppression

Ideologically, politically influenced laws affects society in hazardous ways, alienating voices which they find against their ideologies and could pose a challenge. LGBTQIA+ community across the globe question oppressive power structures and regimes. They are as a result, face legislative actions to further marginalize them and silence dissent. For example- Hungary’s far-right government in 2025, banned pride events which mark the community’s representational space created by the community itself. In 2021, the government banned promotion and portrayal of LGBTQIA+ content to children, seriously affecting museums too. The ILGA Europe (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Association) placed Hungary on 29th rank about queer inclusivity terming the political climate as ‘severe.’ Exhibitions and projects surrounding LGBTQIA+ community are severely scrutinized and penalized. Interference by the governmental and religious institutions have forced museums to adopt self-censorship. One widely-reported controversy concerned the display of Hannah Reyes Morales’ photograph series, ‘Home for the

Golden Gays’ (2023), which depicted elderly queer people in a community in the Philippines at the World Press Photo exhibition at the National Museum in Budapest in 2023. The display sparked a far-right-

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wing backlash, ultimately culminating in the National Museum's director being dismissed from his position. (Museums 2024)

Surveillance

Eleanor Sophie Armstrong, founder of 'Queering the Science Museums' tour explains how she and her group was constantly watched by guards at the museum. She explains-

"...such that on entering each gallery our groups were followed round by security, who radioed ahead to the next gallery on overhearing where we were going."

The act of surveillance in galleries signifies the museums, as an institution, maintenance of stance about 'insider groups' and 'outsider groups' where the queer individuals or groups are considered as atypical and required to be surveyed.

Although such incidents do not restrict individuals from accessing museums, but they create a space of anxiety where discomfort dominates inclusivity, edutainment, and accessibility. It portrays museums as hostile spaces where people belonging to certain identities are unallowed. (Armstrong 2022)

Financial Challenges

Museums which represent any minority community funded by state are legislated by the laws which sustain their belonging to the state, society, and people. It serves the nation state along with contributing the building of idea of that society. They highlight contributions made by the marginalized communities in building of nation-state.²²

Many LGBTQIA+ museums and projects face fund crisis due to resistance from governments and, anti-queer collectives, and people. Sometimes museums have to shut down due to homophobic propaganda. The True's yard Fisherfolk Museum, Britain had to withdraw from a project called Queer Stories of Lynn project, which aimed at creating a heritage trail on the town's LGBTQIA+ community. The project was funded by Arts and Historic England Council, it was criticized publicly by National Trust's former director, Neil Record. ²³

Similarly, in America the Stonewall National Museum and Archives funded by their federal government is being shut down due to abrogation of funding.

The Indian discourse

Queer history and figures in India existed since ancient times where even texts which are regarded as religious now had mentions of same-sex relationships and homosexuality. Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, American scholars specializing in South Asian history, has noted formation of sexual categories in Hindu and Jain texts since 6th century BC, the Kamasutra by Vatsyayana had mention of relationships between individuals of same sexes.²⁴

Similarly, medieval Islamic scholars had written explicitly on same-sex love and relationships. Zulali Khwansari, Muhammad Hasan a 17th century poet who was a court poet of Safavid emperor Shah Abbas I, wrote about Mahamud Ghazi's relation and affection for his slave Ayaz in his series of poetry Mathnawi-yi Zulali translated to English by Scott Kugle; explains Ghazni's relationship with Ayaz.²⁵

“Mahmud set a cup beside him and a decanter before him Full of burgundy wine, as if distilled from his own heart He filled the cup with wine like his love's ruby lips Entangled in the curls of Ayaz, Mahmud began to lose control.”

Carla Peitievich, American scholar of Urdu language, documents mention of terminologies such as dogana and zanakhi from Urdu dictionaries. Zanakhi denote a women's self-chosen primary friend and Dogana refers to female lover. The Rekhti poetry tradition in Urdu are recognised for their explicit expression of same-sex female love, affection, and relations. (Vanita 2002)

In 2018, Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality, abrogating section 377 of Indian Constitution. Since then, LGBTQIA+ community has become more visible and active in voicing their challenges and garnering support for their rights. Private museums in India have organized programs and exhibitions before and after the abrogation of article 377.

Museum of Goa (MOG), Goa

MOG organised an event called 'Freedom Is In The Air' (FIITA) in November 2018. It was an initiative to celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community through art, creative engagement, and discourse, indicating solidarity towards the community and their causes. This event included exhibition, film screenings, seminar, and art activities.

Museum of Kerala History, Kochi

The Museum of Kerala History has been a center for queer inclusion advocacy, creating a safe, accessible, and unbiased space for queer individuals, partners, and families.

1. The museum organized an exhibition in 2018, called Homomorphism II in collaboration with Queerala, a LGBTQIA+ group, which intend to address questions around same-sex love and attraction, relationships etc.
2. In 2024, the museum organized a travelling event called 'gFest' in collaboration with Raise Our Voices, a non-governmental organization, along with few other entities; which encompassed exhibition, talks, film screenings etc. showcased artworks by 22 women artists exploring intersection between gender and identity. In the series of month-long events a talk was facilitated on the women rights.

Museum of Art and Photography, Bangalore

1. Another exhibition, 'Vaanyerum Vizhuthugal: Roots that Reach for the Sky,' featuring artists like Alina Tiphagne, whose medium is photography used to delve into complexities of queer kinship and inherited memory. The exhibition deals with complexities of regional identity here Tamil ones, queer intimacy, and archival storytelling.

2. Apart from exhibitions the museum regularly organizes talks, panel discussions in online and offline mode to create more public accessibility etc. In collaboration with Bangalore

International Centre the museum hosted a talk in 2020 between queer activist and artist Kalki Subramaniam and Paramesh Sahani, Founder of Godrej India Culture Lab. This discussion explored the role art in healing, expressing, and connecting with the queer community.

3. The museum also adopts a broader approach and policy to promote LGBTQIA+ inclusion in their events and workspace. It intends to stir up conversations which are concerning the society and contemporary reality.

Although private museums and art galleries in India hosts events and exhibitions centered around LGBTQIA+ community and their issues in India, but public museums also need to create queer friendly spaces where not just exhibitions or events could be hosted but the community could also feel safe and welcomed. Governments whether central or state must put effort in exploring queer heritage of India to destigmatize

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the discourse. Museums could be facilitator where such efforts could be made because they are primary institutions for preserving India's heritage and an interface for laymen to get acquainted with our history.

Conclusion

The LGBTQIA+ museums are collecting institutions which serves not just a marginalized community but society, largely. It documents information and knowledge which has been obliterated by mainstream society. They are evidence of resistance to patriarchal society which has disbranched narratives which has contributed to building a nation-state. They preserve narratives which has been socio-economically and historically suppressed.²⁶

Women and gender museums cannot be defined with a linear perspective because each is distinctly marked by its location, context, and history as remarked by Elke Kransy (Clover 2022). Such are queer museums because they not just represent the community of a particular region but also serves as spaces for reflection of cross-cultural formations and references. It alternates traditional collection practices in museums to collect contemporary stories.

In 2008, a gathering of women and gender museum professionals characterized these museums into contemporary realities, reflecting on their roles as—"political, cultural, artistic, economic, and social roles and situations of women in the past and the present. They preserve and deepen women's cultures, challenge prejudices, and contribute to the respect of women and human rights. They are a mirror of society and also a means toward changing of the world." (Clover 2022)

Queer objects and their collection by museums is a practice deflecting from linear notions of history and time where pieces will be assembled to build a narrative, an exhibition. Exhibitions centered around queer histories representing tastes and roles, gender dissonances, dispositions and styles, queer feelings, emotions, and desires; debunking false stories, speculations etc. around the community, as remarked by Robert Mills.²⁷

Foucault (1982) argues that knowledge and power transform human beings into subjects but that this occurs in a context-specific manner depending on the time and place where the knowledge and power are encountered (Armstrong 2022).

Institutions assign legitimacy to ideas while shaping them, sometimes when they find it against them either such ideas are

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suppressed or tried to isolate, but they still thrive because the society realizes necessity for thoughts which shape them. In 21st century museums have greater responsibilities to hold society's conscience because authorities worldwide are controlling and regulating ideas which is harming the society, to the possible extent they should function as safe spaces for disagreements, contemplation, and discussions etc.

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²¹ British Museum, "Desire, love, identity: LGBTQ+ History Trail," accessed on May 5, 2025, URL:

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²⁶ Darlene E. Clover "Women's and Gender Museums: Feminist Pedagogies for Illumination, Imagination, Provocation, and Collaboration". In *Remaking Communities and Adult Learning*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004518032_007

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List of Illustrations

1.British Museum's leaflet screenshot

First World Tech and the invisible women of the third world

Angelina Sarkar¹

Assistant Teacher, Economics, Grace High School,
Assam

Abstract: The robust digital advancement, often praised as the hallmark of global progress, also carries a pernicious, darker, unequal underside, one built on the invisible labour of women in developing countries. This paper critically examines how e-waste management that is shown as an environmental responsibility in the Global North materializes as a site of gendered exploitation in the Global South. The study attempts in giving plausible explanation through secondary research, international reports, and qualitative analyses, the paper highlights how women in India, Ghana, Nigeria, and other low-income nations remain exposed to toxic waste, unprotected working environments, and persistent economic precarity. It explores the contradictions of first-world technological consumption sustained by third-world invisible labour and inevitably reinforces the structural inequalities shaping women's participation in the informal e-waste sector. The study also identifies policy gaps, health impacts, and the systemic marginalisation that conceals the contributions made by these women in global supply chains and therefore, arguing that any sustainable digital future must meaningfully integrate gender-inclusive reforms, formal protections, and equitable economic recognition of their contributions.

Keywords: *E-waste management, Gendered labour, Informal economy, Women waste workers, Global value chains*

INTRODUCTION

Most of us would say how fortunate we are to be in this era of technology that is skyrocketing, unveiling every possibility of progress

First world tech and the invisible women of the third world and innovation, everything is a one click away scenario. “The digital boom”. But beneath all the glitters of elite privileges of the first world countries lays a darker truth that is the technology’s backbone to say the least. The same advanced digital tool that hears the praises of making the lives of people in the United States extremely easy is also the same that is exploiting the labour of women in informal economies across Asia and Africa. The technological divide between the First and Third Worlds is not only economic but also deeply gendered. Women in low- and middle-income countries form the invisible part of the system in the global electronics recycling industry that is to handling, sorting, and breaking down discarded devices, often under hazardous conditions.¹ Here in this chapter we are going to delve into the e-waste management world, where management is just a word to explain the exploitation and contamination of the people in the third world countries, here we will discuss how the women sometimes aware and mostly unaware of the harm that’s caused, gets into laborious work for a meagre pay, and on the other hand how the people in the first world countries lets it happen with all the information of how harmful it can be, just because it’s convenient and cheaper for them to do so.²

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Occupational Health Hazards in Informal E-waste Recycling (National Library of Medicine): This study provides an extensive overview of the toxic exposure faced by informal e-waste workers in India, especially women. It shows how open burning, acid baths, and unprotected dismantling expose workers to lead, cadmium, mercury, and brominated flame retardants. The literature highlights how women are biologically more vulnerable to these toxins resulting in hormonal disorders, prenatal complications, respiratory illnesses, and long-term neurological impacts. The study argues that informal recycling persists not because it is efficient but because it is economically convenient for the global system while the bodies of poor women bear the cost.

The Role of Gender in Waste Management (Ocean Conservancy, 2019): This study examines how gender shapes labour roles in the waste sector across developing countries. It situates women at the margins of the system overrepresented in low-paid, low-skill, high-risk tasks such as sorting, cleaning, and dismantling while being excluded from ownership, leadership and decision-making roles. The literature

First world tech and the invisible women of the third world shows that the intersection of poverty, gender norms and limited education pushes women into these hazardous occupations, it further reveals how global environmental policies routinely ignore the gendered nature of labour thereby reinforcing inequalities within the value chain.

Women, E-waste, and Technological Solutions to Climate Change (HHR, 2014): This work stresses how the global push toward “green technology” and “digital innovation” often relies on a hidden gendered labour force. The study demonstrates that although the Global North promotes climate-friendly technologies, the ecological burdens including toxic waste are externalised to developing nations. Women in Asia and Africa, working in informal e-waste dumps, become the silent casualties of this climate paradox. The study also critiques international conventions for overlooking the lived realities of women, arguing that sustainability without gender justice is merely an illusion of progress.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the gendered nature of labour in the informal e-waste sector with a focus on understanding how women disproportionately bear the environmental, health, and economic burdens of global digital consumption.
2. To analyse the gaps in national and international policies including EPR frameworks, Basel Convention guidelines, and domestic e-waste rules and how these frameworks routinely overlook the vulnerabilities and contributions of women workers.
3. To explore sustainable, gender-inclusive interventions that can integrate women into protective, regulated recycling systems, improve their economic security and ensure equitable recognition in the global value chain of technological waste.

Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research methodology supported by secondary data analysis. It uses scholarly articles, international reports, and governmental documents to explore the economic and environmental dimensions of e-waste management in India. The

First world tech and the invisible women of the third world methodology includes comparative analysis, case study evaluation, and interpretation of statistical trends reported by authoritative organizations such as the United Nations and the Global E-waste Statistics Partnership.

Global E-Waste Flows and the Irony of Progress:

Mobile phones, laptops, appliances etc. that are modelled in an advanced yet obsolescence manner, the bleak dynamism that today's world is structured as, makes us fosters an ever-present vigilance toward change. As per data, E-waste is the fastest growing waste streams with over 50 million tonnes generated annually.³ Not to mention, India, Ghana, Nigeria have mountains of e-waste that is discarded in this third world countries and are dismantled manually, mostly women would get involved with the work where they burn or find other ways to extract copper and other metals, these third world countries are also known to be the participants where the flow of E-waste ends up in mostly, just because the regulations are weaker and cheaper.⁴ It clearly shows a spectacle of prejudice and inequality where the technological progress is enjoyed by a certain group and the burden is on certain group. Ironically, it is seen that major flow of the e-waste is from the very agencies that stands for environmental protection from the United States.⁵ And therefore it is so crucial to apprehend the intersection of innovation and dehumanization.

Gendered Labour and the Invisible Women Workers:

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), women constitute nearly 30% of the informal waste sector workforce in developing countries, with many of them working in an unsafe conditions for less than a living wage.⁶ It is the data giving us the roadmap to the idea that women are always given the lowest kind of work in the whole global value chain, because it is indelible to accept that women with the skills of a nurturer can only get the delicate works of cleaning, dismantling and whatsoever is needed for a "Gentle touch". One other reason for women in the third world countries to get involved in this risky and precarious work is because most of these countries have their women getting the least of education. According to the **World Bank (2022)** while global literacy has improved, *adult female literacy in low-income countries remains around 59%*,

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compared to 77% for men.⁷ And therefore, this is one of the reasons women from low income countries are left with nothing but these hazardous works that gives them less than a living wage and under deplorable work conditions. It is also ironic in an extreme manner that the empowerment of the corporate feminism covers the brutal truth about the same system giving heinous work conditions to the women with very unfortunate and less resources of the underdeveloped and developing countries, sometimes they are paid even less than what they are put into.⁸ These women of the third world countries, actually plays a pivotal role in the advancement in the developed countries, and yet are erased from the same global system, their work is unrecognized in both economic data and public discourse.⁹

Health, Environmental and Social Impacts on Women

The impacts of technological progress on women are expected to be hidden and silenced like everyday lives that they live through, starting from the health, there are not just minor but major risks that is caused in the bodies of a women, because of the poisonous toxins like lead, mercury etc. that have tremendous negative impact on women from having hormonal imbalances, to respiratory problems, to having developmental effects on the fetus if the woman is pregnant that says how the risks are not to particular people but a structural framework that is eventually take everyone with it through its influence.¹⁰ And this catastrophic activity is not just limited to women but also to the environment that they live in, these toxic substances contaminates the soil and water, and mostly the air as the discarded items are burned to get valuable items that will give them good money to survive, and because of the stigma around informal workers, it marginalize them even further and keeps them in this cycle of poverty forever and beyond.¹¹ As we go about deciphering the atrocities pondered upon the people working in the informal sectors in some corner of a third world country, and at the same time looking at the innovations reaching new peak, it just everything just clear about how development with inequality that's widening every single day is not something that needs to be proud about, instead it should be something that needs to be worried about.¹²

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India, Women and its Story:

Looking into our country, India, it ranks third largest e-waste generator globally after China and the US.¹³ The reported annual solid waste generation is 62 million tonnes (projected to rise to 165 million tonnes by 2030), India's Generation according to the data from (2019-20) is 1,014,961.21 tonnes and with over 12 million workers (with 12.9 million women) are in the informal waste sector in the urban slum area using dangerous, rudimentary methods without personal protective equipments (PPE) with hazardous components like lead, Mercury, arsenic, cadmium etc. for whom e-waste is a critical source of livelihood.¹⁴ As segregated like any other sector, women predominantly works as collectors and crude separators at landfill sites, these women are from poor and marginalized backgrounds who has zero to negative financial security.¹⁵ A survey in Bengaluru revealed that 99% of aggregator and preprocessor businesses have male registered owner.¹⁶ In India, as we see, the impact of getting into a vulnerable job as this is just a normal way of life, but it's more than just health impacts that we are talking about, the lack of ownership in the supply chain makes it impossible to access any capital to even start a business, there are other risks as well, like sexual abuse and the vulnerability doesn't even stop there, the women spending their day in the midst of toxic chemicals goes back to the kitchen at night, and the children get exposed to it. If we look into the general waste sector, women faces undeniably the challenges, from social stigma to economic deprivation plus the additional gender-specific burdens.¹⁷

Laws, regulations and frameworks that has blind spotted the women: According to the e-waste (management) rules, 2016- e-waste classification includes Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and restrictions on imports of hazardous e-waste.¹⁸ Electronic Waste Management Draft Rules 2022, aims to improve end of life processing within a circular economy.¹⁹

In the above guidelines, it is clear how there are the absent of any regulations for the vulnerability of women in the informal sector. If we are looking for solutions that are more Gender-Inclusive, it should be the ownership opportunities in the supply chain, skill development and training programmes for the ground zero workers without disrupting their work schedules. There also should be separate policies that focuses on the welfare of the ground workers, particularly women. Redirecting e-waste flow from informal to formal sectors, and

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educating women and children involved in e-waste processing, that will reduce the vulnerability to some extent. Even in one of the papers, the role of gender in waste management, 2019, they suggested to adopt “Semi-formalization” approach that provides benefits and security while accommodating women’s need for flexibility due to domestic duties and to improve access to health insurance and protective gear. There should also be a shift in perspective, gender as an opportunity, not just a problem that needs to be solved.

FIRST WORLD TECHNOLOGY CONSUMPTION, THIRD WORLD LABOUR

There is no denying on the central paradox on the advanced policies and economic incentives, the global e-waste management made a contradictory framework based on principles like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), the high cost of compliance creates a powerful economic incentives to bypass these systems.²⁰ This cost differential ensures a continuous flow of e-waste to developing countries where disposal is cheapest.²¹ The core problem remains the same and that is lack of enforceability, with the presence of corruption, lack of resources and sometimes even mislabeling e-waste as a mixed goods in these developing countries, it renders these regulations largely ineffective.²²

The illusion of any form of framework or regulation is a grim reality of today’s capitalist viewpoint that donot even consider the lives of human being as long as there’s profit and advanced facilities at their corners.²³ As mentioned above, these developing countries or the third world most significantly lack in information, and that is through education, majority that gets involved are from uneducated background, and this unawareness makes the whole current system even more favourable to the first world technology businesses, as the lack of information also includes the catastrophic outcomes, through the processing of the e-waste in the informal sector with methods like burning cables to recover copper, or using acid baths to leach out precious metals which makes the unprotected workers and also the environment tremendously exposed to toxic.²⁴ It disrupt their whole ecosystem. Unfortunately, this is slowly continuing to expand as according to data, by 2030 , the e-waste in the developing countries is going to rise twice as many as in the developed countries, and that

First world tech and the invisible women of the third world clearly says that, it is self-sustaining and domestically generated far beyond just imported waste.²⁵

CONCLUSION

The global electronic waste crisis shows us a bleak present and a future where the comfort of the developed countries are and will the backing of the underprivileged developing and underdeveloped countries and with a system that is soon going to bring the trouble to itself from its own. Within this already dire situation, there is something rather pervasive the crux of the matter, marginalisation and completely systemic invisibility of women of the informal e-waste dumps of Ghana, Nigeria, India, and China.²⁶ These women are not silent contributors, they are the foundational, and still unrecognized and exploited. The silence that reeks of the cycle of poverty, the conversations that never describes the tumultuous labour that goes behind the lens that showcases only the advanced digital world with rainbows.²⁷

It is impossible, though mandatory, to highlight the factors above. Unfortunately, the drivers of the e-waste trade is solely and powerfully economic and so, for the women from developing countries having a meagre to zero education with no formal employment opportunities but with hands-on skills and arduous work.²⁸ To sum it all, it is easily arguable to say that the meagre wage that only sustains them a day makes them go through the mountains of discarded dumps, scavenging through computers, televisions and phones, and earning (according to data) 0\$-50\$ per day.²⁹ According to the study, this industry like any other, works in a way where the economic contributions by many would only be recognised with the selective few, and the very bottom of the hierarchical structure is always invisible.³⁰ If we look into the income data from different parts of the world, and for this regard let us take the example of Ghana where it is seen that the major works of collectors and dismantlers are predominantly filled with women and children, and they do it with least amount of money, sometimes to barely get by the night, which places them in a situation where they are in a state of extreme economic precarity, always in a desperate need of daily income which always defies any other risks of life, and health. And their contribution, their labor is always kept at subsistence level even when is the most essential parts of the system's functionings.

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This invisibility in regards to the economic contribution, amplifies to the risks that happens physically and create health-related issues.³¹ The dangerous and unsafe activities that explains the very essence of informal e-waste sector, while all workers are exposed to the hazardous elements, it is uniquely and more of a threat to women because of the complex way that the body of a woman is made of.³² If we try to get to the details of it, their exposure to carcinogens and endocrine disruptors has severe consequences for reproductive health which is directly linked to the untimely miscarriages, abortions, stillbirths, and premature births.³³ Pregnant women, when exposed can directly affect the neurodevelopmental health of their children is also jeopardized.³⁴ According to the study, it is noted that skin and respiratory problems are prone through it, like common ailments because of the workers working without protective gears and much more avoidance and absence of measures that could make the process of the effect slower.³⁵ It is even scarier to see that the research and studies on the particular issue is still very slow and almost invisible, like the data on pregnancy-related illnesses and data on the changes in the body of a woman.³⁶

Furthermore, the social and policy structures further makes it stronger for any changes whatsoever.³⁷ Even if we look into the international and national frameworks, let's say, the Basel Convention that are considered as top-down measures and often lack enforcement and contain loopholes.³⁸ They fail to take into account the informal sectors's social dynamics, especially the role and details of women. When policies like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) are talked about, mainly the focus is on formal producers and recyclers, overshadowing the giant informal workforce which consist more of female is already doing the work of recycling under deadly conditions, and the lack of integration of this particular workforce, these policies are not effectively getting the desired outcome, and it will just deplete the framework even further.³⁹ To mitigate this pattern of functioning, many gaps needs to be lessened.⁴⁰

In conclusion, Digitalisation have clearly brought a different starting point, the kind where everything is reaching new unimaginable heights of advancement with a story that goes parallelly with it, the story of invisibility and inequality. In the toxic chain of this global system where it is enabled by the conspicuous consumption of the digital items by the consumers of the first world countries, to keep the cycle of invisible labourers of the third world countries intact and majorly the

First world tech and the invisible women of the third world contributors, disregarding how it is exploiting them economically, physically poisoned, and socially marginalized and their issues are conveniently hidden behind the so-called larger narrative of the e-waste problems.⁴¹ To reach a point where we can meet sustainability and justice will require a shift in perspective as a whole.⁴² It also requires, the policies to be stern, there should also be initiatives on research, and circular economy models to move beyond theory and act actively to bring these women in light.⁴³ This implies that there should be data collected of gendered-related, region-related issues and also noticing their economic roles and redistributing wages fairly, creating protective measures and policies that openly address their vulnerabilities.⁴⁴ The first world must stop its convenient ignorance and the price of its technological advancement shouldn't be the lives and health of the invisible women.⁴⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) There should be proper implementation of Gender-Inclusive Policies in the E-waste sector by the governments and NGOs.⁴⁶
- b) Leadership opportunities should be given to the Women working informally in this sector.⁴⁷
- c) Shift in the recycling activities and redirecting it into well regulated, well equipped facilities.⁴⁸
- d) Major cause, that is, lack of education should be mitigated and there should be the expansion of education and skill development programs that focuses on the women from the third world countries.⁴⁹
- e) Developed nations must enforce stricter export controls, and to stop disguising e-waste as mixed goods and to fund for the recycling infrastructure in the receiving countries.⁵⁰
- f) Provision of Health Insurance, PPE and social protection for women workers by giving out free or subsidized protective gear, access to healthcare and reproductive health support, and at the same time, there should be childcare assistance.⁵¹

The above recommendations can bridge the wide gap and create a space that is more inclusive of all beings.

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Lived Experiences Of College Students With Pcos: A Qualitative Study

Vidisha Lahiri¹

MPSW, Prasanna School of Public Health, MAHE 2022-2024

Abstract: Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is a multifaceted hormonal condition that affects 6-13% women of reproductive age. Despite its prevalence, research addressing the influence on young adults pursuing higher education remains limited. This Qualitative study aimed to explore the lived experiences, academic impact, and overall well-being of young adults diagnosed with PCOS. Using a semi-structured interview guide, 11 unmarried participants (aged 19-25) currently pursuing higher education in the Udupi district, Karnataka, were selected through Purposive sampling methods. The study revealed significant challenges in healthcare and society, as the majority of participants reported a negative diagnostic experience and medical journey, with a subset electing to discontinue the treatment. While a positive doctor-patient relationship was observed in some cases, the long-term impact was often detrimental. Specifically, the prevalence of Body-shaming and poor medical advice was noticeable, contributing to long-lasting trauma and aversion to future medical care. Furthermore, the participants experienced societal body shaming rooted in a lack of public knowledge regarding Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), emphasizing the crucial need for increased menstrual health awareness. The condition is found to have a profound impact on overall well-being, which can have a potential impact on the academic performances of affected individuals. Simultaneously, the elevated stress level associated with higher education was found to be a potential barrier to a healthier lifestyle. Women managing this condition actively employ a variety of coping mechanisms and lifestyle modifications to manage symptoms and feel the need for a tailor-made solution and a multidisciplinary team. While family and peers were

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identified to play a crucial role in management, mental health is still a neglected domain, reporting experiencing insufficient support and understanding. The study also highlighted prevalent future-oriented worries, particularly concerning fertility and potential future pregnancies.

Keywords: *PCOS, Lived Experience, Higher Education, Medical Trauma, Well-Being, Mental Health, Coping Mechanism.*

INTRODUCTION:

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a significant global public health concern, affecting approximately 6-13% women of reproductive age.⁸³ Characterized by androgen overproduction, leading to hormonal imbalance, irregular cycles, hirsutism, and weight gain, PCOS significantly compromises the physical, psychological, and social well-being of the affected individual.^{84 85}

In India, one in five women suffers from this condition. A 2017 cross-sectional study in urban and rural India highlighted family history and stress as critical factors in the development of PCOS, noting a significant lack of awareness, particularly in rural areas.⁸⁶

For college students with PCOS, managing symptoms alongside academic and social demands can be challenging. Fatigue, mood swings, and body image distress related to weight gain and hirsutism often affect both academic performance and emotional health.⁸⁷

⁸³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/polycystic-ovary-syndrome>

⁸⁴ Escobar-Morreale H. F. (2018). Polycystic ovary syndrome: definition, aetiology, diagnosis and treatment.

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The condition's consequences extend beyond physical health.⁸⁸ But the exact cause contributing to PCOS remains unclear. Previous studies also report that many young women with PCOS have negative experiences with healthcare providers, including delays and barriers and lack of empathy.⁸⁹

Previous research concerning Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) has predominantly utilized a biomedical framework, with exploration into the lived experiences of affected women only recently gaining prominence. While some studies have investigated these experiences at a global level, a scarcity of research exists within the Indian context. Specifically, there is limited empirical evidence examining the impact of PCOS on female students in higher education or working women. Various questions remain unattended, like whether the experiences of higher studies on women with PCOS differ depending on the subject they have chosen. Do these students feel concerned that PCOS can impact their future aspirations? Is there a difference in the experiences of students from different academic streams among undergraduates and postgraduates aged 18-25 years? What are the perspectives and opinions of respondents affected by PCOS?

Review of Literature:

Prior qualitative studies show that women face daily physical, social, and emotional challenges, highlighting the profound psychosocial impact of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome.⁹⁰ A core source of distress stems from the conflict between PCOS symptoms, such as hirsutism, and societal expectations of femininity, leading to feelings of being “different” and negatively impacting social interactions, particularly romantic encounters.⁹¹ Quantitative measures confirm this burden, showing that all five domains of health-related Quality of Life—

⁸⁸ Brutocao, C., Zaiem, F., Alsawas, M., Morrow, A. S., Murad, M. H., & Javed, A. (2018). Psychiatric disorders in women with polycystic ovary syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis.

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emotions, body hair, weight, infertility, and menstrual problems are significantly affected in young adult females with PCOS.⁹²

A major theme across lived experiences is dissatisfaction with healthcare. The diagnostic process is frequently characterized by confusion, frustration, and a lack of trust in providers due to perceived inattention and inadequate information.⁹³ Many women report delayed diagnosis and inconsistent treatment experiences, highlighting a pervasive lack of empathy and poor communication from medical staff.^{89 94} This experience often forces women to engage in extensive self-education and searching to manage and gain control over their condition.⁹³

In sociocultural contexts such as India, the family plays a crucial role; mothers often experience emotional turmoil alongside their daughters and are central to lifestyle management and coping mechanisms.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the condition's high prevalence among young professional students (24.7% in one meta-analysis of medical/dental students) shows its direct link to academic stress, BMI irregularities, and poor social life.⁹⁶ This highlights a critical need for targeted interventions within the higher education curriculum to address lifestyle modifications and close the socioeconomic and academic support gap.⁹⁶

Aim and Objective:

Keeping the above things in mind, this study aims to understand the lived experience of college students with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. With the following objectives as the main focus:

1. To study the treatment experiences of the participants.
2. To understand the impact of PCOS on their achievements in their higher education and their future aspirations.

⁹² Chadha, C., Kataria, J., Chugh, P., & Choudhary, A. (2019). Quality of life in young adult females with PCOS.

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3. To understand the overall experiences of students with PCOS.

Methodology:

Study Design

This qualitative, interpretative study employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore the lived experiences of college students with PCOS. The research was conducted among students studying in the Udupi district, Karnataka. The study was conducted from September 2023 to December 2023.

Study Population

The sample consisted of 11 unmarried higher education students diagnosed with PCOS (aged 19-25), recruited via a purposive sampling method from Institutions. Data Saturation was reached at nine participants, but data collection continued till eleven participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

In-depth interviews were conducted using a 13-question guide developed from a literature review to gather detailed experiences of the participants. The collected data were organized, and thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes.

Ethical Considerations

Verbal consent was obtained from all participants, and the study's objectives were clearly explained. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and the information collected was used exclusively for academic purposes.

Limitations and Delimitations

The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the sensitive nature of the topic made it challenging to find participants. However, focusing on a narrow age group of higher education students and including participants formally diagnosed provided deeper insights.

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Results:

The researcher has conducted in-depth interviews for 11 participants, each ranging from a time period of 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher has thematically analyzed the data into the following categories:

Participant Profile:

Participant	Current Age	Home State	Subject Name	Age of Diagnosis	Initial Symptoms
Participant 1	24	West Bengal	Sociology (B.ED)	16	Irregular menstrual bleeding, frequent mood swings.
Participant 2	23	Madhya Pradesh	MSW	21	Sudden weight gain, irregular periods.
Participant 3	24	West Bengal	Computer Science. (M.Sc)	18	Irregular Periods
Participant 4	20	West Bengal	Physics (B.Sc)	16	Irregular Periods
Participant 5	25	Madhya Pradesh	MSW	23	Irregular periods, Hirsutism.
Participant 6	23	Tamil Nadu	Virology (M.Sc)	16	Irregular Periods
Participant 7	24	West Bengal	MBBS	15	Irregular Periods
Participant 8	25	Kerala	MSW	22	Irregular periods, severe abdominal pain
Participant 9	20	Kerala	MSW	17	Irregular periods, heavy bleeding, severe
Participant 10	25	West Bengal	Sociology (M.A.)	20	Minor multiple cysts
Participant 11	20	Telangana	Psychology (B.Sc)	18	Prolonged Periods

Description:

This section delves into the lived experiences of college students with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), starting with their patient-centric healthcare experiences. It then examines the impact of PCOS on their overall well-being, including the effects of body shaming on their mental and emotional health. The need for a multidisciplinary team and increased awareness about PCOS is highlighted, followed by a discussion on how PCOS affects their academic pursuits. The role of

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lifestyle modification in managing PCOS is addressed, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support and understanding. Finally, the section explores how PCOS influences their future aspirations and long-term goals.

Patient-Centric Healthcare Experiences:

One of the themes that emerged from the analysis was the Patient-Centric Healthcare experience of the participants. It was observed from the interview that most of the participants faced one or the other challenges throughout their medical journey, beginning right from the initial diagnostic process.

Participants reported discomfort with Ultrasound Sonography. The requirement to hold urine and the usage of gel often caused considerable distress, with one participant stating,

“When I went for my first USG.... it was like a torture for me as before USG one has to control their pee.” (P3)

Another voiced annoyance, *“They....put that cold gel on my tummy... I did not like it one bit.”* (P6)

Further, there were observed delays and misdiagnoses, *“I went to doctor, so the doctor thought that I have anxiety and give me anxiety pills.... because of which my situation got even worse.”* (P2). Some even experienced outright negligence.

While a few noted positive initial interactions with doctors, the initial treatment frequently focused on medications like *“I was given birth control, which were to stop my prolonged periods”* (P6).

Participants expressed insufficient clarity, and details provided during diagnosis, *“During my diagnosis, I was not provided with much information. I...was...not at all satisfied...”* (P8)

This problem is exacerbated by a fundamental misconception regarding PCOS among healthcare providers: *“Most of the doctors think that those girls who are facing these problems are fat and...the reason for being fat is that they eat very much but that’s not the actual issue.”* (P3)

This further leads to insensitive medical advice and misjudgment towards the patients. Participants felt doctors disproportionately focused on weight management as the primary or sole solution, neglecting the condition's multifaceted origins.

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“in PCOS the first thing every doctor says no matter whom you visit that either to reduce or to increase your weight, but PCOS can happen because of various other reasons” (P1)

The participants also highlighted shortcomings in healthcare institutions in managing PCOS, including the failure to integrate lifestyle changes into advice, the lack of effective medication without adverse side effects, and the prevalence of body shaming that causes a lack of interest in attending further sessions. There is a pressing need for systemic changes, including pre- and post-counselling, community awareness, and better patient education that includes specialized referrals, such as to a dietitian.

Participants expressed the importance of continuing treatment, despite negative experiences, to manage health effectively. Some also noted the benefits of lifestyle changes in reducing the need for frequent hospital visits.

Wellbeing and Self-Esteem:

PCOS is characterized by hormonal disruption, causing significant physical and mental distress. Involuntary weight gain frequently exposes individuals to social and clinical body shaming, creating considerable psychological distress and leading to a significant negative impact on self-esteem and overall well-being. This theme explores the different domains of well-being and the impact of body shaming on participants.

Physical Symptoms like involuntary weight gain due to metabolic changes causes distress to the participant. *“Why am I gaining more weight when I am controlling my diet?” (P1)*

Another complained, *“My lower portion got heavier.” (P4)*

Hirutism (Excessive Hair Growth), as complained by Participant 2, *“Now as a girl, I have become so fed up with the hair growth ... It affects us and wastes our time.”*

Participants also reported irregular periods, lethargy, increased appetite, insulin resistance, and various other issues, including severe pain, heavy bleeding, low hemoglobin, fatigue, and hair loss.

PCOS has a pronounced effect on mental health, with participants describing frequent mood swings and anxiety often linked to irregular cycles. Participant 1 noted, *“This month I haven’t got my periods properly till now, that’s why I am again getting mood swings...”* further

Lived experiences of college students with pcos supported by Participant 5's statement, "*...I get mood swings, I get irritated sometimes...*"

Participant 7 recounted fluctuations between feeling "*elated*" and "*very much depressed.*" The Participants also complained of being stressed, having brain fog, breakdown, cravings, and poor mental health, further impacting physical health. "*It caused much stress ... I started getting severe cramps.*" (P3)

Physical conditions like hirsutism, weight gain, and acne often affect the mental health and self-esteem of those suffering from this disorder. Participant 3 describes excessive facial hair growth as "*unwanted*" and "*a great problem.*" Which makes the Participants "*feel a little unconfident...to appear in public.*" (P5)

Participant 9 highlighted concerns about weight gain and acne, "*being a student, it affects it and my confidence*" feeling "*insecure about my body.*"

The impact is amplified by pervasive body shaming. Participants experienced this from medical professionals who often ignore hormonal causes, being told to "*reduce your weight then your pcos will get normal but no! We have pcos that's why we have weight.*" (P2)

Participant 3 noted "*continuously get criticized for being fat... told to eat less and do more exercises.*"

Casual shaming and Social Stigma were other challenges highlighted by the Participants.

"Everyone started calling me fat...that hurt me a lot. That broke me emotionally as I was not intentionally putting up weights...." (P4)

Participant 6 elaborated, "*people who didn't know that I have PCOS, they would shame me.*"

The prevalent stigma and psychological burden often impact Social Well-being.

"I have got judged....and sometimes I feel that even now I get judged." (P1)

The Participants felt that mood swings had affected interpersonal relationships and "*not able to cope up with all the situations.*" (P7) Participant 11 describes withdrawing socially due to mental health struggles, expressing a desire to be "*alone*" and not wanting to "*socialize.*"

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Need for Multidisciplinary Team and awareness regarding PCOS:

The critical shortcomings in the current Patient-Centric Healthcare experience have led participants to strongly advocate for systemic change that addresses both care structure and societal understanding, with a more holistic approach to the disorder.

The Participants emphasized that there “*should be a huge team.*” (P6), including sociologists, policymakers, psychologists, and dietitians to ensure a “*holistic approach*” (P7) that extends beyond mere medical intervention. Giving a “*more personalized approach, it can ensure that all woman are receiving the proper treatment and proper services if they are needed.*” (P9)

Lack of Awareness and Stigma in society leaves patients feeling isolated, unsupported, and hurt. Participants speak of feeling dissatisfaction and powerless against superstitions. “*no one to understand the severe problem of PCOS.*” (P4)

Participant challenges the misconception that PCOS is solely caused by lifestyle choices, suggesting there may be deeper underlying reasons.

“*people found it difficult to understandbecause it is not something that is very known..like diabetes or cancer.*” (P6)

Participant 9 suggested deploying social workers and other advocates to tackle stigma and raise the essential awareness currently missing from communities.

Higher Education and PCOS:

Academic performance is significantly impacted by PCOS and its symptoms. In a similar note, the demands of higher education make it challenging to balance academic excellence with a healthy lifestyle.

Participant 1 recalled, “*I really broke down and I was not able to study.*”

Participants became “*tired and stressed very easily*” (P3), which deteriorated academic performance.

Exam-related stress exacerbated irregular periods and severe menstrual cramps, making it difficult to concentrate and leading to a decline in exam results. Physical symptoms—including frequent periods, pain, and anxiety coupled with worries about managing periods and stress-induced eating significantly undermined academic performance.

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Participant 8 expressed, “....sometimes I experience cramps throughout the month, I can’t sit in the class and listen carefully...I can’t get work done on time...”

Participants also described feeling a brain block, making it difficult to study or do anything. Prolonged bleeding causes a lack of energy, with Participant 11 describing, “I used to sleep that’s it.... Mostly I didn’t study for the 45 days.”

Participants reported that PCOS hinders engagement in physical and extracurricular activities due to a lack of motivation, energy, and involuntary weight gain. This negatively impacts athletic performance and leads to emotional distress.

“we don’t feel like doing anything outside the room, outdoor activities, we just don’t feel motivated in those cases so we just sit.” (P7)

Participant 9, further recalled, “I used to participate in sports...because of the pcos, I gained weight, so I wasn’t able to perform very well.”

Higher education’s “demanding nature” (P1) — a continuous stream of presentations, exams, and event organization creates ongoing stress that is difficult to manage alongside PCOS, leading to neglect of health and increased symptoms.

“Most of the cases we neglect our health issues and just focus on our studies.” (P7)

Further supported by Participant 8, “I don’t balance but I grind my teeth and work through the pain.”

Lifestyle modification in managing PCOS:

PCOS calls for lifestyle modification for managing its symptoms. Participants described several key lifestyle modifications adopted after PCOS diagnosis, demonstrating a conscious effort to manage health. A primary area of focus involved dietary changes. “my eating habits...changed.” (P6)

The Participant reported a deliberate reduction towards “oily and spicy... food” (P1) towards a “proper and healthy diet.” (P4)

Concurrently, many emphasized the necessity of physical activity, with some beginning to exercise daily to boost metabolism and improve overall health, while others found that being “very physically active” (P6) through constant movement resulted in positive changes to the menstrual cycle.

Finally, Participant 9 emphasized the importance of getting enough sleep, *“I used to sleep properly like eight hours continuous.” As a part of lifestyle modification.*

The Significance of Comprehensive Support and Understanding in PCOS Management:

Family and Peer support play a crucial role among women suffering from this condition. It fosters acceptance and improves problem-solving. The Participants expressed gratitude towards family for support and a non-judgmental attitude.

“my family was very supportive they didn’t shame for this....” (P6)
Promoting a sense of acceptance.

Participant 3 found strength in emotional support, noting, *“my well-wishers helped me by giving mental support.”*

Participant 4 highlighted, *“my family supported me a lot all through the journey. They used to take me to the doctor for regular checkups, and they used to provide me with all the facilities.”*

The Participants also emphasized the significance of peer support in overseeing one’s emotional welfare, for reassurance and handling challenging circumstances, “I have a friend who helps me to calm down....” (P2)

The participant claims the importance of “comfort” and “support” for a positive outcome in a woman who is suffering from PCOS, so that one can deal with emotional well-being that gets hampered due to the condition.

Participant 5 opens up, *“when people around you, you know agree to what you doing, or you know, they comfort, give you that support. Definitely you will...a positive ... push to work.”*

However, the lack of understanding can be a major challenge. Participant 7 conveys a sense of inadequate comprehension and recognition of the signs and psychological burden associated with PCOS. The participant expresses disappointment and irritation, pointing out that classmates and family do not fully understand the severity of PCOS symptoms.

“support from family and peers were not sufficient because they will fail to understand the symptoms and they just don’t understand that this is all due to the pcos so uh...much required...attention was not given for the mental and emotional impacts.” (P7)

Impact on Future Aspirations:

It is important to understand the thoughts and worries of the participants regarding the future. The theme discovered both positive and negative aspects as Participants expressed mixed worries and optimism.

A major concern is the disorder's effect on future pregnancies. Several participants feared infertility or complications during childbirth, with one citing a relative's struggle, "*I saw my relatives that they weren't able to become mothers that's why they broke down. So I never wanted that the same incident repeats with me.*" (P1)

Regarding future aspirations, some were concerned about irregular periods impacting their careers, while others were optimistic, viewing PCOS as not a limiting factor. This optimism is often tied to self-empowerment, with participants believing better lifestyle choices can mitigate the effects. As Participant 5 stated, "*if I start working on... reversing my PCOS from today itself... I think I won't be facing any challenge 'due' to pcos, in my future aspirations.*"

Conclusion:

This study examined the multifaceted challenges faced by higher education students with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), revealing a prevalent pattern of difficulty that exceeds mere physical symptoms. Women with PCOS tend to be more vulnerable in many situations than those without this condition.

The findings show that experiences range from misdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis to the profound impact of the condition on well-being and academic life. Consistent with earlier studies,^{89 93 94} a significant source of dissatisfaction stems from medical practitioners' lack of empathy and the provision of inadequate information. The study confirmed that PCOS significantly impairs the health-related quality of life across emotional, physical, and academic domains.⁹²

A novel and critical insight is the discovery of body shaming by both society and, alarmingly, medical professionals. Participants recounted distressing experiences where doctors oversimplified weight gain, attributing it solely to poor life choices and causing emotional distress and hesitancy toward treatment. The study also deepened the understanding of the complicated link between physiological symptoms (like cramps and irregular cycles) and psychological distress (anxiety, brain fog), which severely disrupt academic performance and

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concentration. Furthermore, the fear of future infertility and the impact of PCOS on societal expectations of femininity are significant burdens.^{91 97} Managing PCOS alongside the demanding nature of higher education often becomes a barrier to positive lifestyle changes. Ultimately, this research serves as a reminder that PCOS requires a holistic, person-centered approach that integrates psychological and social support with medical care.

Based on these findings, the following is recommended:

- Policy and Awareness: Urgent need for PCOS-related policies and community-level awareness programs to dispel misconceptions and combat stigma, comparable to efforts for diseases like diabetes.
- Holistic Care: Implementing multidisciplinary teams and tailor-made treatment protocols that address the physiological, psychological, and social complexities of PCOS at the ground level.
- Future Research: Further qualitative studies must investigate the impact of weight stigma and the role of family/peer support in the mental health and coping mechanisms of women with PCOS.

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Carrying the Burden Within: Gendered Experiences of Trauma and Violence in *Sampurna 2*

Sampurna Chowdhury¹

Independent Researcher, M.A. in English, Lady Brabourne College,
University of Calcutta, India.

Abstract: Alluding to the statement of Judith Butler, it is essential to dissect this notion because the Gender-based Violence and the politics associated with it, is not simply a matter of the past. This has been an ever-present situation of the women folk, who have been repeatedly been silenced by family members. However, the situation becomes worse when this violence happens within the four walls, by the people whom one considers to be their guardian angels. Situations have been evident in Eastern and South Asia where nearly 75 million women and girls are victims of sexual harassment as reported by UNICEF in 2024. For instance, a two-year-old girl of Maldives remains as the sensational example, where she has been the victim of sexual abuse in the hands of her father, grandfather and great-grandfather in 2020.

However, this in no way, an answer to the fact that this social crisis erupted in the 21st century. This matter of child rape has always been a “hush-hush” matter from the ages and the evidence is in fiction, both in written or in audio-visual format. Such a message has been weaved in the plot of the HOICHOI web series directed by Sayantan Ghoshal in *Sampurna 2*. The protagonist Sampurna, has been the victim of child abuse by her maternal uncle, Hirak Lahiri but has been silenced by her mother. This series shows that how this forced silence hampers the psychological equilibrium of a child and even when she grows

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up, she hesitates to have a fruitful conjugal life. However, Sampurna takes a stance against the systematic victim blaming when years after Hirak attempts to abuse his nephew's daughter in the similar pattern. This holds evidence of the fact that gender empowerment has led to uneven progress and there are still lurking many underreported cases in the crevices of South Asia.

Keywords- *Gender-based Violence, Guardian angels, Psychological equilibrium, Gender empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Deeply entwined within the Roots

From ages, women carried their sexual identity to be a shame, where she always blames herself for the male gaze. She fails to realize that it is her gender identity that is not created by nature, rather constructed by society, where the later has made men assume the power position and the women to be the puppets of their will. This binary of strength has invaded the human psychology to such a bestial instinct, that man does not think twice before inflicting violence upon the small girls, who have not yet started perceiving the notion of this cruel world. The root of this crippled psychology is too deep and dark because it is based on the patriarchal notions, where a man always prefers to make a woman, his woman by means of power. In this line it can be alluded from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*,

The term 'female' is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman.⁹⁸

So, this power can be political, intellectual social or even sexual. Therefore, this dysfunctional mentality of the men folk, degrades the self-esteem of the women and this in turn leads to a guilt complex within them, where they forget to analyse that whether they are truly to

⁹⁸ S.D. Beauvoir. (1956). *The Second Sex* (H. M. Parshley, ed.). Jonathan Cape Publishers, p.99.

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blame. This in turn makes them victim of the gender-based violence because unless and until the women are aware and self-conscious of themselves, they will continue to be victims. Therefore, it is important to know that why woman themselves feel powerless and the impact of this guilt complex in their psyche.

Understanding the Guilt Complex

The psychological setup of the guilt complex within a girl is implanted at a very young age and it develops slowly, from the treatment that she receives from both the male and female members of the family. In the Indian households, the girls are always questioned and finger pointed for their outfits and dressing styles, instead of trying to teach the boys, that how should they respect girls, whether they be their mothers, their friends in school or any stranger girl. about both sex education and the moral behaviour. Most importantly, as the children become aware about modesty and nudity from a younger age, it becomes essential for parents to intervene in providing them with the proper knowledge (Shtarkshall et al., 2007). This includes making them understand about masturbation, appropriate physical contacts and developing conceptions about their own sexuality. This primary level of sexual socialization plays a vital role for the psycho-sexual development of every child, irrespective of their gender differences.

...When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.
I shrank Pitifully.... (Lines 28-32).⁹⁹

Though this poem is reflective of Kamala Das's life, but these lines resonate the life story of many 20th century Indian young women who had little or no knowledge about sexuality and their own body image. This lack of sexual education not only leads to the poor conception of own's body and its needs further leading to incomplete marital bliss. It is important for a child to have a proper understanding about their own body, and this primary lesson begins at home, which is the microcosm

⁹⁹ K. Das. (2012, March 28). *An Introduction*. PoemHunter.
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/an-introduction-2/>

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of society. Das ponders on the very fact that how her lack of body image, made her powerless and “crushed” her spirit.

This poor conception of body image also gives impetus to the birth of guilt complex. Now the question arises that why do girls give so much importance to the conception of body image? This because they imbibe self-objectification from a very younger age, that is, “a chronic tendency to view one’s own body” whether to one’s own self or in front of the society (Calogero & Pina, 2011, p. 428). Most importantly, this leads them to view themselves as objects to be looked upon and in turn leads to stunted psychological growth. And when these women themselves become mothers, they unconsciously pass on this notion about the poor body image to their children who carries this all the way long, unwillingly and unknowingly as a generational trauma.

It is utmost important for a child to develop a positive body image, because this can solely lead to both self- acceptance and having a healthy mindset to approach and accept both the opportunities and difficulties in life with calm headedness. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, girls develop a guilt and shame within themselves for things where they had been scape goat and shun themselves from experiencing the entire world. In most of the cases, this happens when a girl faces physical molestation and she suffers from a guilt complex- because of her sexual identity, as if her identity is a wound that she is carrying.¹⁰⁰ Strange enough is the fact that even the parents of the child especially the mother feels shame and also in most of the cases, the adolescents do not feel safe within their homes.

Ironical Safe Haven

A child finds comfort in the arms of one’s parents, relatives and in homes, but when these known people and known place become the site of violence, then a child becomes extremely vulnerable. The most important thing is that there are many unreported cases of this gender-based violence in South Asia and it continues to happen because in most of the cases, the child cannot approach their parents. According to a study, it has been found that those children who are less connected to their family members are uncomfortable to discuss about sex

¹⁰⁰ M. Devi. (2018). Draupadi. In *Breast Stories: Mahasweta Devi (G.C. Spivak, trans.)* Seagull Publishers. p.25.

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(Shtarkshall et al., 2007). This lack of knowledge makes these young girls more vulnerable in the hands of perpetrators.

Besides this, the number of increasing unreported cases are found when the girls are deliberately silenced, either because they lack the courage to speak up to any family member, or they become numb or even they are not allowed to speak by showing extreme fear. Such uncomfortable situation makes these girls more afraid, which in turn destroys the psychological growth of a child to successfully grow into a self- confident individual. According to a recent report, both Eastern and South Asia holds evidence of 75 million women and girls to be victims of sexual harassment and there might even remain many unreported cases, which gives an equally terrifying and concerning picture to the entire world (UNICEF, 2024). In this regard, the UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell says that the sexual violence of children is not only a matter of shame, but serves as a blot on the backbone of humanity. In this regard, she added that when the place of trust shakes, then the mind of the child, which is delicate like flowers, droops down because of the trauma. It so much affects the personality and the social bonding of the survivor, that she cannot easily overcome it even her in her later age, which creates dysfunctional marital bonds.

It has been observed that the occurrence of lockdown has made the situation cumbersome and when there are movement restrictions, the home becomes the site of violence. In a nutshell, it can be said that the coronavirus is “.... making violence in homes more frequent, more severe, and more dangerous” (The Asia Foundation, 2020). Though it might seem that the matters of child abuse, paedophile and POCSO started taking shape in the 21st century and in a more prominence form after lockdown, but the issue of child rape always existed in the society. The fact is that it remained as a “hush-hush matter” within the four walls of the house, which can be witnessed through the web series *Sampurna 2*.

Unravelling the horror of child rape

“...sexual politics during this time raises an immediate problem... that there is no one time”. ¹⁰¹ Alluding to the statement of Judith Butler, it becomes more pertinent than ever before that the gender-based

¹⁰¹ J. Butler. (2009). Sexual Politics, Torture and Secular Time. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Seagull Publishers, p.101.

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violence and the politics associated with it, is not simply a matter of the past or only of the present. Some matters are ever-present in the society and gets stuck in a loop. In the similar way, abuse of women irrespective of age, caste, class and religion remains true for all the time. This has been explicitly shown in the plot of the HOICHOI web series directed by Sayantan Ghoshal in *Sampurna 2* released in 2023. The story is a continuation of the previous web series *Sampurna* which revolves around the issue of the marital rape, which focuses on the disturbed marital relationship due to the crippled psychology of Raktim. The sequel delves into the matter of child rape as a continuation and introducing a new twist to the existing plot.

This web series begins with the lingering court case of Raktim and his wife Nandini and the situation is brought into the crossroads, where the case is going into the favour of Raktim. However, the case started to take complete recourse, that is, in favour of the newly wedded bride, Nandini by the timely intervention of new lawyer named Hirak Lahiri. The plot twist offered by Ghoshal is that Lahiri is the maternal uncle of Nandini's sister-in-law Sampurna, who molested her twice in her childhood on the pretext of telling her childhood stories, giving her chocolates and offering games. The series show that how a grown-up woman still carries the trauma within her and the manner it affected her conjugal life, where she pretends to be happy.

Additionally, the series subtly pinpoints an ironical fact that is the one who is professionally a lawyer, that is the one who is fighting the case for the victim of marital rape, is the perpetrator of child rape. It might be reflected in this case that what one preaches, does not necessarily practice. However, this brings the audience to an important juncture of psychology where it can be accounted that Lahiri has sexual disorder as he possesses sexual feelings for pre-pubescent children. In some cases, people have dysfunctional sexual feelings both for the children and adults (Seto, 2009). Additionally, sexual abuse of a child can happen both by the means of penetration, inserting any sort of objects inside the genitals, including touch and the second category points out that the adult exposes the genitals to a child or shows pornography which includes non-touching abuse (Positive Childhood Alliance, n.d.). In the series, Sampurna has been the victim of the sexual abuse as child in the hands of his maternal uncle, Hirak Lahiri, with whom she shared an affectionate bond in the pretty similar way, every young girl shares with her close circuit of family members. Little

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did young Sampurna knew that how this single incident created a permanent blot, an irremovable scar in her life.

The person who had been the guardian angel in the life of the protagonist, became the main person who chained her hands and silenced her words. Sampurna's mother refused her to speak a word against her maternal uncle and the fact is that, she lacked the courage to acknowledge the heinous incident that happened within her family. This impacted her psychological growth in such a way that she faced difficulty to consummate her conjugal life and her in-laws always rebuked her for being barren. A study found out that women who faced sexual abuse or incestuous acts by parents or in case of any other family members are likely to be more introvert (Talbot, 2020). Even *Sampurna 2*, captures the after moments of Sampurna's married life in flashbacks, when she took time to feel free with her husband. Moreover, when she encountered Lahiri after so many years, her past trauma returns and she is shown to be tottering in front of him, which makes the latter feel more victorious. She started to day dream about her younger self who has suffered so much, and this memory used to haunt her making her feeble and sacred whenever she encountered him. It is been generally estimated that in paedophilic cases, the adult is familiar to the child and in most of the cases, the touch does not involve contact with the genitals portion (Brown, 2025). And, ironically in most of the cases, this is the situation which makes the children more vulnerable and matters going under the debris of silence, which is very much the case with the protagonist of the film.

This makes it evident why the number of paedophilic cases goes unreported and the rate simply goes on increasing. A nearly recent report concludes that approximately about 370 million girls and women or more who are living, has experienced sexual abuse before they have reached their adulthood (UNICEF, 2024). This speaks volumes and also resonates the importance of such a theme that director Ghoshal wanted to convey through *Sampurna 2*. The transitional arc of the character of Sampurna charted through both the web series is worth mentioning, because in the first series, which is released in the year 2022, she is shown to be a courageous character and even it would be an understatement, because the manner she took an extramile for her sister-in-law even without giving a second thought that her prim and proper family setup would eventually shatter, very few woman would have done. However, that same woman who gave courage and moral

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support to Nandini to fight against her husband for marital rape, suddenly grew submissive, when she had to face Lahiri. It has been found out that in most of the cases; the sexually abused children possess a low conception about themselves and become introverts (Deb & Mukherjee, 2009). Besides this, it has also been found that the sexually abused children feel a stronger urge to stand on their own feet. This is the actual twist of the plot that happens when Sampurna stands against her maternal uncle.

Most importantly, it is important to note that this change within Sampurna, not happens for herself, but when her niece becomes the victim of child molestation in the clutches of Lahiri in the similar way. When Sampurna saw her niece, Tikli along with her maternal uncle alone in the attic, she emerged stronger for a second, but immediately the dark memory shattered her courage. Lahiri took this opportunity and forced to silence adult Sampurna in the similar way, as he had done the 10-year young Sampurna. Because of his immense power in the society as well as a lawyer, he assumed that no one will be able to confront him. However, no longer neither his sister could act as a shield, nor his blackmailing schemes against Sampurna's elder brother or his societal power could silence Sampurna. Besides Nandini and Pratim, Sampurna's husband, along with her other friends, in the end she even got the support of her mother and her brother, who had earlier stood as barriers. Though Sampurna could not muster courage to file case against such an influential lawyer, but she unveiled his monstrous face on the day of a public felicitation being organized by an orphanage. This fictional element shows that paedophilic people often assume the garb of being guardian angels to the children and they only take this opportunity to molest them; luring the innocent girls by giving them toys and affection.

Is there a Remedy?

Even in the age of digitalization, nothing much remains unchanged, because the number of cases in gender-based violence just keeps on increasing. However, the positive side to it, that the number of increasing cases, show that the cases are getting reported and the number of paedophilic people lurking around are getting identified. When Sampurna is able to take a stance against the systematic victim blaming, years after Hirak attempts to abuse his nephew's daughter in the similar pattern and she gets the support of her mother, the same

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mother who silenced her years before, it welcomes the wind of change. The ending note of Sampurna's speech in front of media and the general public, shows that though situation might not be better, but the power of independence of media is making it less cumbersome for the little girls. For instance, a two-year-old girl of Maldives remains has been the victim of sexual abuse in the hands of her father, grandfather and great-grandfather in 2020 (Ganguly, 2020). The case had only been brought to light because the maternal family of the child showed enough concern not only for her physical treatments, but even to give her justice. As rightly, Sampurna in the web series pointed out that both silence and fear from the perpetrator makes him the space to become a much larger criminal and stifles the happiness and mental peace of a child.

The hands which do not tither before abusing a child, should not be given any chances to rectify himself. They should be brought into notice and should be punished then and there. In the series, Sampurna also added that trauma of being molested as a child, remains all the more if she is silenced and so one should speak up, whether the perpetrator be her own guardian angel or a random stranger.

Conclusion

Certain topics can never be put into conclusion, because they remain unresolved and hits the pulse. It can only be put into nutshell, that fiction always mirrors the things that are present around us in an acceptable manner. *Sampurna 2* in no way dilutes Lahiri's intention or the manner he grows monstrous with every passing generation. The thing is that the series becomes acceptable and popular among the human folk, is the stance taken by Sampurna. The choice that she took in the end is not to remain submissive, but to speak up, not only in front of him, but in front of a mass of people who hailed the perpetrator as God. This series give a lesson that the family members should support their daughters to speak up and not let any violence become a hidden burden for them that in later life becomes would develop into a trauma.

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