ISSN 2454-5694
Volume 11 Number 2 December 2025

JOURNAL OF KOLKATA SOCIETY FOR ASIAN STUDIES

An International Bilingual Journal of
Social Science



Kolkata Society for Asian Studies

JOURNAL OF
KOLKATA SOCIETY FOR ASIAN STUDIES
Office: 3/25/1, R.K. Chatterjee Road, Kolkata-700042
Phone:+9432490361
Email: ksasianstudies@gmail.com
kspublication1@gmail.com
Website: www.kolkatasocietyforasianstudies.com www.jrksas.org

EDITORS
Ranjana Ray
Sarmistha De Basu

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

Ranjana Banerjee
Mahidas Bhattacharya
Sanjukta Dasgupta
Mita Banerjee
Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri
Tridib Chakraborti
Sharmistha Banerjee
Swati Sen Mandi
Krishna Bhattacharya
Satyabrata Chakrabarti
Anindya Jyoti Majumdar
President, KSAS (Ex-Officio)

Krunoslav Mikulan
John Adamson
Shyam Sundar Bhattacharya
Debi Chatterjee
Mina Dan
Ishita Mukhopadhyay
Sudipa Ray Bandyopadhyay
Mesbah Kamal
Rajib Bhattacharya
Durga Basu
Reshma Khatun
Arpita Basu
Treasurer, KSAS (Ex-Officio)

General Information

Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies is a double blind peer reviewed publication. It is an International Journal dedicated to the development of all branches of Social Sciences with special reference to Asian Studies. The Journal accepts theoretical and empirical papers on interdisciplinary studies. The Journal occasionally publishes special issues which mediate on a single topic. It also publishes research notes, reports, book reviews, etc.

JKSAS is a half-yearly (June and December) and bilingual (English and Bengali) journal. Only original unpublished papers are accepted. Papers submitted for consideration must not be under consideration elsewhere. The copyright of the accepted papers will lie with Kolkata Society for Asian Studies. Decisions of the Editorial Board are final.

Subscription and Business Affairs

	Annual Subscription	
Countries	**Institutional Subcribers**	**Individual**
India	**INR 1200.00**	**INR 1000.00**
Foreign Countries	**US $ 100.00**	**US $ 90.00**

All correspondences relating to subscription, advertisements and other business matters should be addressed to the SECRETARY, Kolkata Society for Asian Studies. Remittance should be payable to KOLKATA SOCIETY FOR ASIAN STUDIES

Copyright@Kolkata Society For Asian Studies.

Editorial

The winter issue of the Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies contains sixteen articles, which were submitted by authors from various academic backgrounds. These are all plagiarism tested, peer reviewed and edited wherever necessary. This volume begins with the article presented in memory of late Professor Vinoy K. Srivastava by Professor Ranjana Ray, entitled as *Beliefs and practices connected with Bhumijas, a tribe in Eastern India.* The paper covers the mortuary practices of the tribe Bhumij. The Bhumij has a system of mortuary practice, which shows Hinduised status of the tribe in burning of the dead body, as well as retention of the tribal custom, in megalithic burial of the ash and other remains after cremation. In this process clan of the deceased plays an important role in choosing site for megalithic burial and associated rituals.

There are two articles in Bengali. One is entitled as *Iswarchandra and Thakurdas: A Chronicle of a Father and his Son* (পিতা-পুত্র সম্বাদঙ্ঘ ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় এবং ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র) by Satrajit Banerjee from the department of Political Science, Bankura University, West Bengal. The paper points out that though much is written about the relationship and the guidance that Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar received from his mother, but the author has shown that Iswarshandra's father Thakurdas Bandyopadhyay also played an important role during his formative stage in Kolkata.

The other Bengali article titled as *Prevalence of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in East Indian states* (পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের ব্যাপকতা) is jointly written by Manotosh Gayen (Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata), Md Reza Kaushar Hasmi (Department of Geography, School of Earth Sciences, Central University of Karnataka) and Robi Routh (Department of Geographical and Geological Sciences, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland). The authors have dealt with pregnancy of teenage girls in the states of eastern India. They have done field work in the region and had identified factors responsible for this and have suggested measures for protection of the adolescence girls.

Except for the two papers mentioned above, the rest of the papers are in English.The paper, *A Journey for Understanding Folk Odyssey of Rural Bengal: Critical Evaluation of Pather Panchali (Song of the Road) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay*, pointed out simple rural, folk life through the eye of the author of the story, Pather Panchali. The paper is written by Sushil Sarkar, department of English, Kashipur Michael Madhusudan Mahavidyalaya, Purulia, West Bengal.The author

discussed the folk life in the light of the famous novelist Bibhutubhusan Bandyopadhaya.

Apotheosis of Motherhood: Nationalist Aspiration, Sarada Devi, and Self-Identity, by Debarati Maity, department of English, Netaji Nagar College for Women, Kolkata, delved in to the life of Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev. She discussed the concept of motherhood that prevailed in India at the time of Sarada Devi and how Ma Sarada had overcome all and had established herself as eternal mother.

Pratyashi Saikia Tandon of Sociology department, Kamla Arya Kanya P. G. College, Mirzapur, wrote about freedom movement in Assam with focus on the efforts of Kanaklata Baruah in the article, *Female Resistance and the Quest for Freedom in Assam with Special Reference to Kanaklata Baruah.* In the wake of freedom movement against British in Assam, Kanaklata Baruah not only fought for freedom but even sacrificed her life.

Kabita Chakraborty, of the Department of English, Netaji Nagar College for Women, Kolkata, wrote the article, *Capital punishment: An Analytical Appraisal.* The paper is a detailed analysis of death penalty in the law of various countries of the world through ancient to modern times.

Disability and Artificial Intelligence: Redefining Empowerment in India, written jointly by Divya Rani and Anchal, department of Political Science, Banaras Hindu University, focused on the use of AI for physically handicapped persons. Disability is considered as a stigma in our society. The authors recommended use of the artificial intelligence for making the life of the disabled people easier.

The paper, *From Struggle to Liberation: The Journey of Women in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain and Imayam's Beasts of Burden,* is written jointly by V. Sharmila and S. Kalamani, department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore. Though both the stories are based on suffering of women, the authors had gone into the details of the authors' views.

The Article, *Historical Development of English as a Second Language in Nagaland: A Perspective from a Multilingual Society*, is written by Kethokhrienuo Belho of the Nagaland University. English language was introduced by the British missionaries in Nagaland. There is no common indigenous language among the Nagas, who are divided into a number of tribes clubbed together as the Nagas by the British. It is presumed that the English as a second language has enhanced interaction between multilingual people.

Sanjoy Ahanthem and Yaiphaba Ningthoujam of the department of History, Dhanamanjuri University, and the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Manipur University,

respectively, have jointly written the paper, *Manipur and the Shan Kingdom of Pong: Political and Cultural Relations.* Authors have dealt on the history of the relationship between of Pongs of the Shan kingdom of upper Burma and the Meitei of Manipur during the periods of 7th to 18th Century AD.

The article, *Narratives of Nationhood: Corporealizing Memory in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers* by Sambhu R of the department of English, N.S.S. College, Pandalam (Affiliated to University of Kerala), Kerala, analyzed the novel by Baldwin in the perspective of sexual violence at the time of partition of India. The victims under the patriarchal system either had to commit suicide or were killed or had been stigmatized through rest of their lives.

As the title suggests the author, Pritam Rajak, department of Education, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University, has done research on educational programmes available for the students after completion of higher secondary in West Bengal. In the paper, *Which Course to Pursue after Higher Secondary Education in West Bengal: A Few Suggestions*, the author states that there are a wide collection of specialized courses available in fields of Arts and Science for the students to choose for their higher education.

Teaching profession involves a lot of stress on the teachers. Joint authors Trupti Subhrajyoti and Amulyakumar Acharya from the department of Education, Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha, had done research on pre service teachers-trainees. This was to find out the current status of psychological wellbeing of trainees-teachers enrolled in four years integrated B.Sc./B.A.-B.Ed. teacher education programme in Balasore district. The paper titled as *Psychological Wellbeing of Pre-service Teacher trainees- An Exploration* gives result of the research.

Sushanta Kumar Panda and Anshum Sharma, department of Education, University of Jammu wrote the paper titled as *Efficacy of Digital Initiatives in Higher Education System.* The authors have taken primary data from the postgraduate students of Jammu University and have concluded that the use of digital facilities have improved the learning process in the University and recommended research on the development of digital system in the betterment of pedagogy.

Redefining Pedagogy: The Impact of Chat GPT on Education System, written under joint authorship of Sakil Mahaldar, department of Education, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India and Rinki Khatun of Apex Teachers' Training College, Berachampa, North 24 Parganas. They had done research on the use of the Chat GPT and have found out that the system impacts positively. The work is with secondary data.

The author Krishnendu Roy, department of Education,Domkal Girls' College, Domkal, Murshidabad,

has done work on secondary data and had written the paper, *Role of Counseling in Managing Anxiety and Stress among College Students.* The research findings show that counselling is a great support for college going students, both for male and female.

Rebanta Gupta, Centre for Studies in Legal History, The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata, has written the paper, *Shared Spaces, Overlapping Cultures: Co-Spatiality, Syncretism, and the Cultural Universe of Zakaria Street.* Zakaria Street is located in Central Kolkata. In the short but important street exists people from Hindu Marwari and Muslim communities. The author has given history of development of the street and has shown how in the backdrop of competitive communalism and minority appeasement, harmonious coexistence prevails among the diverse communities living in the street.

Volume 11, number 2 of the Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies contains seventeen selected papers and an endowment lecture. The papers covered varied topics, though pedagogy had tilted the balance a little.

Editors thank the authors for the papers submitted with important information on their research and outcome of the same. The editors are grateful to the reviewers of the papers submitted for publication in this Journal. Heartfelt thanks are due to the press for printing the present volume.

Ranjana Ray
Sarmistha De Basu

Content

Editorial

Beliefs and practices connected with Bhumijas, a tribe in Eastern India. ... 1
(Late Professor Vinay K. Srivastava Endowment Lecture)
Ranjana Ray

Iswarchandra and Thakurdas: A Chronicle of a Father and his Son ... 12
(পিতা-পুত্র সম্বাদদ্ধ ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় এবং ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র)
Satrajit Banerjee

Prevalence of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in East Indian states ... 25
(পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের ব্যাপকতা)
Manotosh Gayen, Md Reza Kaushar Hasmi and Robi Routh

A Journey for Understanding Folk Odyssey of Rural Bengal: ... 38
Critical Evaluation of Pather Panchali (Song of the Road)
by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay
Sushil Sarkar

Apotheosis of Motherhood: Nationalist Aspiration, ... 51
Sarada Devi, and Self-Identity
Debarati Maity

Female Resistance and the Quest for Freedom in Assam with ... 67
Special Reference to Kanaklata Baruah.
Pratyashi Saikia Tandon

Capital punishment: An Analytical Appraisal ... 82
Kabita Chakraborty

Disability and Artificial Intelligence: Redefining Empowerment in India ... 100
Divya Rani and Anchal

From Struggle to Liberation: The Journey of Women in Anita Desai's ... 115
Fire on the Mountain and Imayam's Beasts of Burden
V. Sharmila and S. Kalamani

Historical Development of English as a Second Language in Nagaland: A Perspective from a Multilingual Society ... 130
Kethokhrienuo Belho

Manipur and the Shan Kingdom of Pong: Political and Cultural Relations ... 140
Sanjoy Ahanthem and Yaiphaba Ningthoujam

Narratives of Nationhood: Corporealizing Memory in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers ... 151
Sambhu R

Which Course to Pursue after Higher Secondary Education in West Bengal: A Few Suggestions ... 159
Pritam Rajak

Psychological Wellbeing of Pre-service Teacher trainees- An Exploration ... 181
Trupti Subhrajyoti and Amulya kumarAcharya

Efficacy of Digital Initiatives in Higher Education System ... 191
Sushanta Kumar Panda and Anshum Sharma

Redefining Pedagogy: The Impact of ChatGPT on Education System ... 206
Sakil Mahaldar and Rinki Khatun

Role of Counseling in Managing Anxiety and Stress among College Students ... 211
Krishnendu Roy

Shared Spaces, Overlapping Cultures: Co-Spatiality, Syncretism, and the Cultural Universe of Zakaria Street ... 222
Rebanta Gupta

Acknowledgement ... 240

Notes for Contribitors ... 243

Beliefs and practices connected with Bhumijas, a tribe in Eastern India

Ranjana Ray

Abstract

Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava had done research on a number issues related to mankind. He often treaded the paths, so far not charted by any other anthropologists before him. In this memorial lecture, topic as the beliefs and practices of the tribe living in Chotanagpurwas selected. The Bhumijs are a tribe, belonging to Munda group and speak in Kolarian. They live in the plateau area of Eastern India since prehistoric times. They follow a specific method of disposal of the dead. Firstly, they cremate the dead body. After cremation the ash and other remnants are buried at specified space and build megalith on them. Clan of the dead person plays an important role in selection of the bone burial ground. There exists a strong belief in soul and spirit in the process. The paper discusses on the practice of the Bhumij and its implication on the belief system of the said tribe.

Keywords : *Bhumij, Disposal of the dead, cremation, megalith, belief system.*

Introduction

Religion and belief system are studied by the anthropologists since the inception of the discipline Edward B. Tylor (1913) had given a universal definition of religion covering both the so called primitive and civilized worlds. Durkheim (1915), Frazer (1922), Evans-Pritchard (1965) and other social scientists have redefined the concept of religion on the basis of available contemporary data. Religion may be defined as a set of attitudes, beliefs and practices pertaining to supernatural power, whether the power is forces, Gods, spirits or demons. It is the human response to the apprehension of something or power, which is supernatural or supersensory (Ember et al, 2002, p. 439). Anthropological theories of belief system concern with various concepts of supernaturalism present in different societies at different times. Anthropologists have traced the evolution of religion. Tylor (1913) considered Animism as earliest form of religion. The term animism refers to the belief in unseen things, such as soul. When a person dies outwardly the body is same but something has escaped from the body. That is the belief in soul (Hendry, 1999). Frazer (1922:50) defined religion as a "propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to control and direct the course of nature and human life. It may be

*Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava Memorial Lecture delivered on December 3, 2024 in virtual mode organized by Kolkata Society for Asian Studies

said that religion consists of two basic elements, theoretical and practical, namely a belief in power higher than man and an attempt to propitiate and please them".

India is a land of cultural diversity. Religion and belief system varies from one society to theother. For understanding evolution of religion, social scientists had looked into the belief system of the so called primitive society. Vidyarthy (1963) proposed the concept on Man-Nature-Spirit complex. Vidyarthi's theory is based on his work on a tribe called Maler who lived in the erstwhile state of Bihar. Closeness to nature and dependence on nature impacts on the social organization and belief system of mankind. People, who live in the forest or in the close proximity of the forest and depend on the forest for their livelihood, have their culture and society conditioned to forest. Interpersonal relationship is arranged around adaptation to exploitation of resources. Ceaseless anxiety for survival revolves around supernatural beings, religious personnel and ceremonies that are closely linked to the necessity of the people. Religion of many of the tribal people is fashioned according to their subsistence mechanism (Majumdar and Madan, 1956).

Religion, belief system and rituals are closely connected with rites of passage. Of the entire rites of passage funeral as rite of separation is of much importance in any society (Turner, 1967). Mortuary ritual is a complex interplay of rituals, social and environmental phenomena. Mortuary ritual consists of both technical and ritual acts (Radcliffe Brown 1952:143). Technically, burial customs provide the disposal of the unpleasant body of the deceased. Ritually, mortuary rites consist of a number of symbolic acts. Mourning requirements are based on degrees of kinship (Van Gennep, 1960). Death and its rituals reflect the social values (Turner, 1967). Ethnographically two types of burial as primary and secondary are found. But secondary burial has received much more attention in ethnographic literature.

Of all the life cycle rituals of human beings, those connected with the dead has endured a long precedence in the history of man. There are evidences of careful disposal of the dead from the prehistoric time onward. In India evidence of careful burial comes from the Mesolithic period (around 10,000 yrs BCE). They mostly buried their dead beneath the habitation floor (Sankalia, 1965). Grave goods are common. Desecrated cemetery at specific place is of later development from Neolithic period onward. Erection of Megaliths over the interment began with Neolithic culture as is noted in the earliest bed at Brahmagiri in South India (wheeler, 1948). Belief and spirituality connected with mortuary practices areimportant land marks for calibrating human intellectual level. Erection of Megaliths is an important part of the cult of the dead. Both prehistoric and modern megaliths found in India. Present example is from a tribe called Bhumij. Standard anthropological methodology followed is followed for the present study.

The Tribe Bhumij

Chhotanagpur fringe area is homeland to a group of tribe, known as Bhumij. The word 'Bhumij' means born out of soil. Bhumij are mainly distributed in the districts of Manbhum, Singhbhum in the state of Jharkhand. They are found in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa and in the districts of Purulia and Medinipur in the state of West Bengal. The Bhumij are a branch of the Munda. Bhumij are living in the region from prehistoric times. They are settled agriculturists. At one time the Bhumij were huge tracts of land owners and were very powerful. They had their kings and kingdom in the area. The British subjugated them. The Bhumij attracted notice of the British Raj from a very early time (Dalton, 1872). They are also much Hinduised. At the same time they also have retained the traditional socio-cultural traits. The Bhumij belief system presents interesting case of assimilation of traits from the surrounding Hindu communities, especially in the rituals and religious practices. The Bhumij of Eastern India lives in close proximity with a large number of people belonging to different communities having diverse belief system and practices. Mortuary rites of the Bhumij are focused in the present paper. Research had been carried out among the Bhumij residing in the adjoining area of the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand. Investigation was carried out in the Bhumij villages having their own megalithic burial sites. The study area included four villages of East Singhbhum district in the state of Jharkhand and three villages in Midnapur district, West Bengal. The villages selected from district Singhbhum are Uldah, Pairaguri, Narsingpur and Gurajor. The villages are near Ghatshila town and the steel city Jamshedpur (Muhkopadhyay, 1999). Villages studied in Midnapur district are Silda, Rajdoha and Goyalbera near the Jhargram town (Sahu, 1999). Standard Anthropological methods are followed for the study.

Each of the local divisions of Bhumijis divided into a number of exogamous totemistic clan groups. These clan groups are known as *gotra* or *killi*. Bhumij believes that the tribe, wherever they may live at present had its origin at some ancestral village. Each clan has got its customary burial grounds for ash and bones at the ancestral village. Cremation of the body first and then erection of megalithic structure over a secondary burial are the predominant method of disposal of the dead. Bhumij are patriarchal and patrilineal. Descent and inheritance is traced through father's line. The internal structure of Bhumij society does not differ in principle from the Hos or Mundas (Dalton, 1872; Risley 1891; Das, 1931; Sinha, 1962; Singh, 1994). The Bhumij are divided into four divisions on the basis of territory. These are (1) Deshi for those who lived in Singhbhum; (2) Tamaria from Tamar province of Ranchi; (3) Sikhariya who originated from Sikharbhum; (4) Patkumia from Patkum; (5) Shelo, a group who were black smiths; and (6) Barabhumia whose ancestors came from Barabhum. These groups were once supposed to be from respective regions. Each of the local divisions is again divided into a number of exogamous sections known as *gotra* or *killi*. These are exogamous totemistic clan

groups. The relation between Killi and the territorial divisions are not fixed in nature. Sinha (1962) has stated that actual state of distribution of Bhumij clans is not easy to reconstruct. He found that in a village the headman and the priest belong to the clans who were the earliest settlers in the Bhumij villages. They have the privilege of cultivating the best lands. Some of the clans found among the studied communities of eastern India may be named as, *Badda* (after Pabda fish), *Bhuiya* (after Netur fish), *Deo* (after a Fly), *Altara or Alta* (extract of lac), *Jaru (*Gourd), *Kaira* (Pumpkin), *Gulgu* (Shal fish), *Tesa* (A small bird), *Sanri* (a small bird), *Tubang* (A mushroom) etc. The clan group will not harm the clan objects, nor would they take them as food. Clan is important for marriage and also for death. Clan preserves the identity of the Bhumij. Each clan has got its own secondary burial ground, believed to be in its ancestral village (Dey and Ray 2003).

Rites of Passage of the Bhumij

The rituals connected with the Bhumij show phenomena of tribe caste amalgamation In case of delivery of a baby at home; a midwife belonging to the Hindu *Hari* caste attends a woman. The birth pollution is observed for nine days. On the ninth day, a Hindu barber pares the nails, shaves the beard and cuts the hair of the newborn's father. After this, the mother along with the baby is considered as clean and accepted by the society.

Clan organization is strictly observed at the time of marriage. A man may not marry a woman of his own clan. Usually they seek partner from families where *bhayadi* or mutual recognition of kinship is maintained. Adult marriage is practiced by the Bhumij. Widow re-marriage is prevalent. Bride price is common.

Each group of Bhumij believes that the tribe had its origin at some ancestral village. Each clan has got its customary burial grounds for bones at the ancestral village. Mortuary practices of the Bhumij are important for understanding the social organization and belief system of the Bhumij.

Mortuary Practice of the Bhumij

So far as the Bhumij are concerned, the cremation of the body and erection of megalithic structure over a secondary burial are the predominant method of disposal of the dead. The custom described here is mainly of the disposal in case of natural death among the Bhumij community. When a person dies in the village the body is laid on the courtyard and prepared for the last rites. The body of the dead person is cleaned and in case of an adult male it is shaven. Female members of the dead person's family smear the body with oil and turmeric paste and wrap it in a new piece of cloth, used as shroud. Garlands made of flowers are placed on the body and the face is often decorated with pastes of sandalwood. A bier is readily made from bamboo strips. The poll bearers carry the body to the burning

place. Women with broom stick and cow dung solution in an earthen pot proceed in front of the funeral procession. They clean the way by brushing with broom stick and by sprinkling of the cow dung solution. No female member accompanies the funeral procession to the cremation ground. They go up to the end of the village or up to the end of the deceased's homestead.

The Bhumij primarily cremates the body. There is no fixed cremation ground for them. In most of the villages the dead may be cremated at any available space. The burning place is usually selected near a water body. It could very well be at the back of the dead man's house. A pit is dug at the place of cremation. Some dry wood are placed inside the pit. The body covered in a shroud of new cloth is laid on the wood. Some more wood is piled over the body to cover it. Usually the eldest son of the deceased first touches the face of the dead with a flaming torch. In the absence of the eldest son the youngest son may do the duty. In case a man does not have a son, any male member from the father's side will do the ritual. Some elder male members tear a part of the dead man's shroud and tie it loosely around the neck of the person who puts fire to the face of the dead. Then the person is led out from the cremation spot and other male members set fire to the pyre. A fowl is then killed by breaking its neck. The blood is poured over the burning pyre. They believe that it propitiates the spirit of the dead. The fowl is then cooked and eaten with rice beer in the cremation ground. After the body is burnt men carry water in pitchers and pour over the pyre and clench the fire. They put out the fire completely and take the ashes, charcoal and charred bones out of the pit. After the cremation they join the person who has lit the face of the dead and take a dip in the water body nearby. They then return to the house of the deceased. On the way back from the burning place they pick up a *jujup* branch place a stone on it and all the members spit on it. This ensures that the soul of the dead will not follow them nor harm them. If there is a *pipul* tree at a cross road they embrace the tree and partake a part of its bark. At the house of the deceased they touch fire and take rice and lentil with water. The Bhumij observe mourning for ten days. The relatives consider themselves as unclean on those days.

On the day after the cremation, female relatives of the deceased, mainly the daughter in law, go back to the cremation ground accompanied by the village priest, *Laya*. They carry a new earthen pot with them. Charred bones are picked up from the assumed regions of the knee, neck, forehead, breast and elbow. The bones are then smeared with oil and turmeric paste. An effigy of the dead man is made on the ground with the help of the ashes. They place the bones on the legs, naval pit and neck of the effigy. The bones are then wrapped in a piece of yellow cloth and placed very carefully in the clay pot. They say that the bones are raised with extreme care, as much care as is given while lifting a newborn child. The pot is closed with a clay lid. Over it a cloth is tied. The pot is then taken back to the deceased's house. The pot is either kept buried under the soil near the *tulsi,* the sacred plant of the house, or hung tied from the eve of the roof of the house. Later on the pot is carried to its respective

places of megalithic burial. Sometimes they place an elongated piece of rock on the hole of the pyre to mark the spot.

The relatives on the father's side of the deceased do not take cooked rice until the third day. On this day they take bitter rice, boiled with *margosa* (Neem) leaves. For the next ten days only boiled rice and vegetables are taken by them. On the second day the son who lit the face of the dead goes to a water body, takes up a *koosh* grass, and plants it by the pond. Relatives place food and other favorite items of the deceased at the base of the *koosh*. This is done every day until the tenth day. On that day the person sits by the water body and offers ten rice balls to the deceased by throwing them in the water. Then he takes a dip and comes up. A Hindu barber shaves him and he puts on a new cloth given by his maternal uncle.

Between the tenth and twelfth day of the death a ritual known as *Purak Pindadan* takes place. On the day a barber, a washer man and a Brahmin priest are invited to perform the mourning rituals. These people belong to Hindu caste communities. This part of the ceremony is a trait imbibed from the Hindu custom. The barber shaves the head of the male members and also pairs the nails of both the male and female mourners. The washer man washes the clothes of the mourners. The Brahmin priest performs the ceremony of offering food, clothes and other necessities of afterlife to the ancestor. The barber, the washer man and the Brahmin are paid in cash and kind in the same *jajmani* system as the neighboring Hindu community people. The person, who performed the *Mukhagni* or the touching of the face at the time of the cremation, does the ceremony of Purak *Pindadan.* In the evening, the priest accompanies the person to the nearby water body. On the bank of the water body, the priest makes a small heap of clay on the northern corner. At the same time, he also prepares ten rice balls with unsalted butter. The rice balls are placed on the mound. Before this, the person bathes and puts on new cloths. After performing *Purak Pindadan* he takes vegetarian food.

On thirteenth day of death the *sradh*or mourning ceremony takes place. On this day all the relatives are invited. The relatives cook food in the courtyard in an earthen pot. After cooking, the pot is broken and thrown away. The same day, the priest performs a ritual called *Sorashdan*, meaning that gifts of sixteen objects are offered to the departed and to the ancestors. These are beetle nut, clothes, shoes, umbrellas, utensils, water, rice etc. The next stage is the *Pindadan.* The son or equivalent relation offers rice made into small balls mixed with, honey, milk and ghee (unsalted butter) to the deceased and to the ancestors. It is performed in the courtyard of the deceased. After performing all the rituals, the relatives and the other invited villagers participate in a communal feast on the courtyard. These rituals are examples of acculturation of Hindu traits.

Erection of the Megalithic structure

The tribe Bhumij is divided into a number of exogamous totemistic clans. Clan organization is very important among the Bhumij. Every clan has got a designated burial ground where the bones collected in the earthen pot are buried and a megalithic structure is erected on it. The bone is not buried immediately after cremation but mostly done within three days of the cremation. As mentioned earlier for these three days they take only bitter rice. The pot is carried by a male member of the family to the *sasan.* The man is accompanied by the tribal priest, *Laya* and other men folk of the family.

The Bhumij calls the burial ground for the bones as *sasan*. In the *sasan* of respective clan, men folk of the family, first select the place, where the megalithic structure should be placed. The burial sites are closely linked to clan organization. The burial sites are fixed and each clan has got its specific megalithic burial ground. Bhumij living in faraway places would travel to the clan burial grounds with the pot of bones accompanied by the Bhumij priest *laya*. A menhir is erected at the start of the burial. The slab on the top of the dolmen is known as *pata*. Each line of *pata* indicates the descent of a particular lineage. Usually the line for descent goes from west to east. Parallel to the line of *pata* run the *piri. These* represent different families and lineages. At a burial site one can count the number of lineages belonging to a particular clan. Some attempt could be made at finding the time range of burial practice. The selection of the place is made according to the descent line of the dead person. There is a hereditary keeper for each megalithic burial ground. He is known as *Rakhdar.* He enjoys free holding of land for his services. He points out the family line. At the selected place a hole is dug on the ground. Water mixed with cow dung is sprayed on the hole to purify it. The essential food items of the day-to-day life, such as, rice, lentil, onion, potato etc. along with a few coins are then placed in the hole. The pot containing the bones is then placed in the hole. Meanwhile some clan members go to the nearby outcrops in search of suitable stone slabs. They select a stone slab and three or four smaller pieces, which may serve as support to the slab. They carry them to the burial ground. The stone slab is cleaned with water and purified by sacrificing a fowl on top of it. They place the stone slab over the hole. The slab is supported by the three corner stones similar to a dolmen. Near the mouth of the hole balls made of cooked rice paste are placed. Most of the burial grounds are kept in order. The Bhumij ritually clear the ground off overgrowth on the last day of the Bengali year, usually in the middle of April. The size of the flat slab varies from six feet by four feet and a smaller may be of two feet by two feet in dimension. Inscriptions are often found on the slabs. Bhumij who live in the fringe area of plain and plateau in West Bengal at present are constructing brick and mortar structure over the pit in which the bones are buried (Ray, 2000).

A survey was made among the Bhumij of the villages studied in West Bengal for the megalithic burial sites of some of the clans (Sahu 1999; Dey and Ray 2003). These are given in the table below.

The table presents names of the clans and their respective megalithic grounds and location of the village in the respective districts of West Bengal and Jharkhand

Name of the Clan	Village	District
1. Badda	Dorbora	Purulia
2. Bhuiya	Pushradarh	Purulia
3. Altara	Labani	Midnapur
4. Deo	Labani	Midnapur
5. Jaru	Ulidih	Singhbhum
6. Kaira	Bhulaljora	Purulia
7. Gulgu	Bhulaljora	Purulia
8. Tesa	Belberma	Purulia
9. Sanri	Belaberma	Purulia
10. Jugi	Jugilong	Singhbhum
11. Hemron	Hensela	Purulia
12. Tubang	Dhanamara	Purulia
13. Hansa	Gopalpur	Singhbhum
14. Shama	Uldah	Singhbhum
15. Dandakrishi	Pairaguri	Singhbhum

The table shows that the Bhumij of west Bengal probably had their earlier homes in the districts of Purulia and Singhbhum. Both are adjacent districts to each other and are located on the fringe area of Chhotanagpur plateau and 'Rarh' Bengal, the older alluvial plain of the River Ganga.

Ancient Megaliths of the Region

Megaliths go back to a very long time in the past in the region. Bhumij in the Chhotangpur fringe area had been practicing megalithic burial since a very early time. Megaliths are as old as the tribes settled in the region. Ghurye (1926) had carried out survey of the megaliths and had estimated a date of 1000 BCE. Megaliths are common in the Chotanagpur plateau region and its fringe area. Exploration was done for the ancient megaliths of Singhbhum district of Jharkhand (Sen 1969; Ghosh et al. 1984). Prehistoric megaliths of the region are of dolmenoid type and contained urn burial similar to Bhumij system. Ancient burials have eroded along the slope. Prehistoric burials yielded celts and potteries. The prehistoric megaliths may belong to the cultural sequence of Neolithic to chalcolithic age. Charcoals dated from prehistoric site of Barudih in Sanjay river valley, points a date approximately to 1000 BCE.

Religious practices of the Bhumij

Risley (1891) described the Bhumij as Hinduised branch of the Mundas. Sinha (1953) had carried out study of the religion of Bhumij residing in the chhotanagpur plateau region. Bhumij are basically animist in their belief system like the Mundas but at the same time they have imbibed a lot of traits of Hindu religion. Census of India puts Bhumij under Hindu religion. Bhumij pursue animistic religion. They worship their own tribal deities as well as Hindu gods and goddesses but they do not build any temple (Dey and Ray 2003; Ray 2012). Bhumij worship mainly the presiding deities of nature, namely, the sun, forest, hills, streams etc. Idolatry is absent. Deities are regarded by the Bhumij as powerful beings but never as moral beings (Sinha 1953). Religious activities are for happiness and wellbeing of this life. They do not believe in Karma or reincarnation. They have the custom of calling back the soul, known as *roadaka.* The megalithic custom of mortuary practice is in contrast to the Hindu *sradh* ceremony. Although the Bhumijas have incorporated a number of Hindu religious traits under the influence of low rank Brahmin priests and vaisnava preceptors, they still maintain their allegiance to the traditional gods, the deities *Buro Buri,* the ancestral god and goddess, in the form of a stones, smeared with vermilion, which is set in a sacred grove known by the name *sarna,* located near the village. A *Sarna* is composed of purely jungle trees, such as *Sal (Shorearobusta)* and others. These can very well be recognized with certainty as a fragment of the primeval forest, left standing to form an abode for the aboriginal deities. Presence of sacred grove suggests an early form of naturalistic worship. Belief in soul and spirit plays an important part in the life of a Bhumij.

The tribe has retained earlier traits especially in relation to the rituals connected with the disposal of the dead. In eastern India though the tribal group has undergone much cultural change in the form of sanskritisation (Das, 1931; Sinha, 1959), Bhumij people has retained the Mundari traits in the belief and practices related to the disposal of the dead. In spite of the large scale Hindu influence two important factors come up in their belief system, their close connection with the ancestors and the sense of strong solidarity through clan organization. Such belief is expressed in the offering of grave good. They keep the remains of their ancestors in the land near to their agricultural field but a little away from the villages. This points out that they wish that the agricultural field be protected by the spirit of the departed ancestors. They do not want to deprive the ancestors of the proximity to the field that had provided sustenance to the departed when they were alive. It may be said that the ancestors are placed in a specific place so that they may preserve the ground for the Bhumij and protect the harvest.

Bhumij do not want the spirit to leave the ground. For that reason they place food items in front of the megalithic structure not only right after the interment but also annually on festive occasions, so that the soul may not wander away but stay nearby and give protection to those the soul has left behind. This also indicates the awe and fear that leads the people to keep the spirit inside the structure.

The burial practices may also be connected to fertility rites as suggested by scholars for urn burial (Chisholm, 1993; Rajan, 1998; Sundara, 2009). This is also evident in the way the charred bones are treated while placing them in the pot. The task is given to the women. They are instructed by the tribal priest to pick up the bones in the same way as one would pick up a newly born.

At the same time the custom of clan wise designation of megalithic burial ground makes sure that

the dead spirit stays close to the other spirits belonging to the same clan group. Social identity, group solidarity is an important part of the belief system. The group's subsistence, identity, social organization, economy, world view and philosophy rested on its outlook towards the dead, the ancestors. Strict adherence to the clan through the rituals through life cycle of a Bhumij, especially for the selection of the last resting place points to its strong sense of social identity (Dey and Ray, 2003; Ray 2012).

References

- Chisholm, James S. 1993. Death, Hope and Sex, *Current Anthropology* 34(1) : 1 – 24
- Dalton, E.T. 1872. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta (Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing) VI – 327.
- Das, T.C. 1931. *The Bhumijas of Seraikella*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, Anthropological papers, N.S., 2.
- Dey, Subhro and Ray, Ranjana 2003 Bhumij mortuary practice: A case of tribal Hindu interaction, *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society.* 38: 215 – 221.
- Durkheim, Emile 1915. *The Elementary forms of the Religious life.* Translated by J. W. Swain. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Ember, Carol R., Ember Melvin and Peregrine, Peter N. 2002 *Anthropology.* Pearson Education. Pvt Ltd, Delhi.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1965 *Theories of Primitive Religion.* Oxford: Clarendon.
- Frazer, Sir James George 1922 *Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion.* Abridged editon< London: Mac Million.
- Ghosh, A. K.; Ray, Ranjana; Chatterjee, P. G.; Nanda, P. and Bellwood, P. S. Bellwood 1984 Archaeological Reconnaissance in the Sanjai Valley, Singhbhum district, Bihar. *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association.* 5: 29 – 37.
- Ghurye, G. S. 1926. Funerary Monuments of India. *Man in India.* 6: 26 – 57 & 100 – 139.
- Hendry, Joy 1999. *An introduction to Social Anthropology.* Hampshire: Mac Millan Press Ltd.
- Majumdar D. N. and Madan, T. N. 1956. *An Introduction to Social Anthropology.* Calcutta: Asia Publishing House.
- Mukjhopadhyay, Bedabati 1999 *A Study of the Megalithic burial practice among the Bhumij communities in Galudih area, Bihar*. Unpublished M. Sc. Dissertation, Calcutta University.
- Radcliff-Brown, A. R. 1952 *Structure and Function in Primitive Society.* London: Cohen and West.
- Rajan, K. 1988. Archaeology of South Arcot region with special reference to Megalithic burial Complea. *Man and Environment*, XXIII (1) : 93 – 105.
- Ray, Ranjana. 2000. Some notes on the Megalithic burial practice found among the Bhumij Communities from eastern India, in *Prehistoria,* 2000 official journal of UISPP. year 1, issue 1:82 –90. Liege, UISPP.
- Ray, Ranjana. 2012. Beliefs and practices connected with megalithic burial customs in eastern india, in *The Intellectual and spiritual expressions of non literate people,* Anati, E.; Oosterbeek, L.; Mailland, F. (eds.). XVI World congress of UISPP, (Florianopolis, 4 – 10 Sept. 2011) Oxford, Archaeopress BAR-IS 2360. pp 91-96.
- Ray, Ranjana and Subhra Dey. 2003. Bhumij burial practices: A study on caste tribal interaction. *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society,* 38 (243) : 363-373.
- Risley, H. H. 1891. *The Tribes and castes of Bengal.* Vo.1 & 2. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariate Press.
- Sahu, Ruby. 1999. *A brief socio-economic profile of Bhumij people living in three villages, Misnapore, West Bengal*. Unpublished M. Sc. Dissertation, Calcutta University.

- Sankalia, H. D. 1965, *Excavations of Langhnaj: 1944-1963. Part I Archaeology.* Puna. Deccan College Postgraduate Research Institute.
- Sen, D. 1969. Profile of a Preliterate culture in the Sanjai Valley, Singbhum. Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society. 4: 17 – 29.
- Singh, K. S. 1994. *The Sheduled Tribes of India.* Anthropological Survey of Survey of India. Delhi: Oxford University Press. III: 167 – 172.
- Sinha, S. C. 1953. Some Aspects of Changes in Bhumij Religion. *Man in India.* 33(2): 148 – 162.
- Sinha, S. C. 1959. Bhumij-Kshatriya Social movement in South Manbhum. *Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta.* Pp. 9 -32.
- Sinha, S. C. 1962 State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India. *Man in India.* 42(1): 35-60.
- Sundara, A. 2009. Dr. S. P. Gupta's contribution to the study of Disposal of the Deadin Ancient India. In *Dr. Swarajya Prakash Gupta: An Academic and Human Profile.* V. N. Misra and A. K. Kanungo (ed). Indian Society for Prehistoric and Quaternary Studies. Pune. pp.: 155 – 196.
- Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbol: Aspect of Ndembu Ritual.* Cornell: Cornell University Press.
- Tylor, E. B. 1913. *Primitive Culture.* Vol. 2. London: John Murray
- Van Gennep, Arnold P. 1960. *Rites of Passage*. Vol. 1. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Vidyarthy, L. P. 1963. *The Maler: A Study in Nature-Man-Spirit complex of a Hill Tribe in Bihar.* Bookland, University of California.
- Wheeler, R.E.M. 1948. Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947 : Megalithic and other culture in Mysore state, *Ancient India* 4, pp. 180 – 310.

Bio Profile of the Author:
Professor Emeritus
Formerly of the Department of Anthropology,
Calcutta University
Chief Editor of The Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies

Iswarchandra and Thakurdas: A Chronicle of a Father and his Son

Satrajit Banerjee

Iswarchandra's devotion to his mother, Bhagawati Devi, has been portrayed as a unique example that occupies a venerable position in the minds of the common Bengali populace. She is indeed revered as a glorified symbol of motherhood. In the hagiographical renderings of Iswarchandra, narratives of Bhagawati Devi's adoration of Iswarchandra are extensively visible. One of his biographers, his brother Shambhu Chandra, wrote that the affection shown by Bhagawati Devi towards Ishwarchandra was distinctly noticeable compared to that shown to other sons. Eventually, Bhagawati Devi is the major source of inspiration for various reformative endeavours of Ishwarchandra, such as the introduction of widow remarriage and combating conservatism and untouchability. In fact, his unflinching love for humanity, generosity, and compassionate attitude came from his mother. However, Ishwarchandra started living in Kolkata with his father, Thakurdas, from childhood till he finished his education and took up a job. Since he has spent the formative phases of his life with Thakurdas, it cannot be denied that his father had a significant and lasting impact on the formation of Ishwarchandra's outlook, attitude, and personality development. Yet, in Bengal, Ishwarchandra's mother is glorified to a great extent, while his father is largely overlooked. This article will try to review the existing perception by taking into account the intricacies of his relationship with his father.

Keywords: *Iswarchandra, Thakurdas, Bhagawati Devi, English-Sanskrit education, Widow Remarriage*

সংক্ষিপ্তসার: সাধারণ বাঙালি হৃদয়ে এবং মস্তিষ্কে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মাতৃভক্তির বৃত্তান্ত এক অতুলনীয় দৃষ্টান্ত হিসেবে প্রচলিত রয়েছে। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের জীবনীকারদের আলোচনাতেও উল্লিখিত হয়েছে যে, তিনি ভগবতীদেবীর বিশেষ স্নেহভাজন ছিলেন। তাঁর অন্যতম জীবনীকার, সহোদর, শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছেন যে, অন্যান্য পুত্রদের তুলনায়, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের প্রতি ভগবতীদেবীর স্নেহ প্রদর্শনের পার্থক্য সুস্পষ্টভাবে পরিলক্ষিত হত। প্রকৃতপক্ষে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের অনেক গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভাবনা ও কর্মকাণ্ডের ভাগীদার এবং অনুপ্রেরণা ছিলেন ভগবতীদেবী। স্বাভাবিকভাবেই তাঁর জীবনে 'জননী জন্মভূমিশ্চঃ স্বর্গাদপী গরিয়সী' ছিল। কিন্তু বাস্তবে, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র শিশুকাল থেকেই তাঁর বাবা, ঠাকুরদাসের সঙ্গে কলিকাতায় এসে বসবাস করতে শুরু করেছিলেন এবং শিক্ষা দীক্ষা গ্রহণ করা থেকে শুরু করে চাকুরীতে যোগদান করা পর্যন্ত তিনি তাঁর পিতার সান্নিধ্যেই ছিলেন। তাই ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মানসলোকর গঠন বা চারিত্রিক গুণাবলীর ও ব্যক্তিত্বের বিকাশে তাঁর পিতৃদেবের প্রভাব কোন অর্থেই অস্বীকার করা যায় না। অথচ বাঙালি সমাজে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মা যতটা মহিমান্বিত, তাঁর বাবা তা থেকে অনেকটাই বঞ্চিত। বর্তমান প্রবন্ধে প্রচলিত এই ধারণার গন্ডি অতিক্রম করে একটি বিকল্প আখ্যান নির্মাণের প্রয়াস নেওয়া হবে।

সূচক শব্দ: *ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র, ঠাকুরদাস, ভগবতী দেবী, ইংরেজী-সংস্কৃত শিক্ষা, বিধবা বিবাহ*

ঊনবিংশ শতাব্দীর বাঙালি মনীষীদের জীবনালেখ্য রচনাকারীদের আলোচনায় অধিকাংশ সময় বরেণ্য ব্যক্তিদের মাতৃভক্তির বৃত্তান্ত উপস্থাপিত হয়েছে। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের জীবনীকারদের আলোচনাতেও তার ব্যাতিক্রম ঘটেনি। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের জীবদ্দশাতেই চণ্ডীচরণ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় 'মা ও ছেলে' নামক গ্রন্থটি প্রকাশ করেছিলেন। সতিকুমার নাগ 'বিদ্যাসাগরের মাতা ভগবতী দেবী' নামক একটি সংকলন গ্রন্থ প্রকাশ করেছিলেন, যেখানে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের একাধিক জীবনীকার এবং বাংলার কয়েকজন স্বনামধন্য ব্যক্তিদের লেখনীতে ভগবতীদেবীর চরিত্র-মাহাত্য আলোচিত হয়েছে। রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর তাঁর 'চারিত্র পূজা' নামক গ্রন্থে ভগবতী দেবীর চরিত্র চিত্রাঙ্কন করতে গিয়ে তাকে 'লিথোগ্রাফপ্টে' প্রকাশিত 'দেবীমূর্তি' হিসেবে তুলনা করেছেন। (ঠাকুর ১৩৪৩:২১) এই বইটিতে ভগবতী দেবীকে নিয়ে একটি সুদীর্ঘ আলচনা রয়েছে। তবে রবীন্দ্রনাথ নিজেই উপলব্ধি করেছিলেন যে, এই দীর্ঘ আলোচনা সমালোচকদের দৃষ্টি এড়িয়ে যাবে, সে কারণে সমালোচকদের জিজ্ঞাসার জবাব-স্বরূপ এই প্রবন্ধের মধ্যেই তিনি লিখেছিলেন "আশঙ্কা করিতেছি, সমালোচক মহাশয় মনে করিতে পারেন যে, বিদ্যাসাগর সম্বন্ধীয় ক্ষুদ্র প্রবন্ধে তাহার জননী সম্বন্ধে এতখানি আলোচনা কিছু পরিমাণ বহির্ভূত হইয়া পড়িতেছে। কিন্তু একথা তাহারা স্থির জানিবেন, এখানে জননীর চরিতে এবং পুত্রের চরিতে প্রভেদ নাই, তাহারা যেন পরম্পরের পুনরাবৃত্তি। অতএব, বিদ্যাসাগরের জীবনে তাহার মাতার জীবনচরিত কেমন করিয়া লিখিত হইয়াছে, তাহা ভালোরূপ আলোচনা না করিলে উভয়েরই জীবনী অসম্পূর্ণ থাকে।"(ঠাকুর ১৩৪৩: ২৪-২৫)

শ্রী নারায়ণচন্দ্র মুখোপাধ্যায় প্রণীত 'বীরসিংহের সিংহ শিশু' গ্রন্থে 'মা ও ছেলের কথা' (পৃষ্ঠা ১৬৯ থেকে ১৭৮) নামের একটি অধ্যায় রয়েছে, কিন্তু ঠাকুরদাসকে নিয়ে পৃথকভাবে কোন অধ্যায় সেখানে নেই। শ্রী শরৎকুমার রায় রচিত 'বিদ্যাসাগর চরিত' গ্রন্থে 'ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়' শীর্ষক অধ্যায়টি মাত্র সাড়ে তিন পাতা জুড়ে, কিন্তু 'জননী ভগবতীদেবী' শীর্ষক অধ্যায়টির আলোচনা প্রায় নয় পাতা (পৃষ্ঠা ১২ থেকে ২০)। বিভিন্ন বন্ধুস্থানীয় এবং পরিচিত ব্যক্তিদের সঙ্গে আলাপচারিতার সময় মায়ের প্রসঙ্গ উত্থাপিত হলে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র অকুণ্ঠভাবে তাঁর মায়ের গুণকীর্তন করতেন এবং তাঁর জীবনে জননীর অবদানের বিষয়টি উল্লেখ করতেন। শরৎকুমার রায় লিখেছেন যে, মায়ের প্রসঙ্গ উঠলে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বলতেন,"আমি যদি মায়ের গুণরাশির শতাংশের একাংশমাত্র পাইতাম তাহা হইলে কৃতার্থ হইতাম। আমি এমন মায়ের সন্তান, ইহা গৌরবের বিষয় বলিয়া মনে করি"। (রায় ১৩৪১: ১০২) ইংরেজিতে লেখা ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পূর্ণ-দৈর্ঘ্যের জীবনী গ্রন্থে, রচয়িতা সুবল চন্দ্র মিত্র অবশ্য ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়কে নিয়ে পৃথকভাবে সংক্ষিপ্ত আলোচনা করেছেন। বিনয় ঘোষের 'বিদ্যাসাগর ও বাঙালি সমাজ' গ্রন্থে ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় এবং ভগবতী দেবী উভয়কে নিয়েই পর্যাপ্ত আলোচনা করেছেন। তিনি লিখছেন, "মা ছিলেন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের জীবনের ডায়নামো।" (ঘোষ ১৯৮৪: ১৬) ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র সম্পর্কে গান্ধীজি লিখছেন, "আপনার মায়ের অনেক গুণ তিনি পেয়েছিলেন"। (গান্ধী ১৩৬৭:৩৬) প্রসঙ্গত উল্লেখ্য, স্বয়ং ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বীরসিংহ ভগবতী বিদ্যালয় স্থাপন করেছিলেন (১৪ এপ্রিল, ১৮৯০) যার অস্তিত্ব এখনো রয়েছে। (অধিকারী ১৯৭০:২৩) কিন্তু ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়কে নিয়ে এরকম কোন উদ্যোগ তাঁর তরফে দেখা যায়নি।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র, নিঃসন্দেহে তাঁর মা ভগবতী দেবীর বিশেষ স্নেহভাজন ছিলেন। শম্ভুচন্দ্র বিদ্যারত্ন লিখেছিলেন, "জননীরও সকল পুত্র অপেক্ষা অগ্রজ মহাশয়ের প্রতি আন্তরিক স্নেহ ছিল"। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ৪০) প্রকৃতপক্ষে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের অনেক গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভাবনা ও কর্মকান্ডের ভাগীদার ছিলেন ভগবতীদেবী। বিধবা বিবাহের প্রচলনের সপক্ষে, গোঁড়ামী ও অস্পৃশ্যতার বিরুদ্ধে, সোচ্চার হওয়ার ক্ষেত্রে মানুষকে ভালোবাসার দীক্ষা প্রভৃতি বিভিন্ন বিষয়ে সমর্থন ও পৃষ্ঠপোষকতা তিনি পেয়েছিলেন ভগবতী দেবীর কাছ থেকেই। চণ্ডীচরণ লিখছেন, "মায়ের কাছ থেকেই সেবা, পরোপকার, পরদুঃখকাতরতা, দান ও ত্যাগের স্বভাব পেয়েছিলেন বিদ্যাসাগর"। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৩৬৭: ২৫) এছাড়াও ভগবতী দেবীর করুণাময়ী রূপের

এবং তার স্নেহ, দয়া-মায়ার দৃষ্টান্তের প্রাচুর্য এতটাই বেশি যে তার আলোচনা করতে গেলে এখানে স্থানসংকুলান হবে। বিহারিলাল, চণ্ডীচরণ প্রমুখের লেখাতে বিদ্যাসাগরের মাতৃভক্তির একাধিক দৃষ্টান্ত পাওয়া যায়। স্বাভাবিকভাবেই বিদ্যাসাগরের করুণা সাগর হয়ে ওঠার পশ্চাতে ভগবতী দেবীর অপরিসীম প্রভাবকে উপেক্ষা করা যায় না। কিন্তু ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র শৈশবে মাত্র আট বছর বয়সে তার বাবার সাথে কলিকাতার উদ্দেশ্যে রওনা দিয়েছিলেন (১৮২৮, নভেম্বর); এরপর প্রায় বারো-তেরো বছর তিনি পিতা ঠাকুরদাস বন্দোপাধ্যায়ের সান্নিধ্যে কাটিয়ে ছিলেন (১৮২৯-১৮৪১ পর্যন্ত, অধ্যয়ন এবং পরে চাকুরিতে যোগদান করার পর ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তার বাবাকে দেশে ফিরে যাওয়ার অনুরোধ করেছিলেন)। অর্থাৎ ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের শৈশব, কৈশোর ও যৌবনের প্রারম্ভিক পর্বটা অতিবাহিত হয়েছিল ঠাকুরদাসের সাহচর্যে। এই সর্বাপেক্ষা গুরুত্বপূর্ণ গঠনমূলক পর্বটিতে, অর্থাৎ চরিত্র গঠন ও ব্যক্তিত্বের বিকাশের এই পর্যায়ে সন্তান যার সান্নিধ্যে থাকবে তার চরিত্রের উপর সেই ব্যক্তির প্রভাব ও অবদান সবচেয়ে বেশি হওয়াই বাঞ্ছনীয়। আবার, অন্যদিক থেকে বলা যেতে পারে, যে শিশু মাত্র আট বছর বয়সে মায়ের সঙ্গ ত্যাগ করেছে, তার অপরিণত মনের উপর মায়ের প্রভাব কতটা গভীর ও সুদুর প্রসারী হবে—সে সম্পর্কে দ্বিধার অবকাশ থেকেই যায়। সুতরাং সঙ্গত ভাবেই প্রশ্নটা ওঠে যে, শৈশবে মায়ের সঙ্গ ছেড়ে বাবার তত্ত্বাবধানে দীর্ঘকাল অতিবাহিত করা সত্ত্বেও, বাঙালী সমাজে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মায়ের তুলনায় তাঁর বাবার সমাদর অনেকটাই কম।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের যখন মাত্র পাঁচ বছর বয়স তখন ঠাকুরদাস তাঁকে লেখাপড়া শেখার জন্য একজন উপযুক্ত শিক্ষক নিয়োগ করেছিলেন—তাঁর নাম ছিল কালীকান্ত চট্টোপাধ্যায়। শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছিলেন, 'কালীকান্ত অত্যন্ত ভদ্রলোক ছিলেন। শিশুগণকে শিক্ষা দেবার বিশেষরূপ জানিতেন এবং শিশুগণকে আন্তরিক যত্ন ও স্নেহ করিতেন। সে কারণে ছোট ছোট বালকগণ তাহার নিকট সর্বদা অবস্থিতি করিতে চাহিত'। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ১৫) বিদ্যাসাগর তাঁর আত্মচরিতে লিখেছেন, "চট্টোপাধ্যায় মহাশয় সাতিশয় পরিশ্রমী, শিক্ষাদান বিষয়ে বিশেষ নিপুন ও যত্নবান ছিলেন। ইহার পাঠশালার ছাত্ররা, অল্পসময়ে উত্তমরূপে শিক্ষা করিতে পারিত। এজন্য তিনি উপযুক্ত শিক্ষক বলিয়া বিলক্ষণ প্রতিপত্তি লাভ করিয়াছিলেন"। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৮৯১: ২৯) কিন্তু এহেন পারদর্শী মাষ্টারমশাই-এর ভীটে বীরসিংহ গ্রাম হলেও তিনি প্রায়শই পরিভ্রমনে যেতেন। শম্ভুচন্দ্রের বক্তব্য অনুযায়ী, কালীকান্ত ছিলেন ভঙ্গকুলীন এবং বহুবিবাহে আসক্ত। শ্বশুর বাড়ী থেকে প্রাপ্য আদায়ের দিকে তাঁর নজর ছিল বেশী। কালীকান্তকে নিজের পুত্রের শিক্ষক হিসাবে নিয়োগ করার জন্য ঠাকুরদাস ভদ্রেশ্বর ও শ্রীরামপুরে খোঁজ করে তাঁকে নিয়ে আসেন এবং বীরসিংহ-এ একটি পাঠশালাও খুলে দেওয়ার বন্দোবস্ত করেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ১৫) সুতরাং ঠাকুরদাস পুত্রকে উৎকৃষ্ট মানের শিক্ষাদানের জন্য প্রারম্ভিকপর্ব থেকেই সচেতন ছিলেন। আবার ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তাঁর আত্মজীবনীতে কালীকান্ত মহাশয়ের শিক্ষকতার যথেষ্ট গুণকীর্তন করেছেন। তবে শম্ভুচন্দ্র, চণ্ডীচরণ, বিহারীলাল প্রমুখের মতানুযায়ী এ গ্রামের আরেকটি পাঠশালার শিক্ষক, সনাতন বিশ্বাস, শিক্ষার্থীদের বেদম প্রহার করতেন। সে কারণে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পিতা তাঁকে এ পাঠশালায় পাঠানো সমীচিন মনে করেননি। অথচ ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র নিজের দুরন্তপনা, জেদ এবং আরও নানা কারণে পিতার কাছেই যৎপরনাস্তি মার খেয়েছেন।

যাইহোক ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পড়াশোনায় অভাবনীয় প্রতিভা লক্ষ্য করে পন্ডিত কালীকান্ত বলেছিলেন যে, কলিকাতায় নিয়ে গিয়ে তার শিক্ষার ব্যবস্থা করতে এবং তিনি ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে ইংরেজী/পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষা প্রদানের পরামর্শ দিয়েছিলেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ১৭) অতঃপর কালীকান্ত চট্টোপাধ্যায় এবং একজন ভৃত্য সহযোগে ঠাকুরদাস ছেলেকে নিয়ে ১৮২৮ সালের নভেম্বরে (মতান্তরে, ইংরেজির ১৮২৯ সাল ও বাঙ্গালা ১২৩৫ সালের কার্তিক, বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ১৭) কলিকাতায় উপস্থিত হন এবং ভগবৎচরণ সিংহের পুত্র জগদ্দুর্লভ সিংহ-এর বাড়ীতে আশ্রয় নেন। এরপর ১৮২৯ সালের ১লা জুন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে পিতা সংস্কৃত কলেজে ভর্তি করিয়ে দেন। এখানে দুটি দ্বিধার সম্মুখীন হয়েছিলেন ঠাকুরদাস। সংস্কৃত কলেজের ভর্তির সময় ঠাকুরদাস দুটি প্রশ্নে যথেষ্ট দ্বিধাগ্রস্থ ছিলেন—প্রথমটি ছিল ছেলেকে পড়ানোর জন্য কলিকাতায় নিয়ে যাওয়ার ভাবনা এবং দ্বিতীয় সংশয়ের বিষয়টি ছিল ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে ইংরেজী শিক্ষা দেওয়া হবে নাকি সংস্কৃত শিক্ষা।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে কলকাতায় নিয়ে যাওয়ার ব্যাপারে কালীকান্ত চট্টোপাধ্যায়ের প্রস্তাবটি ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় তাঁর পিতা রামজয়কে বিবেচনা করার জন্য অনুরোধ করেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ঠাকুরমা দুর্গাদেবী তা জানতে পেরে জিজ্ঞাসা করেছিলেন, 'ওই একরত্তি ছেলে যাবে কলকাতায় পড়তে?...কলকাতায় না গেলে কি মানুষ হয় না?' উত্তরে তিনি বলেছিলেন, 'না তা হয় না... কলকাতায় কত স্কুল, কত কলেজ'! বস্তুতপক্ষে রামজয় তার পুত্র ঠাকুরদাসের বক্তব্যকেই সমর্থন করেছিলেন (বাগচি, ১৯৪৬:১৮)। আসলে "তৎকালে এ প্রদেশে কাহারও লেখাপড়া শিক্ষার জন্য কলিকাতা যাইবার রীতি ছিল না" (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ১৭)। কিন্তু উপার্জনের জন্য দেশান্তরে যাওয়ার ব্যাপারে কারও দ্বিমত ছিল না। ঠাকুরদাস স্বয়ং পরিবারের অনটন মেটানোর জন্য কলিকাতায় গিয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু লেখাপড়া শেখানোর জন্য ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে কলিকাতায় নিয়ে যাওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত প্রচলিত দেশাচারের বিপ্রতীপ ছিল। প্রকৃতপক্ষে ঠাকুরদাসের এই বিচক্ষণ ও সাহসী পদক্ষেপ ছিল ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের "বিদ্যাসাগর" হয়ে ওঠার প্রথম সোপান। উল্লেখ্য, ঠাকুরদাসের পরিবারের দারিদ্রের মোচন তখনও হয়নি বালক ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র কলিকাতায় আসেন। ঠাকুরদাস কিন্তু পুত্রকে কলিকাতায় অর্থ উপার্জনের প্রত্যাশায় নিয়ে যাননি, লেখাপড়া শেখানোর উদ্দেশ্যে নিয়ে গিয়েছিলেন। এখানেই পিতৃত্বের মহত্তর কর্তব্য সম্পর্কে ঠাকুদাসের দায়বদ্ধতার বিষয়টি বিশেষভাবে লক্ষনীয়। প্রসঙ্গত, রামেন্দ্রসুন্দর ত্রিবেদী এ প্রসঙ্গে বলেছিলেন, "বিদ্যাসাগর যদি...ইংরেজের সংস্পর্শে না আসিতেন; চিরকালই যদি তিনি সেই নিভৃত বীরসিংহ গ্রামের টোলখানিতে ব্যাকরণের তাৎপর্যালোচনায় ব্যাপৃত থাকিতেন, তাহা হইলে ১৩০৩ সালের ১৩ই শ্রাবণ তারিখে কলিকাতা শহরের অবস্থাটা ঠিক এমনি না হইতে পারিত;...'। (ত্রিবেদী ১৩২০:৮) তার এই বক্তব্যটির নিহিতার্থ হল, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের কলকাতায় আগমন তার ব্যক্তিগত জীবনে এবং সমগ্র বাঙালি জাতির জীবনে এক যুগান্তকারী পরিবর্তন এনেছিল।

দ্বিতীয় সংশয়ের বিষয়টি ছিল বেশী গুরুত্বপূর্ণ—ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে লক্ষ্মী-উপার্জনকারী পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষা প্রদান করা হবে, নাকি তাদের পারিবারিক শিক্ষাগত ঐতিহ্যের ধারা বজায় রেখেই সংস্কৃত শিক্ষা প্রদান করা হবে। এই বিষয়ে তিনি নিজে যেমন অনেক অগ্র-পশ্চাৎ বিবেচনা করেছিলেন, তেমনি অনেক আত্মীয় ও শুভানুধ্যায়িদের কাছ থেকে পরামর্শও নিয়েছিলেন। অবশেষে প্রায় একমাস ধরে নানারকম ভাবনা চিন্তা করে এবং প্রস্তাবগুলিকে বিবেচনা করে ঠাকুরদাস ছেলেকে সংস্কৃত পড়ানোর মনস্থ করেন। কিন্তু সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের বিষয়টি কতটা দুরূহ ছিল তা উপলব্ধি করার জন্য ইংরেজি শিক্ষার সপক্ষে যে মতামত ও দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিগুলি প্রসঙ্গক্রমে এসেছিল—তা আলোচনা করা প্রয়োজন।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের নিজের বক্তব্য হল, ঠাকুরদাস ১৪/১৫ বছর বয়সে উপার্জনের চেষ্টায় কলিকাতায় গিয়েছিলেন। সেই সময় মোটামুটি ইংরেজী জানা থাকলে সওদাগরি সাহেবদের হৌসে অনায়াসে চাকরী জুটত। যদিও ঠাকুদাসের নিজস্ব ইচ্ছা ছিল সংস্কৃত শিক্ষা করার, কিন্তু তাঁর পরিবারের অর্থনৈতিক দৈন্যতার কথা স্মরণ করে তিনি ইংরেজী শিক্ষার প্রতি আগ্রহ প্রকাশ করেছিলেন। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৮৯১: ৯-১০) সুতরাং ইংরেজী শিক্ষার কার্যকারিতা সম্পর্কে তিনি বিশেষরূপে অবগত ছিলেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে নিয়ে কলিকাতায় আসার সময়ও বীরসিংহের পরিবারের বিশেষ আর্থিক উন্নতি হয়নি। সুতরাং পুত্রকে একইসঙ্গে শিক্ষাদান করা ও উপার্জনক্ষম করে তোলার ক্ষেত্রে ইংরেজি শিক্ষার উপযুক্ততা নিয়ে বিশেষ প্রশ্নের অবকাশ থাকে না। তাছাড়া, তাঁর পিতা যখন অন্যান্যদের কাছে মাইলস্টোন দেখে ইংরেজী সংখ্যামালা চিনে নেওয়ার অত্যাশ্চর্য ঘটনাটি বর্ণনা করেছিলেন, তা শুনে তাঁরা ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ইংরেজী শিক্ষার ব্যাপারে পরামর্শ দিয়েছিলেন। তাঁরা প্রস্তাব দেন যে, কর্নওয়ালিশ স্ট্রিটে হে' সাহেবের অবৈতনিক বিদ্যালয়ই (হেয়ার সাহেবের স্কুল) হবে উপযুক্ত নির্বাচন। সেখানে ভালোভাবে ইংরেজী আয়ত্ত করতে পারলে পরে বিনা বেতনে হিন্দু কলেজে পড়তে পারবে। আর যদি মোটামুটি কাজ চালানোর মতো শিখে নিতে পারে তাহলে সওদাগর সাহেবদের হৌসে অথবা সাহেবদের বড়ো বড়ো দোকানে অনায়াসে কাজ করতে পারবে। সুতরাং এদিক থেকে বিচার করলে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ইংরেজী শিক্ষা করাই বিধেয় ছিল। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৮৯১: ৫০-৫১)

শম্ভুচন্দ্র উল্লেখ করেছেন, ঠাকুরদাস প্রাথমিকভাবে স্থির করেছিলেন, ছেলেকে হিন্দু কলেজে পড়াবেন। কিন্তু আত্মীয়রা প্রশ্ন তুলেছিলন মাত্র দশ টাকা বেতনে এ ধরনের খরচ সাপেক্ষ শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠানে ছেলেকে পড়ানো বেশ কষ্টসাধ্য। সেক্ষেত্রে ঠাকুরদাস বলেছিলেন যে, ৫ টাকা তিনি বীরসিংহে পাঠাবেন এবং বাকী ৫ টাকায় তিনি ছেলের কলেজের মাসিক বেতন দেবেন। এই পরিকল্পনা শুনে অনেকে আবার চোরবাগানে অবস্থিত অপেক্ষাকৃত কম খরচসাপেক্ষ ইংরেজী বিদ্যায়তনে ছেলেকে ভর্তি করার ব্যাপারে ঠাকুরদাসকে বিবেচনা করে দেখার জন্য অনুরোধ করেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ১৯)

দেশজ ঐতিহ্যের ধারক সংস্কৃত শিক্ষার প্রসঙ্গে তাঁদের যুক্তিগুলির দিকে নজর ফেরানো যাক।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের স্বরচিত জীবনীগ্রন্থে উল্লিখিত রয়েছে যে, তাদের পূর্বপুরুষগণ বংশানুক্রমে সংস্কৃত ব্যবসায়ী। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৮৯১: ৫১) কিন্তু পরিবারের অর্থনৈতিক দুরবস্থার দরুন ঠাকুরদাসের সংস্কৃতের সাধনার বাসনা অপূর্ন ছিল। সেকারনে ঠাকুরদাসের অভিলাষ ছিল যে, পুত্র সংস্কৃত শিখে চতুষ্পাঠিতে অধ্যাপনা করবে। তার পিতার দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি সম্পর্কে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র লিখেছিলেন, "তিনি সিদ্ধান্ত করিয়া রাখিয়াছিলেন, আমি রীতিমত সংস্কৃত শিখিয়া চতুষ্পাঠিতে অধ্যাপনা করিব...তিনি বলিলেন, উপার্জনক্ষম হইয়া আমার দুঃখ ঘুচাইবেক, আমি সে উদ্দেশ্যে ঈশ্বরকে কলিকাতায় আনি নাই। আমার একান্ত অভিলাষ, সংস্কৃত শাস্ত্রে কৃতবিদ্য হইয়া দেশে চতুষ্পাঠি করিবেক, তাহা হইলেই আমার সকল ক্ষোভ দূর হইবেক। এই বলিয়া তিনি আমায় ইংরেজী স্কুলে প্রবেশ বিষয়ে, আন্তরিক অসম্মতি প্রদর্শন করিলেন"। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৮৯১: ৫১-৫২) ঠাকুরদাস ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের সংস্কৃত শিক্ষার বিষয়ে মধুসূদন বাচস্পতির সঙ্গেও আলোচনা করেছিলেন। বাচস্পতি ছিলেন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মায়ের মামা রাধামোহন বিদ্যাভূষনের কাকার ছেলে এবং তিনি সংস্কৃত কলেজে অধ্যয়ন করতেন। বাচস্পতি বলেছিলেন, সংস্কৃত কলেজ থেকে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র অনেক উত্তমরূপে অভিপ্রেত শিক্ষা লাভ করতে পারবে এবং তা চতুস্পঠীর থেকে অনেক ভালোভাবে ও সত্ত্বর শিখতে পারবে। এছাড়াও চাকরির প্রয়োজন হলে, ল'কমিটির পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ হতে পারলে আদালতে জজ-পন্ডিতের পদে নিযুক্ত হতে পারবেন। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৮৯১:৫২)

শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছেন জগদ্দর্লভ বাবুর বাড়ীতে থাকার সময় ঠাকুরদাসের সঙ্গে সংস্কৃত কলেজের তৃতীয় শ্রেণির অধ্যাপক, পন্ডিত গঙ্গাধর তর্কবাগীশের সঙ্গে আলাপ হয়েছিল। তিনি পরামর্শ দিয়েছিলেন যে, কলেজর ভর্তি হওয়ার পাঁচ-ছয় মাস পরে পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণ হতে পারলে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র মাসান্তে ৫/- টাকা বৃত্তি পেতে পারবে। পুত্রের প্রতিভার প্রতি আস্থাশীল পিতা নিশ্চিত ছিলেন যে, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বৃত্তি পাবে। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ২২) পরবর্তীকালে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র ৫/-টাকা ও আট টাকা মাসিক বৃত্তি লাভ করতো। এছাড়াও বিদ্যার্থী হিসাবে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র একাধিক আর্থিক পুরস্কারও পেয়েছিলেন যার মূল্য সেই সময়ে বাজার দরের নিরিখে বেশ বড়োসড়ো অঙ্ক ছিল। বৃত্তির ওই টাকা পরিবারের কাজেও লাগত, পুস্তক কেনার জন্যেও ব্যাবহৃত হয়েছিল, আবার এ টাকায় কিছু ধান—জমিও কেনা হয়েছিল। ঠাকুরদাস সমসাময়িক যুগে প্রচলিত ইংরেজী শিক্ষার কুফল সম্পর্কেও বিশেষভাবে অবগত ছিলেন। সেই সময়, হিন্দু কলেজে পাঠরত এবং সেখান থেকে উত্তীর্ণ হয়েছেন এমন অনেক ভদ্রবংশের বুদ্ধিমান ও কৃতি হিন্দুসন্তানের বিশেষ অধঃপতন ঘটেছিল। এই কলেজের প্রাক্তন অধ্যাপক রাজনারায়ণ বসু তাঁর আত্মচরিতে হিন্দুস্কুলের শিক্ষার্থীদের অধোগামীতার বর্ণনা উপস্থাপিত করেছিলেন। বিহারীলাল বলেছেন, "তদানীন্তন ইংরেজী শিক্ষার কুফল সন্দর্পনে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পিতা বোধহয় ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে সংস্কৃত কলেজে প্রেরণ করেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র ইংরেজী পড়িয়া, তদানীন্তন ইংরেজী শিক্ষিত ব্যক্তিবর্গের ন্যায় বিকৃত হইয়া না পড়ে, ইহাই ঠাকুরদাসের উদ্দেশ্য ছিল। (সরকার ১৩২৯: ৫৭)

অতঃপর ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র নয় বছর বয়সে পটলডাঙ্গায় গভর্নমেন্ট সংস্কৃত কলেজে ব্যাকরণের তৃতীয় শ্রেণিতে ভর্তি হলেন। ঠাকুরদাসের এই সিদ্ধান্তের মাধ্যমে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র কুলধর্মসম্মত সংস্কৃত শিক্ষা লাভ করেছিলেন। এতে ঠাকুরদাসের দীর্ঘকাল-লালিত বাসনা চরিতার্থ হয়েছিল। কিন্তু নিজের আক্ষেপ পূরণ করার পাশাপাশি ঠাকুরদাস কিন্তু কখনই পুত্রের

অর্থনৈতিক স্বনির্ভরতার বিষয়টিকে উপেক্ষা করেননি। তিনি বরং চেয়েছিলেন যে, ছেলে পন্ডিত হোক এবং উপার্জনক্ষম হোক।

ঠাকুরদাস কলিকাতায় থাকার সময় চাকুরি করতেন এবং স্বপাক ভোজন করতেন। কিন্তু পুত্র ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে কলেজে ভর্তি করার পর ঠাকুরদাসের দৈনন্দিন জীবনে বিস্তর পরিবর্তন এসেছিল। প্রথম ছয়মাস ঠাকুরদাসের দিনলিপি সম্পর্কে শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছেন, "পিতা প্রত্যেক দিন সকাল ৯ টার মধ্যে পুত্রকে স্নানাহার করিয়ে কলেজে পৌঁছে দিতেন। তারপর নিজের কর্মস্থলে যেতেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ২৩) আবার বিকেল চারটার সময় ছেলেকে নিয়ে বাসায় রেখে আবার নিজের কাজে যেতেন। এই সময় কিন্তু ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে কিন্তু রান্না করতে হত না। রান্নার যাবতীয় ভার ছিল ঠাকুরদাসের উপর। রাত্রিবেলা ৯টার সময় বাসায় ফিরে তিনি পুনরায় রান্না করতেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র যখন সাহিত্য শ্রেণিতে উঠেছিলেন (দ্বাদশ বছর বয়স, শম্ভুচন্দ্র) তখন থেকে তাকে একবেলা রান্না করতে হত। এসময় তাঁকে গৃহস্থলীর কাজও করতে হত। এছাড়া ঈশ্বরকে বাজার করা, বাসন মাজা, মশলা কোটা দুবেলা রান্না করতে হত। কারণ আর্থিক অনটনের জন্য তার পরিবারের পক্ষে ঝি-চাকর রাখা সম্ভব হয়নি। (সরকার, ১৩২৯:৭৩) অলঙ্কার শ্রেণিতে পড়ার সময় থেকে দুইবেলা রান্না করতে হত। (সরকার, ১৩২৯: ৮৭) সুতরাং ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে বিদ্যালয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার জন্য প্রস্তুত করা, তাকে প্রায় দুইমাইল দূরবর্তী সংস্কৃত কলেজে পৌছে দেওয়া, আবার ওই একই পথ অতিক্রম করে বাসায় ফিরে আসা, তারপর জীবিকা স্থলে যাওয়া, বিকেল ৪টার সময় কর্মস্থল থেকে ছেলেকে আনতে যাওয়া, বাসায় ফিরে আবার কাজে বেরোনো এবং রাত্রে বেলায় ৯টার সময় রান্না করা—এই ছিল ঠাকুরদাসের প্রথম ৬ মাসের দিনলিপি। এরপর যখন তাঁদের বড়বাজারের বাসা থেকে কলেজের রাস্তা চিনে যেতে সমর্থ হলেন, তখন ঠাকুরদাস তাঁকে একা ছাড়তে লাগলেন।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র নৈমিত্তিক পাঠাভ্যাস ঠিকমতো বজায় রেখেছে কিনা সে ব্যপারে ঠাকুরদাস বিশেষ যত্নবান ছিলেন। শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছেন "তিনি কলেজের ব্যাকরণ শ্রেণিতে প্রবেশ করিয়া তর্কবাগীশ মহাশয়ের নিকট প্রত্যহ যাহা পড়িতেন প্রত্যহই তাহা পিতার নিকট বলিতে হইত। ...১০/ ১৫ দিন পরে তিনি যাহা বিস্মৃত হইতেন তাহা পিতা অবিকল বলিয়া দিতেন"। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:২৪) এছাড়াও ঠাকুরদাস প্রত্যেকদিন শেষ রাত্রিতে ছেলেকে ঘুম থেকে উঠিয়ে উদ্ভট সংস্কৃত কবিতা মুখে মুখে শেখাতেন এবং এইভাবে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র প্রায় দুইশত সংস্কৃত শ্লোক শিখেছিলেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের আবার রাত্রিবেলায় পড়াশোনার অভ্যেস ছিল। তিনি চেষ্টা করতেন রাত্রি বেলায় ১০টার মধ্যে শুয়ে পড়তে এবং বাবাকে বলতেন নিকটস্থ আর্মানি গীর্জার ঘড়িতে বারোটা বাজলে, তাকে যেন জাগিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। ঠাকুরদাস ওই দুইঘন্টা অর্থাৎ রাত্রি দশটা থেকে বারোটা পর্যন্ত জেগে থাকতেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:২৫-২৬) হাজার কাজে ক্লান্ত-পরিশ্রান্ত ঠাকুরদাস, ছেলের পড়াশোনার জন্য প্রায়শই এই অতিরিক্ত দুই ঘন্টা জেগে থাকার কৃচ্ছসাধনকে এক অলঙ্ঘনীয় দায়িত্ব হিসাবেই পালন করতেন। বস্তুতপক্ষে ছেলের পড়াশোনার জন্য যে কোনো রকম সহযোগিতা করতে ঠাকুরদাস সবসময় তৎপর থাকতেন। আবার মাঝেমধ্যে তাঁকে ছেলের প্রতি বিশেষ কঠোর হতেও দেখা যেত। যেদিন বাড়ি ফিরে দেখতেন যে, প্রদীপ জ্বলছে কিন্তু ছেলে ঘুমোচ্ছে, তখন নির্বিচারে প্রহার করতেন। ঠাকুরদাসের সেই প্রহার এতটাই মাত্রাতিরিক্ত হয়ে যেত মাঝে মাঝে গৃহস্বামী তিরস্কার করে বলতেন, পুত্রকে এরূপ প্রহার করলে তাকে বাসা পরিত্যাগ করতে হবে। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:২৪)

ঠাকুরদাস ছেলের উপার্জনের বিষয়টি নিয়ে অগ্রিম চিন্তাভাবনা করে রেখেছিলেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মাসিক বৃত্তির অর্থ এবং বিভিন্ন সময় উৎকৃষ্টতা প্রদর্শনের জন্য যেসকল আর্থিক পুরস্কারগুলি পেতেন সেগুলিকে ঠাকুরদাস সঞ্চয় করতেন। তাঁর উদ্দেশ্য ছিল টোল তৈরি করার জন্য জমি কেনা। টোলে দেশীয় গ্রামের ছেলেদের শিক্ষা দেওয়ার পাশাপাশি, ঐ জমির উপসত্ব থেকে যে আয় হবে, তা দিয়ে গ্রামের বাইরে থেকে আসা ছাত্রদের ভরণপোষণ করা হবে—এই ছিল ঠাকুরদাসের অভিলাষ। পরবর্তীকালে ঠাকুরদাস ঐ টাকায় কাঁচিয়া গ্রাম সহ বিভিন্ন স্থানে বেশ কয়েক বিঘা জমি কিনেছিলেন। জমি

কেনার পর উদ্বৃত্ত টাকা তিনি ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের বই কেনার জন্য বরাদ্দ করেছিলেন। এখানে ঠাকুরদাসের বিষয়-আশয় নিয়ে বুদ্ধির তারিফ করতেই হয়। তিনি ছেলের ভবিষ্যতের আর্থিক স্বনির্ভরতা অর্জনের বিষয়ে যতটা যত্নবান ছিলেন, তেমনি ছেলের পড়াশোনার জন্য সবচেয়ে প্রয়োজনীয় জিনিস অর্থাৎ পুঁথিপত্র কেনার প্রয়োজনীয়তাকেও সমান গুরুত্ব সহকারে বিবেচনা করেছিলেন। উল্লেখ্য, মুদ্রণ প্রযুক্তির উৎকর্ষতা তখনও সেভাবে বৃদ্ধি পায়নি। অর্থাৎ অনেক পুঁথি তখনও মুদ্রিত হয়নি। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র নিজেই অনেক সংস্কৃত পুথির অনুলিপি তৈরি করতেন। এই কাজটা ছিল সময় সাপেক্ষ ব্যাপার (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:২৮)। ঠাকুরদাস হয়তো অনুমান করেছিলেন যে, ছেলে পুঁথি কেনার সঙ্গতি অর্জন করতে পারলে, অনুলিপি করার জন্য অযথা সময় নষ্ট সময় হবে না এবং ঐ উদ্বৃত্ত সময়টা তিনি নিজের পাঠাভ্যাসের কাজে লাগাতে পারবেন। এ'সময় ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র একাধিক হাতে লেখা পুঁথি কিনেছিলেন, যেগুলি তার নিজস্ব গ্রন্থাগারে সংগৃহিত হয়েছিল। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ৩১)

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বরাবরই তাঁর পরিবারের প্রতি দায়িত্বশীল ছিলেন। যদিও জীবনের শেষপর্বে বিভিন্ন রকম জটিলতার কারণে তিনি পরিবারের থেকে দূরে কারমাটারে একাকী জীবন কাটাতে মনস্থ করেছিলেন। কিন্তু পরিবারের সব সদস্যদের - মা, বাবা, ভাই, পুত্র, পুত্রবধূ - সকলের আর্থিক স্বচ্ছলতার বিষয়টিকে অত্যন্ত গুরুত্ব সহকারে বিবেচনা করে তিনি প্রতিমাসে প্রত্যেকের ব্যয়-নির্বাহের জন্য নির্দিষ্ট পরিমাণ অর্থ প্রেরণ করতেন। (ঘোষ, ১৯৮৪: ৪৫৫-৪৬০) তাঁর পরিবারের প্রত্যেক সদস্যদেরকে লেখা চিঠিপত্রের মধ্যে এই বিষয়টির উল্লেখ পাওয়া যায়। এমনকি তিনি পুত্রবধূ ও নাতি-নাতনিদের পড়াশোনার সংবাদও নিতেন। তবে আর্থিক সহায়তা প্রদান করার ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর কর্তব্যপরায়ণতা যে কেবলমাত্র পরিবারের সদস্যদের মধ্যেই সীমাবদ্ধ ছিল তা নয়, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের উইল পাঠ করলে দেখা যাবে সেখানে নিকটাত্মীয়, দূঃসম্পর্কিত আত্মীয়, বন্ধুবান্ধব, এমনকি আশ্রিতদের জন্যও অর্থ বন্টনের উল্লেখ রয়েছে। (ঘোষ, ১৯৮৪: ৩৮৭-৩৮৮) পরবর্তীকালে নানাবিধ কারণে (যার অন্যতম কারণ ছিল বিধবা বিবাহ প্রদান করা) ঋণগ্রস্ত হওয়া সত্ত্বেও, ঋণ খেলাপির তকমা যাতে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের নিজের উপরে না লাগে এবং এই বিষয়কে কেন্দ্র করে তার পরিবারের কেউ যাতে অসম্মানিত না হয়, সে কারণে তিনি নানারকম উপায়ে ঋণ মুক্ত হবার চেষ্টা করেছিলেন। (ঘোষ, ১৯৮৪: ৪৫৭)

পরিবারের প্রতি নিষ্ঠাসহকারে ঠাকুরদাসের দায়িত্ব পালনের দৃষ্টান্ত ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র স্বচক্ষে দেখেছিলেন। তিনি আত্মজীনচরিতে উল্লেখ করেছেন যে, চৌদ্দ-পনেরো বছর বয়সে ঠাকুরদাস পারিবারিক অনটনের সুরাহা কারার জন্যেই কলিকাতায় গিয়েছিলেন। এজন্য তিনি নিজের সংস্কৃত সাধনার বাসনাও বিসর্জন দিয়েছিলেন। কলিকাতায় অতিকষ্টে, অনাহারে-অর্ধাহারে থেকে তিনি অর্থসংস্থানের বন্দোবস্ত করেছিলেন। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৮৯১: ৮-১০) তিনি যখন দুই টাকা মাসিক বেতনের চাকরি পান তখন পুরো টাকাটাই বীরসিংহের পরিবারে পাঠাতেন। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৮৯১:১৭) ঠাকুরদাস তাঁর সামান্য রোজগার সত্ত্বেও ছেলেদের উপযুক্তভাবে শিক্ষিত করার জন্য একে-একে তিন ছেলেকেই কলিকাতায় নিয়ে গিয়েছিলেন এবং প্রত্যেকের উচ্চশিক্ষার সুবন্দোবস্ত করেছিলেন। প্রত্যেক সন্তানকে উপযুক্ত বয়সে বিবাহ দিয়েছিলেন। মেজো ছেলে দীনবন্ধুর বিয়ে দেওয়ার সময় ঠাকুরদাস ঋণগ্রস্ত হয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু সে'সময়ও তিনি বীরসিংহে যে টাকাটা পাঠাতেন তা কমাননি, বরং কলিকাতার বাসার খরচ কমিয়েছিলেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ৪১-৪২) শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছিলেন যে, এ'সময় কলিকাতার বাসার সদস্যরা খুব কষ্টেই দিনাপাত করতেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র এরকম একজন পরিবারসর্বস্ব দায়িত্ববান ব্যক্তিকে পিতা হিসাবে পেয়েছিলেন। সে'কারণেই হাজারও সমস্যা সত্ত্বেও পারিবারিক দায়বদ্ধতা থেকে তিনি বিচ্যুত হননি।

পরিবারের মধ্যে সবথেকে বেশি দায়িত্বশীল পুত্র হিসেবে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ওপর অটুট আস্থা ছিল ঠাকুরদাসের। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের কনিষ্ঠ ভ্রাতা ঈশানচন্দ্রের ঋণগ্রস্থতা এবং তার পত্নি ও সংসারের প্রতি অনীহা লক্ষ্য করে ঠাকুরদাস যথেষ্ট উদ্বিগ্ন হয়ে পড়েছিলেন। সে'কথা পিতার কাছ থেকে জানতে পেরে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তার দ্রুত সমাধান করতে তৎপর হয়েছিলেন। এছাড়াও

তাঁর তৃতীয় কন্যা বিনোদিনী দেবীর স্বামী বাবু সূর্য কুমার অধিকারীকে হাই স্কুলের শিক্ষকতার কাজ ছাড়িয়ে মেট্রোপলিটনের সেক্রেটারির পদে নিযুক্ত করেছিলেন। জামাতার সামাজিক প্রতিপত্তির ব্যাপারেও তাঁর সমান নজর ছিল। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ২১৭) ১৮৪১ সাল থেকে ঠাকুরদাস কলকাতা ছেড়ে বীরসিংহ গ্রামে যৌথ পরিবারে বসবাস করা শুরু করেছিলেন। সেই পরিবারের দৈনন্দিন খরচ-খরচার হিসাব রাখার দায়িত্ব তিনি তাঁর পিতার ওপর অর্পণ করেছিলেন। যদিও বীরসিংহের যৌথ পরিবারের যাবতীয় ব্যয়-নির্বাহের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় অর্থ যোগান দিতেন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র। আবার ওই একই সময়, কলকাতার ভাড়া বাড়িতে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের সঙ্গে তার দুই ভাই—দীনবন্ধু এবং শম্ভুচন্দ্র থাকতেন এবং স্বাভাবিকভাবেই ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তাদেরও যাবতীয় ব্যয়ভার বহন করতেন। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ২০১১: ২৪৯)

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তাঁর পিতার প্রতি যথেষ্ট সংবেদনশীল ছিলেন। সেই সময় বেশিরভাগ বয়স্ক মানুষদের মধ্যে তীর্থ ভ্রমণের ইচ্ছে থাকতো। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রও তাঁর পিতাকে গয়াধামে যাওয়ার জন্য বিশেষ অনুরোধ করেছিলেন। পরবর্তীকালে ১২৬৫ সালে ঠাকুরদাস দীনবন্ধু কুম্ভকারের সঙ্গে তীর্থ ভবনে গিয়েছিলেন। প্রায় এক বছর ধরে কাশি, কানপুর, এলাহাবাদ, মথুরা প্রভৃতি একাধিক স্থান পরিভ্রমণ করেছিলেন। বিভিন্ন তীর্থস্থল ভ্রমণ করবার সময় ঠাকুরদাস তাঁর পুত্রের গুণকীর্তন শুনে যথেষ্ট আহ্লাদিত হয়েছিলেন এবং সে কথাগুলি তিনি ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে চিঠি মারফত লিখে জানিয়েছিলেন। এর কিছুদিন পরই, "অগ্রজ মহাশয়ের অনুরোধে পিতৃদেব ত্বরায় দেশে পুনরাগমন করেন"। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ১৫৫) কিন্তু একটু বেশি বয়সে যখন ঠাকুরদাস কাশী বাস করার ইচ্ছা প্রকাশ করেন তখন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তাঁর ভ্রাতা শম্ভুচন্দ্রের কাছে সে ব্যাপারে বিশেষ উদ্বিগ্নতা প্রকাশ করেছিলেন। এমনকি ঠাকুরদাসের কাশী বাসের বাসনাকে সমর্থন করার জন্য কনিষ্ঠ ভ্রাতা ঈশানচন্দ্রের প্রতি তিনি রুষ্ট হয়েছিলেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র লিখছেন, "তিনি (ঠাকুরদাস) বিদেশে একাকী অবস্থিতি করিবেন, তাহা কোনো মতেই পরামর্শসিদ্ধ নহে, সমুদায় আহরণ করিয়া আপনার আহারাদি নির্বাহ করিবেন, তাহাতে কর্মের একশেষ হইবে,....তিনি শেষ বয়সে একাকী বিদেশে কালহরণ করিবেন, ইহা অপেক্ষা দুঃখ ও আক্ষেপের বিষয় কী হইতে পারে? সুতরাং এ অবস্থায় তিনি একাকী কাশীতে বাস করিবেন, ইহা আমি কোনোমতে সহ্য করিতে পারিব না। সেরূপ করিলে তাহার কষ্টের শেষ থাকিবে না"। (ঘোষ, ১৯৮৪: ৪৪৯) তাই শেষ পর্যন্ত তাঁর কনিষ্ঠ ভ্রাতা ঈশানচন্দ্র ও তার স্ত্রীর সঙ্গে ঠাকুরদাসকে কাশীতে পাঠান এবং সেখানেই তাঁর জীবনাবসান হয় (১লা বৈশাখ, ১২৮৩ সাল)। তাঁর ভাইরা কলকাতায় ফিরে গিয়ে শ্রাদ্ধাদি কার্য সম্পন্ন করতে চেয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু বিদ্যাসাগর তাতে সায় দেননি। কারণ ঠাকুরদাসের অন্তিম ইচ্ছা ছিল 'আমার অন্তিম সময় জেষ্ঠপুত্র নিকটে থাকিবে ও দাহাদিকার্য সম্পন্ন করিয়া কাশিতেই অদ্য-শ্রাদ্ধ করিবে'। সেই নির্দেশমাতা কাশীতে দশ দিন থেকে শ্রদ্ধাধি সম্পন্ন করে কলকাতায় ফেরেন। পরে আবার কাশীতে গিয়ে পিতার নির্দেশ মতো মারাঠি বেদজ্ঞ ব্রাহ্মণ ও অন্যান্য হিন্দুস্থানী ব্রাহ্মণদের ভোজন করেছিলেন। (সরকার, ১৪১৬:২৭)

ঠাকুরদাস পুত্রের ধীশক্তির উপর যেমন আস্থাশীল ছিলেন, তেমনি তার কর্তব্যপরায়ণতার ওপরও দৃঢ় আস্থা ছিল। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র ফোর্ট উইলিয়াম কলেজে চাকরীতে (১৮৪১, ২৬ শে ডিসেম্বর) যোগদান করার পর পিতাকে কর্ম থেকে অবসর নিয়ে গ্রামে গিয়ে থাকার অনুরোধ করেন। ঠাকুরদাস সেই অনুরোধ বজায় রেখে চাকরি ছাড়ার ব্যাপারে মনস্থ করেছিলেন। তাঁর মনিব এই পদক্ষেপকে অবিমৃষ্যকারিতা মনে করেছিলেন। মনিব আশঙ্কা প্রকাশ করেছিলেন, অদূর ভবিষ্যতে যদি ছেলের মানসিকতার পরিবর্তন হয় এবং আর্থিক সহায়তা প্রদান করার ব্যাপারে অনিচ্ছুক হয়, তখন ঠাকুরদাসকে অনোন্যপায় হয়ে চাকরীর সন্ধান করতে হতেও পারে। প্রত্যুত্তরে পুত্রের ওপর প্রত্যয়শীল পিতা বলেছিলেন, "আমার পুত্র সাক্ষাৎ যুধিষ্ঠিরের মতো ধর্মশীল এবং আমায় দেবতুল্য জ্ঞানে ভক্তি ও শ্রদ্ধা করিয়া থাকে। তাহার কথা অবহেলা করিতে পারিব না। তাহাকে যদি অধার্মিক-দুশ্চরিত্র জানিতাম, তাহা হইলে কখনই কর্ম ত্যাগ করিতাম না"। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ৫১) ঠাকুরদাস তার বড়ো ছেলেকে ঠিক যেভাবে মানুষ করতে চেয়েছিলেন, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ব্যক্তিত্ব ও কর্তব্যবোধ সেভাবেই গড়ে উঠেছিল।

পিতার কথা পুত্র শুনতেন এবং নিঃশর্তে আজ্ঞা পালন করতেন। সেকারণে ল'কমিটি পরীক্ষায় পাশ করে ত্রিপুরায় জজ-পন্ডিতের চাকুরি পাওয়া সত্ত্বেও পিতার নির্দেশে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র সেখানে যোগদান করেননি। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭: ৩৬) অন্যদিকে প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক উপার্জনক্ষম পুত্রের অনুরোধও যে উপেক্ষনীয় নয়, তা ঠাকুরদাস বুঝতেন। পারস্পরিক বোঝাপড়া, সম্মান, সমাদর ও কর্তব্যপরায়ণতা—এই নিয়েই গড়ে উঠেছিল ঠাকুরদাস ও ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রে সম্পর্কের রসায়ণ।

স্ত্রী'জাতির প্রতি ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ভক্তি ও শ্রদ্ধা সম্পর্কে পিতার কাছে থেকে শোনা একটি গল্পের কথা বলা যায়। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র লিখছেন যে, "একদিন ঠাকুরদাস খিদের জ্বালা ভুলবার জন্য কলিকাতার বাসা থেকে বেরিয়ে পড়েছিলেন। কিন্তু এদিক-ওদিক ঘুরে বেড়ানোর ফলে খিদে আরো বেড়ে গিয়েছিল এবং ক্লান্ত অবসন্ন হয়ে তিনি একটা দোকানের সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে পড়েছিলেন। সেই দোকানে কর্মরত এক মধ্যবয়স্ক বিধবা মহিলা উপযাচক হয়েই ঠাকুরদাসের খাওয়ার বন্দোবস্ত করেছিলেন। শুধু তাই নয়, ওই মহিলা ঠাকুরদাস কে বলেছিলেন, 'যেদিন তোমার এরূপ ঘটিবেক এখানে আসিয়া ফলার করিয়া যাইবে।' (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৮৯১: ১৫) এই ঘটনা শুনে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মন্তব্য ছিল, "পিতৃদেবের মুখে এই হৃদয়বিদারণ উপাখ্যান শুনিয়া আমার...স্ত্রী জাতির উপর...প্রগাঢ় ভক্তি জন্মিয়া ছিল। ওই দোকানের মালিক, পুরুষ হইলে, ঠাকুরদাসের উপর কখনোই, এরূপ দয়া প্রকাশ ও বাৎসল্য প্রদর্শন করতেন না।" (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৮৯১: ১৬)

বিদ্যাসাগরের জীবনের "সর্ব প্রধান সৎকর্ম" অর্থাৎ বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর পিতামাতার প্রভাব সম্পর্কে একটু আলোকপাত করা যাক। কৃষ্ণকমল ভট্টাচার্য লিখেছেন, "সাধারণত লোকের একটা ধারণা আছে যে বিদ্যাসাগর মশায়ের মাতার আগ্রহে এই বিধি (বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলন) প্রচলিত করা হয়; কিন্তু আমি বিদ্যাসাগর মহাশয় এর মুখে একটু অন্যরূপ শুনিয়াছি।' বিধবা বিবাহের শাস্ত্রীয়তা সম্পর্কে নিজে নিঃসন্দিগ্ধ হয়ে তা বাস্তবায়ণের উদ্যোগ নেওয়ার পূর্বেই বিদ্যাসাগর তার মাতার সন্নিকটে নিজের মনোবাঞ্ছা প্রকাশ করেছিলেন। ভগবতী দেবীও বিধবার পুনর্বিবাহের শাস্ত্রীয় নিদানের ব্যাপারে ছেলের কাছ থেকে আশ্বস্ত হওয়ার পর বলেছিলেন, "তবে আমি তোকে বারণ করি না, তুই এ'কাজ কর গে যা। যে যা বলে বলুক"। (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ১৩৬৭: ৫২৩) কৃষ্ণকমল ভট্টাচার্যের বক্তব্যে দুটি বিষয় দেখতে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। প্রথমত, বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের জন্য ভগবতী দেবীর পক্ষ থেকে আগাম কোন উপরোধ বা নির্দেশ বিদ্যাসাগরের কাছে আসেনি। ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়ের কোন ভূমিকার কথা কৃষ্ণকমলের লেখাতে পাওয়া যাচ্ছে না। অথচ ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের অপর এক জীবনীকার, চণ্ডীচরণ বন্দোপাধ্যায়ের বক্তব্য ছিল যে, "মা ও ছেলে" নামক গ্রন্থটির প্রুফ বিদ্যাসাগর মহাশয় স্বয়ং দেখেছিলেন এবং, চণ্ডীচরণ লিখছেন, "বিধবা বিবাহ বিষয়ে তাহার জননীর কতটুকু সম্বন্ধ ছিল, তাহাও প্রসঙ্গক্রমে সেখানে উল্লিখিত হইয়াছে, তাহাতে তাহার জননীর অনুরোধের কোনো প্রমাণ পাওয়া যায় না।" (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৩৬৭: ৬৩-৬৪) বীরসিংহ গ্রামের জনৈকা বালিকা বিধবার দুঃখে কাতর হয়ে ভগবতী দেবী তার পুত্রকে বিধবাদের পুনর্বিবাহের শাস্ত্রসম্মত বিধি অনুসন্ধানের কথা বলেছিলেন কিনা, সে ব্যাপারে দ্বিধান্বিত ছিলেন বিহারীলাল। তবে তিনি আবার নারায়ণবাবুর কাছ থেকে শুনেছিলেন যে বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের শাস্ত্রীয় নিদান সম্পর্কে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের বক্তব্যকে নির্ভুল বলে মনে করতেন ভগবতী দেবী। (সরকার, ১৩২৯: ৩২৭) চণ্ডীচরণের বক্তব্যের মধ্যেও দেখতে পাওয়া যায় যে, ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বিধবা বিবাহের প্রচলন সম্পর্কিত যে বইটি লিখেছিলেন সেটি প্রকাশনার পূর্বে ভগবতী দেবীর কাছে গিয়ে বলেছিলেন, '...আমি বিধবা বিবাহ সম্বন্ধে এই বইখানি লিখিয়াছি, কিন্তু তোমার মত না পেলে এই বই আমি ছাপাইতে পারি না। শাস্ত্রে বিধবা বিবাহের বিধি আছে।' ভগবতী দেবী প্রত্যুত্তরে বলেছিলেন, 'কিছু মাত্র আপত্তি নাই...' (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৩৬৭: ১৮১)

বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের ব্যাপারে ঠাকুরদাসের প্রকৃত অভিমত কি ছিল সে সম্পর্কে মতপার্থক্য রয়েছে। কেউ বলেন বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনে ঠাকুর দাস-এর মত ছিল না এবং সেজন্য পরবর্তীকালে তিনি কাশিবাসী হয়েছিলেন। আবার অন্যরা বলেন, বিধবা বিবাহ সংক্রান্ত পুস্তিকা প্রকাশিত হওয়ার পর ঠাকুরদাস তার পুত্রকে উৎসাহ প্রদান করেছিলেন। (সরকার,

১৩২৯: ৩২৭ -৩২৮) ঠাকুরদাস যদি বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলন সমর্থন না করতেন তাহলে তিনি কখনও একথা বলতে পারতেন না যে, 'আমরা উভয় একবাক্যে বলিতেছি এ বিষয়ে যাহা কিছু সহ্য করিতে হয় তাহা করিব এবং আমাদিগকে যখন যাহা করিতে হইবে তাহা সাধ্যমতে ত্রুটি করিব না।'(বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:১০৭) আবার বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনকে কেন্দ্র করে ঠাকুরদাসের কাশিবাসী হওয়ার আখ্যানটিও গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়। কারণ ১২৭২ সালের অঘ্রাণ মাসে ঠাকুরদাস একবার একটি স্বপ্ন দেখে আতঙ্কিত হয়ে কাশি যাত্রা করার সংকল্প করেছিলেন এবং শম্ভুচন্দ্র ঠাকুরদাসের অভিলাষ সম্পর্কে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে চিঠি লিখে জানিয়েছিলেন। শম্ভুচন্দ্রের লেখা চিঠিতে অথবা সেই চিঠির জবাবে বিদ্যাসাগর যে চিঠি লিখেছিলেন, তার দুটির কোনটিতেই বিধবা বিবাহ সংক্রান্ত কোনো প্রসঙ্গের উল্লেখ ছিল না। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ১৫৬-৫৭) আবার নারায়ণ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়ের কাছ থেকে বিহারীলাল জানতে পেরেছিলেন যে, ১৮৬৫ সালে ঠাকুরদাস কাশীবাসী হয়েছিলেন। আর ঠাকুরদাস "পুন্যার্থেই" কাশীযাত্রা করেছিলেন বলে নারায়ণবাবু জানিয়েছিলেন। (সরকার, ১৩২৯: ৪১৫-৪১৬) সুতরাং আর যাইহোক, বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের জন্য রুষ্ট হয়ে ঠাকুরদাস কাশী যাত্রা করেননি।

বীরসিংহের নিজগৃহের চন্ডীমণ্ডপে কথোপকথনরত ঠাকুরদাস ও ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের কাছে উপস্থিত হয়ে ভগবতী দেবী তাঁর ছেলেকে উদ্দেশ্য করে জিজ্ঞেস করেছিলেন, 'তুই এতদিন যে শাস্ত্র পড়িলি তাহাতে বিধবাদের কোন উপায় নাই কি?' এই প্রশ্ন শুনে ঠাকুরদাস তার ছেলেকে বিধবা বিবাহের স্বপক্ষে ধর্মশাস্ত্রের বিধান অনুসন্ধানের কথা বলেছিলেন। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের জবাব ছিল, "শাস্ত্রে প্রথমত ব্রহ্মচর্য অভাবে সহমরণ বা বিবাহ-এর নিদান রয়েছে।" (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭: ১০৭) তা শুনে ঠাকুরদাস বলেন, 'রাজা রামমোহন রায়, দ্বারকানাথ ঠাকুর প্রমুখের চেষ্টা ও পরামর্শে, গভর্নর জেনারেল লর্ড বেন্টিংক সহমরণপ্রথা নিবারণ করিয়াছেন। আর কলিতে ব্রহ্মচর্যে ধ অপারক; সুতরাং বিধবাদিগের পক্ষে বিবাহই একমাত্র উপায়।' (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:১০৭) এখানে ঠাকুরদাসের বিচক্ষণতা এবং বাস্তববোধ ধর্মীয় সংকীর্ণতাকে অতিক্রম করেছে এবং এখানে তার মানবিক দৃষ্টিকোণ পরিস্ফুট হয়েছে। ঠাকুরদাস তৎকালীন সমাজের প্রগতিশীল ব্যক্তিদের সংস্কারমূলক কার্যাবলী সম্পর্কে যথেষ্ট ওয়াকিবহাল ছিলেন এবং তিনি সমাজের সেইসব সংস্কারপন্থী ব্যক্তিদের দৃষ্টান্ত উল্লেখ করে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের উৎসাহ প্রদান করেছিলেন। এমনকি ব্রিটিশ শাসনের সংবেদনশীল দৃষ্টিভঙ্গির প্রতিও ঠাকুরদাস ইঙ্গিত করেছেন। তিনি উপলব্ধি করতে পেরেছিলেন যে, পুস্তক প্রচার এবং শাস্ত্রীয় অনুমোদনের পাশাপাশি উপযুক্ত আইন প্রণীত হলে বিধবা বিবাহের বাস্তবায়ণের পথ সুগম হবে এবং তা দীর্ঘস্থায়ী হবে। এছাড়াও ঠাকুরদাস অত্যন্ত যুক্তিসঙ্গত কারণে যেভাবে কলিকালে ব্রহ্মচর্য পালনের ব্যবস্থাকে খারিজ করেছেন, তার সেই দৃষ্টিকোণকে হয়তো Common Sense বললে খুব একটা ভুল হবে না।

ঠাকুরদাসের মনোবাঞ্ছা যাই থাকুক না কেন তিনি যথার্থভাবেই অনুমান করেছিলেন যে শাস্ত্রীয় অনুমোদন ব্যতিরেকে দেশাচারকে অতিক্রম করে বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলন করা দুরূহ। সেকারণে তার নিজস্ব সম্মতি থাকা সত্ত্বেও তিনি ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে বলেছিলেন, '...তুমি পুস্তক প্রচার করিবার অগ্রে আরেকবার ধর্ম শাস্ত্র দেখিয়া প্রবৃত্ত হইবে।' (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:১০৭) এই প্রসঙ্গে চন্ডীচরণ লিখেছেন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র শাস্ত্রাদি হতে প্রমাণ সংগ্রহ করিয়া বিধবা বিবাহের পক্ষ সমর্থনের জন্য পুস্তক রচনা করেছিলেন এবং তারপর পুস্তকটির প্রচার করবার আগে তিনি পিতার অনুমতি প্রার্থনা করেছিলেন। ওই পুস্তকটির আগাগোড়া ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র পাঠ করে পিতাকে শুনিয়েছিলেন। এ প্রসঙ্গে ঠাকুরদাসের মন্তব্য ছিল, 'তুমি বিশ্বাস করো, যাহা লিখিয়াছো তাহার সমস্ত শাস্ত্রসম্মত হইয়াছে?' (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৩৬৭:১৮১) ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের কাছ থেকে ইতিবাচক উত্তর পেয়ে ঠাকুরদাস পুস্তক প্রচারে সম্মতি দিয়েছিলেন। সুতরাং শম্ভুচন্দ্র এবং চণ্ডীচরণ উভয়ের লেখাতেই দেখা যাচ্ছে যে, ঠাকুরদাস বিধবা বিবাহের শাস্ত্রীয়তা নিয়ে যে উদ্বিগ্নতা প্রকাশ করেছিলেন তার প্রতিফলন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের ওপর সুস্পষ্টভাবে পড়েছিল। শুধুমাত্র পিতৃ-আজ্ঞা পালন করার জন্য ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র শাস্ত্রীয় অনুমোদন অনুসন্ধানের প্রবৃত্ত হয়েছিলেন তাও বলা যায় না। তবে

বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলনের ক্ষেত্রে শাস্ত্রীয় বিধানের আশ্রয় গ্রহণ করার পশ্চাতে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পিতার ভূমিকাকে অস্বীকারও করা যায় না। পিতার অনুমোদন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের কাছে কতটা অপরিহার্য ছিল সেটা অনুমান করা যায় যখন ঠাকুরদার তার ছেলেকে বলেছিলেন, 'যদি আমি এ বিষয়ে (বিধবা বিবাহ পুস্তক প্রচার) মত না দিই, তবে তুমি কি করিবে?' ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বলেছিলেন, 'তাহা হইলে আমি আপনার জীবদ্দশায় এ গ্রন্থ প্রচার করিব না। আপনার দেহত্যাগের পর আমার যেরূপ ইচ্ছা হইবে সেরূপ করিব।" (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৩৬৭:১৮১) উল্লেখ্য যে, বিধবা বিবাহের প্রচলন ঠাকুরদাসের কাছে এতটাই তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ ছিল যে তিনি এই কার্যনির্বাহের জন্য সকল বাধা অতিক্রম করার উৎসাহ প্রদান করেছিলেন এবং তাঁর পুত্রকে বলেছিলেন, "(এই কার্যে) প্রবৃত্ত হইবার পর কিছুতেই পশ্চাৎপদ হইবে না; এমনকি আমরা তোমার পিতা-মাতা; আমরা নিবারণ করিলেও ক্ষান্ত থাকিবে না"। (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:১০৮) পিতা ঠাকুরদাসের বক্তব্যের প্রতিফলন দেখা গেছিল ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মধ্যে, যখন তিনি শম্ভুচন্দ্রকে লেখা চিঠিতে বলেছিলেন, "এ বিষয়ের জন্য সর্বস্বান্ত হইয়াছি এবং আবশ্যক হইলে প্রাণান্ত স্বীকারেও পরান্মুখ নহি। আমি দেশাচারের নিতান্ত দাস নহি; নিজের বা সমাজের মঙ্গলের নিমিত্ত যাহা উচিত বা আবশ্যক বোধ হইবে তাহা করিব; লোকের বা কুটুম্বের ভয়ে কদাচ সংকুচিত হইব না।" (ঘোষ, ১৯৮৪:৪৫০) সুতরাং বিধবা বিবাহ প্রচলন সংক্রান্ত ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র যাবতীয় চিন্তা-ভাবনা ও পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণের প্রারম্ভিক পর্বে ঠাকুরদাসের সমর্থন ও অনুমোদন তাকে গভীরভাবে প্রভাবিত করেছিল।

ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মাতৃভক্তির যেসব নিদর্শন তার জীবনীকাররা নথিবদ্ধ করেছিলেন সেগুলির মধ্যে আবার কিছু ঘটনা ছিল অতিরঞ্জিত। যেমন—শম্ভুচন্দ্রের বিবাহ উপলক্ষে ভগবতীদেবী ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে বাড়ি আসার কথা বলেছিলেন। সঠিক সময়ে বাড়ি পৌঁছানোর তাগিদে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বর্ষাপ্লাবিত দামোদর অতিক্রম করেছিলেন। চণ্ডীচরণ লিখেছেন, 'মাতৃভক্ত বিদ্যাসাগর কি করিলেন জানতে চাও পাঠক? ভাবিতেও শরীর শিহরিত হইয়া ওঠে বিদ্যাসাগর মহাশয় আবদারে মায়ের আদেশ পালনের জন্য বর্ষার ভরা দামোদরের জলোচ্ছ্বাসে অঙ্গ ঢালিয়া দিলেন। মাতৃআজ্ঞা পালনে বদ্ধপরিকর ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র দামোদরের তরঙ্গ সংগ্রামে জয়ী হইয়া পরপারে উঠিলেন।' (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৩৬৭:৬৭) এই অতিরঞ্জনকে খারিজ করে শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছিলেন, 'চণ্ডীবাবু বর্ষাকালে ভরা দামোদর সাঁতরাইয়া পার হওয়ার কথা যে লিখিয়াছেন, তাহা নিতান্ত অসঙ্গত। বোধ করি চণ্ডীবাবু বর্ষাকালে দামোদর নদের অতি ভীষণমূর্তি কখনো স্বচক্ষে দেখেন নাই; তার জন্যই এরূপ অসম্ভব কথা লিখিয়াছেন।' (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:২৬০) আবার চণ্ডীচরণ লিখেছেন যে, পিতা ঠাকুরদাস পুত্রের চিন্তাভাবনা, অনুভব, জীবনের আদর্শ ও নিষ্ঠা বুঝতে পারতেন না।" (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ১৩৬৭: ২৫) যদি তাই হয়, তাহলে বিধবা বিবাহের প্রচলনের মত একটা যুগান্তকারী পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণের ব্যাপারে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রকে অনুমোদন এবং সমর্থন প্রদান করার পরিবর্তে তাকে বিরত থাকার পরামর্শ দিতেন ঠাকুর দাস। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র নিজেই "বাল্যবিবাহের দোষ" নামক প্রবন্ধ লিখেছিলেন। কিন্তু পিতা ঠাকুরদাসের সিদ্ধান্ত অনুযায়ী ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের বাল্যবিবাহ হয়েছিল। এ প্রসঙ্গে শম্ভুচন্দ্র লিখেছিলেন, 'বিবাহ করিতে অগ্রজের আন্তরিক ইচ্ছে ছিল না। যাবজ্জীবন লেখাপড়া শিখিব, সাধ্যানুসারে দেশের উপকার করিব, তাহার এই আন্তরিক ইচ্ছা ছিল। কেবল পিতার ভয়ে অগত্যা বিবাহ করিতে সম্মত হইয়াছিলেন।' (বিদ্যারত্ন, ১৯৪৭:৩২) কিন্তু এই বিষয়েও পিতার প্রতি ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের অনুযোগ চোখে পড়ে না। তবে জীবনের শেষের দিকে নানা সংসারিক জটিলতাকে কেন্দ্র করে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র অনেক সময় পিতার প্রতি ক্ষোভ উগরে দিয়েছেন। বয়সজনিত কারণে ঠাকুরদাস যখন আর আগের মত বীরসিংহ গ্রামের যৌথ পরিবারকে ঠিকমতো সামলাতে পারছিলেন না তখন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বেশ রুষ্ট হয়েছিলেন। আবার ঠাকুরদাসের অতিরিক্ত প্রশ্রয়ে ঈশানচন্দ্র এবং ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পুত্র নারায়ণ যেরূপ পথভ্রষ্ট হয়েছিল তা দেখে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র তাঁর পিতাকে বলেছিলেন, 'আপনি না নিরামিষাশী? ...আপনি দুটি বেলা ঈশান ও নারায়ণের মাথা খাইতেছেন। তবুও আপনি নিরামিষাশী?' (বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, ২০১১:২৫০) কিন্তু ঠাকুরদাসের অসামর্থের প্রতি তিনি যতটা না অসন্তুষ্ট ছিলেন তার থেকে অনেক বেশি ক্ষুব্ধ ছিলেন যৌথ পরিবার

ব্যবস্থার জটিলতাকে নিয়ে। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের অন্যান্য অনেক বক্তব্যে এই যৌথপরিবার ব্যবস্থার প্রতি অনীহা এবং বিরক্তি খুব সুস্পষ্টভাবেই প্রকাশ পেয়েছে। পিতার সঙ্গে মতান্তর হওয়া সত্ত্বেও পিতা-পুত্রের ঘনিষ্ঠতা যে অটুট ছিল প্রমাণ পাওয়া যায় কাশীতে বসবাসকালে পিতার উচ্ছিষ্ট পাত্রে ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র ভক্ষণ করতেন, ঠাকুর দাস ও তাকে নিজ মুখে মহাভারত পাঠ করে শোনাতেন। (বিদ্যারত্ন ১৯৪৭:২১৩) ধর্ম-কর্ম সম্পর্কে নিজের বিশেষ আগ্রহ না থাকা সত্ত্বেও ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র ঠাকুরদাস বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়ের শ্রাদ্ধের কাজ ও ব্রাহ্মণ ভোজন যথাবিহিত ধর্মমতেই নিষ্পন্ন করেছিলেন। দায়বদ্ধতা রক্ষা করার যে শিক্ষা তিনি তাঁর পিতার কাছ থেকে পেয়েছিলেন তা থেকে কখনো ঈশ্বরচন্দ্র বিরত হননি তাই বিনয় ঘোষ যথার্থই বলেছিলেন ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের পিতা ঠাকুরদাস ছিলেন তার 'টিচার ও ট্রেনার'। (ঘোষ, ১৯৮৪: ১৬)

তবে ঊনবিংশ শতকের দীর্ঘ সময় ধরেই নারীসংক্রান্ত বিষয়কে কেন্দ্র করে সমাজ আন্দোলিত হয়েছিল। ব্রিটিশ ও ভারতীয় সংস্কারকদের তৎপরতাতে নারীশিক্ষা প্রসার, সতীদাহ প্রথা বিলোপ, বহুবিবাহ ও বাল্যবিবাহকে নিয়ে বিতর্ক প্রভৃতি ঘটনা 'নারী ভাবনাকে' সামাজ জিজ্ঞাসার ভরকেন্দ্রে প্রতিষ্ঠিত করেছিল। স্বদেশী যুগের সূচনালগ্নে এবং পরবর্তীকালে দেশকে মাতৃরূপে বর্ণনা করার প্রবণতার মধ্যে জাতীয়তাবাদী ভাবনার প্রকাশ দেখা গেছিল। ১৮৮২ সালে প্রকাশিত বঙ্কিমচন্দ্রের আনন্দমঠ উপন্যাসে উল্লিখিত 'বন্দেমাতরম' শ্লোকটি মাতৃবন্দনাকে দেশ তথা মাতৃভূমিকে একটি ঐশ্বর্যশালী ও স্নেহময়ী মাতৃ-প্রতিমা রূপে তুলে ধরেছিল। (সরকার, ১৯৯৭ : ১৮১) আবার সুমিত সরকার তাঁর আলোচনায় দেখিয়েছিলেন, ঊনবিংশ শতাব্দীর নারীভাবনার একদিকে ছিল 'আধুনিক স্ত্রী' এবং অন্যদিকে ছিল 'মাতা'। অনেকক্ষেত্রেই "আধুনিক স্ত্রী"-এর বেড়াজালে আটকে পড়ে ভুগতে থাকা মাতা, মাতৃভূমির দুর্দশার প্রতীক হয়ে উঠেছিল। স্বদেশী যুগের সাংস্কৃতিক জাতীয়তাবাদের আবহে নারীকে দেশমাতৃকার সঙ্গে সংযুক্ত করে তার গরীমা কীর্তন করা হয়েছিল—বঙ্গদেশকে 'বঙ্গলক্ষ্মী' হিসাবে চিত্রিত করা হয়েছিল। এছাড়াও স্বাদেশিকতার যুগে 'দুর্গা-কালী' প্রভৃতি দেবীমূর্তি একদিকে যেমন শক্তিশালী মাতৃভূমির প্রতিবিম্ব হয়ে উঠেছিল, অন্যদিকে সেগুলি ছিল দেশাত্মবোধের অনুপ্রেরণার অন্যতম উৎসস্থল। (সরকার, ১৯৯৭: ৩০১,৩১৪,৩৪৫) মাতৃরূপে নারী ছিল সমাজচালক পুরুষত্বের আদর্শ ও অনুপ্রেরণার উৎস। স্বাভাবিকভাবেই ঊনবিংশ শতাব্দীর মনীষীদের জীবনালেখ্য রচনাকারীদের কলমে এই মাতৃ-বন্দনার প্রতিফলন ঘটবে এটাই স্বাভাবিক। ঈশ্বরচন্দ্রের মাতা ভগবতী দেবীকে নিয়েও সেকারণে একটু বেশি উচ্ছ্বাস দেখা গেছিল, যে উচ্ছ্বাস তাঁর পিতৃদেবকে নিয়ে দেখা যায়নি।

References

- Banerjee, Ishwar Chandra. 1891. Vidyasagar Charit (autobiography), compiled by Sree Narayan Banerjee, Calcutta: The Calcutta Library
- Vidyaratna, Shambhu Chandra. 1947. Vidyasagar Jibancharit O Bhramnirash. Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited
- Banerjee, Chandicharan. 1367. Vidyasagar. Edited by Bernick Roy. Calcutta: Standard Publishers
- Biharilal, Sarkar. 1329. Vidyasagar (Biography of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar with criticism). Published by Sri Haripada Chattopadhyay. Calcutta: Shastra Prakash Karyalaya.
- Roy, Sri Saratkumar. 1341. Vidyasagar Charit. Calcutta: Roy & Co.
- Ghosh, Vinay. 1984. Vidyasagar O Bangali Samaj (Three volumes). Calcutta: Orient Longman Limited.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. 1343. Charitra Puja (Second Edition). Calcutta: Visva-Bharati Library.
- Trivedi, Ramendrasundar. 1320. Charitkatha. Calcutta: Printed and Published by Sri Gopalchandra Niyogi.
- Adhikari, Santosh Kumar. 1970. Vidyasagar, Calcutta: Rupa and Co.
- Sarkar, Pinakesh. 1416 (Autumn Issue). "Vidyasagar". Korak Sahitya Patrika, Calcutta, pages 25-34
- Bandyapadhyay, Anil Chandra. 2011. Vidyasagar. Kolkata: Progotishil Prokashak

- Gandhi, Mahatma. 1367. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. in Vidyasagar Smriti. Vishwanath Dey (ed.). Calcutta: Sahityam, pp. 35-39
- Sarkar, Sumit. 1997. Writing Social History. Calcutta Chennai Mumbai: Oxford India Press
- Bagchi, Moni. 1946. Amader Vidyasagar. Calcutta: Sarat Pustakalaya.

Other Resources used

- Mukhopadhyay, Narayan Chandra. 1960. Birsingher Simha Sishu. Calcutta: Indian Publishing House
- Nag, Sati Kumar.1978. Vidyasagarer Mata Bhagawati Devi. Calcutta: Orient Book Company
- Mitra, Indra.2019. Karuna Sagar Vidyasagar (Eleventh edition). Calcutta: Ananda Publishers
- Banerjee, Sri Chandichara. 1294, Ma O Chele, Calcutta: Brahma Mission Press
- Mitra, Subal Chandra. 1907. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Story of His Life and Work. Calcutta: New Bengal Press

Bio Profile of the Author:
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Political Science
Bankura University, Bankura
Email: satrazit69@gmail.com

Prevalence of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in East Indian states

[1]Manotosh Gayen ,[2]Md Reza KausharHasmi and [3]Robi Routh

Abstract:

The teenage years, spanning from ten to nineteen, represent a highly sensitive and formative phase in the lives of both boys and girls. However, girls tend to suffer disproportionately during this stage due to social practices such as child marriage. Early marriage often leads to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and an increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, which together pose serious risks to their physical and mental well-being.The present study attempts to examine the levels, trends, and patterns of teenage childbearing inthe eastern states of India, while also identifying the key factors and underlying characteristics that influence these patterns. For this purpose, data has been utilized from the 3rd, 4th, and 5 throunds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), providing a comprehensive basis for theanalysis. The findings reveal that although teenage pregnancy is gradually declining across India, including the eastern states, the rates remain alarmingly high. Among the states, West Bengal records the highest rate of teenage pregnancy (16.40 percent), followed by Bihar (11 percent) and Jharkhand (9.80 percent). These figures highlight the persistence of deep-rooted socio-cultural and economic challenges in the region. Further analysis points to several determinants of teenage childbearing, including place of residence, wealth status, educational attainment, and exposure to social media. These factors collectively shape the likelihood of early marriage and subsequent pregnancy among adolescent girls. Given the seriousness of the issue, there is an urgent need for effective interventions from both government and non-governmental organizations. Policies and programs must be designed to address socio-economic inequalities, enhance educational opportunities, and raise awareness, with the ultimate aim of ensuring the empowerment, protection, and holistic well-being of adolescent girls in these states.

Keywords: *Teenage pregnancy; Childbearing; Socio-economic factors; India and Eastern Indianstates.*

বিমূর্ত

দশ থেকে উনিশ বছরের কৈশোর সময়টা ছেলে এবং মেয়ে উভয়ের জন্যই অত্যন্ত সংবেদনশীল। বিশেষ করে এই সময় মেয়েরা বাল্যবিবাহের কারণে বেশি ভোগে এবং এর ফলে অনিচ্ছাকৃত গর্ভধারণ, অনিরাপদ গর্ভপাত, যৌন রোগের উচ্চ ঝুঁকি ইত্যাদির সম্মুখীন হয়। এই সমীক্ষাটিতে পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের মাত্রা, প্রবণতা এবং ধরণগুলি

অন্বেষণ করার চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে। এমনকী, এই অধ্যয়নটি কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের ধরণকে প্রভাবিত করে এমন কারণ ও নেপথ্যে বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলিকে চিহ্নিত করেছে। বর্তমান গবেষণায় জাতীয় পরিবার স্বাস্থ্য সমীক্ষার (NFHS) 3য়, 4র্থ এবং 5ম রাউন্ডের তথ্য ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে। অধ্যায়ন থেকে জানা যায় ভারত এবং পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যগুলিতে কিশোরী মেয়েদের গর্ভধারণের হ্রাস পাচ্ছে, তবে গর্ভাবস্থার হার এখনও খুব বেশি। এই প্রবনতা সবথেকে বেশি পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (16.40 শতাংশ), বিহার (11 শতাংশ), এবং ঝাড়খন্ডে (9.80 শতাংশ)। বসবাসের স্থান, সম্পদের অবস্থা, শিক্ষা এবং সমাজ মাধ্যমের প্রভাব হল বাল্যবিবাহ ও গর্ভধারণের অন্যতম নির্ধারক। এই রাজ্যগুলির আর্থ-সামাজিক বৈষম্য মোকাবেলার পাশাপাশি, কিশোরীদের ক্ষমতায়ন ও সুস্থতার জন্য বেটি বাঁচাও বেটি পড়াও, বালিকা সমৃদ্ধি যোজনা ইত্যাদির মতো বিশেষ কর্মসূচিগুলির কার্যকর হস্তক্ষেপের প্রয়োজন রয়েছে।

মূল শব্দ: *কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা; সন্তান জন্মদান; সামাজিক-অর্থনৈতিক কারণ; ভারত এবং পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্য।*

ভূমিকা:

কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং কৈশোর মাতৃত্ব বিশ্বব্যাপী উদবিগ্নের বিষয় এবং এক গভীর সামাজিক সামাজিক সমস্যা, যা প্রজনন সংক্রান্ত জনস্বাস্থ্য ব্যবস্থার সামনে বড় চ্যালেঞ্জ (Dutta et al 2022)। কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা বলতে 10 থেকে 19 বছর বয়সী মহিলার গর্ভধারণকে বোঝায় এবং এই বয়সে গর্ভধারণ স্বাস্থ্যের পক্ষে ঝুঁকি কর। ইউনিসেফ (2001)-এর পরিসংখান অনুসারে, বিশ্বব্যাপী প্রতি পাঁচজন মায়ের মধ্যে একজন কিশোর বয়সী, যা দেখায় যে এই সমস্যাটি কতটা ব্যাপক, এবং তা প্রমাণ করে। কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা প্রায়ই অকাল জন্ম, অপুষ্টি এবং উচ্চ রক্তচাপ সংক্রান্ত বিভিন্ন সাস্থ্য সমস্যার সৃষ্টি করে। এমনকি এটি মাতৃমৃত্যু ও শিশুমৃত্যুর হারকে ত্বরান্বিত করে। নিম্ন ও মধ্যম আয়ের দেশগুলিতে 15 থেকে 49 বছর বয়সী মহিলাদের মধ্যে মাতৃত্ব জনিত মাতৃমৃত্যু হার 99 শতাংশ (Bhan 2019), যা কৈশোর অবস্থায় গর্ভধারণের সঙ্গে সম্পর্কিত। বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য সংস্থা (WHO 2014) এর পরিসংখ্যান অনুসারে, 15 থেকে 19 বছর বয়সী আনুমানিক 16 মিলিয়ন মহিলা এবং 15 বছরের কম বয়সী এক মিলিয়ন মহিলা প্রতি বছর কৈশোর মাতৃত্ব লাভ করে। কৈশোর মায়ের সংখ্যা অস্বাবাভিকভাবে নিম্ন ও মধ্যম আয়ের দেশগুলিতে বেশি, যেখানে এই জন্মের 90 শতাংশ (WHO 2011)। বিপরীতে, উন্নত দেশগুলিতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং কৈশোর মাতৃত্ব তুলনামূলক ভাবে খুবই কম; এর অন্যতম কারণ পরিণত বয়সে বিবাহ, উদার পরিবার পরিকল্পনা এবং উন্নত স্বাস্থ্য পরিষেবা যা উন্নয়নশীল দেশগুলির থেকে আলাদা (Nandi et al 2014)। উদাহরণস্বরূপ, মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র, পোল্যান্ড, রোমানিয়া, বুলগেরিয়ার মতো দেশে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণে এবং মাতৃত্ব অবিবাহিত কিশোর-কিশোরীদের সাথে যুক্ত, উন্নয়নশীল দেশগুলিতে বাল্যবিবাহ এবং পারিবারিক সম্পর্ক সামাজিক কাঠামো দ্বারা প্রভাবিত হয় (Mehra and Agarwal, 2004; Sedgh et al 2015)।

কৈশোর অবস্থায় গর্ভধারণ সাব-সাহারান আফ্রিকা এবং দক্ষিণ এশিয়া দেশগুলিতে একটি উদ্বেগজনক সমস্যা। আফ্রিকা মহাদেশের নাইজেরিয়া, মালি এবং উগান্ডায় বিশ্বের সবচেয়ে বেশি কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের হার রয়েছে (Kirchengast 2016)। বাংলাদেশ, নেপাল এবং ভারতের মতো দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দেশগুলিতেও উচ্চ গর্ভধারণ হারের কারণে মহিলারা ব্যাপক স্বাস্থ্য চ্যালেঞ্জের সম্মুখীন (Acharya et al 2010)। চীনকে পেছনে ফেলে ভারত বিশ্বের সর্বাধিক জনসংখ্যার দেশ হওয়ার নেপত্যে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্ব সম্পর্কে জন সংখ্যাবিদরা উষ্মা প্রকাশ করে (Hertog et al 2023)। ন্যাশনাল ফ্যামিলি হেলথ সার্ভে (NFHS)-5-এর পরিসংখ্যান অনুসারে, ভারতে 18 থেকে 29 বছর বয়সের মধ্যে 24.7 শতাংশ মহিলা 18 বছর বয়সের আগেই বিয়ে করেছেন। এই পরিসংখ্যানটি গ্রামীণ এলাকায় আরও বেশি, যেখানে বাল্যবিবাহের হার বেশি। ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের অন্যাতম কারণ হল—বাল্যবিবাহ, শিক্ষার অভাব, নিম্ন আর্থ-সামাজিক অবস্থা এবং গর্ভনিরোধ বা গর্ভপাতের আইনি জটিলতা (Sharma and Sharma 2021)।

কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্ব নিয়ে ভারতের মধ্যে আঞ্চলিক ভিন্নতা রয়েছে। পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্য যেমন পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, বিহার, ঝাড়খন্ড ও ওডিশায় কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের হার সর্বোচ্চ (Pautunthang 2022)। NFHS-5 (2019-21)-এর পরিসংখ্যান অনুসারে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ-এ 15 থেকে 19 বছর বয়সী 16.4 শতাংশ মহিলা ইতিমধ্যেই গর্ভবতী বা মা হয়েছেন। পূর্ব ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা স্বাস্থ্যগত সমস্যার সাথে সম্পর্কযুক্ত, যেমন—উচ্চ রক্তস্বল্পতার ঘটনা, অকাল প্রসব এবং কম ওজনের বাচ্চাদের জন্ম ইত্যাদি (Banerjee et al 2009)। সর্বোপরি, পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের সমস্যা উদ্বেগজনক। এই গবেষণায় পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের মাত্রা, প্রবণতা এবং ধরণগুলিকে অন্বেষণ করার চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে। পাশাপাশি কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের ধরন কে প্রভাবিত করে এমন কারণ ও নেপথ্যে বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলি চিহ্নিত করেছে।

তথ্য উৎস এবং পদ্ধতি:

আলোচ্য গবেষণায়, ভারতের জাতীয় পরিবার স্বাস্থ্য সমীক্ষা অর্থাৎ ন্যাশনাল ফ্যামিলি হেলথ সার্ভে (NFHS)-এর 3য়, 4র্থ এবং 5ম রাউন্ডের তথ্য ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে। আলোচনার প্রধান বিষয় হল, 15-19 বছর বয়সী মহিলাদের গর্ভাবস্থা, সন্তান জন্মদান এবং মোট সন্তান জন্মদানের হার বিশ্লেষণ করা। এছাড়া, কৈশোর মহিলাদের স্কুলে লেখাপড়ার বছর, প্রথম যৌন মিলনের বয়স, বৈবাহিক অবস্থা, বসবাসের স্থান, সম্পদ, ধর্ম, বর্ণ প্রভৃতি বিষয় নিয়ে আলোচনা করা হয়। এই তথ্যগুলিকে চারটি উপ-বিভাগে বিভক্ত করা হয় যথা, মহিলাদের ব্যক্তিগত বৈশিষ্ট্য, পারিবারিক বৈশিষ্ট্য, সামাজিক-সাংস্কৃতিক বৈশিষ্ট্য এবং পরিবার পরিকল্পনার বৈশিষ্ট্য। বিশ্লেষণে হাইপোথিসিস মূল্যায়নের জন্য ক্রস-টেবুলেশন, শতাংশ, কার্টোগ্রাফিক পদ্ধতি, একমুখী ANOVA এবং স্বাধীন-নমুনা টি-টেস্ট ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে।

কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের স্তর এবং প্রবণতা:

NFHS-এর পরিসংখ্যান অনুসারে, ভারতের প্রায় সব রাজ্যেই কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের হার কমেছে। 2005-06 সালে মোট হার ছিল 16.0 শতাংশ, 2015-16 সালে 7.9 শতাংশ এবং অবশেষে 2019-21 সালে 6.8 শতাংশে নেমে এসেছে (Figure 1)। তবে পূর্ব ও উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের রাজ্যগুলিতে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণ এবং মাতৃত্বের হার এখনো খুব বেশি। NFHS-3 এর এর রিপোর্টে পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে 15-19 বছর বয়সী মহিলাদের মধ্যে এই হার 23.05 শতাংশ, NFHS-4-এ 12.50 শতাংশ এবং সম্প্রতি NFHS-5-এ 11.18 শতাংশ, যা সমগ্র ভারতের গড় থেকে দ্বিগুণ (Table 1)।

NFHS-3য়, 4র্থ এবং 5ম রাউন্ডের তথ্য অনুসারে, জাতীয় স্তরে কিশোরী সন্তান জন্মদানের মোট শতাংশ হার সর্বোচ্চ পূর্ব ভারতে (46.73 শতাংশ) এরপরে উত্তর পূর্ব ভারত (29.58 শতাংশ), মধ্য ভারত (23.17 শতাংশ), দক্ষিণ ভারত (23.03 শতাংশ), পশ্চিম ভারত (21.46 শতাংশ) এবং সর্বনিম্ন উত্তর ভারতে (13.24 শতাংশ) পরিলক্ষিত হয় (Table 1)। NFHS-5 রিপোর্টে, ভারতের 10 টি রাজ্যে সবচেয়ে বেশি কৈশোর জন্মহার পরিলক্ষিত হয়, যার অধিকাংশই পূর্ব ও উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে অবস্থিত। অঞ্চল ভিত্তিক রাজ্যগুলির মধ্যে পূর্ব ভারতে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, বিহার, ঝাড়খণ্ড এবং ওডিশা; উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতে ত্রিপুরা, আসাম, মণিপুর এবং মেঘালয়; দক্ষিণ ভারতে অন্ধ্র প্রদেশ; এবং পশ্চিম ভারতে মহারাষ্ট্র অবস্থান করছে। যাইহোক, পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের হার বছরে পরিবর্তিত হয়। NFHS-3 (2005-06)-এর সর্বভারতীয় প্রতিবেদন অনুসারে, ঝাড়খণ্ড কিশোরী সন্তান জন্মদানের তালিকায় শীর্ষস্থানে (27.50 শতাংশ) এরপর পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (25.30 শতাংশ), বিহার (25 শতাংশ) এবং ওড়িশা (14.40 শতাংশ) ক্রমানুসারে অবস্থান করছে (Figure 1)।

এছাড়াও, NFHS-3 (2005-06) থেকে NFHS-4 (2015-16)-এর মধ্যে সন্তান জন্মের ব্যবধান সবচেয়ে বেশি ঝাড়খণ্ড রাজ্যে (15.6 শতাংশ), তারপরে বিহার (12.8 শতাংশ), পশ্চিমবঙ্গে (7 শতাংশ) এবং ওডিশায় (6.8 শতাংশ)

(Figure 1)। এই তথ্য অনুসারে সমগ্র পূর্ব ভারতে গড় জন্মহার 23.05 শতাংশ থেকে কমে 12.50 শতাংশ হয়েছে, যার ব্যবধান অন্যান্য অঞ্চলের তুলনায় বেশি অর্থাৎ 10.55 শতাংশ (Table 1 এবং Figure 1)। ভারতের অন্যান্য রাজ্যের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে ঝাড়খন্ডে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা ও জন্মহার দ্রুত কমেছে, NFHS-3 (2005-06) থেকে NFHS-5 (2019-21)-এর মধ্যে সর্বাধিক 17.7 শতাংশ হ্রাস পেয়েছে। অনুরূপভাবে, বিহারে 14 শতাংশ, পশ্চিমবঙ্গে 8.9 শতাংশ এবং ওড়িশায় 6.9 শতাংশ ইতিবাচক পতন ঘটেছে (Figure 1)।

ডেমোগ্রাফিক বৈশিষ্ট্য এবং বিন্যাস:

গত দুই দশকে, পূর্ব ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা উল্লেখযোগ্যভাবে হ্রাস পেয়েছে, যদিও সন্তান জন্মদানের হার এখনো অনেক বেশি। NFHS-এর তথ্য অনুযায়ী, অল্প বয়সের মধ্যে সন্তান জন্ম দেওয়া মহিলাদের গড় শতাংশের নেতিবাচক পরিবর্তন ঘটেছে। বর্তমান সমীক্ষাটিতে NFHS-5 এর তথ্য ব্যবহার করে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের বিশদ বিবরণ দেওয়া হয়েছে (Table 2)। তথ্য অনুসারে, বিহার, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ও ঝাড়খন্ডে সবচেয়ে বেশি শতাংশ তরুণী রয়েছে যারা 18 বছর বয়সের আগে গর্ভধারণ এবং প্রসবের অভিজ্ঞতা লাভ করে। এছাড়া এর জন্য দায়ী বিভিন্ন আর্থ-সামাজিক বৈশিষ্ট্য যা প্রাথমিক গর্ভাবস্থার সঙ্গে স্পষ্ট সম্পর্ক প্রদর্শন করে। উদাহরণস্বরূপ, বসবাসের স্থান, বর্ণ, ধর্ম, সম্পদের সূচক, শিক্ষার অবস্থা, মোবাইল ফোনের ব্যবহার ইত্যাদি। কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা রোধ করতে এবং নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন ও স্বাস্থ্যের উন্নয়নের জন্য, আর্থ-সামাজিক কারণগুলিকে মোকাবেলা করে এমন লক্ষ্যযুক্ত হস্তক্ষেপ প্রয়োজন। আর্থ-সামাজিক বৈশিষ্ট্যগুলি একমুখী আনোভা টেস্ট এবং স্বাধীন-নমুনা টি-টেস্ট দ্বারা বিশ্লেষণ করা হয়েছে। সারণী-2 এর সমীক্ষা অনুসারে, শিক্ষার স্তর বৃদ্ধির সাথে সাথে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের সম্ভাবনা হ্রাস পায়। 15-19 বছর বয়সী মহিলাদের মধ্যে 9.5 শতাংশ উচ্চশিক্ষিত এবং 15.7 শতাংশ শিক্ষা ছাড়াই সন্তান ধারণ করেছিল ($p<0.000$***)। কৈশোর মাতৃত্বের হার উচ্চ শিক্ষিত মহিলাদের তুলনায় কম শিক্ষিত মহিলাদের মধ্যে বেশি প্রচলিত। পূর্ব ভারতে মোট 16 শতাংশ মহিলা যাদের স্কুলে পড়াশুনা নেই তারা 18 বছরের আগে গর্ভবতী হয়েছিল, যার মধ্যে বিহারে সবচেয়ে বেশি (22 শতাংশ), তারপরে ঝাড়খন্ড (16 শতাংশ), ওডিশা (15 শতাংশ) এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (4 শতাংশ)। অন্যদিকে, উচ্চ শিক্ষিত মহিলাদের মধ্যে বেশি সন্তান জন্মদানের হার পরিলক্ষিত হয় ওডিশা রাজ্যে (13 শতাংশ), তারপরে ঝাড়খণ্ড (10 শতাংশ), বিহার (9 শতাংশ) এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (8 শতাংশ)। 15-20 বছর বয়সী মেয়েরা যৌনভাবে সক্রিয়, উর্বর এবং উচ্চ সন্তান জন্মদানে সক্ষম, যৌন কার্যকলাপের প্রবণতা সবচেয়ে বেশি ওডিশায় (74 শতাংশ), তারপরে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (48 শতাংশ), বিহার (40 শতাংশ), ঝাড়খন্ড (30 শতাংশ) এবং সমগ্র পূর্ব ভারতের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে 44 শতাংশ ($p<0.00$***)। 15 বছর বয়সের নিচে যৌন ক্রিয়াকালাপ সব থেকে বেশি লক্ষ্য করা যায় পশ্চিমবঙ্গে (21 শতাংশ) এবং কম ঝাড়খন্ডে (9 শতাংশ)। বিবাহের পরে যৌনমিলনের সর্বোচ্চ হার ঝাড়খণ্ডে (60 শতাংশ) পাওয়া গেছে, বিহার (48 শতাংশ), পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (31 শতাংশ) এবং সর্বনিম্ন হার রয়েছে ওডিশা রাজ্যে (11 শতাংশ)। 15-19 বছর বয়সী বিবাহিত মহিলাদের মধ্যে 18 বছর বয়সের আগে সন্তান জন্ম দেওয়ার হার বিহারে সর্বোচ্চ 99.6 শতাংশ, পশ্চিমবঙ্গে 99.1 শতাংশ, ঝাড়খণ্ডে 97.3 শতাংশ ও ওডিশায় 96.9 শতাংশ এবং চার রাজ্যে মোট 98.7 শতাংশ ($p<0.289$)। মিডিয়া এক্সপোজার কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদান হারের সাথে সম্পর্কযুক্ত, যারা টেলিভিশন দেখেন এমন মহিলাদের মধ্যে 50.9 শতাংশ ($p<0.003$***) এবং মোবাইল ফোন ব্যবহারকারীদের মধ্যে সব থেকে বেশি অর্থ্যাৎ 92.9 শতাংশ সন্তান ধারণ করেছিল ($p<0.997$)। কৈশোর মাতৃত্বের হার শহরাঞ্চলের তুলনায় গ্রামীণ এলাকায় বেশি, বিহারে এই হার সর্বাধিক (94 শতাংশ) এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গে (87 শতাংশ)। গ্রাম ও শহরের ব্যবধান সবথেকে বেশি বিহারে (87.4 শতাংশ), তারপরে ওডিশা (82.6 শতাংশ), ঝাড়খণ্ড (80.4 শতাংশ) এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গে কম (74.2 শতাংশ)। দারিদ্র্য, শিক্ষা এবং বেকারত্বের মতো আর্থ-সামাজিক কারণগুলি বাল্যবিবাহ ও সন্তান জন্মদানে সবথেকে বেশি অবদান রাখে। সম্পদের অবস্থা কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থাকে ব্যাপকভাবে প্রভাবিত করে, তথ্যানুসারে 7 শতাংশ

ধনী পরিবার এবং 50 শতাংশ দরিদ্র পরিবার সন্তান জন্ম দেয় (p<0.000***)। নীতি আয়োগের Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)-2021 এর সমীক্ষা দেখায় যে পূর্ব ভারতের সবথেকে দরিদ্রতম রাজ্য ঝাড়খণ্ড এবং বিহার, যেখানে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের হার সবথেকে বেশি। অনুরূপভাবে NFHS-5-এর তথ্যানুসারে, ঝাড়খন্ডে দারিদ্র্যের হার সর্বোচ্চ 55 শতাংশ এবং বিহারে 52 শতাংশ। এছাড়া, ওবিসি জাতির মধ্যে কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের হার সবচেয়ে বেশি পরিলক্ষিত হয় বিহার এবং ঝাড়খণ্ডে (যথাক্রমে 55 শতাংশ এবং 45 শতাংশ)। একইভাবে তফসিলি জাতির মধ্যে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (38 শতাংশ) ও বিহারে (31 শতাংশ) এবং তফসিলি উপজাতির মধ্যে ওডিশা (35 শতাংশ) ও ঝাড়খন্ড (32 শতাংশ) রাজ্যে (p<0.005***)। উচ্চ জন্মহার অন্যান্য ধর্মীয় গোষ্ঠীর তুলনায় হিন্দুদের মধ্যে বেশি (80 শতাংশ) এবং তারা অধিকাংশই দরিদ্র, গ্রামীণ এলাকায় বসবাস করে (p<0.309)। এমনকী, সঠিকভাবে গর্ভনিরোধক ব্যবহার না করায় গর্ভাবস্থার সংখ্যা ক্রমবর্ধমান, এই হার সবচেয়ে বেশি বিহার (79 শতাংশ) ও ঝাড়খন্ডে (74 শতাংশ), এরপর ওডিশা (64 শতাংশ) ও পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (52 শতাংশ) ক্রমানুসারে অবস্থান করছে (p<0.140), ফলে এই রাজ্যগুলিতে সন্তান জন্মদানের পরিমাণ অন্যান্য রাজ্যের তুলনায় অনেক বেশি।

আলোচনা:

এই গবেষণার প্রাথমিক উদ্দেশ্য পূর্ব ভারতীয় রাজ্যে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থার বর্তমান অবস্থা মূল্যায়ণ করা। ফলাফলগুলি দেখায় আর্থ-সামাজিক অবস্থা কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের উপর এক উল্লেখযোগ্য ক্ষতিকর প্রভাব ফেলে। কৈশোর স্বাস্থ্যের উন্নতির জন্য ভারত সরকার কিছু আইন ও কর্মসূচি বাস্তবায়ন করেছে, কিন্তু বাল্যবিবাহ এবং গর্ভধারণের সমস্যা এখনও বিদ্যমান। এই অভ্যাসটি কিশোরীদের বিভিন্ন যৌন ও প্রজনন স্বাস্থ্য ঝুঁকির সম্মুখীন করে। অপর্যাপ্ত বোধগম্যতার কারণে এদের বিভিন্ন ধরনের গুরুতর অসুস্থতা এবং মৃত্যুর হার বেশি হয় (Naik et al 2023)। প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক মহিলাদের তুলনায় কৈশোর মহিলাদের মধ্যে মৃতপ্রসব এবং গর্ভপাতের হার খুব বেশি (Patra 2016)। Atwood এবং Hussain, (1997) এর গবেষণায় দেখা যায়, বাল্যবিবাহ কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থার দিকে পরিচালিত করে এবং কিশোরীদের বিভিন্ন শারীরিক-মানসিক সমস্যার সম্মুখীন হতে হয়। তাই বর্তমান সমীক্ষাটি শিক্ষার স্তর, বৈবাহিক অবস্থা, বসবাসের স্থান, সম্পদ, ধর্ম, বর্ণ, এবং পরিবার পরিকল্পনা সহ বিভিন্ন কারণের সঙ্গে যুক্ত, এমনকি শিশুদের বিকাশে বাধাগ্রস্ত হওয়ার সাথেও যুক্ত। অঞ্চল ভিত্তিক বিশ্লেষনে দেখা যায়, পূর্ব ভারতে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, বিহার এবং ঝাড়খন্ড সহ উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের আসাম এবং ত্রিপুরা রাজ্যে কিশোরী মহিলাদের গর্ভধারণের হার সবথেকে বেশি। ত্রিপুরা এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গে পরিস্থিতি ভয়াবহ, যেখানে প্রায় এক-তৃতীয়াংশ মেয়েদের কৈশোর বয়সে বিয়ে হয় (UNFPA 2022)। বিহার ও ঝাড়খণ্ডের পূর্বাঞ্চল এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গের অধিকাংশ জেলা এই অনুশীলনের জন্য হটস্পট হিসেবে চিহ্নিত (Gita et al 2024)। গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে কৈশোর মায়েদের শিক্ষার হার তুলনামূলকভাবে কম এবং গ্রাম ও শহরের মধ্যে এই শিক্ষার যথেষ্ট ব্যবধান রয়েছে। অর্থ্যাৎ শিক্ষার অভাব এবং বিভিন্ন আর্থ-সামাজিক কারণ কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থার সাথে যুক্ত বলে মনে করা হয় (Goonewardena and Deeyagaha Waduge, 2005)। গবেষণাটি আরও দেখায়, শহুরে মেয়েরা বাল্যবিবাহ থেকে রেহাই পায় না, সাংস্কৃতিক প্রত্যাশা, আর্থিক সীমাবদ্ধতা, সম্প্রদায়ের প্রভাব এবং সহকর্মীদের চাপ দ্বারা প্রভাবিত হয়। অপরাধ ও হয়রানির ঝুঁকি সহ শহুরে পরিবেশে পরিবারগুলি প্রায়ই নিরাপত্তার বিষয়ে উদ্বেগ প্রকাশ করে এবং তাদের মেয়েদের বাল্যবিবাহ ও গর্ভধারণের দিকে ঠেলে দেয় (Mourtada et al 2017)। দুর্বল অর্থনৈতিক অবস্থা বাল্যবিবাহ এবং কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থার উপর যথেষ্ট প্রভাব ফেলে। অর্থনৈতিক সীমাবদ্ধতা, সামাজিক ও লিঙ্গ বৈষম্য, দাম্পত্য, কলহ, পারিবারিক অশান্তি এবং বিভিন্ন মানসিক চাপের কারণে মহিলারা সঠিক সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে পারে না। সাংস্কৃতিক ধারণা, নিয়ম বা ঐতিহ্যগত অনুশীলন সমাজে এত গভীরভাবে প্রোথিত যে কিশোরী মায়েরা মাঝে মাঝে তাদের পরিবারের অনৈতিক আচরণ মেনে চলতে ব্যর্থ হয়। Nandi et al. (2014) এর সমীক্ষা অনুসারে, বেশিরভাগ কিশোরী মেয়ে বিয়ের পরেও তাদের শিক্ষা চালিয়ে যেতে চায়। কিন্তু প্রকৃতপক্ষে, তাদের

পরিবার ও সমাজ তা সমর্থন করে না, এমনকি তাদের স্বামী এবং শ্বশুরবাড়ির লোকেরাও ঘোর বিরোধী। উচ্চ শিক্ষার অভাবের কারণে কিশোরীরা সঠিক সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে পারে না (Becker et al 2006), বাল্যবিবাহের ফলে বাল্যবধূরা উপার্জন করতে অক্ষম হয়, ফলে তারা তাদের স্বামী এবং শ্বশুর বাড়ির লোকের উপর বেশি নির্ভরশীল হয়ে পড়ে (Parsons et al 2015), এমনকি বাল্যবধূরা তাদের বাড়িতে মানসিক নির্যাতন সহ্য করে এবং গুরুতর বিষন্নতা ও একাকীত্ব ভোগ করে (Le Strat et al 2011)।

NFHS-এর তথ্য অনুসারে, তফসিলি জাতি-উপজাতি (SC এবং ST) এবং অন্যান্য অনগ্রসর শ্রেণীর (OBC) মেয়েদের কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের প্রবণতা বেশি, যার মূল কারণ শিক্ষা ও সচেতনতার অভাব (Parsons et al 2015)। বাল্যবিবাহে শিক্ষা একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে, কারণ কম শিক্ষিত নারীদের অল্প বয়সে বিয়ে করার বা সন্তান জন্ম দেওয়ার সম্ভাবনা বেশি, এটি Sagalova et al (2021), Wang et al (2020), and Luo et al (2020) দ্বারা সমর্থিত একটি অনুসন্ধান। কন্যাশ্রী যোজনা, লাডলি লক্ষ্মী যোজনা, এবং বেটি বাঁচাও বেটি পড়াও-এর মতো বেশ কিছু জাতীয় ও রাজ্য-স্তরের কর্মসূচির লক্ষ্য মেয়েদের শিক্ষার প্রসার ঘটানো। কারণ শিক্ষিত মেয়েদের মানসিক ও শারীরিক বিকাশ সম্পূর্ণ না হওয়া পর্যন্ত বিয়ের জন্য অপেক্ষা করে। এই স্কিমগুলি গ্রাম ও শহরে দরিদ্র মেয়েদের উচ্চ শিক্ষা অর্জনে আর্থিক সহায়তা প্রদান করে, এবং আর্থিক সীমাবদ্ধতার কারণে বাল্যবিবাহ এড়াতে সহায়তা করে। গর্ভাবস্থার প্রথম দিকে সম্পদ একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে। যেমন-কৈশোর গর্ভধারণের হার ধনী পরিবারের তুলনায় দরিদ্র পরিবারে বেশি। Sagalova et al (2021) অনুসারে, এই প্রবণতা 1986 এবং 2017 এর মধ্যে জাতীয় প্রতিনিধি সমীক্ষার ডেটার উপর ভিত্তি করে 23টি পশ্চিম ও মধ্য আফ্রিকান দেশের উপর করা একটি গবেষণার ফলাফলের সাথে সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ, এবং Wang et al (2020) দ্বারা চীনে পরিচালিত একটি গবেষণা। বাল্যবিবাহ ও গর্ভধারণের সম্ভাবনা পারিবারিক সম্পদ এবং শিক্ষার স্তর বৃদ্ধির সাথে সাথে হ্রাস পায় (Berliana et al 2018)। Islam et al (2017) এবং Marphatia et al (2023)-এর গবেষণা অনুসারে, কিশোরীদের বাল্যবিবাহ কমাতে এবং ক্ষমতায়ণে জোর দেওয়ার জন্য শিক্ষায় প্রবেশাধিকার বাড়ানো অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। সুতরাং, আর্থ-সামাজিক বৈষম্য দূর করা, সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধি এবং শিক্ষার মাধ্যমে মেয়েদের ক্ষমতায়ন করা তাদের খুব কম বয়সী মা হওয়া থেকে রক্ষা করার একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কৌশল। ভারতের বৈচিত্র্যময় সংস্কৃতি, সামাজিক রীতিনীতি এবং প্রথাগুলি বাল্যবিবাহের অনুশীলনকে উল্লেখযোগ্যভাবে প্রভাবিত করে। গ্রামীণ ভারতে করা একটি সমীক্ষায়, Seth et al (2018) দেখায়, সামাজিক নিয়ম এবং আচার-অনুষ্ঠানগুলি বাল্যবিবাহকে অব্যাহত রাখার ক্ষেত্রে একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে।

পরিবার পরিকল্পনা কিশোরী মায়েদের জন্য অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কারণ এটি তাদের গর্ভধারণকে আরও ভালভাবে পরিচালনা করতে সহায়তা করে। যদি তাদের একটি সহায়ক পরিবার না থাকে তবে পরিবার পরিকল্পনা আরও কঠিন হয়ে উঠতে পারে। উদাহরণস্বরূপ, যদি তাদের সঙ্গী পরিবার পরিকল্পনা প্রতিরোধ করে, তাদের পরিবার সাহায্য না করে, তাদের ভুল পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার করার জন্য বারবার চাপ দেয়, অথবা যদি কিশোরী মা সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে লড়াই করে, তখন গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্ব আরও চ্যালেঞ্জিং হয়ে ওঠে (Dutta et al 2022)। গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে, কৈশোর মায়েরা গর্ভনিরোধের মৌলিক বিষয়গুলির সাথে পরিচিত, প্রাথমিকভাবে কনডমের ব্যবহার। কিন্তু আলোচ্য গবেষণায় এর ব্যবহার ছিল ন্যূনতম, এবং গর্ভধারণের সংখ্যা কমানোর সাথে এর কোনো সম্পর্ক ছিল না (Raj et al 2009)। Jejeebhoy and Sebastian (2003) স্পষ্টভাবে জানান, ভারতীয় উপমহাদেশে এই ধরনের গর্ভনিরোধক জ্ঞানের বেশিরভাগই মিথ, ভুল ধারণা এবং দুর্বলতার অনুভূতিতে আবৃত। যাইহোক, বর্তমান গবেষণা দেখায় যে 70 শতাংশ মহিলা গর্ভনিরোধক পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার করে না, অপরদিকে 30 শতাংশ মহিলা গর্ভনিরোধক পদ্ধতি সম্পর্কে সচেতন থাকা সত্ত্বেও গর্ভনিরোধের কোন পদ্ধতি ব্যবহার না করেই মা হতে বেছে নেন। কারণ বিয়ের পরপরই গর্ভবতী না হলে সামাজিক ও সাংস্কৃতিক চাপের কারণে তারা সমাজে বন্ধ্যা বলে বিবেচিত হবে, যা তাদের কৈশোর বয়সে গর্ভবতী হতে বাধ্য করে (Godha et al 2013)। অপরদিকে Pathak et al (1993) এর মতে, বিবাহিত

মহিলারা সাধারণত তাদের শাশুড়ি এবং স্বামীকে খুশি করার জন্য গর্ভবতী হন। যাইহোক, পূর্ব ভারতের রাজ্যগুলি ঘনবসতিপূর্ণ এবং বিভিন্ন জাতির বসবাস। কৃষি, শিল্প, শিক্ষা ও স্বাস্থ্য ক্ষেত্রের তুলনামূলক উন্নতি হয়েছে, যা কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা হ্রাসের অন্যতম কারণ হতে পারে। কিন্তু সামগ্রিকভাবে এই অঞ্চলে শিক্ষা সচেতনতার অভাব, গণমাধ্যমের (টেলিভিশনের, মোবাইল ফোন) ব্যাপক ব্যাবহার, ঐতিহ্যগত ধ্যান-ধারণা, ও কুসংস্কার বাল্যবিবাহ এবং কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থাকে উল্লেখযোগ্য ভাবে প্রভাবিত করে। ফলস্বরূপ, কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং এর জটিলতাগুলি এখনও খুব প্রচলিত।

উপসংহার:

এই সমীক্ষাটি 2005-06 থেকে 2019-21 সাল পর্যন্ত ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের হার পরীক্ষা করে। গত দুই দশকে ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা দ্রুত হ্রাস পেয়েছে কিন্তু বর্তমান স্তর এখনও উচ্চ। সামগ্রিকভাবে, 15-19 বছর বয়সী কিশোরীদের অনুপাত কমেছে, এই হার 2005-06 সালে 16.0 শতাংশ থেকে কমে 2019-21 সালে মাত্র 6.8 শতাংশ হয়েছে। এটি বছরের পর বছর ধরে সন্তান জন্মদানের একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য হ্রাসকে নির্দেশ করে (IIPS and Macro International 2007, IIPS and ICF 2017, IIPS and ICF 2021)। যাইহোক, ত্রিপুরা, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ, বিহার এবং আসামের মতো কয়েকটি রাজ্যে কৈশোর সন্তান জন্মদানের ঘটনা এখনো খুব বেশি, এর জন্য বিভিন্ন আর্থ-সামাজিক কারণ দায়ী (Goonewardena and Deeyagaha Waduge 2005)। কিছু অগ্রগতি সত্ত্বেও, ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং সন্তান জন্মদানের ব্যাপকতা কমানোর জন্য আরও কিছু উদ্যোগ নিতে হবে। কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা রোধ করা প্রয়োজন কারণ এটি নারী, শিশু, পরিবার এবং সমাজের উপর বিরূপ প্রভাব ফেলে। বর্তমান সমীক্ষায় দেখা গেছে, শিক্ষা সন্তান জন্মদান কমাতে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে। কম শিক্ষা এই অভ্যাসটিকে আরোও বেশি করে তোলে। এই লক্ষ্যে ভারত সরকার শিক্ষার অধিকার আইনটি 14 বছর পর্যন্ত শিশুদের জন্য বলবৎ করে প্রাথমিক শিক্ষার এনরোলমেন্ট অনুপাতকে বৃদ্ধি করেছে। কিন্তু দারিদ্রতা ও অন্যান্য কারণের ফলে প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা অর্জনের পর ড্রপ আউট হার বেড়ে যায়। স্কুল ড্রপ আউট মেয়েদের অল্প বয়সেই বিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। ভারতে বেশিরভাগ মেয়েদের সন্তান জন্মদান বিবাহিত জীবনে ঘটে (Pautunthang 2022)। সুতরাং মেয়েদের স্কুলে রাখার জন্য একটি শক্তিশালী সমর্থন ব্যবস্থা প্রয়োজন। মাধ্যমিক শিক্ষাকে মৌলিক অধিকার করা হলে বাল্যবিবাহ রোধ হবে।

ভারতে কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থার একটি প্রধান কারণ হল কম গর্ভনিরোধক ব্যবহার। উদাহরণ স্বরূপ, ঝাড়খণ্ডে গর্ভনিরোধের অপ্রয়োজনীয় চাহিদা 21.8 শতাংশ, বিহারে 21.5 শতাংশ এবং পশ্চিমবঙ্গে 18.4 শতাংশ, অর্থাৎ সন্তান জন্মদানের প্রবণতা বেশি। গ্রামীণ এলাকায় বিশেষ নজর দিয়ে অল্পবয়সী মহিলাদের জন্য গর্ভনিরোধকগুলিকে আরও সহজলভ্য করে তোলার সুপারিশ করতে হবে। কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা বেশিরভাগ দরিদ্র পরিবারে ঘটে বলে জানা গেছে। Parsons et al (2015) অনুসারে, দরিদ্র পরিবারগুলি তাদের মেয়েদের বাল্যবিবাহের ব্যবস্থা করার সম্ভাবনা বেশি। সুতরাং, দারিদ্র্যই কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের প্রধান চালক। দরিদ্র পরিবারগুলোকে সামাজিক সুরক্ষা প্রদানে বিশেষ নজর দিতে হবে। বিভিন্ন গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে মিডিয়া এক্সপোজার বাল্যবিবাহ ও সন্তান জন্মদান কমাতে একটি অপরিহার্য ভূমিকা পালন করে (Pautunthang 2022; Naik et al 2023)। সংবাদপত্র, রেডিও, টেলিভিশন ও স্মার্টফোন ছাড়াও; সচেতনতা ছড়ানোর জন্য চলচ্চিত্র, তথ্যচিত্র এবং সংগঠিত ও ব্যাপক প্রচারকার্য চালানো উচিত।

সীমাবদ্ধতা:

এই গবেষণায় ন্যাশনাল ফ্যামিলি হেলথ সার্ভে (NFHS) থেকে তথ্য সংগ্রহ করা হয়েছে, যা কৈশোর গর্ভাবস্থা এবং মাতৃত্বের সীমিত বিবরণ দেয়। ছোট নমুনার আকার (small sample size) এবং অনুপস্থিত মানগুলি (missing values) বেশি হবার জন্য, সমস্ত কারণ সঠিকভাবে দেখানো সম্ভব হয়নী। এমনকী, হাইপোথিসিস পরীক্ষায় শুধুমাত্র কয়েকটি আর্থ-সামাজিক ডেমোগ্রাফিক বৈশিষ্ট্য ব্যবহার করা হয়েছে।

References:

- Acharya, D.R., Bhattari, R., and Poobalan, A. 2010. "Factors associated with teenage pregnancy in south Asia: A systematic review". *Health Sci. J.* 4(1), Pp.3-14.
- Atwood, S.J. and Hussain, J. 1997. "Adolescence motherhood: priorities and next steps". J Fam Welfare. 43: Pp.8-14.
- Banerjee, B., Pandey, G.K., Dutt, D., Sengupta, B., Mondal, M., and Deb, S. 2009. "Teenage Pregnancy: A Socially Inflicted Health Hazard". *Indian Journal of Community Medicine.* 34, Pp.227-231. 10.4103/0970-0218.55289.
- Becker, S., Fonseca-Becker, F and Schenck-Yglesias, C. 2006. "Husbands' and Wives' Reports of Women's Decision-Making Power in Western Guatemala and Their Effects on Preventive Health Behaviors." Social Science and Medicine 62 (9): Pp.2313–2326.
- Berliana, SM., Kristinadewi, PA., Rachmawati, PD., Fauziningtyas, R., Efendi, F., Bushy, A. 2018. Determinants of early marriage among female adolescent in Indonesia. *Int J Adolesc Med Health*. 33(1), Pp.1-6. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2018-0054.
- Bhan, N. 2019. "Preventing teenage pregnancy in India to end the cycle of undernutrition". *Published by Elsevier Ltd.* 3, Pp.439-440. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/ S2352-4642(19)30111-7.
- Dutta, K., Naskar, S., Das, D.K., and Banerjee, N. 2022. "Exploring challenges of teenage pregnancy and motherhood from beneficiaries and providers' perspectives: A qualitative study in a rural area of PurbaBardhaman District, West Bengal, India". *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care.* 11, Pp.7272-7279. 10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc 689 22.
- Gita Naik, G., Behera, J., Patra, D and Jena, S.K. 2024. "Adolescent marriage a violation of sexual and reproductive health rights: Trend, spatial variation and covariate analysis from national family health survey". Clinical Epidemiology and Global Health 25:101493. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cegh.2023.101493
- Godha, D., Hotchkiss, D.R and Gage, A.J. 2013. "Association between child marriage and reproductive health outcomes and service utilization: a multi-country study from South Asia". Journal of Adolescent Health 52(5):552-558. DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.01.021
- Goonewardena, I.M.R., and DeeyagahaWaduge, R.P.K. 2005. "Adverse effects of teenage pregnancy". *Cylon Medical Journal.* 50, Pp.116-120.
- Hertog, S., Gerland, P and Wilmoth, J. 2023. India overtakes China as the world's most populous country. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), Policy Brief No. 153, Pp.1-5. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/PB153.pdf
- IIPS and ICF. 2017. *"National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015–16, Mumbai, India"*. http://www.rchiips.org/nfhs or http://www.iipsindia.org
- IIPS., and ICF. 2021. *"National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21"*. International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS),Mumbai, India. http://www.rchiips.org/nfhs or http://www.iipsindia.ac.in
- IIPS., and Macro International. 2007. *"National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) 2005-06, Mumbai, India"*.I, 93-95. http://www.nfhsindia.org or http://www.iipsindia.org
- Islam, MM., Islam, MK., Hasan, MS., Hossain, MB. 2017. Adolescent motherhood in Bangladesh: trends and determinants. *PLoS One*. 12(11), e0188294. https:// doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0188294.
- Jejeebhoy, S.J. and Sebastian, M.P. 2003. "Actions that protect: Promoting sexual and reproductive health and choice among young people in India". Population Council. Available from: http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/wp/seasia/seawp18.pdf, Accessed 04/06/09.
- Kirchengast, S. 2016. "Teenage pregnancies: A worldwide social and medical problem". 10.5772/65462
- Le Strat, Y., Dubertret, C and Le Foll, B. 2011. "Child Marriage in the United States and Its Association with Mental Health in Women." Pediatrics 128 (3): Pp.524–530.
- Luo, D., Yan, X., Xu, R., Zhang, J., Shi, X., Ma, J., Song, Y., Patton, GC., Sawyer, SM. 2020. Chinese trends in adolescent marriage and fertility between 1990 and 2015: a systematic synthesis of national and subnational population data. *Lancet Global Health*. 8(7), Pp.954–964. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30130-3.
- Marphatia, AA.,Saville, NM., Manandhar, DS., Cortina-borja, M., Wells, JCK., Reid, AM. 2023. The role of education in child and adolescent marriage in rural lowland Nepal. *J Biosoc Sci*. 55(2), Pp.275–291. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932022000074.

- Mehra, S., and Agarwal, D. 2004. "Adolescent health determinants for pregnancy and child health outcome among the urban poor". *Indian Pediatrics.* 41, Pp.137- 45.
- Mourtada, R., Schlecht, J., and DeJong, J. 2017. A qualitative study exploring child marriage practices among Syrian conflict-affected populations in Lebanon. Conflict Health. 11(Suppl 1), Pp.53–65. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-017-0131-z.
- Naik, G., Behera, J., Patra, D., and Jena, S.K. 2023. Adolescent marriage a violation of sexual and reproductive health rights: Trend, spatial variation and covariate analysis from national family health survey. Clinical Epidemiology and Global Health 25(2024)101493. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cegh.2023.101493
- Nandi, J.K., Burman, S.K., Das, D., Saha, D.P., and Pal, S. 2014. "Socio-cultural factors influencing teenage pregnancy in rural West Bengal, India". *J Pharm Biomed Sci.* 04(08), Pp.670-673. www.jpbms.info
- Parsons, J., Edmeades, J., Kes, A., Petroni, S., Sexton, M., and Wodon, Q. 2015. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature". *The Review of Faith & International Affairs.* 13 (3), Pp.12-22. 10.1080/15570274.2015.1075757
- Pathak, K.B et al. 1993. "Adolescent Motherhood Problems and Consequences". J. Fam Welfare. 39: Pp.17-23.
- Patra, S. 2016. Motherhood in childhood: addressing reproductive health hazards among adolescent married women in India. *Reprod Health*. 13(1), Pp.1–9. https://doi.org/ 10.1186/s12978-016-0171-7.
- Pautunthang, N. 2022. 'Levels, Trends and Differentials of Teenage Childbearing in India'. *Asian Journal of Population Sciences*. 2, Pp.37-53. https://doi.org/10.3126/ajps.v2i1.51089
- Raj, A., Saggurti, N., Balaiah, D and Silverman, J.G. 2009. "Prevalence of child marriage and its effect on fertility and fertility-control outcomes of young women in India: a cross-sectional, observational study". Lancet. 373, Pp.1883–89
- Sagalova, V., Garcia, J., Kapeu, AS., Ntambi, J., Zagre, NM., Vollmer, S. 2021. Socio-economic predictors of adolescent marriage and maternity in West and Central Africa between 1986 and 2017. *J Glob Health*. 11, 13002.
- Sedgh, G., Finer, L., Bankole, A., Eilers, M., and Singh, S. 2015. "Adolescent pregnancy, birth and abortion rates across countries: levels and recent trends". *J Adolescent Health.* 56, Pp.223-230.
- Seth, R., Bose, V., Qaiyum, Y., Chandrashekhar, R., Kansal, S., Taneja, I., and Seth, T. 2018. Social determinants of child marriage in rural India. *Ochsner J*. 18(4), Pp.390–394. https://doi.org/10.31486/toj.18.0104.
- Sharma, P., and Sharma, N. 2021. "What contributes to teenage pregnancies in India?" https://feminisminindia.com
- UNFPA. 2022. "Child Marriage in India: Key Insights from the NFHS-5 (2019-21)".
- UNICEF. 2001. "Madchen in Entwicklungslandern". UNICEF, Austria.
- Wang, Y., Qiao, J. 2020. Trends and social determinants of adolescent marriage and fertility in China. *Lancet Global Health*. 8(7), Pp.873–874. https://doi.org/10.1016/ S2214-109X(20)30207-2.
- WHO. 2011. "WHO Guidelines on Preventing Early Pregnancy and Poor Reproductive Outcome Among Adolescents in Developing Countries". Geneva, Switzerland.
- WHO. 2014. "Adolescent pregnancy". Available at: www.who.int.

Table 1: Average Percentage of women age 15-19 who have begun childbearing in India, NFHS-3 to 5

Region	NFHS-3 (2005-06)				NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)	Change e (%) 2005-06 to 2019-21
North	7.44	3.40	2.40	-5.04			
	Central		14.17		5.30	3.70	-10.47
	East		23.05		12.50	11.18	-11.87
	North East		11.95		9.33	8.30	-3.65
	West		10.03		6.48	4.95	-5.08
	South		12.15		5.79	5.09	-7.06

Note: North Region- Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand. **Central Region**-Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh. **East Region**- Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal. **North East Region**- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura. **West Region**- Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra. **South Region**- Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Telangana.

Source: IIPS and Macro International, 2007; IIPS and ICF, 2017 and 2021

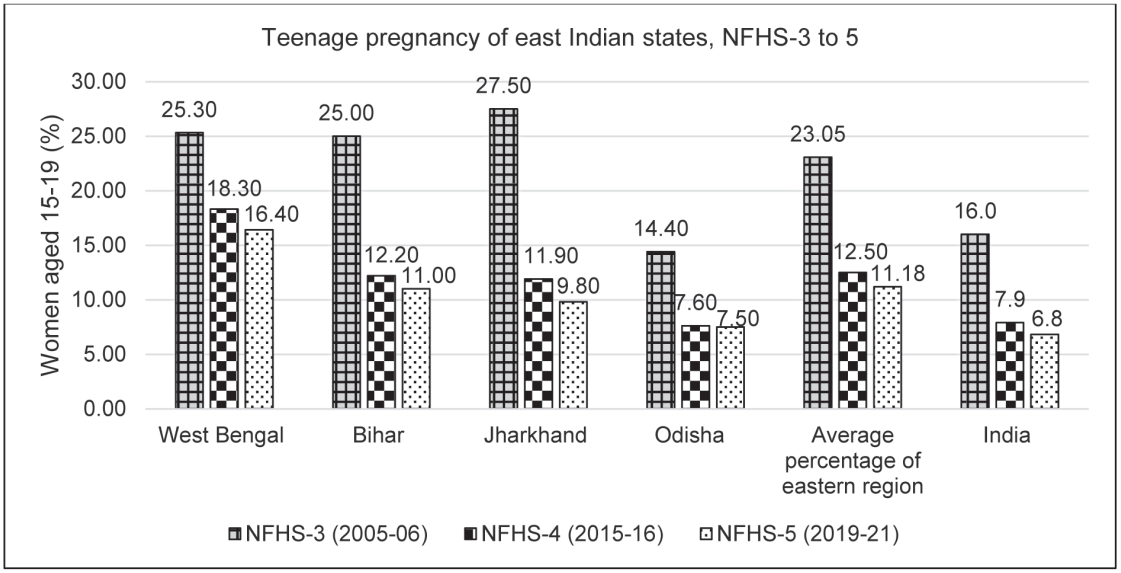


Figure 1: Percentage of women who had childbearing before 19 years of age in Eastern region states, India, NFHS-3 to 5

Table 2: Percentage of women age 15-19 who have begun childbearing, by background characteristics, east Indian states, 2019-2021

Teenage (15-19 years) Childbearing in NFHS-5, 2019-21						
Background characteristics	Bihar	West Bengal	Jharkhand	Odisha	Eastern Region	
A. Women personal Characteristics						
Years of Schooling						
No schooling	21.7	4.1	16.00	15.2	15.7 (382)	*F=11.248, df=5, p=.000***, n=2434*
<5 years complete	5.00	5.70	5.50	5.50	5.3 (130)	
5-7 years complete	15.1	13.50	15.20	10.40	14.2 (345)	
8-9 years complete	30.3	45.8	31.6	27.3	33.8 (823)	
10-11 years complete	18.6	23.2	21.5	28.7	21.4 (522)	
12 or more years complete	9.2	7.8	10.20	12.8	9.5 (232)	
Age at first sex						
Had no sex	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.0 (1)	*F=27.125, df=4, p=.000***, n=2434*
Sex at below 15	12.2	20.9	9.20	14.9	13.9 (339)	
Sex 15 to 20	40.00	47.8	30.30	74.4	44.0 (1070)	
Sex at marriage	47.7	31.3	60.00	10.7	42.0 (1022)	
Don't know	0.1	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.1 (2)	

Marital Status						
Never marriage	0.2	0.00	2.30	0.3	0.6 (14)	*F=1.243, df=2, p=.289, n=2434*
Currently marriage	99.6	99.1	97.30	96.9	98.7 (2403)	
Formerly marriage	0.2	0.9	0.40	2.8	0.7 (17)	
Watching television						
No	58.2	36.6	55.1	29.1	49.1 (1196)	*T=3.024, df=2432, p=.003***, n=2434*
Yes	41.8	63.4	44.9	70.9	50.9 (1238)	
Using Mobile phone						
No	6.1	9.6	4.9	9.3	7.1 (172)	*T=33.367, df=2432, p=.997, n=2434*
Yes	93.9	90.4	95.1	90.7	92.9 (2262)	
B. Household Characteristics						
Type of Residence						
Urban	6.3	12.9	9.8	8.7	8.8 (215)	*T=.232, df=2432, p=.816, n=2434*
Rural	93.7	87.1	90.2	91.3	91.2 (2219)	
Wealth quintile						
Poorest	51.6	45	55.1	43.3	49.8 (1211)	*F=6.129, df=3, p=.000***, n=2434*
Poorer	28.2	33.3	24.8	30.1	28.9 (704)	
Middle	14.2	15.6	13.1	15.6	14.5 (352)	
Richer	6	6.2	7	11.1	6.9 (167)	
C. Socio cultural Characteristics						
Caste						
Scheduled caste	30.5	38.1	16	22.9	27.9 (641)	*F=4.320, df=3, p=.005***, n=2295*
Scheduled tribe	3.4	10.6	31.5	35.2	14.6 (336)	
Other background caste	55.4	16.6	45.3	32	43.1 (988)	
None of them	10.7	34.6	7.2	9.9	14.4 (330)	
Religion						
Hindu	86.5	65	72.3	94.8	79.7 (1939)	*F=1.176, df=2, p=.309, n=2434*
Muslim	13.2	34.2	15.6	0.7	17.1 (415)	
Others	0.3	0.9	12.1	4.5	3.3 (80)	

D. Family planning Factors						
Knowledge of ovulatory cycle						
Before period of cycle	7.6	4.8	9	2.8	6.7 (162)	*F=.435, df=5, p=.824, n=2434*
During period of cycle	22.2	31.2	27.5	32.2	26.5 (645)	
After period of cycle	49	36.3	46.1	42.9	44.7 (1089)	
At any other times	11.8	16.6	12.5	13.8	13.3 (324)	
Don't know	9.4	11.2	4.9	8.3	8.8 (214)	
Current contraceptive uses						
No	78.8	52	73.6	64	69.8 (1698)	*T=1.475, df=2432, p=.140, n=2434*
Yes	21.2	48	26.4	36	30.2 (736)	
Unmet need for contraception						
No demand for family planning	57.2	33.6	51.7	49.8	49.8 (1211)	*F=2.148, df=2, p=.117, n=2433*
Unmet need	21.5	18.4	21.8	14.2	20.0 (486)	
Met need	21.2	48	26.5	36	30.3 (736)	

Note:

The value within the parenthesis ( ) denotes frequency.
Level of significance: *10%, **5% and ***1% level

Source: Computed from unit data of NFHS-5, 2019-21.

Bio Profile of the Authors:

[1]M. Phil, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), Sector-1, Salt Lake, Kolkata-700064, Affiliation-University of Calcutta, 87/1, College Street, Kolkata-700073, India.
Email:manotoshgayen93@gmail.com

[2] Research scholar (Ph.D.), Department of Geography, School of Earth Sciences, Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi-585367, India. **Email:** rezakaushar@gmail.com

[3]Research scholar (Ph.D.), Department of Geographical and Geological Sciences, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland. **Email:**robrou@amu.edu.pl

A Journey for Understanding Folk Odyssey of Rural Bengal: Critical Evaluation of *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay

Sushil Sarkar

Abstract

This paper examines the paradisiacal innocence of rural Bengal and the Bengali way of life, which is free from the dullness and chaos of modern city life. The characters in the novel *Pather Panchali (Song of the Road*) are poor, yet they consistently observe religious holidays, adhere to customs, and live according to their beliefs. This is because they are satisfied with what little they have and are unaffected by greed. The diverse rural Bengali folk culture encompasses its festivals, rituals, dietary customs, beliefs, and superstitions. The novel is narrated from the perspective of a young boy named Apu, who shares a close bond with Durga, his elder sister. He sees the world through her eyes, learns to engage with nature, and undergoes psychological changes after her death. Eventually, they move from the idyllic village of Nischindipur to Varanasi. The novel depicts a journey and transformation of all the characters from innocence to experience, incorporating folklore and folk cultural elements. The present study aims to highlight the declining values of idyllic rural Bengali life, its lifestyle, and the purity of the folk odyssey of rural Bengal, which lacks the hectic schedules and monotony of modern or postmodern life.

Keywords: *Rural Bengali Life, Folk Culture, Folk Odyssey, Cultural Diversities, Idyllic.*

Introduction

The definition of folklore has been the subject of on going discussions even before William Thoms first used the word in 1846. But the term folklore has recently come into use in the literary field. William Thoms, under the pen name of Ambrose Merton, used folklore in *The Athenaeum* in 1846 and applied the words good Saxon compound, folklore—the lore of the people to refer it to Popular Antiquities and Popular Literature. The conception of Thoms and his enumerative definition of folklore specifically refers to the manners, mannerisms, beliefs, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, and so forth. An anthropologist, William R. Bascom, in his "Definitions of Folklore," defines folklore as "It is old fashioned, grey or white-headed, perhaps first receding from its former

strongholds under the impact of modern progress and industry; it is the born opponent of the serial number, the stamped product and the patented standard" (Bascom, 1996, p. 255). According to American folklorist G. L. Harmon," Anything which tends to break down the cohesion of a group—communications, diversity of knowledge, specialisation, etc. —tend to scatter is folklore" (Harmon, 1996, p. 259). In contemporary perspectives, 'Folklore' is an umbrella term used to describe the material, linguistic, and spiritual elements of a particular culture which are passed down verbally or through observation or imitation. The members of that particular folklore or folkloric culturemay share a profession, a language, an ethnicity, an age range, or a place of residence. This corpus of the customary knowledge of folklore is generally conserved and transmitted from one generation to the next, with regular adaptations due to memories, the requirement of time or purpose and the degree of an individual's competence and performance. Archer Taylor, a renowned American folklorist, writes:

> "... the material that is handed on by tradition either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folktales riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words. It may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences or knots, hot cross buns or Easter eggs, traditional ornamentation like the Walls of Troy or traditional symbols like the Swastika. It may be traditional procedure like throwing salt over one's shoulders or knocking on wood. It may be traditional belief like the notion that elder one is good for the ailments of eye. All of these are folklores." (Taylor, 1996, p. 261)

However, folk literature is difficult for division and categorisation as a distinct genre due to its oral tradition and the holistic, cosmic links that folklore demonstrates. The borderlines of folklore, which separate many possibilities, are quite blurry, as folklores cross over and incorporate aspects from multiple sources of life. As such, any attempt to sort subjects into categories cannot be seen as clearly and rigidly defined, but rather as a loosely useful method for conducting a good analysis and comprehension. There is a lot of psychology in folklore or folk literature, particularly in folktales. It introduces a person to the realm of mystery and the supernatural, empowering them to discernthe different universes. Folklores depict the complexity of nature and life, the joys and sorrows of humanity, and acts of loyalty or treason. And the tenets are ceremonial, social, hectic, and artistic. William R. Bascom, in 1953, defines folklore in his research paper "Folklore and Anthropology":

> Folklore, to the anthropologist, is a part of culture but not the whole of culture. It -includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the texts of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance, but not folk art, folk dance, folk music, folk costume, folk medicine, folk custom, or folk belief. All of these are unquestionably worthy of study, whether in literate or nonliterate societies.... All folklore is orally transmitted, but not all that is orally transmitted is folklore. (Bascom, 1953, p. 283)

Folklore consists of a collection of materials, a cultural process, and a method of inquiry applied

to those materials and processes. There is a significant debate over the exact definition of folklore. It can be simply described as a form of art and literature that is transmitted orally, translated, and transformed, excluding customs, beliefs, crafts, language, and the analysis of all transmitted literature. The two primary questions guiding ongoing discussions about the boundaries of folklore are: (1) Should oral literature be studied within its immediate social context? and (2) Are there notable similarities between the oral histories of mediaeval peasants, contemporary primitive groups such as American Indian tribes, African tribes, Bushmen, and modern groups attached to dominant societies but maintaining some individual traits (e.g., American Negroes, sailors, urban and rural immigrants, natives, Kentucky mountaineers)? Many Chinese folklorists also believe folklore is passed from person to person across generations. In this regard, the Chinese folklorist Nai-tung Ting's comment is particularly significant. Nai-tung Ting, in his "Folk Literature Run by the Folk: A New Development in the People's Republic of China," remarks:

> It holds that since folklore comes from the masses, it must ultimately be returned to the masses. In other words, the role of folklorists should be transitional; the preservation and investigation of folklore should ultimately be taken over by peasants themselves. This view clearly disagrees with the view of the majority of Western experts. To most Western scholars, the peasants are presumed to be illiterate or poorly educated, and too much occupied with the concerns of daily life to record and interpret their own culture. Some folklorists may still secretly sympathize with Andrew Lang's estimate-namely; the peasantry is backward and barbarous. (Ting, 1987, p. 260).

According to the critical theory of folklore and folk literature, Alan Dundes writes: "The term folk can refer to any group of people what so ever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language, or religion—but what is important is that a group is formed for whatever reason it calls its own" (Dundes, 1965, p. 2). It is the four functions of folklore which stand for the traditional cultural forms that are communicated between individuals through words and actions and tend to exist in variation.

In India, folk literature as a literary form and spirit of Indian nationalism started to develop in the late nineteenth century, led by newly formed intellectual groups who were educated in the West and were inspired by the new found sense of nationalism in the direction of their own customs and societies. The way Indians handled the indigenous folklore during this period is very noteworthy in several ways. During this time, the study of Indian folk literature was approached from an Indian perspective for the first time in literature and literary background. Previously, non-Indian perspectives were applied to the facts of Indian folklore by Christian missionaries, distant foreign Indologists or colonial British bureaucrats. Secondly, folklore resources started to be linked with national identity and unity, a trend that persisted throughout the Indian freedom struggles. The other two most obvious instances of it are the discussions around nativistic *Khadis* and Mahatma Gandhi's use of the spinning wheel. Folklore

played a vital role in promoting Indian national unity both in pre and post-independence India. The majority of the literary creation on Indian local customs was brought about by missionaries and public personnel who indirectly helped Indian intellectuals to develop a feeling of patriotic awareness. Indian academics and intellectuals started looking into their customs and culture in 1857 to gain independence from British rule. During this time, several Western academics, as well as Indian authors and intellectuals made substantial contributions to the gathering and analysis of Indian folk lore. The noteworthy works of Verrier Elwin whose important books are *Songs of the Forest*: *The Folk Poetry of the Gonds* (1935), *Folktales of Mahakosal* (1944), *Folksongs of Maikal Hills (1944)*, *Folksongs of Chhattisgarh (1946), Myths of Middle India (1949), Tribal Myths of Odisha (1954)* and *Myths of the Tribal Frontier Agency (1958)* etc. But the folk literary tradition and customs were sufficiently available from the medieval period to modern times. The *Mangal Kavyas* of Bengal is a kind of popular literature that emerged in the late medieval era, projecting the story of the marginal section of Brahmanical society and their struggles against the hardships and hindrances of daily life in the written literary forms. The Brahmins and other upper castes were not featured in these narratives when these were first being composed. Even though many writers who composed literary pieces were from the *Kayastha* stock. This is due to the seeming lack of a clear struggle between *Islam* and *Brahmanism* throughout the pre-Mughal era. Afterwards, the collapse of *Buddhism* and eventual degeneration into *Tantrism,* this field became available for either *Islam* or *Brahmanism* to have agreat impact on folk literature or folklore. The establishment of Muslim domination came as a harsh blow to *Brahminism* and its social standing, emerging *Buddhism* and interming lingit with *Vaishnavism* of Bengal, which was severely undermined and attacked by the establishment of Muslim authority. Besides, several anti-Brahminic movements were active in Bengal at that time. And the indigenous cults were strongly against *Brahmanism,* consequently, folk as a literary form gained much attention in Indian vernacular or native literature. The folk literature in this way emerged from the vantage points of patriotic fervour, the need fora revival of nativistic culture and emphasising traditional values of primitive life style, culture, traditions and traditional ways of India. Indian intellectuals and researchers started to investigate their customs and culture in the late 19th century to revive and establish their cultural roots. The Western education and the sense of nationalism among the Indian intellectuals led them to achieve independence from the British, when native Indians looked back at *swadeshi* culture or atnativisticzeal and fervour. Indian folk literary books during this period influenced intellectual and literary backgrounds of India. The prominent works of this time in respect of folk literature are Lakshminath Bezbaruah's *Burhi Ait Sashu* (1911), Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Sati* (1917) and *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (1920), Zeverchand Meghani's *Halardan* (1928), *Dadajini Vato* (1933), *Lok Sahitya and Kankavati* (1947), *Hamara Gram Sahitya* (1940) by Ramnaresh Tripathy. The other important books of folk literature

are *Bela Phule Adhi Rat* (1948), *Dhart Gatt Hai* (1948), and *Dhire Baho Ganga* (1948), written by Devendra Satyarthi. All these books are the testimonials of Bengal's rural culture and cultural values intricately linked with the humble sagas of people and the simple people of India.

The Bengali folk literature has always been a rich source of cultural heritage and traditions of Bengal and India. The folk traditions, culture and literature of Bengal in the literary forms around 1905 became very prominent as folk literature vigorously attempted to reflect upon the traditions of folk literature, culture of rural Bengal. The noted works of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar (1877-1957), Dinesh Chandra Sen (1866 -1939), Upendra Kishore Roychowdhury (1863-1915), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) and Jasimuddin (1904-1976) are very important in this regard. Under the influence and the scholarship of Dinesh Chandra Sen, Bengali folk literature was rejuvenated by Dakshinaranjan Mitra who compiled four volumes of children's folktales such as *Thakurmar Jhuli (Grandmother's Bag* 1907), *Thakurdar Jhuli (Grandfather's Bag* 1909), *Thakurdidir Jhuli (Maternal Grandmother's Bag* 1909) and *Dadamoshayer Jhuli (Maternal Grandfather's Bag* 1913). Thus, the process of rejuvenating and preserving the lost tradition, orality of folktales, and glorious rural folk culture had been also adapted in Bengali children's literature as a separate literary form.

The folk narratives from any culture constantly combine the elements of realism and romance. Generally speaking, the descriptions of folk literature are romantic but contain some realism. Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay's *Pather Panchali* is a prime illustration of the combination of the two, such as romantic realism. The book skilfully captures, to the last detail, the livelihoods of poor rural people and the life of rural Bengal. The book introduces readers to the rustic, ritualistic, gastronomic, religious, and superstitious aspects of rural Bengali society. It is more than lifelike, a panoramic portrait of Bengal sketched in a naturalistic device. The novel's portrayal of Ray family emphasises the most important theme: how extreme poverty persists and how, despite their dire circumstances, Durga and Apu, two children, continue to enjoy pure and innocent joys of life. The Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* depicts the beliefs and customs of ordinary people by revolving around the lives and happenings of the rustic people of Nischindipur village. The folk motifs appear in this novel as a dispersed shadow across all the levels of the novel. Here, folk elements are not an undesired intrusion, rather, their appropriate fusion gives the book an ethnic and native feeling and strengthens its status as the 'Odyssey of Rural Bengal.' The detailed examination of the characters, diets, rituals, recitations of folktales and proverbs, fairs, entertainments and superstitions reveal the existence and importance of folk components which serve as the purpose in *Pather Panchali*. The movie *Pather Panchali* (1955) by eminent Bengali director Satyajit Ray is based on the renowned book of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. In this film, Satyajit Ray depicts a rural Bengal and rural and rustic

family life in an isolated village. Through the screening of the movie, Indian rural life and life style reach its' zenith point and a global appeal forces us to refer to the movie as popular even if it is acknowledged as an example of high/serious art. This high and serious art is portrayed in this fiction with utmost subtlety and vividness. The folk elements in contemporary Indian fiction are extremely sublime, vivid and lifelike, picturesque, which have been realistically portrayed about the serenity of rural life. Nandini Sahu, in her "Folk in Contemporary Indian Fiction," comments:

> One of the most recurring themes in the novel is how poor people being thronged by every hardship do not give up the spirit to live and even in most adverse circumstances, never shy away from cherishing the little pleasures of life and the things which give them hope and keeps them bonded and combats the poverty from which they are suffering is nothing else but love. It is also the portrayal of idyllic village life where people are satisfied with little things. The joy and grief of one family are also shared by the others in the village. (Sahu, 2021, p.128).

An Idealistic Rural and Rustic Life and Life Style:

The book offers the readers a chance to be acquainted with the inclusive aspects of rural Bengali life and life style of Bengali culture. The novel narrates the heterogeneous personalities, such as Bhubon Mukherjee, a wealthy and well-respected man, and the egotistical and heartless Annodya Ray. The novel illustrates the cohabitation of pundits and ignoramuses simultaneously. The characters in the novel, such as Pitom, the metalsmith, sweet vendor Chinibas, and Shorno, the milkman, receive specific recognition due to their individual traits, qualities and personalities. The genuine taste is retained in the comic depictions of Proshonno, the principal of the rural school of Nischindipur village. The major focus of the book is the battle between Harihar Ray and his family's constant struggle with poverty and poverty-inducedprecarity of life. This family always fights against extreme poverty and the ill fates of life. Their happiness to them is the occasional period in the general drama of pain. Moreover, the austere skeleton of the Ray family is realistically shown through the depiction of Indira Thakuran, Harihar's aunt and the cottage of this aged aunt. The narrat or writes:

> In the eastern part of Harihar's compound, there was a thatched hut, which had lain unrepaired for a long time. It was there that the old woman lived. On a bamboo peg hung two dirty garments, the torn ends of which she had knotted together. .... To one side of the room, there was a frayed grass mat and few torn baby quilts, crude patchwork affairs. Some torn clothes, which were all she had, were tied up in a bundle.... The old woman had a jar too, made of sheet brass, an earthenware vessel for curds, and a few odd earthenware pots. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji, 1999, p.9-10)

The widow of Tomrej paints a vivid picture of the terrible reality of what is sometimes considered aromantic hamlet life. Tomrej's wife has endured intolerable and pitiful treatment at the hands of Annada Ray. After the demise of Tomrej, his wife is responsible for repaying Annada Ray for the loan

that he owed to her. Though she makes every effort, the widow is unable to repay the loan. Without offering her a remedy, Annada Ray locks Tomrej's rice store, showing her that she is not worthy of pity. A Bengali agricultural civilisation with a carnivalesque flair is called the village Nischindipur. The population village is diverse in terms of caste, class, race and community. In addition to depicting the dichotomy of affluent versus poor, in the novel, the novelist also makes their mindsets and personal lives the main focal point. The author is virtuousin depicting various dresses, foods and eating habits for different social strata of Bengal. Additionally, the narrator describes other common Bengali foods from the countryside. The main characters of the novel, Apu and Durga, come from a very low-income family; therefore, delicious food is a faraway dream for them. However, brother and sister somehow put together various dishes to satisfy their appetites. The author depicts a moment in the eighth chapter of the novel where Apu and Durga relish green mango with salt and mustard oil and compare it with mango pickle. To illustrate the differences in economic power amongst the villagers, the author uses the description of the village feast as *Bonbhojan* to emphasise various rural Bengali delicacies. The meals cooked by Apu's mother, Shorbojaya and Shejbou, Shorbojaya's wealthy neighbour which reveal the disparities of the socio-economic backgrounds of the two families.

> The custom was for every family to take its own food; and some of the women used the occasion to show off to their neighbours by making a public display of what they had brought.... All the unhappy Shorbojaya could scrape together was some coarse rice, and not much of that, a little very ordinary pulse and couple of egg plants. *Shejbou* of course was there with all the Mukherji children; and their banquet, which was spread out for all to see, included milk thickened syrup made from fresh sugar cane and a delicious confection of bananas and rice. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p. 225)

Rural Folk Theatrical Performances:

For a considerable amount of time, Bengal (including Bangladesh), Odisha, and Assam have been home to popular theatrical performances such as *Jatra*. Since the word *Jatra* comes from the verb *Ya,* which means to move, *Jatra* may also refer to a 'procession' or 'cavalcade' honouring a god or goddess. In the late medieval era, *Jatra* emerged from the fusion of popular Bengali performance styles, including *Kavi Gaan*, *Pânchali*, *Kirtan*, and *Katha Kata*. With the custom of wor shipping *Shakti* cult in *Chandi Jatra,* and *Jatra* as a separate dramatic performance which had started to take shape in rural Bengal. The greatconflict between the demons and the goddess *Chandi* was the subject of the story. Later, in the 16th century, when the *Vaishnavite* movement swept over Eastern India, apopular imagination gave rise to a different type of folk performance known as *Krishna Jatra*. When the Muslim era came to an end, amateur *Jatra* took on a new meaning, but its brilliance gradually faded as the concept of heavenly love and devotion gave way to a secular one about human desire and affection. It had been assumed that the colonial rhetoric of high and low culture ultimately led to the

downfall of *Jatra*. The British theatre replaced *Jatra* as our source of amusement and education due to the swift expansion of urban culture and taste. Regretfully, *Jatra* has since been living on the outskirts of our society, projecting an image of being a subject of entertainment. In this novel, *Pather Panchali, Jatra* is a special entertainment for Apu and Durga provided by the author. The author writes:

> The *Jatra* at last began, and from that moment the earth for Apu ceased to exist, and all the people on it, except for himself and the actors on the stage in front of him. The stage was his entire world, and the players its entire population. The atmosphere of the play was set by the violinists who opened the performance just before dark with a tone poem in a traditional mode known as Imon... The stage was lit with lights which hung in clusters from the wooden structure above. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p. 255)

The Folk Ballads, Festivals and Rituals:

In the history of Bengali, the folk ballads are extensively popular and rich. Through ballads, common Bengali people have been using them since the Middle Ages to express their hopes, dreams, joys, and family values. The ballads became inaccessible to the general public during the colonial era due to the exposure of Western knowledge systems but they solely served to benefit rural women. Women of this era used proverbs and ballads who had no formal education but used them as a means of transferring both ordinary and spiritual knowledge among themselves. Generally, elder folks would teach their younger counter parts the melodies and sayings. The author depicts the elderly Indira Thakuran in the book, who is wellversed in songs and enjoys passing the mon to generations like Apu and Durga. When Durga expresses her happiness, Indira Thakuran also emulates her elderly widowhood with Durga. Durga shows her happiness in the twenty-first chapter of the novel by singing a ballad that Indira taught her when they were enjoying the *Chorok Utsav*. From the author's words:

> Durga was off like a shot and very happily too. The orchard was thick with bushes as high as a man's head, and as she pushed through in search of the leaves, she sang a song her old auntie had taught her and nodded her head as she sang. 'When I saw the yellow gleam in the forest my heart was glad; But I lost the ring from my nose and now I'm sad.' (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p. 254)

In a different instance, Durga resorts to the folk proverbs that are frequently recited in the villages as a *mantra* to halt the rain. Durga says:

> "Rain, rain go away from me,
> There's a *Koromcha* fruit on our lemon tree."
> (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.110)

The intricacies of Bengali folk culture may also be understood through the music of many rural

festivals. The novel depicts the songs of the *Chorok* festival, which takes place in the last month of the Bengali calendar, *Chaitra* and songs are sung by *Brata* spectators through the various ceremonial performances. Even though the song has a religious tinge, religious and rural myths of the ancient ideas are combined with folk creativity.

> From heaven there came a chariot, down to earth's wide plain;
> The Lord God Shiva was in it, and his arrows fell like rain.
> A corpse from the age of Satya and mud from the age of old;
> Sing Shiva, Shiva, brothers all, and their drums like thunder
> rolled."(Bandopadhyay Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.248)

The folklore experts are vigorously interested in the *Bratas* or rites which are undertaken by women due to their rural beliefs and customs in rural Indian Bengali communities. Even though it carries the burden of the great tradition and religions for the common people, the simple rural folks, which integrates *Lokayata cultures* in its unique style and places giving more emphasis on performative elements rather than on religious doctrines, perceptions and rituals. In essence, these *Bratas* offer rural women a safe platform to express themselves and creatively openly through their *Bratakathas* about their struggles, joys, goals, and frustrations. The heart and soul of *Bratas*, of course, are its songs and performances. Similar to other Indian states or provinces (around the time the novel was written), Bengal has its own *Bratas*, which showcase the rich cultural diversity and heritage of Bengal. The scene of the novel is set in the *Rarh* region of the then-undivided Bengal. The author incorporates these *Bratas* of this particular *Rarh* Bengal into the proclamation of the novel. The narrative provides a detailed account of several Bratas, all of which are significant and integral parts of the simple annals of rural Bengal. The author very appropriately inserts the *Holy Pond Brata*, in this particular rite, through which a sister desires her brother's long and healthy life. In the eleventh chapter of the novel, this is portrayed toshow the pure and unselfish relationship between Apu and Durga. The author attempts to delineate Durga's devotion and affection for her brother, Apu, by adhering to the sublimerituals of the customs which she followed. Therefore, considering her status as a virgin, the girl, Durga, begs the *Holy Pond* (whom she regards as God) to grant her brother a long life through the song *Holy Pond Brata*. The author adopted these folk ritualsand also included themin the plot of the novel.

> Oh, holy pond; oh, holy flower!
> I worship you beneath the noon-day sky.
> A maiden's purity is my dower;
> My brother lives and blest am I.
> (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.93)

In the rural areas of Bengal, men also occasionally participate in the *Bratas*, even though these are

typically associated with women. One such instance of them is *Chorok*. In the last month of the Bengali year, *Chaitra Brata* is performed very effectively. On the concluding day of the month, the *Brata* performers engage in a variety of strenuous physical exercises to demonstrate their supernatural or spiritual strength, which they have developed throughout their monthly penances.

> Some ten days after the *Gajon* dance came *blue worship* day, so named after Shiva, one of whose many epithets was God of the Blue Throat. The day after that was *Chorok* itself. The principal rite of the *Blue-Worship* ceremonies took place in the evening. The sannyasis first performed a dance round a date palm tree and then broke off the spikes from its trunk.
>
> (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.247)

The author presents this particular aspect very vividly and describes it with pictorial dexterity, with intricate details:

> One of them will pretend to be a corpse, and the others will bind him up in funeral clothes and carry him to the *Chatim* tree, where they burn dead people. When they've taken him there, they'll bring him back to life again, and they'll hunt round for a dead man's skull ... and when they've got one, they'll march round with it in a procession, singing songs and reciting holy texts. They recite lots of holy texts as they go round and round with the skull. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.247)

Irrational Superstitious Life Style of Rural Bengal:

In his unique style, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay highlights the darker side of the public imagination, presenting a balanced and accurate picture of rural Bengal and Bengali life in the book. The superstition has its roots in illiteracy, andit is rooted among the uneducated rural people. During the pre-colonial and colonial periods, rural Bengal was home to many irrational customs like child marriage and *Sati Pratha,* inhuman customs which are rooted in the superstitious life style of Bengal. In this book, *Pather Panchali*, the author presents superstitious practices through the eyes of a child, Apu, rather than giving a straight forward account of them. By illustrating Apu's meeting with Aturi, a so-called witch, masterfully illustrates the impact of superstition on a young boy's thoughts. Believing all the tales about Aturi, an elderly woman, Apu is terrified and fear-stricken at the place.

> Apu went pale. 'Aturi the witch! 'And they had come there just as it was getting dark. Everybody knew the story of the fisherman's son. He went to steal some of her English plums and she caught him. She sucked the spirit out of his body, wrapped it up in leaves, and threw it into the water; and the fish ate it.... Everybody also knew that if she wanted to she could suck a little boy's blood by just looking at him, and then she would let him go. He would not realize at the time that his blood had been sucked, but when he got home and had his dinner and went to bed, he would not be able to get up again... The old woman screwed up her eyes. Her sunken cheeks were quivering. She thrust her face forward to see them better, and then she began to move towards them, one step at a time. Apu knew he was caught. Escape was impossible. She was angry, and for some reason or other it was with

> him. Any minute now she would suck the spirit out of him and wrap it up in leaves. (Bandopadhyay, Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji 1999, p.135)

The embellishments and cosmetics in the novel serve as symbols of grace and significance among the ladies of *Pather Panchali,* demonstrating the enduring beauty of Bengali culture. With its view into customladen daily life, the novel *Pather Panchali* offers a deep insight into the ordinary and customary life style of chewing betel leaf, which acts as a marker of the culture of rural Bengal.

After a long walk of civilisation, humanity plunged into oblivion, forgetting sublimity, serenity and purity of rural Bengal. We are now sceptical and incredulous towards our modern narratives of life and life style. Besides, postmodernism condition laments the fragmentation, such as a fragmented society, life, culture, and moral values, which looks back to glorify the lives of old values and culture. Harking back into the past, we with utmost import anceenquire about the importance of folks and to revive folk literature which projects the folk Odyssey of rural Bengal in contemporary times. Folk literature kept a particular nation's history, customs and traditions alive for a very long time through its adaptations and appropriations in the literary field. The preservation of traditional norms and rituals is the major goal of folk writings which doesn't only cater the entertainment and aesthetic pleasures. Because of its innate simplicity, folk literature has been successful in preserving historical memory in people's thoughts and emotions. As a folk narrative, *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road*) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, has made rich past of Bengal more approachable and memorable through the adaptations and appropriations of folk elements such as stories, festivals, folk songs, *Jatras,* ballads, rituals, traditions and customs of rural Bengal. Therefore, folk elements become in this fiction as a source of literary medium to help people from different strata of society to access it for knowledge of an ideal Bengal. In this way, this novel of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, translated as *Song of the Road,* reaches the fragrance from the local to the global level. The novel transports everyone back in time to revisit the simple annals of the glorious past of rural Bengal. In this way, folks are born, live their lives, and eventually embrace death, like the calm flow of a large river. The names change with the passage of time, but families struggle with unforeseen disasters, and parents love their children without conditions. And from this distinct point, *Pather Panchali* is not only an ideal example of folk literature, rather it also heightens human awareness for survival and consciousness of the motto of loss of reality from generation to generation. We, "Like the displaced protagonist Apu, we too are facing a near irreversible destruction of our own homelands, and with it the cultures and ways of life that have sustained our joys and sorrows for centuries. The destruction of the natural environment is a catastrophe that requires no translation." (Gupta, 2019, p. Translation, *Pather Panchali*: Why Translating This Bengali Classic in the 21st Century Holds All-New Challenges).

References:

- Archer, Taylor. 1996. "Definitions of Folklore." *Journal of Folklore Research*, *33*(3), 255–264. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 09 -10.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers. Gurugram, India. p. 225.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 225.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 254.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 110.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 248.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 93.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 247.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 247- 248.
- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, India. p. 135-136.
- Bascom, W. R. Definitions of Folklore. 1996. *Journal of Folklore Research*, *33*(3), p. 255–264.http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683
- Bascom, W. R. 1953. "Folklore and Anthropology." *The Journal of American Folklore*, *66*(262), p. 283–290. https://doi.org/10.2307/536722.
- Dundes, Alan. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. Prentice-Hall, London, p.02.
- Gupta, Rimi. "PatherPanchali': Why Translating This Bengali Classic in the 21st Century Holds All-New Challenges", *Scroll*, Nov 30, 2019, page, found in translation. https://scroll.in/article/945228/pather-panchali-why-translating-this-bengali-classic-in-the-21st-century-holds-all-new-challenges.
- Harmon. G. L. 1996. "Definitions of Folklore." *Journal of Folklore Research*, *33*(3), p. 255–264. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683.
- Sahu, Nandini. "Folk in Contemporary Indian Fiction." Block 6, IGNOU Study Materials. https://egyankosh.ac.in/handle/123456789/48599S.https://webservices.ignou.ac.in/PreQuestion/Question%20Paper%20December%202022/SOH/MEG/MEG-16.pdf.
- Ting, Nai-tung. 1987. 'Folk Literature Run by the Folk': A New Development in the People's Republic of China." *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 46 (2): p. 257–71.*JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1178587. Accessed 3 July 2024

Bibliography

- Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan. 1999. *PatherPanchali*. Translated by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Gurugram, India: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Bandopadhyay, Haricharan. 2008. *Bangiyo Shabdokosh*. Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi.

- Barbeau, Marius. 1996. 'Definitions of Folklore'. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 33(3): p. 255–64. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683. Accessed 6 July 2024.
- Bascom, William. 1953. 'Folklore and Anthropology'. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 66, p. 283-90.
- Basu, Rituparna. 2009. 'The Folk Arts of Bengal and Evolving Perspectives of Nationalism, 1920S-40S: A Study of The Writings of Gurusaday Dutt'. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.70: p.512–20. *JSTOR*,http://www.jstor.org/stable/44147698. Accessed 7 July 2024.
- Bhaumik, Sudarshana. 2014. 'Folk Literature and the Changing Cultural Terrains of Eighteenth Century Bengal'. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 75, p. 1393–94. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44158549. Accessed 3 July 2024.
- Chattopadhyay, Sunil Kumar. 1994. *Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay: Makers of Indian Literature.* Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi.
- Chaudhuri, Amit. 2001. *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. India: Macmillan Publishers.
- Das, Sisir Kumar. 1995. *A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy*. Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi.
- Dorson, R. M. 1982. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dundes, Alan. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Egonou, Iheanachor. 1987. 'The Nature and Scope of Traditional Folk Literature'. *Présence Africaine*, no.144, p.10917. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24351506. Accessed 3 July 2024.
- Handoo, Jawaharlal. 1999. *Folklore in Modern India*. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.
- Ryan, Calvin T. 1953, 'Taking Folk Literature Seriously'. *Elementary English*, vol. 30 (3) p. 144–48. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41384045. Accessed 3 July 2024.
- Sahu, Nandini. 2012. *Folklore and the Alternative Modernities*, Authors Press, New Delhi.
- Taylor, Archer. 1948. 'Folklore and the Student of Literature'. *The Pacific Spectator.* Vol.2.
- Thompson, Tok, and Paul Jordan-Smith. 2016. "Folklore, 'Western Folklore,' and the Passage of Time: An Editorial Introduction." *Western Folklore*, vol. 75(2) p. 123–31. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44790909. Accessed 7 July 2024.
- Utley, Francis Lee. 1958, 'The Study of Folk Literature: Its Scope and Use'. *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 71 (280) p. 139–48. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/537683. Accessed 3 July 2024.

Bio Profile of the Author:

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Kashipur Michael Madhusudan Mahavidyalaya
Kashipur, Purulia, West Bengal, India
E-mail: sushilsarkar15@gmail.com

Apotheosis of Motherhood: Nationalist Aspiration, Sarada Devi and Self-Identity

Debarati Maity

Abstract

This paper tries to comprehend how *Saradadevi* made an epoch breaking rise and created a cult of her own by converging the widely disparate and heavily pregnant ideologies of motherhood, femininity, nationalism and spiritualism all into one. It will also try to interrogate and investigate how *Sarada Devi,* despite submitting herself to the ideologies of the two powerful men in her life, did carve out a separate existence for herself and others. The paper will explore how 'motherhood' was reformed and reshaped into a new identity by *Saradadevi*.

Keywords: *Motherhood, femininity, identity, nationalism, Sarada*

Introduction

The Apotheosis of motherhood, which is integral to Indian philosophy and cultural tradition, reached its pinnacle in nineteenth century India, with the nationalist resistance gaining momentum against the colonial civilization indictment discourse. The Nation too was reconfigured in the figure of mother Goddess, Bharat Mata, reaffirming women's traditional roles as wife and mother in the process. Professor Jasodhara Bagchi's article, "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal" (Bagchi, 1990), throws light on the hidden exploitation of women in the ideological glorification of motherhood. In her opinion, 'the ideological aspect of motherhood—it has served the purpose of taking away real power from women and creating a myth about her strength and power… Such an ideology was based on a philosophy of deprivation for women in the world of practice' (Bagchi, 1990).

Objective

This paper focuses on the subjectivity of *Sarada Devi*, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, who was not only worshipped as a divine goddess, but her motherhood was also transmuted to divine motherhood by her husband. It presents *Sarada Devi's* life and works in the light of nineteenth century ideology of motherhood and her becoming the Mother of the Ramakrishna Order from a peripheral character of '*gurumata*' or Master's wife. The paper tries to contest both the Eurocentric definition of motherhood

as well as the nationalist utilitarian perception of maternal power, and attempts to interpret motherhood from Indian woman's perception. It also highlights the erasure of real women's immeasurable loss and distress from nineteenth century nationalist and religious textual and oral representation. It therefore traces the gradual evolution of *Sarada Devi* from obscurity to prominence, her rise as a cosmopolitan mother and establishment of her identity in a male domain of control and power.

Literature Review

Problem of this research is highlighted by the fact that no writings are left by *Sarada* herself save the word '*ma*' or mother in the letter addressed to Mrs. Ole Bull (Lokeshwarananda, 1985). This work therefore heavily depends upon biographies, recorded letters, reminiscences and documentaries and other socio-cultural theories to unlock the lived experiences of *Sarada*, and gain insights about the socio-religious cultural influences shaping an individual woman's life within Bengal's spiritual domain. *Sarada* is therefore understood through the readings and representations of her followers and disciples who have seen her from close quarters and have recorded their reminiscences of her. These reminiscences and memoirs are often candid in expression and offer introspective reflections on people's perspectives, concerns and the rising impact of *Sarada* on the common mass. However, the secondary resources motivated by individual writer's perception, beliefs and intentions, view *Sarada* from multiple coordinates. They construct her as model femininity, a befitting wife, a true disciple and a spiritual guru. The hagiographical literature on the other hand recounts her life and works with mysticism, and effectively communicates *Sarada's* divine aura through a series of conflicting ideas. The ideas of 'Universal Mother' and the 'Mother of the Mission, Divine Goddess and model femininity, the spiritual Guru and the ideal housewife are juxtaposed and related in a way to impress upon the readers the idea of inscrutability of the divine goddess, *Sarada Devi*. The representations reveal how societal beliefs and norms are influenced through repetition of patterns and images, use of persuasive language and promise of authenticity. Yet, neither of these constructions is successful in reading her as an individual self. This research paper seeks to bridge the research gap by uncovering *Sarada*'s struggles and challenges in the seemingly empowered domain of spirituality.

Methodology

This research follows an inductive approach in order to gain fresh perspectives on the relationship between the diverse socio-cultural concepts of gender, sexuality, nationalism and spirituality. The research paper opts for contextual analysis since *Sarada*'s life itself was the plane of praxis for her theories. This paper borrows theoretical insights from both Indian and Western Feminist theories and literature to comprehend the extraordinary life of *Sarada*, who proved to be an exemplar of inclusivity. Thus, this research draws heavily from the theories and critical literature of eminent scholars like

Jasodhara Bagchi, Tanika Sarkar, Indira Chowdhury, Himani Bannerji and others on the concepts of nationalism, Hinduism, women and Spirituality and at the same time tries to impart a new direction to the theoretical understanding of motherhood and womanhood in general.

Period and Place of Discussion

The research delves deep into nineteenth century Bengal's religious-political and cultural phenomenon shaping *Sarada*'s life and choices. This paper, for the purpose of unfolding *Sarada*'s experiences and achievements as a woman in the spiritual domain of nineteenth century, critically explores the biographies and reminiscences penned by some authors after the publication of *Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi* in 1942 by Swami Gambhirananda. The book is seminal not only because it is the first widely acknowledged full-fledged biography on *Sarada*, but also because it heightened the curiosity and emphasis on *Sarada*'s life multiple times henceforth. The intensity, number and multiplicity of engagements have reached unscaled heights in the 21st century. It traces the journey of *Sarada*, from a girl born into a poor *Brahmin* family of Jairambati, a village in Bankura district of West Bengal on 22 December, 1853, to her monumental rise as the *Sangha Janani*, the Spiritual Guru and later as the mother of the universe. She was married to a twenty-three year old Gadadhar alias Ramakrishna at the mere age of five. She was wedded into a relatively poorer family in exchange of a bride price[i]. The mundane life of an ordinary village girl, yearning for a glimpse of her husband who had remained oblivious of her and devoted himself to spirituality, took an extraordinary turn with *Sarada*'s arrival at Dakshineswar and her subsequent divinization.

Sarada, though an ardent follower of Ramakrishna's teachings, went on to become a giant spiritual leader on her own accord. Mother, as conceived by society, is the passive and obedient 'other' of the primary agent; the donor of the see ds of life, the father. In this case, Sri Ramakrishna sows the seeds of spirituality and *Sarada* Devi carries and nurtures them to maturity. She presumably appears just as an agent in the annals of hagiography. The fact of her becoming a spiritual guru in her own right though is not over looked in the later literatures of her own disciples but has not received much attention either. Her spiritual growth in the face of constricting circumstances post the death of Ramakrishna remain subsumed under the looming presence of the mystical giant.

Research findings and Discussion

Sarada Devi (1853- 1920), the child bride of Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-1886), the great religious figure and spiritual master of nineteenth century India, is identified only as a helpmate or as a spiritual consort of her husband in history as well as in theological literature. During Ramakrishna's lifetime, she was an obscured being, apart from her faint existence as the mere wife of the Master. There were even some followers like Ram Datta, who refused to acknowledge the identity of Guru's widow, after

his death. Therefore, Ramakrishna's declaration of *Sarada* as the Universal Mother and the guiding light of the newly formed Organization, alone could notseal her place and assure her acceptance as the spiritual guide in the minds of his followers. Yet, *Sarada* emerged as the Holy Mother of the Monastic Order formed by Ramakrishna and few of his intimate disciples, years after the death of her husband. She acted as a pillar to both the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Movement, contributing significantly towards much of the Mission's varied enterprises. Eminent feminist critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak, 2007), remarks that *Sarada* after being proclaimed as the advisory head of the organization 'performed her role with tact and wisdom, always remaining in the background'[ii]. She became the locus of the Organization with the aid of a few steadfast Ramakrishna's disciples like Vivekananda, Saradananda, Yogananda, Premananda, Niranjanananda, and Girish Ghosh, who invoked her divine motherhood and pronounced her as the mother protector of the Order. The entire corpus of literature highlighting the contribution, significance and impact of the Holy Trio, is eerily reserved about the struggles, sacrifices and compromises in *Sarada*'s life. The handfuls of hagiographical texts, available on her, either reiterates and imitate their predecessors or suffer from an anxiety of certain disclosure. Therefore, the texts lack transparency and authenticity. Saradananda, a dear disciple of *Sarada* Devi, reminded the other authors, '(b)e careful if you quote Sri Sri Ma, do it economically and wisely' (Purnatmananda, 2003). This warning message of Saradananda to be vigilant of their utterances on *Sarada*, appearing in many vernacular books, endows an aura of mystery and mysticism about her. The enigma thus created, highlights her remarkable grit, wit and excellence to sail skillfully through the extraordinary and challenging circumstances of her life. One notes that *Sarada* betrayed similar negotiation between compliance and defiance asevident in the writings of exemplary nineteenth century Bengali women like Kailashbashini Devi, Rassundari Devi, Saradasundari Devi and others, while making her voice heard and presence visible.

The religious pedagogy celebrating *Sarada* as the true consort of the spiritual giant Ramakrishna, however remained indifferent to *Sarada* as a saint because she was not a renouncer according to the scriptural terms. She defied norms and alike the Master, re-defined asceticism by integrating the ideology of renunciation into the daily existence of the worldly householders. However, *Sarada*'s identity as a Mother and her maternal bonding with the followers proved to be some what disadvantageous in the path of establishing her sainthood. *Sarada* was often doubted for her worldliness while privileging motherhood over narrow idealisms of spirituality, patriotism, and renunciation. *Sarada* was extremely rigid and determined in appeasing the hunger of her devotee children as she strongly believed that it was impossible to pursue spirituality in an empty stomach. This step was revolutionary within the spiritual realm because customary Hindu ritual promotes absolute renunciation in the path of spiritual fulfillment. *Sarada* redefined the concept by advocating renunciation of caste and gender

prejudices. In other words it suggests renunciation of ailments of the mind rather than bodily attachments for spiritual progress.

References pertaining to her appear, though limited in theological sources, they escalate in her mature years of spiritual intensity. She, who remained incognito during Ramakrishna's lifetime and even couple of years after his death, suddenly appeared in full excellence in 1890 when she was acknowledged as the third leader of the nascent Ramakrishna movement, besides Vivekananda and Rakhal, Gambhirananda. Her fame reached unprecedented heights post Vivekananda's return from his successful trip of America and Europe in 1897. Subsequently, the literatures began to vouchsafe of *Sarada*'s innate spiritual genius and divinity citing the facts of her meditative capacity and Ramakrishna's worship of her. In other writings, *Sarada* has appeared as an appendage to highlight Ramakrishna's non-carnal marital life and successful training of his wife into a fitting disciple of a spiritual Godman. The image of *Sarada*, thus, has been constructed, rewritten and reinterpreted over a period of time depending on the necessities of the individual or a group of authors, and perceptions of the reformers or devotees at a particular historical context and time. As a result of these multiple versions, what the readers get to see is 'many different *Saradas*' yet the actual historical figure, the 'being' evades in each of them. In all the representations, she is primarily understood in relation to Ramakrishna or his followers (her children), instead of as an individual being. The human figure is literally and metaphorically veiled, preventing not only the male gaze but the very view of the outsiders. The mystery instigates the mind rationale to decode and decipher the human *Sarada* from the existing array of canonical sources and secondary texts, and thereby throw light on the basis of *Sarada*'s divinization and universal accolade as incarnation of Mother Goddess. As a corollary of this research, the condition of nineteenth century Indian women and their relationship with spirituality are illuminated.

Imposition of gender idealism and nationalist ideology of motherhood on *Sarada*

Sarada's life is an illustration of the choices she never had and the choices she made despite the constraints. Ramakrishna, her Sannyasin husband, not only refrained from any kind of sexual intimacy, but ritualistically worshipped his 19-year-old wife as Goddess Tripurasundari in the seat of Goddess Kali, on an auspicious night of 1872. It is here that an otherwise mundane life of a wife of a Saint, gains an extraordinary dimension altogether. Henceforward, *Sarada*'s life took an unexpected turn and she was forced to embark upon a journey which will impact her life and relationship forever. With the sudden leap of fate, she needed to act accordingly and fit into her new, transformative role as an incarnated Goddess, the Divine Mother, and a fitting counterpart of her husband. The changed circumstances and religious patriarchy endowed her with a fleeting identity; from that of a mere human wife to a 'Devi' in actual terms[iii]. This research is an exploration of her unique mental and physical journey which happened to be a balance between renunciation and indulgence.

Sarada, an introvert, *antahpurbasini* woman, was thrusted upon the role of Mother Goddess and with the charge of care and salvation of hundreds of people, by Ramakrishna, the mystic giant, at a very early age. Ramakrishna had imagined *Sarada* as the spiritual deliverer of the mass, as the priest of the great *yagna* and had therefore introduced Latu, one of his followers, to *Sarada* as a prior preparation for the proposed role. On the other hand, Vivekananda regarded *Sarada* as the nucleus of the Order who was supposed to provide emotional anchorage to hapless women and Indians in general. She was assumed to be the touchstone translating his dream of India's rejuvenation into reality. Later on, Vivekananda, following his guru's path, conferred the status of 'Mother of the Mission', 'the Holy Mother' on *Sarada* Devi, and thereby fortified her position as the centre of the Organization. She was further introduced as the *Sangha Janani*, Holy Mother of the Order, to the public by Vivekananda after his unprecedented success at America. This was in conformity with the ancient Indian tradition of honouring the lady sage or wife of a Guru as the executive head of the hermitage and addressing her as the mother[iv]. After the unprecedented success of Vivekananda in the West, the theological literature too began to shift the lens from *Sarada* as an ideal householder and ideal disciple to *Sarada Devi* as a prominent spiritual renouncer, the Holy Mother of the Ramakrishna brotherhood. Thus, Vivekananda played a pivotal role in establishing *Sarada* as the unofficial advisory Head of the Organization.

In both the projections, of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda respectively, she was supposed to be unique or different from the commoners. She was idealized as the 'perfect' woman, embodying masculine imagination of feminine power, and commanding the worship of both man and woman. *Sarada* was exalted and glorified in her suffering and chastity as the much-cherished Sita in the eloquent speeches of Vivekananda. He praised her as 'She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita, our national God she must always remain'[v].

Vivekananda promoted *Sarada* as the metaphorical *Shakti*, responsible for awakening the dormant power and energy residing within every woman. Swami Gambhirananda too similarly conceded that Indian women needed to be invigorated and energized by drawing inspiration from exemplary women. He said that 'India eulogized chastity and motherhood, since the ideal aimed at is a spiritual freedom which has for its foundation absolute self-control' (Sil, 2003). *Sarada* became the best fit as she manifested abstinence in divine motherhood, and combined within her the ideals of femininity and 'true' womanhood. By true womanhood is meant the cult of domesticity, or the value system of the upper and middle-class bourgeois society upholding the attributes of piousness, purity, submissiveness, devotion and domesticity within women. The anti-colonial nationalist identity politics affected the philosophy and perception of the bourgeois and erudite upper-class Hindus. These bourgeois Hindu

men tried to find a balance between the materialist philosophy of the west and the spirituality of the east. In their quest for a nationalist identity and history, a majority of the urban, didactic middle-class society remained anchored in the traditional Hindu India. The canonical representations discuss Sarada on similar analogies of the material and spiritual. Swami Mumukshananda argued that Indian life's ultimate goal is to attain "spiritual objectives: realization of the self, of God, truth and liberation. *Sarada*'s life manifested the fruition of these eternal goals of life and, with her serenity, stability, sincerity, and above all adaptability; she offers a link between tradition and modernity" (Sil, 2003). Therefore *Sarada* ultimately became the archetype of spiritual India, and therefore the symbolic point of difference between east and west.

Indian nationalist sentiments projected motherhood as the emblem of Indian spirituality, Indian femininity, hospitality, cultural tradition and many more. Motherhood that was once considered as impure and filthy and was attributed the darkest, unhygienic, isolated corner of the house for the process of birth to take place, suddenly began to be accentuated to glory in the magniloquent nationalist speeches. The same bourgeois society which debased femininity through analogies of fragility and frailty, sung praises of heroism of motherhood. Eminent scholar, Tanika Sarkar remarks, 'for Bengalis, accustomed to the worship of a variety of female cults, emotional resonances connected with an enslaved mother figure tended to be particularly powerful' (Sengupta, 1992). The necessity of physically and mentally strong sons to fight the Imperial power and release Bharat Mata free from the fetters, accentuated the need for strong willed and efficient mothers in nineteenth century colonial India. It is at this time that the popularity of *Sarada* Devi as an embodiment of motherhood gained fervor. The political situation of the nineteenth century therefore aided in publicizing the popularity of *Sarada*.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that Ramakrishna's development of the Mother-symbolism of the nurturer and protector influenced the ascetic image of Bharat Mata of the incipient Indian nationalism later on (Amaury, 1961). Through her idolization and worship, Ramakrishna emphasized her motherhood to his followers. Ramakrishna was often heard to say that the Mother Goddess he worshipped was the same as the one who lived in the *Nahabat*. He wanted *Sarada* to manifest the Motherhood of God to the world, which however entailed asexuality and sacrifice of her biological motherhood. The idea of motherhood of God emphasized conception of God as a mother. This conception conjoins with the nationalist imagination of India as a Divine Mother. Ramakrishna projected *Sarada* as the avatar of Goddess Saraswati, who had taken re-birth to guide and teach life's ideals to the spiritually confused generation (Gambhirananda, 1983). Thus, the objective was to manifest through *Sarada* Devi a living example of motherhood liable for shaping children's mental health and education. He once exclaimed in praise of his follower Keshab Chunder Sen's mother that 'people will celebrate her entrails' suggesting glorification of mother through greatness of sons (Bagchi, 1990).

Swami Vivekananda, the nationalist spiritual crusader, developed upon his guru's imagery of motherhood and tried to impress upon his global followers, the high status and respect enjoyed by Indian women as mothers. However, in his upholding of motherhood, he unconsciously devalued women as wife in his speeches. In the chapter on 'Mother Worship', Vivekananda decries that 'the highest of all feminine types in India is mother, higher than wife. Wife and children may desert a man, but his mother never [vi]. The Mother within the nationalist paradigm was also the de-sexualized female. Femininity and female sexuality were associated with negativity and impasse. The idea of woman began to be used interchangeably with the idea of Nation and appeared as a signifier of the latter in the nineteenth century nationalist discourse. Vivekananda envisaged Bharat as the mother encouraging 'co-existence of all religions and faith'[vii]. Therefore, motherhood became a ploy for the Indians to counter the civilization indictment discourse of the colonials and posit an elevated image of women's position in India. At the same time, the counter discourse enabled to enthuse a spirit of Indianness, nationality and oneness among the widely disparate and disconnected individuals of the land. The sacred biography of the Twice-Blessed Mother suggests *Sarada* to be the role model for India as a whole since she paved the way for India to regain its lost glory and grandeur. The author prays, 'Let India be awakened to that Ideal. Let all differences among nations…and untouchability…be wiped out forever by the examples of Mother's life. Let the disregarded race of the mothers gain their personal rights' (Sil, 2003).

Sarada cut a decisive figure in the establishment of the Organization through her exceptional wit and grit. Her crucial functional decisions, blessings and prayers, provided the monks support, encouragement, and inspiration. Howsoever, in spite of all efforts, her identity had been merely that of a *Gurumata* or Master's wife, a woman in the minds of the disciples for a long time. After, the death of her husband, she was reduced to a penurious state and almost faded into oblivion. The young naïve girl inherited the fortune of a penniless, deserted being and a life full of uncertainties[vii]. While reminiscing of her distress at Kamarpukur after the death of Ramakrishna to one of her woman followers, Sarada states that it was only Bhanupishi who could perceive her depth of pain and mental hankerings and to whom she could rely on in moments of dejection. She added with a sense of assuagement to her sore heart that 'thereafter one by one her sons came' (author's translation), (Purnatmananda, 2003). The reminiscences thus testify to the fact of her loneliness and her inability to confide in others her mental turmoil but bear it in silence.

Despite everything, *Sarada*, emerged as the unofficial head and advisor of the Ramakrishna Math in a course of few years and controlled everything from the back. All the monk leaders consulted her for guidance regarding various actions of the Math and none could override her decisions or objections. Her statements were received as the order of a Guru (Sil, 2003). Although, there is a strict injunction

on the Ramakrishna Order of male monks to stay away from 'woman and gold' or *kaminikanchan*; this did not apply in case of Mother who was their pillar of strength and love. Vivekananda's letters imploring the brother monks of the Ramakrishna Order to comprehend the power and significance of *Sarada*, attest to the fact that her future position as the invisible administrator of the organization and her permanent placement in the hearts of the masses was a remarkable feat achieved singularly by her. They therefore defied general perception of the earlier biographers of Sarada's easy embarkation on a path prepared by her husband. *Sarada* could not avail the opportunity of reading scriptures, religious texts or traverse different places like her husband and Vivekananda, before assuming the role of the future spiritual guide. She was not even allowed to study beyond the primers by her husband or to attend religious gatherings along with him for fear of public scrutiny and humiliation. *Sarada* eagerly watched and listened to Ramakrishna's theological explanations and witty informative exchanges from behind the bamboo curtain, so much so that she developed severe rheumatism from long hours of standing. The biographers have referred to this anecdote as proof of *Sarada*'s love and longing for her husband, and have missed the fact that, that *Sarada* ached to read. She nursed a great desire for 'complete and autonomous understanding' of religious texts which she ultimately accomplished in a course of many years by seeking aid from different women[viii].

Sarada's life was problematic and did not entail a regular form of wedded bliss wished by most women. It was full of sacrifices. Vivekananda said, "No Hindu can be a priest until he is married, the idea being that a single man is only half a man, and imperfect" (Vivekavani, 2023). Ramakrishna's marriage with *Sarada* ensured success in his spiritual path but robbed her of her desire for motherhood. It should be noted that socio-culturally and historically, motherhood was then the only vocation open to women and the only sphere of self-expression and self-realization. But Ramakrishna's offer of "universal motherhood" and divine motherhood traded woman's instinctive desire, choice of essential motherhood, and sense of belonging for a public role. The rhetoric of Ramakrishna's divine motherhood defined her role as a preacher and emphasized on the perpetuation of his teachings as his aide after his death. *Sarada* Devi on the other hand, insisted on becoming the mother to her devotees and impressed on their minds the same. This is evident when she insisted her followers to think of her as a real mother and not as the Master's wife or mother *per se*. She declared in bold terms to Girish Ghosh, the popular dramatist and ardent follower of Ramakrishna, and also to her followers in her advanced years of spiritual maturity, that she was 'a mother not by virtue of being (their) Guru's wife, nor because of, any assumed relationship, nor by way of empty talk, but truly the mother' ("Life Girish Chandra Ghosh", 2017). Although, she eventually complied with her husband's ascetic mode of living and her denied motherhood but she prevented him from exercising control on her maternal love. She was firm, unflinching and independent when she urged her husband to stay away from her motherhood

and thereby reclaimed the space of woman's autonomy. The scholars have argued for the divergence in principles of Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekananda, but no attempt has been made to understand Sarada beyond the idea of a subordinate or a helpmate in the fulfilment of the dreams of the two men. It is true that all three of them were striving towards a common goal of mass spiritual upliftment, but my study shows that, they each followed a distinct path depending upon their own individual personalities and projected performing identities. This paper explores how *Sarada* navigated the world of the imagined and the world of the real on the vehicle of motherhood.

In the context of early Nationalism, the relationship between the image of Bharat Mata as first imagined by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his *Ananda Math* and that the lived experiences of women were complexly layered. Eminent scholar Indira Chowdhury remarks that," While this glorious motherhood with its latent heroism served to amend the assailed male image, it also signaled a specific pedagogy for women, for with the mothers-to-be rested the fate of the nation of the future"[ix]. The imagined ideal of motherhood during nationalism proved to be a double-edged sword and pushed woman to a further compromised position. Indian nationalist discourse refashioned the Indian state into the symbolic figure of 'Bharat Mata'. The image of mythical goddess was further imported and imposed on women. Other aspects erased, women were merely viewed and glorified as mothers or simply as deliverers of heroic sons. Thus, the unexpected discovery of latent heroism in mothers was not located in any penitent realization of active agency in woman but was linked to the birth of heroic sons. The heroic pedagogy of mothering neither did strengthen the position of ordinary women nor did deify her in any respect but treated her as a means of achieving cultural self-understanding, agency, pride and glory. The figurative mother figure within Indian nationalist discourse is pronatalist and emphasizes the gendered roles of nurturing, caring and self-sacrifice in women. Woman's chastity and purity became a matter of grave concern at this time and consequently, woman, was simultaneously 'defiled and deified'[x] within the nationalist discourse. The idea of Bharat Mata is entwined with this idea of female sexuality and body where honour resides only with a chaste female body devoid of sexual desires. In the words of scholar, Hira (2017), "The sexuality of a woman gets both invoked and repressed, defined and regulated" in the rhetoric of 'Bharat Mata'[xi]. On one hand, she was eulogized and glorified in her motherhood, and on the other, she was debased and tormented as a wife. It was these twin tenets, firstly, the nationalist ideology which gave precedence to mother over wife, and secondly, the religious image of the divine mother, which influenced *Sarada*'s life and role.

The course of *Sarada*'s life was determined at this time of political differences. Her life was meant to be read (much like Rassundari Devi) as a single narrative, the two lives of God's and the devotee's intertwining and interanimating each other (Sarkar, 1993). Here, there were two Gods; one was her husband, the great Seer Ramakrishna, who dictated her future and the other was Vivekananda who

provided her with the launching ground to embark on her spiritual journey. There was also a third factor, as potent and powerful as the other two. This was the role played by the authors and the critics representing her and her life. But, *Sarada* refused to remain a dummy or an agent and charted a new journey of her own. She possessed a rare combination of unflinching devotion to husband God as well as fierce assertiveness and authority. Almost all nineteenth century women narratives depict a quest for identity and autonomous subjectivity. *Sarada* too embarked on a journey that not only enabled her in finding her individuality and identity, but also enabled others to reconstitute themselves and find integrity in life simultaneously.

Sarada's life was designed in such a manner so as to impart a sense of divine purpose to the readers. The biographies are read as an extension of Ramakrishna's own ascetic life, mystical temperament, and his work of providing spiritual salvation to the destitute masses. After Ramakrishna's death, Sarada Devi truly arose as the key figure in the Ramakrishna Movement and helped in disseminating his teachings world-wide but in her own unique way. *Sarada* countered the conservative biological and gender essentialist approach to motherhood and re visioned it as inclusive, incorporating all differences into the fold of humanity. *Sarada*'s carving a niche of her own in the male dominated realm of spirituality was therefore a 'maternal triumph' over dry renunciative notions of exclusion and rejection. And she accomplished this solely on the basis of cosmopolitan motherhood which became the only religion of her life. *Sarada*'s proclamation, "I am a woman and I follow my womanly nature" (Sil, 2003) seem to pave the way for feminism in India by positing a combination of both personal and community form of religion. This thesis is an attempt to understand how Sarada rose to the position of power and eminence sometimes by submitting to the whims of the patriarchal men influencing her life and at times by charting a path of her own.

Sarada's understanding of the ideology of motherhood

Although, her biographers painted *Sarada* as a 'Mother who is not a mother', in other words a Goddess or a *Guru-mata* or Brahmani meaning wife of a Brahman; who shares mental attachment but not physical ties with her children; *Sarada*'s endeavour was to prove that she was not a mother in the conventional sense of the term. She once declared to dramatist Girish Ghosh that she was 'a mother not by virtue of being your Guru's wife, nor because of any assumed relationship, nor by way of empty talk, but your own true mother'[xii]. The separation that the imposition of divinity entailed was repudiated by *Sarada* every time she came closer to her children and served them. She even once remarked in irritation to a disciple who addressed her as the Divine Mother that 'You always harp on that one theme. I say that I am your mother, and that does not satisfy you.'[xiii] *Sarada* never wanted to create a feeling of remoteness in the minds of her children and thereby desisted from asserting herself as divine Goddess to her intimate disciples. And even if she complied with the fact of Divine Mother

in certain circumstances, she perceived it differently. She was once heard to reflect that, 'People call me the Divine Mother. I think, maybe they are right. How otherwise can one explain the strange things that have happened in my life?. . . If I say to myself that a certain thing should happen, the wish is always fulfilled'[xiv]. So, divinity for her was a way of explaining women's pragmatism and visionary power in a world that refuses to accept women's intellectual compatibility with the men. The anecdotes and the reminiscences overlook the challenges of being deified. She was always under the radar of the public. She had to offer clarification for every action and reaction of her. Given the social restrictions of her time and her own pitiful predicament, it was impossible for *Sarada* to rebel against society's preoccupation with superstition or the hagio-political agenda of mystical representation. In order to survive and carve out her own space and identity, she too complied and even added dimension to the fabricated tales of divinity.

Sarada manifested that in femininity, which is perceived as an ensnaring and debasing thing by patriarchy as a whole; alone lies the power and possibility of regeneration of mankind. Despite living and working in an oppressive patriarchal domain, she is seen to protest and stand firm in matters relating to motherhood. Motherhood in case of *Sarada*, emerges as a symbol of strength and autonomy influencing woman's identity and position. Food and feeding are deeply rooted in maternal nurturing. *Sarada* protested when Ramakrishna complained of her extravagance in distribution of food to his followers, and forcedhim to comply and allow her will to triumph. These instances indicate that she was very keen on establishing maternal bonding and asserting her maternal identity. The act of giving food creates a sensation of warmth and love between a mother and her child, and establishes communion with people by providing an immediate experience of fulfilment, a sense of belonging, and thereby provides for both psychological and physical nourishment. *Sarada* sought to re-constitute and develop the close bonding between mother and child through the act of providing nourishment. *Sarada* even refused to abide by the rule of the spiritual organization to address the disciples inducted to renunciation by their *sannyasi* names, and called them by their birth names (Gambhirananda, 1983). She cited the logic of the relationship of attachment between mother and children. Thus, the conventional feminine practices were used as a trope for fighting suppression, asserting independence, and negotiating identity in case of *Sarada*.

Ramakrishna imagined her as the future spiritual benefactor of the masses after his death, but she was never allowed to actively participate in the public world prior to his death. *Sarada* lived almost in imprisonment inside the tiny room of *Nahabat*, the musical tower above the gate of the temple. She never left it even for ablutions or calls of nature except in the wee hours of night. She could not even get access to the spiritual discourse taking place every day in the room next to the *Nahabat*, where her own husband was the cynosure of attraction. However, the strict confines of her *antahpur* could not

deter strong-willed *Sarada* from acquiring knowledge or from developing maternal bond with Ramakrishna's followers. *Sarada*, propelled by curiosity, perforated the bamboo screen divider just enough to have a peek into the public realm. Thus, *Sarada*, instead of dismantling the wall between the public and the private, punctured it and stood at the juncture of transition between the modern and the traditional.

Women of nineteenth century lived a puppet like existence bereft of both significance and purpose, save as raw materials for social progression. *Sarada* encouraged mass moral awakening, and initiated the suffering, the deprived and the marginalized to spiritual philosophy, for whom the reformative measures and access to social institutions, religion and empowerment remained a distant dream. *Sarada*'s motherhood can be explained as a "metaphorical way of giving birth" (Sengupta, 1998) to herself as also to her devotee children. Many girls subjected to patriarchal torments, found freedom, peace and identity in her protected shelter. Some girls even became *Pravrajikas* (nuns) of the Sarada Math, the women's wing of the Ramakrishna Math, under her guidance. As for example, Parul, who became *Pravrajika Bharatiprana*, the first President of Sarada Math. Motherhood for her became a tool for transforming patriarchal maternal ideology and redefining female identity and femininity. Femininity normatively defined through the parameters of ontological functions and sexuality, transforms in case of *Sarada*, into a qualitative attribute affecting human understanding of oneself and his/her connection with the world of creations. Motherhood as lived and practiced by *Sarada* was an evolved spiritual experience making way for collaborative living, human empathy and bonding. Motherhood in case of *Sarada*, transcends the limitations of its narrow-codified definition of bonding between mother and children and adopts the macrocosmic Indian philosophical view of the connection between all human beings, and connection between man and the outer cosmic world. It transcends even human diversities of language, class, caste, nationality and others, and gives rise to homogeneity and inclusivity.

Conclusion

Sarada Devi is one of the earliest women to question and unsettle dominant gender power equations. She through her craving for biological motherhood, voluntary rearing of her niece and caring for the needs of hundreds of devotee children with the joy and satisfaction of a biological mother, gave voice to subjugated womanhood. She prioritized woman's choice, desire, autonomy and self-identity. The scholars are thus propelled to revisit the concept of motherhood from the perspective of Indian womanhood.

Spiritual movement, which indirectly aided nationalism, as it rejected caste distinctions and religious prejudices, evolved as a unifying weapon at the embracing call of Holy Mother. She provided a

resolution to the question of 'embodying the twin problems of female agency and female subject-formation' (Sengupta, 1998). *Sarada* by affirming the inseparability or oneness of God and Goddess time and again to her followers, based on the tenets of foundation of the Vedanta philosophy, created an enabling space for femininity and womanhood. Research says, "Woman-centred spiritualism allowed women ample space to examine and subvert Victorian gender norms"[xv]. The act of forming spiritual communities by women was emancipating in itself since it provided comfort, mental peace and support to helpless women. It offered visibility, voice and autonomy to hitherto marginalized women. Spirituality allowed women to savor freedom and control within an otherwise "uncontrollable social organization and relations of power" (Bannerji, 2002). *Sarada*'s idea of motherhood is therefore inseparable from the interconnected relation between women and spirituality, and her identity as the spiritual leader. However, her identity as the spiritual gurustill remains subsumed under the reflection of the two powerful men, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and requires detailed exploration and exposition with relation to femininity and administrative pragmatism.

End notes:

i Swami Gambhirananda., *Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi*, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1942.

ii Gayatri C. Spivak*., Other Asias*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, p 207. The reference is repeated in S. Sharma, "Sarada Devi" in Long, J.D., R.D. Sherma, P. Jain., M. Khanna. (eds) *Hinduism and Tribal Religions. Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*, Springer, Dordrecht. 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1188-1_841

iii One is reminded of Satyajit Ray's film Devi (1960), based on Provat Kumar Mukhopadhyay's short story, exploring the psychological upheavals in young girls worshipped as incarnations of Goddesses Durga or Kali. The film depicts that the repercussion of the act on young Doyamoyee was too much. She moved on from initially believing herself as Devi to being psychologically distraught at the sight of her failed powers in curing and bringing Khoka back to life. Ray deals with the inability of young girls voicing their own feelings and opinions and the absence of free will in religious orthodoxy.

iv Sage Anusuya and sage Arundhati are a couple of such figurative mythical examples who held a place of authority in the hermitages of Guru Atri and Guru Vashishtha respectively.

v Swami Vivekananda Views On Women - Indic Today (indica. today)

vi The sayings were accumulated as fragmentary notes of a class lecture by Vivekananda at New York. Mother worship (ramakrishnavivekananda.info)
www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/abanindranath-tagore-rejected-european-art-promoted-hindu-spirituality-to-convey-indianness/

vii Ramakrishna had dictated her to keep the door at the south open, and will claim no right to Ramlal's (his nephew who stayed with Sarada at Dakshineshwar) property even if he builds 'Kothabari' or whorehouses. Sarada states that Ramlal truly earned so much that he had enough to spare in building whorehouses. [source missing

viii During her stay at Kamarpukur, Laxmi who frequented the village pathshalas, helped Sarada to learn how to read a little. Later in life, after the death of Ramakrishna, at Dakhineshwar, Sarada used to gift leaves and vegetables to a girl who made her learn the letters.

ix Indira Sengupta Chowdhury., "Mother India and Mother Victoria: Motherhood and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal". South Asia Research, Vol.12, No.1, 1992. (PDF) Mother India and Mother Victoria: Motherhood and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal (researchgate.net)

x A term used in book description of Tanika Sarkar., *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Time*s. Orient Blackswan.

xi Hira Naaz., "Women's Sexuality in The Indian Nationalist Discourse", Aug 14, 2017, https://feminismindia.com>woman

xii Girishchandra Ghosh., "Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother", 2017. Sri Sarada Devi – The Holy Mother

xiii Swami Nikhilananda., "Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother", Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother | Vedanta Society of Southern California

xiv *Ibid*

xv Vivekavani, "Gauri Pandit", January 16, 2023. GauriPandit - VivekaVani

References

- Amaury, Riencourt, de. 1961. *The Soul of India*. London: Jonathan Cape. p.250.
- Bagchi, Jasodhara. 1990. "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal", EPW, 25 (42/43): 65-71. Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal on JSTOR (accessed on 1st December 2024)
- Bannerji, Himani. 2002. 'Re-generation: Mothers and Daughters in Bengal's Literary Space', *Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism*, Anthem Press.
- Bhattacharya, Sukumari. 1990. 'Motherhood in Ancient India'. EPW.25 (42/43): 50-57. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4396892(accessed on 19th November, 2024)
- Gambhirananda, Swami. 1983. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.p61
  ..... 1942. *Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi*. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
- Hira, Naaz. Aug 14, 2017. "Women's Sexuality in The Indian Nationalist Discourse". https://feminismindia.com>woman (accessed on 29th November, 2024)
- Lokeshwarananda, Swami. 1985. *Satarupe Sarada*. Kolkata: Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture.
- Nikhilananda, Swami. 'Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother'. Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother | Vedanta Society of Southern California (accessed on 20th November, 2024)
- Purnatmananda, Swami (ed). 2003. *Sri Sri Mayer Padaprante*. vol.4, Kolkata: Udbodhan Karjalaya. 1997. *Shri Shri Mayer Padaprante*. vol.3, Kolkata: Udbodhan Karjalaya. p691.
- Sarkar, Tanika. 2014. *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Time*s, The Orient Blackswan.
- *A Book of Her Own. A Life of Her Own: Autobiography of a Nineteenth Century Woman*. Autumn 1993. Colonial and Post-Colonial History. History Workshop Journal. No.36, pp. 35-65. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289251(accessed on 20th November, 2024)
- Sengupta, Indira Chowdhury. 1992. 'Mother India and Mother Victoria: Motherhood and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *South Asia Research*, 12(1). (PDF) Mother India and Mother Victoria: Motherhood and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal (researchgate.net) (accessed on 25th November, 2024)
- 1998. 'The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal'. Oxford University Press. (37) The Frail Heroand Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal | Indira Chowdhury - Academia.edu (accessed on 20th November, 2024)
- Sil, Narasingha P. 2003. *Divine Dowager: the life and teachings of Saradamani, the Holy Mother*, London: Associated University Press. Divine Dowager by Sil Narasingha | PDF (scribd.com) (accessed on 20th November, 2023)
  2017. *The Holy "Mother who is not a mother": Saradamani Chattopadhyay*. DOI:10.5040/9798216036623.ch-002The Holy "Mother Who Is Not a Mother": Saradamani Chattopadhyay | Request PDF (researchgate.net) (accessed on 20th November, 2024)

- Sri Sarada Devi-The Holy Mother. 'Life: Girish Chandra Ghosh'. 2017.https://srisaradadevi.in/2017/12/02/girishchandra-ghosh/(accessed on 16th November, 2024)
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 2007. *Other Asias*. Wiley-Blackwell, New Jersey, USA. 2007, p 207
- Swami Gambhirananda., *Holy Mother ShriSarada Devi*, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1942.
- Vivekavani. January 16, 2023. 'Gauri Pandit'. Gauri Pandit - VivekaVani (accessed on 20th November, 2023)

Bio Profile of the Author

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Netaji Nagar College for Women, Kolkata-32
Email: nncwenglish@gmail.com

Female Resistance and the Quest for Freedom in Assam with Special Reference to Kanaklata Baruah

Pratyashi Saikia Tandon

Abstract

In the history of India's movement for independence from the British rule, role of Assam was crucial. During the first half of the nineteenth century, north-eastern region of India witnessed a sudden upsurge in anti-British protests movements. By the Treaty of Yandaboo, the British government brought Assam under their rule in 1826. Since then, the citizens of Assam had their heart set on fighting for freedom from the foreign dominion. Together with men, the women of Assam also threw themselves into the events that unfolded with the aim of ending the suzerainty of the Crown. The coming of Mahatma Gandhi to Assam in the year 1921, captivated Assamese men and women from all backgrounds. During this juncture, the more radicalised revolutionary women acted as one powerful force fighting closely together with their male fellows to cripple the administration of the British Empire. Against this backdrop, this paper discusses the case of female resistance during the freedom movement in Assam which has often been over looked in the history of India. The paper focuses on the contribution of Kanaklata Baruah, a brave rebel of Assam, who sacrificed her life fighting for the cause of her state. The paper explores extant academic literature and other secondary sources relevant to the topic.

Keywords : *Women; Quest for Freedom; Indian Independence Movement; Kanaklata Baruah; Assam; British rule.*

Introduction

Women's participation in the struggle for independence from years of British predominance is a critical domain of contemporary historical inquiry. Women have always played an active role in shaping society and civilisation. Across the ages, women in India have shown inexplicable determination and patriotism sharing the ideal of socio-economic and political improvement of their nation. During the struggle for Indian independence from the British colonial dominion, Indian women displayed indomitable spirit and prowess by shouldering critical responsibilities alongside men in the political space of the country. The bravery of these women transcended the nondescript, in terms of the active role they played as revolutionaries, the setting up of covert groups, publication of anti-British texts and bulletins as well as suffering harsh inflictions and torments.

India witnessed years of persistent struggle, conflict and warfare before attaining freedom from the fetters of British predominance. The people of India had to hammer a tough path fighting against British paramountcy to liberate India from the political control of Britain. Indians resisted British control the right from the very start with the first nationalist movements taking shape in the early 20th century and culminating in the transfer of authority and command in 1947. Women involved in the independence movement in different appellations. Women of Assam also participated fervently in the freedom movement. Women played significant roles in agitation politics, developed their own political organizations and voiced their opinions, however, before the 1970's, their contribution and involvement in moulding the freedom movement was unacknowledged (Chandra, 1971). Particularly, the nationalist narratives paid undivided attention to only few mainstream women, thus, overshadowing the exceptional contributions of not only those at the margins but even obliterating the patriotism and sacrifices of women like Kanaklata Baruah, Tai Bai, Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade, Mausama Begum and so on.

In the initial stages of independence struggle, contributions of women appertained to commitment towards social reform, dynamic involvement in demonstrations and movements, and resistance against social barriers and patriarchal norms. The beginning of women's active contributions owed the seeds of intensive engagement and leadership in later stages of the freedom movement. The 19th century mothered women who steamed the urge to liberate themselves from social prejudices and discriminatory norms. The advent of reformers and activists during this time cultivated and nurtured women specific issues such as women's education, widow remarriage, child marriage, and social and political acclivity of women. Futurists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule assumed the role of catalysts for female consciousness and concerns comprehending that emancipation of women was necessary for both social upscaling and nation-building. With the nationalist movement shoring up during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women eventually evolved into influential characters in bolstering the nationalist claim for autonomy and self-rule. The active part played by of women in various nationalist campaigns and movements played a vital role in shaping the trajectory of the struggle.

Assam, situated in the North Eastern part of India has its own contribution to this apocalyptic struggle for liberation. Prior to the 13th century A. D. the areaon the eastern side of the Karatoya river, present day Assam, was called Kamrupa or Pragjyotisha till the rise of the Ahom kingdom.[1] (Gogoi, 2006). This region comprised of an extensive geographical region characterized by a significant extent of demography and way of life. Documented narratives of Assam depict the state's deep cultural traditions, ancient civilizations, medieval conflicts and colonial encounters. Assam came under British dominion (Baruah, 1986) after it's annexation in 1826 by the Treaty of Yandaboo.[2] The waves of anti-

British uprisings by women in diverse parts of the country and Gandhi's appeal for non-cooperation movement against the British rule, reached this part of the country as well and Assam too witnessed unflinching resolution and heroism of women and their role while overthrowing the British domination from the region. Hailing from diverse regions, backgrounds, and life domains, these women were one brute force ensign of freedom, that left an imperishable mark on in the history of Assam and India. During the struggle for liberation from British domination, women turned out to be the aphonic creators of change, reconstructing the ground for freedom with resilience, renunciation, courage and fortitude.

The freedom movement in India flared-up innumerable anti-colonial agitations across the length and breadth of the country. This period was highly consequential in the history of women emancipation in India. Gandhi's unbreakable spirit emboldened the women of Assam to break social barriers and exercise their agency in the crusade for freedom. Several gallant women epitomized the revolutionary zeal by participating in the freedom movement with unswerving determination, patriotism and dexterity. Apart from engaging physically, women often rendered intellectual insights and propagated women's rights and socio-economic reforms. Their narrations and compositions, speeches, and pleadings were instrumental in altering social perspectives and in furthering the revolutionary cause. Kanaklata Barua was one such women who was deeply inspired by the thoughts and ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi in overthrowing the British rule from India.

Objectives of the study

The study aims to analyse the significant contribution of women in the nationalist movement in Assam specifically that of Kanaklata Baruah in the light of secondary literature. It tries to understand the growth of female consciousness and their initiation into the struggle for liberation. Finally, the study seeks to interpret extant academic research on the role played by women Indian Independence Movement during the early 19th and 20th century.

Methodology

The paper provides an overview of the role played by women in Assam in the struggle for independence from British suzerainty by analysing secondary literature relevant to the study. The exploratory study is based on secondary sources like books, journals, articles, regional newspapers like The Deccan Herald, The Hill Times, Assam Tribune etc., E-magazines, E-libraries, internet sites, conference papers, reports, government sources like Government of Assam, sites for historical information, databases like Shodhganga, Research Gate.

Freedom Struggle In Assam

The annexation of Assam by the British in 1826 led to a series of revolts against the British

predominance. The first revolt, called the Ahom revolt took place in 1828. It was led by Gomdhar Konwar, Haranath, Dhananjay Borgohain and others who striked the British repository at Sadiya. The revolt was supressed by the British and they strengthened their control over Assam. Another revolt which was led by Piyali Barphukan occurred there after. Piyali got the assistance of Jiuram Dulia Barua, Benudhar Konwar, Rupchand Konwar, Deuram Dihingia, Boum Chingfau and other nobles who succeeded in crushing the British camp at Rangpur. But Piyali and Jiuram were captured and hanged while others were prisoned for fourteen years. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 that spread throughout India was led by Maniram Dewan in Assam. Both nobles and common man took part in this revolt. However, it was unsuccessful and Maniram Dewan and his accomplice Piyali Barua we're hanged in Jorhat jail in 1858.

In 1861, after almost three years, the peasants of Assam launched a revolt at Phulaguri in the district of Nagaon. In the year 1894 another peasant uprising was staged at Patharughat in Darrang. Both these revolts witnessed active participation of peasants in challenging the tyranny and repressive policy of the British administration in Assam. The British cold-heartedly quashed these uprisings and many peasants met their demise.

In 1919, the unnerving tragedy at Jallianwala Bagh, escalated the urge for freedom across the nation and in 1921 after Mahatma Gandhi took the lead, the movement to upthrow the British dominion assumed a heightened temperament and renewed spirit. As a result, the non-cooperation movement got kick-started by which the entire nation got united to impel the British and gain Swaraj (Panigrahi, 1984).

The year 1942 saw the surging struggle for freedom reach it's pinnacle when Gandhiji initiated the "Quit India Movement with the call "Do or Die". The nationalistic and patriotic fervour of this widespread upsurge stimulated the people of Assam too and there were widespread protests against the British rule. The confinement of Mahatma Gandhi along with other leaders soon after the launch of the movement further galvanised the people of Assam to participate actively in the freedom movement. On the 26th of January in 1930 when 'Purna Swaraj'[3] (absolute freedom from British rule) (Mochahary & Joseph, 2022) was announced it emboldened the people to protests through mass participation, start processions and hoist the tricolour on government premises across Assam.

In Assam, resentment against the foreign dominion unfolded in a calm manner initially, but soon after, oppression and brutality against the people aggravated and influential leaders of Congress like Gopinath Bordoloi, Pitambar Dev Goswami, Deveshwar Sharma and Mohammad Tayabullah were arrested. This intensified the frenzy and anger of the Congress leadership in Assam who there after turned to combative methods against British like turning rails off the track and burning trains, ambushing army outpost and fracturing communication channels. Several violent events broke in different areas of the state.

The Quit India Movement proceeded in a galactic way in almostall corners of Assam including Darrang district. People from diverse class, age, occupational pursuit and social and linguistic affiliations, joined the movement in large magnitude. Kushal Konwar, who was the president of the local wing of the Congress at that time was an avid follower of Gandhi's ideology of non-violence. However, false accusations of thwarting a train off the track and killing many British soldiers were labelled against him and he was hanged (IF, 2017). This act of the Britishers enraged the revolutionary groups of Gohpur and resulted in the withdrawal of British flags from all prestigious places and buildings and display the Indian National flag.

Female Voice and Resistance in the Assam Freedom Struggle

Feminist consciousness and participation of women in the nationalist struggle surfaced simultaneously in India with the awareness of rights and identity. With Mahatma Gandhi's appeal for active participation and inclusion of women in the Quit India Movement, many women from nook and corner of the country came forward to join the women's organisations that emerged at that time. This resulted in the integration of women's movements into nationalist movement. The crusade for women's socio-political rights in the Third World took shape out of the historical circumstances and concurrent times as nationalism. In addition, as ripples of the First wave of feminism swayed across Europe and America, it jiggled India as well. In different parts of the world women started demanding for the right to vote which aroused the consciousness of women in India too. Irish women like Margaret Cousins (Jayawardena, 1995) supported Indian women in their demand for representation in the minimal constitutional changes executed in early 1917. In this year, the Indian Women's Association[4] was found especially with the purpose of sending a contingent of women to Edwin Montagu, who was the Secretary of State for India at that time. The contingen tasked for granting suffrage rights to women in the new constitutional reforms which subsequently took shape as the Government of India Act, 1991 commonly called Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

Women from every walk of life fought as heroically as men to free to gain freedom from the British imperialism. When India's freedom struggle acquired the shape of a robust crusade women from also dived into the struggle. Women figured prominently in the freedom movement in Assam and their activism and bravery brought about tangible changes which were reflected in their dissenting voices and political agency during the long transitional period for independence from British colonialism. While there were women who persisted resolutely undeterred by authoritarianism and brutality of the British rule, others were bold enough to demand their fundamental rights and freedom that were crushed under the shadow of the British government in Assam. Women's involvement crossed beyond organisations and lectures to conscientious responsibilities in macroscale protests, demonstrations, condemnation and resistance movements. Acting synergistically with their male

fellows, they orchestrated marches, demonstrated outside bars, and took part in Satyagrahas. Despite facing confinements, arrests and brutalitiesat the hands of British authorities, these women showcased remarkable courage and resilience.

The struggle for political, social, and economic freedom from British colonial empire has been viewed from multiple perspectives in the political discourse of India. In the early twentieth century, prominent Indian nationalists leaders held different conceptions and philosophies for creating a self-reliant India. Along with the male ideologues, women demonstrated their indomitable spirit and patriotic zeal in dismantling the oppressive rule of the British regime to reconstruct India based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. (The Deccan Herald, 2021). There were women rounding up in the streets and open places demanding the overthrow of autocratic regime that had been in place for long. It was a signal that women wanted remarkable change for the betterment of their country and themselves. The sweeping engagement of women in resisting the British rule manifested the full immensity with which women steadfastly refused the British rule in Assam and contributed to organised opposition against the oppressive regime. It also demonstrated the powerful role that women could play in challenging the colonial domination, laws and rulesthat had failed to show regard for human dignity and value and provide them with autonomy, basic freedom, and uniform rights, who were till then seen as secondary citizens. The battle that women waged were not oriented to personal benefits, but to free the Assamese society from fear, discrimination and tyranny of the imperialist regime. Women of the time became well aware that such freedom could be achieved only through radical changes aimed at changing existing institutions, and overthrowing of the despotic rule in Assam. From *Chandraprabha Saikiani's* efforts towards women's education and employment to *Mangri Orang,* an Adivasitea garden worker popularly known as '*Malati Mem'* who fought against sale of foreign liquor and opium to *Dariki Dasi Barua's* picketing of opium shops during the civil disobedience movement, to *Bhanumati Talukdar* popularly known as *'Volunteerani Bai'* and credited with the title '*Sarojini of Assam',* who organised mass meetings throughout the state and urged women to follow Gandhiji's footsteps (Sharma, 1993). Assamese women acted as active agents in determining the freedom movement in their own unique and transformational way (GOA, 2020).

The arrival of the British in Assam brought about a gradual change in the socio-political sphere of the state. With the reformist movement and the freedom struggle, gender relations and the status of women came to be perceived with renewed insights. It heralded a new era for women as they moved from the domestic space to assume public roles with men. It was mostly the women with educated background who played the most crucial role in making the women aware about their potentialities and capabilities. There is a close connection between education of women and their sense of national identity and consciousness. Many women had first learnt about patriotism and nationalist movement once they entered the public sphere to acquire education. On the contrary, severa lilliterate women bound to the private sphere of the house were also active participants in the movement. In the course of their nationalistic activities, women got the opportunity to connect and associate with educated

nationalist compeers. This association enabled them to acquire education in a number of other ways, most frequently within the enclosure of the jail. Towards the early part of the twentieth century, women throughout the country started realising the parallelism between education and women's empowerment. Educated women came to engage in criticizing, questioning and condemning the British domination of India (Chandra, 2009).

Many educated Assamese women took to writing as a medium for presenting the apathy, denial and social reality of the time. Popular figures like Nalini Bala Devi, a noted Assamese poet, influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, induced patriotism and influenced other women to organize together and fight against British oppression through her poems like '*Alakananda', 'Smriti Tirtha', 'Shantipath (essay anthology) etc.* Together with Hemanta Kumari Devi and Guneshwari Devi, Nalini Bala opened a khadi training centre at Guwahati to popularise swadeshi and non-cooperation movement by using khadi as a weapon against the British. Others like Swarnalata Baruah (1871–1932), daughter of Gunabhiram Barua, was a pioneer in the field of woman's emancipation and education in Assam and published a book, titled '*Aarhi Tirota (Exemplary Woman)'* besides contributing to *Asam Bandhu* and *Bijuli*. In Swarnalata Baruah's writings the temperament of Assamese women of the age was mirrored. Bidyawati Gogoi, a social worker and writer authored several books like *Rod Aru Dwaror Majedi, Syamantamoni Sandhyabonti* etc. Another poet, Jamuneswari Khatoniyar (1899–1924), wrote and compileda bevy of poems in Assamese named *Arun* in the year 1919. She also coordinated the *Juroni Sabha,* a religious and literary gathering at her house every evening, while Padmavati Devi Phookanani (1853-1927) composed her ideas on the conditions of women. Widowed at the age of 32, Padmavati wrote an article in Baheen, *"Bidhoba,"* which speaks of the harsh life of widows in Indian society. In another article named "*Samajot Tirutar Sthan"* (Women's Place in Society), she commented on the general condition of women in society.

The entire history of the freedom movement under went a change with thead vent of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene in 1917. With his experience of South Africa behind him, Gandhi was conscious of the female potentialities as passive resisters. As he experimented with his weapon of Satyagraha in India he felt that women could take part in it together with men. Women were drawn to Gandhi by his magnetic personality, his distinctive naturalness and transparent sincerity. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's (Nath et. al., 2021) ideas of social regeneration and his vision for women's empowerment, articulated during the All India Women's Conference in 1936, women in Assam developed a strong impulse to improve their status in society and take part in the freedom movement. Gandhi's encouragement for political participation and leadership of women and attaching the concepts of 'swaraja' and 'satyagraha' to the development of women brought about a paradigm shift in the freedom struggle movement in India, the ripples of which ran through the women in Assam as well. He wrote in 1921, "I have great expectations from women. I want that they should make an equal contribution for the attainment of Swarajya. Their job would become much easier if women did so willingly" (INC, 1921). At Gandhi's call, women from all over India joined the congress played an

important role in taking it forward and making it successful. Triggered by his thoughts and visions, women of the Brahmaputra valley too played exemplary roles from the period 1920s to 1940s organising themselves as into various *samitis*, wings and factions.

Women were therefore, not mere add-ons to the Gandhian movement, but were an important part of it. In fact, when explaining his strategy of satyagraha and how it worked, Mahatma Gandhi had often expressed the view that he felt women would understand the method better. Satyagraha required a great deal of patience and forbearance, as well as moral courage. Gandhi felt that most women in India had these qualities. The early twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of many city and town-based women's associations. Unlike the girls' schools, these were initiated by women themselves. It was as if there was something in the air at that time which made women want to reach out to each other, to do activities together and to broaden their mental and physical horizons. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927 stood out as a significant milestone, addressing women's concerns and advocating for social reforms. The emergence of visionary leaders like Kamala Nehru, Annie Besant, and Sarojini Naidu added vigour to the nationalist movement. These leaders fervently championed India's cause, inspiring women across the nation to join the struggle for independence, the ripples of which reached Assamese women as well.

Based on Gandhian ideals (Joshi, 1988) and amidst the mushrooming of women's organisations across British ruled India, the early twentieth century witnessed a growing number of mahila samitis (women's associations) in several towns in the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam: Dibrugarh (1907), Sibsagar (1916), Nagaon (1917), Tezpur (1919) amongst others. Prominent women leaders like Kironmoyee Agarwala and Chandra Prabha Saikiani formed the *Tezpur Mahila Samiti* in Sonitpur district in 1919. Chandraprabha Saikiani (1901-72) was co-founder of the mahila samitis in both Nagaon and Tezpur. She soon emerged as a key figure in the burgeoning mahila samiti movement and became the founding secretary of the provincial Assam Mahila Samiti in 1926 (Medhi, 2013). In 1921, Gandhi visited Tezpur and his appeal to women to focus on constructive activities like spinning and weaving as a way to contribute in the fight for freedom from British rule, gave renewed vigour and hope to the Samiti and women in general (Nath, 2018). Another women-led organisation *Nari Mukti Bahini* formed by a widow named Brahmomoyee in 1921 in the Cachar district of Assam worked towards emancipation, empowerment and education of women fostering their increased participation in the nationalist movement in Assam (Roy, 2019) in 1930, a young activist named Pushpalata Das formed '*Mukti Sangha'* along with Sarla Saxena, Punya Prava Barua and Jyotsna Majumdar to mobilize young women for the national movement. These women vowed to liberate their motherland from the foreign occupation. In 1926, the Assam Mahila Samiti, at the state level was formed as *Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti* with Chandraprabha Saikiani as the secretary (Bank & Littan, 2024). This was followed by the formation of other district and primary or village level *mahila samitis*. A large number of women participated in the movement, by engaging in meetings, taking to street protests and rallies, organising processions, boycotting schools, courts, and offices.

Bidyawati Gogoi, another freedom fighter, hailing from Dhakuakhana founded the *Dhakuakhana Mahila Samiti* and worked hard to spread women's education in the greater Dhakuakhana area. The participation of women in India's historic struggle for freedom, their lives and sacrifices and hardships they bore are a strong testament to the role adopted by women and the capability of women's organisations in constructing their identity and shaping India's war for independence.

Women in the Brahmaputra valley walked alongside men in the struggle against anti-imperialist rule. Whilemany female activists accepted martyrdom with open arms others bore injuries and wounds in gunfire and baton charges. Some of these brave women who sacrificed their life were Dariki Das Baruah who died in imprisonment, Bhogeshwari Phukanani who was shot while marching forward with the national flag at Barhampur, Tileswari Barua who was shot dead while trying to hoist the national flag at Dhekiajuli, Rebati Lahon who suffered from pneumonia due to filthy living conditions in jail and later died. Others like Kahuli Devi, Kumali Devi, Padumi Gogoi, Golapi Chutiani, Thunuki Das, Jaluki Kachariani and Kon Chutiani all sacrificed their lives at Dhekiajuli police gunfire in 1942. The pattern of women's participation in the politics of the freedom movement showed that they were drawn into the movement, not in the first instance after the arrest of their men folk. They were not cowed down by this punitive action of the Government. Instead, it strengthened their resolve to keep up the tempo of the movement and prevent it from dying out. The determined spirit of these women left the British authorities rather confused.

The Formative Years of Kanaklata Barua

Kanaklata Barua, popularly known as "Birabala" was a woman who made a pivotal contribution to the freedom struggle at the forefront in the Assam chapter of the movement. Kanaklata was born on 22nd December, 1924 at a village called Barangabari in Sonitpur district of Assam. Kanaklata grew up in the backdrop of a period of domination and defeat by foreign rule underscored by deep desire for independence. Her parents were Krishna Kanta Barua and Korneshwari Devi. Kanaklata was very attached to her grandfather who affectionately called her '*Aai'*. Being born in a family which relied on farming as a means of living she had to face adversity from a very small age. Nurtured and reared in the 'Dolakasharia' family in Gohpur district, patriotic qualities got ingrained in her from the very beginning.

Kanaklata had become radicalized from an early age; her parents had died when she was still a child, forcing her with the responsibility of looking after the household and her younger siblings. Kanaklata could study only up to third standard and there after had to drop out from school. She heralded a sense of responsibility and duty out of the adversities that shaped her destiny. The experience taught Kanaklata the importance of independence, and it also opened her eyes to the disparities in Assamese society, particularly in the inequalities present in gender roles.

The accounts of extraordinary sacrifices and heroism of freedom fighters like Kushal Konwar, Mohan Chandra Singha, Chandraprabha Saikia, Lakhidhar Sharma, Seniram Das and the like

profoundly fired the imagination of Kanaklata Barua. She was also well-informed about the protests carried out for the shipping of bamboo and cane from the Gohpur pocket for building of pro tem camps for English soldiers amidst World War II by socio-political organisations like Chaiduar Rayat Sabha that took birth in 1931, under the stewardship of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, More so, she was grounded in at a very young age with the tales of freedom struggle and dominion and oppression of Britishers by her maternal uncles who were popular Congress leaders at that time. Having grown up under the influence of such luminaries, Kanaklata cultivated the competency to challenge and baffle men of any creed. Though she was bound to the domain of home and it's responsibilities, the tales and accounts of struggles to achieve freedom heightened her intellectual curiosity about the outside world of politics and public debates.

Kanaklata Barua was *revolutionary feminist* who ardently believe din the freedom movement and believed that women should be able to defend their motherland. She was an outspoken proponent of greater involvement of women in revolutionary activity for the cause of the nation. She therefore joined the women's 'suicide squad' which was incredibly radical in nature. Her radical and extremist views aligned with the male extremist group of the time which made her believe in many of the ideas and conduct of the militant revolutionaries of the time.

Kanaklata Baruah and Assam's Fight for Liberation

Kanaklata Barua, from a quite younger age used to attend secret meetings of various students' organisations active in her village at that time. She was the youngest women revolutionary who gave her life for liberating the country from the clutches of Britishers. The Quit India movement of 1942[5] with Gandhi at the helm invigorated the spirits of young Kanaklata. The ideas of freedom and sovereignty that sparked the Indian war of independence further captivated the mind of Kanaklata Baruah which led her to actively participate in the movement to overthrow the foreign rule. Earlier, she went to join the Azad Hind Fauz, however, as she was still immature, the organisation did not accept her membership plea and her dream failed to get wings.

Kanaklata later joined *'Mrityu Bahini'*- a death/suicide squad. Her extreme dedication and stout-heartedness availed her membership of the organization though she was below the minimum age required for joining. Her radical and diehard nature subsequently got her leadership of the women cadre of *Mrityu Bahini.*

On 20th September, 1942, the rebellious faction of Gohpur led by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, planned to roll out the national tricolour at the district police station. Kanaklata voluntarily acceded to head a procession comprising of around 5000 unshielded villagers and young men and women, mostly students. Around 500 women from nearby villages lined the streets. Several volunteers from Tezpur and other nearby places arrived at Kalyanpur camp to join different death squads. Gohpur Police Thana was around 12 kilometre from new Purubbari tea garden where the volunteers halted for while. They were cautioned by the leaders about the imminent dangers they might confront in front of the Thana premises.

The leaders instructed the women comrades to stand behind in the procession. Kanaklata opposed the instructions by refusing to stay at the back of the procession and said that if required," *female volunteers would forgo their lives for their native land*".[6]

Kanaklata's intense speech before her death left the audience spellbound and lighted their spirits. Equipped with armaments of valour and fortitude and propelled by an unflinching determination for freedom, Kanaklata, the radical revolutionaryforged ahead to the police station shepherding a massive congregation of women volunteers capturing everyone with the phrase:*" Joi Aai Asom", "British leave India", "Vande Mataram"*.

The cry of "*Vande Mataram"* and resonance of instruments like conch-shells, brass-shells and barrels echoedwaves of grit, determination and selfless urge to gain freedom into the character and soul of the advancing volunteers. Upon reaching the police station, Kanaklata declined to beg apology and resign to the opposition of the controlling officer of the police station, Rebati Mohan Som, and his constables who were armed to open fire anytime. Despite being repeatedly warned, of dire consequences, the crowd went ahead with their plan of hoisting the tricolour at Gohpur police station in Tezpur. Brushing off a gun, Kanaklata valiantly forced into the premise of the police station (Pathak, 2008).

Following this the police unpredictably opened fireand Kankalata was gunned straight on the chest. She crumbled down with a feeble cry *'March Ahead'* while still holding the tricolour in her hand. Her compatriot Mukunda Kakoti immediately took hold of the flag. Mukunda too encountered gunshots on the same spot as Kanaklata. Both Kanaklata and Mukunda died of police firing. However, their extraordinary sacrifice did not go fruitless and the Indian tricolour was ultimately hoisted at the police station. Consequently, the Quit India Movement in Assam gained strength in different areas of Darrang district such as Kalabari, Gohpur, Jamugurihat, etc. along with the town of Tezpur. It further rekindled the nationalistic sentiments of the people and large sections of society jumped into the movement for freedom to oust the Britishers from India.

Conclusion

In 1918 Lenin stated that experiences associated with liberation movements all around the world validates the truth that success of a rebellion or revolution is determined to a great degree by the extent of women's participation. During more than a century thereafter women were espied establishing and participating in reformist and revolutionary movements.

Women have always been the less visible and uncompensated contributors. Though they have remained at the centre of national and social struggles in India where they attended these protests in large numbers, they have not been given the recognition and respect they deserve barring a few elite class women. In this context of invisibility, it is utterly important to look back on their historic actions in these revolts and highlight the legacy of women in current mobilisations of resistance that have taken shape in India and Assam. It is with this aim to immortalise the contributions of women in Assam, especially the heroism of Kanalata Baruah that this paper is written.

The sway of World War I (1914-1918) and Russian Revolution (1917) on the thoughts and activities of colonised agriculture-based societies of the Third World provided maturity and strength to nationalist sentiments and raised the hope that the large mass of working people could overthrow the power-welding minorities. National Freedom Struggles emerged in Asia and Africa during the early 19th and 20th century while the free-market economies in Latin America witnessed the rise of resistance movements. Women played a crucial role in all these struggles. The Indian Home Rule League founded by Annie Besant, an Irish socialist and the osophist in 1916 was the most effective response to World War I. It saw the participation of women like Sarojini Naidu, Ambika Charan Majumdar etc. in many of the League's activities like organising political discussions, creating reading rooms in cities for education, selling of pamphlets and mobilising public opinion in favour of self-government by writing in newspapers like New India and Common Weal. As a precursor to the Indian Independence Movement, it laid the ground across India, including Assam, to achieve self-rule from Britain. The Home Rule Movement brought people from diverse regions and faiths together and helped in their political awakening. The Khilafat Movement of 1919 too had it's impact on Assam. Resolutions were materialised all through Assam demanding the immediate return of the Sultan of Turkey to the throne. On 19th March, 2020 public meetings and hartals were organised in Gauhati, Goalpara, Jorhat, Sibsagar and North Lakhimpur (Bhuyan & De, 1978). Tarun Ram Phook and elivered speeches to at Maroain Kamrupon 26th February and at Hajo on 27th February 1921 against British deception and ill-treatment of Turkish Emperor. A number of community helpers were part of the gathering and took oath against consuming liquor.[7]

These struggles marked by active women leaders inspired women in Assam. The passionate and electrified speeches of these pioneer women generated in them a strong sense of national unity, democracy and self-governance, increased nationalist sentiments and encouraged them to engage in political activities and freedom struggle. Kanaklata Baruah came across as a brilliant representation of unconventional revolutionary feminism who took recourse to the incalculable political atmosphere to testify her progressive attitude. The female procession to uplift the national flag at Gohpur Police Station was in any event anil lustration of women's offensive activism during the freedom struggle in Assam. The unwavering engagement of women in the militant manoeuvres awakened their senses to their own emancipation and rights. The consciousness among the women folk about their equal rights was backed with the demand for socio-political change grounded on the ideals of liberty and equality. The freedom movement in Assam offered women of different social standings new forms of political assertion and expression. The new political space favoured new roles for females. It was this level-headed space challenging gender inequality that led Kanaklata Baruah to drift free from the traditional private confine and participate in the national unrest to safeguard her endangered motherland. The magnetic spirit for freedom demonstrated by this revolutionary young woman of Assamled her to embrace martyrdom for the nation at a tender age of 17 years. Many women were wounded in the Gohpur uprising. This rebellion galvanised other rebelling women patriots in various parts of the state.

The allegory of Kanaklata Baruah confronting death and leading other women as well as allegories of other loyalist women symbolized a nation built on there silience and self-sacrifice of women no lesser than men. Kanaklata Baruah was post humously christened as 'Shaheed' (martyr) and 'Birabala' (brave women). The heroism and patriotic fervour exhibited by Kanaklata Baruawill forever remain inscribed in bright letters in the archive of Assamese history and India's war of independence. Kanaklata's sacrifice paid off as Indiafinally earned independence.

The records of history most often neglect the compelling roles played by these women revolutionaries in the Indian freedom movement. These courageous women though often overlooked in historical accounts, were a crucial force in propelling and shaping the freedom movement across the region. It is a general misbelief that Assamese women in the independence movement were restricted to secondary roles of caretakers, food preparers or message-carriers. However, many took bold roles as freedom fighters, planners and even leaders. Kanaklata's tale is one of resilience, perseverance and imperishable warrior. Her legacy lives on the continued fight for autonomy, indigenous rights, ethnic and linguistic identity. Kanaklata Baruah's sacrifice is an inspiration that needs to be etched in the annals of India struggle for independence. It is essential to acknowledge and celebrate the everlasting spirit and contributions of Kanaklata Baruah and other women brave hearts of the time. They have not only sculpted historical events but have also provided the framework for contemporary social and political changes.

Endnotes

[1] The Ahom kingdom also known as the Kingdom of Assam (1228-1826) was a kingdom of the late medieval period prospered in the Valley of Brahmaputra (contemporary Assam) in North East India for approximately 600 years in spite of attacks by Mughal rulers. Sukaphaa, a Tai prince from Mong Mao (the present Yunnan Province of China), established the kingdom. Under the leadership of Suhungmung the kingdom expanded significantly in the 16th century.

ii The Treaty of Yandaboo was a peace agreement which was articulated at the culmination of First Anglo Burmese War. The Treaty was came to force on 24 February 1826 after two years of hostility between British army and the Burmese (present day Myanmar). Both the East India Company and King of Ava (Ava existed as the capital of Burma during 1364-1841) ratified the treaty. Following the Treaty, Assam, Manipur, Arakan and Taninthai became the colonies of Britain. Available at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/my-view/treaty-of-yandabo-assam-accord-and-assam-an-academic-discussion-9558/ Retrieved on: 09/09/24.

iii At Kaliabor in Nagaon district of Assam, the *Purna Swaraj* celebration saw the engagement of more than 400 women under the leadership of Kiran Bala Boro. According to reports, police prevented them and beat them for participating in the celebration. Kiran Bala Boro was arrested and taken prisoner.

iv The early nationalist movements saw the relentless rise of women's organisations. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) crystallized as a critical milepost of women's issues and championing for social reforms. All India Women's Conference (AIWC), founded in 1927 by Margaret Cousins in Poona is the oldest women's organization in India. The association of visionary leaders like Sarla Roy, Hansa Mehta, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and others added dynamism to the nationalist struggle. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All India Women%27s Conference. Retrieved on : 08/09/24.

v In the year 1942 complete Police Raj was enforced in Assam subjecting the people to untold sufferings and heinous atrocities, more so for the women. According to the Bordoloi Committee Report on Atrocities committed in 1942, at least eighty women of the Brahmaputra Valley were victims of such heinous police outrages, which included mass raping and molestations. Pregnant women also could not escape military brutality. Women were tortured both physically and mentally in various ways. Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence, 23rd June, 1984 (henceforth APAl). Kamrup, Assam.

vi Biography of Kanaklata Baruah. Available at: https://devlibrary.in/biography-of-kanaklata-barua. Retrieved on : 25/10/24.

vii History sheet on T.R. Phookan, Confidential Home Dept. Poll. : 1924, K.W., X. to File No. 66, NAI; Guha, Planter-Raj to Swaraj, p. 123.

References

- Assam in the Freedom Struggle, The Hill Times, 18 August, 2020. Retrieved on: 10/05/24. Available at: https://thehillstimes.in/featured/assam-in-the-freedom-struggle
- Banik. Sarmistha, and Das. Littan. 2024. 'Quit India Movement And The Unsung Women Freedom Fighters Of Assam With Special Reference To Dhekiajuli Martyrs.' *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts* 12 (1): 377-382.
- Baruah, S L. 1986. "A Comprehensive History of Assam", MunshiramManoharlal.
- Bhuyan and De (ed.) 1978. 'Political History of Assam.' *Publication Board Assam. Vol. II*, pp. 4-5
- Biography of Kanaklata Barua,' Dev Library. Retrieved on: 15/05/24. Available at: https://devlibrary.in/biography-of-kanaklata-barua
- Chandra, Bipin. 1971. Modern India. New Delhi, pp. 184-86.
- B, Chandra. 2009. History of Modern India. Orient BlackSwan. p.202.
- Explained: Recalling 'Quit India', when ordinary Indians took to the streets with a vow to 'Do or Die,' The Indian Express, 9 August 2022.
- GOA. 2020. 'Woman Freedom Martyrs of Assam.' Blog by- Assam MyGovt. Government of Assam. Assam.
- Gogoi, Kumar Nitul. 2006. 'Continuity and Change Among the Ahom'. Concept Publishing Company. ISBN 978-81-8069-281-9.
- History sheet on T.R. Phookan, Confidential Home Dept. Poll. : 1924, K.W., X. to File No. 66, NAI; Guha, Planter-Raj to Swaraj, p. 123.
- Kamrup District, Government of Assam, India. 29 March, 2022. Retrieved on: 20/10/24. Available at: https://kamrup.assam.gov.in/about-us/history
- India Foundation Research Centre. 2017. Periphery in India's Independence Movement: A Re-look from Northeast India. New Delhi: IF
- Joshi, Pushpa. 1988.*'Gandhi on Women'*. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, India.
- Kanaklata Barua', India Netzone: E-Magazine, 19 August 2019. https://www.indianetzone.com/70/kanaklata barua.htm
- Key events in the Freedom Struggle Leading to India's Independence,' The Deccan Herald, 15 August, 2021.
- *Kum, Jayawardena. 1995. '*The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule'. *Taylor & Francis. pp. 147–155.* ISBN 978-0-415-91104-7. Retrieved 10/10/
- Medhi, Hemjyoti. 2013. 'The women s question in colonial Assam a case study of ChandraprabhaSaikiani and the Assam mahilasamiti'. University of Delhi. Retrieved on: 12/09/24. Available at: https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/384852. Pp- 1
- Mochahary, R &Chennatuserry, Chacko Joseph. 2022. 'Forgotten Heroes of Assam against British Rule'. Conference Paper. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365181877_Forgotten_Heroes_of_Assam_against_British_Rule.

Retrieved on: 12/09/24.

- Nathet. al. 2021. 'Indian Freedom Struggle and the Role of Assamese Women: A Historical Study'. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)* Volume 12, Issue 1, pp. 267 – 276
- Nath, H.J. 2018. 'Assamese Women in the Freedom Struggle of India: A Gender Perspective.' *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education* 10 (2): 282-287.
- Panigrahi, D. N. 1984. *Quit India and the Struggle for Freedom*. New Delhi. Pp. 13–14.
- Pathak, Guptajit. 2008. *Assamese Women in Indian Independence Movement: With a Special Emphasis on KanaklataBarua Mittal Publications.* New Delhi.
- 'Role of Assamese Women in Indian Freedom Struggle,' Dhaara, 17 January, 2023.
- Roy, D. 2019. 'Quit India Movement in Cachar: A Historical Study.' *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS*) 24(3): 25-28.
- Sharma, D. 1993. *Assamese women in the freedom struggle*. Calcutta. Pp- 245.

Bio Profile of the Author:

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology,
KamlaAryaKanya P. G. College, Mirzapur,
Uttar Pradesh, India. PIN: 231001.
Email: tpratyashi@gmail.com

Capital Punishment: An Analytical Appraisal

Kabita Chakraborty

Abstract

Since long capital punishment is the most controversial issue all over the world. The main object of criminal laws of a country is primarily intended to reform the offenders rather than revenge. However, the state is also accountable for protecting the interests of the society at large and reaffirming the public's trust in the legal system, and the death penalty may be a tool for this purpose. Throughout the world two extreme approaches regarding the capital punishment have been advocated. One, is for retaining the death sentence for certain offences and other for abolition of it. In India, the death penalty is applied for two reasons, the first is that the wrongdoer must suffer for the actions done and the second is that by punishing the wrongdoers, it will deter future wrongdoing. Under this prevailing situation how far capital punishment will control the crime rate is really a debatable issue. Here the researcher overall review the present status of Capital punishment procedure.

Keywords : *capital punishment, retribution, reformation, controversial, abolition, death sentence.*

1. Introduction:

1.1 An Overview

The significance of a crime is largely determined by its course of action and its detrimental effect on society. The specific punishment for that crime is also affected by it. As the crime progresses, the risk of punishment increases and the offender has to pay for that. When the severity of the crime reaches its peak and thereby raises the question of the security of the society, the death penalty for that crime is given.

A crime is punish able with death penalty not only because it is deemed to be an act of pernicious character but also it transcends all forms of cruelty and is carried out by a very well-organized offender. In this case, the social reaction to that crime is also considered as a great factor.

In many cases the perpetrator is aware of the fatal consequences in response to his crime but deliberately commits the crime out of sheer stubbornness and desperation. In all these aggravated situations, the ruling authority has noother alternative but to proclaim strict verdict, the death penalty is given as a punishment on that rare circumstances.

1.2 Objectives

Through significant judicial statements, legislative actions, and shifts in public opinion, one may follow the capital penalty's jurisprudential development. The Judiciary has been instrumental in determining the legal environment governing the death penalty. The Court has articulated a range of principles and tests throughout the years since independence to govern the application and review of death sentences, demonstrating a changing and evolving comprehension of justice and human rights. The application of the death penalty in India has long been questioned from a legal, moral, and constitutional standpoint. Although it is constitutionally allowed in some situations, its use has sparked debate about whether it aligns with the Indian Constitution's tenets of justice, equity, and human rights. A complex interaction between constitutional requirements, judicial interpretations, societal norms, and international human rights standards is reflected in India's jurisprudential evolution of the death penalty.

Through tackling this research issue, the study aims to advance academic knowledge of the Legal and constitutional aspects of the death penalty in India, offering perspectives that can guide policy discussions, court rulings, and initiatives to uphold human rights and advance justice within the Indian legal system. Towards this end, followings are the research objectives of this study:

- Examine the constitutional framework and historical background of the death penalty in India.
- Examine the capital punishment's jurisprudential development using significant court rulings and legislative changes.
- Analyze the effects of the death penalty in the Indian judicial system on society, ethics, and human rights.
- Examine the efficacy and equity of the death penalty as a crime deterrent while taking comparative research and empirical data into account.
- Examine possible changes or alternatives to the death penalty within the Indian legal system, guided by the values of justice and human rights.

1.3 Capital punishment: Retributive approach

The death penalty is used in the broadest sense as a weapon of vengeance justice. This doctrine believes that there is moral legitimacy to take the life of a person who kills another individual. Aperson who has the brutality to kill can never be a part of a orderly society. Executing a murderer brings justice to the injured party and they get compensatory satisfaction. The cruelty of a murderer cannot be alleviated unless he is similarly tormented by death.

1.4 Capital punishment: Deterrent approach

Deterrence has been defined by Dr. Johnson as discouraging the offender by terror or naked fear from repeating his crime and at the same time preventing others from following his path. The mainpurpose of deterrent theory is to keep the offender away from criminal activities. The death penalty largely serves this objective. The imposition of any death penalty naturally instills fear in the minds of other offenders and prevents them from committing similar crimes. The purpose of the death penalty is not only to eradicate the ruthless criminal but also to set an example to the society that the consequences of any cruel and inhumane act are so horrible.[1]

2. Different modes of Capital punishment

In ancient period, the application procedure of capital punishment was extremely barbaric, and with the passage of time, scientific thinking has evolved which also brings the change in the mode of execution of this maximum punishment.

2.1 Primitive period

On that era no criminal was recognized as a human being in society and was regarded as the property of the authorities. In ancient times, any crime was punishable by death according to the will of the authorities and was carried out in a very cruel manner.

- **Beheading**

The practice of beheading as a means of execution was widespread in ancient times throughout the world. In the previous monarchical system the king used to order the death penalty in this manner, mainly as a punishment for any heinous crime.

- **Hanging**

In this method, the death penalty is carried out mainly by hanging the offenders through ropes. In the present era, this process is also used as a means of execution in countries like India.

- **Burning**

The practice of burning the perpetrator alive as punishment for his deeds has been seen in many cases of the old regime. In the Middle Ages it was common practice for women to be burned alive as a form of punishment for witchcraft.

- **Boiling in Oil**

The process of such execution is mainly mentioned in ancient scriptures. Boiling to death was a common mode of death penalty in many parts of Europe and Asia. Due to the lengthy process, death by boiling is an extremely painful method of execution.

❑ **Flaying alive**

It was a very brutal execution process in which the perpetrators had to die through extreme physical torture. In the process, the skin of the offender's body was removed and he was pushed to his death.

❑ **Throwing to wild beast**

The Latin term "Damnatio ad bestias" means "condemnation to be asts". It was a form of capital punishment prevails in Ancient Rome, where the offender was killed by wild animals, usually lions or other big cats. This form of execution was first introduced around the 2nd century BC, in Roman Republic.

❑ **Crucification**

Crucifixion is another way of the execution of capital punishment in this process offender was tied or nailed to a wooden cross or beam and left in the same position with starvation until eventual death has occurred from exhaustion and asphyxiation. This practice was very common as a form of death penalty in ancient Roman Emperor.

❑ **Crushing**

In this method the offender was executed by crushing him with a heavy object. This crushing was done mainly by applying force through iron or wooden planks.

❑ **Strangulation**

In this process the death penalty was carried out mainly through hanging. The practice of executing in this manner is still practiced in many Eastern countries

❑ **Torningapart**

In this cruel process, the body of the criminal was pulled out from both sides. This process was practiced in medieval Europe and Imperial China by using four horses. Sometimes camels was also engaged in that process in the Middle East.

❑ **Back-breaking**

It is an execution technique to prevent blood from leaking on to the ground. It was mostly used in Mongolian countries.

❑ **Falling**

In this method the death penalty was carried out by raising the offender to a certain height and then throwing him away.

❑ **Poisoning**

The practice of execution by direct application of poison to the food of the offender was common in

many lands in ancient times. Through drinking an infusion of hemlock was used as a method of execution in ancient Greece.

❑ **Burial alive**

It is a traditional method of executing death penalty. In this method the criminal was buried into the earth in living condition. Such punishments were given mainly for the crime of treason in the old monarchy.

2.2 Modern period

In present era, with the advent of modernity, the process of execution has become more innovative, and the use of various scientific methods is now practiced in different countries.

❑ **Shooting**

It is the second most prevalent method of death penalty after hanging, which is applied in various countries in different process

a. China, Belarus and Russia (before moratorium on death sentence)-By a single shot back of the head of the offender.
b. Thailand-by a single machine gun
c. Indonesia-by firing squad

- North Korea-various media sources claim that it is using overly potent weapons, including anti-aircraft guns.
- Lethal injection

  The procedure in volves injecting in to the body of the offender very subtly and professionally and killing him instantly without any suffering, this process was introduced in the United States in 1982, lethal injection has since been adopted by China, Taiwan, Thailand, Guatemala, and Vietnam.

❑ **Electrocution**

In the process, the culprit is exposed to a very powerful electrical current and he is electrocuted to death. This process of capital punishment was mainly practiced by the United States and Philippines. Now it is legally executed in Florida, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Oklahoma as a secondary method.

❑ **Gas inhalation**

In this method, the offender was tied to a chair and locked in a gas chamber filled with toxic cyanide gas, which would soon enter the body and kill him. It was firstly practiced in the United States and Lithuania. Now this process is legally proclaimed in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Oklahoma, and Missouri.

❑ **Stoning**

In the process, the offender is made to stand in a certain place and many people surround him and throw heavy stones at him until he is hit by the stone and dies. It is used as a form of capital punishment in Somalia, Afghanistan, tribal parts of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Northern Nigeria, Mauritania, Qatar, Iran, Yemen and since 2014, in Brunei.[2]

3. Capital Punishment: Historical Overview

In ancient times, law enforcers thought that human life was the most sacred and precious thing, so the purpose of life was not only to protect his holiness but also to keep him safe from all sides. So those who can indulge themselves in the activities of taking away that precious life are above all kinds of arrogance. Murder has always been considered the worst crime in the world and the death penalty for that criminal has become a necessity for society. The prevailing thinking regarding the death penalty in different countries of the world are discussed below.

3.1 Roman and Greece: Approach towards Capital Punishment.

Ancient Roman society recognized the preventive quality of the death penalty. Under ancient Roman law, the offender was exposed to the public, and the death penalty created a ceremonial atmosphere. Because in that era it was thought that the welfare of the society was being established through the death penalty for the heinous criminal. The death of the hated person was done with considerable torture for example, a person who killed his father was tied up in a sewn bag with a live dog, cat or cobra and thrown into the river. The main purpose of such punishment was to cause the criminal to suffer a very painful death.

The use of the death penalty in the ancient Greek penal system is also seen in the case of various crimes. In that country, the death penalty for criminals was carried out through various forms of suffering. The main purpose of carrying out the death penalty in public was to control crime in the society and to set a social precedent.

3.2 English Approach towards Death Penalty

3.2.1 Ancient Period

England's Historic Crime and Punishment Policy show that the use of the death penalty was widespread in the middle Ages to control crime. Henry VIII, who ruled England for nearly 50 years, was famous for his brutality against criminals. In his day, it was customary to boil criminals alive and kill them. Such cruelty continued during the reign of his daughter, Queen Elizabeth, as his successor. This brutality towards criminals finally became extinct by the end of the eighteenth century and criminals

were relocated to the American colonies. Judging by the history of the death penalty in England, Doctor Fitzgerald found that the death penalty in England had declined rapidly over the last 200 years.

3.2.2 Nineteenth Century

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the use of the death penalty started to be widely criticized by the general public, and gradually it was used only for heinous crimes. Many of the criminals who were sentenced to death in those days would have been released from this extreme punishment if they had agreed to relocate to the American colonies. Lord Denning appearing before the royal Commission on capital punishment expressed the view that "Punishment is the way in which society expresses its denunciation for wrongdoing and in order to maintain respect for law It is essential that punishment inflicted for grave crime should adequately reflect the revolution felt by the great majority of the citizens. For them, it is a mistake to consider the object of punishment as being deterrent or reformative or preventive and nothing else. The truth is that some crimes are so outrageous that society insists on adequate punishment because wrong doer deserve it, irrespective of whether it is deterrent or not".

3.2.3 Twentieth Century

The death penalty, in addition to its cruelty, is quite harmful to human dignity. Some of the negative effects of the death penalty force the general public to look at it and various complications started to create surround the death penalty and as a result, the British Royal Commission was appointed in 1949, and according to this Commission, the death penalty was abolished from d England and Wales for five years at 1965 and finally in 1969 the death penalty was completely abolished from the province of England.

3.2.4 Present Status

The death penalty for murder was postponed in 1965 and eventually abolished in 1969 (1973 in Northern Ireland); the last hanging executions in the United Kingdom were in 1964. Even though it was never utilized, the death penalty was still a recognized punishment for several crimes, including treason, until it was outlawed entirely in 1998. William Joyce was the last person to be put to death for treason in 1946. The United Kingdom was bound by Protocol No. 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights in 2004; regardless of the UK's standing within the European Union, the convention forbids the reinstatement of the death penalty while the UK is a party.

On February 21, 1994, additional provisions to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill were introduced, sparking a parliamentary discussion on a subject that suggested the reinstatement of the death penalty. The first, which called for "the murder of a police officer engaged in the execution of

his job" to result in death, was defeated by a vote of 186 to 383. By a vote of 159 to 403, a new provision that would allow for a general reintroduction and provide the Court of Appeal the authority to substitute life in prison was rejected. The target of this would have been terrorists involved in the war in Northern Ireland. Conservative MP Philip Hollobone proposed a new bill introducing the death penalty in England and Wales in June 2013. The bill was withdrawn.

3.3 Sri Lankan View on Death Penalty

Sri Lanka's penal system abolished the death penalty altogether in 1995, but reintroduced it into the penal code as part of social security after the death of the Late Prime Minister, Mr. Bandaranaike.

3.4 Italian View on Death Penalty

Italian criminologists have expressed differing views on the merits of the death penalty. Lombro so has supported the application of capital punishment for those offenders who are habitual criminals and will never change their nature. According to him the death penalty would serve as a useful regulator for them. Beccaria on the other hand, was opposed to the use of the death penalty because he believed that it had an immoral effect on society because one's life was too precious and should not be executed.

3.5 French View on Death Penalty

Following extensive discussions and debates between French law enforcement and policy makers, the death penalty was abolished since it is generally accepted that the death penalty is not justified in light of the current trends in reformative penal policy.

3.6 American View on Death Penalty

According to various literature published in the United States, the death penalty is used with great caution in that country. This does not mean that the death penalty has been completely abolished in the United States. In many cases the maximum punishment is still considered appropriate in this country even though this punishment is applied for very rare situations. U.S. penal policy advocates support the practical use of the death penalty for two reasons: first, the death penalty can be used to control future murderers, and second, the person who kills has no right to his own life. According to the modern United States, the process of maximum punishment should be limited to homicide and rape, the most heinous national crime and there has been a change in the current thinking regarding the use of the death penalty, which gives more emphasis on the secret, painless and speedy execution, rather than the previous ruthless, painful and lengthy punishment process. Electrocutions, hanging, asphyxiation are currently used as the main means of execution in the United States, although several provinces under the United States have abolished death penalty.[3]

3.7 Indian View on Death Penalty

3.7.1 Ancient view

The death penalty was given considerable importance in the ancient history of crime in India and was used as punishment for various crimes. Various Indian epics, such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, mention various forms of the death penalty. It is very much relatable and significant that in the oldest epic, Bhagwat Gita, killing was occasionally justified as a virtue, and acting in a way against the general view of death penalty as asin or a sign of cowardice.

Dharma Shastra also contained a passage saying "killing of a murderer (Atatayinah) is one's duty, may the killer be a preceptor, child, old man or even a learned Brahmin" that means if a criminal is released without punishment, the crime will increase manifold. Manu, the great legislator, believed that strict attitude and intimidation were essential in governing the country. According to him, there is a great need to introduce the death penalty to prevent people from committing sins such as murder. If there had not been such a process of punishment, the whole country would have been in turmoil and the strongest community would have eliminated the weaker section of people. Under the medieval Mughal rule in India, the death penalty was used in its most ruthless manner. However, in the first half of British rule, especially in the nineteenth century, the barbaric mode of execution of capital punishment was abolished and in modern India, only the death penalty by hanging is legally recognized.

3.7.2 Modern view

In today's India, death penalty is used as a punishment for certain serious crimes with is specifically mentioned under Indian Penal Code

1. Waging where against the government
2. Abetment of mutiny
3. Giving or fabricating false evidence leading to procure one's conviction for capital offence.
4. Murder
5. Abetment of suicide by child or insane person
6. Attempt to murder by a life convict
7. Dacoity with Murder and Kidnapping for ransom

4. Capital Punishment: Judicial Activism in India

4.1 Capital punishment under Criminal law

Up to 1983, the death penalty was only prosecuted if a murder was committed by a person to whom a life sentence has already been served. The Indian Penal Code for other offences did not yet obligate the capital punishment and in its ruling on the writ petition filed by Mithu and others, the Supreme

Court of India on April 7, 1983, that the court could impose any other punishment on the offender. Section 303 of the IPC (Section 104 of BNS) was questioned for its constitutionality. Article 303 of the Indian Penal Code was said to have violated Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. The 5 judges constitutional bench led by Y.V. Chandrachud observes that section 303 of IPC (Section 104 of BNS) is unconstitutional and a death sentence cannot be imposed as a mandatory punishment even though the murder was committed by a lifer. Since then, all murder cases have been included in section 302 of the Indian Penal Code(Section 103 BNS), and the death penalty has been used as an alternative to life imprisonment. However, this maximum punishment is enforced only in rare of the rarest cases.

4.2 Conflict of views in Judiciary

Based on a major dispute about the necessity of the death sentence, members of the Indian Judiciary are firmly divided into two groups. Supporters of abolishing the death penalty contend that it violates human dignity and is a key component of retaliatory mentality, both of which are inappropriate under the current legal code. However, some who support the death sentence argued that it has a deterrent effect to heinous crimes like murder and has a social necessity. Our criminal law has occasionally carried out the capital punishment for offences like murder through specific amendments.

In the pre 1955 era, when a judge used a lesser punishment for a crime other than the death penalty, the judge had to record the reason for the punishment. Stated differently, it indicates that the judges discretion was subject to additional scrutiny. The imposition of this barrier on the judiciary was later found to be completely unjustifiable because, even if a judge makes the firm decision to impose life imprisonment rather than capital punishment, it will lose its impact if it is not properly assessed. In many cases its adverse effects are seen such as in **Queen v. Osram Sungra,** without providing a reason, the court granted life imprisonment rather than death sentences where the accused committed a cold-blodded murder with premeditated intent. Judges often disagree on whether death penalty or life imprisonment should be appropriate for any murder. It may be appears that one judge who considers the death penalty to be the appropriate punishment for a murder but the rest of the judges do not agree with it. On that reference it can be stated that in **Kunju Janardhanam v. State of Andhra Pradesh** while his innocent wife and two children were sleeping in the dead of night, the accused enamored with the charm of a village girl, brutally murdered them. Despite the girl's letters warning him not to ruin his happy family life by engaging in illicit intimacy, the accused chose to commit triple murder with extreme depravity. The death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by 2:1 majority. Mr. Justice A.P. Sen noted that he disagreed with the majority in his dissenting opinion and observed, "The accused who acted as a monster, did not even spare his two innocent minor children in order to get rid of his wife and issues through her, if death sentence was not to be awarded in a case like this I do not see the type of offences which call for death sentence."

Rajendra Prasad's case, which was exclusively dealt by the Supreme Court of India, is particularly significant in assessing the effectiveness and usefulness of the death penalty.

In this case, it is seen that a convict sentenced to life imprisonment, who was very arrogant, was released from jail a few days ago on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, 1972. Shortly after his release from prison, the criminal suddenly attacked a man named Rambharosey and repeatedly tried to stab him. He somehow managed to free himself from the assailant, reached his house and locked the door, and the criminal rushed there any asked him to open the door. Meanwhile a man named Mansukh tried to stop the criminal there and at the end he died at the hands of that criminal. The Supreme Court, in a 2: 1 majority, through Mr. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer had observed that it is the failure of the sentencing body that it has not been able to remove the criminal tendencies from the minds of the offenders and that is why this cruel death has taken place and in this case life imprisonment should be given instead of death penalty for the culprit. It was otherwise held by the Court "A second murder is not to be confounded with the persistent potential for murderous attack by the murder. This was not a menace to the social order but a specific family feud..... Here was not a youth of uncontrollable, violent propensities against the community but one whose paranoid pre-occupation with family quarrel goaded him to goat the rival.''

Justice A. P. Sen sharply reacted on this view of majority according to him In this case, the culprit can not get relief from the death penalty in any way, he mentioned that "the case of this accused is destructive of the theory of reformation. The "therapeutic touch" which is said the best of preventing repetition of the offence has been of no avail. Punishment must be designed so as to deter, as far as possible from commission of similar offences. It should also serve as a warning to other members of society. In both aspects, the experiment of reformation has miserably failed. I am quite sure that with the commutation of his death sentence, the accused will commit a few more murders and he would again become a menace to the society.''

Additionally it was held by the Ld. Judge "... The humanistic approach should not obscure our sense of realities. When a man commits a crime against society by committing a diabolical, cold blooded, pre-planned murder of one innocent person the brutality of which shocks the conscience of the court, he must face the consequences of his act. Such a person for fits his right to life."

There is a section relating death penalty in the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, Section 354 (3) (Section 393 BNSS) states that whenever a court sentences an offender to death, special reasons must be given for the sentencing and it must also be stated there why the sentence of life imprisonment is not applicable in that case.

5. Capital Punishment: Critical Evaluation

5.1 From International status

An international statistic compiled by the United Nations in 1962 shows that the suspension or abolition of the death penalty has no immediate effect on the rise of crime in society. Countries that have abolished the death penalty, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and some Latin American states, have not been affected through this abolition. It is noteworthy that the abolition of the arbitrary use of the death penalty has resulted that the means of capital punishment is now limited to the execution of the murderer. In this reformative era, there is no use of the retributive doctrine like "tit for tat". Rather, the doctrine of reprisal spreads hatred and enmity among more people and does not prevent crime in any way. The retributive approach is outdated and does not properly accept modern criminal justice.

5.2 Ancient time

Beccaria were the first criminologist who had developed resistance against the capital punishment in 1764. He resolutely opposes this cruel and barbaric punishment process and emphasizes on their individual treatment. According to him, giving death as a punishment for crime carries the impression of cruelty and immorality of mankind. One of the reasons for the expulsion of the doctrine of vengeance is that to execute a person as a punishment means to actively kill him as well. It has also been observed in various cases that more than 80 per cent of the perpetrators involved in the murder have committed the murder under certain circumstances like provocation, jealousy, sexual impulsiveness, poverty or intoxication. Professor Scott has expressed skepticism about the effective execution of the death penalty because in many cases it has been seen that many innocent people have been subjected to such punishment as a result of wrongful trial. Because once the death sentence of an innocent person is carried out through wrong judgment, it is not possible to come to the right conclusion and restore his life. This is why in the case of such punishment, the offender is released under the plea of "benefit of doubt" if there is even the slightest suspicion of his guilt.

At no time in the history of human civilization has the death penalty been excluded, Different doctrines concerning the death penalty are prevalent among Indian penologist. Many of them have supported the use of the death penalty as a punishment, while others have called for the abolition of the death penalty for the sake of humanity. According to those who support the death penalty, this process of punishment will act as a crime controller and will force the people of the country to lead a lawful life. The supporters of capital punishment belief that in order to bring justice, the culprit must be sentenced to death. If the murderer is not sentenced to death, the person he killed will never be brought to justice. On the other hand, according to the opposition to the death penalty, the growing

number of murders in the society proves the uselessness of the death penalty. They also think that a hardened criminal commits killing with a very clever and cold-blooded manner, so that even if they are caught, they can easily escape from punishment. Reacting strongly to this doctrine, the Law Commission of India noted in its 35th report that "having regard to the conditions of India, to the variety of the social upbringing of its inhabitants, to the disparity of the level of morality and education in the country, to the vastness of its area, to the diversity of its population and to the Paramount need for maintaining law and order in the country at the present juncture India cannot reached the abolition of capital punishment. arguments which would be valid in respect of one area of the world may not hold good in respect of another area in this context similarly even if evolution in some parts of India may not make a material difference it may be fought with serious consequences in other parts on a consideration of all the issues in for the commission is of the opinion that capital punishment should be retained in the present state of the country."

From the above analysis it is clear that neither the use of the death penalty nor its abolition is entirely appropriate. The need or usefulness of this punishment depends on the nature of the crime and its circumstances.

6. Requirements for the death penalty: Review

- The death penalty is justified for those criminals who, naturally, carry out the killing with a very cold head and through a pre-planned manner.
- In agrarian countries like India, land disputes are often blamed for killings. In all these cases, the perpetrators are aware of their actions but commit such crimes out of sudden excitement. They can never be considered professional killers and in most cases the death penalty is not justified.
- Young people in particular are more likely to commit heinous crimes, such as murder, as a result of a social event or religious or political incitement. In all these cases the judge has to determine the appropriate punishment for the offender with the utmost care and analysis of the situation.
- Though the intensive studies carried out by Dr. Sethna within the criminal Sessions of Bombay High Court, it was concluded that, only 26.28 per cent out of the 507 murder cases were found to have been premeditated and in all other cases the cause of murder is the presence of instant arousal, emotion, uncontrollable anger, etc., so in these circumstances death penalty cannot use as a form of deterrence.
- The main purpose of imposing the death penalty on non-correctional offenders is to provide security to the society. In this case, it should be kept in mind that the use of this punishment is not only to intimidate the perpetrators but also to make the society aware of the horrors of murder.

From the above review it is understood that the classification of murder depends mainly on the social environment and the characteristics of the offender. Based on this principle, it can be said that habitual criminals or sex psychopath's offenders are considered as abnormal people who engage themselves into the heinous acts without considering the depth and negative impact of their crime. There is also another type of criminal who kills people and enjoys it without any specific reason.

They carry out one murder after another just for fun. And when they are questioned about it, they are quick to admit their guilt and say that they have the demonic pleasure of killing someone who has been tortured to death. Needless to say, no punishment other than the death penalty is appropriate in these cases.

6.1 Arguments "for" Death penalty

- The expulsion of the murderer by the death penalty is an appropriate retaliatory process and brings justice to society.
- Punishment should be based primarily on the severity of the crime and any heinous crime should be tried very strictly in order to deter it and to keep societal security.
- The capital punishment reveals the societal view towards these horrific crimes.
- A person who has taken the life of another has lost his right to his own life.
- The capital punishment should be viewed primarily as vengeful justice because it provides peace of mind to the victims and his family members.
- This is the most effective way to protect society from the hands of ruthless criminals and that is why the death penalty is legalized in the constitution.
- Many authorities believe that life imprisonment is more cruel than the death penalty.
- Economically speaking, the death penalty is far less costly than the life imprisonment for a criminal.
- The capital punishment protects prisons from overcrowding, and the expulsion of relatively dangerous offenders facilitates prison discipline.
- The capital punishment upholds the rule of law and prevents the victim's family from taking the law into their own hands.

6.2 Arguments "against" Death penalty

- The real meaning of the capital punishment is murder and all forms of murder are considered wrong, so the death penalty is wrong.
- The capital punishment is a process which is irreversible on evidence of irrationality and results in injustice to the person who was wrongly executed.
- The capital punishment is a ruthless revenge that pushes society towards a barbaric attitude.

- The capital punishment is an unreasonable and discriminatory process where the punishment is given for killing to many poor people who may not have a chance or ability to defend themselves properly.
- It is far more desirable to keep a man alive in the midst of all sieges than the capital punishment.
- The capital punishment violates human rights and specifically violates Articles 3 and 5 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.
- A large number of murderers commit offence under immediate emotion and excitement and in that case the death penalty can in no way provide justice.
- The death penalty does not give the offender the opportunity to reform or rehabilitate in any form which is not acceptable under the current penal policy.[4]

7. Conclusion

According to modern doctrine, those who break the law need to be given appropriate punishment as a price for the crime. In developing countries like India, more importance is given to the application of penal section than to the analysis of the appropriateness of punishment. Weak punishment formulation and structural flaws in the nature of penal policies indirectly destroy the usefulness of the law. some laws relating to social policies like law relating to homosexuality and beef ban are gaining more popularity all over the country due to having over strict penalties even section 499 or 500 IPC Which is dealing with the criminal defamation are also added with this list. It was earlier considered as a civil wrong and therefore criminalize during the British period. The main flaw of the Indian legal system is that any judicial process here is time consuming. One of the downsides of the Indian legal system is that the policy of imposing punishment for relatively less important crimes is often not properly reviewed for serious and more destructive crimes. Although some activities are no longer included in the list of crimes, for an instance homosexuality is not a crime in present days.

Whenever punitive measures are taken to curb criminal activity, it is important to keep in mind that human nature is very complex and cannot be easily guessed. This is why not all people respond equally to the same situation. From this realization the idea of inventing different types of punishment policy for criminals came into application. The prison is not only considered a four-walled enclosure, but also a training center for those who break the law. More attention is being paid to the process of correcting criminals through proper training than just keeping them under the supervision of the authorities. It has been realized that security in society is possible only when the perpetrators will be corrected through separate treatment. Experience has shown that it is not enough to rehabilitate the offenders during his penalty period. It is also the duty of the authorities to ensure that after their release from prison they are able to lead a proper life.

The duty of a proper law-making policy is to correct and rehabilitate juvenile and first-time offenders and to adopt deterrent policy for habitual offenders. That is why the current penal policy places more emphasis on institutional infrastructure with reformative approach. Punishment should be made in such a way that instead of inflicting external pain on the perpetrators, the perpetrators should be made more aware of the moral values of the society and they should be established as a sophisticated member of the society.

Punishment policy should never be too harsh or too lenient. Punishment policy largely reflects society's attitudes toward crime, so the goal of enforcement depends largely on the social infrastructure and values prevalent there. In fact, the main demand of the present age is to improve the rehabilitation process and reduce the use of external punishment. Punishment procedures can never be created automatically. It develops mainly in the context of the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of a particular society. They also have pre-dominance effects on emergence of crime. That is why alternative approaches are needed to control the criminal and his criminal tendencies so that new penal policy can be developed in the criminal justice process. Although in recent ages there has been a radical change in penal policy in many developing countries of the world, there is still a need for in-depth review in a number of areas related to crime and criminals.

One of the major tasks of modern penal policy is to scientifically classify criminals, to control the work of various criminal organizations and to improve their punishment system. The impact of criminology and the spread of related legislation is inextricably linked with punishment. Inhumane treatment with a criminal is not justified and fundamental human rights and dignity must always be respected. An appropriate criminal justice policy always places the utmost importance on the security of the society and builds resistance against the perpetrator and his criminal tendencies.

By emphasizing on the penal justice system The Supreme Court in **Ankush Maruti Shinde v. State of Maharashtra** case observed that "in perpetuating the sentencing system law should adopt the corrective machinery or the deterrence based on factual matrix. Imposing sentence without considering its effect on social order may be in reality a futile exercise.....it is, therefore, the duty of every Court to avoid proper sentence having regard to the nature of the offence and the manner in which it was perpetuated or committed."

According to some punishment theorists, the practical response to punishment for a crime depends largely on what the particular society or country is going through. For example, the death penalty, deportation, solitary confinement, etc., which are used arbitrarily in times of revolution or war, are not applied in same manner during the times of unity and peace.

In light of the increasing terrorism activities in India, it could be argued that the application of capital punishment for terrorists is an appropriate response, given that such instances are indeed rare and exceptional. And in the same vein, it is imperative to crack down on the growing corruption in various parts of India, especially in the Department of Politics and Corporations.

Based on the current criminal justice process, the chief justice of India, Justice P. Sathasivam, during the occasion of National Legal Service Day (6th November, 2013) expressed that "justice is still in a cynical phase for the common man, despite a force being made to make it accessible."

Endorsing his views Justice G.S. Singhvi regarding legal fraternity said that "it is time to ponder over whether in 65 years we have been able to achieve the goal to provide justice for people and whether we have created an atmosphere where everybody has equality of opportunity and status for people."

He further observed that "Justice was still an illusion for millions of people in the country and it is not accessible to a majority of the population."[4]

In 2020, capital punishment was last carried out in India when four convicts in the 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder case were hanged. The Supreme Court has stated that it should be used only in the rarest of rare cases. As of 2021, 56 countries retain capital punishment, while 111 have abolished it.

End notes:

[1] Prof. N.V. Paranjape, *Criminology & Penology* 357 to 358 (Central Law Publications, Delhi, 18th edn., 2019)

[2] List of methods of capital punishment, *available at*: https://en.m.wikipedia.org (Visited on 20 May, 2022)

[3] Prof. N.V. Paranjape, *Criminology & Penology* 359 to 362 (Central Law Publications, Delhi, 18th edn., 2019)

[4] Prof. N.V. Paranjape, *Criminology & Penology* 363 to 382 (Central Law Publications, Delhi, 18th edn., 2019)

[5] Prof. N.V. Paranjape, *Criminology & Penology* 327 to 329 (Central Law Publications, Delhi, 18th edn., 2019)

References:

- Paranjape, Prof. N.V. 18th edn, 2019. *Criminology & Penology.* Central Law Publications, Delhi.
- Swamy, Dr. N. Maheshwara. 1st edn. 2013. *Criminology and Criminal Justice System* Asia Law House, Hyderabad.
- Ahuja Ram. 2000, reprint 2015. *Criminology.* Kolkata Rawat, Jaipur.
- Sutherland, Edwin H, et.al., 11th edn., 2020. *Principles of Criminology.* Lanham A Division of Rawman & Littleld.
- Gaur, K.D. 3rd edn., 2015, reprint 2017. *Criminal law criminology and administration of criminal justice.* Haryana Lexis Nexis, Haryana.
- Williams and Katherine. 7th edn., 2012. '*Textbook on Criminology'* (Oxford University Press, UK.
- Penology / Sociology, *available at:* https://www.britannica.com (Visited on May 3, 2022).
- Lifting the veil on the scope of penology, *available at* :https://blog.ipleaders.in (Visited on May3, 2022)
- Evolution of the Process of Punishment in India, *available at:* https://www.ijlmh.com (visited on 7th May, 2022)
- Origins & Forms of Punishment in Ancient Hindu and Mohammedan Law, *available at*: https://theindianlaw.in (Visited on May 9, 2022).
- Indian Penal Code, available at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org (Visited on May 10, 2022)
- The history of punishment in India, *available at:* https://blog.ipleaders.in (Visited on May12, 2022)
- TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH HARSH PUNISHMENTS, *available at*: https://watchmojo.com (Visited on May 14, 2022).
- Punishment-Rehabilitation, *available at:* https://www.britannica,com (Visited on May14, 2022)
- Theories of punishment-a thorough study, *available at:* https://blog.ipleaders.in (Visited on May15, 2022)
- Reformative Theory of Punishment In India, *available at:* https://lawcorner.in (Visited on May15, 2022)

- Punishment under IPC:All you need to know about it, *available at:* https://blog.ipleaders.in (Visited on May17, 2022)
- Most famous and controversial criminal cases in India, *available at:* https://blog.ipleaders.in (Visited on May 20, 2022)
- List of methods of capital punishment, *available at:* https://en.m.wikipedia.org (Visited on 20th May, 2022)
- Death Penalty in 2024 *available at* : https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/research/analysis/reports/year-end-reports/the-death-penalty-in-2024 (Visited on May 20, 2025)
- Execution List in 2024 available at : https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/research/analysis/reports/year-end-reports/the-death-penalty-in-2024 (visited on 20 th May 2025)
- The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974)
- The Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860)
- New Criminal Laws, 2024 (BNS, BNSS & BSA)

Bio Profile of the Author:

Professor, Faculty of Law, ICFAI University, Tripura

Email: kabita.legal@gmail.com

Disability and Artificial Intelligence: Redefining Empowerment in India

[1]Divya Rani & [2]Anchal

Abstract

Artificial intelligence has become a phenomenon in the world. The machine with ability of doing cognitive task and automation have made this technology beneficial for almost every aspect of human life. Even though, there are many challenges and threats are attached to it, AI has been blessings in many areas such as health, education, transportation, hotel, agriculture and defence. Apart from these areas, AI has emerged as a new ray of hope for the Differently abled persons. The machine has been beneficial for all categories of the disability. It is bringing massive changes in the lives of the Differently Abled. People suffering from different types of disabilities are now becoming capable with the use of Artificial Intelligence. People with visual impairment and hearing loss are experiencing normal life with the use of smart phones and audio devices. People with physical disabilities are able to make their lives easier through artificial limbs and robotic devices. AI is playing an important role in giving people with disabilities their place and rights in social participation. Hence, people with various types of disabilities are accepting AI as the best assisting device for themselves. This paper will enumerate the leverages of AI for PwDs and how it is redefining the meaning of empowerment with accessibility and participation. It further describes the policy and applicability of AI in facilitating accessibility and empowering differently abled persons in India.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Persons with Disabilty (PwDs), Empowerment, India*

Introduction

Disability has been a stigma in Indian society for long. The change in perception has come during 1970s; the period, which is also known as social movements era. In India, the first movement for the Persons with Disability (PwDs) has started with the basic demand of recognition and medical facility. This movement helped them to unite and made people aware with their rights and demands. Since 1970s to 2016 Act, the movement of dignity and respect has been challenged and controlled by many actors and factors. However, the significant change came with the 2016 RPwD (Rights of People with Disability) Act when policy makers to populace, started taking cognisance of the issues and challenges of PwDs face in day to day life. The Government of India is not only focusing on the changing basic infrastructure for inclusive society for PwDs but also using new technology to bring significant changes in their lives. Artificial Intelligence is one of the new technology that has been used widely for upgrading and uplifting lives of PwDs with providing assistive devices that could eliminate the hindrance from

their lives. Moreover, AI tools and applications facilitate PwDs accessibility and mobility for education and jobs. Empowerment includes education, jobs and self-reliant and AI has the capacity to fulfil all aspects.

This paper is a descriptive study in which Disability and types of disability have been discussed. The paper has in-depth study of how AI is beneficial for PwDs and its significant role in empowering them. The paper is based on primary source in which Act on Disability in India has been discussed and the paper exclusively based on analysis of secondary sources i.e. books and articles.

Disability: Definition and Types

According to Oxford Dictionary, disability is defined as an impairment or deficiency in which it affects the body at cognitive, intelligence, limitations, exercise, sensory and physical levels etc. It can happen at birth or sometimes after birth. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)-2006, disability has also been defined as a person suffering from disability when they suffer from impairment on physical, mental and intellectual grounds for a long period of time. It affects them in many ways in interacting with other people or participating socially as well as hindrances in their life (Government of India, 2021).

According to the Disability Act introduced by Americans, "person who has any kind of physical or mental impairment, due to which he/she becomes incapable of doing daily or other tasks in their life or their ability to work gets limited, he/she is called disabled". However, disability cannot be defined by limited definitions as it has many dimensions. It can be found in many forms (see Figure-1) such as visible, invisible, simple, difficult, physical-mental, vision, hearing and speech. It is not necessary that it is similar for each person and easily identifiable (Jangeed, 2023).

Types of Disability

Figure - 1

Cerebral palsy	Multiple Disabilities	Leprosy Cured Person
Hearing impaired	Low Vision	Intellectual Disability
Specific Learning Disabilities	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Sickle Cell Disease
Speech and Language Disability	Parkinson's Disease	Acid Attack Victims
Chronic Neurological Conditions	Haemophilia	Muscular Dystrophy
Thalassemia	Multiple Sclerosis	Dwarfism
Mental Illness	Deaf	Blindness

Source: (Government of India, 2016)

Cerebral Palsy : It is related to neuromotor disorders. Due to which the person's movement, muscle tone and posture are affected. As a result, the person faces difficulty in walking, talking and other work activities (Patel, Neelakantan, Pandher, & Merrick, 2019).

Hearing Impaired : A person who has less than normal hearing ability. This disability can be mild, moderate or severe (WHO, 2024).

Specific Learning Disabilities : This disability affects a person's ability to learn, speak, read, write etc. (Wecapable, 2019).

Speech and Language Disability : It is a permanent language related disability. Which occurs due to damage to a particular part of the brain. In this the person feels unable to speak, that is, he is unable to express his thoughts properly (Wecapable, 2019).

Chronic Neurological Conditions : It is related to Central and Peripheral Nervous System. This disease affects human spinal cord (Wecapable, 2019).

Thalassemia : Thalassemia is a blood related disease caused by haemoglobin deficiency. This disease destroys red blood cells (Wecapable, 2019).

Mental Illness : This completely affects the mental level of the person - like mood, thinking, attitude, memory, decisions and behaviour etc (Wecapable, 2019).

Multiple Disabilities : If a person has more than one disability, he is placed in the category of multiple disability (Wecapable, 2019).

Low Vision : A person who has low vision ability compared to normal vision ability.

Autism Spectrum Disorder : It affects the full development of a person's skill abilities. It also affects communication and social abilities (Wecapable, 2019).

Parkinson's Disease : This disease affects the physical functions/movements of a person and keeps increasing with age and time. Therefore, as a result of increase in age, the condition of a person becomes worse. At present there is no permanent treatment for this disease (Wecapable, 2019).

Leprosy Cured Person : This disease can occur in a person at any age. It is caused by a Mycobacterium Leprae Bacteria. This disease directly affects the skin, eyes and peripheral nerves (Wecapable, 2019).

Blindness : When a person is not able to see completely with both eyes and cannot distinguish between darkness and light. That person is defined by the disability of blindness (Wecapable, 2019).

Deaf : A person who does not have the ability to hear in both his ears cannot hear anything (Wecapable, 2019).

Haemophilia : This is a blood related disease caused by deficiency of protein in the blood. As a result of which the blood flow stops. This disease is mostly found in men.

Multiple Sclerosis : It affects the person's brain through the central nerve. Due to which the person's ability to communicate is reduced (Wecapable, 2019).

Intellectual Disability : This is a condition in which a person becomes intellectually differently abled. The person is not able to learn, understand, and reason (Wecapable, 2019).

Sickle Cell Disease : This is also a blood related disease that quickly destroys the blood cells and changes them into abnormal shapes. It starts stopping the flow of oxygen to various parts of the body through red blood cells (Wecapable, 2019).

Acid Attack Victims : People who become disabled due to exposure to acid or any other dangerous substance (Wecapable, 2019).

Muscular Dystrophy : Muscular dystrophy is a disease related to the muscles of the entire body. This is a continuously growing disease. In this, the ability of the person's muscles to work gradually decreases. Therefore, there is no treatment available for it (Wecapable, 2019)

Dwarfism : This is a disorder related to physical development. In this the height of the person is much less than normal (Wecapable, 2019).

Disability laws in India in the Context of Technology

During 1970s, India has witnessed movements and awareness for disability rights. This era has marked as paradigm shift from the prevailing societal perception where individuals with disabilities were often marginalized and overlooked and existed on the fringes of society, devoid of basic human rights and recognition. These movements gradually helped differently abled people to have recognition on medical grounds. Efforts were made to raise the status of the PwD's in society with the help of assistive devices and medical treatment. In this direction, Indian Rehabilitation was established in 1986 by the Government of India to protect the interests of the differently abled (AshaBhawan Centre, 2017), in which proper education, research and rehabilitation of the differently abled people were discussed, this society was later known as the Indian Rehabilitation Act of 1992. Under this, development of all services for technology was also discussed. However, this Act was not implemented properly rather it was very selective (Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1992).

Though, this act was harbinger of the fight for the dignity and inclusivity of PwDs. After this Act, many laws were laid down by the Indian Government over the period of time such as- Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 - The Act was divided into 14 chapters, covering 7 types of disabilities. It included all the problems related to disabilities such as education, freedom, equality and physical access. Along with, 3% reservation was also given for the PwDs in all government jobs and higher education institutions (Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1996). Similarly, the National Trust Act 1999 was established. This Act included persons who were related to intellectual disability i.e. mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism and multiple disabilities. The basis of this Act was to empower those people in the society who could not fight for their own rights (Chandra & MD, 2011).

After National Trust Act of 1999, the Indian government felt the need to determine a national policy in which rules for improving the quality of life of the PwDs should be discussed. As a result, the National Policy for Persons with Disability was implemented in 2006, in which, like other citizens, the Differently abled people were also considered important for the society and social development (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2006). In the 2011 Indian Census, it was found that almost 2.68 crore people in India are differently abled. Whereas the reality was the opposite as this number was of only 7 types of disabilities (Office of Chief Commissioner for Person with Disabilities, 2021). In view of this situation Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD-2016) was introduced and implemented by Government of India. This act is including all perspectives of the rights of the differently abled people. In this Act, through 17 chapters, an attempt has been made to solve every problem related to the life of the differently abled people. Apart from equality, freedom, education and economic rights, some other rights have also been included in this Act like technology, access and communication. As a result, the lives of the differently abled have become more efficient. Efforts have been made by the Indian government that on the basis of these rights they should face less obstacles in their daily life experiences. They should be able to do all their work like other people in every field. In this context, the chapter 8 of RPWD Act 2016 has been set on the subject of technology, access and communication. So that all the differently abled people can get other rights in addition to the fundamental rights and become more capable. In Chapter 8 of the Act, Sections 40, 41 and 42 are created related to issues of communication, technology and accessibility; these sections cater the interest and policy on AI for PwDs (Government of India, 2016). Following are the salient features of Sections 40, 41 and 42.

Section 40 Accessibility : This section has been made in the context of different types of accessibility of persons with disabilities in each area. It was said by the Central Government that with the help of Chief Advisors, it would make communication, technology, transportation, exchange of information, accessibility of physical environment and other facilities for the differently abled fully accessible to the differently abled (Government of India , 2016).

Section 41 Access to Transport : In this section, some criteria have been set for the participation and accessibility of differently abled people for all types of transport. It was made mandatory to provide all types of facilities as per the requirement of the differently abled people at railway station, airport, bus stop etc. Orders were given to create physical accessibility to facilities like ticket counters, parking and toilets. Orders were given to determine these facilities in such a way that every type of differently abled person can avail all the facilities for example providing all the information to a blind person through technology (Government of India, 2016).

Section 42 Information and communication technology : According to this section, all types of

information and communication facilities will be designed in such a way that all differently abled people can access them. Like – all the material will be made accessible to all through audio, printing form and electronic medium. For those who are unable to hear or see, the material will be available electronically and in sign language etc (Government of India, 2016).

The main purpose to discuss all rights of PwDs above is to put Artificial Intelligence in a legal framework while using it to the leverages of PwDs. AI and rights related to AI come under all three sections. AI has profound role to facilitate differently abled persons to empower and it can be used for any type of disability. As Indian government emphasises on the Responsible Use of AI as in this arena AI it would be a significant and revolutionary step. It has leverages of empowering PwDs in all aspects such as education, transportation and accessibility.

Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Development

Artificial Intelligence can be defined as an ability of machine to achieve goals, especially in a complex, uncertain environment. Machine has ability to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving learning, problem solving and decision making (NITI Discussion Paper). It is a wide-open field that can be used in any area from Robots to self-driving cars. The genesis of the development of this technology begun in mid twentieth century. In 1956, John McCarthy organized a ground-breaking workshop centered around the newly coined concept of AI. This two-months event encouraged research that eventually led to the development of automated systems in the 1970 and anexpert systems which came into existence in 1980s. The automated systems primarily focused on automating mathematical and statistical tasks, such as solving logical proofs. Expert systems were introduced to address the limitations of these earlier systems by incorporating specialized knowledge from specific fields. However, expert systems had a significant drawback: whenever the expert knowledge was updated, the coding, training, and implementation had to be entirely redone. During 1957, John McCarthy generated LISP (List Processing Language) for Artificial Intelligence that was considered as the oldest programming language that helps in programming easily. In the years that followed, not much success was achieved in developing Artificial Intelligence due to complexity and expertise to operate AI based appliances and Machines. However, the leverages of AI could not be ruled out and scientists and engineers were working on to make it more accessible and approachable. Therefore, after a few years, the development of Artificial Intelligence again took a new turn and around 1970 it was believed that Artificial Intelligence could be capable in other areas also. Gradually Artificial Intelligence started being used for big tasks & projects with which artificial intelligence continued to develop (Mijwel, 2015). The important breakthrough came in 1990s when third revolution happened that is also known as Information and Technology Revolutions and subsequently another breakthrough with a period of introduction of "Deep Learning" that models higher level processing through extracting smaller

modules together (Ayoub and Kenneth, 2016). With incredible advancement in data collection, processing and computation power, intelligent system can do variety of tasks and enhance productivity. Expansion in AI's capabilities have expanded its utility in different fields. Comparing to initial period of its development, growth and advancement in AI in recent times is exponential.

AI can be broadly categorized in to two types: Modular and General. Modular AI has specialized in a specific domain and improves its performance through practice. In contrast, General AI can apply its knowledge flexibly to address a wide range of abstract and complex problems that involve reasoning, meaning and grasping values. Both categories have the ability to 'learn' from their tasks and enhance their performance over time.

The general area of Artificial Intelligence can be divided into more specialized branches. At a 'micro-level', we find the research on neural-net analogies, an area concerned with models composed of several simple and often randomly connected components. At the 'macro-level' we combine the simple basic components to complex but specialized problem-solving units (Persson, 1964). In present, modular AI have been used in all areas of human life and in few selective areas, there are appliances of general AI especially in automobile (self-driving car) and health sectors.

Artificial Intelligence in India

1960 was the year when AI was introduced in India. During that time, the first course on AI was started in IIT Kanpur. After a year prof HN Mahabala returned to India and started to discuss its context with prof Marvin Miskey. The first research on separate Artificial Intelligence was started by Prof. Narasimhan in TIFR. After this, in the time period of 1980, a machine was made which could translate the Indian language project and the optical Character Recognition project at ISI Kolkata. These two functions have been defined historically in the Indian perspective. In 1986, the Indian Government supported a five-year project with the assistance of UNDP and accepted the Knowledge Based Computing System as the Indian Fifth Generation Computer System (Itihaasa Research and Digital ,2018). Afterwards, Artificial Intelligence has been continuously growing in India. Leaders and policy makers have been keen to develop AI through various technical institutes, researches and scholars. In addition, India has adopted IT revolution (Third Revolution) at initial stage and it gave leverages for adaptation and advancement of the technology during the second breakthrough. Not only AI based applications and leverages but also implementing national strategy paper to use AI responsibly is a major concern of Indian government. Considering the benefits of AI, it is pertinent to use AI in such areas where this technology facilitates human life, hence then empowering person with disability is one of the major areas where AI can play an important and significant role.

Leverages of AI in Empowering PwDs

Generally, in the daily activities of life, all persons are connected with technology. Technology, in this paper, Artificial Intelligence has made remarkable presence in our daily activities. AI has emerged as a new power for the differently abled; through AI, suggestions and facilities are being provided to solve various problems of the differently abled. As a result, many obstacles in the life of the differently abled can be easily resolved (Analytics Insigh, 2022). AI is no less than a boon for the differently abled. It is enabling PwDsto overcome all the obstacles ranging from physical barriers to communication and information. AI is providing its best facilities in all fields like education, communication, transportation and employment. With its help, now even differently abled people have been able to participate independently in every field. It has also reduced the perception of difference and discrimination between people with disabilities and non-differently abled. With its help, differently abled people are being able to do tasks along with non-differently abled people due to which the differences between them and various types of discrimination have also ended (Christopherson, 2023). The symptoms and effects of each disability are different. Similarly, the problems and needs of differently abled people are also different from each other. The persons with disability experience challenges in daily life. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, accessibility and mobility have become easier for the lives of all differently abled people. AI has ability to perform all tasks on its own, unlike human intelligence that provides an important opportunity for the PwDs. It promotes the participation of the differently abled in the society (Barik, Aggarwal, Deepak, & Raj, 2023). AI has played significant roles for differently abled in the following areas:

i) Education : First and foremost is in the field of education, a good number of AI tools have been created for PwDs. For instance, a self-learning Braille device has been created for visually impaired children which is called "Anni". It has emerged as an important assistive device for visually impaired children to read and write. Similarly, many other AI tools like notebook, Readable.com, Digital Art Academy for the Deaf (DAAD), Indian Science Technology and Engineering Facilities Map (I-STEM), Dyslexia Assessment for Language of India (DALI) are few examples of AI tools for empowering and educating PwDs. All these devices provide immense assistance to differently abled children in reading, writing, understanding teaching material and reading documents and empower children to participate in classes without any hesitance (Shivani, Gupta, & Gupta, 2024). Recently, during Purple Fest, in Panaji, an innovative device "HearSight Audio Vision" was launched for blind people. This device has 21 types of features and capable of providing information about any obstacle coming within a distance of 4-5 feet. The device also has facial recognition of people registered on this device with voice control system and recognizes Indian currency. This device can be accessed without the use of Internet. With all these basic facilities, the device has the ability to make life easier and accessible for any blind people. It will fulfil the needs of millions of people and simplify their daily life (Monteiro, 2024).

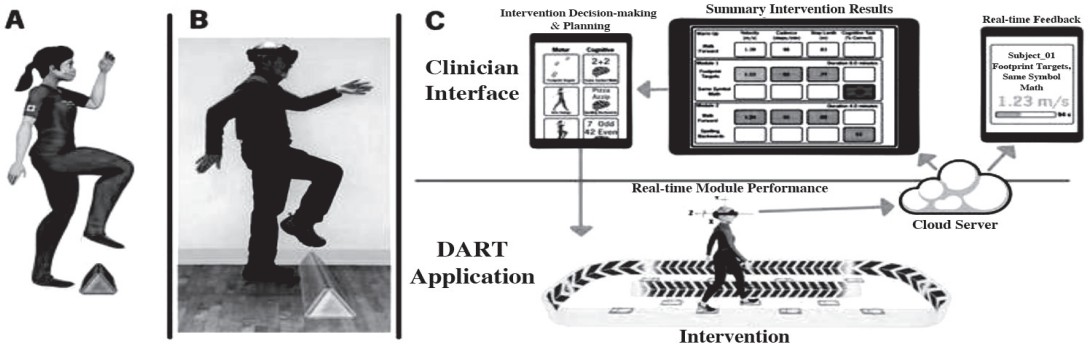


Voiceitt: This app uses AI to translate non-standard speech patterns into clear, understandable language, benefiting individuals with speech impairments like cerebral palsy or ALS



(Source: Google) OrCamMyEye: This device uses AI to read text aloud, recognize faces, and identify products for individuals with low vision

ii) Physical Accessibility : There are many differently abled people who are unable to walk or do physical activities. But now, with the help of technology, they are living their lives like other people in the society by using electronic and robotic wheelchairs and other equipment. Such facilities have provided a new ray of hope to their lives. Through which they can now educate themselves and get employment in the future. Earlier, the biggest challenge before them was to get out of the house that has now been eliminated by technology. Now, all differently abled persons are able to access and avail opportunity from education to employment (Stanly, 2023). A person who is not able to walk, AI based electronic wheelchairs are available for them. This wheelchair can be modified and designed as per the need of the person. It has many advanced features such as voice control, remote control, and can even do tasks like climbing stairs. Using this wheelchair, the differently abled person has been able to re-establish his participation at employment, education and social life (Singh & Gaharwal, 2018). At present, these new technologies are providing equal environment and facilities to everyone at the same level. It is helping the society to become more inclusive and PwDs are working together with non PwDs. Though, these facilities were not available earlier to the differently abled and it was the major reasons behind the confinement of the PwDs to their homes only (Martinez, 2021).



(Source:Google) Using augmented reality to make Parkinson's disease physical therapy more accessible (IMAGE)

iii) Communication Access : With the help of various AI technologies, many barriers to communication for the differently abled have been removed such as talking to non-differently abled people, using mobile, writing and reading etc. Voice technologies like Alexa, Siri and AI have made communication easier for people with disabilities. For example, blind people can now use the voice system to talk to other people or share their thoughts with them. They can also record it and send it. Similarly, mentally differently abled people are able to share their feelings and thoughts with other people by availing AI based tools.



Some Apps like AVA leverages AI for real-time captioning and transcription of conversations, making it easier for people with hearing impairments to participate.

iv) Empowered by Technology : In terms of providing basic infrastructure, the Government of India may have not achieved goals especially facilities like ramps, toilets and lifts for PwDs. However, the facility of upgrading technology and using it for their utmost benefits are quite visible in government's policy and actions. The significant contribution of technology or AI is visible in eliminating hurdle of accessibility of PwDs. It is making them capable in performing their tasks. Through this, now a blind person can write without seeing and a person with physical disability can walk with the help of electronic wheelchair. Therefore, technology has given a way to live the life of the differently abled as they want. It is not only empowering them but also making them happy and innovative.

v) Connectivity with world : Through various AI based assistive devices, all types of differently abled people have now been able to connect with people across the world at a large scale. Through facilities like email, mobile, audio etc., they have been able to discuss and hold virtual meetings with other people sitting at home. People with severe disabilities are also able to access and reach out people with the help of tools such as language translators and content readers. On the contrary, differently abled people have got more opportunities to get employment from home (Weitzman, 2023).



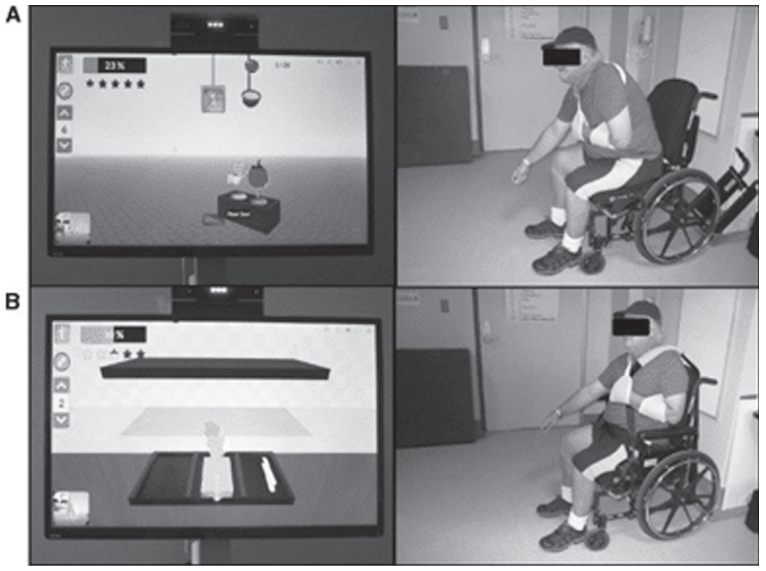
(Source: Google) Project Euphonia is a Google Research initiative working to make speech recognition software more accessible. Conversations are a daily occurrence, but talking can be a major challenge for millions of people around the world with atypical speech

vi) Opportunity of Employment : New opportunities have also been found in employment for the differently abled in the technological field. The benefits are directly being availed by them. There are various private companies which are suitable in providing virtual employment to the differently abled as per their requirement. Physically differently abled people, who are not able to go to office on regular basis, are getting maximum benefit from it. AI has provided them a new direction to become financially independent (Shenoy, 2022).

With these leverages, we can say that AI has the potential to make life of PwDs more inclusive and simpler. AI tools are resolving their basic and fundamental problems of accessibility that is the utmost reason of their no participation in public sphere. Another significance of AI is that it is very cost-effective. Based on the problems and needs of the differently abled, AI is bringing a hope to them to live independently.



Trexo Home : cerebral palsy rehabilitation at your finger tips



(Source: Google) Participant performing virtual reality training using Jintronix Rehabilitation software and a Kinect v2 camera.a Intervention game - uses leaning to challenge sitting balance b Control game: uses limited arm movements only. Participant is strapped into his chair

Conclusion

The life of PwDs is considered to be challenging in India. This is the reason why disability has been considered as stigma in society. It took many years and constant fights and movement to make society and policy makers to think PwDs beyond their physical limitations and treat them with dignity and respect. Moreover, consider them as equal citizens with equal rights. Their physical structure makes them dependent on others because of their special need and limitation of accessibility. Artificial Intelligence may have mixed impact and response from the populace, but in the area of empowering PwDs, it has remarkable benefits with less harms. AI based applications and tools are extremely beneficial and it has changed the lives of PwDs beyond expectations. It has given power to accessibility, education and jobs that will eventually give them life of dignity and self-dependent. AI has facilitated to make an inclusive society in which digital divide is prevalent. However, in terms of disability, it is exceptional and improving the lives of isolated and marginalized people with disability. Various assistive devices have also opened new avenues for the differently abled in the field of education and employment. Therefore, AI should be used more responsible and empowering PwDs with education, jobs and happy life.

References

Primary Sources

- Government of India. 2016. *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act-2016.* New Delhi: Government of India.
- Government of India. 2023. *Natinal Programme on Artificial Intelligence (NPAI) Skilling Framework.* New Delhi: Government of India.
- Government of India. 2021. *Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India-A statistical profile: 2021.* New Delhi: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs. 1992. *Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992.* New Delhi.
- Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs. 1996. *The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.* New Delhi: Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs.
- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. 2006. *National Policy for Persons with DIsabilities.* New Delhi: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Office of Chief Commissioner for Person with Disebilities. 2021, 08. 08. *Disability in India*. Retrieved from http://www.ccdisabilities.nic.in/: http://www.ccdisabilities.nic.in/resources/disability-india
- WHO. 2024, January 02. *Assistive technology*. Retrieved from WHO: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/assistive-technology
- WHO. 2024, February 02. *Deafness and hearing loss*. Retrieved from WHO: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss

❑ Secondary Sources

- Analytics Insigh. 2022, September 11. *Artificial Intelligence's impact on the Lives of People with Disabilities*. Retrieved from Analytics Insigh: https://www.analyticsinsight.net/artificial-intelligences-impact-on-the-lives-of-people-with-disabilities/
- AshaBhawan Centre. 2017, October 17. *Disebility Rights Movements Hintory in India*. Retrieved from Ashabhawancentre.medium.com:https://ashabhavancentre.medium.com/disability-rights-movements-history-in-india-7fb1f7399517#:~:text=In%20the%20year%201995%2C%20 the,government%20services% 20and%20educational% 20institutions.
- Ayoub, Kareem and Kenneth Payne. 2016, 'Strategy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence'. *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30(5-6). P. 800-801.
- Chandra, S., & MD, G. 2011. Intellectual Disability in India: The Evolving Patterns of Care. *International Psychiatry, 08*(02), 01-03.
- Christopherson, R. 2023, February 16. *What does Chat GPT think about how AI can help disabled people?* Retrieved from Ability net: https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/what-does-chat-gpt-think-about-how-ai-can-help-disabled-people
- Itihaasa Research and Digital. 2018. *Landscape of Artificial Intelligence Machine Learning Research in India.* Delhi: Itihaasa Research and Digital.
- Jangeed, K. 2023. "DIVYANG: Respecting Disability Thorugh the Biopic of Stephen Hawking the Theory of Everything". *Journal of Emerging Technologies ans Innovation Research, 10*(02), 497-502.
- Martinez, C. 2021, March 05. *Artificial Intelligence and Accessibility: Examples of a Technology that Serves People with Disabilities*. Retrieved from Inclusive city maker: https://www.inclusivecitymaker.com/artificial-intelligence-accessibility-examples-technology-serves-people-disabilities/
- Mijwel, M. M. 2015. History of Artificial Intelligence. 01-07.
- Monteiro, L. 2024, January 14. *AI-Rn Device Detects 200 Faces, Scan Cash for Blind People*. Retrieved from times of india. indiatimes.com: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/ai-run-device-detects-200-faces-scans-cash-for-blind-people/articleshow/106820998.cms
- Patel, D. R., Neelakantan, M., Pandher, K., & Merrick, J. 2019. Cerebral palsy in children: a clinical overview. 126-135.
- Persson, Staffan (1964). An Introduction to Artificial Intelligence. *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, June, 66(2). p. 89.
- Shenoy, M. (2022, February 04). *India's first AI-based job platform for persons with disabilities*. Retrieved from Hr world: https://hr.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/indias-first-ai-based-job-platform-for-persons-with-disabilities/89347450
- Shivani, Gupta, M., & Gupta, S. B. 2024. A Systemeatic Analysis of AI-Empowered Educational Tools Developed in India for Disabled People. *Information Technologies and Learning Tools, 100*(02), 199-216.
- Singh, A. K., & Gaharwal, M. 2018. Artificial Intelligence Based Wireless Smart Wheelchair. *International Journal of Emergining Technologies in Engineering Research, 06*(03), 162-167.
- Stanly, M. 2023, November 01. *An analysis of the accessibility and inclusion of AI for people with disabilities*. Retrieved

from indiaai: https://indiaai.gov.in/article/an-analysis-of-the-accessibility-and-inclusion-of-ai-for-people-with-disabilities

- Wecapable. 2019, October 16. *Category: Disabilities*. Retrieved from https://wecapable.com/: https://wecapable.com/category/disabilities/
- Weitzman, T. 2023, June 16. *Empowering Individuals with Disabilities Through AI Technology*. Retrieved from Forbes: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/06/16/empowering-individuals-with-disabilities-through-ai-technology/?sh=648aa8af6c73

Bio Profile of the Authors:

[1]Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Banaras Hindu University
Email : divya1@bhu.ac.in
&
[2]Doctoral Fellow
Department of Political Science
Banaras Hindu University
E-mail : anchalkayat@bhu.ac.in

From Struggle to Liberation: The Journey of Women in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* and Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*

[1] *V. Sharmila* & [2] *S. Kalamani*

Abstract

Anita Desai, a renowned Indian diasporas writer through her novel *Fire on the Mountain* presents a glimpse of the burning issues of female struggle to survive in a male- dominated society. Her novel deals with Nanda Kaul, who is depressed and anxious due to her indifferent and unloving husband. Imayam wrote many novels and short stories dealing with caste discrimination, patriarchy, women's sufferings, injustice and oppression. The writings crafted by Anita Desai stand as a compelling testament to the changing roles of women, surpassing societal expectations and mirroring the transformative voyage from pre-independence to the present time.

Though both, Imayam and Anita Desai, wrote in different periods of time, they spoke about issues related to women who are torn between hope and despair in patriarchal societies. The marginalized women workers, such as washerwomen, in the novel the *Beast of Burden*, endured sexual violence from the village head of the upper caste. The present paper analyses two different types of women suffering – one type like Arokkyam, rises above the sufferings and faces life indomitably, whereas the other type like Nanda Kaul, unable to face sufferings, breaks down physically and mentally. Concepts related to existentialism with its fear, alienation, absurdity, prejudice, and escapism is used in the analysis of the characters.

Key words : *Dalit, Existence, Marginalization, Oppression, Patriarchy, Rural, Suffering, Struggle, Urban, Violence.*

> "As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, andwe'll all be better off for it". — Sandra Day O'Connor

Introduction

Indian writing in English is a bright canvas that captures the complexities of India's social fabric, with an emphasis on the voices of underrepresented groups. Women from underprivileged communities have frequently been underrepresented or omitted from popular narratives due to gender, caste, class,

religion, geography, or other socioeconomic considerations. The experiences of such marginalised women have been illuminated by a number of Indian writers in English, especially women, who through their notable contributions have addressed these voices in recent decades.

The intricate caste and societal hierarchies permeating Indian society had its impact on the position of women in society. Discrimination against marginalized women, whether from lower castes, tribal communities, religious minorities, or rural areas, has been exacerbated by factors such as caste, class, and religion in addition to gender. Over the years, numerous authors have employed English or a regional language as a means of asserting the voices and experiences of people who are at the margins of society. The intersection of gender and caste is one of the most important themes, as women from lower castes—especially Dalit women—face oppression based on both caste and patriarchy. The autonomy and resiliency that underprivileged women acquire to combat oppression is a prominent theme in their writing. As they navigate patriarchal structures and social conventions, their battle is frequently both personal and collective.

The present paper is an attempt to portray the sufferings of women due to patriarchy and caste taking for an analysis the novel *Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai dealing with the sufferings of an urban woman under the tyranny of patriarchy and another novel *Beasts of Burden* by Imayam focusing on a rural woman encountering difficulties due to caste.

Desai's novels, originally written and published in English, caters to a worldwide readership, and represent the views of urban, educated, and frequently privileged women. The use of English shapes her narrative style, with a focus on psychological introspection and existential themes, which are accessible to a wider, predominantly elite readership. Considered one of the leading writers of south India, Imayam seeks to present the lives of ordinary women and men living on the fringes in the northern coastal districts of Tamil Nadu, their everyday problems and inequalities in a language that employs raw candour. Imayam's work, initially written in Tamil, and translated into English carries the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of a particular context.

When Desai's narratives frequently centre on the existential struggles of urban, upper-class or upper-caste women, despite the fact that these struggles are significant, but they exist within a framework of privilege where caste and extreme deprivation are largely absent, Imayam's work vividly depicts the lived realities of Dalit women, highlighting caste-based discrimination, systemic oppression, and economic deprivation. His narratives not only draw attention to the intersection of caste and gender but also highlight the resilience of Dalit women in the face of such adversity.

As demonstrated in books like *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai frequently explores the psychological depth of her characters by examining their internal conflicts and problems with identity, alienation, and self-understanding. Similar to this, Imayam concentrates on the mental and emotional

anguish of his characters, illustrating their struggles within a culture characterized by strict conventions, caste systems, and individual struggles. For example, *Beasts of Burden* explores the psychological conflicts of the protagonist, which are influenced by societal circumstances. Complex family dynamics and the duties of women in the home are regularly examined in Desai's works, which typically show their loneliness and hardships. Imayam also depicts family relationships, particularly the ways in which family members are impacted by society structures. Imayam depicts persons whose private lives are impacted by more general societal viewpoints.

Desai is renowned for reflecting the inner emotions of her characters through the use of vivid imagery and symbolism, especially those associated with nature. The emotional terrain of her characters is frequently portrayed through her pictures. Similar symbolism is used by Imayam, especially in the way he mirrors his characters' emotional and psychological states through the use of animals, rural settings, and other natural aspects. Both *Beasts of Burden* and *Fire on the Mountain* are moving examinations of both individual and societal hardships that provide deep understanding of women's life. Imayam's work concentrates on social realism and caste discrimination, whereas Desai's tends toward psychological and existential topics within an upper-middle-class setting. Notwithstanding these variations, both writers are dedicated to capturing resilience, estrangement, and the personal cost of social expectations.

Introduction to Anita Desai

Diaspora literature is written by writers living outside their homeland and characterised by alienation, isolation, nostalgia, search for identity, and constant displacement of the self. It deals with migrant consciousness and focuses on the life of migrants and their internal and external conflicts in a foreign land. Displacement, fragmentation, marginalization, identity and cultural conflicts and others such issues faced by migrants are themes widely reflected in contemporary Indian writing in English. By portraying these themes along with multiculturalism and universal aspects of human existence, diasporic literature occupies a prominent place in world literature.

Anita Desai is one of the most influential novelists in Indian literature in English. She has won the Sahitya Academy Award for the novel *Fire on the Mountain* in 1978. She has presented in her work female characters and the problems they face in a patriarchal society. Women have been given a secondary place since ancient times and there has been a need for women to fight for their rights. Even in western countries, women had to wage a long battle for the right to vote, and equal pay for equal work. Women are victimized in many countries. Their voice for equality began as a socio-political development, which slowly gained momentum with advancements in different fields, including writing. Feminists share a deep concern about the portrayal of women in writing and women's mental struggles and problems that were brought before the public, raising significant issues regarding the portrayal of women in literature.

Nanda Kaul's Longing for a Quiet life

Anita Desai is an adept in dealing with the lonely experiences of women characters. The novel *Fire on the Mountain*, deals with the protagonist Nanda Kaul's experiences in her journey from adulthood to old age. She was the wife of the Vice Chancellor of a university. She became weary of her responsibilities and loveless life. After the death of her husband, she moved to Kasauli to live a quiet life. In spite of her old age she wanted to live alone inher isolated cottage at Carignano in Kasauli, a mountain in India.

Embracing solitude in silence, Nanda Kaul lived in harmony with nature. She enjoyed the moments of gentle breeze weaving her thoughts and ideas together in peace to make these magical moments unforgettable. She saw the birds fighting and playing with each other; listened to the chirping of birds and the fluttering of wings and kept thinking. The rustling of the leaves in the gentle breeze created a warm feeling inside her.

> She had practised this stillness, this composure, for years, for an hour every afternoon: it was an art, not easily acquired. The most difficult had been those years in that busy house where doors were never shut, and feet flew, or tramped, without ceasing. She remembered how she had tried to shut out sound by shutting out light, how she had spent the sleepless hour making out the direction from which a shout came, or a burst of giggles, an ominous growling from the dogs, the spray of gravel under bicycle wheels on the drive, a contest of squirrels over the guavas in the orchard, the dry rattle of eucalyptus leaves in the sun, a drop, then spray and rush of water from a tap. All was subdued, but nothing was ever still. (Anita Desai 1977: 33-34)

Since she enjoyed her solitude, she was determined to be alone and became annoyed when her privacy was disturbed by the visit of the postman or the maid.

Nanda Kaul's house was simple, with open windows and white walls. Rising to the top of the slope in her garden, she observed with bitterness as the postman lumbered towards Carignano, a bored kid bopping beside him. She saw the postman coming up the hill, fearing that he might deliver a letter and ruin her quiet time. Nanda Kaul averted her gaze. She enjoyed being in her house surrounded by natural objects and the author narrates beautifully her experience in Carignano:

> Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli. Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quite house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life – as she realized on her first day at Carignano, with a great, cool flowering of relief –and at last she had it. She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction. (Anita Desai 1977:13)

Raka's Arrival: an Intrusion

Nanda Kaul's grand-daughter Tarahad a violent and philandering spouse in Rakesh; so she became an

unhappy and worried woman who frequently experienced mental breakdowns. Tara's daughter Raka is another important character in the novel. As she apprehended, the letter Nanda Kaul received from the postman was from her daughter Asha, requesting her to take care of her granddaughter Raka, the great-granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. Raka was recovering from typhoid, but her despondent mother Tara was heading to Geneva to try to reconcile with her violent and harsh diplomat husband Rakesh. Desai explains the situation:

> Tara's husband was given a new posting... in Geneva, and Asha had persuaded her daughter to go with him, to give him another chance. There was the little problem of their child who was only just recovering from a near-fatal attack of typhoid, but Asha was sure they would find a way to deal with this minor problem. The main thing, she had trumpeted, was for Tara to rouse herself and make another try at being a successful diplomat's wife. Surely Geneva would be an excellent place for such an effort. (Anita Desai 1977: 24)

Asha would not be able to take Raka with her because she had to rush to" Bombay at the end of the month to help Vina [her daughter] with her confinement" (Anita Desai 1977:25). Hence, she requested her mother, Nanda Kaul, to look after Raka.

The novel reflects on the silence and solitude of the old woman Nanda Kaul's deserted life and the anguish that follows. After the demise of her husband, she shifted to Kausali, far from the city, in search of happiness and peace among the hills and pinecones. Asha's news about her granddaughter Raka coming over to her, disturbed Nanda Kaul's peaceful seclusion and she was irritated in the beginning. She wanted to stay away from everyone to be alone in Carignano, as she no longer wished to continue with her responsibilities or ties. But Asha's letter about Raka's arrival annoyedher. It is worthwhile to make a note of Sartre's views in this regard: "Existence is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance: it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart like a great motionless beast—or else there is nothing more at all" (Sartre 1969: 177).

Nanda Kaul wish to Escape from her Unhappy Past

Nanda Kaul, before coming to Carignano, led an unhappy life since her patriarchal husband was indifferent to her. She never enjoyed her married life. To add to her sufferings, she discovered that her husband, who was the Vice Chancellor of the university, was having an affair with Miss David, a mathematics teacher. Nanda wanted to be alone, away from his pointless existence. Desai depicts Nanda Kaul's life as a continuous internal struggle–Nanda Kaul's husband never showed any affection to her but was bent on getting the responsibilities related to his position fulfilled. He was so greedy and treacherous that he wanted Nanda Kaul to assume the role of the ever-loving hostess, to amuse the visitors in the dining room by sitting atop a large table draped in silk. He wanted to show off that he had a good family. Nanda Kaul suffered silently because of his fastidious nature. But even after his

death and her move to Carginano to live her own life, things did not go smoothly for her. When she did not want any disturbance or intrusion, the letter from her daughter came announcing the arrival of Raka.

Nanda Kaul became worried when she got the news from her daughter Asha about the visit of her great granddaughter. When she needed freedom and a peaceful environment, the letter came to disturb her. Her expression changed as she read her daughter's letter. Jean Paul Sartre's words from his work *Nausea* rightly fit in while describing her condition: "I want to leave, to go somewhere where I should be really in my place, where I would fit in… but my place is nowhere; I am unwanted. . . ." (Sartre 1969: 164). Her great- granddaughter would come to spoil her solitude.

Raka seeking Solace in Nature

Despite her innocent appearance, Raka is a quiet girl who disliked being around others. Being the daughter of an abusive and cruel father, who was also an alcoholic, Raka became despondent and lonely even at her young age. She saw her father hitting her mother brutally. As Anamika Majhi points out in her article" The Marital Discord: an Analytical Study in Anita Desai's Novels *Fire on the Mountain*",

> Visible reasons why married couples find marriage as an intimidating bond is that they face issues like lack of trust, mutual respect, love and understanding in their relationship. It is thus clear that catastrophe in the married world of Anita Desai's fiction arises basically because of unreliable incompatibility. What Desai pleads is a balance, a midway between the two extremes of practicality and fantasy and that is the only way to arrive at a fruitful solution of the problem of marital discord. This is an issue which is cause of anxiety to all times. (Anamika Majhi 2018: 515)

The lack of parental love drove Raka lonely, and she found consolation in the world of nature. The desolate, dilapidated, and barren landscapes of Kasauli, reflected her inner turmoil and hence drew her in.

Woman's Pivotal Role in Family

Anita Desai highlights the agony of women due to the torture given by various members of the family and society. Married women are chained and burdened with all kinds of heavy responsibilities throughout their life. Women plan and work tirelessly for the welfare of the family. Their unconditional love, uncompromising care and untainted affection make the family chariot move forward. The happy journey of a family begins with the embrace of a woman who is an elegant wife, a caring mother, and a humble daughter-in-law who fulfils all her duties. The journey becomes triumphant due to the greatness of a magical mother. Desai presents the internal conflicts of the female character fighting against the odds. As a female novelist, Desai has carved a niche for herself by exploring the emotional

world of women and bringing to light various deep forces in female consciousness and psychology.

The arrival of her granddaughter Raka was like an intrusion in Nanda Kaul's peaceful life. Memories of the unpleasant past and the unhappy and burden some tasks Nanda Kaul had carried out emerged now and then and filled her with pain. She had always been busy with thankless, endless household chores. Her memories reminded her of the hectic life she had been leading in those days – sewing, sweeping, cleaning, supervising the cooking, instructing the servants, caring for the three children, and receiving her husband's guests.

On the outside, Nanda Kaul enjoyed the comforts and social status of a leader's wife: but deep down, she felt lonely, dissatisfied and neglected. She was a dutiful wife who met the needs of her husband and children. But the relationship between the husband and wife was strained. His extra-marital relationship with Miss David was a factor in the unhealthy relationship. Emotional deprivation was the root of Nanda Kaul's disillusionment with life. Her husband did not love her as a wife but regarded her as a necessary tool to run his family effectively. Even after knowing about the illicit relationship, she did not confront her husband but suffered pain in silence. She was entirely under the control of her husband. The author vividly paints the traumatic married life of Nanda Kaul, who is a representative of Indian women who live their lives for their children, husbands, family and society. Rajnesh Kumar, in his article titled "Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Exploration" brings out the themes of Anita Desai in the following manner: "Anita Desai's exploration of female identity stands as a central theme in herbody of work, reflecting a keen understanding of the intricate nuances that shape women's lives with in the context of Indian society. Throughout her novels, Desai crafts narratives that delve into the complexities of female protagonists grappling with questions of identity, autonomy, and societal expectations" (Rajnesh Kumar 2024: 412).

Women in Male-dominated Society

In a world dominated by men, women's likes, desires, and talents are buried deep in their hearts. Women's wishes are brought to the notice of others only at times by authorities who can scan their minds and hearts from different angles and circumstances. Anita Desai is an avid reader of women's thoughts. When Nanda Kaul wanted to settle in a peaceful place, free from the shackles of endless duties and responsibilities, she was called upon to care for, comfort, and communicate with another human being, her granddaughter Raka. The news of her arrival upset her. M.K. Subashini in her article "Alienation and Isolation in the Novel, *Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai" compares Nanda Kaul's life in Carignanoto a river." Her life at Carignano can be rightly compared to the surface of the river which is very clear and it reflects isolation. The arrival of the granddaughter is like a stone thrown on the surface of river where her isolation is disturbed forming ripples" (M.K. Subashini 2014: 3).

Nanda Kaul's childhood friend Illa Das came to Carignanoto see Raka. After losing her employment at the university, she became an officer in the social welfare department. She had been working to prevent child marriages by educating the community about the drawbacks of the custom. Preet Singh, the father of a local child bride, raped and killed Ila Das, when she protested against his plan of getting his seven-year-old daughter married to an old man. Nanda Kaul was devastated when she learnt about Illa Das' death. Unaware of her great- grandmother's death, Raka hurried inside the house and exclaimed to everyone that she had started a fire in the forest.

In *Fire on the Mountain* Anita Desai addresses women's issues like suffering, subjugation and putting up with violence. The novel depicts Anita Desai's tragic philosophy of life, according to which decent people pay a heavy price for their goodness and endure unending suffering. The novel becomes a symbol of purging and devastation, of a cruel world full of countless women like Nanda Kaul, Tara and Ila Das, of unfair circumstances where women bear the brunt of tragedy, societal injustices, and injustices inflicted upon them by a barbaric culture of males. Women have made significant progress in the modern era compared to earlier periods, but they still have to go a long way.

Desai delves into the internal struggles and consciousness of her characters, often portraying their emotions and thoughts with profound sensitivity. Her narratives frequently explore themes of loneliness, identity, and the search for meaning in life. This psychological focus sets her apart from many contemporary Indian authors. Her prose is often poetic and layered with symbolism. Nature plays a recurring role in her narratives, serving both as a backdrop and a metaphor for her characters' emotional states. Example: In *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), the stark and isolating beauty of the Himalayan landscape mirrors Nanda Kaul's desire for solitude and detachment from the world.

Desai often examines existential dilemmas, portraying characters who grapple with their place in the world, their relationships, and their inner conflicts. These themes resonate with urban, educated readers familiar with modernist literature. She is deeply concerned with the lives of Indian women, particularly their struggles within rigid familial and societal structures. Her portrayal of gendered experiences is both empathetic and critical.

Desai's narratives often centre on middle-class or upper-class Indian families, focusing on their psychological and emotional challenges rather than systemic issues like caste or poverty. Example: Her characters, like Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, often come from privileged backgrounds, and the stories emphasize their personal struggles rather than broader social inequalities. Her writing style emphasizes introspection over action, favouring the development of mood and atmosphere. The slow, reflective pace allows readers to immerse themselves in the characters' inner worlds. Thus when Desai is concerned with the inner world of the characters, Imayam focuses more on the physical struggles and mental anguish felt by his characters.

Nancy Poornima, in the article titled "The Unheard Screams of Dalit Women in Imayam's '*Beast of Burden*'" states,

> ... through the character Arokkyam, we realise a Dalit woman untold pains, who experiences physical assaults, verbal abuse and sexual abuse. We could see the helpless pathetic condition which results in depression, loss of confidence, anxiety and fear for future. Some people fight back to bring betterment in their life and some fail to bring it. Imayam's '*Beast of Burden*' clearly conveys the far cry of the dalit woman in a washerman community. Dalit women are trapped in patriarchal societies; they face severe social discrimination as a dalit and a woman and deny them freedom in all spheres of life. Her screams and worries were unheard and unnoticed by anybody. (Nancy Poornima 2019: 957)

Introduction to *Beasts of Burden*

When the state of women and their sufferings are portrayed by a woman novelist from the perspective of a woman, it is interesting to note that writer Imayam also presents the condition and struggles of women in society. With his keen observation and insight, he is able to present the events that happen in the lives of women along with their experiences in a very realistic manner. Imayam's first book, *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* was published in 1994 with an intense depiction of casteism. Kazhuthai is associated with Vannan and Vannati, who are washermen. They live in places reserved for them doing this washing for generations. *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* translated into English as *Beasts of Burden*, depicts the life of the poverty-stricken Dalits, the way they lead their lives and meet their basic needs in a caste-oriented society. The novel, *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* accurately portrays the lifestyle of a low-caste woman, Arokkyam, and her family. Arokkyam used to participate in all the good and bad happenings in the village. Her help proved invaluable when girls attained puberty and women during their labour. Arokkyam's family also had certain responsibilities during funerals in the village.

Arokkyam and her Family

The novel is structured around two journeys undertaken by the protagonist Arokkyam – a pilgrimage of faith and a routine trip to her usual washing pond. The story begins with her pilgrimage to St. Anthony's Church, a journey of hope. Arokkyam's longtime dream was to go to that church. She went to the upper-class house, where she was working to get permission. Though they refused her permission at first, she managed to get permission to go to the church along with her husband, son, and daughter. When they reached the church, they could not find the priest there and were told that the priest would come in the afternoon. Arokkyam was upset. The author describes her condition in the following manner. 'Arokkyam refused to eat. Her heart was heavy. It always turned out like this when she came to this church. As soon as she had heard that the priest was not there, her hopes had wilted away. She took it as an ill omen' (Imayam 2019:30). Despiteall her troubles, her dream remained unfulfilled.

Sufferings of Dalit Women

The Dalit women have historically experienced persistent sexual assault and harassment. Rather than being considered real, flesh-and-blood humans, they are seen as objects to be toyed with. Chadayan, an upper-caste man in the novel was free to do as he pleased. Mary, Arokkyam's daughter was abused by him. One day, when her mother was unwell, she went to every house in the street to collect clothes. Then Chadayan, who belonged to an upper caste, raped her. Though she struggled against him, he did not let her go. Mary was in agony as to whom she could tell this incident. She wept for a long time. Chastity was the only thing that was hers, and she could not protect that also. She cried bitterly. Later, when she came to her mother, Arokkyam guessed what could have happened to her daughter, and started crying. Even though there were men in their house, they could not do anything against such things, because they belonged to lower caste. The writer brings out Mary's condition in the following manner:

> Arokkyam asked Mary whether she would light the wood stove and make a little gruel. Mary was extremely exhausted and weary. She washed her swollen face, she left the house and came outside only after it had darkened completely. She sat down in front of the stove, still in tears. In the light of the burning stove, her face looked anguished. She cooked a handful of rice, making gruel for Arokkyam alone. The evening's collection of food would be sufficient for Savuri and Peter. Savuri ... called out to Mary three times ... It was only at the fourth call that Mary heard him. As if she had come to herself at last, she came to the threshold of the house. (Imayam 2019:130)

The Dalits are left helpless. They cannot do anything against in the upper caste people, even if they are insulted or ill-treated. Rashida Manjoo, in her report points out the condition of Dalit women: "The reality of Dalit women and girls is one of exclusion and marginalization.... They are often victims of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence. They are often displaced; pushed into forced and/or bonded labour, prostitution and trafficking" (Rashida Manjoo: 2013). Besides being homemakers, women go out to work to help run their families without any financial strains. In their work places, they may be sexually harassed; at home they may have to put up with alcoholic husbands.

Due to triple oppression—based on caste, class, and gender—Dalit women suffer particular challenges that are highlighted by Dalit feminist theory. Dalit feminist theory emphasizes the unique social, economic, and cultural difficulties faced by Dalit women, whereas mainstream feminist thought frequently focuses on the hardships of upper-caste women. Dalit women face discrimination not only because they belong to a lower caste but also because they are women and frequently live in poverty. Caste, gender, and class all contribute to the double or triple marginalization of Dalit women. The life of Arokkyam is an example of this triple oppression as she suffers in the hands of her husband and

upper caste people for whom she washes clothes and due to her poverty. Her daughter Mary also suffers harassment as she could not struggle against the upper caste people.

Arokkyam thrust into Existence

Arokkyam remained ignorant of many things happening in the world. She lived her entire life for her children. As Jean Paul Sartre says in his *Nausea*" I am the one who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire: the hatred, the disgust of existing, there are as many ways to make myself exist, to thrust myself into existence" (Sartre 1969: 99), Arokkyam did everything for her family without which she could not survive. She endured all hardships and pains for the sake of the family. Even small children would call Arokkyam a "Vannati woman". She did not get angry because she thought that it was beyond their humble community. Moreover, she had to do her job in peace. When Arokkyam developed such kind of tolerance, her son Peter was fed up with the kind of life they were leading. The following conversation between Arokkyam and Peter reveals that.

Why don't we just finish with this business once and for all?'

'Now what's the matter?'

'We'll ask people to give us our wages properly, in money.'

'Is that likely to happen?'

'And why not?'

'Do you think this is something that was set up yesterday or today?'

'Then why can't we keep a shop like my brother does?'

"Do you think we come from a line of Rajas to act out our wishes? We are people who can't so much as change our loincloths". (Imayam 2019:36)

Sufferings of the Marginalised women

These people did not have any time for themselves. They were always at the disposal of others. When Arokkyam and her husband Savuri were sleeping, Ramasamy, the Panchayat Joint President and Colony President, who belonged to the upper class, called on them. It was before the first light of dawn and Arokkyam was still half asleep. She could not recognize the caller in the darkness. She shook Savuri awake. 'Wake up, da, useless fool,' (Imayam 2019: 47) shouted Ramasamy. Savuri woke up startled. Savuri was deeply disturbed. For a moment his mind raced and they wondered why Ramasamy had come. Savuri and Arokkyam could not have any time, which they can call their own.

When Arokkyam's son Peter wanted to go to Madras, she criedover her son; she always worried about her daughter Mary. During Pongalshe felt sad because none of her children were with her. "She would be a mere corpse hereafter, abandoned by everyone, no one at all at her side. Who was there left to be her comfort? First Josep went away. Then Mary was gone. If peter too should go?...and why

should he stay? Had they all actually planned to isolate her like this? And would the townsfolk stand for it?" (Imayam 2019: 223)

Arokkyam's daughter Mary also had her troubles and difficulties. She married her aunt's son, Diraviyaraj, and was taken to his village. Mary gave birth to a boy. Two years later her husband, Diraviyaraj died of a snake bite and Mary returned to her mother's village with her child. She joined her mother washing clothes and household chores. Arokkyam became heartbroken since she did not seem to have any relief from her sufferings.

Arokkyam had great affection for her village and people and treated them as her relatives. Moreover, her children had gone to different places and hence she was isolated from everyone. She says, "Throughout my life I believed my children were everything to me. I don't need wealth, or comforts, or a big mansion. To this day, there is breath in my body only because of the thought that my children are about me. If it were not for them, I'd give up my life in an instant, saami" (Imayam 2019:222).

Arokkyam's Attempt to Rise above her Problems

When Nanda Kaul wanted to be away from human beings and human ties, Arokkyam wanted to be surrounded by her children. One became frustrated and despondent due to her experiences and relationships, the other one cherished her family ties. Arokkyam's work was on the wane, and new changes came to her village. A new laundry shop and tailor shops had also come up. Due to this, her career declined, and she became very depressed. She was tired of thinking about the change that came to the village; the villagers seldom searched for her.

Arokkyam woke up at midnight and broke into a loud lament. First she wept for Josep, then for May, and then again for Peter. She sang her laments in turn. She castigated the laundry man and the tailor. She wept aloud saying it was because of them that her family had scattered and fallen upon evil days. She complained about the townsfolk. At last she railed against Savuri for not allowing her to go and see Sahayam's child nor even to visit Mary. She wept until it was morning at last. (Imayam 2019: 291)

As a washerman, Savuri's father was unaware of how they initially arrived at that place. Given that Savuri established himself as the village's only was her man. At the novel's end, Arokkyam was seen carrying Mary's baby on her hip trying to hide her tears. Her daughter, Mary, followed from behind, and Savuri was leading the way. They kept disappearing as they walked. Neither their shadow, northeir footprints could be seen. "As they walked further and further, they looked like dark shadows. Then those shadows too diminished. They appeared as mere dots. Gradually the dots merged. A single dot. Even that diminished, disappeared. Like the bare sky, the horizon stretched, endless. Then just space. Empty space" (Imayam 2019: 332). This is the way of human life.

Comparison of the two writers

Anita Desai's and Imayam's female characters from the chosen works were analysed in terms of their choice, existence, and other aspects using the notions of existentialism. The leading existentialist figures are Arokkyam, Mary, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Asha, and Tara. Jean-Paul Sartre's views on existentialism are used in the analysis of the characters. Existentialism, which is dealt extensively with alienation, fear, absurdity, prejudice, escapism, and an overwhelming need for liberation, began influencing nearly all modern-day writers. Novelist Anita Desai, demonstrates a strong preference for the existentialist understanding of the human condition in *Fire on the Mountain*. Not only Nanda Kaul, but Raka, and Ila Das also suffer from loneliness and boredom. Similarly Arokkyam also suffers due to loneliness, lack of freedom and caste oppression. However, Nanda Kaul and Arokkyam try to find the purpose of their life.

Desai's work has been praised for its eloquence and depth but critiqued for its limited engagement with broader socio-political issues, such as caste and poverty. Her focus on elite and urban perspectives contrasts with the works of authors like Imayam, who foregrounds marginalized voices, Dalit experiences, particularly those of women, in a way that amplifies their resilience and humanity. His characters often fight against oppressive societal norms, highlighting their agency despite systemic barriers. His writing is informed by the traditions, dialects, and cultural nuances of rural Tamil Nadu, adding authenticity to his storytelling. Imayam's work explores the intersections of caste and gender, portraying how these identities compound oppression. His narratives often feature strong women characters like Arokkyam who challenge societal norms. By centring on Dalit women, his stories highlight their dual marginalization and their resilience in navigating oppressive systems.

The marginalization of characters is portrayed by both authors, although in distinct settings. Desai examines how women are emotionally and psychologically isolated in privileged yet constricting family and social settings. Imayam draws attention to the structural oppression that Dalits, and especially Dalit women, endure, highlighting their battles with prejudice based on gender and caste. The oppressed are given a voice in both situations, which promotes social awareness and empathy.

Conclusion

The present study explores the social reality of women's condition and explains the various forms of violence they face. The way caste, class and gender play a fundamental role in Indian society, has a history of organized violence against oppressed gender, caste and class communities in recent centuries. In most rural areas, streets, houses and neighbourhoods are organized primarily according to one's caste, class and religion. The present paper, thus tries to analyse the condition and struggles of women and how they undergo physical violence and mental trauma, in a gender based society in Anitha

Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* and in a caste – ridden society in Imayam's novel *Beasts of Burden.*

With thought-provoking and frequently ambiguous endings, his novels examine the human condition in profoundly nuanced and frequently unnerving ways. His books do not provide easy answers to the issues they raise, but reveal the ingrained oppressive structures that impact his characters' lives, implying that although individual endeavours could offer a certain amount of comfort or self-satisfaction, the larger socio-political systems essentially remain the same. The endings of Imayam's books frequently function as a critique of society and personal stagnation, giving the reader the impression that although progress is gradual and hampered, the fight for equality and dignity is still essential.Women instead of succumbing to the circumstances, should rise above them and become empowered.

References

- Anamika Majhi, 2018. 'The Marital Discord: an Analytical Study in Anita Desai's Novels *Fire on the Mountain'. Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 5 (12): 512 – 515.
- Arulselesteen Prema, A. 2015. "From Limits to Liminal Spaces a Study of Select Works of Sivakami and Imayam." Inflibnet.ac.in.
- Baveja Devi, Kumari. 2023. "An Ecocritical Study of Anita Desai's Novel Fire on the Mountain." *Res Militaris European Journal of Military Studies*, (13).
- Brindha, S., Dr. Ramya, S., & Ragupathi, K. 2021. "An Echo of Cultural Embellishments of Dalits: with reference to Imayam's Beasts of Burden." *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, (25): 17669 – 17675.
- Desai, Anita. 1997. Fire on the Mountain. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.
- Imayam. 1994. Beasts of Burden. Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom. 2019: Niyogi Books.
- Jain, Nandita. 2021. "The Fragmented World in Anita Desai's Novel, Fire on the Mountain." *International Educational Scientific Research Journal*, 7 (6).
- Jayakumar, R. Deivasigamani, T. 2022. "Victimisation of Marginalised People: A Study of Imayam's Beasts of Burden." *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6 (4): 6826 – 6836.
- Kumar, G, & K Ravichandran. 2021. "The Subjugated and Disordered lives Of Dalits in Imayam's Beasts of Burden Novel." *SP Publications International Journal of English and Studies*, (3): 158–162.
- Kumar, Kiran. 2022. "Honour as Discourse a Select Study of the Novels of Perumal Murugan and Imayam." Inflibnet.ac.in,
- Majeed Dar, Dr. Ab. 2015. "Isolation in Wilderness: A Protest against Social Norms in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain", *An International Journal in English*. https://www.the-criterion.com/isolation-in-wilderness-a-protest-against-social-norms-in-anita-desais-fire-on-the-mountain/.
- Majhi Anamika, 2018. "The Marital Discord: an Analytical Study in Anita Desai's Novels Fire on the Mountain." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, (5): 515.

- Manjoo Rashida, 2013. "Side-Event: Dalit women: Working together towards the elimination of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence based on gender and caste." UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.
- Nancy Poornima, N. 2019. "The Unheard Screams of Dalit woman in Imayam's 'Beast Of Burden." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research,* (6): 953 –957.
- Rajnesh Kumar. 2024. "Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Exploration. EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research**,** 10 (1): 412.
- Sathya Priya, S. 2015. "Caste and Gender Exploitation in the Select Novels of Queen Mary Imayam." Inflibnet.ac.in.
- Subashini, M. K. 2014. "Alienation and Isolation in the Novel, Fire on the Mountain by Anita Desai," *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, 2 (11): 1 – 6.
- Sandra Day O'Connor, Address to the 1990 Sixteenth Annual Olin Conference: "Women in Power" 1990
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1938. *Nausea*. Translated by Alexander, Lloyd. 1969. New Directions.

Bio Profile of the Authors:

[1]Ph.D. Scholar
&
[2]Professor, Department of English
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women. Coimbatore-43
E-mail: 21phenf003@avinuty.ac.in,
kalamani_eng@avinuty.ac.in

Historical Development of English as a Second Language in Nagaland: A Perspective from a Multilingual Society

Kethokhrienuo Belho

Abstract

This paper delves into two key aspects of the English language in Nagaland. Firstly, it provides an overview of the historical development of English, tracing its origins back to the arrival of Christian missionaries during the colonial era. Secondly, it explores the factors that led to the elevation of English as a second language and its eventual establishment as the sole official language of the State. This examination of the journey of English in Nagaland includes insights from a multilingual society and an analysis of its current status. The study draws upon secondary sources such as books, theses, and journals to gain a deeper understanding of the development of English in an indigenous reserved community. Furthermore, the paper considers the impact of Christianity and education in fostering the growth of the English language in Nagaland. Through a review of the literature and an analysis of the complexities within a multilingual society, the study concludes that a multilingual society like Nagaland facilitates the establishment of foreign languages with relative ease. Intriguingly, the study also reveals that languages not associated with the local cultural identity can become the official language, thus reinforcing the notion that complex tribal linguistic communities are sensitive to language dynamics. This sensitivity can lead these communities to prioritise and promote a foreign language over languages indigenous to other tribes.

Keywords: *education, Christianity, multilingual, missionaries*

1. Introduction

1.1. Brief History of the Nagas

Nagaland is known for its diverse socio-linguistic settings and is considered one of the most diverse states in India. The state's creation was based on linguistic considerations following the recommendations of the State Reorganization Committee in 1956. In 1962, the Indian Parliament passed an Act to formally include Nagaland as a state, and in 1963, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the second President of India, officially declared it the 16th state of India. The Nagas, an indigenous ethnic group primarily located in Nagaland, with communities in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam, have a

rich history as independent tribes governed by their customs and councils. British colonialism and the introduction of Christianity in the 19th century transformed Naga society, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity that blends traditional customs with modern influences. This unity fuelled the Naga political movement for autonomy, culminating in Nagaland's statehood in 1963, although political struggles continued. Today, the Nagas maintain a vibrant cultural heritage and have embraced the English language as the sole official language of the State.

1.2. Overview of Naga Languages

The Naga languages are part of the Tibeto-Burman language family but are not a homogeneous group, exhibiting significant differences and being mutually unintelligible. Burling (2003), Grierson (1903-1928), and Morrison (1967) significantly contributed to the classification of Naga languages and the understanding of their variety. The Nagaland state government currently recognizes 18 Naga indigenous languages. The State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) is primarily responsible for developing educational materials to preserve and promote these languages. Tenyidie, Sumi, Ao, and Lotha are taught up to the high school level, with Tenyidie also used for offering PhD at Nagaland University. According to Ezung (2017), there are approximately 85 indigenous languages spoken in Nagaland. This estimate is based on recognised languages and their dialectal variations. Nagaland designates English as the official language and Nagamese as the lingua franca, while Hindi and Sanskrit are also included in the school curriculum. Sachdeva (2001) describes Nagaland as one of the most complex sociolinguistic settings globally, with a population of 1.9 million offering such diverse culture and language, comprising approximately 60 Naga languages and dialects, which are genetically related but mutually unintelligible. The Nagaland Government's official portal showcases its rich linguistic diversity, with each tribe having its distinct language and various dialects. The state government recognizes 17 tribes and 18 languages, including dialects.

Table1. State-recognized Naga languages

Tenyidie	Kheza	Zeme	Konyak	Chokri
Ao	Sangtam	Liangmai	Khiamniungan	Phom
Lotha	Yimchunger	Pochury	Nthenyi	Kuki
Sumi	Chang	Nzokhwen		

(Editedsource: https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/people-culture)

2. Historical Development of English as a Second Language

To understand English as a second language in India, referring to an established model is helpful. Kachru (1985) presented a compelling classification known as **Kachru's Three Circles of World English**, which has become a prominent framework for categorizing the varieties of English worldwide. Kachru's model consists of three groupings:

The Inner Circle: This category includes countries where English is the primary language, or, in simpler terms, where English is the first language. Countries such as England and the United States are part of this group.

The Outer Circle: This category encompasses countries where English is not the first language but has been adopted as a second language and plays a significant role in the country's institutions. Countries like India and Singapore fall into this category due to their history of British colonization, which has integrated English into their societies.

The Expanding Circle: This refers to regions where English is learned as a foreign language. Countries such as Japan and China are examples of this circle, where British colonization did not occur, and English serves solely as a foreign language for international communication.

As mentioned above, India is classified within the Outer Circle of Kachru's model, where English functions as a second language and plays a significant role in various sectors of society, including education, government, and business.

2.1. English from a Foreign Language to a Second Language

The history of the English language in India is a fascinating story of cultural and linguistic transformation. In a multilingual nation, English has emerged as a dominant language, and its popularity continues to rise still today. While tracing the history of languages that have influenced mainland India, we find that foreign languages have significantly impacted and shaped the country in every sphere. During the pre-colonial period, the Persian language was predominant until it was replaced by English.

English, which was introduced by the colonial rulers, managed to establish a strong foothold in India for several reasons, with linguistic diversity being a key factor in its success. Although Hindi was a strong contender among Indian languages striving to become the national language, no single language has become the dominant language in India. To this day, Hindi and English are the two official languages of India, as per Article 343 of the Indian Constitution. The educational policies under colonial rule significantly strengthened the presence of English in India. In particular, Lord Macaulay's educational policies of 1835 aimed to create a class of people who could serve as intermediaries between the British and Indians and to develop a group of Indians who were "Indian in

blood but English in their outlook, morals, and intellect." These policies ultimately gave rise to a new class of intellectuals responsible for the making of modern India. Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" strongly advocated for the importance of English in education, stating that "Indians cannot be educated using their mother tongue."

In 1854, Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, sent the "Wood's Despatch" to Governor-General Lord Dalhousie. This document declared that the English language is to be the medium of instruction in the higher branches, and the vernacular in the lower. English is to be taught where there is demand for it, but it is not to be substituted for the vernacular languages of the country. The system of grant-in-aid is to be based on the principle of perfect religious neutrality.

This was perhaps the formal introduction of English in education, which is often referred to as the "Magna Carta" of Indian education for its recommendations that provided a new direction for education in India. After gaining independence, the growing popularity of English raised concerns about national identity. In 1950, Hindi was selected as the sole official language of the Union of India, while English was given the status of an "assistant" language, meant to be phased out after 15 years. However, the demand for English increased, as did the approval from educated Indians, further contributing to its development.

Additionally, the apprehension of non-Hindi speakers, who neither accepted nor supported the dominance of Hindi, led to tensions. This pressure prompted the government to enact the Official Language Act in 1963, elevating the status of English from "Assistant" to "Associate Language" indefinitely. The Indian Education Commission (1964-1966), also known as the Kothari Commission, further empowered the role of English by recommending its promotion from the school level and emphasising the strengthening of English in higher education.

2.2. Development of English in Nagaland

For the State of Nagaland, English is a direct product of colonisation but was introduced differently compared to mainland India. While English in India replaced and competed with established languages like Persian and Hindi, in Nagaland, it blended seamlessly into the education system without significant resistance. This acceptance was partly due to the lack of a common language among the Naga tribes.

Initially, there was limited documentation on early education in Nagaland, with missionary accounts being the primary sources. Kiremwati (1995) and Aier (2012) provide significant insights into this period. Education and the introduction of English were primarily driven by British colonial efforts and American missionaries. Aier noted that the Nagas owe their modern education more to the missionaries than the British. The British, unable to fully penetrate the tribal regions due to fierce resistance, invited American Baptist missionaries, who successfully evangelized and introduced

education. The advent of Christianity marked a new era for the Nagas, ending practices like headhunting and fostering a sense of unity and identity among the tribes. The first efforts of formal education began with American missionaries like Mrs. Mary Clark, who opened a school in the Ao area in 1878, and Rev. C.D. King, who established a school in Kohima in 1879. By 1941, the government and the missions jointly opened the first high school in Kohima, with private schools following by 1943. The missionaries were instrumental in creating written literature for the Nagas, with significant contributions from figures like the Clarks and Rev. Revenberg, who standardized languages using the Roman script.

English was introduced through mission schools not as a primary focus but as a tool for spreading Christianity. Missionaries recognized the need for an alternative language for education while developing tribal languages, with English serving as a suitable option due to its availability and global significance. By 1945, English had become the medium of instruction in government schools, demonstrating its integration into Nagaland's education system.

English's continued prominence in Nagaland is largely due to the absence of a dominant local language, allowing it to become a common and indispensable language for connecting Nagas to the modern world. Despite being a foreign language, English was embraced by the Naga society, who recognised its value without strong resistance.

2.3. Leading Factors Contributing to the Growth and Development of English in Nagaland

a) Absence of a Common Language: The growth of English in Nagaland can be attributed largely to the absence of a common Naga language. Language diversity is a defining feature of Naga society, with each tribe maintaining its own distinct linguistic and cultural identity. No single tribal language dominates over another, as no tribe is willing to accept another tribe's language as a representative common language. In this scenario, English, as a neutral and foreign language that does not represent any particular tribe, was accepted with minimal resistance. This acceptance has allowed English to become a unifying medium for communication and education.

b) Education: Education is a primary factor in the widespread adoption of English in Nagaland. Traditionally, education among the Nagas was conducted through youth dormitories called "Morungs," where life skills and cultural values were taught. With the introduction of modern formal education, English naturally became the primary medium of instruction, compelling students to learn the language as they pursued education.

c) Mixed Marriages: Inter-tribe marriages, especially in urban areas, have contributed to the growth of English as children from these marriages often learn English as their first language. This trend among educated urban Nagas has increased the popularity and use of English in daily life.

d) Government Role: In 1967, the Nagaland Assembly declared English as the state's official language, making it the sole medium for education and administration. This governmental endorsement not

only solidified the development of English but also emphasized its importance as a language of learning and governance.

e) Media Influence: Media, including music, movies, newspapers, and videos, play a significant role in the growth and popularity of English in Nagaland. English-language media is well-received among the Nagas, further boosting the language's popularity and use. As English content becomes more accessible and prevalent, it continues to reinforce English as a vital part of Naga society.

3. Contemporary Status of the English Language

English in India today symbolizes aspirations for quality education and broader participation in both national and international arenas (NCERT, 2006). The introduction of English reflects a political response to these aspirations, rendering academic debates on its early introduction almost irrelevant. As the most dominant global language, English is the first language in many developed countries, the second language in numerous developing countries like India, and a foreign language for many others. It serves as the official language for international bodies such as the UN, UNESCO, and the World Bank, and dominates media, trade, and education. English has become synonymous with modernization and is rightly regarded as a global language.

A 2004 U.S. survey named India the country with the largest English-speaking population worldwide (Crystal, 2004). In Indian society, English plays a crucial role in education and national life (Patel & Jain, 2008). The language has fostered a new intellectual class, including bureaucrats, elites, politicians, and educators, strengthening its foothold in India. A report by NCERT and EdCIL (2012) highlights a significant shift in public opinion favouring English, leading to its increased teaching at the primary level. Factors such as the growth of the middle class, rapid urbanization, changing employment trends, IT sector outsourcing, privatization of education, internet usage, tourism, and media popularity have increased demand for English-medium education. Once merely a "library language," English is now seen as a language of opportunity and global identity, prompting state governments to make it widely accessible.

Estefandiari (2013) categorizes English's functions in India as Auxiliary, Supplementary, Complementary, and Equative. The Auxiliary function sees English as a "library language" for knowledge acquisition, promoting passive bilingualism. The Supplementary function caters to limited needs, like tourist interactions. The Complementary function involves using English alongside native languages in social contexts, creating stable bilinguals. The Equative function positions English as an alternative language across all domains.

Meganathan (2011) summarizes the evolution of English in India. Initially seen as a library language in the pre-colonial period, English gained the status of 'Associate Official Language' after independence, expanding its scope and significance.

Essential highlights of English's role in India include: -

- English is a subject in the curriculum of all 32 states and Union Territories.
- English is offered as a second language in many states, preferred over other Indian languages.
- It is introduced as a second language in 19 states: 16 starts in Class I, one in Class III, and two as late as Class V.
- Across India's 29 states and 7 union territories, English serves as either an official or assistant language in 11 states.

Research indicates that English is the dominant language in administration and education in most Indian states. It remains a vital link language and will continue to play a crucial role in Indian society for decades. Although widely used, English is not one of the languages officially recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

4. English from a foreign language to a second language: A perspective from a multilingual society

Does multi-lingual society accommodate and accept foreign languages to avoid their internal language complexity? The transformation of English from a foreign language to a secondary language in India is a captivating journey. In mainland India, the history of the English language is a compelling narrative deeply intertwined with the politics of identity and the replacement of established languages such as Persian. In 1835, Lord William Bentinck enacted the 'English Education Act,' through which English supplanted Persian as the language of the higher courts. The increasing popularity of English in the post-independence period raised concerns about national identity, leading to the selection of Hindi as the sole official language of the Union of India in 1950. English was demoted to the status of an auxiliary language and was slated for official termination after 15 years. However, apprehension among non-Hindi speakers, who neither embraced Hindi nor supported its dominance, ultimately compelled the government to pass the Official Language Act in 1963, elevating the status of the English language from 'auxiliary' to 'associate language'. Language diversity in India is a delicate issue, and this is one of the key factors that has bolstered the English language, solidifying its foundation in India

The acceptance and establishment of the English language in Nagaland, an Indian state in the northeastern region, have unique characteristics compared to its entry into mainland India. Unlike in other parts of India, there was no strong resistance to the introduction of English in Nagaland, mainly because it became integrated with the education system. Also, at the time of its introduction, there was no predominant language in Nagaland, allowing English to establish itself in a society with multiple local languages. However, despite the lack of a dominant language, making English the sole

official language of the state is challenging due to the linguistic complexity among the various Naga tribes. Understanding how a foreign language became integral to such a multilingual and diverse cultural society helps us appreciate the sensitivity of a multilingual society.

In a multilingual society like Nagaland, which is also multi-tribal, there is a constant sense of insecurity and consciousness about identity. This feeling of vulnerability among the multilingual groups facilitated the acceptance of English. Each Naga tribe has its distinct language and dialectical variations. Elevating one tribe's language to be the language of the general populace inevitably leads to resistance from other tribes who want to maintain the status of their languages. In such a scenario, complex dynamics and strong resistance from the linguistic groups whose languages are marginalized are expected.

The historical evolution of English in mainland India provides evidence supporting the argument that in a multilingual society, it is easier to choose a language for general use that does not reflect identity. Presently, English, alongside Hindi, serves as the official language of India. Hindi could not be sustained as the sole official language of India, nor could it be accepted as the National Language due to resistance from the non-Hindi speaking population. Conversely, the Parliament had to pass the Official Language Act in 1963 to continue the use of English as the official language. Similarly, an inclination towards promoting a particular tribal language can also be expected in the context of Nagaland. This is the primary reason why English has been able to maintain and reinforce its role, ultimately becoming the sole official language for the Nagas.

To sum up this observation and draw inferences from the analysis, it is reasonable to conclude, at least in the context of Nagaland, that a multilingual society facilitates easier access and accommodation of foreign languages with less resistance. This is because internal linguistic diversity seems more complex and challenging to address. Promoting and designating English as the official language is the preferred choice, as English does not favour any specific tribe in Nagaland.

5. Status of English in Present Nagaland

English occupies a central role in Nagaland, serving as the sole official language, a second language, and the primary medium for formal education. It is essential for bridging the diverse tribes of the Nagas and advancing the state's development. As the only official language, English is used for administrative purposes, educational instruction, and as a common language among educated Nagas. It is introduced at the pre-primary level in urban schools and integrated from the primary level across all schools in Nagaland. Additionally, English is increasingly becoming the first language for many educated urban residents.

5.1. Assessing the Importance of English for the Nagas

Nagaland's unique choice of English as its sole official language underscores the importance of mastering the language. English is the primary medium of instruction throughout the education system, with students at the secondary level choosing between their mother tongue and English. However, this emphasis on English presents challenges. Students must learn a non-native language before even beginning primary school, placing a significant burden on teachers to provide instruction in a language that students may not fully understand. Moreover, the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning is a concern. The proficiency levels in educational settings often fall short of expectations, partly because many students encounter English only in formal educational contexts, which may not be ideal for language acquisition. English is frequently taught as a subject rather than as a functional language, which can diminish the effectiveness of language learning. Despite English's established role as a second language and its importance in Nagaland, a comprehensive review and enhancement of its role in the educational system are needed**.**

5. Conclusion

The evolution of English in Nagaland reflects a unique interplay between historical influences and sociolinguistic dynamics. English, introduced through the efforts of missionaries during the colonial period, has become deeply embedded in Nagaland's educational and administrative systems. Its role as the state's sole official language is a testament to its significance in uniting the diverse Naga tribes and facilitating communication and development.

The historical context reveals that English's acceptance in Nagaland was influenced by the absence of a unifying tribal language and the pragmatic needs of a multilingual society. Unlike mainland India, where English's role was contested and politically charged, Nagaland's lack of a dominant indigenous language allowed English to establish itself relatively easily. The absence of resistance to English can be attributed to its neutrality among tribal languages and its practical utility in education and governance.

In the contemporary context, English serves not only as a second language but as a primary medium of instruction and a critical tool for social and economic advancement. However, the challenges of mastering a non-native language from an early age and the effectiveness of English language education remain concerns. The need for a thorough review and enhancement of English language teaching practices in Nagaland is evident to ensure that it fulfils its role effectively and supports the linguistic and cultural development of its people.

Overall, Nagaland's experience underscores a broader pattern observed in former British colonies, where English has often been adopted as a key language due to historical legacies and practical considerations. This phenomenon highlights the complex interactions between language, identity, and education in multilingual societies and reinforces the global significance of English in contemporary contexts.

References

- Aier, C. 1996. *An ethnographic study of the language situation in Nagaland with special reference to the learning and teaching of English*. Hyderabad: CIEF.
- Banerjee, S. 2016. 'A study of the current status quo of English as a second language in India'. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 6*(8).
- Burling, R. 2003. *The Tibeto-Burman Languages of Northeastern India*. In Graham Thurgood and Randy J.Polla (eds.), The Sino-Tibetan Languages, 169-192. London &New York: Routledge.
- Easterine, I. 2001. The creative dimension of language: Personal reflection on the teaching of English. In R. Sachdeva (Ed.), *Language education in Nagaland*. PP. 51-54. New Delhi: Regency Publication.
- Esfandiari, L.T. 2013. 'The status of English in the educational system of India'. *ELT voices-India,* Volume 3 issue 4.
- Ezung, M. K. 2017. 'Status of the Languages in Nagaland: An introspection'. *Nagaland University Research Journal,* 14-19.
- Grierson George A. 1903-1928. *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. 3:2.* Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India.
- Ilong, E. A. 2013. *Tribal transformation: The early history of the Naga Hills*. New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- Kachru, B. 1985. *Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: English language in the outer circle.* In R. Quirk and H. Widowson (Eds.), English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures (p. 11-36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kapfo, K. 2001. Role of Nagamese in Nagaland. In R. Sachdeva (Ed.), *Language education in Nagaland* (pp. 59-75). New Delhi: Regency Publication.
- Kiremwati, K. 1995. *Education and the Nagas with special reference to Ao-Nagas*. Impur: Clark Memorial High School.
- Krishnaswamy, N., Krishnaswamy, L. 2006. *The story of English in India*. India: Foundation Books.
- Kuolie, D. 2006. *Structural description of Tenyidie: A Tibeto-Burman language of Nagaland*. Kohima, Nagaland: Ura Academy Publication Division.
- Meganathan, R. 2011. *'Language policy in education and the role of English in India: From library language to language of empowerment*. British Council.
- Marrison, G. E. 1967. *The classification of the Naga languages of north-east India.* Ph.D. dissertation. London: University of London.
- Sachdeva, R. 2001. *Language Education in Nagaland: Sociolinguistics Dimensions*. New Delhi: Regency Publication. https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/people-culture (Retrieved on December 20, 2024)

Bio profile of the Author:
Assistant Professor,
Nagaland University, Kohima campus, Meriema, Nagaland. Pin- 797004.
Email: kethobelho@gmail.com, kethobelho@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

Manipur and the Shan Kingdom of Pong: Political and Cultural Relation

[1]Sanjoy Ahanthem & [2]Yaiphaba Ningthoujam

Abstract

The Shan Kingdom of Pong and Manipur had a cordial relation for most parts of their recorded history. The relation between the two, which dates back to the 7th century, lasted until the 18th century after which the Pong kingdom faded away from the power dynamics of the region that was completely dominated by the rising Burmese empire. Nonetheless the relation between the two kingdoms was deep and impactful while it lasted, mutually influencing the culture, economy, polity and even transcending the way of life for both. As recorded in the chronicles of both the kingdoms, the two collaborated in wars against common enemies and frequently helped each other in times of troubles. The kings and queens of the Pong frequently visited the royal court of Manipur thereby indicating deep bond between the two kingdoms. The two kingdoms also had close people-to-people connection, which in turn, influenced the culture and way of life of the masses. The paper attempts to encapsulate the whole gamut of relationship between Manipur and the obscure and mysterious kingdom of Pong from 7th century to 18th century.

Keywords: *Manipur, Pong, Burma, relations, culture, war.*

1. Introduction

The northern Shans inhabiting the present states of Myanmar and China were the immediate and the closest neighbour of the kingdom of Manipur[1] for centuries. In fact, the Shans were the first outsiders to have encountered the Meiteis inhabiting the isolated mountain gritkingdom of Manipur in ancient times. Hence, their pervasive impact on the overall socio- economy and polity of Manipur was immense. The Meiteis and the Shans are believed to have shared a common ethnicity that is marked by similar social norms and culture. There are uncanny similarities between the two in terms of food habits, housing designs, beliefs and practices, festivals and even superstitious beliefs and culture (Devi 2019: 99). Earlier, it was the Shans especially the Pongs, who being more powerful, called all the shots in the interactions between the two powers. However, they never ill-treated the Meiteis but rather helped in ushering civilization among them. In the later period, the role reversed with the Meitei kingdom reaching its zenith of power and posing constant troubles to both Shan states and even Ava since the

18th century. However, the good relation between the Meiteis and the Shans especially the Pongs continued with Manipur helping them against the constant threats of the Burmese.

The origin of the ancient kingdom of Shan in upper Burma is obscure. The Shans migrated to Burma before the beginning of the Christian era (Maw 2018:21). Muang (2023:2) attributed the term "Shan" as a derivative of "Siam" meaning a group of mountainous people who migrated from Yunnan during the 6th century AD. Both the Shan themselves as well as the Burmans considered them as Tai people inhabiting Burma. In fact, the name Shan itself was given to them by the Burmese (Colquhoun 1885:206). During the zenith of their power in 13th and 14th centuries, they ruled all over Burma and thereafter extended their empire as far as Yunnan in China in the north, Tensaaerim of Burma in the south, Assam of India in the west and in the west parts of Laos and Thailand in the east (Wansai, 2004). During its heyday, the kingdom thus was of considerable importance in the region and exacted allegiance from Assam, Manipur, Cachar, and Tripura in the west. Moreover, numerous Shan chiefs in the Kabaw valley paid tributes to it (Brown 2001:58). The might of the Shansdeclined during the 16th century when many of the Shan *muangs* (principalities) were conquered during the reign of the Burmese king, Bayinnaug (1551-1581) after a series of military campaigns (Chan 2006:47).

The purpose of the paper is to unearth the deep buried yet intricate political and cross-cultural relationship between the kingdom of Manipur and the mysterious Shan kingdom of Pong during the period from 7th to 18th century. The age-old Manipur- Pong Shan interactions are often neglected in contemporary research mainly due to the lack of proper historical materials. The present paper is a humble attempt to fill the void in this area. The paper relies on the chronicles of both Manipur and Burma in unearthing obscure relations between the two kingdoms. The paper depends substantially on *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal court chronicle of Manipur and the Shan chronicle found in Manipur as highlighted by R.B. Pemberton that was translated in Manipuri in finding out the interaction between the two kingdoms. Further, the writings of both Manipuri and Burmese historians provided rich source of materials on the research area. In this regard, colonial writings of G.E. Harvey, N. Elais, J. George Scott, and Edward Harper Parker on the Shans in Burma served as rich sources of the obscured Shan history. The Burmese sources were carefully corroborated with the accounts of Manipur including the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and the Shan Chronicle as mentioned by R.B. Pemberton.

Apart from highlighting the intricate and cordial relation between the two kingdoms, the present paper argues that it was the policy of Burmese expansionism since the onset of the 18th century that completely altered the political landscape between the two kingdoms as well as the region itself for centuries to come. In fact, the rise of Burmese might under King Bayinnuang (1551-1581) resulted in the subjugation of all the Shan muangs and since the second half of the 18th century, the same fate befalls the kingdom of Manipur as she faced a series of devastating Burmese invasion one after other.

Thence, the history of the region was dominated by the rise of Burmese expansionism whereby they completely subjugated the Shans, the Manipur Kingdom and even most parts of the present North East India. The gradual Burmese expansion in India ultimately proved to be their undoing as they came into direct collision with another power, the British which ultimately defeated them in course of three wars (1824-1826; 1852-1853 & 1885).

The present paper suffers from major limitation of relying unduly on Chronicles and the works of colonial writers. Moreover, the lack of proper historical records on Manipur, along with the need to approach existing writings with skepticism, and the absence of an authentic, people-centric history of the Shans, made it extremely challenging to gather reliable materials for the study. The study also faced certain limitations regarding the periodization of the crucial events unfolding between the two kingdoms. Often the dates mentioned in different chronicles and other sources do not match with each other's, thereby highlighting the need for more collaborating work that spans across regions and time period. To that extent, the study found certain difficulties even in locating the now non-existent kingdom of Pong historically and geographically among the numerous yet forgotten Shan states and principalities.

2. Manipur and the Shan Kingdom of Pong: Political Connections

The Pongs belonged to a branch of Tai that was known as Mao Shan (Singh 1986:291). Harvey (2000:322) also considered Pong as the same as Maw and the people as Mao Shans. Scott (1901:282) was of the view that the kingdom of Pong as understood by the Meiteis was the Mong Mao Rong (great Mong Mao) that was situated probably in the extreme southwestern part of the Shan kingdom. Elias (1876:2-3) in his book, 'History of the Shans', also wrote that the Kingdom of Pong known to the Manipuris and her neighbours i.e. Cachar, Tripura was the Mung- Mau or the country of Mau in Burma. Kausambi was the Budhhist name of the kingdom (Elias 1876:2-3). The Manipuris used Pong as synonymous with the Shans (Singh 1986:291; Sorokhaibam 2021). Hodson (1908:114) argued that the reason for it was that Pongs at that time were the mightiest among the Shans with whom the Manipuris had dealings throughout her history. The Pong Shans, in fact maintained close cultural relationship with both Tai people in Assam and Manipur until it was annexed to Ava (Chan 2006:47).

Pemberton (2008:108) relying on an ancient Shan chronicle found in Manipur, vividly explained the history, polity and geography of the Pong kingdom whose capital was at Moguang in present Burma. He mentioned the boundary of the kingdom as extending from the Assam valley in the north to mountains of Manipur and Kabo valley in the west to the Chinese province of Yunnan in the east. Harvey (2000:322) in his 'History of Burma' pointed out that during its glorious days, the Pong kingdom stretched between the Brahmaputra and Salween river. Their territory sometimes extended over Moguang and Mohny in, and sometimes over the upper Chindwin River and into Manipur.

Parker (1893:45) while writing at the closing years of the 19th century, was of the view that the erstwhile Pong kingdom was probably Luh- ch'wan rather than Muh-pang. According to him, the area covered under it was represented by the *sawbwaships* of Moguang, Mo-hny in probably Momeit and North Theinni. Further, it might have included within its boundary other mediatised Shan States forming parts of Chinese dominions like Nan-tein, Kan-ngai, Lung-ch'wan, Mengmo, Man-mao, Hulasa etc. Thus, the Pong kingdom during its heydays occupied quite a vast area and was a force to be reckoned with in the region.

The first king recorded in the Shan Chronicle as mentioned by Pemberton was Khool- liee who ascended the throne in 80 A.D. and a list of 12 kings was specified till the reign of Murgnowin 667 A.D. (Pemberton 2008:109). The chronicle further mentioned the successful military expedition of Samlongpha, the brother of king Sookampha in Cachar and Tripura. From there, he finally came to Manipur around the latter half of the 8th century A.D. through the source of the Khuga River (Pemberton 2008:109). *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal court chronicle of Manipur, also attests the arrival of Samlongphain Manipur in 698 A.D. (Parratt 2005:29). It further mentioned him as staying in the capital Imphal for ten years at a place called Pong *Inkhol*[2] and returned by the river way of Iril in the north to his land. However, there is a huge discrepancy as to the period of the reign of Sookampha as the Hsenwi State Chronicle mentioned him ascending the throne in 1152 A.D. (Scott 1967:18). Elias (1876:27) on the other hand, gave the year of his accession as 1220 A.D. Both the Hsenwi Chronicle and Elias mentioned Samlongpha, the conqueror as the brother of Sookampha and mentioned in detail about his military conquest. The huge discrepancy between the Manipuri sources and the others regarding the reign of Sookampha needs further research.

Until 1474 A.D., there was little mention of political exchanges between the two kingdoms in both the Shan Chronicle as well as *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. However, during the mentioned year, Soohoongkhum also known as Khekkhompa, the king of Pong sent an emissary to king Kyamba (1467-1508) of Manipur, requesting one of his daughters as his queen to whom the Meitei king obliged. However, as known from the chronicle, the retinue was waylaid and the bride kidnapped by the king of Khampat near the western frontier of Samjok (Pemberton 2008:113). The enraged King of Pong in alliance with the Manipuri king invaded Khampat and destroyed it (Pemberton 2008:113). *Cheitharol Kumbaba* also mentioned the joint expedition against Khampat but the year is mentioned as 1470. The joint victory against Khampat is vividly accounted in the royal court chronicle of Manipur as-

Meetingu Kyampa and Choupha Khekkhompa[3], the king of Pong, made an alliance and fought (against the Kyangs). The Yinthi River[4] which is 100 lam across was bridged with gold and silver and the two crossed it together. They sat together on one golden throne on one golden mat. They ate

together from one royal plate. They attacked together Kyang Khampat of Kapo. They defeated Kyang. (Parratt 2005:41)

After the victory, a friendship treaty was signed, accordingly the boundaries between the two kingdoms were demarcated, and the Kabaw valley was handed over to Manipur (Singh 2014:2978). The fixing of boundary was recorded in *Cheitahrol Kumbaba* as well as in *Pong Meitei Lamyen Lairik*[5]. Accordingly, Manipur got Mungkhong and Mungwai in the north east, Loijarik in the east and in the south, Miyatong hills, and the area upto the Heinou Khongnempa Pokpa. The whole of Heinou Khongnempa Pokpa went to the Pongs. Regarding Samjok, Manipur received the western portion while the eastern portion fell into the hands of the Pongs. The two kings also exchanged gifts. The Pong king presented the Manipuri king a golden *pandhan*, a silver mounted *dao,* and a *dulai* or litter. Those objects and a sacred spear were passed through generations of kings as royal insignia until the reign of king Marjit who ruled from 1813 to 1819 (Brown 2001:58).

The cordial relation between the Pong kingdom and Manipur continued till the reign of king Garibniwaz (1709-1748) and consultations regarding diplomatic and administrative reforms were carried on (Sorokhaibam 2021). The Shan chronicle also mentioned the fleeing of two princes Mongpo and Kyathon to the court of Garibniwaz from Burmese in around 1734 thereby seeking his protection. Further, in their support he attacked and destroyed the town of Meetoo and established the two brothers at Moongkhaon by giving his daughter Yenjeejoyaee to the elder brother (Pemberton 2008:115). The same expedition is recorded to have happened in the year 1735 in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (Parratt 2005:145).

Further, during his reign, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* is replete with the arrival and leaving of various ambassadors and emissaries of Pong. Garibniwaz also presented several gifts to the king of Pong when he ascended the throne in 1739[6]. It consisted of palanquin, set of royal dress, and everything that was needed for a king without withholding anything (Parratt 2005:150). In the next year, the king of Pong along with the queen came to Manipur and participated in a boat race with the king of Manipur. The king of Pong was also presented several valuable gifts that consist of palanquin, white Sekpin (canopy), royal sword and all other items required for a king (Parratt 2005:151). The king of Pong also presented the Manipuri king a gift that was believed to have supernatural powers (Parratt 2005:150).

In 1745, the king of Pong along with his wife arrived in Manipur asking for help against its enemies (Parratt 2005:162). Garibniwaz accordingly sent his younger brother Atolpa to help the Pongs in the next year to restore law and order in the kingdom. As put up by historian Singh (1965:162), the help was the last of its kind for the Manipuris to extend its friendship to the Pongs. After that, the dynamics of power in Burma changed rapidly thereby rendering the Pong kingdom merely a pawn

and subsidiary to the rising Burmans. Thereafter, with the emergence of Burmese empire in the political scenario, the influence and even the existence of the Pongs ceased and Manipur had to deal with the hostile Burmese instead of the friendly Pongs that they had dealt with for centuries.

3. Manipur and Pong Kingdom: Cross Cultural Relations

Since ancient times, Manipur had diplomatic and cultural relations with the Shan kingdom of Pong. In fact, the first mention of any foreign country in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* is the Pong indicating perhaps the first external contacts of the Manipuri kingdom. Regarding the extent and age-old relation between the two kingdoms, Laishram (2009:2) observed that the Kingdom of Manipur emerged from the obscurity first as a neighbour and more importantly, an ally of the kingdom of Pong. She asserted that the Meiteis belong to the Tai race sharing close affinity with the Shans. Parratt (2005:3) went further in hypothesizing a common origin of the Meiteis and the Pongs with both migrating from southern China before the pre Christian era. However, Hodson (1908:10) on the contrary argued that though the influence of the Shans on the culture and polity of Manipuris overwhelming, it is difficult to group the Meiteis as Tais due to the Meitei language being more akin to the Tibeto- Burman tree.

Nonetheless, the Meiteis since the beginning of their civilization were deeply influenced by the Shans especially the Pongs. In fact, the process of detailed historical recording of the events in the kingdom in the form of *Cheitharol Kumbaba* was started in 1485 by king Kyamba after a meeting with the king of Pong (Parratt 2005:3) with the beginning of the *Cheithaba*[7] method of dating. Kyamba after taking the help of the Pongs ensured that the events that happened were recorded with years (Singh 1965:91). As a result, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* became more detailed, rich, and scientific as a court chronicle.

The Manipuri kingdom in the ancient times also learnt immensely from the Pongs in matters of administrative reforms. In fact, diplomatic and administrative reforms in both kingdoms were made in consultation with each other as mentioned above. The Pong kings brought various changes in their dominion especially in the fields of drainage system, irrigation, agriculture, housing, weaving, and other industries. The seincluded measures like smooth and free flow of water bodies, proper utilization of fire, effective construction of houses by bamboo, introduction of transplantation of rice, and initiation of silk culture (Singh 2014:20). They also built a number of royal grain storage houses where paddy collected in the form of taxes from its subjects and various items collected in the form of tributes were stored (Singh 2014:20). The Meiteis also more or less followed these reforms. The successive kings invested a lot of time and energy in dredging rivers, adopting silk culture, new cultivation methods and use of bamboo in house construction. Further, tributes were collected from the *Lois*[8] and kept at *Keis* (granaries).

The recorded influence of the Pongs in the Manipuri culture and way of life dates back to the 7th century when Samlongpha stayed in Manipur for ten years in the capital as mentioned above. During his stay, he found the people to be backward and accordingly enacted several changes in dress and food habits, cleanliness, and manners to usher in the light of civilization (Pemberton 2005:110). He also brought certain changes in the style of building houses in Manipur. Accordingly, the king's old Naga style of house was abandoned and a new one known as '*Sung Kaie-poon Seaba'* meaning long-live house was built (Brown 2001:58). The extensive use of bamboo in building houses of the Meiteis also seemed to have been influenced by the Pongs as they also used it as the main material in building their houses. Samlongpha also brought certain changes in the way the Meiteis talk by getting rid of slangs (Singh 1986:296). He also introduced to the Meiteis the chewing of *pan* instead of the pieces of dried fish that made them dirty (Allen 2010:12). Samlongpha could be considered in a way as both a conqueror and benefactor of the people of Manipur and he was treated with both fear and honour. As a result, the Meiteis still have sayings like *Mee Pong Uni*, *Mee Pong Tani, Mee Pong Lakani* meaning man of Pong may see, man of Pong may hear and man of Pong may come depicting the act of concealing of any unbecoming act or behavior which one wishes to keep in secret (Singh 1986:299).

Samlongpha also asked the people of Moirang to offer to the deities the tributes meant for him (Brown 2001:58). The practice continues till date as people celebrates and offer on a yearly basis whatever they could to *Ebudou Thangjing*, the God of the people of Moirang that is located in the south of Manipur valley.

The Pongs and the Meiteis also had age-old people- to people contact resulting in migration and settlement of especially the Pongs in Manipur. The Pongs were in fact, the first outsiders to have migrated to Manipur during different centuries starting from the time of Samlongpha in the 7th century AD. (Ahanthem 2019:90). The migration of Pong Shans though not backed by archeological evidence is replete in tales and literary works of the Meiteis (Singh 2015:140). The Shans also migrated to Manipur in the 15th and 16th centuries when attacked by the Chinese and Burmese and settled gradually in Manipur (Singh 2010). The ancient text, *Nongpok Haram*[9] mentions the arrival of Singngun, Choukhunpung and Khunlak, all Pongs, during the reign of king Mungyamba (1562-1597AD), who became the progenitors of three *yumnaks* (surnames) of the Meiteis viz. Nandeibam, Khumbongmayum and Chingabam after settling down with the Meitei ladies in Manipur. McCulloch (1980:XXIII) even mentioned the name of a Shan Village called Khurkhul in Manipur, about nine miles from Imphal, who spoke the Shan language. Contemporary Manipuri historian, Birachandra (2013:73) mentioned the present day Langol in Imphal West district as inhabited by the Pong Shans. Though the Meiteis might have migrated and settled in the Pong kingdom as they did in Burma voluntarily or otherwise, records of it are non-existent and there is further scope for investigation in this aspect.

The Pongs also had their share of influence in the religious life of the Meiteis. The statue of Lord Visnhu at Lamangdong in the present Bishnupur district was also given by king Chaupha Khekkhomba to king Kyamba after the conquest of Khampat as mentioned in "*Vishnu Fangbagi Puran*" (Indramani 2014:18-19). Kyamba requisitioned a Brahmin who could take care of the statue and thence started the regular worship of Lord Vishnu in Manipur (Singh 1965:94-95). After the above-mentioned joint venture of Khampat, he had also exchanged his servant, a drummer with a servant of the king of Pong who was a trumpeter (Parratt 2005:41). This was probably done so that different cultures were promoted in each other's kingdom. There were also references about the sharing of the expertise in the treatment of various ailments and diseases. When King Chokphalung, who succeeded his father Khekkhomba as the next Pong king, came to Manipur after he suffered from leprosy, proper arrangement was made for his stay at Pong *Ingkhol* by king Kyamba (Singh 2014:34). The king of Manipur requisitioned the services of his royal priests and priestesses for the treatment of the Pong king. After three months, he was completely cured of the disease and he went back to his kingdom (Singh 2014:34). Further, it was during the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652) that guava was introduced by the Pongs in Manipur when their king presented a sapling of the tree to help the Manipuris in curing dysentery (Singh 1965:119).

The Pong Shans also introduced certain fruits, vegetables, and cloths in Manipur. *Heipong*, an edible wild fig and *Kampong*, an aquatic edible plant, may also be mentioned. Another vegetable that have medical property known locally as Pong Hawai (Cowpea) is assumed to have come to Manipur from the Pongs. Further, until date the Pong route or the Pong *Lambi* as known locally still exist in Manipur in the present Imphal East district. A bamboo artifact called *pongden*, a round bamboo container was also copied from the Pongs (Parratt 2017:31). Further, there is also a reference of *Phipong*, which literally means cloth of the Pong in *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (Parratt 2005:38). The design of the cloth was most likely imitated from the Pongs.

From both historical and literary accounts, both the Pongs and the Meiteis regarded each other as brethren. In this regard, it is interesting to note the view of Manipuri historian, Singh (1986:304) who hypothesized the blood relation of the Pongs with the Meiteis since the time of Samlongpha in the 7th century. Here, he argues that since Samlongpha stayed in the land of the Meities for so long, they must have left several descendants and near ones and must have considered the Meiteis as their kins and relatives. Goswami (2019:62), another Manipuri historian also subscribed to similar view that due to the long stay in Manipur, many descendants and followers of Samlongpha might have been absorbed within the Manipuri society thereby influencing the socio-cultural life of the people. The recorded influence of the Pongs in the culture and way of life of the Meiteis dates back as early the 7th century and it continued until they were fully subdued by the Burmese in the 18th century.

4. Conclusion

The relation between Manipur and the kingdom of Pong went a long way as the first interaction between the two could be traced to the 7th century AD. In fact, the first external contacts of the Manipuri kingdom were the Pongs. They had always been in cordial relations for most parts of their recorded history. Besides the matrimonial alliances between the two kingdoms, there were people- to people contact resulting in migration and settlement of especially the Pongs in Manipur. In the beginning, the Pongs were more powerful and advanced and as such, ushered in many positive changes in the Manipuri society. But in the later period, especially in the 18th century when Manipur reached the zenith of its power, the Meiteis played a protective role even assisting the Pongs in their internal as well as external matters. The Pongs not only introduced certain fruits, cloths and vegetables in Manipur but also influenced the socio-cultural life of the Meiteis. However, Manipur Pong relations endedcompletely in the 18th century when the Pong kingdom faded away after being completely dominated and eventually absorbed by the rising Burmese. The rise of the Burmese completely changed the political scenario in the region and Manipur had to deal with the hostile Burmese instead of the friendly Pongs that they had dealt with for centuries. The Burmese onslaught led to the complete dissolution of the Pongs as an independent kingdom during the 16th century, while Manipur was reduced to a mere pawn in the power politics of the region. The theater of power then shifted to the tussles between the two expansionists: the British and the Burmese. Ultimately, the relations between the Pongs and the Manipuris were relegated to the past and were forgotten completely. However, further exploration in this deeply buried field could unearth the obscure history and culture of both the Shans and the Manipuris.

Endnotes

1 Manipuris a state in the northeastern part of India bordering Myanmar. It has a total area of 22,327 Sq. Km. with a population of 2.3 million according to the 2011 census. Manipur was an independent kingdom before the British annexed her in 1891. After independence, she became a part of the Indian Union in 1949.

2 *Inkhol* means homestead. The place is on the eastern side of Kangla in Imphal East district.

3 During the period, N. Elais (1876) mentioned the Sabwa of Mong Mao as Chau- Hum-pha same as Choupha as mentioned in Cheitharol Kumbaba.

4 Chindwin River as known by the Meiteis.

5 An archaic manuscript that deals with the accord of the sharing of land between Pong and Meitei. It has been published by Manipur State Archives in 2003.

6 N. Elais (1876, p.46) mentioned the name of Haw- Seing commencing his reign in 1739. Therefore, he might be the king of Pong as mentioned in *Cheitharol Kumbaba.*

[7] The word *Cheithaba* comes from *Chei* (stick) and *Thaba* (to put down). In ancient Manipur, counting was done by putting down sticks that represented the base number. Thus, *Cheithaba* means putting down sticks to aid counting. Under the *Cheithaba* method of dating, each year was given a specific name corresponding to the name of the person who performed the *Cheithaba* ceremony. Another *Cheithaba*would succeed the person at the end of the year. Thus, from 1485, every year was named after the *Cheithaba*.

[8] A group of people who were subdued or outcasted in the earlier Meitei society.

[9] *Nongpok Haram* is an unpublished manuscript in the custody of Manipur State Archives, Imphal west.

References

- Ahanthem, S. 2019. 'Nongpok Haram: The Easterners in Pre- Colonial Manipur', *History Research Journal,* 5 (5): 89-97. DOI: 10.26643/hrj.v5i5.7964.
- Allen, B.C. 2010. *Gazetteer of Naga Hills and Manipur* (Part 2). New Delhi: Mittal Publications. (First Published 1905).
- Birachandra, N. 2013. *Ethnic and Ethnicity in Pre Colonial Manipur Society*. Imphal: G.M. Publications.
- Brown, R. 2001. *Statistical Account of Manipur*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. (First Published 1873).
- Chan, A. 2006. '*Burma: Shan domination in the Ava period*' (c. AD 1310–1555). *Journal of the Siam Society.* 94,2749.https://thesiamsociety.org/wpcontent/uploads/2006/03/JSS 094 0d Aye Chan Burma Shan Domination In Ava Period. pdf. Accessed on 13th September 2023.
- Colquhoun, A.R. 1885. *Amongst the Shans*. New York: Sribner and Welford.https://ia800909. us.archive.org/4/items/amongstshans00colqrich/amongstshans00colqrich.pdf Accessed on 2nd December 2023.
- Devi. T. C. 2019. 'Society and Culture of the Meitei of Manipur and Tai Shan of Burma a comparative study.' Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Imphal: Manipur University.
- Elias, N. 1876. *Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunan.* Calcutta: Printed at the Foreign Department Press.https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/introductory sketch of the history of the shans in upper burma and western yunnan.pdf. Accessed on 10th December 2023.
- Goswami, H. 2019. *History of the People of Manipur*. Imphal: Yaol Publishing Limited.
- Guha, R. 2023. On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India In Cain, P.H. & Harrission, M. *Imperialism* (pp. 53-59). London: Routledge.
- Harvey, G.E. 2000. History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824, The Beginning of the English Conquest. New Delhi: Asian Education Services. (First Published 1925).
- Hodson, T.C. 1975. *The Meitheis*. Delhi:B.R. Publishing Corporation. (First Published 1908).
- Indramani, N. 2014. Manipurda Vishnu Purakpaamasung Lamangdongi Vishnu Phura, *Reform*, 2 (1), 17-25.
- Laishram, R. 2009. *Early Meitei History*. Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- Manipur State Archives. 2003. *Compilation of Archaic Manuscripts*, Vol.1. Imphal.
- Maw, S. Z. 2018. Filling the Power Vacuum: The Rise and Fall of the Shan in Central Myanmar (C.1300-1550). *Journal of Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science*, 16 (7), 21 30.http://www.maas.edu.mm/Research/Admin/pdf/2.%20Dr%20Shwe%20Zin%20Maw(21-30).pdf. Accessed on 20th September 2023.
- McCulloch, W. 1980. *Valley of Manipur*. Delhi: Gian Publications. (First Published 1859).

- Muang, S. H . *Shan People and their Culture,* https://www.academia.edu/37318871/Shan people and their culture CHAPTER ONE SHAN PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURE, Accessed on 14th November 2023.
- Parker, E.H. 1893. *Burma with special Reference to her Relations with China*. Rangoon: Rangoon Gazette Press. https://archive.org/details/burmawithspecial00parkrich. Accessed on 18th December 2023.
- Parratt, J. 2017. *The Coils of Pakhangba: A Culture History of Meeteis*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Parratt, S. N.A. 2005. The Court Chronicle of The Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa, Vo.1, 33-1763 CE.London:Routledge.
- Pemberton, R.B. 2008. *The Eastern Frontier of India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. (First Published 1835)
- Scott J.G. 1901. Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States. Part II. Vol-1. Rangoon: Superintendent Government Printing, Burma. https://www.myanmar-law-library.org/IMG/pdf/shan state part ii volume i.pdf Accessed on 23rd November 2023.
- Scott, J.G.1967. Hsenwi State Chronicle. In The GUARDIAN (Originally written in 1897).17-20 (February). https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/hsenwi state chronicle.pdf. Accessed on 23rd November, 2023.
- Singh, H.N. 2015. 'Early People in Manipur*,' Journal of Emerging Technology and Emerging Research,* 2 (8), 135-142.https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1701A14.pdf. Accessed on 15th October 2023.
- Singh, K.M. (ed). 2014. Descent of the Scion of Sorarel on the Earth (A Shan Chronicle in *Meitei).* Imphal: Konsam Imo Singh.
- Singh, R. K. J. 1965. *A Short History of Manipur*. Imphal: O.K. Store.
- Singh, R. K. J. 2010. History of Medieval Manipur, Part 2,https://e-pao.netepSubPageExtractor.asp?src=manipur. History_of_Manipur. History_Of_Medieval_Manipur_2. Accessed on 1st October 2023.
- Singh, W. I. 1986. *The History of Manipur: An Early Period*. Imphal: W. Kishori Devi.
- Singh, Y. S. 2019. 'Political Exploits of Manipur in the Chindw in Valley (1467-1748),' *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*. 4 (4), 2973-2985.https://ijsser.org/files_2019/ijsser 04 221.pdf. Accessed on 5th October 2023.
- Sorokhaibam, M. S. July 31, 2021. 'Shan (Pong)' Relationship with Meitei: Mongmaorung, The Splendid Capital of The Kingdom of Pong, *Imphal Review of arts and politics*, https://imphalreviews.in/shan-pong-relationship-with-meitei-mongmaorung-the-splendid-capital-of-the-kingdom-of-pong/#google_vignette. Accessed on 12th November 2023.
- Wansai, S. February 25, 2004. *Shan-Burmese Relation: Historical Account and Contemporary Politics,* https://unpo.org/article/434. Accessed on 5th September 2023.

Bio profile of the authors

[1]Assistant Professor

Department of History, Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur.

Email: zuluthem@gmail.com

&

[2]Assistant Professor,

Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy Manipur University, Manipur.

Email: yaipha_ning@yahoo.in

Narratives of Nationhood: Corporealizing Memory in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*

Sambhu R

Abstract

What the Body Remembers (1999) is an indictment of Partition violence in which many women were forced to give up their lives in the name of preserving family honour. The novel makes us rethink the patriarchal machinations behind female suicides being valorized as instances of martyrdom and filial piety. The title of the novel points not just to the indelibility of the violence inscribed on the female body by patriarchal discursive structures but also to the embodied nature of memory that retroactively bridges the gap between experience and remembrance. By punning on the word 'remember' with its twin connotations of 'reminiscing' as well as 're-membering' (re-embodying), Baldwin hints at the shocking murder and subsequent mutilation of Kusum around which the novel revolves and invites us to reflect on how the 're-membered' corpse archives violence from a feminist perspective. Through an analysis of the patriarchal biases inherent to male narratives about Partition violence which in turn lead to the coalescence of communal memory around masculine tropes, the present paper attempts to read Baldwin's novel as a text that subverts the self-proclaimed authenticity of master narratives. It argues that memory is not just a dormant repository of past events but something deeply embodied. Thus, the communal body and the female body, whose role in the formation of nationhood is vociferously denied everywhere, become extensions of each other through the act of recollection.

Keywords : *embodied memory, Partition, trauma, storytelling, communal body*

Diasporic writers are known for their relentless preoccupation with the themes of communal as well as self-identity, which when yoked to the idea of home, provide them with a critical optic to problematise their traumatic history. Although 'home' is a term fraught with tensions for diasporic individuals, prominent writers like Rushdie have sought to unmoor it from an idealised image of a pristine and immutable land to which one is tenuously connected by genealogical ties. In his *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie talks about home as a place that can be recreated using the power of memory. Reminiscing about home from a foreign land creates 'a kind of double perspective: because they [diasporic writers] are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society' (75). Shauna Singh Baldwin, an Indo-Canadian writer, who in recent years has shot to popularity with her astute depictions of Sikh

family life organised around patriarchal mores, is someone who enjoys this 'double perspective' that Rushdie underscores. An insider as well as an outsider, she represents India through nostalgic Oriental lenses in combination with 'western frames of discourse, and via Western knowledge systems' (Lau and Dwivedi, 5).

In her debut novel *What the Body Remembers* (1999), Shauna Singh Baldwin makes an intrepid attempt to revise patriarchal accounts of the Partition through an embodied form of feminist historiography. The novel, which spans the period from 1928 to the time of India's Partition of 1947, narrates the story of Roop and is set in Pari Darwaza in erstwhile Punjab. The novel unfolds in a manner that represents the intricate intertwining of the political and the personal. On a purely political level, the novel depicts the turmoil attending Partition ranging from inter-religious warfare to the angst of a divided nation, and on a personal level, it reveals how ideas of nationhood are inextricably bound up with personal as well as communal histories. The partition of the Punjab province of the British Empire caused one of the greatest upheavals in Indian history, with close to 10 million people being forced to relocate to either side of the Radclie line. It was an event in which almost 5 million Muslims left East Punjab and 4 million Sikhs and Hindus left West Punjab, with close to half a million falling dead in the mindless bloodshed that was unleashed along the border. It is against this turbulent backdrop that the novel portrays the internal dynamics of Bachan Singh's household.

The novel primarily focuses on Roop, the daughter of Bachan Singh, who has grown up strongly convinced of a woman's obligations to her household, the most important of which are marriage and procreation. The word 'Roop' itself connotes bodily symmetry, aesthetic perfection, and beauty. By extension, it represents every woman's body on which patriarchy imprints its dominance, with the result that its memories are also filtered through a male chauvinist politics. Roop, as a child, has decided that she is not going to join the long line of her predecessors who became just drudges after their marriage. Having set her sights on a rich groom, she comes across as more ambitious than her sister Madani. In order to make herself attractive to prospective grooms, she learns to be 'silent and obedient' (Baldwin 1999, 132) and also 'good-good, sweet-sweet and obedient as Sita so everyone will love her...' (Baldwin 1999, 135). As such, at the young age of sixteen, she accepts a proposal from a middle-aged landowning Sardarji who cites his wife Satya's inability to bear him children as the reason for his remarriage. Most of the novel is devoted to delineating in painstaking detail the personal jealousies that vitiate the relationship between Roop and Satya. When Sardarji and Roop shift to Lahore leaving Satya behind in Rawalpindi, the latter begins to pine away in her loneliness. Satya, who cannot endure estrangement from Sardarji contracts tuberculosis and embraces death as a vindication of the insults she has to suffer on account of Roop dominating Sardarji's affections. However, in Satya's last moments, Roop feels a strange affinity for her. She even assimilates Satya's pride and ambition in staking claim to her Sikh identity.

Although the plot of the novel might be tantalizingly similar in tenor to the large corpus of Partition literature, what distinguishes Baldwin's novel from other similar accounts is the shock it delivers in its final moments through the horrifying death of Kusum. For a five-hundred-page novel that provides a veritable description of the conflict-ridden life of the border community, most of *What the Body Remembers* reads like a preparation for its gruesome climax whose horror cannot be properly accounted for unless it is located within the broader context of the gender biases within the Sikh community. The novel's climactic scenes, which volatilize patriarchal assumptions of memory through a triumphant portrayal of the ways in which the female body's violations can intersect with the collective memory of the communal body's oppressions and deprivations, turn the novel into a masterwork of Partition literature.

Anne McClintock argues in her brilliant essay 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism, and the Family' that 'all nationalisms are gendered' (61), with the implication that it is the institutionalization of gender difference, with men on top of the hierarchy getting directly involved in nation-building and women serving just a symbolic role, that structures ideas of nationhood. She identifies the dominance men enjoy in cultural representations as well as access to national resources in support of her claim that nationhood is sustained by the inequality in gender relations. She comes up with this polemical argument after considering multiple formulations of nationhood proposed by male theorists including Benedict Anderson, who are of the view that nationhood rests on a shared experience of identification with an extended community. But McClintock refutes the all-inclusiveness of this definition by arguing that nationhood rests on the 'male' recognition of identity rather than on an ungendered abstraction. She contends that though women are enjoined to be part of the nation, their involvement is largely metaphorical since it is men who are expected to hold the reins in any nation-state. If at all women have a role in nation-building, it is as biological reproducers of national groups. On the other hand, the role of men is metonymic and the very idea of a nation is the extended idea of one man joined to another across space and time.

Even as McClintock laments the ubiquity of male-centred theories of nationalism and the glaring absence of a feminist version, she lays down a few guidelines for any such upcoming theory that seeks to do justice to the participation of women in the formation of an 'imagined community.' She argues:

> A feminist theory of nationalism might be strategically fourfold: investigating the gendered formation of sanctioned male theories; bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in national formations; bringing nationalist institutions into critical relation with other social structures and institutions, while at the same time paying scrupulous attention to the structures of racial, ethnic and class power that continue to bedevil privileged forms of feminism. (65)

Extrapolating from McClintock's suggestions, it can be argued that the feminist mode of historiography in *What the Body Remembers* problematizes the complex ways in which male nationalism informs the

intersections between national and social structures. As Sangari and Vaid point out, 'Feminist historiography now implies in some sense a move towards the integrated domain of cultural history' (22). It has sought to make forays into the extensive realm of cultural history since it realises the immediate need to reform aspects of cultural life that are impregnated with deep-seated gender biases. By demonstrating how nations are 'born' out of the contested iconography of familial space where the patriarch extracts conformity from female members through the ritualistic enactment of subservience to male authority, Baldwin can be seen to call into question the idea of an ungendered nationhood.

What the Body Remembers considers the family as contributing to nationhood in at least three ways: by offering a central patriarchal figure for legitimizing social hierarchy through presupposing a uniformity of interest, by allowing irreconcilable social distinctions to be forged into a linear and harmonious historical narrative on the model of the inequality in gender relations, and by means of sexual reproduction. The novel in fact sets up a parallel between the act of narration and reproduction, the two modes of 'remembering' the Sikh community uses to ensure its continuity. Popular narratives of Partition reflect what McClintock refers to as 'the gendered formation of sanctioned male theories' (65). These narratives, enunciated by male theorists, reflect the distortions and wilful misrepresentations with which female agency is presented so that it remains amenable to a patriarchal overstory. The same can be said about the cherished reproductive role accorded to women in the Sikh community. It is glorified as the epitome of feminine perfection and women are persuaded to perpetuate the communal body, no matter what all sacrifices they have to make. However, the procreative role of women is taken for granted and they do not appear as active participants in any male accounts of history. It is this twin injustice implied by the semantic fecundity of 'remembering' that the novel highlights.

The novel makes repeated references to the power of story telling and the influence it has exerted on the formation of the Sikh identity. Rather than just listen to their cultural content, what these stories invite the audience to do is to act on their 'pedagogical intent' (Baldwin 46). All these stories are articulated from a male perspective and they are meant to be passed down from generation to generation without any attrition to their entrenched patriarchaldogmas. This means that even when it is a woman who narrates these stories, it is actually the men who have ultimate control over the narrative trajectory. It is through such cumulative acts of storytelling that the novel shows Sikh subjectivity as taking shape. For instance, when Roop reminds herself that one day she will have to pass down to Jeevan's sons the stories of Sikh martyrdom she heard her father narrate to Jeevan, she is implicating herself in the perpetuation of male-centred narrative strategies. But the novel does not rest content with letting men have the upper hand. It subverts masculine agendas implicit in storytelling by refracting these stories through a feminist discourse. By challenging the memorization of Sikh history in ways that are consistent with patriarchal motives, the novel attempts to recalibrate the

psychological effects these stories have on the listeners from a feminist standpoint. The novel then goes one step further to establish that these psychological effects engender concomitant corporeal responses which in their bulk make up the 'embodied memories' that sustain a community.

> It is in Marcel Proust's *In Remembrance of Things Past* that one comes across the overwhelming precision and power of 'embodied memory.' His work is a meticulous foray into the complex interaction between the recollection of an event and the sensorimotor responses it triggers at lightning speed. *What the Body Remembers* is obviously not a novel that unfolds on a grand Proustian scale. However, the role it accords to embodied memory remains unsurpassed in Indian writing in English. Unlike in Proust's novel where memory recreates a private world in a tangible form, in Baldwin's novel, memories of contested historical episodesproduce analogous bodily sensations that streng then the communal bond. The most recent research in embodied cognitive science negates the old view of memory as 'a storage disk with statically stored content from which information can be 'retrieved' in a current situation' (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2018,24). Scientists now concur that rather than memory being a repository of experiential data that is passively drawn upon in a suitable context, it is 'a function of the entire organism, the product of complex, dynamic, re-categorising and interactive processes, which are invariably 'embodied'' (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2018,25).

Baldwin's novel shows how Sikh political identity is created through multiple stories about embodied suffering. The novel reiterates that it is always stories about the violation of bodies that remain vivid in memory since memory itself is corporeal in its most poignant manifestations. The stories that bring out the embodied nature of memory in the novel encompass a varied range— from those that Bachan Singh narrate to Jeevan about the Jalliawala Bagh massacre to ones that portray in harrowing detail the atrocities committed by Mughal tyrants against Sikh Gurus. It is through such rituals of memorization that the history of communal violence sediments in the psyche of the listener and manifests itself as appropriate corporeal responses that then harden into instinct. The novel adeptly depicts how embodied remembrance creates a sense of persecution and imminent martyrdom in Sikh women.

Women are repeatedly reminded in the novel that their pre-ordained role is to get married before their bodies become undesirable and produce babies. Although Sardarji is not a good match for sixteen-year-old Roop, her family is concerned that she will lose her eligibility as a bride very soon if she does not marry in time. Sardarji's own glaring ineligibility as a forty-year-old widower does not strike them as much of a problem. The dogmatic belief that women must devote themselves to procreation can be seen to have led to the death of Roop's mother decades earlier as she unsuccessfully tried to deliver a second child even after complications resulting from her first delivery. It is the same constraining discourse of womanhood that makes Sardarji reject his barren wife Satya in favour of Roop. This ideology reaches its crescendo in the tragedy that befalls Roop's sister-in-law Kusum during the Partition when she is assaulted and killed by Muslim marauders who then proceed to rip out her

womb and dismember her body in the most brutal fashion imaginable. An episode that recalls the novel's title, it functions as the axis around which the novel develops the idea of embodied memory.

It is through the conflicting accounts of Kusum's husband Jeevan and her father-in-law father Bachan Singh that Roop comes to know about what happened the womenfolk of women of Pari Darwaza including Kusum, Roop's paternal aunt Revati Bhua, and the family's maid servant Gujri. Their accounts give us a peek into the gendered narration of violence, with male versions leaning more to the side that valorises the death of the tortured women and those of women reflecting the truth about their suffering. It is men's stories that always constitute the master narrative of such events. Women's stories, on the other hand represent what is 'left over' from patriarchal tellings. They are residual not in the sense of what remains after male narratives have interpreted the event but in the sense of remaining unamenable to dominant significations. Although both accounts are rendered by men here, Roop, in listening to them, and responding with scepticism and silence, emerges as a corrective consciousness that reflects the incredulity with which master narratives have to be countenanced.

Baldwin's intention in presenting two male accounts of a gruesome incident is clear here. She is not inviting either Roop or the readers to choose between the two; rather she sets up the testimony scenes to reveal the extent to which male narratives can render invisible the atrocities against women. It is this invisibilisation of brutalities against woman tacitly sanctioned by patriarchal discourses that she brings to the forefront. As such, the novel encourages the reader to adopt a critical attitude to male representational politics. It is Kusum's husband Jeevan who recounts Kusum's brutal death first. Even as Jeevan narrates the story, the readers get a peek at the perspectival shifts between Jeevan and Roop. The subtle differences between Jeevan witnessing the events at Pari Darwaza and Roophearing it recounted awakens the reader to the patriarchal ideologies implicit in narratives articulated from a male perspective. The simultaneity of narrating and listening reveals a gap between male biases about the accepted roles of women and the resistance with which women receive them. It is in this gap, which represents a slippage between male representational one-sidedness and the polyphony of female historiography, that embodied memory takes shape.

Jeevan tells Roop that, on entering the house, he founda white-clad mount, and that on lifting the cover, he discovered it to be Kusum's mutilated corpse. He says: 'A woman's body lay beneath, eachlimb severed at the joint. This body was sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again' (Baldwin 1999, 446). Jeevan now tries to reimagine what happened to Kusum. He finds it strange that Kusum was mutilated by her marauders without raping her first. His male logic cannot easily accept rape not preceding such a grotesque act. He even goes to the extent of terming it a 'waste.' He is able to conclude that Kusum was not raped since her legs are not bloody. More than a base and violent act, he considers rape a political manoeuvre with one man tacitly telling another: 'I took your pawn. Your move' (Baldwin 1999, 447). Still, Jeevan examines the corpse for signs of a

possible message, and finds that the womb had been torn out. He interprets it as the attackers telling the family: 'We take the womb so there can be no Sikhs from it, we take the womb, leave you its shell' (Baldwin 1999, 447).

Jeevan's account betrays his animosity towards the marauders not for inflicting pain upon his wife or for dismembering her corpse, but for sending a message through this violent act so as to hurl defiance at the Sikh community. Bachan Singh's account, which immediately follow's Jeevan's, gives us a clearer picture of the circumstances surrounding Kusum's death.

Although Bachan's Singh's account is also undergirded by the same patriarchal prejudices, it provides information crucial to unravelling the mystery in which Kusum's death is shrouded. Bachan Singh tells Roop that, when the mob arrived at Pari Darwaza, he knew that the women in the household had to be secured against the threat. More than anyone else, he was concerned about Kusum since she alone was still in her prime. His anxiety was that the Muslim marauders might rape her and thus corrupt the Sikh lineage of their family. Bachan Singh immediately tells Kusum that it is incumbent upon him to act in the best interests of the community now that the marauders can enter the house anytime. When he reveals to her the threat she posed from a procreative angle, she readily understands that she is being called upon to sacrifice her life. To this, the only requests she makes is that Bachan Singh take her to the front room so that her sons will not hear hercry out in pain. Roop, who is listening to Bachan's Singh's account with bated breath, now understands that it is Kusum's father himself who killed her. Bachan Singh corroborates this when he affirms that Kusum offered no resistance at all when he brought the *kirpan* down on her neck as 'always she made no trouble' (Baldwin 1999, 456). Bachan Singh also tells Roop that it is only after Kusum valorously gave up her life that the marauders could desecrate her corpse.

What troubles Roop about Bachan Singh's narration is his assertion that Kusum offered her neck willingly to him and that there was not even a trace of grief or regret in her decision to sacrifice herself. As in the case of Jeevan's testimony, she evaluates Bachan Singh's telling also from a critical distance. Baldwin expertly conveys Roop's incredulity and scepticism by having her moments of doubt presented in italics. Such a narrative technique gives stylistic expression to Roop's reservations about the plausibility of Bachan Singh's narrative and also echoes those of other women who might have felt a wave a protest rising within them on hearing such filiopietistic accounts narrated in a manner that discredits the sufferings of the murdered women. However, the paradox is that Roop knows she will be passing down a mixture of these two accounts to Jeevan's sons. In her rendering she will not question Bachan Singh's conviction that Kusum became a martyr for preserving the honour of the Sikh community. But she also knows that the embodied memory of the event will nudge her closer to the truth and that in time master narratives will be debunked. She will not be able to escape the pull of embodied memory because it is what aligns her individuality with her communal identity. Her remembrance of the violence inflicted on the communal body has left its marks on her body too—marks that will keep on bleeding until they are narrativized with authenticity.

Thus, it can be seen that in both Bachan Singh's and Jeevan's retellings, Kusum's death is rendered meaningful by imbuing it with a ritualistic significance that evokes the long-standing tradition of women's subservience to men in Sikh society. That these accounts are undercut by the silence and scepticism of Roop, which the novelist communicates to the reader by means of a certain stylistic ingenuity, speaks volumes for the unadorned authenticity of female historiography. However, the only question that remains to be answered in the novel is how long women in such traditional communities have to stay enmeshed in ritualistic observances that tacitly valorise docility, conformity, and the worshipping of masculine attributes. Though Baldwin does not have a definite answer to this or to the question when the active role of women in building the community, and by extension, the nation, will be acknowledged, she believes that revisionist accounts of the Partition can challenge the sanctity of master narratives. The title of the novel, which confronts the reader again and again with its visceral immediacy also communicates Baldwin's unswerving conviction that the violated female body is not a passive site for mourning or valorization but a vindicator of alternative accounts of history that dissect male chauvinist accounts for elements of patriarchal myth-making and representational infidelity.

Works Cited

- Baldwin, Shaun Singh. 1999. *What the Body Remembers.* New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India.
- Lau, L. and Dwivedi, O.P. 2014. *Re –Orientalism and Indian Writing in English*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.1-26.
- Leuzinger-Bohleber, Marianne. 2018. *Finding the Body in the Mind: Embodied Memories, Trauma, and Depression*. N.p., Taylor & Francis.
- McClintock, A. 1993. 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family.' *Fem Rev* 44, 61–80. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1993.21
- Rushdie, S. 1983. *The Indian Writer in England, In the eye of Beholder: Indian Writing in English*. Commonwealth Institute, pp 75-83.
- Sangari, K. and Vaid, S. 1986. *Recasting Women: Essays in colonial History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Bio profile of the Author
Assistant Professor,
Department of English, N.S.S. College
Pandalam (Affiliated to University of Kerala)**,** Kerala, India.
Email: 3333sambhu@gmail.com

Which Course to Pursue after Higher Secondary Education in West Bengal: A Few Suggestions

Pritam Rajak

Abstract

After the completion School Education, students face dilemmas regarding their upcoming academic endeavors. Those having acquired proper guidance succeed in selecting a specific branch of study without difficulties. Therefore, it is essential for us to be aware of the available opportunities for Higher Studies. This paper is a modest attempt to inspect an overview of the courses offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in West Bengal. For fulfilling the same objective, the researcher has accessed a list of courses available at the Centralized Admission Portal (CAP) of the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal. The CAP (an abbreviation for the same) was launched on 19th of June, 2024 which aims to simplify the admission process in the platform of Higher Education across the state. This write-up is built around a systematic study of a detailed elucidation of the availability and opportunities for the pupils who have successfully passed Higher Secondary examination. In recent times the field of Education has been profoundly expanded creating rooms for newer concerns and fresh experiences. This paper deliberates upon a thoroughgoing interpretation of a diverse range of courses, spanning from Traditional to Professional and Vocational streams. This is eagerly anticipated that this research article will illuminate us about the scopes and challenges in Higher Education.

Keywords : *Academic Programmes, Higher Education, West Bengal, District-wise programmes.*

Introduction

Higher Secondary Education (HSE) in India plays a pivotal role for students who are preparing for Higher Education to shape their career prospects. This phase is considered to be one of the most crucial phases in a student's life (Kaleem and Akhtar, 2021). HSE acts as a bridge between School Education and Higher Education which facilitates a smooth transition between the two spheres (Sahoo, 2024). A key function of HSE is to equip the students with the essential skills and knowledge which is required for exceling in their chosen fields of study at the level of Higher Education (Mwita et al., 2023).

However, upon completing HSE, many students face challenges in the selection of an appropriate subject or course for their Higher Education. During this transitional phase, they actively explore various options to make suitable decisions about their educational and career paths. Although, the shortlisting of a suitable subject requires significant effort, patience, and attention which is why this remains a significant and an essential task for students.

India's Higher Education system is the third-largest one as per the global index (Rajak & Tattwasarananda, 2020). It provides students with specialized knowledge and skills, contributing significantly to employability (NEP, 1986; Cheng, et. al 2022). Higher Education in India is delivered through recognized universities, affiliated colleges, and specialized institutions. Generally, colleges focus on Undergraduate courses, while universities are primarily responsible for Postgraduate and Doctoral-level programs.

However, many universities and colleges offer both undergraduate and postgraduate courses across general disciplines as well as technical and vocational fields. The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India offer a wide range of disciplines, including General Education, Technical Education, Medical Education, Vocational Training, Agriculture, and Professional courses. Colleges are primarily recognized for awarding degrees at the bachelor's level.

Significant disparities exist in the academic subjects offered by colleges, particularly in the state of West Bengal. To address these issues and promote uniformity and transparency in the admission process, the Centralized Admission Portal (CAP) was introduced on June 19, 2024, by the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal. This initiative aims to streamline the admission process across institutions with ease.

This systematic analysis aims to provide a detailed elucidation of the availability and opportunities for students who have successfully completed their Higher Secondary examination in West Bengal. It explores a diverse range of courses, spanning from Traditional disciplines to Professional and Vocational streams. The study aims to shed light on the scope and challenges of Higher Education to offer valuable insights for students for navigating their post-HSE academic journey.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To know the number of colleges/ Higher Education Institutions in West Bengal on the basis of district (and affiliating university) which are indexed in the Central Admission Portal, Government of West Bengal.
2. To explore the academic Courses/Programmes offered by the colleges and universities in West Bengal (as included in the Central Admission Portal, Government of West Bengal).
3. To identify the most offered as well as the least offered (common) subjects as attached in the Central Admission Portal, Government of West Bengal.

Method and Material:

The study is primarily based on quantitative analysis which is followed by a critical consideration of the same. It explores all courses or programmes that are indexed in the Centralized Admission Portal. The Centralized Admission Portal is an initiative of the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, which was launched on 19th of June, 2024 in order to build uniformity, transparency in the admission process and streamline the portal smoothly which will invariably be convenient for the students for applying in the Higher Educational institutions across the state. Currently, the portal focuses on the admission procedure for undergraduate courses of 16 Universities and 461 Government and Government-aided affiliated colleges or Higher Education Institutions. However, Presidency University, Jadavpur University, autonomous colleges, minority educational institutes or colleges, teacher training, Law, Fine Arts and Performing Arts, Crafts, Dance, Music, Engineering, Pharmacy, Nursing, Medical and Self-financing or Private colleges have been excluded from the centralized portal.

In addition to that, after a careful analysis of the data in the MS Excel, percentage-analysis technique is used to interpret the results.

Analysis and Interpretation:

At present there are 462 Government or Government aided degree colleges and 10 state-aided universities that offer a total of 6960 Undergraduate Programs through Centralized Admission Portal, West Bengal. These ten universities include the University of North Bengal, Kazi Nazrul University, Bankura University, SKBU, CBPBU, Raiganj University, The Sanskrit College and University, Diamond Harbour Women's University, Rabindra Bharati University and Murshidabad University. The university-wise number of affiliated colleges and the number of courses offered by these institutions is presented in **Table No. 1**.

Table 1. University-wise number of Degree Colleges

Sl. No.	Affiliating University	No. of Affiliated Degree Colleges (Govt./aided)	Total UG Courses
1.	University of Calcutta	122	1635
2.	University of Burdwan	58	1444
3.	Vidyasagar University	51	721
4.	West Bengal State University	45	667
5.	Kalyani University	51	581
6.	North Bengal University	41	454
7.	KaziNazrul University	13	421

8.	GourBanga University	25	312
9.	Bankura University	23	265
10.	SKBU	20	262
11.	Cooch Behar PanchananBarma University	13	145
12.	Raiganj University	0	26
13.	The Sanskrit College and University	0	10
14.	Diamond Harbour Women's University	0	9
15.	Rabindra Bharati University	0	7
16.	Murshidabad University	0	1
	Total Courses	**462***	**6960**
**10 universities have been excluded.*			

Source: Centralized Admission Portal, WBSCHE (https://wbcap.in/) (*as on 19.06.2024)*

According to the table, the University of Calcutta has the highest number of affiliated colleges offering the highest number of undergraduate courses, i.e. 1635. Followed by same, the colleges under the University of Burdwan offer 1444 courses, Vidyasagar University offers 721 courses, West Bengal State University offers 667 courses, Kalyani University offers 581 courses, North Bengal University offers 454 courses, Kazi Nazrul University offers 421 courses, Gour Banga University offers 312 courses, Bankura University offers 265 courses, Sidho Kanho Birsha University offers 262 courses, and Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University offers 145 courses, Raiganj University offers 26 courses, The Sanskrit College and University offers 10 courses, Diamond Harbour Women's University offers 9 courses, Rabindra Bharati University offers 7 courses, and Murshidabad University offers only one course at undergraduate level.

District-wise analysis of number of colleges and universities reveals a great disparity in number of institutions, while Kolkata gains much attention for having the highest number of degree colleges and universities, i.e. 65. The cause for the same maybe located at the colonial history of India which accounts for how British had set up the first industrial trade region in India. However, the North 24 Parganas, and South 24 Parganas have secured 2nd and 3rd position with 47 and 36 HEIs respectively. The Uttar Dinajpur district has the lowest number of degree colleges among all the districts (see Table No. 2).

Table 2. District-wise Distribution of HEIs that offer undergraduate programs

Sl. No.	District	Total HEIs	No. of Degree Colleges	No. of Universities
1.	Alipurduar	10	10	0
2.	Bankura	24	23	1
3.	Birbhum	16	16	0
4.	Cooch Behar	15	14	1
5.	Dakshin Dinajpur	10	10	0
6.	Darjeeling	16	15	1
7.	Hooghly	27	27	0
8.	Howrah	17	17	0
9.	Jalpaiguri	10	10	0
10.	Jhargram	10	10	0
11.	Kalimpong	3	3	0
12.	Kolkata	65	63	2
13.	Maldah	11	11	0
14.	Murshidabad	26	25	1
15.	Nadia	24	24	0
16.	North 24 Parganas	47	47	0
17.	Paschim Bardhaman	14	13	1
18.	Paschim Medinipur	21	21	0
19.	Purba Bardhaman	22	22	0
20.	Purba Medinipur	20	20	0
21.	Purulia	21	20	1
22.	South 24 Parganas	36	35	1
23.	Uttar Dinajpur	7	6	1
	Total	**472**	**462**	**10**

Currently, these institutions provide four kinds of programs based on course pattern (see the Table 3), which include namely, 1) 3-Year Degree Programme, 2) 3-Year Multidisciplinary, 3) 4-Year Honours and Research and 4) 4-Year Multidisciplinary program. On the other hand, on the basis of different types of degree, it appears that 10 different types of undergraduate courses (refer to Table 4), which

includes B.A (Bachelor of Arts), B.A/B.Sc., B.A/B.Sc./B.Com, B.Com. (Bachelor of Commerce), B.FAD (Bachelor of Fashion and Apparel Designing), B.Sc. (Bachelor of Science), B.Voc. (Bachelor of Vocational Studies), BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration), BBM (Bachelor of Business Management), and BCA (Bachelor of Computer Application).

Table 3. Course type based on Course Pattern

Sl. No.	Course Pattern	No. of Courses
1.	3-Year Degree Programme	976
2.	3-Year Multidisciplinary	547
3.	4-Year Hons./Hons& Research	5347
4.	4-Year Multidisciplinary	90
	Total	**6960**

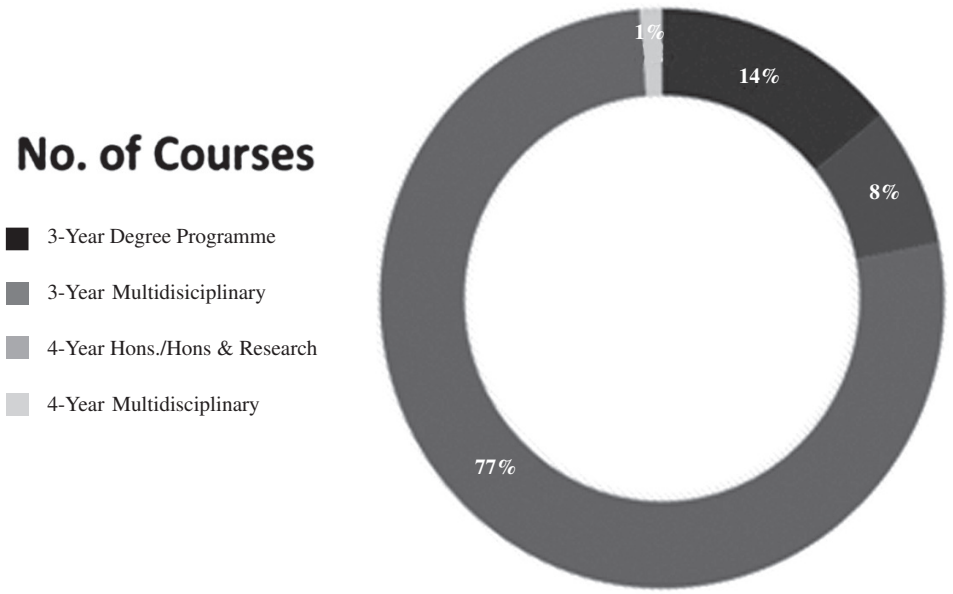


Figure 1: Percentage of UG Course based on Patten

From the above table, it is clear that out of total courses, 976 (14%) courses followed the 3-Year Degree Programme, 547 (8%) are 3-Year Multidisciplinary in nature, 5,347 (77%) are 4-Year Honours/ Honours and Research, and 90 (1%) are 4-Year Multidisciplinary programmes. The large number of courses under the 4-Year Honours/Honours & Research category is due to the Ministry of Education's adoption of the NEP 2020 policy, which the state subsequently embraced through the introduction of the State Education Policy in 2023.

Table 4. Stream-wise details of Subjects and Courses of Study

Sl. No.	Course Type	No. of Subjects	No. of Courses
1.	**B.A**	43	4198
2.	**B.Sc.**	43	2174
3.	**B.Com**	11	390
4.	**B.A/B.Sc.**	10	132
5.	**BCA**	1	22
6.	**BBA**	4	21
7.	**B.Voc.**	12	16
8.	**B.A/B.Sc./B.Com.**	5	5
9.	**B.FAD**	1	1
10.	**BBM**	1	1
	Total Courses		**6960**

As per the analysis about the distribution of courses by type, Bachelor of Arts (B.A) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) emerge as the most prevalent streams (see Appendix-I). More specifically, there are 4,198 course that are provided as B.A courses and 2,174 coursesas B.Sc. courses only. In contrast, 390 courses are offered as B.Com, 132 as B.A./B.Sc., 22 as BCA, 21 as BBA, and 16 as B.Voc. Furthermore, five subjects– Sericulture, Clinical Nutrition & Dietetics, Communicative English, Advertising Sales Promotion & Sales Management, and Tourism and Travel Management—are available as B.A/B.Sc./B.Com. degree courses.

Additionally, it is noted that the B.FAD and BBM courses are offered in only two colleges across the state. The Rani Birla Girls' College in Kolkata, affiliated to the University of Calcutta, is the sole institution providing an undergraduate degree course in Fashion and Apparel Design, while Cooch Behar College, Cooch Behar is the only one offering a BBM degree.

The undergraduate courses are primarily offered at Degree Colleges. However, there are many universities that also offer undergraduate level courses. The university-wise list of undergraduate programmes is presented in a table below.

Table 5.University-wise UG Program details

Sl. No.	University	Course Pattern	Type	Course
1.	**Bankura University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.A**	Philosophy in Santali Vernacular Geography in Santali Vernacular
			B.Sc.	Physics in Santali Vernacular Mathematics in Vernacular
2.	**Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.A**	Hindi
3.	**North Bengal University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.Sc.**	Tea Science
4.	**Raiganj University**	3-Year Degree Programme	**B.A/B.SC**	Geography
			B.A	English Bengali History Sanskrit
			BBA	Business Administration
			BCA	Computer Application
			B.A	Bengali Education English History Philosophy Political Science Sanskrit Sociology
		4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.A/B.SC**	Economics Geography
			B.Com	Accountancy Botany Chemistry Computer Science
			B.Sc.	Mathematics Microbiology Physics Sericulture Zoology

5.	**Sidho Kanho Birsha University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.Sc.**	Psychology
6.	**Murshidabad University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.A**	Santali
7.	**Kazi Nazrul University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.Sc.**	Medical Laboratory Technology Medical Radiology And Imaging Technology Optometry Physiotherapy Animal Science
8.	**Diamond Harbour Women's University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.Sc.** **B.A**	Mathematics Geography Philosophy Sanskrit Bengali Education English History Political Science
9.	**The Sanskrit College And University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.A**	Panini Vyakarana Sahitya Ancient Indian and World History Bengali English Linguistics Pali Philosophy Sanskrit Bengali Advaita Vedanta
10.	**Rabindra Bharati University**	4-Year Hons./Hons & Research	**B.A**	Economics English History Philosophy Political Science Sanskrit

Table 5 outlines the undergraduate courses offered by the state universities in West Bengal. Ten universities, as of now, offer their undergraduate courses through the Centralized Admission Portal of the Government of West Bengal. A total of 36 subjects are found which include Hindi, Tea Science, Geography, English, Bengali, History, Sanskrit, Business Administration, Computer Applications,

Education, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology, Economics, Accountancy, Botany, Chemistry, Computer Science, Mathematics, Microbiology, Physics, Sericulture, Zoology, Psychology, Santali, Medical Laboratory Technology, Medical Radiology and Imaging Technology, Optometry, Physiotherapy, Animal Science, Advaita Vedanta, Panini Vyakarana, Sahitya, Ancient Indian and World History, Linguistics and Pali.

Three universities employ unique features in offering various courses. Bankura University gives a special attention towards the importance of Santali vernacular as the medium of instruction. This university has provided undergraduate programmes on Philosophy, Geography, Physics, and Mathematics through Santali Vernacular. On the other hand, Kazi Nazrul University focuses on Medical Laboratory Technology, Medical Radiology & Imaging Technology, Optometry, Physiotherapy and Animal Science. Hence, the aspirants who are searching for courses in these fields may consider this institution on their priority list. However, to impart knowledge of ancient literature, Philosophy, Hindu Law, Grammar, Indian Culture, and Sanskrit among the Indians, The Sanskrit College and University provides an ample amount of courses which include Panini Vyakarana, Sahitya, Ancient Indian and World History, Bengali, English, Linguistics, Pali, Philosophy and Sanskrit.

Quantitatively, the Raiganj University stands out with a highest number of undergraduate courses. Previously known as Raiganj College, it has now upgraded into a full-fledged state university. At present the university offers 26 subjects for undergraduate course. Raiganj University is the only institution which offers an UG course in Sericulture. Moreover a course on Tea Science is found at North Bengal University, Psychology at Sidho Kanho Birsha University, Santali at Murshidabad University and Hindi at Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University.

Top Ten Most offered Subjects:

The Appendix II shows the list of subjects provided in a total number of colleges and universities in West Bengal along with the percentage. According to the table, there are a total of 112 subjects which are provided exclusively at undergraduate level across the state. Out of them, English, Bengali, History, Political Science, Philosophy, Sanskrit, Geography, Education, Mathematics and Chemistry are identified as the top ten most offered subjects.

There has been seen disparity in between the Arts (or Humanities) and Science streams. Subjects connected with the stream of Arts show higher importance than that of Science. However, in the category of Science stream, the subjects like Geography, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Zoology, Botany, Computer Science etcetera appeared as highly demanding subjectsas compared to other streams.

Less Offered/Common Subjects:

Only a small number of institutions in the state focus on a limited range of subjects. For those interested in general Arts or Science disciplines may opt for the following subjects: Physical Education (offered in 87 colleges), Physiology (38 colleges), Anthropology (25 colleges), Statistics (15 colleges), Psychology (22 colleges), Electronics (14 colleges), Geology (13 colleges), Plant Protection (3 colleges), Sericulture (2 colleges) and Library and Information Science (2 colleges).

Figure No. 2 illustrates the availability of these subjects across districts in West Bengal. The figure clearly shows that subjects like Computer Science, Education, Sanskrit, History, Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Political Science, Sociology, Zoology, Geography, English, Economics, Chemistry, Botany, Bengali and Accountancy are widely offered and are available in nearly all districts.

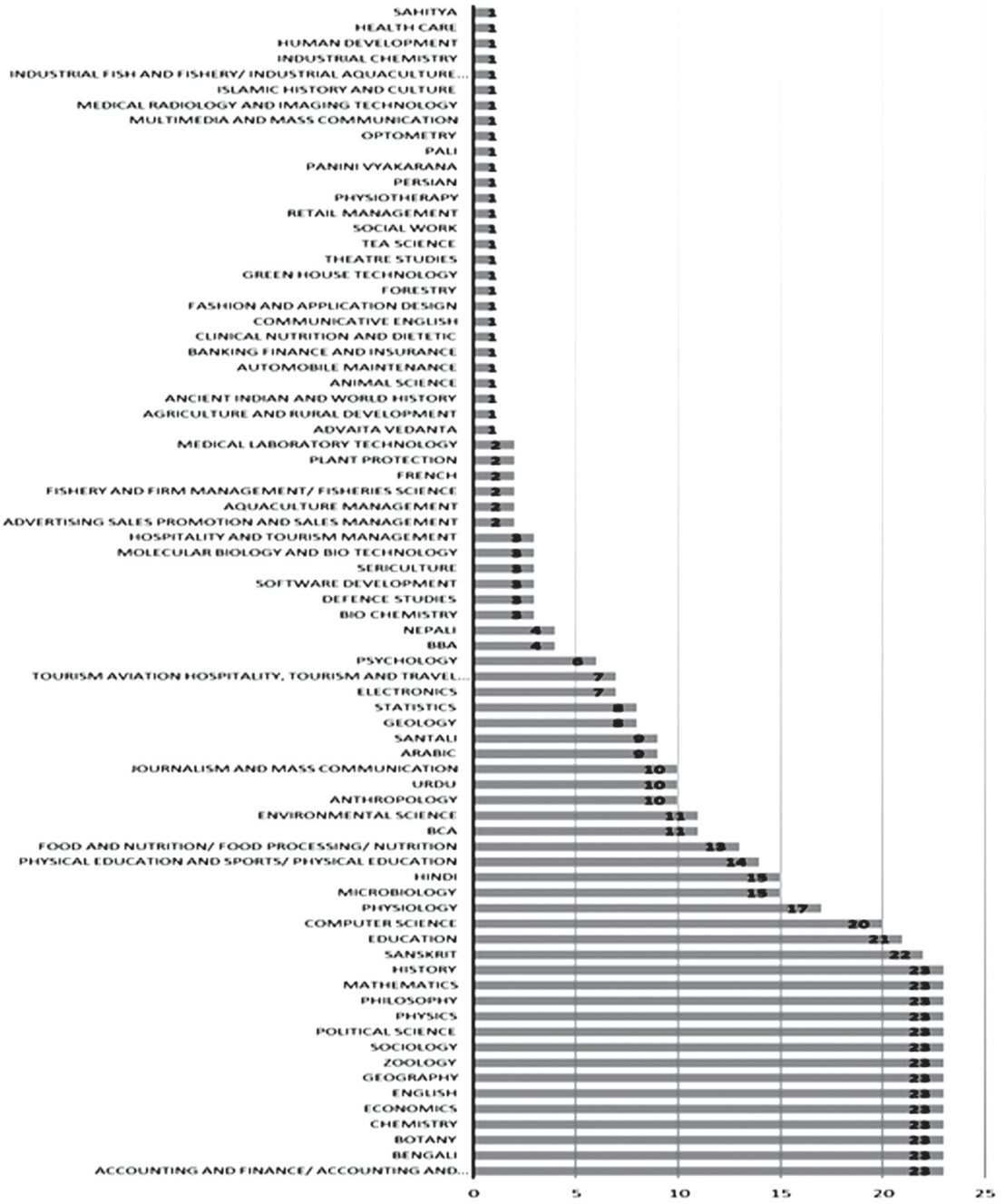


Figure 2. Subject-wise No. of Districts Details

However, apart from these subjects, there are certain subjects that have also been noticed in a very less number of districts. The following few are the list of subjects which students may consider for pursing graduation degree after completion of their school education.

1. Language based courses:

In addition to the traditional language subjects, the state has also offered Honours courses in Santali (39 colleges), Urdu (26 colleges), Arabic (29 colleges), Nepali (15 colleges), Kudmali (8 colleges), Persian (3 colleges), and French (2 colleges). The Santali Honours course is primarily concentrated in the southwestern districts of the state, which includes Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura, and Medinipur (both Purba and Paschim). Urdu Honours is available in 10 districts (Birbhum, Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur, Maldah, Howrah, Murshidabad, Paschim Bardhaman, Kolkata, Hooghly, and North 24 Parganas), while Arabic Honours is offered in 9 districts (Birbhum, Dakshin Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Maldah, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Hooghly, and North 24 Parganas) and Nepali Honours is available in 4 districts (Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling).

The Persian Honours course is provided by three colleges only: Government Girls' General Degree College, Lady Brabourne College, and Maulana Azad College. Meanwhile, Honours in French is offered exclusively at Syamaprasad College, Kolkata, and Chandernagore College, Hooghly.

2. Professional Courses:

Professional degree prepares students for a particular profession by emphasizing competency skills along with theory and analysis (Miller et al. 2018). The HEIs of the state have provided a number of professional degree courses that can be considered for higher studies. The few of them are discussed below:

- **Journalism and Mass Communication:** The course in Journalism and Mass Communication is becoming increasingly popular. It includes topics such as Reporting and Editing, Radio Broadcasting, Media and Communication, Cultural Studies, Media Management, Press law, Advertising, Public Relations and so on. However, there are plenty of career opportunities which include News Reporter, Screenwriter, Radio Jockey, Content Writer, Advertisement, TV Correspondent, Public Relation Specialist, etc. (Yusuf, 2016; Hindustan Institute of Technology & Science, 2024). Currently, 45 colleges are offering Honours programs in this field across the state.
- **Food and Nutrition:** A wider scope can be found in the field of Food and Nutrition. This field offers extensive career opportunities in Government as well as Non-Government organizations spanning across departments such as Health, Social Welfare, and national or international bodies (Choudhury, 2020). Positions such as Nutrition Consultants, Sports Nutritionist, Sustainable

Nutritionist, Public Health Nutritionist, Food Safety Officer, Food Technologists, Flavour Chemist, Molecular Gastronomist, Food Stylist, Food Critic, Programme Executives, Nutrition Counsellors, and Dieticians are in demand, especially in health departments (Prasad, 2021). At present 49 colleges have provided undergraduate Honours courses.

- **Tourism and Travel Management:** Upon completing a course in Tourism and Travel Management, students can pursue careers as Travel Officers, Travel Executives, Airline Staff or Managers, Tour Guides, Travel Agents, Tour Operators, Travel Writers, and more (Shilpi, 2016; Vedpathak, 2024). In this state, only 11 colleges offer an Honours degree in Tourism and Travel Management.
- **Defence Studies:** Defence Studies is an academic discipline that explores topics related to national and international security (Singh, 2015). It encompasses areas such as military history, strategy, international relations and defence policy. This Honours course is available at only three colleges, namely Sudhiranjan Lahiri Mahavidyalaya (Nadia), Syamsundar College (Purba Bardhaman), and Rabindra Mahavidyalaya (Hooghly). Graduates of this program can pursue various career opportunities in the Indian Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, Fire Brigade and other security-related fields.
- **Advertising Sales Promotion and Sales Management:** This course is primarily focused on marketing strategies, advertising and sales promotion techniques, communication strategies, and sales management principles. It prepares students for careers in advertising, sales management, marketing, public relations, brand management, digital marketing, and related fields. Currently, it is offered at only two colleges: Gokhale Memorial Girls' College (Kolkata) and Bhairab Ganguly College (North 24 Parganas).
- **Fishery Science/ Aquaculture Management:** The Fishery Science or Aquaculture Management course is a specialized field of study that focuses on fish farming techniques, sustainable aquaculture practices, aquatic biology and related areas (Murty, 2015). In West Bengal, there are seven colleges which offer an Honours-level program in this discipline. Among them, three colleges provide B.Sc. Honours course: Asutosh College (Kolkata), Acharya Prafulla Chandra College (North 24 Parganas), and Brahmananda Keshab Chandra College (North 24 Parganas). Additionally, Khejuri College (Purba Medinipur) and Ramnagar College (Purba Medinipur) also offer the program. Two colleges, Ramnagar College (Purba Medinipur) and Asutosh College (Kolkata) offer the course as a B.Voc. programme.
- **Agriculture and Rural Development:** The subject encompasses a range of subjects which includes Animal Husbandry, Agronomy, Horticulture, Sericulture, Agricultural Technology, Rural Marketing, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering, and Rural Livelihood related fields (TMU, 2024). It opens plenty of career opportunities in agricultural and rural sectors, such as

marketing manager, Research officer, Rural Manager, Trainer, Consultants etc. However, in this state, there is only one college that offers an undergraduate Honours course on it namely Chandraketugarh Sahidullah Smriti Mahavidyalaya, located at North 24 Parganas district.

- **Automobile Maintenance:** An undergraduate course in Automobile Maintenance, commonly known as Automobile Servicing, equips students with specialized skills in maintaining heavy commercial vehicles, along with mechanical, electrical, and electronic control systems. Bajkul Milani Mahavidyalaya in Purba Medinipur is the only college which offers an honours degree in this field.
- **Fashion and Apparel Design:** The fashion industry in India has experienced substantial growth in recent years (Bhatia & Juneja, 2016; Rajput, 2023). It encompasses a rich history of clothing trends, sewing techniques, footwear design and garment craftsmanship. Rani Birla Girls' College in Kolkata is the only institution in the state which offers an undergraduate honours programme in Fashion and Apparel Design (B.FAD). This course opens up a wide range of career opportunities including roles as a fashion designer, textile designer, art director, illustrator, influencer, stylist, consultant, merchandiser, model, retail buyer, product developer, graphic designer, creative director and many more (Rajput, 2023). Students may consider this field in their wish list.
- **Forestry:** By studying Forestry Science, students can find a wide range of career opportunities, including positions such as Forester, Forest Range Officer, Forestry Technician, Forestry Consultant, and Forestry Scientist/Silviculturist. However, job opportunities are more limited in West Bengal, with the subject being primarily concentrated in the Bankura district. For those interested in pursuing an undergraduate degree in Forestry, Pandit Raghunath Murmu Smriti Mahavidyalaya is the only college in the entire state that offers an honours degree in this field.
- **Tea Science:** North Bengal University is the only university in the state that offers an undergraduate program in Tea Science. This program is primarily aimed at strengthening the backbone of the tea industry across the country. By offering this unique program, Darjeeling district distinguishes itself from other districts.

3. Vocational Courses:

Beside the traditional courses, seven colleges, namely Gour Mahavidyalaya, Belda College, Egra Sarada Shashi Bhusan College, Mugberia Gangadhar Mahavidyalaya, Ramnagar College, Asutosh College and Bangabasi Evening College have offered B.Voc. (Bachelor of Vocational Education) degree courses on the following twelvemajor subjects. These are :

i. Health Care,
ii. Medical Laboratory Technology,

iii. Software Development,
iv. Green House Technology,
v. Theatre Studies,
vi. Food Processing,
vii. Tourism and Hotel Management,
viii. Fishery and Firm Management,
ix. Hospitality and Tourism Management,
x. Retail Management,
xi. Industrial Aquaculture and Fisheries
xii. Banking Finance and Insurance.

Students may also opt one of these courses after completion of their School Education. The B.Voc.course is basically a three-Year undergraduate programme that focuses on skills development-based learning.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the academic programs available for Higher Education in West Bengal through the Centralized Admission Portal, which was aimed to enhance the accessibility and transparency of the state's Higher Education system. The state's HEIs offer a wide collection of courses at undergraduate level after the successful completion of Higher Secondary Education. The most prevalent programmes are found in the fields of Arts and Science, while specialized courses such as Fashion and Apparel Design, Defence Studies, and BBM are available at only a few colleges.

The study also highlights the efforts that few universities have addressed, like Bankura University, in promoting regional languages like Santali as a medium of instruction. Despite the diversity of subjects offered across districts, there are notable disparities in the distribution of institutions and courses. In response to societal demands, some colleges have begun to prioritize professional and vocational courses alongside traditional ones. These vocational programmes aimed at enhancing employability include subjects like Plant Protection, Sericulture, Library and Information Science, Journalism and Mass Communication, Food and Nutrition, Tourism and Travel Management, Advertising Sales Promotion and Sales Management, Fishery Science, Agriculture and Rural Development, Automobile Maintenance, Forestry, Tea Science, and more. Overall the findings emphasize a need for a guided approach in selecting appropriate courses available for Higher Education in West Bengal.

References

- Bhatia, G. & Juneja, S. 2016. 'Analytical Study on Indian Fashion Designers'. *International Journal of Recent Research Aspects*, 3 (3): 86-94.
- Centralized Admission Portal. 2024. Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, Retrieved on June 19, 2024, from: https://wbcap.in/.
- Cheng, M., Adekola, O., Albia, J. C. and Cai, S. 2022. 'Employability in Higher Education: A Review of Key Stakeholders' Perspectives'. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, 16 (1): 16-31.
- Choudhury, M. 2020. 'Food Science and Nutrition as A Career', Employment News, Retrieved on July 8, 2024, from: https://www.employmentnews.gov.in/FOOD%20 SCIENCE%20 AND% 20NUTRITION% 20AS%20A%20 CAREER 20Nov15.pdf
- Hindustan Institute of Technology & Science. 2024. Career Options in Journalism & Mass Communication & Scope of Journalism. Retrieved on July 15, 2024, from: https://hindustanuniv.ac.in/blogs/career-in-journalism-and-mass-communication-job-options-and-scope/
- Kaleem, S. and Akhtar, S. M. J. 2021. 'A Review of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education in India'. *South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics*, 12 (4): 148-158.
- MHRD India. 1986. National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986. New Delhi: MHRD India. Retrieved on June 12, 2024, from: http://www.ncert.nic.in/oth anoun/npe86.pdf.
- Miller, A. K., et al. 2018. 'The Impact of a College Career Course on Students' Career Decision States', *The Career Development Quarterly*, 66 (4): 371-377.
- Murty, V. S. 2015. 'The Status of Fisheries Science in India – Including results of certain field developments, the results of application of innovations resulting from fisheries science work', *Fishing Chimes*, 34 (11): 9-31.
- Mwita, K., Kinunda, S., Obwolo, S., and Mwilongo, N. 2023. 'Soft Skills Development in Higher Education Institutions'. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science.* 12 (3): 505–513.
- Prasad, N. 2021. 'Emerging Careers in Food and Nutrition Science', Employment News, Retrieved on July 8, 2024, from: https://www.employmentnews.gov.in/NewEmp/More Content New.aspx?n = In Depth Jobs & k = 60204
- Rajak, P. &Tattwasarananda, S. 2020. 'Growth of Higher Education Institutions in West Bengal with Special Reference to their Status of Accreditation'. *Pedagogy of Learning*, 6 (2): 1-13.
- Rajput, A. 2023. 'Future Prospects in Fashion Design'. *International Journal of Home Science*, 9 (2): 203-205.
- Sahoo, S. 2024. 'Secondary Education in West Bengal: Status and Challenges'. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 11 (1): 404-413.
- Shilpi, M. 2016. 'Scope of Tourism in India'. *International Journal of Enhanced Research in Management & Computer Application*, 5 (5): 48-51.
- Singh, S. 2015. 'The State of Security Studies in India: Limitations and Potential'. *Millennial Asia*, 6 (2): 191–204.
- TMU. 2024. 'BSc Agriculture Course Details, Full Form, Admission, Fees, Syllabus, Top Colleges, Career', Retrieved on May 21, 2024, from: https://www.tmu.ac.in/blog/bsc-agriculture-course-details-full-form-admission-fees-syllabus-top-colleges-

career#:~:text = The%20BSc%20 Agriculture% 20program%20 typically, agricultural%20 economics%2C%20 and %20 agricultural%20 engineering.

- Vedpathak, S. 2024. 'A career in Travel and Tourism'. *The Hindu, Retrieved* on July 27, 2024, from: https://www.thehindu.com/education/careers/a-career-in-travel-and-tourism/article 68425133.ece
- Yusuf, M. K. 2016. 'Career in Mass Communication: Opportunities and Responsibilities'. *Deleted Journal,* 5 (7): 9–13.

Bio Profile of the Author:
Assistant Professor
Department of Education, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University,
West Bengal, Pin-736101,
Email: edu.pritam@gmail.com

Appendix – I: Stream-wise details of Subjects offered at HEIs in WB

Sl. No.	Course Type	Subjects	Total Subjects	Total Courses
1.	B.A	Bengali, Economics, English, Geography, History, Philosophy, Political Science, Sanskrit, General Arts, Education, Nepali, Sociology, Hindi, Physical Education & Sports, Santali, Social Work, Arabic, Urdu, Journalism & Mass Communication, Kudmali, Anthropology, Tourism & Travel Management, Chemistry, Accounting & Finance, Statistics, Defence Studies, Library & Information Science, Multimedia & Mass Communication, Mathematics, Communicative English, Psychology, Persian, Geology, Islamic History & Culture, French, Advaita Vedanta, Panini Vyakarana, Sahitya, Ancient Indian & World History, Linguistics, Pali, Human Development, Computer Application	43	4198
2.	B.Sc.	Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Zoology, Bio Science, Pure Science, Geography, Computer Science, Economics, Microbiology, Nutrition, Environmental Science, Geology, Forestry, Physiology, Electronics, Plant Protection, Food & Nutrition, Tea Science, General Science, Life Science, Physical Science, Anthropology, Sericulture, Psychology, Molecular Biology & Bio Technology, Statistics, Mathematics & Computer Science, Automobile Maintenance, Aquaculture Management, Industrial Chemistry, Bio Chemistry, Medical Laboratory Technology, Medical Radiology & Imaging Technology, Optometry, Physiotherapy, Animal Science, Industrial Fish & Fishery, Computer Application, Fisheries Science, Agriculture & Rural Development, Biological Sciences	43	2174
3.	B.Com	Accounting & Finance, Commerce, Accounting & Management, Accountancy, Business Management, Financial Accounting, Marketing Management, Accounting, Accountancy & Marketing Management, Advertising Sales Promotion & Sales Management, Tourism & Travel Management	11	390
4.	B.A/B.Sc.	Geography, Economics, Physical Education & Sports, Psychology, Mathematics, Food & Nutrition, Library & Information Science, Tourism & Travel Management, Computer Application, Human Development	10	132
5.	BCA	Computer Application	1	22
6.	BBA	Tourism Aviation Hospitality, Business Management, Business Administration, Hospitality & Tourism Management	4	21
7.	B.Voc.	Health Care, Medical Laboratory Technology, Software Development, Green House Technology, Theatre Studies, Food Processing, Tourism And Hotel Management, Fishery And Firm Management, Hospitality And Tourism Management, Retail Management, Industrial Aquaculture And Fisheries, Banking Finance And Insurance	12	16
8.	B.A/B.Sc. /B.Com.	Sericulture, Clinical Nutrition & Dietetic, Communicative English, Advertising Sales Promotion & Sales Management, Tourism & Travel Management	5	5
9.	B.FAD	Fashion and Application Design	1	1
10.	BBM	Business Administration	1	1
		Total Courses		**6960**

Appendix – II: Subjects-wise number of HEIs offered in West Bengal

Sl. No.	Subjects	Total No. of Colleges				% of Colleges offer 4-YearsHons./ Hons. With Research Prog	Universities		% of Universities offer4-YearsHons./ Hons. With Research Prog.
		3-Years Degree Program	3-Year Multidisciplinary	4-YearsHons./ Hons. With Research Prog.	4-Years Multidisciplinary Program		3-Years Degree Program	4-YearsHons./ Hons. With Research Prog.	
1.	English	67	1	445	0	**96.32**	1	4	**40**
2.	Bengali	69	2	439	0	**95.02**	1	4	**40**
3.	History	69	1	437	0	**94.58**	1	3	**30**
4.	Political Science	67	1	391	0	**84.63**	0	3	**30**
5.	Philosophy	68	1	339	0	**73.37**	0	4	**40**
6.	Sanskrit	67	1	318	0	**68.83**	1	4	**40**
7.	Geography	54	5	312	0	**67.53**	1	2	**20**
8.	Education	37	1	275	0	**59.52**	0	2	**20**
9.	Mathematics	53	1	246	0	**53.24**	0	2	**20**
10.	Chemistry	49	0	222	0	**48.05**	0	1	**10**
11.	Physics	48	0	213	0	**46.10**	0	1	**10**
12.	Economics	46	1	207	0	**44.80**	0	2	**20**
13.	General Arts	0	199	39	0	**8.44**	0	0	**0**
14.	Zoology	41	0	178	0	**38.52**	0	1	**10**
15.	Botany	41	0	161	0	**34.84**	0	1	**10**
16.	Commerce	12	101	41	0	**8.87**	0	0	**0**
17.	Sociology	14	0	126	0	**27.27**	0	1	**10**
18.	Computer Science	17	2	107	0	**23.16**	0	1	**10**
19.	General Science	0	100	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
20.	Accountancy	0	3	90	0	**19.48**	0	1	**10**
21.	Hindi	15	0	61	0	**13.20**	0	1	**10**
22.	Physical Education	18	3	48	0	**10.38**	0	0	**0**
23.	Accounting and Finance	0	1	53	14	**11.47**	0	0	**0**
24.	Accounting and Management	32	0	32	0	**6.92**	0	0	**0**
25.	Physical Education and Sports	20	0	39	0	**8.44**	0	0	**0**
26.	Santali	9	0	39	0	**8.44**	0	1	**10**
27.	Journalism and Mass Communication	3	0	41	0	**8.87**	0	0	**0**
28.	Physiology	4	0	38	0	**8.22**	0	0	**0**
29.	Microbiology	2	0	37	0	**8.008**	0	1	**10**

30.	Physical Science	0	37	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
31.	Urdu	10	0	26	0	**5.62**	0	0	**0**
32.	Pure Science	0	17	0	18	**0**	0	0	**0**
33.	Life Science	0	33	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
34.	Arabic	2	1	29	0	**6.27**	0	0	**0**
35.	Nutrition	6	0	25	0	**5.41**	0	0	**0**
36.	Bio Science	0	19	0	11	**0**	0	0	**0**
37.	Environmental Science	7	0	20	0	**4.32**	0	0	**0**
38.	Anthropology	0	0	25	0	**5.41**	0	0	**0**
39.	Statistics	10	0	15	0	**3.24**	0	0	**0**
40.	Food and Nutrition	0	1	23	0	**4.97**	0	0	**0**
41.	Psychology	0	0	22	0	**4.76**	0	1	**10**
42.	Electronics	8	0	14	0	**3.03**	0	0	**0**
43.	Computer Application	0	0	16	0	**3.46**	0	1	**10**
44.	Nepali	0	0	15	0	**3.24**	0	0	**0**
45.	Geology	0	0	13	0	**2.81**	0	0	**0**
46.	BBA	0	0	7	2	**1.51**	0	0	**0**
47.	Mathematics and Computer Science	0	9	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
48.	BCA	0	0	7	1	**1.51**	0	0	**0**
49.	Business Administration	0	0	6	1	**1.29**	0	1	**10**
50.	Kudmali	0	0	8	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
51.	Bio Chemistry	0	0	6	0	**1.29**	0	0	**0**
52.	Business Management	0	0	4	1	**0.86**	0	0	**0**
53.	Communicative English	0	0	5	0	**1.08**	0	0	**0**
54.	Human Development	0	0	5	0	**1.08**	0	0	**0**
55.	Mass Communication and Journalism	0	0	4	0	**0.86**	0	0	**0**
56.	Persian	0	1	3	0	**0.64**	0	0	**0**
57.	Tourism and Travel Management	0	0	4	0	**0.86**	0	0	**0**
58.	Defence Studies	2	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
59.	Financial Accounting	0	1	2	0	**0.43**	0	0	**0**
60.	Hospitality and Tourism Management	0	0	3	0	**0.64**	0	0	**0**
61.	Molecular Biology and Bio Technology	0	0	3	0	**0.64**	0	0	**0**
62.	Plant Protection	3	0	0	0	**0**	0	0	**0**
63.	Sericulture	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	1	**10**
64.	Software Development	0	1	2	0	**0.43**	0	0	**0**

65.	Tourism Aviation Hospitality	0	0	0	3	**0**	0	0		**0**
66.	Accounting	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
67.	Advertising Sales Promotion and Sales Management	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
68.	Aquaculture Management	0	0	0	2	**0**	0	0		**0**
69.	Fisheries Science	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
70.	Food Processing	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
71.	French	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
72.	Library and Information Science	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
73.	Medical Laboratory Technology	0	1	0	0	**0**	0	1		**10**
74.	Multimedia and Mass Communication	0	0	2	0	**0.43**	0	0		**0**
75.	Philosophy in Santali Vernacular	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	1		**10**
76.	Accountancy and Marketing Management	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
77.	Advaita Vedanta	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1		**10**
78.	Agriculture and Rural Development	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
79.	Ancient Indian and World History	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1		**10**
80.	Animal Science	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1		**10**
81.	Automobile Maintenance	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
82.	Banking Finance and Insurance	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
83.	Biological Sciences	0	1	0	0	**0**	0	0		**0**
84.	Clinical Nutrition and Dietetic	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
85.	Fashion and Application Design	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
86.	Fishery and Firm Management	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
87.	Forestry	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
88.	General Arts in Santali Medium	0	1	0	0	**0**	0	0		**0**
89.	Geography in Santali Vernacular	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1		**10**
90.	Green House Technology	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
91.	Health Care	1	0	0	0	**0**	0	0		**0**
92.	History in Santali Medium	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
93.	Industrial Aquaculture and Fisheries	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
94.	Industrial Chemistry	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
95.	Industrial Fish and Fishery	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
96.	Islamic History and Culture	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0		**0**
97.	Linguistics	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1		**10**

98.	Marketing Management	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
99.	Mathematics in Vernacular	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
100.	Medical Radiology and Imaging Technology	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
101.	Optometry	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
102.	Pali	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
103.	Panini Vyakarana	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
104.	Physics in Santali Vernacular	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
105.	Physiotherapy	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
106.	Political Science in Santali Vernacular	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
107.	Retail Management	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
108.	Sahitya	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
109.	Social Work	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
110.	Tea Science	0	0	0	0	**0**	0	1	**10**
111.	Theatre Studies	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
112.	Tourism and Hotel Management	0	0	1	0	**0.21**	0	0	**0**
	TOTAL	**971**	**547**	**5324**	**53**		**5**	**60**	

Source: *Centralized Admission Portal, West Bengal (As on 19.06.2024)*

Psychological Wellbeing of Pre-Service Teacher Trainees- An Exploration

[1]*Trupti Subhrajyoti* & [2]*Amulya Kumar Acharya*

Abstract

Teaching is a demanding and dynamic profession that involves addressing learners' diverse needs and fostering global citizenship with a strong sense of pride. Teachers' wellbeing is impacted by various stressors, including heavy workload, lack of administrative assistance, lack of parental support, lack of career advancement opportunities, participation in educational reform, lack of autonomy, unstable working conditions, and low self-esteem. Pre-service teacher trainees face constant exposure to various contextual and personal stressors, which is not different from the regular work environment. The emergence indication towards high levels of stress, burnout, and attrition faced by pre-service trainee teachers and hindered psychological wellbeing which is a substantial influencing factor for the teacher's performance in schools draw the desired attention to explore the current status of Psychological Wellbeing of trainees teachers enrolled in 4 years Integrated B.Sc./B.A.-B.Ed. teacher education programme in Balasore district, analyse the contribution of theory and practicum/internship program of the curriculum in psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees, and investigate teacher educators' opinion about the current scenario of Pre-service teacher trainees' Psychological Wellbeing. Data were collected from both Pre-service Teacher trainees and Teacher Educators (n1 = 214, n2=10) through simple random sampling techniques. A Psychological Wellbeing Scale was developed and standardized for Pre-Service Teacher trainees, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability score .859, ensuring its potentiality. The result shows that around 73.68% of pre-service teacher trainees had acceptable psychological wellbeing whereas the status of psychological wellbeing of both male and female trainees were same. Additionally, the internship/practicum portion of curriculum affect more to their psychological wellbeing rather than theoretical/teaching learning environment. Teacher educators of TEIs also gave their significant contribution in drawing a remarkable conclusion related to the present study.

Keywords: *Psychological Wellbeing, Pre-service teacher trainees*

Introduction

Teaching is one of the most demanding and challenging professions as it assigns teachers with the task of addressing learners' multidimensional needs (Chirico et al., 2020). Additionally, to play the dynamic role in installing Indian pride in learners, develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support human rights, sustainable development, and global well-being, fostering a global citizen with a deep-rooted sense of pride in order to make India 'a global knowledge superpower' mentioned in the document of National Education Policy, 2020 is absolutely not an easy task for a teacher and the professional trainees who carry a vision to pursue 'teaching as a profession' of the present era. As the central stakeholder in the educational process, teachers need excellent psychological well-being (Gunathilaka et al., 2022; Honskusová et al., 2022; Kossybayeva et al.,2022). But, currently researchers explored that Teachers' wellbeing is impacted by various stressors including heavy workloads (Agyapong et al., 2022; Wahab et al., 2024), lack of administrative assistance in schools and parent relations (Gearhart et al., 2022), lack of career opportunities, participation in educational reform discussions, unstable working conditions, and low self-esteem that contributing to a negative work environment (Ortan et al., 2021). Moreover, the pre-service teacher trainees face constant exposure to various contextual and personal stressors, which is not different from their regular work environment (Zaimoðlu & Dagtas, 2023).

Studies have highlighted the importance of emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, self-awareness, and physical aspects of well-being (Alluru & Suneela, 2023) where Dreer-Goethe (2023) has linked teacher well-being to mentoring quality. As, teachers' wellbeing is significantly influenced by educational reforms, yet systematic research on this topic is scarce (Aoetal., 2023). Hence researchers in the present study focused on the psychological wellbeing of pre-service trainee teachers, who are preparing themselves for 21st-century classroom. Moreover, Zaimoðlu & Dagtas (2023) explored pre-service teachers' wellbeing during practicum. Rachmawati and Lidyasari's (2023) have found that 44 Indonesian pre-service training teachers had excellent well-being but struggled to improve their quality over time. Social support and lifestyle variables significantly impact the psychological well-being of 410 pre-service teachers in Turkey, with marriage being the most significant predictor (Sezer, 2022). Zaki's (2019) study found moderate levels of psychological well-being across genders, highlighting implications for teacher education programs. Zadworna-Ciešlak & Kossakowska (2018) explored the impact of stress and psychological logic on teacher well-being. Currently, in the process of making 21st century teacher, the attention is dragged by the trainees as Corcoran & O'Flaherty (2022) found learning to teach is stressful as like as teaching and highlighted that Pre-service teacher encountered academic, social, and emotional difficulties during their learning to teach (Corcoran & O'Flaherty, 2022). Thus, the emergence indication towards hindered psychological wellbeing which

is a substantial influencing factor for the teacher's performance in schools (Rachmawati & Lidyasari, 2023) draw the desired attention to explore the current status of Psychological Wellbeing of pre-service trainee teachers, those who chose and enrolled in Integrated teacher education programmes just after finishing their higher secondary education. Moreover, Researchers can never ignore the immature career decision making ability of the adolescents (Subhrajyoti, 2023) for those who although take admission into integrated TEPs, but feel hard to exist.

Research Question

1. What is the current status of Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees?
2. Which portion in the curriculum (Theory and Practicum/Internship) affect more to the Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees ?
3. What do the teacher educators perceive about the Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees?

Objective of the study

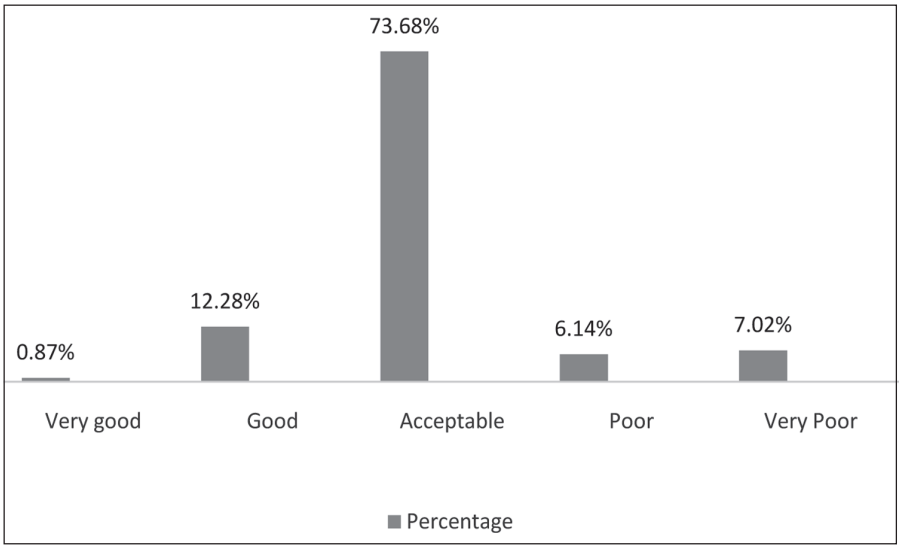
1. To explore the current status of Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees.
2. To analyze the contribution of theory and practicum/internship portion of Curriculum in Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees.
3. To investigate the teacher educators' perception about the current scenario of Pre-service teacher trainees' Psychological Wellbeing.

Methods

Data were collected from both Pre-service Teacher trainees and Teacher Educators (n1 = 214, n2=10) through simple random sampling techniques, those who are currently enrolled and joined in Teacher Education Institutions for Integrated B.Sc.-B.Ed./B.A.-B.Ed. Programmes. Researcher developed a Psychological Wellbeing Scale for Pre-Service Teacher trainees with proper standardization in the present context to collect data from the trainees and used an interview schedule to collect the opinion of all the faculty members those who are serving as Teacher Educators in several TEIs based upon their lived experiences related to PSW of their student trainees. The Cronbach's alpha reliability score for the Psychological Wellbeing scale is .859 which ensures the potentiality of the tool.

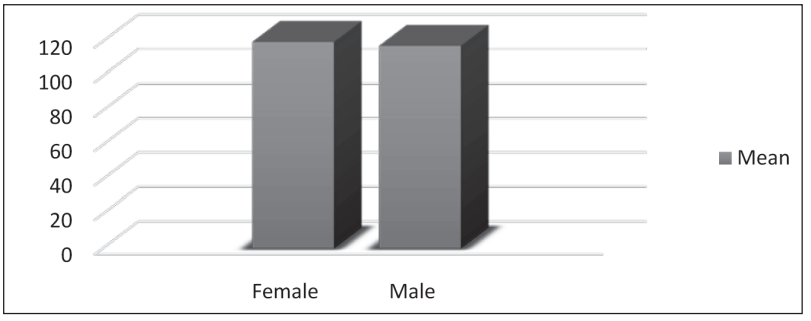
Result

To explore the current status of Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees



[Fig. 1 Status of PSW of Pre-service teacher trainees]

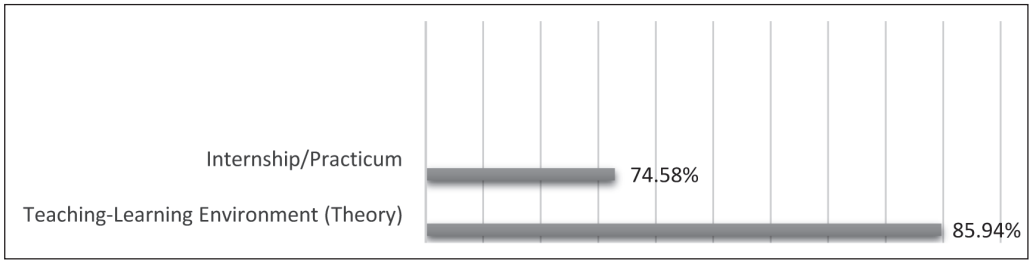
From the above figure, it is found that 73.68% Pre-service teacher trainees of integrated TEPs had acceptable and 12.28% had good psychological wellbeing. Whereas, only 0.87% had very good psychological wellbeing. The percentage was more in case of degraded psychological wellbeing which showed around 14% trainees were coming below the acceptable range. It might be due to the parental pressure to join in the integrated programme rather than individual's own interests and choice. Further, the Institutional climate might be improper to address the needs regarding career growth in teaching profession.



[Fig. 2 Mean difference between Female and Male trainee teachers w.r.t their PSW]

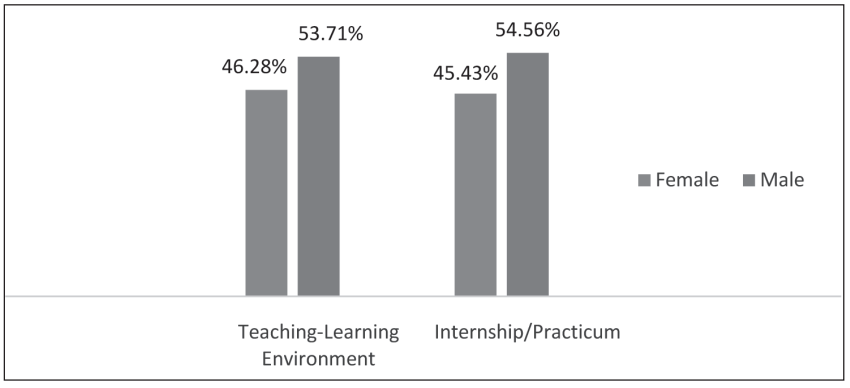
From the above figure, it is resulted that there was no statistically significant difference in the psychological wellbeing of male and female pre-service trainee teachers of integrated TEPs. Both the gender were having same status of wellbeing in psychological perspectives which might be due to the uniform selection procedure of the state for admission.

To analyze the contribution of theory and Practicum/internship portion of Curriculum in Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees.



[Fig. 3Psychological wellbeing of Pre-service teacher trainees w.r.t Teaching-Learning Environment (theory) and Internship/Practicum]

The result depicted that internship/practicum portion (74.58%) in curriculum affect the psychological wellbeing of pre-service trainee teachers of Integrated TEPs rather than the theoretical teaching-learning portion (85.94%). Pre-service trainee teachers possessed great psychological wellbeing during theoretical transaction but felt distressed during internship/practicum. It might be due to lack of orientation and practice before pre-internship which leads to poor confidence. Further, absence of microteaching lesson, simulation in the syllabus ultimately affect the interpersonal and communication skills of pre-service trainee teachers what make them psychologically distressed during internship.



[Fig. 4Psychological wellbeing of Female and Male Pre-service teacher trainees w.r.t Teaching-Learning Environment and Internship/Practicum]

The above figure 5 designed very clearly Gender related Psychological wellbeing differences with respect to different learning conditions. In both theory and practicum portion, Female trainee teachers had low psychological wellbeing than their Counterparts. If both the portions of curriculum is analysed, female trainees felt more psychological distress during practicum/internship than theoretical transaction but male trainees had better psychological wellbeing during practicum/internship than theoretical transaction. During internship, the female interns were advised to wear sarees which might be an additional burden for the females to carry and maintain it for almost 6hrs during the internship every day. Further, the distance of the schools and transport facility somewhere might be the possible cause of their psychological distresses during internship.

To investigate the teacher educators' opinion about the current scenario of Pre-service teacher trainees' Psychological Wellbeing

Q1. Do you think Enrolment in B.Ed. after several attempts causes a poor mental health for a pre-service teacher trainees?

Surprisingly, there were equal number of responses in support of both yes and no. In support of 'yes', respondents opined that, "*somehow multiple failures makes an individual feel psychologically inferior*". Whereas, half of the teacher educators replied thatentering into the teaching profession is still a backup plan for an individual.Only few numbers of students comes to B.Ed. after several attempts and mostly there is no role of several attempt rather than the interest and teaching aptitude of the trainee teacher is concerned if the causes of the poor mental health will be analysed.

Q2. Do the pre-service teacher trainees have any scope after completing this course in the present era?

All the TEs wholeheartedly welcomed and agreed that, *"Integrated teacher education programmes carry the responsibility of those individuals who have dreamt only about teaching as their profession"*. They opined that several opportunities are now available by both govt. and private sector for B.Ed. degree holders. The Pupil teachers can able to create a special identity in their pedagogical performance and will definitely get the better opportunity and so on.

Q3. Do you think the practical components is burdensome for the trainees?	Teacher Educators gave priority to the existence of practicums in the curriculum but somehow in the integrated situation, it might be burdensome for the trainees.
Q4. Previously it was a notion that teaching profession is the last choice- what is your opinion about this from the societal point of view?	The Educators believed that in present scenario the 'teaching profession' is the best choice for building a nation, as it carries the same value as other professions and is a lucrative and prestigious career. *"Aspirants should choose teaching as a profession based on their interest, rather than pressure, as it contributes to the nation's growth"*. Though somewhere the stereotypical thought of society still exists, but will be diminished soon.
Q5. Would you expect the students after passing senior secondary will choose teaching rather than medical as a profession through ITEP for secured life?	All the Educators expected that, *"there might be a great tussle between medical and teaching profession"*. In the coming days, a huge rush in the field of teaching can be seen after the completion of senior secondary.
Q6. Which type of Teacher education programmes are more reliable in the context of 21st century and why? Integrated or Single?	There was a mixed response for both integrated and single course structure. Educators preferred integrated courses as it saves time in the competitive world where fraction of second matters. Those who preferred to single course structure, they believed that Single teacher training courses are more reliable and provide maximum exposure for practical aspects rather than integrated courses.

Discussion

The study found that 73.68% of pre-service teacher trainees in integrated TEPs had acceptable psychological wellbeing, while 14% had below acceptable levels. This aligns with previous studies by Zaki (2019) and Mohsinally (2024), which found majority in moderate levels of psychological

wellbeing in both genders. These studies suggest the need for programs to enhance psychological well-being for future educators, while Rachmawati & Lidyasari (2023) and Muqodas et al., (2019) found high levels of psychological well-being in 73%-78% of trainees. However, Both the gender were having same status of wellbeing in psychological perspectives which was strongly supported by Zaki (2019). Zaimoðlu & Dagtas (2023) explored factors like motivation, students, their appreciation of the profession, feelings of inadequacy, relationship management, their multiple roles, technical concerns, and future perceptions affect the psychological well-being that pre-service teachers perceived during their practicum, Masood et al. (2022) mentioning factors like the availability of instructional materials, class size, teaching subjects not related to major areas, furniture availability, methods for different abilities, dealing with individual differences, demands, teaching extra classes, non-teaching duties, and transportation charges which supported the result of the present study that is Pre-service trainee teachers felt more distressed during internship/practicum than theory learning and the females suffered more during practicum than males.

Conclusion

Psychological well-being is crucial for preservice teacher trainees in the 21st-century educational context. As, Integrated Teacher Education Programme is designed for the individuals, who choose 'Teaching as a Profession' by choice after completing higher secondary education to create a sustainable Teacher Education System, the essence of 'Psychological well-being' must be valued to handle stress, prevent burnout, and maintain motivation and passion for teaching, effective classroom and instructional management, fostering a positive learning environment and addressing behavioural issues constructively. Focusing on the pre-service trainee teachers' psychological wellbeing may not only influence their long-term career satisfaction but also reduce the likelihood of career dissatisfaction and turnover.

References

- Agyapong, B., Obuobi-Donkor, G., Burback, L., & Wei, Y. 2022. 'Stress, burnout, anxiety and depression among teachers: a scoping review'. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *19*(17), 10706. 10.3390/ijerph191710706
- Alluru, N, H., & Suneela, M. E. 2023. 'Nurturing Future Educators: the Crucial Role of Well-being in Pre-service Teachers. *IJFMR*. 5(6): 1-7. DOI 10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i06.9975
- Ao N, Zhang S, Guoxiu T, Zhu X and Kang X. 2023. 'Exploring teacher wellbeing in educational reforms: a Chinese perspective'. *Front. Psychol*. 14:1265536. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1265536
- Babic, S., Mairitsch, A., Mercer, S., Sulis, G., Jin, J., King, J., Lanvers, U., & Shin, S. 2022. 'Late-career language teachers in Austria and the UK: Pathways to retirement'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 113(8). Doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2022.103686
- Chirico, F., Sharma, M., Zaffina, S., & Magnavita, N. 2020. 'Spirituality and prayer on teacher stress and burnout in an

Italian cohort: A pilot, before-after controlled study'. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10 (2933). doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02933

- Corcoran, R. P., & O'Flaherty, J. 2022. 'Social and emotional learning in teacher preparation: Pre-service teacher well-being'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *110*, 103563.
- Dağtaş, A., & Zaimoglu, S. 2022. *The language learning journey of ELT teachers: A narrative approach*. In E.
- Davis, T. 2019. 'What is well-being? Definition, types, and well-being skills. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-happiness/201901/what-is-well-being definition-types-and-well-being-skills. (Retrieved on 5 Aug 2024)
- Dewaele, J.-M., Franco Magdalena, A. & Saito, K. 2019. 'The effect of perception of teacher characteristics on Spanish EFL learners' anxiety and enjoyment'. *Modern Language Journal*, 103(2). doi: 10.1111/modl.12555.
- Dreer-Goethe, B. 2023. 'Well-being and mentoring in pre-service teacher education: an integrative literature review'. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. 12 (4): 336-349. DOI 10.1108/IJMCE-09-2022-0073
- Gearhart, C. A., Blaydes, M., & McCarthy, C. J. 2022. 'Barriers to and facilitators for teachers' wellbeing'. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 867433.
- Gunathilaka, C., Wickramasinghe, R. S., & Jais, M. 2022. 'COVID-19 and the adaptive role of educators: The impact of digital literacy and psychological well-being on education—A PLS-SEM approach'. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *31*(4):397–421. doi: 10.1177/10567879221113546
- Honskusová, L., Vojíř, K., & Rusek, M. 2022. 'Pre-service chemistry teachers' professional vision development: The effect of lesson-observation practice *Journal of Baltic Science Education*, *21*(1):52–68. doi: 10.33225/jbse/22.21.52
- Kossybayeva, U., Shaldykova, B., Akhmanova, D., &Kulanina, S. 2022. 'Improving teaching in different disciplines of natural science and mathematics with innovative technologies'. *Education and Information Technologies*, *27*(6):7869–7891. doi: 10.1007/s10639-022-10955-3
- Mohsinally, M.H. 2024. 'Psychological Wellbeing Among Teacher Trainee Students'. *International Journal of Creative Research Thought*, 12(5):1308-1321.
- Muqodas,I., Kartadinata, S., Nurihsan, J., Dahlan,T., Yusuf, S., & Imaddudin, A. 2019. 'Psychological Well-Being: A Preliminary Study of Guidance and Counseling Services Development of Preservice Teachers in Indonesia'. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research,* 399:56-60. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/
- Massod, S., Siddiqui, M., &Arif, K. 2022. 'Challenges Pre-Service Teachers Face During Teaching Practicum: An Anatomy of Teachers' Education Programs'. *VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences,* 10(2):131-141. DOI: 10.21015/vtess.v10i2.1049
- Rachmawati, I., & Lidyasari, A. T. 2023. 'Psychological Well-Being of Pre-Service Training Teachers'. *Journal Kajian Bimbingandan Konseling*, 8(2):147–157. doi: 10.17977/um001v8i22023p147-157
- Sezer, H. 2022. 'The Role of Social Support and Lifestyle in Pre-Service Teachers' Psychological Well Being'. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*. 17(2): 225-245. 10.29329/epasr.2022.442.10
- Vesely, A. K., Saklofske, D. H., & Nordstokke, D. W. 2014. 'EI training and pre-service teacher wellbeing'. *Personality and individual differences*, *65*, 81-85. 10.1016/j. paid. 2014.01.052

- Wahab, N. Y. A., Rahman, R. A., Mahat, H., Hudin, N. S., Ramdan, M. R., Razak, M. N. A., & MohdYadi, N. N. 2024. 'Impacts of Workload on Teachers' Well-Being: A Systematic Literature Review'. *TEM Journal*, *13*(3).
- Zadworna-cieślak, M., & kossakowska, K. 2018. Psychological Wellbeing in the teaching profession'. *Edukacja Doros³ych.* 2: 199-209.
- Zaimoğlu, S., & Dagtas, A. 2023. 'Exploring the wellbeing of pre-service teachers during their practicum. *Ege Journal of Education*, 24(2):194-208. https://doi.org/10.12984/egeefd.1279510
- Zaki, S. 2019. 'Psychological Well-Being of Pre-service Teachers: A Gender Perspective'. *THINK INDIA*, 22(4):3841-3855.

Bio Profile of the Author

[1]Ph.D. Scholar (JRF)
P.G. Department of Education
Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha
Email- truptisubhrajyoti97@gmail.com

&

[2]Professor
P.G. Department of Education
Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha
Email- amulyaacharya.pmv@gmail.com

Efficacy of Digital Initiatives in Higher Education System

[1]*S.K.Panda* & [2]*Anshum Sharma*

Abstract

Technology has become an integral part of education system. Now technology becomes a crucial component of teaching-learning process. Digital initiatives are the remarkable step towards achieving the goals related to education system. It helps in meeting the future needs of the teachers, students and administrators (stakeholders). By imparting digital initiative or ICT applications in the education system, India will be able to achieve the goal of modernization of society by modernizing the institutes. Digital changes are the revolutionary step for bringing an auspicious development in higher education institutes. For the present study, objectives are:i) to study the digital initiatives used by the students of University of Jammu, ii) to study the efficacy of digital initiatives used by the students of University of Jammu, and iii) to obtain suggestions from students of University of Jammu for improvement of digital components. Data were collected from 200 post graduate students of University of Jammu to identify the various digital initiatives undertaken by them and also study the efficacy of these digital initiatives which is initiated by the Government of India at higher education level. These digital initiatives include SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, National Digital Library of India (NDLI), online education, e-PG Pathshala, e-Shodhganga, National Academic Depository (NAD), ICT Labs etc. This study also focused on the various problems that students faced while using such digital initiatives in their education process.

Keywords: *Digital Initiatives, Digitalisation, Higher Education, Efficacy.*

Introduction

Education is the tool in the hand of people that helps in moulding the intellectual level of anyone and improves the overall personality of the individual. It is a process of embedding student with intellectual, moral and social aspects. It is fundamental aspect for getting full potential of human being, promoting equitable society, developing responsible citizen for a nation who helps in promoting the national development and make a prosperous nation. In India, education system is always in a top priority. Government of India works at his best to achieve the goals and objectives of the education system. The 21st century education system demands a new aspect, revision and revamping the whole structure of education in order to build the India's traditions and value system in a sustainable way (Goyal,

2024). Each level of education that is primary level, secondary level and higher level needs a blow of modernity with new means, methods and ways of teaching-learning process.

In higher education, improvement is required for overall development of students. There is a huge gap between the learning outcomes and what is required in modern era. In the era of science and technology, it becomes very important to equip the institutes with technology in order to cope with the fast-changing world, dictated by the advancement of the technology (Cohen et al., 2022). Government's efforts of improving higher education are in great speed. New and relevant courses are developed. New innovative ideas are implemented in making education effective in nature. These innovative ideas are mostly accompanied by the digitally means. New technology interventions have been used for improving the teaching-learning process like assessing the outcomes of education, helping the teacher for their lesson plans, better assessment and evaluation, proper management, planning, administration, attendance, admission process etc.

The use of technology in education is referred to as the digital transformation of education. With the aid of technology, the traditional system of education has gradually and very smoothly transformed into a digital one (Raja & Nagasur bramani, 2018). Technology has become an integral part of education system. Initially seen as an addition to education, but now technology becomes a crucial component of it. However, the transition from a traditional to a digital education system was not easy. It had taken decades to build a suitable system, which inspires users and trains employees to accept the new up-gradation. In 1930, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) broadcast the first educational and cultural programme through broadcasting radio and All India Radio in 1937 broadcasted first educational programmes for pupils in school (Sarmah & Lama, 2017). Moreover, the introduction of television and its adoption as an informational medium led to the emergence of educational television for students of secondary school in 1961. In 1984, computer education was started with the vision of Computer Literacy and Studies in School (CLASS). Instead of these initial initiatives, Information and Library Network Centre (INFLIBNET) in 1991 and National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) in 2009 were considered as a major initiative in the field of digitalization of the education (India Report Digital Education, 2021). After this, there is an exponential development of technology in the field of education has been seen in India. The emergence of Educational Satellite (Edusat), a dedicated satellite for education, contributed to the rise of telecasts with the interactive feature of EDUSAT transmissions. With the passage of time, popularity of technology in education increased. Role and responsibility of teacher have also changed from traditional teacher to technology oriented (Grover & Naik, 2021).

Digital initiatives are the remarkable step towards achieving the goals of modernisation of education system. It helps in meeting the future needs of the teachers, students and administrators (stake holders).

By imparting digital initiative or ICT applications in the education system, India will be able to achieve the goal of modernization of society by modernizing the institutes. Digital changes are the revolutionary step for bringing an auspicious development in higher education institutes. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has launched a number of programmes to help students and teachers overcome the difficulties of remote learning. Platforms like e-PG Pathshala, SWAYAM, Swayam Prabha, e-Shodhganga, National Digital Library of India, National Academic Depository, e-Shodhsindhu, GIAN, the National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) etc. are some of the digital initiatives that are started by the govt. of India for providing instructional materials and pertinent training to teachers and students across the nation. ICT tools like radio and television help the government reach more target groups

To optimize educational attainment, educational institutions should look beyond the conventional confines of classroom instruction by combining modern technology with all pedagogical approaches (Marie & Nagaraju, 2024). For the successful implementation of digital initiatives, awareness of ICT tools and resources (Bordoloi et al, 2024) is important for the proper utilization of technology in teaching-learning process (Mokhtari, 2023). Knowledge related to use of smartphone and computers, use of digital platform, awareness about online platforms and resources among students and teachers are prerequisite for proper implementation of digital initiative in general classrooms.

Digital Education and Its Evolving Trends across the World

Due to the surge of the pandemic in 2020, nearly 1.6 billion children were impacted by the temporary closure of schools in 194 countries as of early April 2020, according to UNESCO. Through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), digital education has advanced rapidly and, as a result, revolutionized traditional educational systems worldwide. In response to the global acceleration of digital transformation, many nations and international organizations have implemented digital education reform policies, elevating digital education to the level of national strategy and encouraging its development and reform. Numerous reports, policy frameworks, and strategies have been released by both developed and developing countries, with a primary focus on the proper implementation of the digital components in education system.

In 2019, the German federal government formally introduced the Digital Agreement for Schools. In August 2021, the Chinese Ministry of Education designated Shanghai as a pilot zone for digital education transformation. The Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027), published by the EU, identifies major concerns related to digital education that need to be promoted at the EU level. In September 2020, UNESCO and UNICEF jointly released a report on digital connectivity in education.

Australia's National Curriculum encourages all students to learn digital literacy and technology, ensuring on-going involvement from Foundation to Year 8 or 10. The Digital Literacy Capability

emphasizes that digital literacy is an essential skill that should be taught across all learning areas, in alignment with the Australian Technologies Learning Area Curriculum, which recognizes technology education as a vital part of students' development (ACARA, 2022).

In recent years, Finland has made significant investments in digital infrastructure for education, including cloud computing, online learning platforms, and high-speed internet connectivity, as digital transformation has gained importance in the country (UN, 2021). China, Singapore, and Macao were the top three countries in 2018 for the digital reading literacy achievement of 15-year-olds, with Hong Kong ranking fourth (OECD, 2019).

South Korea has introduced new initiatives such as the 2022 Revised National Curriculum, the Digital-Based Educational Innovation Plan, and AI digital textbooks to transform pedagogical approaches and equip teachers and students with the necessary 21st-century skills amid the 4th Industrial Revolution. According to a prominent report, "64% of schools in the UK are integrated with technology" (EdTech Assessment Tool, 2022). In the IMD World Competitiveness Digital Ranking 2022 Report, the UK ranked 16th in 2022, up from 10th in 2018, with an overall score of 86.45 (IMD, 2022). With the advancement of science and technology, nearly all countries are investing in the digitalization of education at both the school and higher education levels to optimize the utilization of human resources in all fields and contributing to the overall development of human capital in a more inclusive and sustainable manner. By integrating digital tools into the learning process, countries aim to equip students with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected world, ensuring that the workforce of the future is well-prepared to meet the demands of the global economy.

Review of Related Literature

The rapid advancement of technology has brought about a revolution in education, and this is also true in India (Chakrawarty & Pallai, 2024). Luvy, (2018); Madhale, (2018) examined the digital India program has been started with the aim of changing the nation into a digitally enabled society. In the study of Jhangiajh et al., (2020), number of applications such as digital locker, SWAYAM, e-scholarship, digital libraries and internet facilities become much popularized in our country. Setiawanet al., (2020); Khan, (2021); Olayemiet al., (2021) studied on the perceptions of students towards online learning. Most of the students show positive attitude towards online learning method of education. Bano & Vasantha, (2020) conducted a study and found that several initiatives started by Government of India under 'Digital India' and 'Make in India' in education system that includes SWAYAM courses, e-pathshala, SWAYAM PRABHA, e-vidhya and National Digital Library of India (NDLI) that bridge the gap of employability skills, to improve the quality of education and also promote the digital literacy and socio-economic development. SWAYAM is a method of "online and self-learning," which means it offers opportunities for lifetime learning (Paul et al., 2018). Tajik & Vahedi, (2021) studied

on e-learning education through SWAYAM courses and found out that enrolment under such courses is increased day by day. Maharaj, (2018) write a report that highlighted the contribution of e-PG Pathshalain the advancement of e-learning and also investigated the knowledge, application, and impressions of the E-PG Pathshala programme among students. The education sector is witnessing increased use of information communication technologies in teaching, learning, and administration processes (Nivetha & Radha, 2024). NDLI is anticipated to bring about a paradigm shift in the education movement. The current state of electronic thesis and dissertations at Indian university libraries and Shodhganga was highlighted by Das & Saikia, (2014). They believed that open access platforms for electronic thesis and dissertations will boost the rate of research, make it easier to gather necessary data and knowledge, and benefit all academic groups.

Many developing nations, like India, are better positioned to disregard the outdated models that were previously used in developed nations like the USA and take advantage of the most recent developments, like the hybrid model, the inclusion of novel and unusual subjects, gamification, peer-to-peer learning, and profile mapping. Future of the nation will be dominated by automation, artificial intelligence, and advanced technologies. To live and prosper, the next generation of employees and citizens will need to be proficient in a wide variety of technology (Gabriel et al., 2022). Therefore, there is an obvious need for excellent technology integration in schools to assist mould and develop the necessary abilities (UNESCO, 2020). Active online learning approaches, Moodle/H5P activities, AI (OECD, 2020; Vander Vlies, 2020; Xie et al., 2020), AI-assisted Learning Management Systems (LMS), and virtual reality training all improve the courses (Gonzalez et al., 2025). By using these tools, teachers can create learning environments that are tailored to each student's needs (Bower, 2019), increasing student engagement and efficacy (Almaiahet al., 2020; Radianti et al., 2020; Zhou, 2020). Preparing teachers to take advantage of the complexities of contemporary educational technologies is important (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). With the support of live lectures, office hours, and group collaboration, video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Google Meet have become indispensable for in-the-moment interactions (Bower, 2019). An online approach recognizes how digital engagement is changing and how it may be used to create immersive learning environments. According to Simonson et al. (2019), online education prioritizes structured material distribution over interactive learning processes. Bond et al. (2021) also explained the significance of pupil engagement in blended and online learning, with a focus on meaningful interaction and active learning techniques.

Dhas, (2017); Fouzdar & Behera, (2017) Gupta & Sharma, (2018); Konwar, (2017); Periasamy, (2019); Sharma, (2018); Thakkar & Joshi, (2017) were studied the attitude of students toward e-learning. These students were belonging to the different fields of education like engineering, arts,

B.Ed. and sciences. Their study has found that most of the students showed positive attitude towards e-learning. In the study of Verma & Nigam, (2024) showed that thecritical success factors play a major role in shaping positive attitudes of students towards e-learning. Singh, (2021); Subediet al., (2020); Unger & Meiran (2020) studied the impact of e-learning on the teaching-learning process. They found that while using electronic media, students as well as teachers faced various problems related to e-learning. They all showed positive attitude towards e-learning and ICT integrated classrooms (Setua & Yadav, 2024) but problems like slow internet facility, lack of knowledge regarding use of online media, absenteeism of student from online classes, lack of interaction, problem of electricity, unavailability of subject matter, online evaluation, health issues like headache, non-seriousness of the students etc were prevailing during online classes. These problems make online education ineffective in nature. Harini & Verghese, (2021); Pandey & Kiran, (2021); Srivastava & Dave, (2021) studied the various challenges and acceptance level of online learning by students. Internet services, lack of concentration, technophobia, misuse of platform, abuse and cyber bullying were affected the online learning process**.**

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the various digital initiatives used by the students of University of Jammu.
2. To study the efficacy of digital initiatives used by the students of University of Jammu.
3. To obtain suggestions from students of University of Jammu for improvement of digital components.

Research Questions of the Study

1. What are the various digital initiatives used by the students of University of Jammu?
2. What is the efficacy of digital initiatives used by the students of University of Jammu?
3. How do the students perceive the digital initiatives?

Research Methodology

The present research was descriptive in nature. In the present study, the population was comprised from all the 36 departments of the University of Jammu. For the collection of relevant data, sample was selected from 20 departments out of 36 departments of University of Jammu by using simple random sampling technique. After that, 10 students were randomly selected from each of the 20 selected departments. Thus, 200 (10 x 20) post graduate students were included in the sample. In the present study, the investigators employed an interview schedule for collecting relevant data from participants. The interview schedule (consists of 45 items) was designed to collect in-depth insights related to various digital initiatives, their efficacy and effectiveness in the process of learning among

students of University of Jammu. Items covered a wide range of topic related to prominent digital platforms and resources such as SWAYAM (providing free online courses from Indian universities), Swayam Prabha (40 DTH channels offering educational content), online education platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Zoom, Telegram, and Skype, as well as platforms like e-PG Pathshala (offering postgraduate courses), the Shodhganga portal (repository of Indian theses), the NAD portal (for digitizing academic credentials), NDLI (National Digital Library of India), and also addressing the various challenges such as technical issues, accessibility barriers, and gaps in content delivery that students faced while using these digital initiatives. After collection of required data and the same has been analysed with the help of percentage. There were some open ended items requiring description, were scored and analysed accordingly.

Main Findings

In the present, it was found that the students showed positive attitude towards digital initiatives in higher education system. They were very comfortable to use various technologies in their learning process. During pandemic, these initiatives were proved as a boon in education system and also saved the academic achievements of the student by continuously providing facilities that were helpful for completing their academic session. Students used different platforms for their learning process. This approach is helpful in obtaining maximum learning outcomes.

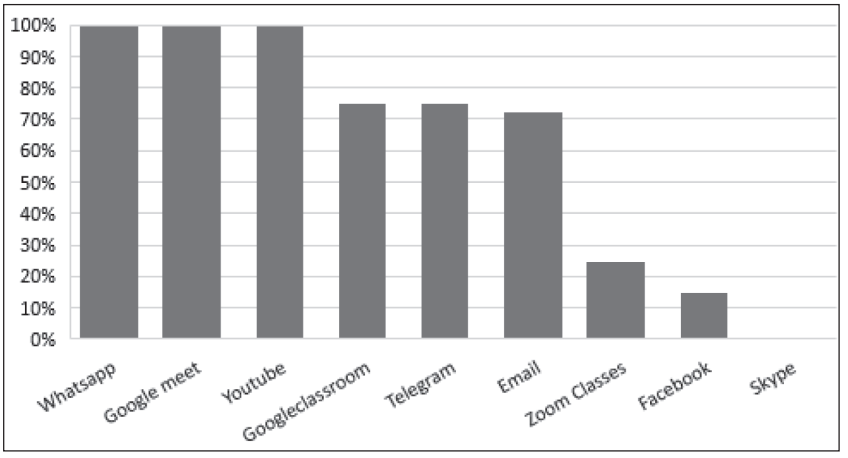


Fig. 1. Percentage of Online Applications used by the students

The figure 1 shows that out of 200 respondents, 75% used google classroom, 72.5% used email, 0% used skype, 100% used Youtube, Whatsapp and Google meet, 25%used zoom classes, 15% used

Facebook and 75% used telegram for their online education during pandemic. Data indicates that WhatsApp, YouTube, and Google Meet had a 100% usage rate among the respondents highlights their crucial role in facilitating online learning during the pandemic. This data also reveals that majority of students adapted to a variety of online tools to support their education, with each platform offering different functionalities—whether for communication, content sharing, or virtual meetings. The wide use of these applications reflects the growing importance of digital platforms in the education sector, especially in times of crisis when traditional classroom learning was not possible. According to the study of Nivetha & Radha (2024), use of Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube is higher than that of well-known social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

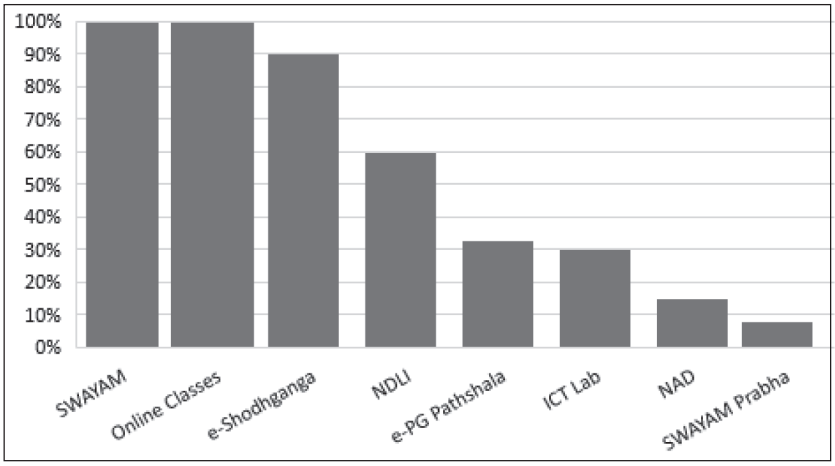


Fig. 2. Percentage of Digital Initiatives Used by the Students

The figure 2 shows that out of 200 respondents, 100% used SWAYAM platform, 100% used online classes for their education during pandemic, 90% used e-Shodhganga, 60% used NDLI, 33% used e-PG Pathshala, 30% used ICT labs in their course work, 15% used NAD and 8% used SWAYAM Prabha DTH channel. Students used SWAYAM online courses and e-Shodhganga widely. It has been found that the SWAYAM platform is quite famous among students of the University of Jammu and there is a 100% enrolment of students under Swayam courses. e-Shodhganga was also widely used by the students for their research work in their post-Graduate programme. This means that students are interested in using different digital platforms for their learning process.

Table 1 Efficacy of the Digital Initiatives in Higher Education

Efficacy of Digital Initiatives	Percentage
Provide a variety of courses	94%
Provide a best teaching-learning resource	81%
Provide a certificate after completion of course through SWAYAM platform	100%
Availability of open choice courses	72.5%
Availability of thesis and research work	88%
Covering all the subjects	85%
E-content prepared by the experts	74%
Easy to find topic	37.5%
Cover wide range of subject matter	50%
Use of easy language	47.5%
Systematic arrangement of the e-content	49%
Increase creativity	55%
Increase competency	75%
Accessible from anywhere and anytime	85%

There are a number of the advantages of the digital initiatives but some of them are depicted in the table 1 showing the efficacy of digital initiatives in the Higher education. It has been found that due to number of the benefits associated with the online educational platforms, students are willing to continue their education through online medium. These platforms have an advantage of variety of e-content, easily availability of it, can be access from anywhere and anytime, providing a best learning experiences, covering all the subjects either technical or non-technical, increase competency, creativity and intellectual capacity of the students.

Table 2 Problems Faced by the Students while Using Digital Initiative

Problems Related to Digital Initiatives	Percentage
Lack of proper infrastructure	90%
Websites are not working properly	87.5%
E-content is not systematic arranged	78%
Proper internet facility is not available in university campus	72%
Far flung areas have electricity problem	60%
Lack of motivation	75%
Lack of interest	65%
Too lengthy subject material	72.5%
Lack of proper gadgets that supports these education portals	65%
Registration problem	85%

Lack of face-to-face interaction with teacher	90%
Health issues	92.5%
Ineffective presentations in video lecture	82.5%
Time mismanagement	87.5%
Lack of awareness	83%

Table 2 shows the number of the problems faced by the students while using digital initiatives. Majority of the students faced problems related to the working of the websites, registration under some portals, lack of infrastructure, ineffective video lectures, lack of face-to-face interaction, lengthy subject material etc. At individual level, students also faced problems like lack of motivation, lack of awareness, time mismanagement, health issues, lack of interest etc. These are some challenges that act as a reluctant and hindrance in the way of 100% implementation of these initiatives in the education system.

Table 3 Suggestions for Strengthening the Digital Initiatives that Started in the Field of Education System

Suggestions	Percentage
Providing proper infrastructure	85%
Providing internet facility with good speed	82.5%
Face to face interaction	85%
Update the portal	90%
Systematic arrangement of the e-content	77.5%
Aware the students	82.5%
Coordination between students, teachers and stakeholders	71%
Role of teacher in popularising these digital initiatives	75%

The above table 3 shows the various suggestions given by the students for improving the working of the digital initiatives. Lack of infrastructure is one of the major issues. There should be an installation of proper equipment and infrastructure that supports such initiatives. Internet is the only way to connect with such platforms. There should be a good internet facility that supports the good connectivity. Such online platforms should be updated time to time. There should be a seminar programmes, awareness campaigns, workshop etc. for popularising such initiatives among students.

Discussion of the Results

On the basis of the findings of the present study, students have adopted the digital components for carrying out their learning process in efficient way. Govt. of India has started a number of digital

initiatives. Students showed a positive response towards SWAYAM, Shodhganga portal, online education and National Digital Library. Moreover, SWAYAM portal is very popular among students. But there are problems related to equipment, infrastructure, lack of interest, lack of awareness towards digital initiatives (Barik, 2022), lack of motivation, internet facility (Verma & Verma, 2022) effect the cent percent implementation of the digital education. The government has invested substantial financial resources in the development of various digital platforms aimed at enhancing education and providing accessible learning opportunities for students (Olayemi et al*.,* 2021). However, despite these efforts, a significant challenge persists: many students are not fully aware of these initiatives or how to utilize them effectively (Sk & Sain, 2024). This lack of awareness limits the potential impact of the government's investments, resulting in all the efforts become vain. As a consequence, the intended benefits of these digital platforms, such as improved access to educational content and enhanced learning experiences (Kumar & Shobana, 2024), are not being fully realized, undermining the success of these initiatives (Gupta, 2023 and Tunga, 2023). The study also revealed that students have little knowledge related to the working of different educational sites like e-PG Pathshala, National Digital Library, SWAYAM Prabha and National Academic Depository. The present study also revealed the lack of infrastructure (Madhavi, 2024) that support computer lab, SWAYAM Prabha set up, smart classrooms effect the digitalization of education in the higher education institute. All types of educational institutes should popularize the digital platforms through seminars, workshops and orientation courses (Das, 2023; Unger & Meiran, 2020), so that students get knowledge related to these digital platforms and they are able to avail their facilities optimally (Gawande, 2020; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In the study of Verma and Nigam (2024), it has found that students who receive active university support in the area of e-learning are more likely to have a favourable attitude about it.

Implications of Research Findings in the field of Education

1. Technology offers students quick access to knowledge, rapid learning, and enjoyable opportunities to put what they have learned into practice.
2. It allows them to gain insight into difficult concepts and explore new topics.
3. It is possible to employ technology in order to create individualized learning strategies for each learner.
4. Teachers can use technology to boost productivity, apply practical digital tools to promote student learning opportunities, and boost engagement and support from students
5. Technology can also help schools save money on physical teaching aids, improve the effectiveness of their educational initiatives, and maximize teacher productivity.

Conclusion

Over the years, technology has become increasingly noticeable in every industry and the impact of digital initiatives on educational institutes has made a remarkable revolution in the advancement of education system. Now-a-days, students are adopting various methods to improve their academic records and they also looking for easier way to study. Digital initiatives that are started for the advancement of the education system has shifted the paradigm from traditional way of education to online and blended mode of education. Different technological tools like computers, smartphones and internet facilities are used for teaching-learning process. All the efforts in education system worked for the betterment and advancement of the education. The information gathered by the study have the potential to work for the advancement of the technology in the field of education. The present study also provides the ground for the future research that enable the policymakers, administrators, teachers and students to optimum utilize the digital initiatives and also overcome the different challenges that hinders the cent percent implementation of the digital initiatives in the institutes.

References

- ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority). 2022. *Digital literacy infrastructure in Australian schools*.https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-2022
- Almaiah, M. A., Al-Khasawneh, A., & Althunibat, A. 2020. 'Exploring the critical challenges and factors influencing the E-learning system usage during COVID-19 pandemic'. *Education and Information Technologies*, *25*(6), 5261–5280. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10219-y
- Bordoloi, A., Choudhury, A., & Roy, S.C. 2024. 'Role of ICT in Improving Quality of Education: Perception of Head Teachers of Secondary Schools of Kamrup (Metro) District, Assam'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*,*6*(1).
- Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marín, V. I., & Händel, M. 2021. 'Emergency remote teaching in higher education: Mapping the first global online semester'. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, *18*(1), 50. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00282-x
- Bano, Y., & Vasantha, S. 2020. 'Bridging employability skill gap through digital enabled education'. *International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Science, 9*, 508-519.
- Bower, M. 2019. 'Technology-mediated learning theory'. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *50*(3), 1035–1048. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12771
- Chakrawarty, S., & Pallai, P. 2024. 'Effectiveness of Flipped Classroom Technique in Enhancing Academic Achievement of B.Ed Students: An Action Research'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*, *6*(1). 68-78
- Cohen, A., Soffer, T., & Henderson, M. 2022. 'Students' use of technology and their perceptions of its usefulness in higher education: International comparison'. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning,* 38.https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360172371 Students' use of technology and their perceptions of its usefulness in higher education International comparison
- Das, K., & Saikia, N. K. 2014. *Shodhganga Repository: A Comparative Study with Special Reference to the Universities of Assam*. 9th Convention PLANNER-2014, Dibrugarh, Assam, 348-368.
- Das, M. 2023. 'Digital Learning in the Context of NEP 2020: A Comprehensive Analysis'. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, 4*(12). 1764-1768.

- Dhas, L. J. S. 2017. 'Attitude of college students towards e-learning'. *International Journal for Research in Emerging Science and Technology*, *4*(9), 13-23.
- Fouzdar, K., & Behera, S. K. 2017. 'Attitude of postgraduate students towards mobile learning'. *International Journal for Educational Studies*, 111-119.https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/publication/journalsandperiodicals/indianjournalofeducationaltechnology/IJET_January2024.pdf
- Gabriel, F., Marrone, R., Van, S. Y., Kovanovic, V., & Laat, M. 2022. 'Digital education strategies around the world: practices and policies'. *Irish Educational Studies*, 41. 85-106.
- Gawande, S.M. 2023. 'Digital Initiatives for Higher Education in India: A Technological Revolution'. *University News*, *58*(15), 6-10.
- Gonzalez, J. R., Sanchez, S. N., Seoane, P. I., & Diaz, P. J. L. 2025. 'Challenges and perspectives in the evolution of distance and online education towards higher technological environments'. *Cogent Education*, *12*(1).https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2447168
- Goyal, D. 2024. 'The Future of Education: Trends and Innovations in Teaching and Learning'. *Global International Research Thoughts*, *12*(1), 36-42. https://doi.org/10.36676/girt.v12.i1.110
- Grover, S., & Naik, P.R. 2021. 'Understanding the role of teachers at the advent of digital age'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology, 3*(1), 99-05.https://ciet.nic.in/IJET_July_2021/index.html
- Gupta, A. 2023. *A Study on Perception of Students and Teachers towards Digitization in Indian Education.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/ 371987000 A Study on Perception of Students and Teachers Towards Digitization in Indian Education
- Gupta, M., & Sharma, M. 2018. 'A study on attitude of senior secondary school students towards e-learning in relation to their gender, residential backward and nature of school'. *International Journal of Engineering, Science and Mathematics,7*(1), 418-432.
- Harini, R., & Verghese, J. 2021. 'Level of Online Learning Motivation in Ners Professional Students in Online Learning at University Muhammadiyah Malang'. *Journal of Ners and Midwifery*, *8*(3). 343-347.
- IMD. 2022. *World digital competitiveness ranking*. https://www.imd.org/centers/wcc/world-competitiveness-center/rankings/world-digital-competitiveness-ranking/
- Jhangiah, R., Kennedy, R. K., & Sherlin, S. 2020. 'Digital initiatives in education: An overview'. *Society for the Advancement of Library and Information science,* 328-333.
- Khan, R. 2021. 'Importance of Digital Library in Education'. *International Journal of Research in Library Science (IJRLS), 7*(4). 102-117.
- Konwar, I. H. 2017. 'A study on attitude of college students towards e-learning with special reference to North Lakhimpur of Lakhimpur District, Assam'. *International Journal of Information*, *4*(1), 1-9.
- Kumar, J. S., & Shobana, D. 2024. 'A study on the impact of digital transformation on student empowerment in higher education of India'. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 5. 426-432. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377772645 A study on the impact of digital transformation on student empowerment in higher education of India.
- Luvy. 2018. 'Impact of digital India by 2019'. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 23-28.
- Madhale, P.D. 2018. 'Effect of Digital India on Indian society'. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development,*96-102.
- Madhavi, K. V. 2024. 'Implementation of Digital Initiatives in Higher Education Institutions (HEIS): An Exploratory Study on the Perceptions of University Teachers'. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*,*29*(12). 51-58.

- Maharaj, N.G. 2018.; 'A Study on Role of e-PG Pathshala in the Development of E-Learning'. Knowledge Librarian: *An International Peer Reviewed Bilingual E-Journal of Library and Information Science, 5*(01).104-113.
- Marie, M. J., & Nagaraju, M. T. 2024. 'Student Teachers Perception towards the Self-Blend Model of The Blended Learning Approach'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*,*6*(1) 11-25.
- Mokhtari, F. 2023. 'Fostering Digital Literacy in Higher Education: Benefits, Challenges and Implications'. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation. 6*. 160-167.
- Nivetha, R., & Radha, B. 2024. 'Digital Divide: A Comparison of Under graduate Female Student's Use of Social Media Platforms in Urban and Rural Areas'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*, *6*(1).43-53
- Olayemi, O. M., Adamu, H., & Olayemi, K. J. 2021. 'Perception and readiness of students towards online learning in Nigeria during Covid-19 pandemic'. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).*https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/5051
- Pandey, P., & Kiran, U. V. 2021. 'COVID-19 outbreak: e-learning resources and online classes, advantages and disadvantages'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*, *3*(20), 220-229.https://ciet.nic.in/IJET July 2022/index.html
- Paul, P., Bhimali, A., Kalishankar, T., Aithal, P. S., & Rajesh, R. 2018. 'SWAYAM: The platform for modern and enhanced online and flexible education-a knowledge survey'. *International Journal of Applied Science and Engineering*, *6*(2), 149-155.
- Periasamy, R. 2019. 'Attitudes towards e-learning among the bed trainees'. *International Journal of Information and Computing Science*,*6*(12). 54-64.https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/publication/journalsandperiodicals/indianjournalofeducationaltechnology/IJET_January2024.pdf.com)
- Radianti, J., Majchrzak, T. A., Fromm, J., & Wohlgenannt, I. 2020. 'A systematic review of immersive virtual reality applications for higher education: Design elements, lessons learned and research agenda'. *Computers & Education*, *147*. https://doi.org/10.1016 /j.compedu. 2019.103778
- Raja, R., & Nagasubramani, P. C. 2018. 'Impact of modern technology in education'. *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research*, *3*(1), 33-35.
- Sarmah, B., & Lama, S. 2017. Radio as an Educational Tool in Developing Countries: Its Evolution and Current Usages.
- Setiawan, B., & Iasha, V. 2020. 'Covid-19 pandemic: The influence of full-online learning for elementary school in rural areas'. *JPsd (Jurnal Pendidikan Sekolah Dasar)*, *6*(2). 114-123.
- Setua, C. & Yadav, M. 2024. 'Relationship between Attitude towards ICT and Techno-Pedagogical Skills of Rural Secondary School Teachers of West Bengal Board'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*, *6* (1). 102-113.
- Sharma, P. 2018. *Literature Review: The effectiveness of e-learning for imparting quality education to students*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323335958
- Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S. 2019. *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education* (7th ed.). Information Age Publishing.
- Singh, S. P. 2021. 'Readiness towards using blended learning approach for Teacher's preparation'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*,*3*(2). 57-75. https://ciet.nic.in/IJET Jan 2022/index.html
- Srivastava, S., & Dave, A. C. 2021. 'COVID-19 Scenario of Online Education: A Study Based on Acceptance Level of Online Learning among Students of Gujarat During Lock-Down'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*, *3*(2).
- Sk, M. M., & Sain, S. K. 2024. 'Implementation of Digital Initiatives in Higher Education in India: Problems and Solutions'. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 50*(10). 275-81. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i101618.
- Tajik, F., & Vahedi, M. 2021. 'Quarantine and Education: An Assessment of Iranian Formal Education during the COVID-19 Outbreak and School Closures'. *International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology*, *17*. 159–175. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1285530
- Thakkar, S., & Joshi, H. 2017. 'Students' Attitude towards E-learning'. *International Journal of Advance Engineering and Research Development*, *4*(11). 209-213.

- Tunga, S. K. 2023. *Digital Initiatives in Higher Education: Strategies Role of Academic Libraries and LIS Professionals*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication /372528344 Digital Initiatives in Higher Education Strategies Role of Academic Libraries and LIS Professionals
- United Nations [UN] 2021. Technology and innovation report 2021. Catching technological waves Innovation with equity. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tir2020 en.pdf
- UNESCO. 2020. *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all.* UNESCO, Paris
- Unger, S., & Meiran, W. R. 2020. 'Student attitudes towards online education during the COVID-19 viral outbreak of 2020: Distance learning in a time of social distance'. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science (IJTES)*, *4*(4). 256-266.https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/publication/journalsandperiodicals/indianjournalofeducationaltechnology/IJET_January2024.pdf (ed.gov)
- Van der Vlies, R. 2020. *Digital strategies in education across OECD countries:/Exploring education policies on digital technologies*./OECD Education Working PapersOECD Publishing, Paris, No. 226
- Verma, I., & Nigam, S. 2024. 'Facilitating positive attitude in students: A study of critical e-learning factors'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology*, *6* (1). 79-89
- Verma, V., &Verma, R. 2022. 'The transition from traditional to digital teaching learning due to COVID 19: A comparative study'. *Indian Journal of Educational Technology, 4*(1),1-10.https://ciet.nic.in/IJET_July_2022/index.html/
- Xie, K., Siau, K., & Nah, F. 2020. 'COVID-19 pandemic–Online education in the new normal and the next normal'. *Journal of Information Technology Case and Application Research*, *22*(3). 175–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228053.2020.1824884
- Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V. I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. 2019. 'Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education–Where are the educators?' *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, *16*(1), 39. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0
- Zhou, C. 2020. 'Virtual reality in education: A tool for learning in the experience age'. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, *10*(8). 600–605.

Bio Profile of the Authors:
[1]Assistant Professor
Department of Education,
University of Jammu,
Jammu-180006
Email: drpanda772gmail.com
&
[2]Research Scholar
Department of Education
University of Jammu,
Jammu-180006
Email: anshumsharma12@gmail.com

Redefining Pedagogy: The Impact of ChatGPT on Education System

[1]Sakil Mahaldar & [2]Rinki Khatun

Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the transformative role of ChatGPT, a generative AI developed by OpenAI, in redefining educational pedagogy. The study aims to examine how ChatGPT influences teaching strategies, student engagement, and educational assessment. A qualitative review of secondary sources was conducted to evaluate both the promises and pitfalls of integrating ChatGPT into learning environments. The findings reveal that while ChatGPT enhances student autonomy, fosters critical thinking, and supports educators in instructional planning, it also raises concerns regarding accuracy, ethical use, and over-reliance. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for responsible AI integration in education.

Keywords : *ChatGPT, Education, AI Tools, Pedagogy, Teaching Strategies, Critical Thinking, Ethics*

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly influencing the educational landscape. One of the most significant advancements is ChatGPT, a conversational AI developed by OpenAI that can simulate human-like dialogue and process complex language prompts. The tool is gaining traction among students and educators for its ability to provide instant academic assistance, brainstorm ideas, and support learning across disciplines. As digital literacy becomes a core component of modern education, tools like ChatGPT are altering how knowledge is created, shared, and evaluated. However, its integration brings not only opportunities but also challenges, including ethical concerns and pedagogical dilemmas. This paper critically evaluates ChatGPT's impact on pedagogy, particularly in the context of higher education.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the role of ChatGPT in reshaping pedagogical practices.
2. To assess the benefits and limitations of using ChatGPT for both students and teachers.

3. To understand the ethical and academic implications of AI-assisted learning.
4. To recommend strategies for effective and responsible use of ChatGPT in education.

Methodology

This is a conceptual study based on qualitative analysis of secondary data. Recent peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, institutional reports, and expert blogs from 2022 to 2024 were consulted. The sources were identified using databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Research Gate. Thematic content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, perspectives, and concerns across academic and practitioner literature. The study does not involve primary data collection but relies on synthesis of expert opinions and documented experiences. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both pedagogical innovation and practical challenges, especially in a fast-evolving area like educational AI integration.

Literature Review

Ollivier et al. (2023: 153) describe how ChatGPT promotes dynamic learning by customizing instruction and stimulating critical engagement. However, Alkaissi and McFarlane (2023: e34965) caution that AI hallucinations—false but plausible-sounding information—can undermine academic integrity. Khan et al. (2023: 112345) advocate for digital training for educators to use AI tools wisely.

McGee (2023: 201) finds that ChatGPT supports differentiated learning and encourages a shift from rote learning to learner-cantered approaches. Huang et al. (2023: 130) emphasize the need for ethical frameworks and supervision to avoid misuse. Despite these discussions, gaps remain in empirical validation, and many studies focus on speculative analysis.

In addition to existing studies, OpenAI's own documentation and public reports have emphasized transparency, accuracy, and ethical constraints in AI use. World Bank (2023) provided policy-level insights about how ChatGPT can supplement under-resourced education systems. The work by Whatson (2022) details both the enthusiasm and hesitation expressed by digital educators. Sharma (2022) adds perspective from the medical education field, where clarity, precision, and human judgment remain irreplaceable. Collectively, these sources suggest a strong need for educator agency and critical digital literacy to accompany any use of generative AI in classrooms.

ChatGPT in Pedagogical Practice

1. Enhancing Student Learning and Research

ChatGPT enables students to generate ideas, summarize complex texts, and clarify difficult concepts. It also assists in drafting and editing academic writing. Bo•ić and Poola (2024: 7) report that students using ChatGPT exhibit greater engagement in research-related tasks.

2 Supporting Educators

For teachers, ChatGPT is a time-saving companion that assists in lesson planning, assessment creation, and instructional design. It suggests diverse teaching strategies tailored to students' levels and learning styles (Whatson 2022: 4).

3 Improving Writing and Language Skills

The AI helps users refine sentence structure, grammar, and coherence. According to Sharma (2022: 5), students use ChatGPT to enhance vocabulary and fluency, especially in second-language contexts.

4 Innovative Assessment Practices

Educators employ ChatGPT to develop personalized quizzes and formative assessments. It also aids in evaluating student responses and offering feedback, making assessment more interactive and timely (Bo•ić & Poola 2024: 9).

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its advantages, ChatGPT presents notable concerns:

1. Inaccuracy and Hallucination

ChatGPT may offer responses that are factually incorrect or misleading. This can particularly impact disciplines requiring precise data or logic (Rueda et al. 2023: 6).

2. Risk of Academic Dishonesty

The ease of generating content has led to concerns about plagiarism and undermining of original thought (Huang et al. 2023: 128). Unchecked usage may erode students' academic honesty.

3. Digital Divide and Accessibility

Access to ChatGPT depends on internet connectivity and subscription models, which marginalizes students from rural or underprivileged backgrounds (Whatson 2022: 3).

4. Overdependence on AI

Prolonged reliance may diminish students' independent thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Sharma (2022: 5) warns against replacing human judgment with automated reasoning.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the reviewed literature, the following key insights were derived:

- Increased Engagement: Students demonstrate higher motivation and deeper inquiry when using ChatGPT (Rueda et al. 2023: 4).

- Improved Efficiency: Teachers report reduced planning time and enhanced classroom interaction (Bo•ić & Poola 2024: 8).
- Pedagogical Shifts: Teaching becomes more facilitative than instructive, with ChatGPT handling routine queries.
- Ethical Ambiguity: Without institutional policies, AI use may lead to inconsistent or unethical educational practices.

Additionally, educators in developing regions reported ChatGPT as a bridge over resource gaps where textbook shortages or instructor unavailability were frequent. Several institutions piloted AI-supported tutoring programs and found improvements in student submission rates and clarity of understanding. Moreover, the need for creating AI-resilient assessments—ones that require authentic critical thought and process documentation—is becoming more prominent as a protective response to ChatGPT misuse.

Recommendations

1. Institutional Policy: Formulate clear AI usage policies within educational institutions.
2. Teacher Training: Provide professional development to equip teachers with AI-related pedagogical strategies.
3. Student Orientation: Instruct students in ethical and critical usage of AI tools.
4. Equitable Access: Ensure access to AI technologies across socio-economic strata.
5. Continuous Review: Regularly evaluate AI tools for relevance, accuracy, and ethical alignment.
6. Curriculum Integration: Include AI literacy and critical thinking as part of formal teacher training programs.
7. Assessment Design: Encourage original, process-based, and reflective assignments to minimize misuse of generative AI.

Conclusion

ChatGPT represents a paradigm shift in education by offering innovative ways to deliver and receive knowledge. It supports individualized learning, enriches academic writing, and reduces administrative tasks for educators. Yet, the success of ChatGPT in pedagogy depends on how ethically, strategically, and inclusively it is implemented. As educational institutions stand at a crossroads, ChatGPT symbolizes both promise and caution. For regions with limited educational infrastructure, ChatGPT may act as a transformative equalizer. However, in well-resourced systems, it must complement rather than replace traditional pedagogies. Teachers should be viewed not as gatekeepers, but as facilitators and curators of AI-informed learning. Institutional readiness, ethical clarity, and digital empathy will determine

whether ChatGPT enriches or undermines educational equity and intellectual growth in the long term.

References

- Alkaissi H & McFarlane SI. 2023. Artificial hallucinations in ChatGPT: Implications in scientific writing. Cureus 15(2): e34965.
- Bo•ić V &Poola I. 2024. ChatGPT and education. Research Gate. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.18837.40168
- Huang S, Chen J & Wang X. 2023. 'Integrating AI tools like ChatGPT into education: Potentials and pitfalls.' *International Journal of Educational Technology* 19(3): 122–135.
- Khan S, Malik F & Tariq M. 2023. Educators and AI: Exploring the role of ChatGPT in modern teaching. Frontiers in Education 8: 112345.
- McGee, K. 2023. 'Redefining teaching with AI: ChatGPT's role in classroom innovation'. *Journal of Digital Education* 10(4): 201–215.
- Ollivier M, Roussel P & Genet, C. 2023. 'ChatGPT and higher education: Opportunities and challenges in fostering critical thinking'. *Computers in Education* 67(5): 151–162.
- Rueda MM et al. 2023. Impact of the implementation of ChatGPT in education: A systematic review. Computers 12(8): 153.
- Sharma, D. 2022. Impact of ChatGPT on medical education.
- Whatson, S. 2022. The impact of ChatGPT on education: The good and the bad. Digital Learning Institute.

Bio Profile of the Authors:

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Education,
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India.
E-mail:sakil1252@gmail.com
&
[2]Assistant Professor, Apex Teachers' Training College,
Berachampa, North 24 Parganas- 743424, India.
Email:rinkikhatun1920@gmail.com

Role of Counselling in Managing Anxiety and Stress among College Students

Krishnendu Roy

Abstract

Objective

This study investigates the role of counselling in managing anxiety and stress among college students. It specifically explores the effectiveness of interventions, accessibility barriers, gender-based variations in counselling uptake, and the growing impact of digital counselling platforms using both qualitative and recent quantitative data.

Method

The research employs qualitative data from secondary sources including peer-reviewed journals, surveys, and institutional reports, with an emphasis on data published within the last five years. A thematic analysis identified major themes such as the effectiveness of counselling interventions, existing barriers, gender-specific responses, and technological integration in counselling.

Result

The study finds counselling to be significantly effective in reducing anxiety and stress, with interventions like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, and group therapy showing marked improvements. Quantitative data from 2022-2024 reveal that 76% of CBT users reported reduced anxiety. Barriers like stigma, cost, and time remain critical. Digital platforms enhance access, with 78% of users reporting improved emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Counselling is a vital support system for college students. Removing access barriers, leveraging digital tools, and adopting gender-sensitive practices will enhance counselling's reach and impact, ultimately supporting better academic and mental health outcomes.

Keywords : *Counselling, Anxiety, Stress, College Students, Digital Platforms, Mental Health, Gender Differences, Accessibility Barriers*

Introduction

Students have become a large group and the high rates of anxiety and stress among college students the prevalence of anxiety and stress among college students being caused by intense academic pressure, social expectation pressure, financial pressure, and the transition to adulthood. These stressors often also translate to negative consequences on students' mental health, academic performance and overall well-being. Counselling has become an integral resource for addressing these priorities by equipping students with tools to cope with their barriers and create a support network to navigate their respective challenges. Counselling interventions (cognitive-behavioural therapy, mindfulness practices, and peer support programs) have been shown to be highly effective in lowering stress and anxiety. While prevalent and significant, the application and legitimateness of directing administrations in advanced education is incipient, especially their job in encouraging affectability and scholarly achievement for undergrads.

Introduction College students are increasingly vulnerable to anxiety and stress due to academic pressure, social expectations, financial burdens, and the psychological demands of transitioning to adulthood. These factors can negatively impact mental health, academic performance, and personal development. Counselling, including CBT, mindfulness training, and peer support programs, is essential in mitigating these effects. However, despite its benefits, counselling remains underutilized due to stigma, cost, and systemic barriers. This paper seeks to elaborate on the multifaceted impact of counselling by examining its effectiveness, exploring accessibility challenges, analyzing gender-specific responses, and assessing the role of digital platforms based on data from 2022–2024. It identifies pathways to optimize accessibility and effectiveness in student mental health interventions.

Literature Review

Prevalence of Anxiety and Stress among college students

The academic environment forces one-of-a-kind stressors on understudies, including scholarly execution pressure, monetary limitations, and social transformation challenges. It has been examined that 48% of understudies revealed moderate to serious degrees of tension, while 60% experienced overpowering pressure during the scholastic year. Additionally, research directed in India viewed that 47% of understudies experienced pressure-related side effects and 36% experienced uneasiness problems (Amanvermez *et al*. 2023). These discoveries underscore the dire requirement for compelling mediation to address psychological wellness issues in academic settings.

Role of Counselling in Managing Anxiety and Stress

Counselling is a structured intervention designed to help individuals manage psychological and

emotional challenges. In the context of college students, counselling has proven to be instrumental in reducing symptoms of anxiety and stress. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) are two widely used approaches in campus counselling centres. For instance, studies have shown that CBT reduced anxiety symptoms by 40% and stress levels by 30% among college students. Similarly, MBSR programs have been associated with a 28% reduction in stress levels (Li & Peng, 2021). These findings demonstrate the efficacy of counselling in improving mental health outcomes among students.

Barriers to Accessing Counselling Services

Despite the demonstrated advantages of guiding, a few hindrances ruin its openness and usage among understudies. The shame encompassing psychological wellness remains a huge impediment, with 63% of understudies dreading judgment as a justification for not looking for help (Li, Peng & Tao, 2023). Moreover, an absence of mindfulness about accessible guiding administrations fuels the issue. For instance, a review directed in the UK saw that 42% of understudies knew nothing about their establishment's emotional wellness assets. Monetary requirements likewise assume a basic part, especially in low-pay nations. It has been featured that just 35% of colleges in agricultural countries offer free or sponsored advising administrations, contrasted with 85% in big-time salary nations (Paralkar & Knutson, 2023). Addressing these boundaries is fundamental to guarantee equitable admittance to emotional well-being support.

Gender Differences in Counselling Outcomes

Gender-specific contrasts in emotional wellness challenges and their reaction to directing mediations have been broadly archived. Ladies are bound to encounter uneasiness and stress, with concentrates on showing that 70% of female understudies announced higher feelings of anxiety compared with half of male understudies (Kausar *et al.* 2021). Ladies additionally will quite often look for advice all the more habitually and report improved results. Then again, men frequently show hesitance to look for help because of cultural assumptions about manliness. This discrepancy highlights the requirement for gender-sensitive approaches in advising administrations. For instance, drives, for example, the "Man Up" crusade in Australia have effectively urged male understudies to take part in emotional well-being conversations, bringing about a 20% expansion in directing usage among men.

Digital Counselling as an Emerging Trend

The ascent of advanced stages has altered psychological well-being care, making guiding administrations more open to understudies. Teletherapy and psychological wellness applications, for example, Better Help and Talk space have acquired notoriety, particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic. Digital counselling has significantly improved access, with 78% of users reporting emotional

well-being improvements, especially due to flexibility and anonymity. These findings reinforce the role of digital platforms in overcoming traditional barriers such as scheduling conflicts and social stigma. Research demonstrates that web-based guiding is pretty much as powerful as in-person meetings, with concentrates on detailing a surmised 35% decrease in uneasiness side effects through online CBT programs (Parsons *et al.* 2022). Besides, advanced apparatuses address availability hindrances by giving adaptable booking choices and decreasing the disgrace related to up close and personal meetings. For example, a review directed by the Journal of Medical Internet Research in 2022 saw that 78% of understudies favoured computerized guiding over conventional techniques because of anonymity and comfort.

Gaps in the Literature

While the study by Amanvermez*et al.* (2023) highlighted the benefits of counselling in managing anxiety and stress, several gaps remain unaddressed. First, there was limited research on the long-term effectiveness of counselling interventions, particularly beyond the duration of therapy. Additionally, the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on counselling outcomes is underexplored, especially in diverse student populations. Last but not least, the role of peer counselling and its comparative effectiveness with professional counselling requires further investigation. Similarly, Kausar *et al.* (2021) focused on traditional therapeutic models while overlooking innovative approaches such as group therapy and hybrid models combining digital and in-person sessions. This is where this study comes into play to tactfully bridge these pre-existing gaps associated with this central research topic.

Theories and Models

Theory of Planned Behaviour

This theory aligns well with the study on the role of counselling in managing anxiety and stress among college students by addressing the psychological and social factors influencing students' decision to seek counselling. TPB emphasizes three core components namely attitude toward behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. All these factors can influence counselling uptake. It has been critically analysed that students' beliefs about the benefits of counselling, for example, stress reduction and emotional support, can positively shape their intention to seek help. Peer and societal attitudes toward mental health play a critical role. If counselling is normalized within a college community, students are more likely to access services (Larsson Hartley & McHugh, 2022). Factors like stigma, financial constraints or lack of time can affect students' sense of control over accessing counselling services. Addressing these barriers can enhance counselling utilization. The study can identify actionable strategies to encourage counselling uptake among college students by exploring these components [***Refer to Appendix 2***].

Methodology

A qualitative, descriptive research design was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the central research topic. The study leveraged secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, books, institutional reports and government websites (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2022). All these relevant bits of data have been gathered from secondary sources and the criteria for source selection included credibility, published within the last five years and relevance to counselling practices in addition to their impact on mental health, specifically anxiety and stress among college students. Databases such as PubMed, Researchgate, IEEE and Google Scholar were used to identify pertinent literature [***Refer to Appendix 3***].

A thematic analysis has been utilized to examine this multitude of gathered pieces of information. Key themes, for example, the adequacy of advising, obstructions to openness, distinctions in sexual orientation and the effect of advanced guiding stages have been distinguished and ordered (Caldarelli *et al.* 2024). This strategy considered the ID of repeating examples and connections inside the information, giving experiences into how guiding addresses nervousness and stress. The review complied with ethical considerations for utilizing secondary data. All sources were appropriately credited, and only publicly available information was utilized to keep up with research trustworthiness.

Findings and Analysis

Critical analysis of the way counselling helps reduce anxiety and stress levels among college students

It has been revealed that counselling interventions play a significant role in reducing anxiety and stress levels among college students. Counselling services, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness training, and group therapy, have consistently demonstrated positive outcomes. Approximately 76% of college students who underwent CBT experienced significant reductions in anxiety symptoms (El-Monshed *et al.* 2022). Similarly, mindfulness-based interventions showed an approximate 35% decrease in perceived stress levels as well. Group counselling also emerged as an effective approach, fostering peer support and shared experiences. For instance, a 2022 study across five universities found that nearly 68% of students in group counselling programs reported improved coping mechanisms for stress. Additionally, students accessing online counselling platforms reported benefits, with 81% noting improved mental well-being after 4-6 sessions (Ran *et al.* 2022). Counselling's effectiveness extends beyond symptom relief, as it also enhances students' academic performance and overall well-being. Students who engaged in counselling exhibited a 24% higher retention rate in college compared to their peers who did not seek help (Yang & Yang, 2022). These findings highlight the critical role of counselling in alleviating mental health challenges among college

students, demonstrating its effectiveness in creating a supportive environment for academic and personal growth. However, continued efforts are necessary to address barriers and ensure equitable access to counselling services. These results are supported by recent studies from 2022–2024 showing that CBT led to a 76% reduction in anxiety symptoms, and mindfulness interventions brought a 35% drop in stress levels. Such findings underscore the continued effectiveness of evidence-based counselling practices.

Identification of obstacles that hinder students from seeking counselling

The analysis highlights several barriers that prevent college students from seeking counselling despite its proven benefits. Stigma remains a prominent obstacle, with surveys showing that 60% of college students avoid counselling due to concerns about being perceived as weak or judged by peers (Liu, Guo & Xu, 2023). This stigma is particularly pronounced among male students, who are 30% less likely to seek counselling than female students. Financial constraints also significantly impact access. It has been critically analysed that 42% of students cited the cost of mental health services as a primary reason for not seeking help (Larsson, Hartley & McHugh, 2022). Although counselling is available on campus, limitations such as session caps or additional charges for extended services pose challenges.

Time constraints further exacerbate the issue. Approximately 38% of students reported difficulty balancing academic commitments with scheduling counselling appointments (Caldarelli *et al.* 2024). Long wait times for campus mental health services also deterred students, with some institutions reporting delays of 4-6 weeks before the first session. Cultural and social factors compound these barriers. International students, for instance, face extra difficulties, like newness to guiding administrations and social marks of disgrace. It has been viewed that just 25% of global understudies in the US used grounds for psychological well-being administrations contrasted with 45% of home-grown understudies (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2022). Tending to these boundaries requires designated intercessions, for example, decreasing shame through mindfulness crusades, giving reasonable and adaptable advising choices, and extending computerized directing stages to oblige busy schedules.

Exploration of differences in how male and female students perceive and respond to counselling services

The examination uncovers huge orientation-based contrasts in how male and female undergrads see and answer guiding administrations. Research reliably shows that female understudies are bound to look for advising than their male partners. For example, a 2022 overview by the Sound Personalities Organization viewed that 63% of female undergrads looked for guiding administrations contrasted with just 37% of male understudies (El-Monshed et al. 2022). Disgrace assumes a more conspicuous

part in deflecting guys from looking for help. It has been fundamentally examined that 45% of male understudies apparent directing as an indication of a shortcoming, contrasted with 28% of female understudies. This cultural assumption of profound independence among men frequently keeps them from drawing in with psychological wellness administrations. As far as reaction to advising, females will quite often show more prominent receptiveness to talking about personal difficulties, prompting more compelling remedial results. It has been shown that female understudies exhibited a 40% higher pace of commitment and support in directing meetings contrasted with guys (*Ran et al.* 2022). On the other hand, male understudies frequently favour objective situated or arrangement-centred approaches, for example, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which offers organized critical thinking procedures. Tailored methodologies like these have shown guarantee in further developing commitment among male understudies. These discoveries feature the requirement for gender-sensitive counselling strategies. Schools can all the more likely help all understudies in overseeing uneasiness and stress really by tending to disgrace, advancing assistance by looking for ways of behaving among men, and redoing remedial methodologies. Recent data also indicates that structured therapeutic approaches such as CBT tend to yield better outcomes for male students, who prefer goal-oriented interventions. In contrast, female students are more open to emotional expression and more likely to seek help proactively, confirming the importance of gender-sensitive counselling strategies.

Critical analysis of the impact of online counselling tools on accessibility and effectiveness for managing student mental health

Digital counselling platforms have fundamentally upgraded openness and viability in overseeing understudy psychological well-being, especially for tending to nervousness and stress. It has been dissected that as high as 78% of understudies who utilized advanced guiding instruments announced better close-to-home prosperity, referring to accommodation and secrecy as significant benefits (Li & Peng, 2021). Openness has been a critical advantage of computerized stages. Online apparatuses take out topographical boundaries and diminish stand-by times, which are normal with conventional advising administrations. It has been reported that around 65% of understudies favoured web-based meetings because of adaptable planning, permitting them to adjust scholastic responsibilities (Li, Peng & Tao, 2023). Moreover, 82% of understudies detailed getting to psychological well-being administrations from far-off areas during the Coronavirus pandemic, showing the basic job of advanced stages in keeping up with congruity of care. Adequacy is one more strength of advanced directing. Platforms offering Cognitive Behavioural Therapy modules, directed contemplation, and constant visit administrations have shown critical outcomes. For example, understudies utilizing applications like Better Help or Talk space detailed a 30% decrease in feelings of anxiety after only a month and a half of commitment (Paralkar & Knutson, 2023). Regardless, challenges remain. The shortfall of eye-to-

eye affiliation can disappoint fondness working for specific students, while others face issues with web accessibility or mechanical schooling. Notwithstanding these cut-off points, automated coordinating stages address a significant and flexible solution for keeping an eye on profound prosperity troubles, particularly for students facing disgrace or determined impediments to standard directing [***Refer to Appendix 1***].

Conclusion

Based on recent findings, both traditional and digital counselling interventions significantly alleviate students' mental distress and improve overall well-being. For example, 81% of students using online platforms reported noticeable improvements after 4-6 sessions. Despite its proven benefits, barriers such as stigma and lack of affordability persist. Gender-based differences show that structured, goal-oriented approaches suit male students best, while female students are more open to emotionally expressive methods. The incorporation of digital tools allows broader access, though challenges like digital literacy and rapport-building remain. This study bridges existing gaps by providing updated empirical evidence and offers practical strategies to improve counselling outreach. Institutions should prioritize stigma reduction, affordable hybrid counselling models, and gender-sensitive practices to create a more inclusive mental health support system on campuses.

Gender-based variations further highlight the importance of targeting strategies to address specificrisks. Counselling approaches that challenge male students but are structured and focused ongoal achievement are the most effective, while female students are more likely to utilise counselling services and are more responsive. Digital consulting platforms a imto solve accessibility to services while providing the flexibility, convenience, and anonymity that appeals to a wider market. Nonetheless, it is widely accepted that elements such as rapport building and equitable access to technology are still areas to refine. The study addresses an important gap by synthesizing the effects of counselling across various outcomes and recommends the need for stigma reduction interventions, affordable care, and gender-based approaches within psychosocial counselling services. Moving forward, the goal should be to incorporate digital and traditional counselling services as a hybrid best practice model whenever possible. Therefore, counselling is indispensable for supporting college students in managing anxiety and stress. By addressing existing barriers and tailoring interventions, institutions can foster an environment conducive to mental health, academic success, and personal growth, ensuring students are equipped to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

References

- Amanvermez, Y., Rahmadiana, M., Karyotaki, E., de Wit, L., Ebert, D. D., Kessler, R. C., & Cuijpers, P. 2023. 'Stress management interventions for college students: A systematic review and meta-analysis'. *Clinical Psychology: Science and*

Practice, *30*(4), 423. Retrieved from: https://research.vu.nl/files/359047030/Stress_management interventions for college students A systematic review and meta-analysis.pdf [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]

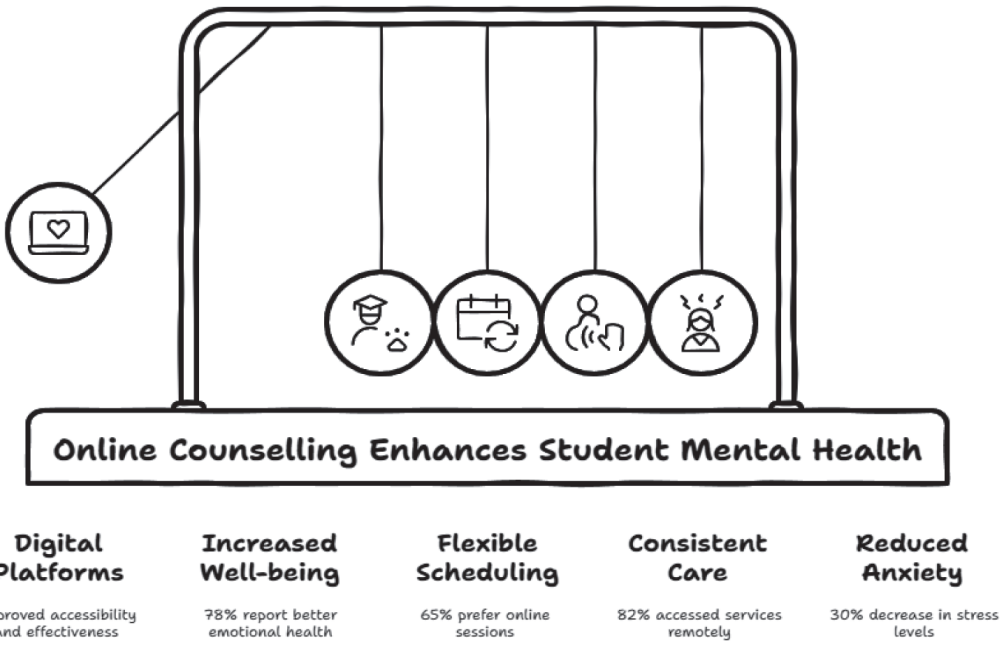
- Caldarelli, G., Pizzini, B., Cosenza, M., & Troncone, A. 2024. 'The prevalence of mental health conditions and effectiveness of psychological interventions among university students in Italy: A systematic literature review'. *Psychiatry Research*, 116208. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178124004931 [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- El-Monshed, A. H., El-Adl, A. A., Ali, A. S., & Loutfy, A. 2022. 'University students under lockdown, the psychosocial effects and coping strategies during COVID-19 pandemic: A cross sectional study in Egypt'. *Journal of American college health*, *70*(3), 679-690. Retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07448481.2021.1891086 [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Kausar, N., Ishaq, A., Qurban, H., & Rashid, H. A. 2021. 'Fear of covid-19 and depression: Mediating role of anxiety and stress among university students'. *Journal of Bioresource Management*, *8*(1), 9. Retrieved from: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/cgi/viewcontent. cgi?article = 1290&context = jbm [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Larsson, A., Hartley, S. & McHugh, L. 2022. 'A randomised controlled trial of brief web-based acceptance and commitment Therapy on the general mental health, depression, anxiety and stress of college Students'. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, *24*, pp.10-17. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212144722000114 [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Li, Y., &Peng, J. 2021. 'Does social support matter? The mediating links with coping strategy and anxiety among Chinese college students in a cross-sectional study of COVID-19 pandemic'. *BMC Public Health*, *21*(1), 1298. Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1186/s12889-021-11332-4.pdf [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Li, Y., Peng, J., & Tao, Y. 2023. 'Relationship between social support, coping strategy against COVID-19, and anxiety among home-quarantined Chinese university students: A path analysis modeling approach'. *Current Psychology*, *42*(13), 10629-10644. Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12144-021-02334-x.pdf [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Liu, X. Q., Guo, Y. X., &Xu, Y. 2023. 'Risk factors and digital interventions for anxiety disorders in college students: Stakeholder perspectives'. *World Journal of Clinical Cases*, *11*(7), 1442. Retrieved from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10011984/ [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Naidoo, P., & Cartwright, D. 2022. 'Where to from here? Contemplating the impact of COVID-19 on South African students and student counseling services in higher education'. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, *36*(4), 355-369. Retrieved from: https://hungu-mut.figshare.com/articles/journal contribution/Where to from Here Contemplating the impact of COVID-19 on South African students and student counseling services in higher education/18096077/1/files/32837387.pdf [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Paralkar, MA, U., & Knutson, PhD, D. 2023. 'Coping with academic stress: Ambiguity and uncertainty tolerance in college students'. *Journal of American College Health*, *71*(7), 2208-2216. Retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07448481.2021.1965148 [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Parsons, D., Gardner, P., Parry, S., & Smart, S. 2022. 'Mindfulness-based approaches for managing stress, anxiety and depression

for health students in tertiary education: a scoping review'. *Mindfulness*, 1-16. Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12671-021-01740-3.pdf [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]

- Ran, Z. O. U., Zeb, S., Nisar, F., Yasmin, F., Poulova, P., &Haider, S. A. 2022. 'The impact of emotional intelligence on career decision-making difficulties and generalized self-efficacy among university students in China'. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 865-874. Retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2147/prbm.s358742 [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]
- Yang, Y., & Yang, P. 2022. 'Effect of college students' academic stress on anxiety under the background of the normalization of COVID-19 pandemic: the mediating and moderating effects of psychological capital'. *Frontiers in psychology*, *13*, 880179. Retrieved from: https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.880179/pdf [Retrieved on:18/01/2025]

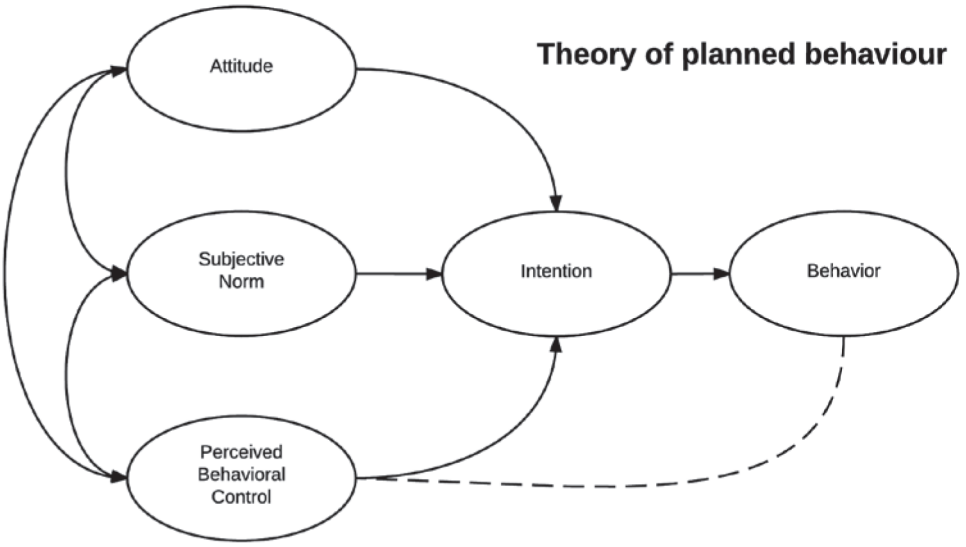
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Online counseling enhancing the mental health of students



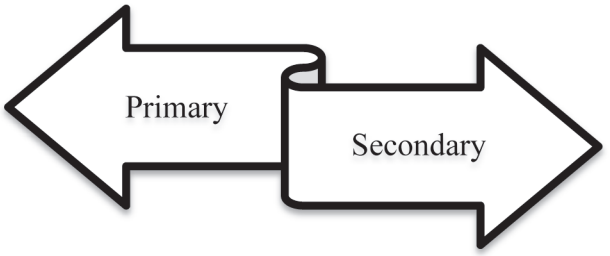
(Source: Guided by Ran *et al.* 2022)

Appendix 2: Theory of Planned Behavior



(Source: Guided by Larsson Hartley & McHugh, 2022)

Appendix 3: Source of data collection



Bio profile of the Author:
Assistant Professor & Head
Department of Education
Domkal Girls' College
Domkal, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India
Email:roykrishedu@gmail.com

Shared Spaces, Overlapping Cultures: Co-Spatiality, Syncretism, and the Cultural Universe of Zakaria Street

Rebanta Gupta

Abstract

This article engages in a critical discussion of multiple facets of Zakaria Street, Kolkata, and its surrounding locality, ranging from the historical development of the street to the complex cultural and spatial identity that defines it. It traces the historical genesis of the street and the dialectical and dialogic relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim communities that defined the locality's syncretic culture, by underscoring a history of conflict and reconciliation. The article explores the intricate interactions between Hindu and Islamic cultural influences, emphasizing the concurrent arrangements of various religious, commercial, and cultural structures along the street. It also provides a critical examination of the renowned culinary culture of the area, discussing the interdependent relationship expressed through food between the Hindu and Muslim communities during Ramadan. In conclusion, the article underscores the recent efforts made to promote communal harmony in the highlighted street, amidst a politically charged environment marked by the rise of Hindu nationalism and increasing communal tensions.

Keywords: *Co-spatiality, Communal Harmony, Kolkata, Secularism, Space, Syncretism.*

Introduction

A thriving cosmopolitan culture is one of the defining features of Kolkata, the administrative capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. While the city's demography is largely accentuated by a Hindu-majority population, residents from other faiths, namely Islam, have co-existed with the Hindu community for centuries, sharing histories of strife, struggle, and camaraderie. Zakaria Street, a short but important street in Central Kolkata, and its surrounding locality are defined by the co-existence of the Hindu Marwaris and Muslim communities over the years and it houses the biggest Ramadan market of the city, which draws not only Muslim but Hindu enthusiasts in search of delectable food items. Despite having a troubled history of communal conflict, this street comes alive with transactions between the two communities and remains a vibrant example of a syncretic and secular culture. This article engages in a critical discussion of multiple facets of Zakaria Street and its surrounding locality, ranging from the historical development of the street to the complex cultural and spatial identities that

define it. The article traces the historical genesis of the street and the dialectical and dialogic relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim communities that defined the locality's syncretic culture, by underscoring a history of conflict and reconciliation. It further discusses the complex interactions between the Hindu and Islamic cultural layers by drawing attention to the co-spatial arrangements of different religious, commercial, and cultural structures and spaces along the street, using the idea of 'co-spatiality,' conceptualized by Jacques Lévy (2021). It also makes a critical survey of the celebrated culinary culture of this locality, discussing the transactional relationship celebrated through food between the historically contending Hindu and Muslim communities during the Ramadan months. The article concludes by highlighting the recent initiatives undertaken to foster communal harmony with the street in focus, against an incendiary atmosphere surcharged with the rampant spread of Hindu nationalism and communal tension.

Situating the Geographical Coordinates

Zakaria Street is located in the Chitpur region of Central Kolkata, in Ward Number 43, under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's (KMC) jurisdiction. This historic street connects two important avenues of the city: Rabindra Sarani and Chittaranjan (also known as Central) Avenue. Known for being an important site for its religious and gastronomic features, it hosts the historic Nakhoda Mosque, the largest mosque in West Bengal as well as in Eastern India, and the street turns into an open-air exhibition of various food items during the Ramadan months every year, attracting thousands of epicureans from across the length and breadth of Kolkata, and also from outside. The settlement of 'Haji' Nur Muhammad Zakaria, an influential Muslim businessman and philanthropist hailing from the Kutchi Memon community in the 1850s, possibly led to the christening of this place, which is still resided by a large section of Kolkata's Muslim community (Bandopadhyay, 2022: 73). Along with places like Park Circus and Kidderpore, Zakaria Street and its fringes serve as a significant sanctuary for the Muslim populace of the city, which seems to revolve by and large around the Nakhoda Mosque and dates back to the colonial period.

It is interesting to note how Zakaria Street, named after a Muslim businessman, like a hyphen connects two important roads running parallel to each other and named after two illustrious Indians with non-Muslim [Brahmo and Hindu] affiliations, namely, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the celebrated litterateur and polymath and the winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, and Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925), popularly known as Deshbandhu, the monumental political activist and lawyer from Bengal. The recent outburst of Hindu nationalism in India triggered the rechristening of many Islamic-sounding places to more 'palatable' and 'decolonized' Hindu ones. It is to be noted that the chequered positioning of different streets and landmarks in this part of Kolkata, that have been named after personalities hailing from both Hindu and Muslim communities. Located precisely

at the junction where Zakaria Street merges with Chittaranjan Avenue, is the Mohammad Ali Park, named after Mohammad Ali Jauhar (1878-1931), an Indian freedom activist and a principle founder of the All India Muslim League. It has emerged as one of the most celebrated centres for Durga Puja, the annual Hindu festival observing the homecoming of the Goddess Durga. As many as eight to nine alleys or streets radiate out of Zakaria Street, which are alternatively named after Hindu and Muslim personalities or religious sites. A glance at the names might provide an idea of a peculiar symbolic syncretism operating in this area; namely, Syed Salley Street, Surti Bagan Street, Sudam Sil Street, Mandir Street, Kanai Seal Street, Nawab Badruddin Street, Ismail Madan Street, and Rajmohan Street. In the absence of any demarcation line between these streets, a peculiar fluidity is observed between them as one street 'flows' into the other. The name of the major arterial street, i.e., Zakaria Street, often surmounts that of the subsidiary ones. As a result, substantial portions of the connecting streets are frequently identified as parts of Zakaria Street. The individual identities of the connecting streets and lanes are subsumed under the larger symbolic and cultural paradigm of Zakaria Street, suggesting uncertainty and turbulent confusion, since the "boundaries between organizations [here, streets] are blurred and the importance of interdependence increases" (Jorani and Hassan, 2017: 1133). This arrangement of streets bearing multicultural signifiers not only testifies to the presence of a vibrant syncretic culture in this locality but also points to the possibilities of overcoming religious and cultural animosities existing between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. This will be highlighted in the following sections. Zakaria Street observes parallel operations of the spiritual, mercantile, and the culinary dimensions since it houses a complex mirror work of mosques and temples, hotels and shops, and eateries and restaurants. These three dimensions intersect and operate parallelly in a single space. The street is lined by colonial-era residential houses and shops, and is marked by a crowded and insalubrious atmosphere, where the urban modernity of Kolkata still negotiates with the airs of a distant colonial time.

The Historical Development of Zakaria Street

As mentioned earlier, Zakaria Street was named after 'Haji' Nur Muhammad Zakaria, an influential Muslim businessman and philanthropist hailing from the Kutchi Memon community, which traces its origin to the Kutch region of Gujarat. Possibly a resident of the nearby Amratolla Street, Haji Zakaria was a trader from the aforementioned region, who arrived in the city after the Great Revolt of 1857. By the 1870s, he started playing an important role in Bengal's politics and emerged as a Pan-Islamist, and subsequently amassed a large section of Bengal's working men as his followers (Chakraborty, 1975: 75). Zakaria presumably wielded considerable influence among the Kutchi Memons and owned a firm called 'Haji Jackariah Mahomed and Company,' besides serving as the secretary of the Calcutta-based Indian Trades Association and as an advisor to the British in promulgating the first Factories Act of 1881 (Banka, 2021; Chakraborty, 1975: 75).

The emergence of Zakaria Street cannot be pinpointed easily; however, its early development seems to have been co-terminus with the construction and development of the adjoining Central Avenue. In 1914, the Calcutta Improvement Trust took up the 'Central Avenue Scheme' in concurrence with the need for a north-south thoroughfare between Chitpore Road and Cornwallis Street, which was also manifested in an 1854 map drawn by the alderman William Clark, that projected a line linking up Bagbazaar in the north and Dharmatala to its south (Bandopadhyay, 2022: 89). The Central Avenue Scheme, undertaken during the First World War and the early interwar period (1914-1928), thus began as an urban renewal scheme that "recycled more than 200 acres of prime land in the inner city and displaced at least 50,000 individuals from the densely populated neighbourhoods of Soorti Bagan, Jorabagan, Jorasanko, and Colootola" (Ibid) and Zakaria Street can be thought to have taken shape during this rehauling scheme.

The street was primarily dominated by Muslim *bustees* or shanties before the landlords started selling sections of land along the street to the wealthy Marwari traders, who were arriving in Calcutta from Rajasthan. The poor Muslim shanty dwellers often found themselves displaced by their Muslim landlords and subsequently by the Marwaris, while only the wealthy Muslim traders and shopkeepers kept themselves afloat by owning buildings and properties along the street, successfully resisting the advancements of the realtors and the landlords (Banka, 2021). The establishment of the Calcutta Improvement Trust in 1911 led to massive development schemes being undertaken in Soorti Bagan and Zakaria Street. This led to the erasure of the *bustees* to create space for the "new and valorized 'frontage properties," as the dwelling spaces were converted into commercial establishments, while "existing tenants were driven out from these parts unceremoniously, monetary compensations were handed out to erstwhile property owners as consolation" (Bandopadhyay, 2022: 99-100). The Marwari business owners continued benefiting from these schemes, while their interventions added fuel to the already existing communal tension in that area. The proposal of the Marwari Association to widen and extend many streets also had an impact on this locality, as Zakaria Street was stretched and widened by 1916, and 'building sites abutting on it were sold at a satisfactory price' (Ibid: 85). The fault lines produced by the communal riots of 1910, which had witnessed protracted violence between Hindus and Muslims, were compounded by the recoupment and eviction program, as anti-Hindu resentment became deep-seated among the Muslims of Zakaria Street and its surroundings. The 1911 Census shows that Zakaria Street locality had changed 'beyond recognition' as a result of the work of the Improvement Trust (Thacker's Indian Directory 1918), which is further elucidated in the discussion below:

"The 1918 street directory names only three properties, but in the 1933 street directory, there are references to 54 properties along the same street. Of the 54 properties, the first 35 names between

Lower Chitpore Road and Surtee Bagan (also written as 'Surtibagan' and 'Soortee Bagan' in colonial documents) Lane refer to commercial establishments owned or occupied by people bearing Muslim names. In the Soorti Bagan area, where the Improvement Trust had launched its first scheme, the remaining properties were both predominantly commercial and had owners or occupants with Hindu Bengali (upper caste) and Marwari surnames" (Bandopadhyay, 2022: 85).

The dawn of the Marwari fiefdom on Zakaria Street was further crystallized by the settlements of some prominent Marwari families like the Oswals and the Maheshwaris (Banka, 2021). Krishna Kumar Birla, the celebrated industrialist, recalls that the men of his family had moved to Calcutta to make a fortune while the women would stay back at their ancestral homeland in Pilani, Rajasthan, and how the family had shifted to a house in Zakaria Street before his birth (Birla, 2007: 48). However, socio-political unrests that gripped the city between 1910 and 1926 had an impact on Zakaria Street as well. While the Hindu-Muslim riots would be ignited by local factors concerning the Hindus and the Muslims, the Marwaris often became the target of the Muslim mob (Chakraborty, 2017: 770). Besides the simmering resentment against the Marwaris for being migrants and encroachers, the other motivating factor behind the violence might have been the spectacular amount of wealth the community had amassed, which stood in stark contrast with the impoverished Bengali Hindus and Muslims residing in that area. Birla describes the incendiary situation of the locality during communal riots in a vivid manner:

"Whenever there was a communal riot in the city, we had to live in constant tension. Once, during one of these riots which probably took place around 1920, our house was surrounded by a riotous Muslim mob. We had many faithful servants including a brave durwan from upcountry named Ashta Singh. Whenever the house was in danger of being attacked, our servants immediately locked the entrance to the house. Ashta Singh would then take a gun and resort to blank fire" (Birla, 2007: 60).

The constant threat of violence made the Birla family exit Zakaria Street and settle in Rainey Park in the southern part of the city, a move replicated by other Marwari families of the locality. The mass exodus of the Marwaris by the 1950s not only impoverished the locality culturally and financially, but some of the grand mansions inhabited by them were either sold or leased. The street is currently marked by its chaotic atmosphere and haphazard modern constructions, as this once-residential neighbourhood now functions as a commercial district, with trucks, shops, restaurants, moving companies, garment stores, gemstone shops, and electrical appliances shops reigning supreme. Only a handful of families from the Muslim and Marwari communities still reside in the locality. The emptying mansions along the street "have been subdivided into smaller parts, with some having been converted into office spaces, while others into residential units. While some residents have remained here because of the nostalgia and the attachment to their family's heritage, for others, the reasons are

financial" (Banka, 2021). The scars of communal riots might still exist unconsciously in the collectively memory of the two communities inhabiting the locality, but they have, over the years, after numerous episodes of friction and tensions, learned to co-exist and celebrate a syncretic culture, observing the rapid changes that have engulfed the area and the city. Zakaria Street is no longer associated with communal tensions, as the erstwhile tensions seem to have paved the way for a hermeneutics of reconciliation and mutual adjustment.

The Co-Spatial Dynamics of the Street

The Zakaria Street locality is characterized by intersections and overlapping of two socio-cultural and spatial layers, which could be roughly identified as the Hindu and Islamic layers. While this locality is characterized by a dense concentration of the Muslim population and an overabundance of Islamic cultural relics, it functions as a cultural bubble in the larger Hindu-majority ecosystem of the city. This narrow street and its surroundings are marked by complex juxtapositions of a mosque, a Hindu temple, restaurants, guest houses, roadside stalls, gemstone shops, garment stores, pharmacies, and barber shops, which are manned by both Hindu and Muslim residents. It often gets "choked with vehicles transporting goods, traders, labourers and hawkers, making it a challenge to navigate on foot. Clustered around the masjid, where the street ends to meet Rabindra Sarani, there are permanent as well as street side shops selling everything from garments and *ittar* to meats and kebabs" (Banka, 2021). While labels like 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' cultures might seem outrageous and imply the denial of a unified culture, this article would argue that this unified culture (described as the *Ganga-Jamunitehzeeb*) is a product of a co-spatial arrangement of distinct spaces, realities, and cultures, one indigenous (Hindu) and the other foreign (Islam), which operate simultaneously in this locality, and the mere underscoring of these components does not repudiate the existence of a greater unifying culture.

The idea of 'co-spatiality,' conceptualized by the French geographer Jacques Lévy (2021), points out a specific type of interspatiality or relation between spaces, where the "vertical superimpositions of different spaces which 'occupy' the same extent...hinges on the axiom of a possible 'vertical' (that is: without distance or inclusion) superimposition of different social realities" (Lévy, 2021: 2). It refers to a vertical interconnection between two distinct but overlapping spaces or realities occupying a common extent, where "each of these realities is involved in spatialities (i.e.-spatial acts and spatial agencies) which are simultaneously situated in the same *here*" (Ibid: 2). Any urban space is characterized by overlapping spaces and realities and complicated by the movement of different groups and actors (Iori, 2022). Zakaria Street is no exception in this regard, where two socio-cultural and religious layers, represented by the Muslim and Marwari communities, inhabit the same space, yet they are engaged vertically on top of the other, which allows interlayer dialogues and transactions. The physical

space provided by the street and its surroundings acts as the 'base map' which remains independent of other layers, yet sums up all other spaces and realities that function upon it. The following sections will highlight how the Hindu and Muslim spatial-cultural layers have formed a complex arrangement of religious structures, residential buildings and commercial sites, which characterize the locality as "an arrangement of various spatialities [and realities]...seen as a series of superposed layers" (Lévy, 2021: 8).

While communal riots and tensions have characterized Indian politics on an unprecedented scale since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, scenes of co-existence and harmony could be cited time and again in favour of the secular framework of the nation, where Zakaria Street has emerged as a microcosm of Indian secularism, which endorses *Sarva Dharma SamaBhava* ('Equal treatment to all religious pathways'), an idea espoused by Mahatma Gandhi as "an effective basis for a tolerance on which to premise a just inter-religious peace and harmony" (Heredia, 2009: 12). This is best understood by the presence of the Nakhoda Mosque and the Jabreswar Shiva Temple on this street, the two religious structures representing Islam and Hinduism. Despite being positioned in the same locality, they throw up different religio-spatial matrices, but "in practice interactions between [these] different spatial units and their respective logics do occur" (Lévy, 2021: 5). This article proposes that, in the interactions and overlapping between these religious spaces, the street itself acts as a 'switch,' which enables linkage between different grids, "making it possible to move from one layer to another" (Christ, 2022: 1).

The Nakhoda Mosque, inaugurated in 1926, is the largest in West Bengal and Eastern India. Built under the benefaction of Abdar Rahim Osman, hailing from the Kutchi Memon community of Muslims of Kutch in Gujarat, can hold nearly 10,000 people on four levels (Bach, 2006: 592). Built upon an existing small mosque, the present structure was influenced by Emperor Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, and its main entrance was fashioned after the Buland Darwaza of Fatehpur Sikri. Armed with two minarets and domes, the red brick mosque's Indo-Sarasenic architecture not only reinvigorates the memories of the Mughal Empire but seems to have been "a conscious choice to make a Muslim statement in a city conspicuously lacking in them" (Ibid: 593). The mosque gets decked up in lights during Ramadan, as it lets the devotees know if the moon of Eid can be seen by lighting the minaret tops. The overlapping of the adjoining culinary space and the mosque's sacred space can be traced back to the establishment of a mercantile district by the Kutchi Memons, who traded with Burma, Ceylon, Java, and Singapore. The mosque itself is a relic of that trading hub since traders were behind its establishment and the first Muslim restaurants of this area emerged as a result (Banka, 2023).

While the grand ornate gateway to the mosque, located at the intersection of Chittaranjan Avenue and Zakaria Street, symbolically absorbs the entire locality within the sacred jurisdiction of the mosque,

the non-Islamic sites; such as, the temple and the house of a Vaishanavite family, appear as bubbles and their borders are contiguous with the mosque's extended sacred space, forming unique interreligious and interspatial dialogues. The Jabreswar Mahadev temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, stands at the intersection of Zakaria and Mandir Streets. The brief history of the establishment of the temple is enunciated by a stone engraving written in archaic Bengali on its front side, which states that the temple was established by one Shyama Kaviraj on the auspicious day of Dahami in 1725 Shakabda [Saka Era] or the Christian year 1823. It houses the stone idol of Shiva, known as 'Jabreswar Mahadev,' with a stone sculpture of the deity's bull Nandi facing the idol. Despite its diminutive presence, the temple bears the tragic fingerprints of communal conflicts. The temple committee's annual souvenir (2000) states that the idol was destroyed twice, and the arsonic phase of the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946, orchestrated by the All India Muslim League, led to the temple's destruction, which was later rebuilt by the devotees and the idol was reinstated with assistance from the-then ruler of Burdwan, possibly Sir Uday Chand Mahtab. Though its stature on the city's religious map is incomparable with that of the neighbouring mosque, the temple is visited by many devotees every day, and Shaivite festivals like Maha Shivaratri, Shravan Mahotsav, Maha Rudrabhishek are routinely observed, which have also spawned miraculous sagas on the deity's divine prowess. The location of the temple and the mosque on the same 'basemap' not only transforms this crowded trading district into a spiritual highway but also signifies an attempt at communal reconciliation against a hostile history of conflict, where the same street witnesses the overlapping of simultaneous celebrations of contradictory events like Shivaratri, Ramadan, and the selling of formidable beef, all within a distance of a few meters. The street, therefore, provides a transition from one sacred space to another and enables switching between different religio-cultural matrices.

Besides the sacred spaces, the other two prominent overlapping spatial tiers of this locality seem to be residential and commercial. The locality's dominant Islamic culture is perceived through a throng of shops primarily addressing a Muslim clientele, often giving the semblance of a medieval Arabic city. The street is cluttered with stores of gemstone sellers; Islamic apparel, namely, hijab*, naqaab, abata,* and Stoll for women and *sherwani* and *kurta* for men; pharmacies selling both modern and traditional *unani* medicines. Unlike other pharmacy shops in Kolkata, the ones on Zakaria Street are distinguished by the name *dawakahanas*, indicating the prevalence of traditional Islamic medical practices. There are perfumers selling *ittar*, carpet shops; salon and offices of Hajj tour organizers. These are to name a few. This close arrangement of different stores and establishments undoubtedly lends this place an exotic flavour, as if time has been wound back to medieval times. However, the guest houses and transport companies scattered across the locality, which send truckloads of commodities to different parts of the country and abroad, seem to be owned by Hindus, as they are

named after Hindu deities like Shiva, Durga, and Krishna. This complex map of commercial spaces shows an inter-communal synergy operating, where economic needs have brought the two communities to a transactional culture.

Tucked between these diverse spaces are other exotic spatial narratives. The palatial residential building of Gauhar Jaan (1873-1930), one of the first recording vocal artists of the country is located right beside Nakhoda Mosque. This bears rickety signatures of the opulent life of one of the most successful Indian musicians. It is interesting to note the contiguity of the mosque, a sacred site sanitized of any earthly profanity, and this building owned by a singer with a flamboyant and lascivious lifestyle. The chequered configuration of sacred and profane, and opulence and religiosity, underscores a culture of acceptance that allowed the co-existence of a controversial courtesan and a religious site on the same street. Previously known as the 'Gauhar Building,' and currently called 'Salim Manzil,' the building is a palimpsest of memories. While music resounded in every corner in its heydays, the currently dilapidated building has had a long history of transfer of ownership and litigations and Gauhar's opulent days have been overwritten by the mundane practices of its present residents. Sights of clothes drying from parapet grills and a fleet of shops on the ground floor selling a variety of goods from hardware to foreign currency (Sampath, 2012: 262) seem to be a shocking transformation to this space. Mention may also be made of the old mansion of Carrimjee Allibhoy Merchant, which is reminiscent of a forgotten Parsi heritage of the locality. Built of red brick with a heavy iron gate and a white marble plaque still bearing this name, this dilapidated mansion was supposedly owned or named after Carrimjee, who, according to a 1956 edition of Foreign Commerce Weekly, published by the United States Department of Commerce, was a wealthy export and commission merchant of shellac and paint in Calcutta, who traded with western companies (Banka, 2021). Like the surrounding mansions, the precarious existence of the Carrimjee mansion now serves as a relic of the now-dwindling Parsi community of the city and indicates the cosmopolitan culture of an overtly 'Islamized' city street. No well-defined boundaries, therefore, separate different spaces in this locality, and the complex arrangement of these spaces, inhabited by various communities demonstrating urban mobility, shows the "fascinating but dangerous experiment of living at the same time in several different contiguous, but otherwise widely separated, worlds" (Park et al., 1925: 41).

It is interesting to observe the co-spatiality of different overlapping, often contesting culinary spaces in this locality. Along with makeshift food stalls during the Ramadan months, the street is characterized by close and often overlapping arrangements of different restaurants and eateries, manned by Hindus and Muslims alike. The Rajasthan Guest House, supposedly established by the Marwari residents emigrating from Rajasthan, offers vegetarian dishes to its customers, in consonance with the dominant tradition of meat abstinence seen within this community. The glowing devotion to the Hindu

deity Ganesha is visible from its signboard saying 'Shree Ganesh' and it tethers this space not only to a distinct culinary but also to a sacred tradition of the Marwari homeland. A similar vegetarian eatery called Annapurna Bhojanalaya located on the adjacent Tarachand Dutta Street testifies not only to a tradition of non-violence and spiritualism practiced by the Hindu community but also towards an effort to carve out a distinct identity in a larger Islamicate ambit and preserve the cultural relics of the once-dominant Marwari community that inhabited the locality. Alongside these 'Hindu' culinary spaces, the street is shared by eateries and restaurants managed by Muslims, like the Bombay Hotel, Taskeen, Dilli 6, and Benazir Hotel. Against the strict vegetarian injunction followed in Rajasthan Guest House and Annapurna Bhojanalaya, the Muslim eateries are known for selling delectable meat items like *kebabs*, *chaap, nihari,* and *haleem*; offered in different versions like chicken, mutton and also beef. While the Hindus have traditionally abhorred beef consumption, with the Marwaris especially known for following strict vegetarianism, it is interesting to note how the same locality harbours two contradictory culinary spaces offering vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals simultaneously. As the religious symbols of the Hindu deities like Annapurna and Ganesha function as markers for culinary spaces managed by the Hindus, the Arabic or Urdu names like 'Taskeen' and 'Benazir' function as signifiers for the Muslim proprietors and the separate culinary spatio-cultural matrices they offer. As a switch, the street offers transitions from one culinary space to another and acts as a mediator between two contradictory yet overlapping culinary cultures, negotiating differences and fostering understanding and mutual co-existence.

The Gastronomic Geography

The advent of the month of Ramadan turns Zakaria Street into an open-air exhibition of delectable food items, as hundreds of epicureans from across Kolkata and beyond flock to this culinary hotspot to cherish the tastes of Delhi and Awadhi cuisines. The *iftar* market of this locality buzzes into action as soon as evening descends on the horizon. Makeshift roadside stalls, restaurants, and food carts offering a wide range of delicacies, such as "[s]ucculent kebabs, flavourful *haleem*, creamy *faloodas*, *sheermal*, halwa-puri" (Alexander, 2023), populate almost every nook and cranny of this narrow and congested street, creating a semblance of Aminabad or Alambagh, the culinary centres of Lucknow. Along with the Chinese-dominated Sun Yat-Sen Street of the Poddar Court locality, located just a kilometer away, Zakaria Street has emerged over the years as one of the principal melting pots of history, gastronomy, architecture and culture in Kolkata. While the Park Street area, known for its anglicized culture, remains popular for its annual jamboree during Christmas, the food festival of Zakaria Street, despite lacking official patronage, almost serves as an Islamic response to the apparent Judaeo-Christian ethos and sentiments that characterize the buildings, eateries, institutions and visitors of Park Street and the associated annual Christmas festivity.

While the bouquet of food is prepared for the Muslim residents stepping out of the Nakhoda Mosque after offering their evening prayers, the shops have expanded their clientele to welcome epicureans, enthusiasts, and food vloggers from different religious and cultural communities. Every year, the *iftar* market materializes itself with "around 100 temporary stalls and 30-odd permanent restaurants during Ramzan [sic]. While most of these stalls sell unbeatable Awadhi cuisine, many also sell garments, *ittar,* home décor items, utensils, and other things" (Mitra and Chakraborty, 2019). Besides the roadside stalls, restaurants and eateries on and around Zakaria Street, such as, Adam's Kebab, Dilli 6, Taskeen, Al Baik, Sufiya, and Lucknow Restaurant serve eclectic platters of exotic Mughlai and Awadhi delicacies, ranging from snack items like *bakarkhani* and *sheermal* to desserts like *falooda* and *firni.* While the theological and spiritual aspects of Ramadan might not always capture the attention of the Hindu-majority visitors, its gastronomic dimension has functioned as a great attractor to draw them to an overtly Islamic territory and cherish the unique food culture brought to India by the Islamic merchants and conquistadors. The Kutchi Memon community, which has historically inhabited Zakaria Street, is widely known for its passionate association with food. Although *malpua* and *queemachaaps* dominate their kitchens as part of the *iftar* menu, a few unique recipes having antecedents in Gujarat, their native homeland, have been forwarded down the generations, such as, the china grass *halwa*, which is a Ramadan specialty (Banka, 2023). Although the destructive and proselytizing spirit of the Mughal rule in the Indian subcontinent is widely condemned by the Hindu nationalists, it seems to be utterly impossible to decouple the Mughals and their cuisines from the gastronomic habits of the Bengalis. The return of the Mughal Emperor Humayun (1508-1556) to India from Safavid Iran in 1555, resulted in the immigration of several Persian aristocrats, scholars, warriors, artists, and most importantly, chefs, who spread across India and a few settled in Bengal. The conquest of Bengal in 1576, by Emperor Akbar (1542-1605), Humayun's successor, not only witnessed the emergence of Dhaka as the capital of Mughal-controlled Bengal but also saw the crystallization of power of these Persian aristocrats (later known as the Ashrafs) and their culinary culture in Bengal (Sengupta, 2022: 60). The influx of Islamic cuisine in Kolkata can be traced back to nearly three hundred years, when Muhammad Reza Khan (1717-1791), the *Naib Diwan*, the regional administrative officer of the Mughal Empire of Bengal, built his mansion in the Chitpur locality, and consequently a Muslim habitat, along with some eateries, came into existence. The construction of two mosques in the Tollygunge and Dharmatala regions of the city by Prince Ghulam Muhammad Sultan Khan (1795-1872), the exilic son of the Mysore regent Tipu Sultan, also led to the expansion of Islamic cuisine in Kolkata. Food stalls and eateries gradually emerged around these mosques and were gradually absorbed into the culinary smorgasbord of the Bengalis (Ibid: 62). Similar patterns could be observed in Zakaria Street as well. Several food stalls, specializing in Mughal or Awadhi

cuisines, manned by Muslim residents, mushroomed around the Nakhoda Mosque from the early twentieth century, resulting in the complex cohabitation of the culinary and the spiritual in the same space, where the street functions as the fragile threshold and a hyphen betwixt the mosque's spiritual space and the larger culinary ambit that surrounds it.

The transformation of Zakaria Street, a regular public thoroughfare, into a site of culinary exhibition and festivity during Ramadan essentially underscores the fluidity of the public spaces, which facilitate "interactions and exchanges that go beyond the religious and cultural. They help create neighbourhoods by sharing space and nurture the social fabric" (Koppikar, 2024). The festive period not only witnesses material transactions between Muslim shopkeepers and primarily Hindu customers, but it also marks the confluence of two cultures and ideologies, negotiated by the agency of the culinary. This festivity not only functions as a "simple rupture in the mundaneity of the everyday life of the urban citizens," but its symbolic and affective dimensions "provoke the re/negotiation of individual and group identity and place-based heritage through representational displays of meaning" (Finkel and Platt, 2020: 2). The Ramadan festival generates a unique coordinate of space and time, whereby the Hindu and the Muslim communities, sharing a history of prolonged socio-political frictions in the Indian subcontinent, are brought together in a transactional relationship that bolsters community bonding. With the onward march of Hindu nationalism and resultant cultural otherization of some ethnic groups, the Indian Muslims are allegedly leading a precarious existence. High-pitched Hindutva campaigns by some political parties also touched this locality during the recent elections, which presumably deepened the fault lines already existing between the two communities. However, this window of festivity creates a culinary carnivalesque, which could be described by taking cues from Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis in his seminal work *Rabelais and His World* (1968). The carnivalesque, according to Bakhtin, is typified by the idea of a collective whole with no hierarchies and characterized by "rebelling against social norms before the community made a sober return to normalcy after the temporary period of festivity" (Ibid: 3). This Ramadan carnivalesque, mediated by the culinary agency, certainly does not completely efface the existing hierarchies between the two communities but provides an interface for mutual dialogues by upending the existing social barriers, thereby upholding the idea of a city, which "appear[s] as an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or visit, to play and consume in" and represents the existence of a 'dynamic community' to the outside world (Harvey, 1989: 9). This is countenanced in the saga of the three musketeers: Ravi Chourasia, Afzal Khan, and Faizal Khan, who are visitors to Zakaria Street and are emblematic of the spirit of inclusiveness that define the street and the locality:

"His [Chourasia's] family members are strict vegetarians. Chourasia has just returned from Ujjain, where the Mahakaleshwar temple is an annual destination for his family members at the start of

Chaitra (the first month of the Hindu calendar) Navratri. But his religion has never stood in the way of his friendship with Ali and Khan. "We have grown up together. I have eaten at their places and they have eaten at mine. Nothing can change that relationship," said Chourasia, whose family owns a "pure veg" eatery on Tarachand Dutta Street in the same neighborhood" (Mitra, 2022).

The transactional relationship between the Hindu and the Muslim populations, therefore, not only signifies dialogues between two communities but also interactions between two separate socio-cultural layers, engaged in a curious practice of co-spatiality. Interactions between layers require the presence of 'switches' or connectors linking up the layers (Lévy, 2021: 3), and the food stalls and eateries could be interpreted as performing the role of the primary switches between the Hindu and Islamic socio-cultural layers, which simultaneously share the same space.

The culinary bonanza at Zakaria Street also provides enthusiasts from the Hindu community with the formidable taste of beef and sets a critical example of turning the existing religio-political currents in India around the 'cattle question' upside down. The consumption of beef has always been a contested issue in India since cattle are much adored and revered as sacred beings by Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Prohibition of cattle slaughter has been historically endorsed by spiritual and political leaders like Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi and taken forward by Hindu nationalist organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Hindu traditions have praised and respected cows since they exemplify munificence and maternal love: "The cow is venerated as the great provider and is naturally therefore identified with the earth and regarded as too sacred to be killed" (Brockington, 1996: 205). The voluntary, self-imposed restriction on beef by the Hindu-majority population of the country also finds echoes in the Constitution of India, as Article 48 under the Directive Principles of the Constitution mentions that "the state administration shall make necessary arrangements to re-organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines," besides emphasizing that "the state shall endeavour to prohibit slaughtering and smuggling of cattle, calves, and other milch and draught cattle" (National Law University 2012: 234). While the protection of cows is celebrated in Hinduism as an expression of compassion that simultaneously acknowledges humans' power over other creatures and their vulnerability before the divine agency (Kemmerer, 2012: 59), it has taken an insidious turn with the advent of cow vigilantism in India. Mob-induced violence, perpetrated by Hindu extremists on non-Hindu, especially Muslim communities, in the name of *gauraksha* [cow protection] has led to alleged harassment, torture, and even murder of several individuals since 2014. The infamous 2015 case of Muhammad Akhlaq, a Muslim resident of Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, being lynched by a frenzied mob, who suspected that the victim was in possession of beef in his refrigerator, drew national headlines and criticism (Chandra, 2018: 135). Against the backdrop of the surging

Hindu nationalist tendencies in the national socio-cultural theatre, West Bengal remained surprisingly immune to the restrictions on beef. The state, with a thriving Muslim population constituting nearly thirty percent of its demography, has never imposed any ban on cow slaughter. Despite being a Hindu-majority state and occasional demands from different Hindu activist groups to discontinue cow slaughter, the Government of West Bengal has never really taken any initiatives in this direction, while this nonchalance has often been interpreted as an act of minority appeasement. Although the Bengali Hindus turned averse to the consumption of beef during the Bengal Sultanate period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, with medieval Bengali writers like Bijoy Gupta and Mukundaram Chakraborty associating beef with the Muslim populace in their literary works like *Manasamangal* and *Chandimangal* (Sengupta, 2022: 56-57), the liberal and Western-educated section of the Bengali Hindus did not altogether shun the practice of beef consumption, which finds expression in Zakaria Street. The eateries and food stalls here have earned both fame and notoriety for the sale of beef delicacies. Sufia, one of the most celebrated outlets in the locality, located just opposite Nakhoda Mosque, is an important outlet selling several beef dishes, while their flagship item beef *nihari* tops the chart during the winter months. Footfalls in front of Sufia in the wintry dawns intersect with the mellifluous call of the *fazr [morning] prayers* in the Mosque, as *nihari*, a spicy and hot broth topped with meat, is served en masse. A snapshot of the morning congregation of gastrophilessavoring a formidable meaty taste elucidates the reigning excitement:

"It is 4.40 am but Sufia Restaurant, opposite the Nakhoda Mosque on Zakaria Street, is already abuzz with activity. An elderly man wrapped in a shawl sits on a raised tandoor with a sealed daegh (a large traditional handi). Beside him is a man chopping ginger and green chilli, while another group is making dough balls and stuffing some of them with dal [lentil]. Before the patience of those who have assembled outside in cars, bikes, and on foot wears off, the man removes the lid and uncovers the dough. A cloud of smoke slowly escapes the large opening and suddenly everything around is warm" (Javed, 2019).

While different types of bread like *tandoori roti, khameeri roti, shirmals, parathas* and *dalpuris* accompany beef-encrusted *nihari*, other items with shreds of beef like *biryani, halim,* and *kebabs* also enjoy considerable popularity among the customers. Other important food joints on Zakaria Street and its surroundings, such as, the Adam Kebab, Bombay Hotel, Aminia and Dilshad cater to the customers with dishes like beef *boti kebab,* beef *malai kebab,* beef *chnamp,* beef *korma* and beef Awadhi *biryani;* to name a few, which are savoured by a significant section of the Hindu customers. This indeed sends out a strong political message in the debate regarding personal versus communal choice, individuality versus collective demand. While many Bengali Hindus tasting beef have historically irked their peers, the absence of any significant backlash or ban on its sale in the concerned

locality reinforces the liberal and critical outlook of the Bengali population, which seems to be nose diving in the rest of India with the spread of political conservatism and liberal backsliding.

Reinforcing Harmony through Street Walks

The politics of West Bengal is chiefly defined by occasional outbursts of violence, polarization along communal lines, rampant corruption, and the distribution of freebies to the marginalized population. The electoral times transform the state into a fiery cauldron of competitive communalism, as the Leftist and associated political parties allegedly engage in the appeasement of the Muslim community, while the Hindutva forces attempt to earn political brownie points by appeasing the Hindu-majority population. The existing mode of violence in the state "can be termed as entirely 'political' in nature, as violence has been predominantly used to capture political power and maintain an iron grip on the key levers of state power. It is different from violence in the other states of India, with socio-cultural, ideological or economic factors largely made subservient to the cause of political domination and rampant polarising partisanships" (Ghosh and Sahoo, 2022: 8). This incendiary situation featuring violence and communal polarization is further exacerbated by the rise of Islamic terrorism in West Bengal sponsored by militants and often materialized through illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, who have been allegedly sheltered by the ruling political dispensations over the years.

A symbolic exit route from this stifling and communally surcharged atmosphere is offered by a series of urban walks that aim to foster communal harmony and cultural syncretism. Zakaria Street has incidentally emerged as a laboratory for this socio-cultural experimentation. 'Know Your Neighbour' (KYN) is one such social initiative to foster communal harmony, undertaken by the Kolkata-based SABAR Institute, a public policy research group (Mitra, 2022). It organizes a series of neighbourhood walks involving students from different universities to learn about the city's population and cultural dynamics. These walks enable the participants to engage in dialogues with the residents of a locality and have a first-hand experience of that area's social realities. Besides bolstering community awareness, they can be seen as simultaneously acting as an innovative source of learning and for preserving the city's unique heritage, since they function as a recreational activity for exploring heritage and a potential tool of heritage management (Saiyed et al., 2007). The first walk was organized during June and July of 2016, which explored Zakaria and Colootola Street to provide the participants with a panoramic view of the lives of the Muslim residents of this locality during Ramadan. Nearly fifty participants from different religio-cultural communities participated in the Iftar celebration to understand how peaceful cohabitation could be achieved by the Hindu and Muslim communities despite theological differences (Know Your Neighbour, 2019). While Zakaria Street and its surroundings are often frequented by enthusiasts during Ramadan festivities, many remain oblivious to its historical and cultural narratives, which are dissected during these walks. These exploratory walks not only chart

Zakaria Street but also cover its neighbouring streets and remarkable landmarks, such as the traditional Unani *dawakhanas* or medicine shops on Colootola Street; the *thakurbati* of Balaich and Dutta along Kabiraj Lane; Purnachandra Dutta's house on Phears Lane; the Muhammad Ali Library on Kanai Seal Stree;, to name a few (Mitra, 2019). The close and complex arrangement of these sites underscores peculiar interference patterns, where the Hindu and Islamic cultures, despite positioned dialectically; inform each other through dialogic interactions. While Ayurveda remains the most popular branch of traditional medicines in India, the age-old Unani medicine shops remind one of the undercurrents of Islamic traditional medicines being still in vogue, since the days of Mughal rule. Phears Lane, a neighbouring pathway of Zakaria Street, located well within the Islamicate ambit of the latter, is not only the home to Purnachandra Dutta, visited by the celebrated Hindu mystic Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-1886), who played a significant role in promoting interfaith harmony in colonial Bengal, but also to Haji Allauddin Sweets and Adam's Kebab; two of the most-visited places by the gastrophiles, the manufacturers of the much-cherished sweet *aflatoon* and *sutli* kebab, respectively (Mitra, 2019). This close network of streets functions as a switch between the spiritual dimension signified by two of the veritable symbols of Hinduism and Islam in Bengal; Ramakrishna and Nakhoda Mosque; and the mundane and sensuous dimension symbolized by the restaurants and sweet shops. The idea of religio-cultural syncretism is further bolstered by the Muhammad Ali Library, located just adjacent to Zakaria Street. Established in 1930, it remains a repository of rare books in Urdu, Arabic, and Persian languages, along with the Urdu versions of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* the two principal Indian epics (Sengupta, 2019). While these two epics are considered to be the highest achievements of Sanskrit literature and the ancient Hindu civilization, their transcriptions in Urdu, possibly meant for dissemination among the Muslim populace, suggest an attempt at promoting intercultural dialogues that characterize this locality.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of competitive communalism, minority appeasement, and Hindu nationalism taking West Bengal hostage, the multicultural and multi-religious character of Zakaria Street seems to be a beacon of hope for fostering communal and cultural harmony. The co-existence of contesting spaces and cultural strands that characterize this locality has undoubtedly been achieved after a long period of communal tensions and conflicts. The high density of interactions between different communities has prevented unilateralism in culture. The residents have gradually honed "the skill of efficiently practicing different layers of the same space, that is, to master co-spatiality as part of the self's own spatiality" (Lévy, 2021: 10). Despite an overarching Islamic culture, the Hindu cultural relics have not been suppressed and exist in an equation of complementarities with the dominant Islamic relics. The co-spatiality of Zakaria Street "brings together potentially scattered and diverging

universes in a common 'extent' and establishes a modest dialogue between them" (Ibid). Though this one instance of communal harmony cannot be brandished to airbrush the raging issues of communal persecution, ethnic cleansing, mass conversion, iconoclasm, and religious hatred that remain as faultlines between the Hindu and the Muslim communities, the spatial-cultural dialogism of this locality can show a way forward to the rest of the country.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Jaismita. 2023. 'Kolkata Foodies Pick Their Favourites at Zakaria Street'. *The Telegraph*. December 4, 2023. https://www.telegraphindia.com/my-kolkata/food/kolkata-foodies-and-vloggers-on-top-food-picks-from-kolkatas-zakaria-street/cid/1929262#goog_rewarded.
- Bach, Brian Paul. 2006. *Calcutta's Edifice*. New Delhi: Rupa& Co.
- Bandyopadhyay, Ritajyoti. 2022. *Streets in Motion*. Cambridge University Press.
- Banka, Neha. 2021. 'Streetwise Kolkata: Beyond Food and City's Largest Mosque, Zakaria Street Is a Story of Muslims and Marwaris.' *The Indian Express*. March 30, 2021. https://indianexpress.com/article/research/streetwise-kolkata-beyond-food-and-citys-largest-mosque-zakaria-street-is-a-story-of-muslims-and-marwaris-7246388/.
- —. 2023. 'How Nakhoda Masjid's Neighbourhood in Kolkata Grew into a Ramzan Food Hub'. *The Indian Express*. April 17, 2023. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/nakhoda-masjid-kolkata-ramzan-food-hub-8561325/.
- Birla, Krishna Kumar. 2009. *Brushes with History*. London: Penguin UK.
- Brockington, J L. 1996. *The Sacred Thread*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Chakraborty, Dipesh. 1975. 'Riots Religion and the Working Class Milieu: Bengal's Jute Mill-Hands in the 1890s'. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress,* 36 (4): LXXIII–LXXV. https://doi.org/10.2307/44138884.
- Chakraborty, Martina. 2017. 'Community, National Questions among the Hindi-Speaking People of Calcutta in 1910-1930'. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress,* 78: 770-788. https://doi.org/10.2307/26906151.
- Chandra, Rakesh. 2018. 'The Menacing Growth of Mob Lynching: A Study in Indian Legal Perspective'. *Journal of Legal Studies and Research,* 4 (4): 134–143.
- Christ, Martin. 2022. 'Co-Spatiality in the Early Modern European Bedchamber.' In: Susanne Rau and JörgRüpke (eds.), *Religion and Urbanity Online*. pp. 1-12. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/urbrel.17261275.
- Finkel, Rebecca, and Louise Platt. 2020. 'Cultural Festivals and the City'. *Geography Compass,* 14 (9): 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12498.
- Ghosh, Ambar Kumar, and Niranjan Sahoo. 2022. 'Understanding the Unique Nature of Political Violence in Bengal'. *Orfonline.org*, March. https://www.orfonline.org/research/understanding-the-unique-nature-of-political-violence-in-bengal.
- Harvey, David. 1989. 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism'. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography,* 71 (1): 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583.
- Heredia, Rudolf C. 2009. 'Gandhi's Hinduism and Savarkar's Hindutva'. *Economic and Political Weekly.* July 18, 2009. https://www.epw.in/journal/2009/29/special-articles/gandhis-hinduism-and-savarkars-hindutva.html.
- Iori, Elisa. 2022. 'Co-Spatiality.' *Religion and Urbanity: Reciprocal Formations*, December. https://doi.org/10.58079/vztx.
- Jabreswar Shiva Temple. 2000. *Annual Souvenir of the Jabsreswar Shiva Temple.* Calcutta.
- Javed, Zeeshan. 2019. 'A Bowlful of Warmth.' The Times of India. Times of India. December 21, 2019. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/a-bowlful-of-warmth/articleshow/72910057.cms.
- Jorani, Noor Ali AL, and Shatha Abbass Hassan. 2018. 'Fluidity in Urban Planning'. *International Journal of Science and Research,* 7 (3): 1133–1137.

- Kemmerer, Lisa. 2012. *Animals and World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- "Know Your Neighbour." 2016. knowyourneighbour. in. 2016. https://www.knowyourneighbour.in/.
- Koppikar, Smruti. 2024. 'How Festival Celebrations Define, and Redefine, Public Spaces - Question of Cities'. Question of Cities. https://questionofcities.org/how-festival-celebrations-define-and-redefine-public-spaces/.
- Lévy, Jacques. 2021. 'Co-Spatiality: An Introduction.' In: Susanne Rau and JörgRüpke (eds.), *Religion and Urbanity Online*. pp.1-10. Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter.
- Mitra, Bishwabijoy, and Shamayita Chakraborty. 2019. 'Have the Polls Impacted the Ramzan Mood on Zakaria Street?' The Times of India. Times Of India. May 13, 2019. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/events/kolkata/has-the-polls-impacted-the-ramzan-mood-on-zakaria-street/articleshow/69309668.cms.
- Mitra, Debraj. 2022. 'Ramazan Mirrors Friendly Spirit of Kolkata in Face of Divisiveness'. Telegraph India. April 7, 2022. https://www.telegraphindia.com/amp/my-kolkata/news/ramazan-mirrors-spirit-of-kolkata/cid/1859481.
- Mitra, Dipawali. 2019. 'Presidency University Students Take Walk to Re-Discover Zakaria Street'. The Times of India. Times Of India. August 26, 2019. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/presidency-university-students-take-walk-to-re-discover-zakaria-street/articleshow/70836794.cms.
- National Law University, Delhi. 2012. *The Constitution of India*. Lucknow: Eastern Book Co.
- Park, Robert E, Ernest W Burgess, and Roderick D Mckenzie. 1970. *The City*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.
- Sampath, Vikram. 2012. *"My Name Is GauharJaan!": The Life and Times of a Musician*. New Delhi: Rupa& Co.
- Saiyed, Abrar Ali, Anita Basalingappa, and Piyush Kumar Sinha. 2016. 'Value Network in Heritage Walks: Case Studies of Ahmedabad City Walks'. *Journal of Heritage Management,* 1 (2): 191–204. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455929616687897.
- Sengupta, Anuradha. 2019. 'Kolkata Fights Back against Communal Rabble-Rousing'. The Hindu. October 4, 2019. https://www.thehindu.com/society/meet-the-neighbours/article29596767.ece.
- Sengupta, Jayanta. 2023. *Hensheldarpan*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers Pvt Ltd.
- *Thacker's Indian Directory*. 1918. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Company.

Bio Profile of the Author:
Research Fellow, Centre for Studies in Legal History
The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata
Email: rebantagupta4@gmail.com

Acknowledgement

Dr. Disari Roy
Assistant Professor
Department of Women's Studies
Diamond Harbour Women's University
Sarisha, West Bengal

Dr. Sraboni Chatterjee
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Psychology, Bijoy Krishna Girl's College, Howrah

Dona Ganguly
Assistant Professor (UGC)
Department of Political Science
The Bhawanipur Education Society College

Dr. Krishnendu Roy
Assistant Professor & Head
Department of Education
Domkal Girls' College
Murshidabad, West Bengal, India

Dr. Sudeshna Basu Mukherjee
Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Calcutta
Alipore Campus

Dr. Sanjukta Dasgupta
President, Executive Committee, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, Kolkata
ScoTs Research Affiliate
Visiting Fellow, IASH, University of Edinburgh
Visiting Professor, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland (2018)
Honorary Visiting Professor, Dept. of English, Sister Nivedita University
Professor, Dept of English (Retd)
Former Dean, Faculty of Arts
Calcutta University

Dr. Aloy Chand Biswas
Assistant Professor in English
Egra S. S. B. College

Dr. Samir Kumar Das
Professor of Political Science
University of Calcutta

Dr. Reshma Khatun
Assistant Professor
Department of Education
Aliah University
Park Circus Campus, Kolkata

Dr. Devalina Gopalan
Assistant Professor
Women's Christian College
Kolkata

Dr. Sampan Chakrabarty
Assistant Professor
Department of Bengali
Faculty of Arts
Banaras Hindu University (BHU) / काशी हिन्दू विश्यविद्यालय

Dr. Tanusree Chakraborty
Faculty, Globsyn
PhD from University of Calcutta
Area of Specialisation Gender, Economics, Micro Finance

Dr. Rajib Bhattacharyya
Associate Professor in Economics,
Goenka College of Commerce and Business Administration, Kolkata.

Dr. Kuntal N. Chaudhuri
Assistant Professor,
Department of Botany,
Vivekananda College,
269, Diamond Harbour Road,

Mita Banerjee
Vice Chancellor of Kanyashree University,
Nadia, West Bengal

Suman Chakrabarty, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology &
Coordinator- Dept. of Food and Nutrition
Mrinalini Datta Mahavidyapith
(Affiliated under West Bengal State University)

Dr. Chandramalli Sengupta
Faculty in PG Bengali
Asutosh College, Kolkata

Dr. Runa Roy
Assistant Professor
Department of Economics
Goenka College of Commerce and Business Administration

Dr. Ranjana Banerjee
President of UW Asia; Membership and Extension officer of the National Association of Soroptimist International. Member in GWIs Fellowship Committee.

Notes for Contributors

We accept contributions in four categories for the Journal of Kolkata Society For Asian Studies:

- Research Articles
  The original research papers submitted for consideration should not exceed 7000 words. It includes figures, charts, tables and references and excludes the abstract, key words and the bio-note of the author/s. Papers based on scientific study, review articles written in correct English and Bangla will be considered for publication.
- Research Notes:
  Informal items of topical interest (maximum 5000 words including endnotes and bibliography).
- Reports:
  Based on any survey or field study approved by any recognised University or Authorised research organization (maximum 5000 words including endnotes and references).
- Reviews of Social Science Scholarship:
  Books, Journals and other media (maximum 800 words), are also invited for reviews in the Journal.

Style Sheet for Research Article

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate (hard copy) along with a softcopy. All correspondences regarding manuscripts should be submitted to:

   The Editor, Kolkata Society for Asian Studies.
   Postal Address: 3/25/1, R. K. Chatterjee Road, Kolkata-700042 Phone +91 9432490361
   Email: kspublication1@gmail.com Copy to: ksasianstudies@gmail.com

2. Manuscripts should be typed using a word-processing program like MS.
   Word with .doc/.rtf extension and also in pdf. format. Type the manuscript on one side of the paper. Leave double space between the lines, extra space between the sections and keep 1 inch (2.54 cm.) margins on all four sides of the paper.

3. Abstract should be provided before the article.

4. The number of Key Words should be up to 10.

5. The contributor's affiliations and his/her complete mailing address must be given at the end of the manuscript.
6. Endnotes should follow numerical order. Try to avoid footnotes.
7. As the journal will be mainly printed in Black, the authors are requested to make the charts, graphs and tables using Black and White combination only.
8. The references should be like:
   i. Embedded references (Phillipson 1992: 144)
   ii. Multiple references placed in alphabetical order '(Ellis 1994:10; Lenneberg 1967: 7; Pinker 1994: 54)'
   iii. Multiple references of the same author published in the same year arranged serially '(Pattanayak 2000a, 2000b)'

The detailed style of referencing follows:

a. Books:

Wirsing, G. 1972. Indian Experiment: Key to Asia's Future. Calcutta: Orient Longman.
Liu, J., H. A. Ross and D.P. Kelly. 2000. The Ethnographic Eye: An Interpretative Study of Education in China. New York : Falmer Press.

b. Articles in Edited Volumes:

Atkinson, J. M. 1987. Religions in Dialogue: The Construction of an Indonesian Minority Religion. In: R.S. Kipp and S. Rodgers (eds.), Indonesian Religions in Transition.
pp. 171-86. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

c. Articles in Journals:

Sonntag, S. K. 1996. 'The Political Saliency of Language in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh',
Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 34 (2): 1-18.

d. Edited and Translated Volumes:

Zakaria, H. A. and H. A. Crouch (eds.). 1985. Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
Becker, C. 1923. Early History of the Catholic Missions in Northeast India (1598-1890), edited and translated by F. Leicht and S Karotemprel. 1989. Shillong: Vendrame.

e. Unpublished Works:

Kurasawa, A. I. 1988. 'Mobilization and Control: A Study of Social Change in Rural Java, 1942-1945.' (2 vols.)
Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Ithaca: Cornell University.
Mullins, D. 2001. 'Land reform, poverty reduction and HIV/AIDS'. Paper presented at the Southern African Regional Poverty Network conference on Land Reform and Poverty Alleviation in the Region, Pretoria, 12-14, March.

f. Primary Source Citations:

The location of the archive (the name of the town/village/city) and the country must be mentioned. Materials from personal archive should contain the name and location of the collector. If an audio/ audiovisual material is being used, the date/time and location of the recordings should be specified.

g. Website Citation:

http://en.mastersinleiden.nl/programmes/history-arts-and-culture-of- asia/en/introduction (accessed/ retrieved/updated on 5th May 2014)

Other specifications:

i. Use double quotation marks where necessary. Single quotation marks should be used only for a quotation within a quotation.
ii. In the text, the words from a regional language other than English which appear in a commonly used dictionary must be italicized. Proper names from all the countries and terms like 'et al.', 'ibid.', 'vis-a-vis' etc. should be written in Roman alphabet.
iii. A stop should be used after abbreviations ('ed.','vol.' etc.), contractions ('Dr.', 'Prof.' etc.) and between initials (as in 'J.S. Karan'). Do not use a stop in a contraction in capital ('UNESCO', 'USA' etc.).
iv. In the text, the numbers from one to nine should be in words rather than figures. However, 10 and above can remain in figures. Use 'thousands' and 'millions', avoid 'crores' and 'lakhs'. Dates and page numbers should be in full forms (like '2002-2007' and 'pp.125-127').
v. Attach each figure and table on a separate sheet of paper at the end of the article and arrange them serially. The titles should be short and crisp.
vi. Figures, tables, charts, graphs or photographs reproduced from any other source must obtain Copyright permission before reproduction.
vii. Diacritical marks should be consistent.

Glosses and Translations of Examples:

1. Language specific examples must be provided in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) or in Roman alphabet.
2. Examples from various languages other than English should be translated. Some examples may require a translation along with a word-for-word or morpheme-by- morpheme gloss.
3. The translation and the gloss should be placed under the example with proper indentation and alignment (in case of word-for-word or morpheme-by-morpheme gloss).
4. The grammatical categories in a gloss must be abbreviated
   For example,
   a) adʒɔnek brʃʈi hoyetʃhe.
      today lot rain be-pr.pf.3rd
      'Today there was heavy shower.'
   b) boneder ʧʃhobi.
      sister-gen.pl. picture
      'Sisters' picture.'
5. The abbreviations must be given in a separate list.
   The paper/s submitted for consideration should not have been published before or under consideration for publication, anywhere in any language. The work must be approved by its author and the co-authors and also by the authorities of the place where the research was done. If the paper is accepted for publication in the present journal, it must not be published anywhere in any language without the proper written consent of the copyright holder.

For Papers in Bangla

The same style sheet should be followed for papers written in the Bangla language. Bangla font 'Avro' 'Kalpurush & Unicode' is preferred. For all the Bengali papers the title, abstract, keywords and references should be submitted in English along with the main papers.

Off Prints: The first author of each paper will receive 5 off prints free of cost.

Notifications

This is to inform you that the Journal of Kolkata Society for Asian Studies accepts newly published book for its Review section.

The authors, who wish to get their books reviewed, should submit their books both in hard copy and soft copy. In absence of soft copy, the hard copy needs to be submitted in duplicate.

It is essential to submit the book with a covering letter clearly mentioning the purpose of submission. Kindly note that the book submitted for review will not be returned to the Author.

Kindly send the hard copies of the book to the following address: The Editor, Kolkata Society for Asian Studies.

Postal Address:
3/25/1, R. K. Chatterjee Road,
Kolkata 700042
Phone: +919432490361

Kindly send the soft copy of the book to the following Email Ids. prof.ranjana.ray@gmail.com
debasusharmistha@gmail.com

Copy to: kspublication1@gmail.com

RECENT PUBLICATION

Suniti Kumar Chatterji on Indian Languages
(A Commemoration Volume in the Centenary Year of ODBL)
Editor: Dhrubajyoti Das
Year: August, 2025,
Published by: Kolkata Society for Asian Studies
ISBN: 978-81-955545-5-3

'A Fiesta of Fifty Years of Indo-Bangladesh Relations :
Assessing the Varied Dynamics of Opportunities and Challenges'
Editor: Dr. Archita Ghose
Year: 2024, Published by
Kolkata Society for Asian Studies © Kolkata Society for Asian Studies.
ISBN: 978-81-955545-8-4
ASIN: B0D9TY16M1 (Kindle Edition)

Relevance of the Universal Mission of the Bengali Renaissance
for a Sustainable Future for India and the World.
Editor: Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty, Sarmistha De Basu
Year 2024 Published by Kolkata Society for Asian Studies © Editor
ISBN: 978-81-955545-3-9

Banglar Nabajagaraner Prasangikata o Bishwavratrittwabodh
Editor: Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty, Sarmistha De Basu
Year 2024 Published by Kolkata Society for Asian Studies © Editor
ISBN: 978-81-955545-6-0

Traditional Clay-Arts of Bengal: A Comprehensive Museological & Folkloric Study
Author: Arpita Basu
Year 2023 : Published by Kolkata Society for Asian Studies © Author
ISBN: 978-81-955545-2-2

Exploring the Saga of India-Nepal Relations: Juxtaposing Issues
of Convergence and Divergence
Editors: Tridib Chakraborti Sarmistha De Basu
Year 2023 Pub: Kolkata Society for Asian Studies © Kolkata Society for Asian Studies
ISBN: 9788195554508

Research Methodology: Tools & Techniques in Social Science
Editors: Durga Basu Asmita Basu
December, 2022 Pub: Setu Prakashani, Kolkata Delhi © Kolkata Society for Asian Studies
ISBN: 9788195706051

Cultural Exchange through Folklore
Volume 1 and Volume 2
Editors: Sarit K. Chaudhuri Sarmistha De Basu Arpita Basu
Pub: Serials Publications (P) Ltd, New Delhi
© 2022, Kolkata Society for Asian Studies & Serials Publications (P) Ltd
ISBN: 9789391844035

Indian Relations with Sri Lanka and Maldives
(A Collection of Research Articles)
Editor: Sarmistha De Basu Pub: Kolkata Society for Asian Studies December: 2021
Paper Back Edition, ISBN: 978-81-955545-1-5
E-Book Kindle Edition, ASIN : B09N2QB2NZ

Contours of India's Act East Policy: Opportunities, Challenges
and Futuristic Trend of Indo-ASEAN Partnership
Editors : Archita Ghose & Sarmistha De Basu
June : 2021 Pub: Kolkata Society for Asian Studies
ASIN : B097NL92S2
E-Book, File size: 2386 KB/ Kindle Editlon

Published by Kolkata Society for Asian Studies, Postal Address : 3/25/1, R.K. Chatterjee Road, Kolkata - 700042
Phone : +91-9432490361
Email : ksasianstudies@gmail.com kspublicationl@gmail.com
Website: www.kolkatasocietyforasianstudies.com www.jrksas.org

Printed at : The Saraswati Printing Works, 2, Guru Prosad Chowdhury Lane, Kolkata 700 006

Price: Rs. 600.00