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# THE RESEARCH FRONTLINE - JOURNAL

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The Research Frontline – Journal (TRF-J) emerges in response to this intellectual and civic imperative – to bridge the worlds of research, policy, and public discourse through informed scholarship and critical inquiry. TRF-J is a peer-reviewed, quarterly, online, and open-access journal, published under the aegis of CDFA Research Foundation, New Delhi.

Ultimately, The Research Frontline – Journal aims to become a leading voice in contemporary academic and policy discourse, nurturing critical thinking, encouraging young scholars, and contributing meaningfully to the debates that define our national and global future.

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## **About The Research Frontline – Journal (TRF-J)**

In an era of rapidly transforming global realities, the need for a rigorous, accessible, and multidisciplinary academic platform has never been greater. The Research Frontline – Journal (TRF-J) emerges in response to this intellectual and civic imperative, to bridge the worlds of research, policy, and public discourse through informed scholarship and critical inquiry. TRF-

J is a peer-reviewed, quarterly, online, and open-access journal, published by the CDFA Research Foundation, New Delhi. The journal is dedicated to advancing research, scholarship, and advocacy by providing an inclusive space for academics, researchers, practitioners, and policy thinkers to publish high-quality work that interrogates contemporary questions of governance, economy, culture, and society.

At its core, The Research Frontline seeks to address the persistent gaps in India's research and policy ecosystem, where the demand for timely, analytical, and interdisciplinary publications often outpaces their availability. Many journals today remain constrained either by prohibitive submission fees, narrow thematic focus, or extended publication lags that compromise the contemporary relevance of scholarship. TRF-J aspires to counter these limitations by ensuring rigorous peer-review standards, rapid yet meticulous editorial processes, and free public accessibility to knowledge that matters.

Reflecting its multidisciplinary vision, the journal welcomes original contributions, research papers, analytical essays, book reviews, and commentaries, across diverse domains: Economics, Political Science, History, Public Finance, Governance, Culture, International Relations, and Security, Political and Defence Strategy, Public Enterprises, Literature, Language, and Science and Technology Policy, among others.

With its emphasis on both theoretical innovation and applied policy relevance, TRF-J seeks to foster a dialogue between academia and governance, between critical reflection and practical application. It envisions itself as not merely a repository of research but a forum of ideas, a meeting ground for scholars and practitioners united by a shared commitment to shaping an equitable, informed, and forward-looking society.

Ultimately, The Research Frontline – Journal aims to become a leading voice in contemporary academic and policy discourse, nurturing critical thinking, encouraging young scholars, and contributing meaningfully to the debates that define our national and global future.

## Editorial Preface

It gives me immense pleasure and a profound sense of responsibility to present the **first and inaugural issue of The Research Frontline – Journal**, released on **10 January 2026**. The beginning of a new year symbolises renewal, reflection, and resolve, and it is in this spirit that this journal makes its formal entry into the academic and intellectual landscape.

The Research Frontline – Journal is conceived as a rigorous, inclusive, and independent platform for scholarly engagement. At a time when knowledge production is often constrained by disciplinary silos, ideological rigidity, or market-driven priorities, this journal aspires to reclaim research as a **public good**, critical, ethical, and socially responsive. Our objective is not merely to add another academic periodical, but to cultivate a space where ideas are debated with integrity, evidence is foregrounded, and diverse perspectives are encouraged to engage with one another.

The vision behind this journal is rooted in the belief that research must speak to the realities of our time. The contemporary world is witnessing profound transformations—political realignments, social upheavals, technological disruptions, environmental crises, and shifting global power structures. These developments demand careful analysis, historical grounding, and policy-oriented thinking. The Research Frontline seeks to bridge theory and practice by welcoming contributions that are analytically robust, methodologically sound, and relevant to pressing local, national, and global concerns.

This inaugural issue stands as a testament to that commitment. The articles featured here reflect a range of themes, methodologies, and disciplinary approaches, while sharing a common concern for depth, clarity, and critical engagement. They underscore the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and demonstrate how research can illuminate complex issues rather than oversimplify them. I extend my sincere appreciation to all contributors who placed their trust in this new journal and helped shape its foundational character.

A scholarly journal is never the work of one individual alone. I am deeply grateful to the **Editorial Board, reviewers, and advisors**, whose intellectual guidance, rigorous evaluations, and unwavering support have been instrumental in bringing this issue to fruition. Their commitment to academic standards and ethical publishing practices forms the backbone of The Research Frontline. I also acknowledge the efforts of the editorial and technical teams who worked diligently behind the scenes to ensure a smooth and timely release.

As Editor-in-Chief, I envision The Research Frontline – Journal as a continuously evolving forum—open to early-career researchers and established scholars alike, attentive to marginalized voices, and responsive to emerging debates. We encourage submissions that challenge dominant narratives, question assumptions, and propose innovative frameworks, while remaining grounded in scholarly discipline and respect for evidence.

On this inaugural occasion, I invite readers not only to engage with the articles presented but also to become active participants in the journey ahead—as authors, reviewers, and critical readers. The strength and relevance of this journal will ultimately depend on the vibrancy of the intellectual community it nurtures.

With hope, humility, and determination, I welcome you to the first issue of The Research Frontline – Journal. May this platform contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of knowledge, informed public discourse, and the collective search for truth.

**Dr. Kaniz Fatima**

Editor-in-Chief

The Research Frontline – Journal

1 January 2026

## Managing Editor's Foreword

It is with great enthusiasm and a deep sense of purpose that I write this note on the occasion of the inaugural issue of *The Research Frontline – Journal*, released on 10 January 2026. The launch of this journal marks not merely the beginning of a publication, but the realization of a long-cherished commitment to fostering rigorous, independent, and socially engaged scholarship.

In an era defined by rapid change, information overload, and shrinking spaces for critical inquiry, the role of an academic journal becomes ever more significant. *The Research Frontline* is envisioned as a platform that upholds intellectual honesty, methodological rigor, and analytical depth, while remaining accessible to diverse scholarly communities. As Managing Editor, my foremost responsibility has been to ensure that these principles are reflected not only in intent but also in editorial practice.

This inaugural issue represents the collective effort of scholars, reviewers, editors, and technical teams who believe in the transformative power of research. Each contribution has undergone careful editorial scrutiny to maintain academic standards while preserving the author's original voice and argument. Our aim has been to strike a balance between scholarly excellence and meaningful relevance, ensuring that research published here speaks both to academia and to broader societal concerns.

The journal consciously adopts an interdisciplinary and pluralistic approach, encouraging dialogue across history, public policy, political science, sociology, international relations, and allied disciplines. We believe that complex contemporary challenges, whether social, political, economic, or environmental, cannot be adequately understood through isolated disciplinary lenses. This issue, therefore, reflects our commitment to intellectual cross-pollination and critical engagement.

I would like to place on record my sincere gratitude to Dr. Kaniz Fatima, Editor-in-Chief, for her academic leadership and vision, which have been central to shaping the identity and ethos of *The Research Frontline*. I also extend heartfelt thanks to our contributors for trusting a nascent journal with their work, and to our reviewers for their time, insight, and dedication to upholding scholarly standards.

As we move forward, *The Research Frontline – Journal* seeks to grow as a credible and vibrant forum for both emerging and established scholars. We particularly welcome voices that are often underrepresented in mainstream academic discourse and research that challenges dominant paradigms with evidence-based reasoning.

This inaugural issue is only the beginning. I invite readers to engage critically with the ideas presented, to participate in scholarly dialogue, and to contribute to future issues. Together, we hope to build a journal that not only reflects academic rigor but also responds thoughtfully to the realities of our times.

**Mohammad Salman**

Managing Editor

The Research Frontline – Journal

10 January 2026

## Deputy Managing Editor's Note

The launch of the inaugural issue of *The Research Frontline – Journal* on 10 January 2026 is not merely a ceremonial beginning; it is a conscious step towards redefining how we approach research, knowledge, and intellectual engagement. At this threshold, it becomes essential to ask not only *what* we research, but *why* and *for whom* we do so.

As Deputy Managing Editor, I view this journal as a space of responsibility, towards scholarship, towards society, and towards future conversations yet to unfold. In a time marked by polarisation, fragmented narratives, and the marginalisation of nuanced thought, research must reclaim its ethical and dialogic character. *The Research Frontline* is envisioned precisely as such a space: reflective rather than reactionary, critical rather than conformist.

This journal recognises that knowledge is not produced in isolation. It emerges from social contexts, historical experiences, and lived realities. Therefore, we consciously encourage research that is attentive to power structures, sensitive to exclusions, and open to multiple ways of knowing. The inaugural issue reflects this spirit by bringing together diverse perspectives that challenge intellectual complacency and invite deeper engagement.

What distinguishes *The Research Frontline* is its commitment to process as much as product. Editorial work here has not been treated as a mechanical exercise, but as an academic dialogue—one that respects the labour of authors, values the insight of reviewers, and prioritises clarity without compromising complexity. This approach, I believe, is vital for nurturing a culture of meaningful scholarship, especially for early-career researchers seeking principled platforms.

I wish to acknowledge the collective effort behind this issue. The guidance of Dr. Kaniz Fatima, Editor-in-Chief, and the meticulous coordination by Mohammad Salman, Managing Editor, have been central to shaping the journal's intellectual direction. I also extend my appreciation to the contributors whose work inaugurates this journey and sets a thoughtful tone for what lies ahead.

Looking forward, *The Research Frontline – Journal* aims to be more than an archive of articles. It seeks to evolve as a community of inquiry—one that welcomes disagreement, encourages interdisciplinarity, and remains responsive to changing academic and social realities. We hope readers will not only consume knowledge here, but question it, critique it, and carry it forward.

As this first issue reaches its readers, it carries with it a simple yet enduring aspiration: that research remains humane, courageous, and socially grounded. May this journal continue to grow as a space where ideas are not merely published, but genuinely engaged with.

**Wasia Khan**

Deputy Managing Editor

The Research Frontline – Journal

10 January 2026

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# Geopolitics of Greed: Resource Competition and the Erosion of Global Cooperation and Responsibilities

Dr. Aadil Zeffer<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The twenty-first century has witnessed intensifying global competition over vital resources like energy, water, food, and critical minerals- driven by strategic rivalry, economic nationalism, and technological transitions. This paper argues that a politics of narrow self-interest or “geopolitics of greed” increasingly shapes state behaviour, and that this resource competition erodes the foundations of global cooperation and shared responsibility. Drawing on realist and institutionalist perspectives, and illustrated with contemporary empirical cases (critical minerals and the energy transition, vaccine nationalism during COVID-19, transboundary water stress, and food-energy shocks), the paper analyses mechanisms by which resource competition transforms cooperation into contestation. It then examines the systemic costs of such dynamics- institutional erosion, inequitable outcomes, amplified crises, and fragmentation of global governance- and proposes policy pathways to restore cooperative capacity: diversifying supply chains, strengthening multilateral frameworks for common-pool resources, designing equitable crisis-sharing mechanisms, and fostering normative shifts toward responsible interdependence. The paper concludes that restoring durable cooperation will require both technical remedies and political will to re-embed responsibility in the governance of shared resources.

## Keywords

Resource competition, geopolitics, critical minerals, vaccine nationalism, transboundary water, global cooperation, institutional erosion

## Introduction

Access to and control over natural resources have been central to politics since the origins of any state. In recent years, however, resource competition has taken on new forms and urgency. The global -

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energy transition, driven by decarbonization, has created unprecedented demand for critical minerals (lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements), intensifying strategic rivalries over supply chains. Concurrently, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of global public-goods provisioning when rich states prioritized domestic access to vaccines. Climate change and population pressures have heightened transboundary water stress in many regions, and food security remains vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. These trends reveal a pattern: when states or powerful non-state actors treat resources as instruments of narrow national advantage, cooperative institutions fray and shared responsibilities are neglected. This paper calls that pattern the “geopolitics of greed.” It defines the concept, situates it within relevant international relations (IR) theory, and analyses its impacts through empirical cases. The analysis proceeds in four parts. First, framing the theoretical and conceptual groundwork: defining geopolitical greed, resource competition, and the forms of cooperation that are eroded. Second, empirical evidence from four domains- critical minerals and the energy transition, pandemic vaccine geopolitics, transboundary water stress, and food-energy shocks to demonstrate how resource competition manifests and corrodes cooperation will be presented. Third, the systemic consequences: institutional erosion, inequitable outcomes, crisis amplification, and fragmentation of global governance will be analysed. Fourth, policy and normative remedies to restore cooperative management of the common resource will be proposed. Throughout, the argument is that technical fixes (diversification, reserves, recycling) are necessary but insufficient: meaningful progress depends on institutional reforms and normative commitments that rebalance immediate national interests with long-term shared responsibilities.

This paper starkly illuminates how contemporary resource rivalries do not affect all actors equally: the burden falls disproportionately on poor nations and the world’s most vulnerable populations. When powerful states and transnational firms securitize supply chains, prioritize national stockpiles, or impose export controls, the immediate strategic prize is often captured by wealthier actors but the downstream effects are borne by those with the least capacity to absorb shocks. In practice this means that poor countries lose bargaining power over the extraction, pricing and processing of their own resources; their ecosystems are degraded to supply distant industries; and their economies remain locked into low-value, extractive roles while the high-value manufacturing and refining stages capture most profits and technological spillovers.

The mechanisms of exploitation are multiple and mutually reinforcing. Unequal trade structures and investment contracts, often negotiated under imbalanced political pressure or indebtedness, lock resource-rich but capital-poor countries into contracts that favour multinational corporations and importing states. Tax avoidance, weak regulatory oversight, and opaque concession agreements further

leak rent away from local publics. In crises, the pattern becomes more acute: vaccine nationalism, grain export bans, or preferential access to critical minerals translate directly into delayed access to medicines, food price spikes, and stalled development projects in poorer countries. Meanwhile environmental externalities-pollution, deforestation, water depletion- impose health and livelihood costs on local communities that rarely figure in the balance sheets of distant beneficiaries.

The human consequences are severe and cumulative. Communities lose land and traditional livelihoods, face involuntary displacement, suffer worsening public health outcomes, and see opportunities for local industrialization and skills development foreclosed. As resource values rise globally, local inequality often widens: elites and internationally linked actors capture new rents while rural and marginalized groups remain impoverished. The moral dimension is also important: claims of “civilized” stewardship ring hollow when the practices of powerful states and corporations undermine the sovereignty, rights and agency of poorer peoples. Such injustice erodes social cohesion, fuels grievance, and in some cases contributes to conflict-ironically increasing the very insecurity that geopolitically driven actors justify to secure resources.

Addressing these asymmetries requires more than technical fixes: it demands a redistribution of voice, rights and revenues in global resource governance. Policies that would make a real difference include transparent and mutually fair contract standards, stronger domestic capacity for resource regulation, genuine technology transfer and local value-addition requirements, equitable crisis-sharing mechanisms, and international tax cooperation to prevent offshore rent extraction. Above all, the geopolitics of resources must be reframed from a zero-sum contest to a matter of global justice: until the systemic patterns that privilege the wealthy are corrected, the language of cooperation will remain largely rhetorical while poor nations and poor people continue to pay the cost.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

“Geopolitics of greed” is used here to describe state and elite behaviours that instrumentalize access to strategic resources primarily for short-term competitive advantage, bargaining leverage or domestic political gain-often at the expense of long-term global public goods, equity, and multilateral cooperation. This phenomenon includes resource nationalism, export controls, hoarding, techno-protectionism, and the strategic weaponization of supply chains. It is distinct from traditional power politics by centring economic and resource leverage as primary means of influence in an interdependent world.

**Theoretical Anchors: Realism, Institutionalism, and Constructivism** - The phenomenon has explanatory roots in multiple IR traditions. Realism foregrounds states' security and material interests: competition over resources is an expected dimension of power politics (Mearsheimer, 2001). Institutionalists, however, emphasise that repeated interaction and institutional design can mitigate anarchy's worst effects-creating rules, monitoring, and reciprocal institutions that sustain cooperation (Keohane, 1984). Constructivists add that norms, identities, and shared expectations shape whether states treat resources as commons requiring stewardship or as spoils to be appropriated. The geopolitics of greed emerges where realist incentives dominate in the absence of resilient institutions and where normative frameworks for shared responsibility are weak or contested. Several mechanisms explain how resource competition erodes cooperation such as the dominant producers may employ quotas, export controls or technology restrictions to obtain leverage, prompting importers to securitize supply chains and respond with protectionist or strategic measures. In emergencies (pandemics, food shocks), states prioritize domestic populations-creating unequal access and reducing incentives to cooperate. When major powers view multilateral frameworks as constraining, they may sidestep or weaken institutions, reducing collective problem-solving capacity. The domestic political incentives (electoral cycles, industry lobbying) favour visible national actions (hoarding supplies, subsidizing domestic miners) over invisible long-term cooperative investments. The competition in high-tech sectors (semiconductors, defense) turns resource interdependence into strategic vulnerability, encouraging securitization rather than shared management. These mechanisms operate interactively to transform cooperation into contestation.

**Empirical Manifestations:** To make these mechanisms concrete, we can examine four domains where resource competition has produced clear challenges to cooperation: critical minerals and the energy transition; vaccine nationalism in the COVID-19 pandemic; transboundary water stress and violence; and food and energy shocks that feed geopolitical rivalry.

**Critical Minerals, Energy Transition, and Strategic Interdependence:** The clean-energy transition is mineral-intensive. Wind turbines, EV motors, and battery networks require lithium, nickel, cobalt, graphite, copper, and rare earth elements (REEs). The International Energy Agency (IEA) and other multilateral analyses have documented steep demand growth for many of these minerals as decarbonization accelerates (IEA, 2023). This rapid shift has geopolitical consequences. Some countries currently dominate many refining and processing steps for REEs and other critical minerals. Market concentration creates leverage: export curbs or technology restrictions by dominant suppliers can disrupt global manufacturing chains and produce strategic dependencies (IEA, 2023; IRENA, 2023).

Recent supply-side manoeuvres illustrate the geopolitics of greed. Financial and policy actors have warned of heightened risk to global REE supply chains due to export curbs and concentrated refining capacity (Goldman Sachs; Reuters reporting, 2025). Policymakers in importing countries have responded with strategic initiatives-partnership agreements, stockpiling, and industrial subsidies-to diversify sources and reshore critical stages of production (WEF, 2024; LSE commentary, 2025). While such actions may enhance national resilience, they can also institutionalize fragmentation and produce competitive dynamics that reduce incentives for cooperative governance of mineral resources. The result is an arms race of supply-chain securitization that can raise costs, slow the energy transition, and provoke retaliatory policies.

**Vaccine Nationalism and Pandemic Governance:** The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how crisis politics can become an arena for selfish resource politics. Wealthy states secured bulk purchases of early vaccine supplies and, in some cases, prioritized domestic immunization irrespective of global equity considerations. Scholars and analysts have characterized this as “vaccine nationalism,” showing how hoarding and export restrictions extended the pandemic’s economic and human costs by delaying universal coverage (Hafner et al., 2020; Riaz, 2021). Vaccine nationalism reduced incentives to finance global distribution platforms early and undermined trust in multilateral mechanisms (e.g., COVAX), amplifying global health inequities.

The pandemic case demonstrates the mechanism of hoarding under time-pressure and uncertainty that turns a shared public good into a scarce asset subject to geopolitical competition. In the absence of binding or enforceable global allocation rules and with powerful domestic political incentives, cooperation faltered-resulting in avoidable mortality, slowed economic recovery, and political fallout.

**Transboundary Water Stress and Resource Violence:** Water scarcity is an increasingly salient geopolitical risk. Climate change, population growth and upstream developments (dams, diversions) have exacerbated tensions over shared rivers and aquifers. While many transboundary basins are governed by cooperative agreements, stressors have increased incidents of water-related violence in several regions. Recent reporting has documented an alarming rise in attacks on water infrastructure and disputes over access, notably in conflict zones (Pacific Institute aggregate reporting; The Guardian reporting on 2023 increases in water-related violence). Where upstream states seek unilateral control over water flows for economic or political ends, downstream states may perceive existential threats, further degrading trust, and cooperation. Water geopolitics demonstrates how a vital resource can become a direct instrument of geopolitical pressure. Where institutions for joint management are weak

and strategic incentives favour unilateral gains, cooperation frays-often with humanitarian consequences.

**Food, Energy Shocks and Strategic Fragmentation:** Food and energy markets are tightly linked to geopolitical contestation. Conflicts, sanctions, and export restrictions can create cascading effects on global food security. The 2022–2023 period revealed how war, blockade, and sanctions disrupted grain supplies, elevating food prices and triggering policy responses such as export bans. These reactive policies often enacted under domestic political pressure intensify global scarcity and encourage reciprocal measures by other states. The result is volatility and fragmentation of markets that historically depended on relatively open trade. Thus, short-term national protections in one crisis can magnify insecurity globally, demonstrating the feedback loop where resource competition produces greater systemic fragility.

**Systemic Consequences:** The empirical cases reveal a pattern of systemic consequences arising from geopolitics of greed. When major powers or coalitions treat global institutions instrumentally-engaging only when alignment with narrow national goals exists, institutions decay. The weakening of multilateral arrangements reduces information sharing, collective problem solving and enforcement capacity. Crisis response suffers as a result: fragmented action, duplication of effort, and unequal burden-sharing. The resource competition tends to advantage actors with preexisting economic and political power. Hoarding of vaccines, control over refining capacity for critical minerals, or unilateral water projects often disadvantage poorer and downstream states. These inequities undermine the normative legitimacy of international governance and fuel grievances that can escalate political instability and conflict. The short-term, self-protective measures often exacerbate crises. Export bans on food, protectionist industrial policy, and securitization of supply chains raise prices, reduce efficiency, and lower global resilience. For example, delaying the energy transition by politicizing critical minerals raises long-term climate risks-paradoxically undermining the very security that geopolitical actors seek to protect. A key systemic dynamic is the creation of rival blocs organized around secure resource access (e.g., informal mineral partnerships, bilateral supply agreements). While such blocs may provide some stability for members, they fragment global governance and reduce the prospects for universal rules or equitable burden-sharing. Fragmentation can also encourage zero-sum calculations in crises.

**Policy Pathways to Restore Cooperation and Responsibility:** Given the stakes, what can policymakers, international institutions, and civil society do to counteract the geopolitics of greed and

rebuild cooperative capacity? The remedies require a mix of technical, institutional, and normative measures.

**1. Diversification and Strategic Resilience (without weaponizing interdependence):** States should pursue supply-chain diversification, recycling, substitution research, and strategic reserve policies to reduce vulnerability. However, diversification must be implemented transparently and cooperatively (e.g., shared strategic reserves or regional processing hubs) to avoid incentivizing, protectionism. Multilateral frameworks for transparency in critical-mineral trade and for technology transfer can reduce fear-driven securitization while improving collective resilience.

**2. Strengthening and Reforming Multilateral Institutions:** International institutions need updating to manage 21st-century resource challenges. Reform should focus on inclusive governance (voice for developing countries), enforcement mechanisms (to deter export controls that cause systemic harm), and crisis-sharing protocols (for vaccines, food, and energy). For example, treaty provisions for equitable access, pre-agreed allocation rules, and mutual assistance clauses in pandemics could reduce incentives for hoarding.

**3. Legal and Normative Frameworks for Commons Stewardship:** Establishing binding norms and legal agreements for the stewardship of critical commons (transboundary waters, fisheries, global public-goods like pandemic vaccines) can shape state expectations and reduce opportunism. Norm entrepreneurship-by coalitions of states and normative actors (NGOs, religious groups) can foster shared responsibility.

**4. Equity-Focused Mechanisms and Compensation:** To address legitimate development needs, global mechanisms should include compensation, finance, and technology transfer to help resource-poor states transition (e.g., green industrial policy assistance). A failure to balance distributional concerns will perpetuate resource competition driven by insecurity and inequality.

**5. Crisis-Ready Cooperative Architectures:** Pre-negotiated mechanisms for crisis allocation (for vaccines, grain, energy) akin to contingency treaties could be designed and ratified now. Such mechanisms would specify trigger conditions, allocation formulas and financing arrangements, reducing the temptation to resort to ad hoc hoarding when crises strike.

**6. Normative Reframing:** From Short-Term Gain to Interdependence Responsibility: Finally, rebuilding cooperative regimes requires normative change. Political leadership, public education, and

civil society campaigns can reframe resource interdependence as mutual responsibility rather than vulnerability to be weaponized. International dialogues and transnational advocacy can help cultivate cooperative norms that endure beyond electoral cycles.

## **Discussion**

Combining realist caution with institutionalist optimism yields the most practical policy approach. Realism warns that states will act on material incentives; institutionalism indicates that well-designed institutions can alter incentives and stabilize cooperation. The geopolitics of greed flourishes where institutions are weak or where dominant actors find unilateralism politically convenient. Thus, responses must address both material vulnerabilities (technical supply chains, stockpiles) and governance deficits (representation, enforcement, equity). A recurring dilemma is that many cooperative remedies depend on the very same political will that resource competition undermines. For instance, building binding global allocation rules for vaccines requires trust that others will comply—trust that evaporates when states have previously hoarded supplies. Overcoming this paradox requires leadership by credible coalitions willing to bind themselves first (leadership by example), and creative incentives for compliance (trade benefits, financing support). Another important insight is that not all responses labelled “securitization” are harmful. Some degree of strategic awareness such as prudent diversification and investment in domestic processing capacity can increase resilience without destroying cooperation if pursued in transparent, non-zero-sum ways. The challenge is to distinguish prudent resilience from aggressive geopolitics of greed.

## **Conclusion**

The geopolitics of greed-resource competition driven by narrow state interest poses a serious threat to the cooperative institutions and shared responsibilities that underpin global stability. Contemporary cases such critical minerals in the energy transition, vaccine nationalism, transboundary water tensions, and food/energy shocks illustrate how competition over resources can corrode cooperation, producing inequity, institutional erosion, and amplified crises. So, preventing further erosion demands both technical fixes and political reform. The diversification of supply chains, deepening multilateral institutions, creating crisis-ready allocation mechanisms, and fostering normative commitment to shared responsibility are all essential. Importantly, the remedies must address distributional inequalities: only by embedding equity and inclusion into resource governance can the world reduce incentives for zero-sum competition. The alternative is bleak: a fragmented international system in which resources become instruments of coercion, cooperation atrophies, and global crises magnify. The choice policymakers face is not merely managerial but ethical that whether to treat shared

resources as instruments of power or as foundations for a stable, equitable world order. Reasserting responsibility and rebuilding cooperation is both a practical necessity and a moral imperative.

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# STATE AND IR IN RETREAT: TERRORISM AS A CHALLENGE TO STATE CENTRISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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## Abstract

The state has been the fundamental unit of analysis as far as International Relations is concerned. However, the centrality of the state in IR has been put to the test time and again, and this time around by a phenomenon, which was hitherto localized and often neglected: terrorism. It has been established that terrorism has existed much before its present phase, as described by David Rapoport in his theory of ‘wave phenomena.’ This paper is an attempt to examine the impact of terrorism on various strands of state centrality (Public attitude, State capacity) in international relations. It shall also assess the extent to which these groups have managed to challenge the capacity of the state. The paper shall not necessarily confine itself to the nature or *modus operandi* of such groups, but rather to the broader impact this phenomenon has had on the work and thinking about international politics. It also draws attention towards the state’s response to such a phenomenon, and how that response has forged the nature of IR as a discipline and international relations as subject matter for generations to come. It has also been established that the states have used different means to curb terrorism, which has potentially further decreased the democratic quotient even in liberal democracies.

## Keywords

Terrorism, Sovereignty, Intervention, State, Public, IR

## Introduction

International Relations as an academic discipline is relatively new. Given the emergence and the nature of the discipline, the notions of state and war have been central to its existence. Within the disciplinary history of IR itself, one comes across various debates at different historical junctures, which have been

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indirectly influenced by the emerging geopolitical realities the great power politics that dominated the field have been replaced by the emergence of non-state actors, which have not only challenged the states within but the global security architecture as well. One such phenomenon, which emerged as a major challenge to state-centric international relations but also has stretched the frontiers of discipline, has been the phenomenon of *Terrorism*. *Terrorism* has been defined differently at different historical junctures. As per the conventional understanding, terrorism could be defined as the use of force, fear, or threat by non-state armed actors against the state or civilians to achieve political or ideological ends. However, *Alex P Schmid* has questioned any such definitional certainty of terrorism at the global level. Schmid is of the opinion that defining the terrorist depends on those who do this act of defining, and mostly, the governments define who or which organizations qualify to be defined as a terrorist. Terrorism of any type has a lasting impact. Since it has been analysed more under the ambit of organizations and not the phenomenon, there seems to be a relatively incomplete flow of discourses about it.

Hence, the contribution of *David Rapoport* in this context becomes pertinent. To explain in detail, the conceptual history of ‘modern terrorism’, Rapoport has used the notion of what he refers to as ‘wave phenomena’. According to Rappaport, “*waves are special activity happening during a time period characterized by expansion and contraction and specialized by the feature of having an international character.*’ He argues further that these waves impact the organization and may advance a lasting impact by either continuing the existence of an organization or by contributing to its disappearance if it does not inspire it. This contest about the definitions of terrorism has been widely accepted in contemporary discourse on the same. Interestingly, in present times, the role of state-sponsored terrorism has dominated the discourse on terrorism. Since the state is the essential entity in international politics, we would try to analyze the impacts of terrorism on various elements correlated to the state.

### **Conception of the State**

One of the profound impacts of terrorism can be located in comprehending the concept of the state. The paper will look into the idea of the state through what has been referred to as the Westphalian state. Although there are possibilities of differing natures of state in a post-colonial world, from the Weberian conception of the state, it has been envisioned as an organized entity that holds a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. On the other hand, Varshney defines terrorism as an act of collective violence. ‘Collective violence, according to Varshney, can be defined as “violence perpetrated by a group on another group, by a group on an individual, or by an individual on a group” (Varshney 2009, 279).

Such authority of the state seems to be akin to what contractualist theorists forwarded. As the theory suggests, civilians surrender some of their rights before the state in exchange for the protection of those rights by the state. However, the construction of the state is such that it is deemed to have an upper hand in using violence. In the language of *Max Weber*, it can be called '*monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory.*' Any state that fails to exercise authority ceases to be one, or at most could be defined as a failed state. There are different ways in which a conflict emerges within a state; one of the reasons for the same could be excessive use of force on the part of the state itself. And the one who revolts either to ensure some changes in the existing system or to entirely establish a new system becomes a criminal in the eyes of that state.

These dissenting voices later set up certain organizations and not only challenge the principle of sovereignty but also challenge the principle of territoriality and citizenship (Varshney, 2009). Varshney has employed this argument while discussing the demands made by ethnic groups, but in this paper, its usage has been extended to other groups, particularly those who forge this idea of collective violence as a means to achieve political ends. This leads to unjustified repressive measures towards certain groups or people. Exercise of this influence by the state is important. '*Sovereignty is best conceptualized in terms of not state control but of state authority*' (Thomson 1995, 214). Apart from that, broadly, such activities undermine the internal sovereignty of the state by an individual or a group.

However, one of the essential features of what Rapoport refers to as 'wave phenomena' has been its international character. These organizations act not only within the boundaries of a particular state, but beyond it as well, thus taking the course of extra-territoriality. Assessing the four waves of modern terrorism (anarchist, anti-colonial, new left, and religious) put forward by *David Rapoport*, we find that all of them have an extraterritorial reach. This can be understood by the '*movement of strategies* and the people associated with them. For example, the strategies of assassinations during the anarchist wave (1880-1920), and the struggles against colonialism (1920-1960), excessive internationalism during the new left wave (1950-1990), and the centrality of religion in the fourth wave (1979- till date). These groups sometimes operate from beyond the boundaries of the host state, and may also be operating against multiple states simultaneously.

Thus, this helps one to figure out the threat to the external sovereignty of the state, where the acts of violence are planned or orchestrated from beyond the borders of a particular state. However, it becomes equally important to notice whether the notion of sovereignty has been used to justify state

action or means to perpetuate illegal acts against individuals, groups, or states. The argument has recently been used by great powers to infringe on the territorial integrity of the weaker nations, resulting in further violation of the rights of the people. One such example could be the United States military intervention in Iraq. Such an attempt at the '*selective sovereignty*' approach fits the notion of '*organized hypocrisy*' put forward by Stephen Krasner, which refers to 'the presence of long-standing norms [in this case, non-intervention] that are frequently violated' for the sake of some 'higher principles' – violations that are generally tolerated by the international community (Acharya 2007). Here, higher principles were an amalgamation of violations, hence Acharya prefers to call it '*disorganized hypocrisy*.' Though this is not the major point of our analysis, one should be aware of this side of the discourse. The other part is being understood through the Westphalian Treaty of 1648.

### **Evolution of the Westphalian Order and Brands of Terrorism**

After the end of thirty years of war (1618-1648), the Treaty of Westphalia was significant in laying the new foundation for the formation of the modern state system. The treaty formalized the nation-state system through its commitment to the establishment of 'sovereign' states. It was believed in the field of international politics that the state now has a fixed conception through the idea of sovereignty. As David Boucher argues, 'the settlement provided for and gave formal recognition to the modern state system in Europe' (Osiander 2001, 260). Seyom Brown argues that 'even to this day two principles of interstate relations codified in 1648 constitute a normative core of international law, which are the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs' (Osiander 2001, 261). Evans and Newnham's *Dictionary of World Politics* finds that several important principles that were subsequently to form the legal and political framework of modern interstate relations were established at Westphalia (Evans and Newnham 1990, 420). Hans Morgenthau is quoted in Osiander (2001, 261), asserting that certain "rules of international law were securely established in 1648" more specifically, "the Treaty of Westphalia made the territorial state the cornerstone of the modern state system." He also recognized Michael Sheehan's view that the settlement "formally recognized the concept of state sovereignty" (ibid), and Hendrik Spruyt's claim that "the peace of Westphalia formally acknowledged the system of sovereign states" (ibid). Even though Stephen Krasner dismissed the link between 1648 and the creation of the sovereign state, he argues that the peace of Westphalia was a breakpoint with the past, but not as one understood by students of international relations and law. By analyzing the above definitions, we can argue that the concept of sovereignty has formed its fixed place in international politics. But it is this idea about 'fixity' that has been traversed and challenged by many phenomena with a global reach, one among them being terrorism.

Terrorist groups today represent significant armed actors who can inflict consequential violence

outside the authority of states. The mere ability to contest the monopoly of violence in the state by these armed groups challenges the core of the Westphalian conception of the state. The four waves of terrorism traced by Rapoport had state-challenging elements. They challenged the capacity of the state by questioning primarily its control over borders. During the first wave, the movement of Russian anarchists across Europe became easier because better communication and transportation services facilitated their movement. By doing so, they could easily propagate their ideas and goals. Since they had a better reach, they were able to attract a large mass towards them. As Rapoport (2019, 49) notes, Proudhon's journeys showed that "they had more influence abroad than at home. Russian anarchists gave training to nationalist groups of various countries, even if they had different aims, like the Polish, the Armenians, and others, argues Rapoport.

The second wave also became prominent across borders because of the acknowledgment of revolutionary activities conducted before and the subsequent help from the diaspora communities. The third wave also depicted the extraterritorial reach of terrorism. An example by Rapoport is how different groups cooperated in attacks such as the Munich Olympic massacre of 1972 and the kidnapping of OPEC members in 1975, among others. The fourth wave, termed as religious wave by the author, is a contemporary trend of the phenomenon. It is in trend because of the extended audience.

The world has, since its inception, been composed of people from various religions; what has changed with the distribution of these communities across the globe as opposed to the earlier times when they were usually concentrated in one geographical area. This provides an incentive to the one who propagates because people are inclined to whom they share certain beliefs, values, etc. This shows that the sovereignty of states has been impacted by the emergence of terrorism at the international level. States have become permeable entities to such activities. Violence is being inflicted whenever and wherever possible, without the sovereignty of states being a botheration. Therefore, what catalyzes the activity is a profound point. Because there are always different reasons to do so.

The driving reasons may be majorly ideological, strategic, and psychological, among others. In case the ideological underpinning is based on any global ideology/religion, then terrorist action represents an even greater challenge to the state-sovereignty system. The transition of terrorist groups away from direct state sponsorship of terrorism and towards more amorphous groups has made this a more potent threat to the Westphalian State System. Terrorism thus whether state-sponsored or non-state, can alter international relations in many ways. It could be intra or interstate, if the activity is specifically meant to target just one state, for let us say political reasons. The first response may be a counter-threat, followed by the adoption of new strategies and changes in policies. The moment the state alters its policies simply conveys how terrorism has been at least successful in threat-based persuasion. The

changing policies may favor certain sections and go against others. (Examples could be discriminatory visa policies.) Depends upon which group it was and what it wanted to alter. Apart from politics, a similar response may be visible if any other structure of society is targeted. In other instances, a group of states may be the target. Strategies for this may vary depending upon deliberation by a state and its allies.

### **Engendering State Conflict**

Terrorism has the potential to ignite wars among states. The use of violence by terror groups has brought India and Pakistan, two nuclear powers, to the brink of war on multiple occasions. The friction thus emerged has been the reason for failed negotiations, and the possibility of peace and stability in the region looks bleak. This has led to the worsening of the relations between the two. Various means of negotiations have failed. These two countries are not the only examples where one can see interstate relations being impacted. As Raymond Aaron argues, ‘interstate relations involve in essence the alternatives of peace and war’ (Elrod 1976). Hence, the latter is more prominent in this case because, as Richard B Elrod argues, ‘the sources of international dissension and discord generally seem to overbalance the forces of harmony.’

More recently, especially after the 9/11 attacks, the escalation of conflict between states has increased. The launch of the war on terror is a prime example of worsening relations between states. Whether the US with Afghanistan or Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since the present world is considered to be a globalized village, any event happening at the international level has consequences at the national and sub-national levels. It is important to note that the emergence of terrorism can come from any area of the globe. It can originate from a sub-national level and spread to the national or international level. That is what has happened to most such movements. Hence, it is essential to analyze them from both a bottom-up and top-down approach. While the former connotes how national and international phenomena are defined by the sub-national factors, the latter is defined as vice versa (Giraudy et al. 2019). These approaches are mainly used in Comparative politics, but their theoretical framework can help in any field. Some other events that have been triggered by terrorism are summarized below.

One of the largest and most devastating conflicts that was precipitated by terrorism has been World War I itself (assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a Serb terrorist). Apart from widespread destruction and death, it dismantled the entire political order based on **the Concert of Europe**. Though the concert essentially centred on Europe, some of its features did help in maintaining the international system for about a century. They are: focus on practicality between the extremes of an absolute consensus upon right and wrong in international relations, followed by the distribution and

equalization of responsibilities and opportunities among the states considered to be important to the system (Elrod 1976, 170). The Black Hand, a Serb group supported by the Serbian state, aimed to unify Bosnia and other areas with large Serb populations under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with Serbia. Austria always felt Serbia was a hindrance to maintaining its multi-ethnic empire. Austria's annexation of Bosnia in 1908 and Serbian ambitions to unite South East European Slavic people strained the relations further. The Balkan wars led to the dominant emergence of Serbia in the region. In 1914, the Black Hand assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, plunging Europe into war. European leaders wanted to ensure, through various measures, that the war that erupted in Europe would turn into a global war. Hence, the states started taking sides. Austria-Hungary received support from Germany to attack Serbia. Ultimately, Europe entered the war, and the First World War was the destined consequence.

The war resulted in the loss of almost half of the Serbian army to death, injury, or capture. Overall, the war in total led to over 10 million deaths. In the ensuing mega war, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires collapsed, Russia turned communist in the revolution, and nations like Poland were reborn. These consequences were part of a minor event that engendered state conflict not just between two but many participants.

## **Components of State Capacity Undermined by Terrorism**

### **5.1 Effect on Public Attitude**

Terrorist violence often results in a loss of democratic legitimacy for many state institutions, and the failure to protect civilians is seen as a serious failure. If a government cannot protect its people, it is no government at all. The institutional role in shaping public attitude is vital. They do so through policy formulations, political communications, and advancing changes, among others. 'People expect social institutions to function efficiently and impartially. The expectation of efficiency can mean a demand for speedy decision-making, a realization of certain social objectives employing decision-making, and impartiality would signify equal treatment to all citizens (Blom 1970, 110). But if the institutional capacity to formulate the right opinion of itself is lost among the public or gets tarnished, it impacts its capacity to regulate the public. They also face difficulty in getting the faith of the public back in themselves. Arguments of K Adeney can be introduced here as well. She argues that "minorities feel victimized either by the alienation of dominant language or culture or by the politics of 'us' and 'them.'" (Adeney 2017). Applying the same thesis here, one can figure that when one group gets a monopoly of violence over the other, it makes others feel victimized and at one point or the other the conflict between the two may take strong turns. or what Wilkinson calls the 'sparking of

countermobilization’ (Wilkinson 2004). That would not only lead to violence, but if not dealt with properly, it can strengthen and fix the biases. Even a mere accommodation policy may not work because accommodation does not necessarily eliminate the conflict/violence.

The differential impact of terrorism on different communities exacerbates the deepening of inter-community biases. This is especially the case when the government response is weak or even complicit. For example, a government may adopt the policy of what P. Staniland calls “total warfare” towards a group, which means a monopoly of violence in the hands of one, in this case, the state. If the state does so, its question of neutrality is undermined. Rather, some groups may view the stance of the state as discriminatory, and that is when the biases towards not only the state but also the group get enhanced. Though the targets of terrorism are multiple, they, however, know the importance of public opinion. ‘By sowing fear, actors hope that the public will put pressure on the target regime to enact policy concessions to militants or that policymakers, fearing the erosion of public support, will bend to the terrorist demands’ (Avdan 2022).

These inter-community biases are reinforced by the media. The role of the media in disseminating biased narratives related to various groups has always added salt to the wounds. The increase in recent attacks against communities seen in France, Madrid, New Zealand, and other places is an excellent example of how community bias gets strengthened. Whether it is the publicizing of biased narratives by the media or accommodative tendencies depicted by certain outlets in favor of the act, in both cases formulation of biases takes place. At times, the state may use its capacity to generate public opinion in favor of its policies. A good example is the 2003 Iraq war. ‘The Bush administration was able to manage public opinion before and during the war, with some comparisons with public opinion on other wars, particularly the 1991 Gulf War’ (Muller 2021, 1). A visible consequence of such a policy was the strengthening of Islamophobia, not just in the West but overall in the world. Hence, the public attitude gets impacted either towards other groups or towards the state, whatever the context may be. The declining institutional capacity to regulate the existing ideational differences among its people leads to the vulnerability of both the state and its people. State and people become relational in this context. The vulnerability of one also defines the vulnerability of the other, not forgetting that the degrees may vary. People in this context can subscribe themselves to various ideas through internal or outside influence, thus propagating something which the state may feel against it. The state may adopt various repressive means to deal with such issues because of perceived threats, which in turn affects the attitude of the public towards the state. Thus, the act of terrorism overall influences and shapes the public attitude and opinion towards various groups.

## 5.2 Impact on State Capacity

The threat of terrorist violence forced states to augment their state capacities both in surveillance and small wars. It became a more accepted sort of method after the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 attack was not considered merely an attack on the state. It led to debates about the violation of the rights of citizens, foreigners, etc. Having this in mind, the USA became conscious about safeguarding its territory from such massive attacks. After various discussions on it, the state decided to increase its surveillance measures. ‘It quickly became clear after the attack that the global response to terrorism would involve augmenting various forms of surveillance’ (Gazo and Haggerty 2005, 171). Thus, it became a handy tool for states to locate terrorist groups or their contacts. ‘It was also a valuable asset for the US war in Afghanistan and has become a key dimension in the efforts of the Western nations to secure themselves against future attacks’ (ibid). The process of surveillance was facilitated by what Haggerty and Erinson call ‘surveillance assemblage’, which refers to the means that help to make sense of the proliferating, decentralized, and uncoordinated regime of visibility’ (Gazo 2005, 172).

Surveillance in this sense speaks of immense state capacities to penetrate deep into society. Haggerty and Gazo differentiate this surveillance from traditional ones by considering it not just a thing but a ‘*potentiality*’ (Gazo and Haggerty 2005, 173). The easy availability of surveillance technology was greatly facilitated by the need for states to monitor communications among terrorists. The need for anti-terrorist surveillance has been justified in three ways. First, it can provide information that can be retrospectively analyzed to provide insights about terrorists and their operations, followed by its capacity to deter future attacks and allow authorities to thwart future attacks (Gazo and Haggerty 2005, 180-181). However, it has had a second-order effect in constraining the civil liberties of common people.

Governments have been eager to use the availability of these technologies to monitor their citizens. The **Patriot Act** in the USA provided both the template as well as ideological legitimacy to the more intrusive surveillance programs in other countries. In *Osborne V. United States* (1966), Justice Douglas argued, ‘We are rapidly entering an age of no privacy, where everyone is open to surveillance at all times; where there are no secrets from the government. The aggressive breaches of privacy by the government increased by geometric proportions (Heinrich, Ward). Canada’s Public Safety Act was also drafted along the same lines. Most countries in the world now have such laws, especially those where such incidents are frequent. Like India, Canada, China, and others. They contain various measures by which such activities could be either stopped or hindered at least. Cumulatively, such bills have the potential to reduce individual privacy rights through an opportunistic expansion of institutional powers and the questionable use of such technologies for a host of unstated

purposes (Gazso and Haggerty 2005, 179).

Contemporary surveillance techniques have been designed in a fashion that permeates personal space very well. Legislation such as the US Patriot Act has been termed by Pikowsky as an ‘act of altering the balance of rights between the citizen and the state (ibid). Thus, surveillance, seen as a security measure, is not merely that. It has its limitations as well. It infringes on the rights of people; they can be monitored anywhere without a blink of an idea about the same. It also creates what Haggerty and Goza call ‘*fear of the unseen*’ (Gazso and Haggerty 2005, 183). People tend to ask for more security apparatus because they feel that it would make them feel more secure. It can also increase terrorists’ capacity to attack. When terrorists are aware of sites that have been securitized by surveillance, they move towards spaces that are not yet under such measures. An example of the same would be the bombing of the Atlanta Olympics, where the considerable presence of security at the game prompted an attack on the concert outside the village (ibid). It also benefits the security market.

As more and more surveillance businesses are taking up. ‘Following the model of the military-industrial complex, powerful corporate interests are increasingly aligned with a push for greater surveillance and security devices irrespective of questions about their demonstrable need, adequate performance, or likely success’ (Goza and Haggerty 2005, 184). The problem is also increased by the fact that citizens are hardly aware of the consequences of deep surveillance measures. They lack the political imagination to assess the risks of such tools (ibid). Seeing it that way, the surveillance measures might be considered apt as per the context, but their long-term consequences are way too dangerous. Rather than taking the path of surveillance measures, which cost way too much, it could be better if the root of the issues is dealt with, for that is a prioritized option over being under an invisible and visible security apparatus. As *Benjamin Franklin* famously assesses, ‘Those people who are willing to trade their essential freedom for the sake of temporary security deserve and shall have neither, and will lose both.’

The need for localized and effective responses to terrorist violence has also resulted in the augmentation of police forces worldwide; this has transformed these forces effectively into paramilitaries, which has led to a loss of democratic accountability from these agencies. States have been exposed to violent acts, even by their forces. Like attacks on one community by the forces that belong to the dominant one. This also strengthened inter-community biases. Because it has been seen that the military or police force is inclined towards members of their community, irrespective of the act committed by them. This has been widely noted in countries like the USA, France, India, and others. In the USA, racist tendencies have led to an assessment of such implicit bias. In a series of

experiments by Stanford University, it was found that for police officers, ‘Black faces looked more criminal than the white ones’ (Wen 2020, BBC Future report). Such behavior reinforces biases and violent acts. This has also been observed in the case of Muslims overall, after the argumentation about ‘terrorism’ was associated broadly only with them. One example is India. In an article by ‘The Hindu’ based on a survey report, it was argued that Muslims feel there is bias in policing (The Hindu 2018). It is reinforced by the concept of appearances. Appearances decide whether one will be caught or set free. These examples help one grasp how systematic discrimination towards communities can impact their daily lives. Because even states have been visualized mostly to form unjustified laws. Given the benefit of lack of clarity and misinformation to the state, their laws are deemed to act like that, but some do it deliberately and institutionalize the biases. That is also a fact that cannot be ignored. Besides, the response of states may vary depending on their capacities. Jackson also talks about the differential capacity of the state. Thus, it can be argued that the augmentation of state capacity has increased the effectiveness of some states to deal with terrorist violence, but at the same time, the second-order effects have been detrimental to democratic accountability.

### **5.3 State Failure**

Terrorism can spiral into broader insurgencies and rebellions and has often resulted in complete State failure. As far as failed states are concerned, security concerns may arise from threats such as terrorism and enforced migration (Cecon 2014). The event of 9/11 posed a question before the Western government related to the issue of state failure. It became a "quintessential example of securitization: the process by which issues are accorded security status or seen as a threat through political labeling, rather than a result of their real objective significance” (ibid). Such a marking gives the green light to Western governments for the implementation of inequitable policies in the global South (ibid). This has been observed in States like Somalia, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Afghanistan. In all of these cases, the terrorism snowballed into civil wars, and vast swathes of territory came into the hands of shadowy and amorphous groups. They have been considered, especially by the West, as states that provide ground or nourishment to activities like terrorism. For them, examples could be Afghanistan, Sudan, and others. However, establishing a direct link between terrorism and failed states is, to some extent, naive because it does not take into consideration that not all weak and failed states are plagued by terrorism, and the case of Afghanistan is not enough (ibid).

Such wars had a significant deleterious impact on the neighboring States, which had to devote a lot of resources to deal with issues like refugees, easy availability of guns, and safe avenues for drug trafficking. State failure also has the collateral effect of making the people of a deteriorating state leave the country, creating, consequently, massive refugee flows that destabilize neighboring countries,

as happened in the case of Africa (ibid). Also, for instance, since 1990, circa 100.000 exiles left Somalia and moved to bordering Kenya, with the side-effect of fuelling some of the inter-ethnic strains existing in the country (ibid). Through borders, ‘not only weapons but also drugs and people become objects of criminal traffic as in the cases of Colombia and Myanmar’ (ibid).

Thus, more than the perceived threat by Western countries from such states, it is these states that are on the brink of collapse. People of these countries are the primary audience that suffers every sort of violation and threat. Even if they decide to migrate or become immigrants to new places, there is no guarantee of their equal treatment. They may face more sociocultural identity issues in the migrated places, in the form of identity recognition, accommodation, and associated issues. Most Western states have been facing this issue to accommodate such people in the tussle between their status of being a ‘Multi-nation’ or ‘Polyethnic’ state (Wilkymlika). In the language of Huntington, ‘The impacts of these substantial immigration movements are deemed to be the fuse of a cultural conflict (‘clash of civilizations’) between different social configurations (Cecon, 2014).

To deal with such emergent problems of state failure, the International Community had to formulate novel concepts like **R2P** (Responsibility to Protect) to legitimize international intervention. The major impetus for the R2P principle was the Bosnian and Rwandan crises. They became a base for the states to think about intervening in other states. Though there was a dilemma about sovereignty and intervention, the intensity of the atrocities forced them to initiate R2P. It rested upon three pillars. As per the *Global Centre For The Responsibility To Protect*, they are: Pillar **One** asserts that ‘Every state has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.’ **Pillar two** speaks about ‘The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that responsibility.’ The **third pillar** is ‘If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and by the UN Charter.’

The state intervention, however, became more problematic due to strategically motivated intervention in the case of Libya and failure to apply in the case of Syria. In the Libyan case, the UNSC acted promptly, and within no time the Gaddafi regime in Libya was struck down by various military coalitions under the broader framework of NATO. The act was carried out under Resolution 1973. Under this resolution, the UNSC, for the first time, authorized coercive military intervention in a sovereign state without the consent of that state’s governing authorities.’ (Zifack, n.d., 6). However, the council's resolution number 1973 received opposition from certain members; Brazil, China,

Germany, India, and Russia were the major ones. These stemmed in part from the commitment of Russia and China in particular to the principle of nonintervention in the affairs of sovereign states and in part from disagreements between Security Council members as to the most appropriate strategies to be deployed to bring the violence quickly to an end. (Zefick, n.d., 7).

Despite reservations, the act was considered to be a success. The main reasons were the authorization of the UNSC, support to the UNSC by regional bodies like the Human Rights Council and Arab League, and quick response by the UNSC with fewer delays (Zefick, n.d, 10). The role of the UNSC in Libya received major scrutiny during the crisis in Syria. The Syrian crisis was the test of the UNSC, as Syria broadly has the same issue as that of Libya, which is the crimes against civilians. But the response varied in this case. The demonstrators in Syria voiced their concerns about various socio-political issues, taking inspiration from the already erupted Arab Spring. The Bashar al-Assad regime had to tackle these massive protests. The government leashed heavily on them. Atrocities were at their peak, and the UNSC began to consider the situation. Every member of the Security Council expressed deep concern about the rapidly deteriorating Syrian situation. However, different emphases were visible when its members considered what action should be taken (Zifack, n.d., 16). For example, the UK voiced for violence to stop, Russia considered it as Syria's domestic matter, and India also vouched for a more peaceful approach (Zifack, n.d., 16-17). What was visible was only passing one resolution after the other. Each resolution was stuck over time due to reservations raised by various states. The states were busy with illusory paperwork, some signed and others vetoed, and meanwhile, the scathing environment of Syria proliferated. The international community had arrived at an impasse, and the Syrian death toll has since passed 8000 (Zifack, n.d., 26). The examples of Libya and Syria are prima facie evidence of state failures advanced by various reasons, which could be and in most cases are '*foreign-sponsored motivations.*' Such states then become volatile, especially in the hands of major powers, either directly or indirectly.

## **Conclusion**

Terrorism as a phenomenon has existed long before the times when 'religious terrorism' became the keyword in the security studies lexicon. This paper has drawn attention to different aspects of interstate, intra-state, and international relations that the emergence of terrorism has brought with it. The paper has established that terrorism has the potential to alter contemporary security architecture, state centrality, and international legal regime in multiple ways. The paper has established that the term terrorism itself is not monolithic, and hence its various dimensions need to be taken into account while theorizing it. There are certain basic tenets acceptable to a wide range of scholars, like violence, sudden attacks, assassinations, and international character, etc.

By keeping them as basic premises, we glean that the centrality of the state, largely viewed in terms of sovereignty, is not the only component of the state that gets jolted. Rather, we garner that its impact sweeps across various strands like engendering state conflict, public attitude, state capacity, and state failure, among others. Such impact defines and redefines the power, authority, stability, peace, and other relations among groups, states, organizations, etc. That is why the usage of the term ‘state centrism’, at least in this examination, is used to connote aspects beyond sovereignty, though acknowledging the primary importance of the same. The paper has also tried to evaluate whether a conclusive judgment about the phenomenon could be reached or not. The aspect of state terrorism has often been neglected in the state, and the UN and other agencies also seem to be sceptical about its usage concerning the state and its allied branches. This again raises the question about the genuineness of the ‘defining agency’. The phenomenon of terrorism has also altered the nature of state response to such activities with increasing use of surveillance methods and other algorithms, which in the future may have devastating effects on the individuality of human beings, as thinking beings rather than being programmed machines.

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# The Idea of a Multidisciplinary University: Implementing NEP-2020 in Indian Higher Education

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## Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a transformative restructuring of Indian higher education through the creation of multidisciplinary universities that dissolve rigid disciplinary boundaries. The policy promotes an ecosystem of learning in which the sciences, social sciences, arts and vocational streams coexist and complement one another. This paper explores the practical and policy dimensions of implementing this vision within India's complex higher education landscape. It examines the theoretical underpinnings of multidisciplinary education, the challenges of translating policy into practice and the role of institutional innovation in this context. The hypothesis guiding this paper is that the success of NEP-2020's multidisciplinary framework depends on the alignment of institutional autonomy, governance reform, and faculty capacity-building. Drawing on examples from emerging Indian universities, such as Ashoka and Azim Premji, as well as reforms at IIT Delhi and the University of Delhi, this study argues that genuine transformation requires not only policy endorsement but also a cultural shift in academic governance and pedagogical philosophy. Through a qualitative and policy-oriented analysis, the paper concludes that while NEP-2020 provides a visionary roadmap, its realization hinges on sustained investment, flexibility in curriculum design and the creation of a truly inclusive academic environment.

## Keywords

NEP-2020, multidisciplinary education, higher education policy, institutional reform, India, holistic learning.

## Introduction

The landscape of India, including the landscape of higher education in India, is entering a significant

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change, fuelled by the pressing necessity to align academic structures with the requirements of a rapidly changing global economy (Government of India, 2020). For centuries, the Indian system of higher education has been characterized by closed disciplinary silos, affiliation-based restrictions and limited institutional autonomy, all of which have resulted in disjointed learning and hindered academic creativity (Bhardwaj et al., 2024). As India seeks to establish itself as a key player in the knowledge economy, the need to introduce system reforms that foster flexibility, creativity and interdisciplinarity has become increasingly pronounced (Chakrabarti, 2021). The process of acquainting learners with a general intellectual framework, in addition to expertise in particular areas, is a priority in international models of higher education, especially those that focus on liberal arts, cross-competencies and the end-product approach to education (Chakrabarti, 2020). It is against this background that the reform discussions in India have intensified, aiming to transform universities into vibrant centres of inquiry, problem-solving and holistic development. One of the paradigms in these debates is multidisciplinary learning (Devi 2020). At a time when the world faces intricate problems that cannot be addressed using traditional subject-based approaches, such as solving complex climate change, embracing digital transformation, supporting public health, and tackling social inequality, universities need to produce graduates who can combine their skills across disciplines (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2020).

Multidisciplinary education stimulates students to think flexibly, reason creatively and have the ability to apply different frameworks to real-life problems. In the case of India, where the population level is high and the innovation environment is developing, it is not only desirable but also necessary to develop such capabilities. Possibly due to the shift towards hybrid jobs in the industrial sector, which involve a combination of technology, interpersonal relationship comprehension and analytical ability, multidisciplinary learning is now a key focus of national competitiveness and progress as a community (Nirmal, 2024). It is against this context that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a ground-breaking and ambitious vision. NEP-2020 proposes overhauling the entire higher education landscape into a multidisciplinary university system, offering alternative career paths through curricular options and fostering a student-focused learning environment (Pal 2023). The four-year undergraduate programme (FYUP), multiple exit and entry choices, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and encouragement of major-minor combinations are key characteristics that characterize an unprecedented policy promise of busting through academic silos. The policy views institutions of higher learning as comprehensive and holistic entities, where sciences/social sciences, humanities, vocational studies, and other professional disciplines are complementary and coexist. It is a change not only in structure, but also in educational philosophy, one that emphasizes learning as broad-based, inquiry-driven, and conducive to innovation (Sharma & Sharma 2022).

The transition between policy aspiration and institutional practice, however, is a complex and uneven process. Although the NEP provides a vision and roadmap, the Indian higher education ecosystem is characterized by structural constraints, governance issues, resource imbalances and entrenched academic cultures that do not welcome change (Suman 2023). The research problem that arises fundamentally is, thus, the institutional discrepancy between policy ideals and institutional realities. What can universities do to operationalize multidisciplinary learning, considering the prevailing regulatory frameworks? Which structural and pedagogical changes are needed to change the entrenched academic practices? What actions can the faculty, administrators and policymakers take to recreate the institutional cultures in collaboration with the objectives of the NEP? These are important questions that should be addressed when measuring the viability and sustainability of the NEP-2020 reforms. The paper will explore these questions by analyzing the concept of the multidisciplinary university in Indian higher education within a particular socio-cultural and regulatory framework.

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1 Concept of Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Learning**

Multidisciplinary has evolved as a historical response to the transformation of universities from narrowly specialized spaces into institutions oriented toward broad intellectual inquiry. In earlier phases of higher learning—particularly during the medieval and Renaissance periods—knowledge production was concentrated primarily within specific domains, such as philosophy, theology, or the natural sciences (Tirthali 2024). The sharp fragmentation of knowledge into increasingly specialized subfields emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, driven by industrialization, scientific advancement, and the rise of professional expertise. While such specialization allowed for depth and rigor, it also entrenched rigid disciplinary boundaries that often obscured the holistic understanding (University Grants Commission, 2022). By the mid-20th century, it became evident to educators and policymakers that complex social issues—such as environmental degradation, technological ethics, poverty, and public health—could not be adequately addressed within isolated disciplinary frameworks (Verma 2024). This recognition prompted a shift toward more integrative modes of inquiry, giving rise to a multidisciplinary approach that convenes diverse bodies of knowledge to pursue shared questions or problems. In this framework, disciplines interact side by side without abandoning their conceptual autonomy, enabling problems to be examined from multiple methodological standpoints. Such an approach acknowledges that each discipline contributes distinct assumptions, epistemic tools and analytic strategies and that meaningful inquiry often requires the interplay of these varied perspectives. Within higher education, this integrative orientation has been crucial for dismantling entrenched silos

and fostering academic structures that better align with contemporary societal and global knowledge demands (Chandramana 2020). Consequently, the terms *multidisciplinary*, *interdisciplinary*, and *transdisciplinary* have gained prominence as overlapping yet distinct modes of knowledge integration. Within this broader spectrum, multidisciplinary learning involves the concurrent use of multiple disciplines to explore a topic or solve a problem without merging theoretical frameworks or methodological orientations (Garg 2024). Each field maintains its identity, allowing learners to compare insights across domains—for example, when economists, biologists, political scientists, and engineers conduct parallel analysis of a shared issue.

Interdisciplinary learning represents a more synthetic model, one that explicitly integrates methods, theories, or conceptual structures to produce insights unattainable through a single disciplinary lens. Cognitive science, combining psychology, neuroscience, linguistics and computer science, exemplifies such fusion (Kurien 2020). Transdisciplinary learning extends this integration further by incorporating stakeholders beyond formal academic contexts—such as policymakers, industry practitioners, and community groups—to co-produce knowledge aimed at real-world problem-solving (Misra 2025). Urban planning, which demands collaboration among architects, sociologists, technologists, environmental scientists and local citizens, offers a prototypical example.

Together, these models constitute a continuum of knowledge integration: multidisciplinary learning emphasizes breadth, interdisciplinary learning emphasizes synthesis and transdisciplinary learning prioritizes collaborative, solution-oriented innovation. The cognitive and pedagogical value of these approaches is increasingly evident, as they promote critical thinking, creativity, and higher-order analysis by encouraging learners to navigate and synthesize diverse epistemologies (Narkhede 2025; Nayak 2022). In an interconnected global landscape, such multidimensional competence has become essential for both academic relevance and professional adaptability.

## **2.2 Global Pedagogical Frameworks**

The current state of higher education models worldwide provides a rich understanding of how multidisciplinary learning can be institutionalized. Various areas have developed different traditions of pedagogy, the work of which integrates the dimensions of breadth, depth and flexibility, areas that greatly piqued the aspirations of NEP-2020 (Nayak 2022). By understanding these frameworks, Indian institutions can recognize the various ways in which multidisciplinary structures can be incorporated into curriculum design, administration, and academic culture. The American liberal arts tradition is one of the most influential models of multidisciplinary education globally. Its major attributes focus on the scope of learning, exposure to various areas of knowledge and acquisition of critical interrogation skills. Instead of stimulating early specialization, the liberal arts model motivates intellectual

exploration during the initial years of undergraduate education through a well-designed general education curriculum. Before students choose a major, they typically participate in general courses in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, mathematics, and the arts (Nirmal, 2024). One of the key characteristics of this system is the majors-minors system, which provides students with the flexibility to study a major and, simultaneously, explore related areas. For example, a student can major in economics and minor in philosophy, psychology, or environmental studies. This construction not only expands the academic vistas but also fosters interdisciplinary thinking and comprehensive comprehension. It is evident how the U.S. liberal arts model can be relevant to NEP-2020. NEP promotes liberal arts college-style, interdisciplinary exposures and student-focused learning, which is deeply ingrained in the American liberal arts schools. Having adopted aspects such as general degree programs and flexible credit systems, Indian universities can move towards establishing learning platforms that foster curiosity, creativity, and intellectual autonomy.

Developed in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century, the Humboldtian model is the philosophical foundation of contemporary European higher education (Shukla 2022). This model is based on the principle of unity of research and teaching, whereby universities do not passively receive existing knowledge but are actively engaged in developing new knowledge through scholarly inquiry. The faculty and students collaborate on research, creating an atmosphere where academic freedom and independent thinking flourish. One of the primary characteristics of the Humboldtian tradition is its excessive emphasis on the autonomy of universities as a means to preserve institutions as places of open inquiry, intellectual freedom, and holistic growth (Singh 2024). Instead of understanding education as job training, the Humboldtian model views education as a means to develop the whole person, not only intellectually but also ethically and culturally. This practice has had a significant impact on the higher education systems in Europe, characterized by modular, open electives and research-based teaching. In the case of India, the model emphasizes the need to empower universities with increased autonomy, which is one of the central demands for realizing the multidisciplinary vision of NEP-2020. Humboldtian in focus on research-cumulative learning will be specifically relevant in the case of Indian institutions that require reinforcing the research culture with flexible academic frameworks.

The case of Asian tertiary education, particularly in Singapore and Japan, exemplifies the success of hybrid forms in reconciling Western liberal arts with the region's educational needs. These systems are strategic by integrating STEM with the humanities and social sciences because innovation has been known to result from the interplay of different disciplines. Universities in Singapore, such as NUS and Yale-NUS College (which has since merged into NUS), have adopted liberal arts models that

emphasize multidisciplinary foundations, inquiry, and cross-cultural understandings (Srivastava 2022). Their programmes are therefore structured in such a way that they produce versatile graduates who can absorb the world economic challenges but remain in touch with the national developmental policies in the same technological, business and research sectors. Japan has also made similar efforts to reorganize university education, aiming to make it more multidisciplinary and offer more comprehensive curricula.

### **2.3 Theoretical Basis for NEP-2020**

Holistic education is a philosophical tradition that views human development as a multifaceted process, encompassing the cognitive, emotional, ethical, social, and physical dimensions of learners (Yenugu, 2022). Instead of focusing education on an academic process, holistic models focus on whole-person education- that is, not only does the student need to be an adequate intellectual, but he or she must also be capable of empathy, be able to think critically, be emotionally stable and develop moral judgment. The method combines several elements of learning, recognizing that knowledge acquisition is closely tied to individual values, well-being, and social interaction. Holistic education, therefore, facilitates learning systems that are expansive, valuable, and based on real-life situations. This tradition has a significant influence on NEP-2020 (Aithal, 2020a). The policy aims to produce balanced individuals who can effectively overcome complex 21st-century problems through multidisciplinary exploration, a flexible curriculum and by embracing the arts, sciences, and vocation. The focus on Indian knowledge systems, ethics and socio-cultural awareness also intensifies the holistic orientation of the envisioned policy. Within the setting of multidisciplinary education, the idea of holism ensures that a student gains well-rounded skills in various competence fields, as opposed to focusing on intense specialization.

Constructivism views learning as an experience, an activity, and a socially mediated process. This theory posits that learners construct knowledge through the interplay of ideas, experiences, and their surroundings, rather than passively receiving information. Constructivist pedagogy emphasizes hands-on, contemplative, experimental and collaborative approaches to inquiry (Bhatia, 2011). NEP-2020 is founded on the principles of constructivism because it focuses on inquiry-based, project-based, and experiential learning. As pedagogical methods, these strategies help initiate questions, facilitate problem analysis, engage students in real-world ventures, and foster the collaborative creation of knowledge. These learning processes emphasize memorizing content that is important to know and use. The multidisciplinary curricula are also based on constructivism. When learners study a problem using a variety of disciplinary approaches, they actively construct conceptual connections and gain knowledge in more sophisticated and interesting ways (Gupta, 2012). The social aspect of

constructivist learning is reflected in the collaborative nature of multidisciplinary work, where learners interact with diverse perspectives and ideas. Therefore, the project's dedication to the flexibility and multidisciplinary education frameworks offered by NEP-2020 has a solid foundation in constructivist ideas. Higher education systems are now adapting their expectations in response to the evolving needs of the global knowledge economy. The present-day society needs scholars who are not just knowledgeable in a specific field but also 21st-century-skilled graduates who value critical thinking skills, creativity, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and flexibility. Outcome-Based Education (OBE) represents a significant shift from conventional content-centered instruction to competency-based learning. OBE focuses on clear learning outcomes, graduate qualities, and measurable skills that students should develop by the end of a programme (Mishra 2020).

## **NEP-2020: Vision and Structural Mandates**

### **3.1 Policy Provisions on Multidisciplinary Education**

NEP-2020 presents a set of structural changes aimed at transforming the Indian higher education system into a versatile, learner-focused, and interdisciplinary ecosystem. The reintroduction of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) is one of the major provisions that will enable students to gain a wide and in-depth understanding of knowledge (Kaushik 2014). In comparison to the traditional three-year model, the FYUP has a more generalized base during the first year, with subsequent levels of specialization and optional research experience in subsequent years. This model reflects the global liberal arts framework and helps students explore various academic disciplines before making informed specialization decisions.

Besides the FYUP, NEP-2020 also provides academic flexibility by offering multiple entry- exit provisions. Students are at liberty to join and leave the programme at different levels as they get a certificate at the end of year one, a diploma at the end of the second year, a bachelor's degree at the end of the third year and finally a bachelor's degree with research at the end of the fourth year (Mahajan 2021). This design is based on the knowledge of the varying Indian socio-economic set-ups and demonstrates the studio's capability to interrupt and continue education without incurring academic penalties. The policy facilitates lifelong learning by enabling learners to pause and resume where they left off, thereby reducing the rate of dropouts. One of the greatest innovations that allows mobility and flexibility is the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). The digital system allows students to obtain credits at various institutions and transfer them to a centralized system. These sales credits can be accumulated over time and later redeemed to finish the degrees or diplomas. The ABC establishes an academic ecosystem that is interconnected with students, enabling the integration of programs

across different universities to facilitate genuine multidisciplinary learning. It enables students to formulate various and customized learning configurations that transcend institutional boundaries. NEP-2020 also promotes the idea of multidisciplinary education by introducing major-minor combinations.

### **3.2 Institutional Restructuring Mandates**

The NEP-2020 is developing a vision for restructuring the Indian higher education system to facilitate the provision of multidisciplinary education. The formation of an integrated higher education cluster can be listed among the most transformative recommendations, as institutions at a geographical location do not operate independently but work together (Okada, 2012). These centres, which include colleges, universities, and research institutions, are likely to share resources, faculty expertise, labs and online resources. The cluster model will help democratize access to high-quality education and minimize duplication of academic programs by dismantling institutional silos and strengthening the overall, more effective higher education ecosystem. Another related requirement is the creation of multidisciplinary universities and Higher Education Institution (HEI) networks. NEP-2020 suggests that all institutions of higher learning must be expanded to large, resource-rich multidisciplinary institutions with an array of programmes in arts, sciences, social sciences, vocational and professional fields. This change necessitates that related colleges either transition to autonomous degree-granting institutions or join larger university clusters. The ultimate purpose of such restructuring is to enhance academic autonomy, foster cross-departmental cooperation and ensure that students experience a variety of areas to study, aligning with the policy priorities based on holistic and flexible learning trajectories. Another pillar of the NEP-2020 institutional restructuring agenda is strengthening the research ecosystem. The policy acknowledges that India has conducted relatively little research compared to other countries worldwide and suggests several reforms to close this gap. These initiatives are the creation of the National Research Foundation (NRF) to finance high-quality research, promote interdisciplinary research centres in higher educational institutions and incorporate research opportunities into undergraduate programmes (Pilz 2021). Through the culture of questioning and invention, NEP-2020 aims to ensure that students do not perceive research as postgraduate research, but rather as an integral part of multidisciplinary study. Finally, NEP-2020 pays considerable attention to teacher training and professional development, as it is acknowledged that faculty members play a decisive role in the implementation of multidisciplinary curricula.

### **3.3 Policy Logic Behind Multidisciplinary Education**

The policy rationale behind NEP-2020, which focuses on multidisciplinary education, can be explained by the fact that the Indian higher education system has become heavily fragmented over time

and therefore, there is an urgent need to address its numerous fundamental flaws. Universities and colleges have long been structured in a disciplinarily strict manner that inhibits student flow, curtails intellectual exploration, and hinders meaningful interaction among departments over the past few decades (Saini 2015). It is a form of disaggregation in that it confines knowledge to small compartments, as well as creates graduates who lack contextual knowledge on how to solve complex societal problems. NEP-2020 aims to break silos by encouraging multidisciplinary designs to move knowledge more interdisciplinarity, thereby establishing a more integrated and connected academic ecosystem where knowledge shifts freely and easily across disciplines and fields. Simultaneously, the multidisciplinary mandate of NEP-2020 is strongly linked to the aim of enhancing employability in the rapidly changing international workforce. The contemporary type knowledge economy is now more inclined to regard hybrid professionals as individuals with a technical background, analytical, social, and innovative capabilities. It is equally true in technology, healthcare, communications, as well as in the fields of public policy and business: employers now demand graduates capable of cross-disciplinary adaptation, teamwork and cross-disciplinary problem-solving. Additionally, the NEP-2020 considers multidisciplinary education to be a driving force for innovation and creative problem-solving. Lightning rarely emerges from disciplinary knowledge per se, but rather as a result of cross-disciplinary engagement, where different points of view converge to generate new ideas, approaches, and solutions to problems.

### **Indian Higher Education Before NEP-2020**

The pre-NEP structure of Indian higher education was shaped by an expansive affiliation system in which thousands of colleges were linked to a limited number of central universities, a model initially intended to maintain uniform academic standards but which ultimately entrenched bureaucratic control and constrained institutional autonomy. This rigidity limited colleges' capacity to design curricula, introduce interdisciplinary offerings, or experiment with innovative pedagogies, leading academic programmes to become increasingly obsolete and disconnected from evolving societal and industry needs (Sheikh 2017). Compounding these limitations were rigid departmental silos within universities, where compartmentalized structures and minimal interdepartmental collaboration impeded the circulation of cross-disciplinary knowledge. Departments functioned as insulated units with their own rules and little incentive to engage in interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary teaching or research, thereby restricting the development of integrative academic practices (Shukla 2022). These structural barriers were reinforced by an exam-centric learning culture that dominated the pre-NEP landscape, privileging rote memorization and textbook reproduction over conceptual understanding, critical thinking and problem-solving. High-stakes assessment systems encouraged lecture-based pedagogies while discouraging inquiry-driven or experiential approaches, leaving students with limited

opportunities to cultivate multidisciplinary perspectives or higher-order cognitive abilities (Das 2021).

Until NEP-2020, Indian higher education was governed widely with its constituent bodies, including the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All-India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), as well as different State Higher Education Councils. Everybody had their own goals, regulations and permitted procedures. Although intended to provide quality and standardization in institutions of higher learning (HEIs), the result of this plethora of authorities was overlapping jurisdictions and administrative duplication. Universities often find themselves in a bureaucratic labyrinth when implementing new programs, changing the curriculum, or initiating interdisciplinary projects. This disjointed regulatory framework discouraged academic innovation, making it challenging to establish dynamic, multidisciplinary learning models within institutions (Kumar 2022).

A key issue before the NEP governance ecosystem was the autonomy conferred on most colleges and universities. Most HEIs, especially affiliated colleges, lacked control over their fundamental academic processes, including curriculum development, faculty hiring, evaluation requirements and financial decisions (Mahajan 2019). This absence of academic and administrative freedom meant that institutions failed to tailor their programs to local demands and experimented with new academic forms, such as majors, minors, open electives, or interdisciplinary degrees (Mehta 2021). Consequently, the institutions continued to rely on the main directions and failed to transform into multidisciplinary and dynamic environments that could stimulate innovation and holistic learning. The lack of independence also eroded institutional identity and strategic long-term planning.

Complex bureaucratic processes also influenced the Indian higher education governance structure, slowing down the decision-making process and limiting the dynamism of institutions. Systems of approvals were notorious for taking a long time and undergoing several levels of scrutiny by various regulatory bodies and government offices (NITI Aayog, 2024). The introduction of a new course, the amendment of a syllabus, or the establishment of a collaborative program required a significant amount of paperwork and queues, which was not conducive to experimentation and curriculum change. Centralization of power in decision-making also led to bureaucratic control, whereby faculty and institutions had minimal control over academic affairs. It was not very easy to follow learner-centered strategies, integrate technology, or implement multidisciplinary pathways, all of which are fundamental elements and part of the NEP-2020 vision. It meant that the pre-NEP governance and regulatory ecosystem was not adequate to support flexible, innovative, and globally competitive institutions of higher education.

### Teacher Preparation and Academic Culture:

- a) **Limited Interdisciplinary Training:** Inadequate interdisciplinary training of the faculty was one of the most significant deficits in Indian higher education prior to the introduction of NEP-2020. The vast majority of teachers had been trained in narrow operational disciplinary areas and frequently did postgraduate and doctoral training in very narrow subjects. Consequently, they were not exposed to other pedagogies, theories, and research methodologies beyond their own primary subject. It rendered it challenging for faculty to create or provide programs that integrated the arts, sciences, humanities, and social sciences. This disciplinary isolation was further exacerbated by the lack of systematic cross-disciplinary training, such as workshops, joint research teams, and interdisciplinary teaching fellows. As a result, the students were also denied the exposure to academic practices that linked knowledge across fields (Peters 2020).
  
- b) **Promotion Structures Favouring Narrow Specialization:** The systems of academic promotion and career advancement in Indian higher education historically placed a strong focus on powerful disciplinary research output, frequently quantified in terms of publications in field-based journals or, in a more archaic method of quantifying, in terms of the number of publications. This emphasis did not encourage the faculty to seek interdisciplinary collaboration or experiment with pedagogical innovation, as current appraisal systems did not support such efforts. The teachers became interested in pursuing their special interests in the field to avoid the risks associated with interdisciplinary projects, curriculum restructuring, or new modes of teaching. Consequently, the institutional culture had a predisposition to lean towards specialization rather than integration, which posed a challenge to the realization of a multidisciplinary programme and a holistic model of education (Raj 2022).

## **Case Studies of Emerging Multidisciplinary Models in India**

### **5.1 Ashoka University**

Ashoka University in India stands as a leading example of a multidisciplinary higher education institution grounded in the liberal arts philosophy, offering an academic model that emphasizes broad intellectual foundations before students pursue specialized fields of study (Singh 2020). Its liberal arts framework exposes learners to diverse domains across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and quantitative reasoning, thereby cultivating critical thinking, intercultural competence and advanced problem-solving skills. This pedagogical orientation closely aligns with the NEP-2020 emphasis on lifelong, multidimensional learning by encouraging exploration rather than early academic compartmentalization. A defining strength of Ashoka's model is its intentionally cross-disciplinary

curriculum design, which allows students to combine majors, minors and concentrations across multiple fields, fostering individualized and integrative academic trajectories (Subramanian 2021). Ashoka’s experience offers several instructive lessons for NEP implementation: it illustrates that innovative and flexible curriculum design becomes possible through robust academic autonomy (Ashoka University 2024); it underscores the centrality of faculty development in equipping instructors to teach interdisciplinary courses with confidence; it demonstrates how writing-intensive, research-oriented and experiential pedagogies effectively cultivate NEP-compatible twenty-first-century skills; and it provides a working model of how the multidisciplinary aspirations of NEP-2020 can be operationalized through adaptive course structures, open electives and sustained cross-departmental integration (Tamrakar 2024).

## **5.2 Azim Premji University**

Azim Premji University represents another compelling model of multidisciplinary education in India, particularly in its integration of the social sciences, public policy, and education studies (Patil 2021). Its academic structure is grounded in a mission-oriented commitment to social change, which naturally fosters a multidisciplinary approach and exposes students to fields such as development studies, economics, sustainability, public health, governance, education, and psychology. This structure equips learners to interpret complex social issues through multiple analytical lenses while synthesizing conceptual knowledge with practical engagement. By weaving together social sciences, policy and education, the university cultivates a holistic understanding of the interdependencies shaping real-world challenges—an ethos aligned with the NEP-2020 vision of socially relevant, whole-person education. A core strength of Azim Premji University lies in its investment in innovative pedagogical models (Srinivasan 2022), including a strong emphasis on experiential and field-based learning in which students apply classroom knowledge within rural communities, NGOs, and government institutions (Azim Premji University 2023). This commitment is reflected in pedagogical practices that incorporate case studies, reflective dialogue, collaborative and project-based learning and the use of faculty-led interdisciplinary research and field experience to create applied learning environments. The institution’s focus on nurturing critical thinking, empathy, social responsibility, and problem-solving mirrors the intellectual and ethical capacities prioritized by NEP-2020 (Aithal 2020b).

## **5.3 IIT Delhi**

In recent years, IIT Delhi has undergone a substantial transformation to respond to India’s growing demand for multidisciplinary education, moving beyond its historically engineering-centric and conservative institutional structure by establishing new academic schools, expanding departmental

scopes, and creating flexible curricular pathways that allow students to explore fields outside their core discipline (Srinivasan 2022). These reforms have facilitated the emergence of a more inclusive academic ecosystem in which learners and faculty engage with the humanities, design, public policy, artificial intelligence and applied sciences in an integrated manner. Complementing these structural shifts, the institute has also developed robust interdisciplinary research clusters that promote collaboration across diverse domains to address complex national and global challenges such as sustainability, healthcare, digital transformation, and climate science. By drawing together expertise from engineering, the natural and social sciences and policy studies, these clusters exemplify institution-wide commitment to cross-disciplinary inquiry. IIT Delhi's transition toward flexible curricular structures, diversified academic programmes, strengthened humanities and social sciences offerings and newly established interdisciplinary schools and centres underscores the capacity of traditionally specialized institutions to effectively operationalize the NEP-2020 vision of research-driven, academically integrated, and multidimensional higher education.

#### **5.4 Delhi University**

Delhi University has been a central actor in India's higher education reform landscape, most notably through its implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) and the introduction of major curricular revisions designed to enhance flexibility, promote multidisciplinary learning, and align academic structures with international norms (Aithal 2020c). The FYUP framework expands students' academic choices by offering a wider array of foundational courses, open electives, and disciplinary pathways, thereby enabling learners to pursue multiple academic routes rather than remaining confined to a single specialization. While these reforms mark significant progress, Delhi University continues to grapple with the structural challenges posed by its vast scale, heterogeneous student population, and complex governance arrangements. With more than ninety affiliated colleges operating under divergent resource conditions and administrative capacities, achieving consistent implementation of multidisciplinary reforms across the system remains difficult. Variations in infrastructure, faculty strength, and institutional preparedness result in uneven adoption of NEP-aligned initiatives, while multi-layered bureaucratic processes further slow decision-making and hinder the effective rollout of innovative academic structures (Indian Institute of Technology Delhi 2023; Bhoi 2025). These institutional realities highlight both the potential and the constraints of transforming large public universities into fully multidisciplinary institutions in accordance with the ambitions of NEP-2020.

## **Opportunities and Implementation Pathways**

### **6.1 Governance Reforms**

Governance reforms proposed under NEP-2020 foreground the need for strengthened autonomy frameworks, revised accreditation and ranking structures and institutional restructuring through HEI clusters, all of which are essential for advancing a multidisciplinary higher education system. Greater academic and administrative autonomy enables universities to redesign curricula, introduce interdisciplinary courses, update programmes in response to social and technological shifts and innovate with assessment methods, co-teaching models, and flexible credit structures. Such autonomy also facilitates more responsive decision-making, allowing institutions to tailor academic strategies to context-specific needs rather than conforming strictly to uniform regulatory mandates. Complementing this, NEP-2020's shift toward accreditation frameworks that prioritise learning outcomes, research ecosystems, innovation, and student engagement—rather than infrastructure-based metrics—creates incentives for institutions to diversify their curricula through multidisciplinary programmes, skill-oriented modules, and experiential learning components. Institutions that effectively implement cross-disciplinary learning stand to benefit within these outcome-based systems, encouraging sector-wide alignment with NEP's multidisciplinary vision. Additionally, the restructuring of institutions into HEI clusters fosters collaborative academic ecologies in which neighbouring colleges and universities may share faculty, laboratories, libraries, research facilities, and elective courses. This model expands access to multidisciplinary teaching resources for smaller or under-resourced institutions, while enabling joint degrees, common core courses, and collaborative research initiatives, thereby reinforcing a more integrated and equitable higher education landscape.

### **6.2 Pedagogical and Curriculum Innovations**

A common core curriculum that introduces all students to foundational knowledge in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and communication skills establishes broad intellectual exposure and a shared academic base essential for pursuing high-level interdisciplinary education, whether within or beyond a chosen major. Such core structures cultivate key competencies—including analytical reasoning, writing proficiency, ethical reflection, and quantitative literacy—that underpin multidisciplinary engagement. Complementing this foundation, project-based and experiential learning models involving real-world projects, internships, fieldwork, and community participation strengthen the connection between theory and practice while reinforcing critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and teamwork, all of which align with the twenty-first-century skill agenda of NEP-2020. These experiential formats immerse students in multidisciplinary environments where they must integrate knowledge from multiple domains to address practical challenges. Credit-transfer mobility,

enabled through mechanisms such as the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), further expands interdisciplinary possibilities by allowing students to earn credits across institutions and disciplines, pursue joint programmes, move across HEI clusters, and construct customized, multi-domain academic pathways. Collaborative teaching models also play a pivotal role, as co-teaching across fields enriches classroom dialogue, exposes students to diverse disciplinary perspectives, and breaks down departmental silos; interdisciplinary teaching teams are particularly effective in designing integrated courses in areas such as science–policy, technology–ethics and environment–economics, thereby enhancing the coherence and depth of multidisciplinary learning.

## Conclusion

The implementation of NEP-2020 is one of the most crucial events in the history of Indian higher education, presenting a radical vision for how knowledge is created, organized, and taught. The demand for multidisciplinary universities in policy is not only about structural change but also about philosophical change, involving a shift towards more holistic, flexible, and integrative learning. As demonstrated in this paper, on the one hand, the conceptual basis of multidisciplinary education is already present, grounded in the worldwide liberal arts tradition, constructivist pedagogy, 21st-century skills models, and outcome-based educational models. However, on the other hand, there is a challenge in translating these ideas into the reality of the Indian institutional environment, which is characterized by a diverse and often inflexible institutional culture. The case studies analyzed, including those of Ashoka University, Azim Premji University, IIT Delhi and the University of Delhi, indicate that significant change is possible and is currently in the implementation process. These institutions demonstrate how flexible curricula, cross-disciplinary partnerships, innovative teaching models, and research-based practices can foster vibrant academic ecosystems that align with the objectives of NEP-2020. Simultaneously, they also expose the structural barriers that still underpin change, such as a lack of institutional autonomy, divided rule, hard-bopped departmental divisions, and unequal faculty ability to practice interdisciplinary teaching. The analysis reveals that institutional commitment and profound cultural change are the key factors that will ultimately make NEP-2020's multidisciplinary vision successful.

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# India–Korea CEPA: A Multi-Method Assessment of Trade in Articles of Iron and Steel

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## Abstract

This paper critically assesses the India and Korea’s Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) trade impact, focusing on articles of iron and steel (HS Chapter 73). The study used a multimethod assessment to provide a rigorous evaluation of bilateral trade outcomes under India-Korea CEPA by using descriptive analysis to understand the tariff cuts and trade trends followed by difference-in-differences (DiD) method, and SMART partial-equilibrium simulation to disentangle residual effects. Korea by the year 2016, completely eliminated its tariff on Indian exports yet the exports recorded a modest growth. On contrary, Korea’s exports saw a sharp increase post India’s tariff cuts but later diminished due to safeguard measures and improved domestic capacity by India. The DiD results shows negative coefficients for exports and imports with non-FTA partners which implies that CEPA underperformed as compared to counterfactual. SMART simulations confirm these asymmetric results with India’s export gains supported by positive residual non-tariff effects. However, Korea’s tariff-driven benefits, as predicted, were offset via safeguard duties plus policy frictions.

Overall, the results reveal asymmetric and limited trade gains under India-Korea CEPA. The study highlights that balanced durable trade benefits results not just from tariff reduction but improved competitiveness and properly managed non-tariff barriers. Specially India needs to manage the policy related measures along with structural frictions to secure more durable trade gains

## Keywords

India-Korea CEPA, Articles of Iron and Steel (HS Chapter 73), Difference-in-Difference, SMART Simulation

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## Introduction

India with the Republic of Korea (ROK) have deepened economic ties progressively within two decades. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signing in 2009 was a momentum. It came into force in 2010, committing both of these countries to substantial tariff reductions. It covers nearly 93% of India's export items going to Korea and 85% of Korea's export items sent to India (Banik & Kim, 2022). Subsequent visits such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to Seoul during May 2015 and President Moon Jae-in visiting New Delhi during July 2018 further reinforced such a bilateral framework. CEPA aligns to Korea's "New Southern Policy," identifying India as a key partner, as Korea is an important part of India's "Look East Policy," and the two governments have set a USD 30 billion trade target by 2030 (GOI, 2021). Within this expanding partnership, however, a rather impressive asymmetry reveals the iron with steel sector (HS 73). India's exports of articles for iron and also steel to Korea grew from around USD 2.7 million to about USD 45.3 million from the year 2000 to the year 2023. During that time, Korea's exports to India grew from USD 17.3 million exceeding USD 308.7 million. Even with Korea completely scrapping tariffs by 2016 and India substantially cutting tariffs. India's exports responded modestly as compared to Korea's export trends for similar years. HS 73 turns into quite a compelling case for the evaluation of CEPA's trade impact due to this divergence in liberalization commitments.

The India-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is being reviewed as well as upgraded, in order to better meet the objectives originally envisaged also to reflect the evolving requirements for both parties (Sahoo et al., 2023). Evaluating its outcomes is even more vital for HS 73, since it is a strategically important industry. As an important input for infrastructure and industrial development this sector has been at the core for bilateral trade dynamics because it is globally one of the most important industries. Korea completely eliminated tariffs, and India substantially cut tariffs, but trade outcomes in iron and steel have remained uneven. These outcomes do reflect structural competitiveness gaps in addition to non-tariff barriers that still persist. All recent assessments highlight the sector's growing vulnerabilities including the CRISIL (2025) forecast of India's rising steel demand, the Joint Plant Committee's (2025) warning of domestic supply constraints, and the OECD's (2025) outlook on global overcapacity. India is seen as a key growth driver globally according to World Steel in Figures 2025 within a softening world demand backdrop in general, a view that is echoed in Indian public sources anticipating strong domestic consumption growth through 2025. Therefore, timely investigation of CEPA's limitations can be performed via a closer examination of trade flows, patterns, as well as impacts and inform evidence-based inputs into its forthcoming revision.

Despite the importance of the steel sector, strict causal evaluations about CEPA's impact are scarce when using counterfactual approaches. A multi-method evaluation of CEPA's impact on India, Korea trade in articles of iron and steel (HS 73) addresses this gap. The analysis (i) describes trade flows including tariff trajectories, (ii) benchmarks bilateral trade outcomes against non-FTA partners using a difference-in-differences (DiD) approach, and (iii) simulates SMART partial-equilibrium to disentangle tariff-driven and residual non-tariff effects. The study provides evidence through disentangling of tariff-driven effects. These approaches do together enable a comprehension of CEPA's impact in a more thorough way on bilateral trade's most sensitive segment.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the literature review (Section 2) and methodological framework (Section 3) evaluate trade outcomes, and the empirical findings (Section 4) integrated descriptive analysis, a difference-in-differences (DiD) approach, and SMART partial-equilibrium simulations. Section 5 contains policy implications, and Section 6 is the conclusion. Thus, the study contributes to sector-specific and evidence-based literature and further debates the performance in addition to future revision of India's FTAs.

## Literature Review

The economic evaluation of trade agreements has is mainly along two complementary trajectories: simulation-based models (partial-equilibrium (PE) and computable general equilibrium (CGE) frameworks), and econometric approaches that estimate causal effects relative to a counterfactual. Both approaches underscore the central fact that tariff liberalization alone does not guarantee trade growth; trade outcomes are derived by sectoral competitiveness, non-tariff measures (NTMs), and policy effectiveness. In the India–Republic of Korea CEPA, implemented in 2010, these frictions are particularly salient for articles of iron and steel (HS 73), a segment subject to trade remedies and industrial policy interactions. For HS 73, this study explicitly integrates tariff line SMART simulations along with a sectoral difference in differences (DiD) design under CEPA. Then the study separates effects tariffs driven, with residual non-tariff effects.

Ahmed (2010) employed SMART partial-equilibrium model coupled with the GTAP CGE framework is one of the earliest systematic evaluations of CEPA. His results suggested the idea that both bilateral trade as well as consumer surplus would increase under a full liberalization. However, the welfare distribution was uneven since Korea would gain more, and India risked welfare losses under certain closures. The study highlighted gains within sensitive sectors like iron and steel would likely be offset by tariff revenue losses and safeguard use. To help delineate both the potential and the limits involved

in tariff-driven integration, the methodology draws upon Jammes and Olarreaga (2005) for SMART mechanics and upon Hertel (1997) and Narayanan and Walmsley (2008) for the GTAP model and database.

Ex post studies highlight varied CEPA results among sectors. Banik and Kim (2022) do find a structural asymmetry that the Republic of Korea retains a comparative advantage for merchandise goods while India's relative strength is in services, and this does imply that India's persistent overall deficit under CEPA is driven by merchandise trade rather than services. Korea's exports into India are still focused on manufactures of high value like machinery, iron and steel, and electrical equipment, a pattern where India's export basket orients more low value goods and raw material.

At one time, Cho (2012), Taneja, Kalita, and Saluja (2012), and Seshadri (2015) document how tariff preferences expanded market access on paper. However, Indian exporters frequently faced standards along with certification hurdles, restrictive rules of origin, then low utilization, limiting effective gains. Gupta (2024) shows India's services exports for Korea increased on a more strong level than imports out of Korea after CEPA. India's bilateral services surplus increased because of this.

Several studies highlight the sector-specific treatment which steel requires. Steel ranks among the most policy-distorted industries globally OECD (2023) reports stress. It is subject to repeated safeguard and anti-dumping and countervailing actions. India, according to Taneja et al. (2014), used steel protection after CEPA's start since it curbed Korea's actual export profits. Industrial competitiveness in steel, Yedla and Cho (2019) further note, is shaped via capacity expansion policies, global supply cycles, environmental regulations, along with tariffs. These findings suggest interpreting tariff liberalization together with global price dynamics and domestic industrial policies.

Studies on CEPA have relied heavily up to this point on ex-ante simulation (Ahmed, 2010), descriptive trade indices (Taneja et al., 2012, 2014; Seshadri, 2015), and also sectoral competitiveness analysis (Yedla & Cho, 2019). However, for thorough causal evaluation with counterfactual methods it is still underexplored, especially for sensitive sectors such as steel. For infrastructure, industrial demand, also construction, India has high steel demand growth of 8.5%-9% in 2025, recently reported by CRISIL and Indian Steel Trend Report. However, this might sharply increase the imports since domestic production grows slowly because plant maintenance lags plus capacity utilization constrains (Joint Plant Committee, 2025; CRISIL, 2025). Also, joint global action should quickly work to stabilize this area. Steel overcapacity worldwide shall probably greatly grow near 2027, fueling demand. OECD 2025, this will result in lower prices. Consequently, there will be a lessening of profit margins.

The reviewed literature stresses about three consistent findings. CEPA's advantages were asymmetric initially: India had greater force in services and Korea made firm gains in goods trade (Banik & Kim, 2022; Gupta, 2024). Second, export growth has been insufficient as a result of tariff liberalization alone, for outcomes have been restricted through NTBs, safeguard measures, as well as supply-side constraints (Ahmed, 2010; Taneja et al., 2014). Sectoral case studies show iron and steel face greater frictions than overall trade implies therefore they require deeper evaluation. Yet even with wide-ranging simulation exercises, no study has simulated tariff-lines. Also, no study has approached the topic by way of counterfactual econometrics. This paper fills in that gap through applying of SMART simulations with a difference-in-differences framework to HS 73 trade. Analysis highlights the effects that are asymmetric and limited regarding CEPA within India-Korea trade.

## Methodology

This study employs a thorough methodological framework toward evaluating the trade impact on articles of iron and steel (HS Code Chapter 73) of the India, Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Since the steel sector has a globally sensitive and protected nature, the analysis integrates empirical trade data with predictive simulation techniques. UN Comtrade has been accessed for bilateral trade data, and the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) for tariff schedules. The World Bank WDI and the WTO Tariff Database provide other supplementary indicators. The study period spans 2000, 2023 for it enables a strong comparison of pre- and post-CEPA trade outcomes.

## Difference-in-Differences (DiD) Method

To assess the trade impact regarding India's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) on the articles of iron and steel sector (HS Chapter 73), the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) approach is employed in this study. The method isolates FTA implementation's effect while controlling for global trade shocks along with other time-varying factors. It is especially well suited for policy evaluation work. Even though a formal regression model has not been used, this manual implementation of DiD can assess the policy's impact simply and intuitively using available data. In this framework, trade with non-FTA countries serves as the control group, while India's trade with FTA partner countries is defined as being the treatment group. Trade values get compared across both the pre-FTA period and the post-FTA period.

The DiD estimator is calculated as:

$$DiD = (\bar{Y}_{Treatment,Post} - \bar{Y}_{Treatment,Pre}) - (\bar{Y}_{Control,Post} - \bar{Y}_{Control,Pre})$$

Where,

- Y Treatment, Pre: Average trade value (exports/imports) with the treatment group before the implementation of the agreement.
- Y Treatment, Post: Average trade value with the treatment group after the implementation of the agreement.
- Y Control, Pre: Average trade value with the control group of countries, before the agreement period.
- Y Control, Post: Average trade value with the control group after the agreement period.

By comparing the change within trade values from the pre- to the post-FTA times, the DiD estimator isolates the net effect within the FTA across both the treatment group and also the control group. A positive DiD value shows that trade with FTA partners grew faster than with control countries. A negative DiD value implies that trade toward FTA partners performed worse relative to the counterfactual because this suggests limited or adverse effects of the agreement, while a positive value reflects a favourable impact.

### **Simulation Analysis of Trade Scenarios with FTA Partner**

The second phase utilized within the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) platform's SMART model. SMART is a partial equilibrium model that simulates trade flow changes when policy interventions cut tariffs. The model estimates trade effects via integrating elasticity assumptions alongside actual tariff data, with this integration providing a standardized approach to project expected changes following FTA implementation (Jammes &Olarreaga, 2005). We did conduct some SMART simulations specifically for Chapter 73. These simulations worked toward a focused prediction for the Total Trade Effect following India's FTA with South Korea.

### **Steps to calculate residual non-tariff effect based on Actual Value**

<p><b>STEP 1</b></p> <p>Extract the Export Values for India i.e., Actual value (2023)</p>
<p><b>STEP 2</b></p> <p>Calculate the New Value (Initial Value+Total Tariff Effect (TTE) from SMART model)</p>
<p><b>STEP 3</b></p> <p>Residual Non-Tariff Effect (Actual Value-New Value)</p>

Notes- Initial value is the trade value before the implementation of FTA, and Actual Value is the present trade value (2023).

A three-step approach calculates the residual non-tariff effect that is based on actual value in order. Tariff reduction and elimination cause increases to exports, which this method allows us to separate. Actual export value is extracted out from WITS. That extraction is for 2023. New value is calculated secondly via adding total tariff effect from the SMART model with initial trade value. The residual non-tariff effect is calculated by subtracting actual value from that new value at the last.

**Steps to calculate the tariff and residual non-tariff effect based on predicted value**

<p><b>Step 1</b> Extract the Export Values for India as well as Partner country</p>
<p><b>Step 2</b> Calculate the Average Annual Growth Rate of India as well as Partner and non-FTA partners</p>
<p><b>Step 3</b> Calculate the difference Average Annual Growth rate (AAGR)</p>
<p><b>Step 4</b> Calculate the New Value i.e., Simulated FTA Value (Exp*(1+Difference AAGR))</p>
<p><b>Step 5</b> Estimate the FTA Total Trade Effect =New Value- Initial Value</p>
<p><b>Step 6</b> Residual Non-FTA effect = FTA Total Trade Effect -TotalTariff Effect from SMART Model</p>

Notes- Initial value is the trade value before the implementation of FTA

Actual Value is the present trade value.

We implemented for us a linear cut method, based upon trade which is following a natural growth trajectory even without FTA intervention. This approach began after it calculated the Annual Average Growth Rate (AAGR) of India's iron and steel trade with FTA partner during post-implementation years. We then compared these rates against what was the AAGR of India's trade with non-FTA countries during corresponding periods. We found the “net effect” from the FTA through examination of the difference between those growth patterns. This did effectively control for more broader global trade conditions that then might have influenced trade flows regardless of preferential agreements.

To construct a scenario that is counterfactual that represents trade patterns projected when FTA is absent. We did implement the FTA year by adjusting the initial trade value bit by bit to calculate the net growth differential. Across all the years, this methodology employs multiplication of the base trade value by the adjusted AAGR (1+adjusted growth rate) simply. A simulated trade path is shown by this

here in light of the absence of a Free Trade Agreement for India. For ascertaining the FTA impact on trade, the anticipated value is compared with the observed trade value. A negative value indicates underperformance despite a concessional tariff agreement. A positive effect rather shows results exceeding predictions. Studying actual trade results and creating forecasting gives real support and empirical justification for theory. The global market is unstable as there exist protectionist policies at a global level that go along with those tariff reduction measures. On account of all of these factors, the method does provide quite reliable evidence-based results that help analyse the impact of FTA on the trade outcomes in iron and steel sector.

## Empirical Results:

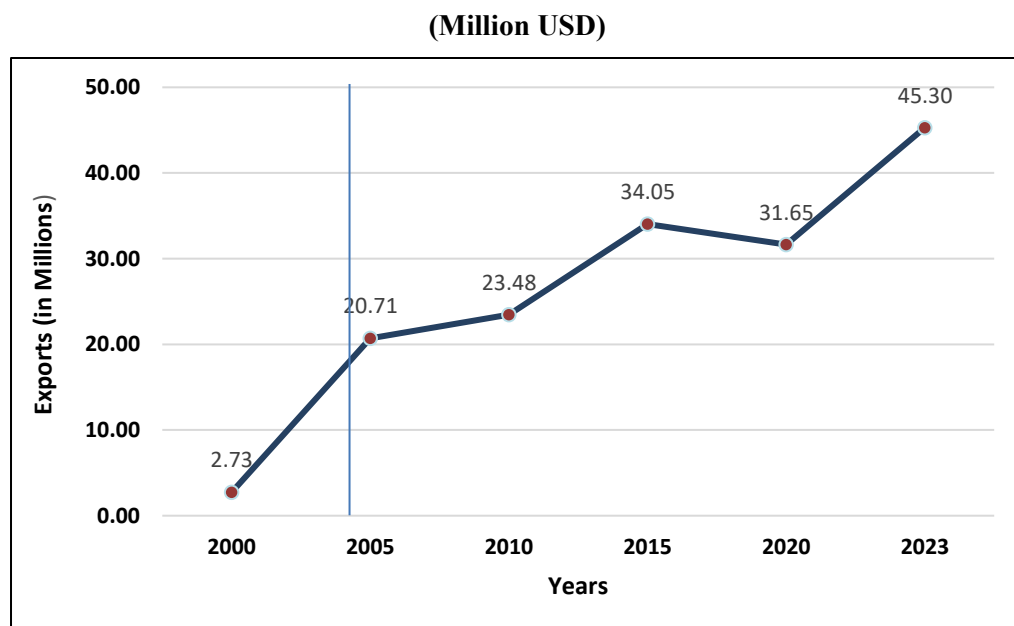
### Descriptive Analysis

Having established the methodological framework for analysis we now turn to the empirical evidence as to how India's Free Trade Agreement have shaped bilateral trade relationships with South Korea. In this section we present a detailed examination toward tariff trajectories as well as trade flow between India and South Korea with which it has implemented free trade arrangement. This analysis covers a time frame spanning approximately two decades (2000-2023) in order to capture periods both before and after FTA implementation.

### Assessment of Trade Volumes and Tariff Rates

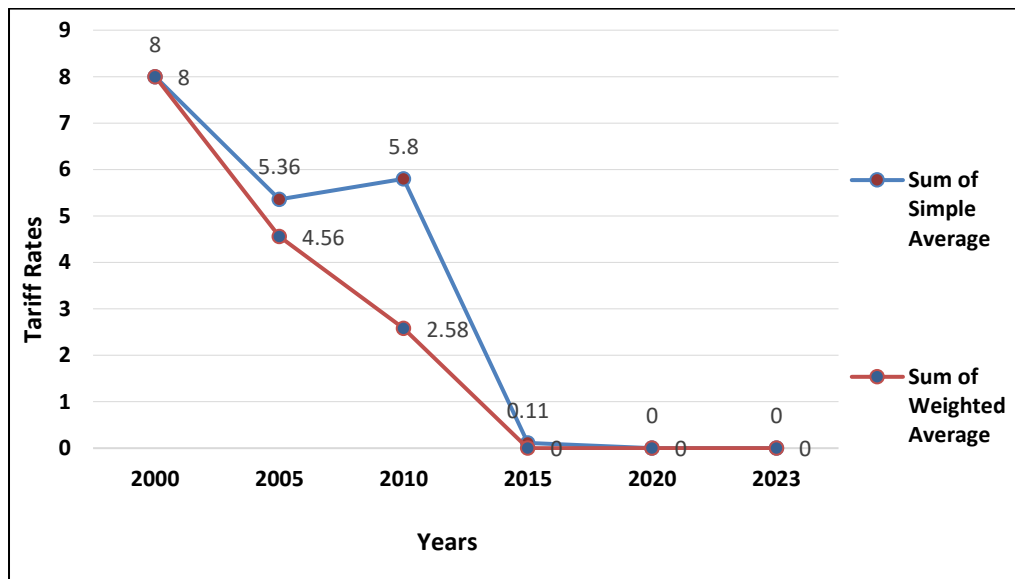
This section focuses on trade volume as well as tariff structures since these jointly impact India and South Korea trade. Examining these jointly matters to obtain for a much clearer perspective of how these policies affect the bilateral trade flow.

**Figure 1 Indian Export of Articles of Iron and Steel to South Korea (Source: WITS Database)**



India's exports to South Korea of articles of iron and as steel in Figure 1 have grown overall since 2000, but the trajectory does not fully align with tariff concessions secured under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) also has been uneven. Exports rose from a modest USD 2.73 million back in 2000 to USD 20.71 million in 2005 because India integrated increasingly into global value chains, as demand increased in Korea. By 2010 CEPA was implemented, and exports that year reached USD 23.48 million. This figure indicates just slight growth for the prior five years. Exports sharply increased right after the FTA as they reached USD 34.05 million in 2015 suggesting tariff cuts likely offered some stimulation. However, momentum faltered soon thereafter because exports fell slightly to around USD 31.65 million in 2020 plus this coincided with global steel market volatility while possibly reflecting particular supply-side constraints including Korean competition. In 2023 exports reached USD 45.30 million with a strong recovery the highest level reviewed. The export trajectory when it is taken together highlights that while CEPA eased some expansion tariff elimination acting alone did not generate transformative or sustained growth in India's iron and steel exports directed to Korea.

**Figure 2 South Korea Tariff Rates on Imports of Articles of Iron and Steel from India**



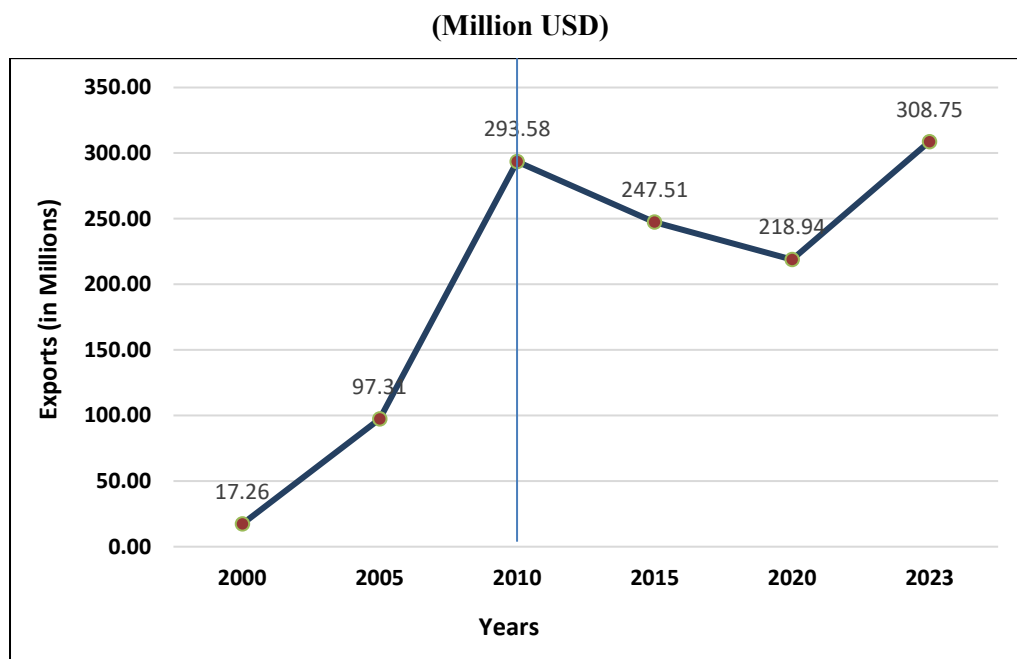
Source: WITS Database

South Korea's tariff profile that is for Indian articles of iron and steel in figure 2 shows a clear and deliberate path for liberalization which culminated in complete duty-free access after 2016. In 2000, both the simple average with weighted average tariff rates stood at approximately 8 percent for that signified substantial entry barriers. Tariff levels had fallen moderately by 2005, with the weighted average reaching 4.56 percent. The simple average stayed elevated at 5.36 percent reflecting protection's gradual reduction even before CEPA. Following entry of the agreement into force back in

2010 tariff rates declined quite sharply so by 2015 the simple average had dropped to 2.58 percent while the weighted average fell quite close to zero (0.11 percent) which was consistent with Korea's phased tariff elimination commitments. From 2016 and after that, both the tariff measures converged at 0 percent since that ensured that Indian exporters faced absolutely no tariff barriers within the Korean market. India's exports did not expand proportionately, as Figure 1 shows, even despite this full liberalization. Non-tariff factors such as quality standards, supply competitiveness, and global market dynamics continued to constrain India's ability to fully exploit tariff concessions provided by Korea because CEPA effectively dismantled tariff barriers, as this disconnect underscores.

India's exports to Korea did not increase in proportion (Figure 1) though South Korea's tariffs on Indian iron and steel items fell to zero by 2016 (Figure 2). Tariff elimination under CEPA was indeed necessary, but was insufficient to drive of sustained export. Competitiveness problems along with non-tariff barriers had a key impact.

**Figure 3 South Korea Export of Articles of Iron and Steel to India**

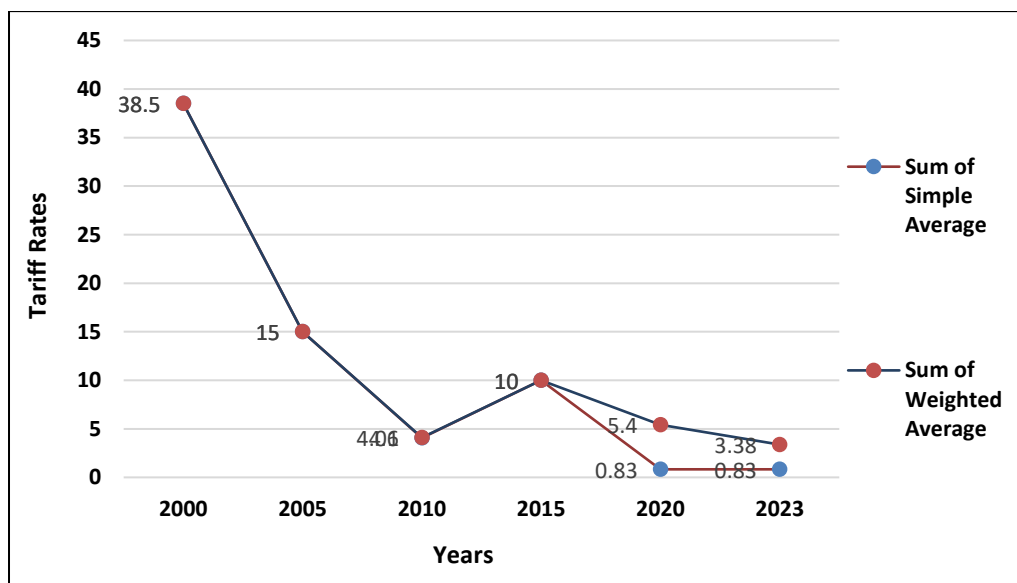


Source: WITS Database

South Korea's exports of articles of iron and steel to India within figure 3 did grow rather sharply in both the pre- and immediate post-CEPA years, even though subsequent trends reveal volatility, and also partially taper off. India's need grew for better steel products as Korea was competitive regarding value-added steel goods so exports rose from USD 17.26 million in 2000 to USD 97.34 million in 2005. Korean exports surged dramatically up to USD 295.58 million by 2010, the year CEPA came into force, tripling in just five years. Tariff concessions were well-positioned and exploited by Korean firms. Therefore, this spike suggests firms captured Indian market share immediately upon CEPA's

implementation. However, momentum softened thereafter because exports declined down to USD 247.51 million in 2015 and further down to USD 218.94 million in 2020. The decline coincides with India’s steel capacity growing domestically as global demand is shocking along with India stressing a policy on self-reliance in steel production. Korean exports did slightly exceed their peak back in 2010 by 2023. However, these exports rose to USD 308.75 million. Korea’s strength within high-grade specialized steel categories reflects this recovery where Indian producers are less competitive. India’s industrial policies and cyclical global steel conditions constrained sustained growth however the pattern highlights Korea’s early substantial export gains under CEPA overall.

**Figure 4 Indian Tariff Rates on Imports of Articles of Iron and Steel from South Korea**



Source: WITS Database

India’s tariff regime on Korean iron and steel articles reveals an obvious liberalization trend in figure 4, albeit with reversals reflecting India’s overall industrial policy issues. Average tariff rates in 2000 were prohibitively high at 38.5% because they strongly protected the domestic steel industry. By 2005, tariffs already fell steeply to 15%, with India committed to the WTO as gradually integrating into global trade. By 2010, the weighted average reduced further to 4.06%. Notably, the simple average rose to 10%, a reflection of varied deregulation across tariffs. After CEPA’s implementation, tariffs declined further, with tariffs reaching 0.83% (weighted) as well as 5.7% (simple average) by 2020. Tariffs averaged minimal amounts by 2023 (around 0.8, 3.4%). This confirms India is committed to nearly complete tariff liberalization with Korea in this sector. Indian tariff barriers saw an important reduction, in particular on high-volume import lines, as the trajectory reveals, which is the first of a couple of important dynamics: India also maintained a bit higher tariffs on some sensitive products (reflected in the divergence between simple and weighted averages), consistent with its strategy for

protection of vulnerable segments of the domestic steel industry.

Figures 3 and 4 when they are considered together depict those asymmetric benefits of CEPA: despite total tariff elimination, India's exports to Korea (Figure 1 above) grew only modestly, while Korea's exports to India surged sharply after tariff reductions. The data do suggest that CEPA favored Korea more in the sector of iron and steel. This sparks inquiries as to whether India was prepared for leveraging reciprocal market access.

### Results of Difference in Difference Method

While the descriptive analysis highlighted broad trends as well as asymmetries in India, Korea trade in articles of iron and steel (HS 73), which does not establish causality. A Difference-in-Differences (DiD) framework is used in order to address this certain issue. CEPA's effects are then benchmarked against a counterfactual shown by India's trade with non-FTA partners. DiD estimates are in Table 1 and these estimates compare changes during pre-FTA and post-FTA times. Positive values indicate trade performs more strongly with Korea in relation to the control group, whereas negative values reflect performance weakens under CEPA compared to the counterfactual.

**Table 1 Difference-in-Differences Results for India–Korea Trade  
(Top 10 vs. All Non-FTA Countries)**

Top 10 Non-FTA Countries (Control Group)		
	(log DiD)	% Change
Total Trade	-0.13	-12.38
Exports	-0.15	-13.66
Imports	-0.23	-20.88
All Non-FTA Countries (Control Group)		
	(log DiD)	% Change
Total Trade	-0.08	-7.55
Exports	-0.15	-13.66
Imports	-0.14	-12.65

Source: Author's own calculation

Note: Estimation based on exports, imports, and total trade between 2000-2023 for HS code Chapter 73 Articles of Iron and Steel

Table 1 reports difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation results for India, Korea bilateral trade since the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) started in 2010. Since estimations use of the natural logarithm for trade values, coefficients can be interpreted roughly as percentage changes from a counterfactual without CEPA implementation. Two alternative control groups considered were all non-FTA trading partners along with India's top-10 non-FTA trading partners. Alternative control

groups allow testing for results robustness. Checking of outcomes sensitivity to the selection of a control group is also enabled.

### **Total Trade**

The DiD coefficient for total India, Korea trade is negative in both specifications given total bilateral trade did perform worse relative to India's non-FTA partners following the CEPA. If top-10 non-FTA partners form the control group, the coefficient is  $-0.132$  equalling a 12.4% drop in overall trade versus the counterfactual. The estimated effect is smaller in its magnitude when all non-FTA countries are used ( $-0.079$ , that is, or a 7.6% decline). These estimates difference highlight how choosing a control group matters: the narrower set of top-10 partners, as well as who compare more closely to Korea in trade intensity, suggests a sharper adverse effect, while the broader set of partners leads to mild decline.

### **Exports (India to Korea)**

India's exports to Korea stay constantly negative under both specifications. In the event that a comparison is against all non-FTA countries or against the top-10 non-FTA group, the DiD estimate is  $-0.147$  ( $\approx 13.7\%$  decline). This kind of result is of course particularly important. One stated objective of the CEPA was increasing India's export access to the Korean market. Instead, exports appear to have grown less (or declined more) than they would have without the agreement, which suggests either preferences were utilized to a limited extent, barriers existed for specific products (such as non-tariff measures), or Korea's other FTA partners competed strongly.

### **Imports (Korea to India)**

Imports show the most substantial adverse impact. when the top-10 non-FTA partners are the control group, the DiD estimate is  $-0.234$ , also that translates to a 20.9% decline in imports relative to the counterfactual. The magnitude falls to  $-0.135$  ( $\approx 12.7\%$  decline) with the broader control group used, remaining strongly negative. This suggests the idea that Korean exporters did not gain so substantially from that CEPA. Likewise, India's imports from non-FTA partners changed in that period. Possible explanations include that India substitutes inside its import basket, that suppliers outside Korea are cheaper or more competitive, or that Korea reorients its own trade toward other markets.

Overall, the results show for positive trade effects expected in either direction were not generated by the India, Korea CEPA. Imports alongside exports saw relative decreases, yet the magnitude differed among groups. The estimates happen to be consistently negative throughout all specifications so this lends credibility to the conclusion that the CEPA's impact was not expansionary for bilateral trade.

Estimating import sensitivity to the control group also signals that choosing appropriate counterfactuals carefully matters as well as suggesting that India traded with its closest non-FTA partners were unfavourable for Korea in the post-CEPA years. Exports persistently suffer from a negative effect, which underscores structural constraints in India's export competitiveness. Tariff concessions alone have limited power because they fail to increase exports.

### Simulation Analysis of Trade Scenarios with FTA Partners

Our investigation explores how simulated trade values differ quite from actual values for India's articles of iron and steel exports (Chapter 73) with Korea FTA partner country after their agreement. Developed by the World Bank as well as UNCTAD, the study used a partial equilibrium tool i.e., SMART model to simulate the different trade flows due to FTA implementation. Based on the adjusted growth rates, the simulated values through linear projection, using non-FTA trends as the benchmark. We sought out to isolate just what the net impact of all these trade agreements was through this specific approach. We also intended to make a determination as to whether or not these agreements delivered on their promised benefits in real-world trade volumes.

**Table 2 Tariff and Non-Tariff Effect based Actual Values in Chapter 72**  
(Values in USD '000)  
(India as exporter)

Country	India
FTA Implementation Year	2010
Actual Value (2023)	45297.37
New Value (Initial Value + Total Tariff Effect from SMART)	26579.37
Residual Non-Tariff Effect	18718.37

Author's own calculation

In contrast to South Korea, India's export performance presents a more favourable outcome under the CEPA framework. In 2023, what was the actual export value of India to South Korea. It was USD 45,297.37 ('000). This is greatly higher than the predicted tariff-based value of USD 26,579.37 ('000). A positive non-tariff residual effect in the amount of USD 18,718.37 ('000) was yielded here.

India's steel exports expansion was because of factors beyond tariff liberalization as a positive residual indicates. Trade complementarities linking India with South Korea along with demand-side drivers within the Korean market or also India's steel products competitive positioning may get included. Tariff liberalization also likely spurred exports. India's export performance also increased through helpful market dynamics or non-tariff elements.

**Table 3 Tariff and Non-Tariff Effect based Predicted Values in Chapter 72****(Values in USD ‘000)****(India as exporter)**

Country	India
FTA Implementation Year	2010
Initial Trade Value	24496.49
New Value	45580.57
FTA Total Trade Effect	21084.08
Total Tariff Effect from SMART	2082.88
Residual Non-Tariff Effect	19001.20

Author's own calculation

Table 3 presents India's iron and steel exports' decomposition toward South Korea under the CEPA. The estimated simulated FTA total trade effect for the studied period is USD 21,084 thousand. The tariff-induced effect explains just USD 2,083 thousand of this increase via SMART simulations. As a contrast, the non-FTA residual effect, which amounts to USD 19,001 thousand, constitutes the major share of all the observed export growth. This indicates India's exports toward South Korea largely expanded due to non-tariff and structural factors. These exports were not driven largely by preferential tariff reductions. The limited magnitude of tariff-induced gains may reflect Indian exporters' relatively low utilization of preferential tariffs, competition from alternative suppliers within the Korean market, or product composition mismatches. These are elements that potentially explain the reasons tariff benefits are not fully realized. These results highlight that while India exported more goods to South Korea during the CEPA period, tariff liberalization explains only a little of this growth.

**Table 4 Tariff and Non-Tariff Effect based Actual Values in Chapter 73****(Values in USD ‘000)****(South Korea as exporter)**

Country	South Korea
FTA Implementation Year	2010
Actual Value (2023)	308748.73
New Value (Initial Value + Total Tariff Effect from SMART)	351877.65
Residual Non-Tariff Effect	-43128.92

Author's own calculation

The results in table 4 indicate that actual trade outcomes differed from predictions based on tariffs, while tariff liberalization under the India, Korea CEPA (2010) was expected to create meaningful trade expansion. In South Korea's actual export value to India during 2023 was USD 308,748.73 ('000). The

predicted trade value based upon initial trade as well as tariff effect was USD 351,877.65 ('000). USD 43,128.92('000) resulted in a negative residual non-tariff effect.

Due to the fact that non-tariff factors acted as constraints and did offset gains from tariff liberalization, then a negative residual value is highlighted. India's non-tariff measures and safeguard duties on steel products, competitive disadvantages for Korean exporters, or shifts in global demand and supply conditions may explain Korea's reduced trade potential despite tariff concessions.

**Table 5 Tariff and Non-Tariff Effect based Predicted Values in Chapter 72**

**(Values in USD '000)**

**(South Korea as exporter)**

Country	South Korea
FTA Implementation Year	2010
Initial Trade Value	303565.52
New Value	366376.4
FTA Total Trade Effect	62810.92
Total Tariff Effect from SMART	48312.12
Residual Non-Tariff Effect	14498.80

Author's own calculation

The results presented within Table 5 reveal India's iron and steel import decomposition from South Korea under CEPA. The simulated FTA total trade effect amounts up to USD 62,811 thousand. Imports likely will rise from the pre-FTA year (2009) to the post-FTA year (2023); this shows that impact. Out of this, the tariff-induced effect, as SMART simulations obtained, accounts to USD 48,312 thousand, which indicates that tariff liberalization shaped the expansion of imports. At about USD 14,499 thousand, the calculated residual non-FTA effect suggests that tariff concessions alone cannot fully explain a part of the observed increase. Non-tariff factors including global demand dynamics, changes in consumer preferences, as well as supply chain linkages may explain this residual component. Based on results, tariff preferences drove India's import expansion from South Korea dominantly. However, non-tariff factors contributed greatly to this import expansion too.

The combined analysis regarding tariff and non-tariff effects underscores the asymmetric outcomes of the India, Korea CEPA in Chapters 73 based on both predicted and actual values. Tariff liberalization generated substantial predicted trade gains for South Korea as an exporter then the actual outcomes fell short; however, negative residual non-tariff effects suggested that restrictive non-tariff measures, safeguard duties, along with adverse market conditions partly offset tariff concessions. In contrast, India's export performance was characterized through strong tariff-driven gains as well as additional positive residual non-tariff effects. India's export growth exceeded tariff concessions due to competitive advantages plus market complementarities as this performance indicated. Findings imply CEPA tariff cuts crucially affected bilateral trade though gains varied

due to supportive or restrictive non-tariff factor interplay. To be sure of more balanced trade outcomes, these findings point to the need for a periodic review of CEPA provisions, targeted policy support, and a closer monitoring of non-tariff barriers for both partners.

### **Synthesis and Policy Implications**

Results of this combined analysis sketches a consistent and subtle story of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between India and Korea using econometric estimation, and simulation. By the year 2016, Korea rapidly liberalized its tariffs upon Indian articles of iron and steel. Whereas, descriptive statistics reveals an uneven and modest growth path in Indian exports. A sharp surge can be seen in Korean exports in the initial post-FTA years. These gains later decline due to the expansion of Indian domestic steel capacity and policy related choices such as safeguard duties.

The difference-in-differences calculation further completes this picture by revealing how both the countries experienced a decline in bilateral trade as compared to non- FTA partners. The negative coefficients of DiD reveals how CEPA did not led to any trade dynamism as compared to the non-FTA partners. SMART simulation results separate the trade outcomes into tariff driven effect and residual non-tariff effects. Here, an interesting twist takes place when India's residual non-tariff value comes out to be positive, implying the other factor's role in supporting India's trade beyond the liberalization effect. Whereas, this residual effect turns out to be negative in case of South Korea, implying the role of safeguard measure as well as non-tariff barriers. These outcomes highlight the benefits that India is getting from non-tariff factors while Korea's gain are being curtailed by structural and policy frictions.

Understanding the lessons derived from this analysis is utmost important. From policy perspective, elimination of tariff does not guarantee gains from trade growth. Following measure must be adopted by India to harness trade gains; investment to compete in exports in is necessary as much is the quality upgradation and better exploitation of opportunities and schemes arising out of the preferential agreements which leads to better market access. In case of Korea, following points are worth highlighting, the role of non-tariff barriers and safeguard duties can lead to offsetting the trade gains. It is important to review FTA clauses actively so that the asymmetries and reciprocal outcomes can be better addressed. Uneven and short-lived gains must not be the focus; trade strategy should focus and actively work towards attaining durable trade gains.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India-Korea has not resulted in trade expansion in case of articles of iron and steel despite tariff

liberalization. It was expected that the trade liberalization would result in intensification of bilateral trade between the two countries. The layered methodology in the paper helps understand the different aspects of trade. Tariff cuts and trade trends before and after the implementation of CEPA form the first layer. Notably, Korea completely revoked the tariff by 2016, and India also revised its tariff schedules with sharp reduction. However, on close observation it is worth highlighting that despite complete tariff elimination by Korea on Indian exports of article of iron and steel, India's export was modest and volatile, while Korean exports experienced a sharp increase initially, declining later. The decline in Korea's export can be due to India's production capacity expansion and safeguard duties. This paradox is later reinforced by the econometric evidences presented in the paper.

The study performed difference-in differences estimations to understand the net effect of CEPA by comparing CEPA trade with counterfactual i.e., top 10 non-FTA partners and all non-FTA partners. For both exports and imports, negative coefficients have been recorded. It throws light upon the fact that the CEPA has not supported bilateral trade flows instead it has underperformed its counterfactual. This forms the second econometric layer of the paper in understanding India-Korea CEPA.

Further, trade outcomes can be explained by performing simulation using SMART model which forms the third layer of the paper explaining the 'why' behind trade outcomes. Indian exports recorded positive residual non-tariff effects, which suggests that despite tariff impact, other factors such as complementarities or product level factors supported trade. Whereas, Korea on the other hand recorded negative residual effect, indicating to the interplay and importance of the role of non-tariff measures, and safeguard duties in place by the other country.

Thus, the central finding of the paper is the asymmetric and limited benefits of this CEPA. Looking from an economic lense, this highlights policy-related as well as structural frictions.

In case of India, cost disadvantages, quality gaps and other compliance are some of the structural challenges which limits its ability to perform. Korea's trade diversification and India's extensive use of safeguard measures are policy related frictions. It can be concluded that complementary industrial strategies and management of non-tariff barriers play a very important role beside the tariff liberalization. In the absence of control over these factors it is difficult to reach durable trade integration.

The study is one of the few multi-method assessments of CEPA in case of articles of iron and steel. It combines descriptive analysis to under the tariff cuts and the impact of it on the trade trends, DiD to reveal the net effect beyond descriptive method, and SMART partial-equilibrium simulation to

understand disentangle residual effects. This gives a deeper understanding of drivers of trade outcomes. It also broadens the understanding of the asymmetric nature of liberalization impact, stating how policy related decisions and structural frictions can led to different results for countries under same agreement.

Lastly, for policymakers, this study highlights major factors. In case of India, it is of utmost importance to improve the utilization of preferential access resulting from various agreements. Further to strengthen export competitiveness, India should complement FTAs with improved quality standards, and improved supply side bottlenecks. To ensure reciprocity in trade outcomes, it is essential to maintain transparency and monitor non-tariff barriers. Most importantly, the review clause in trade agreements should be fully harnessed to align with commitments to reach long term policy goals. Only than countries signing FTA will experience sustained and balanced trade growth resulting from liberalization.

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# Purity and Pollution in the Construction of the Female: Rites of Menarche and Menstruation

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## Abstract

Historically, cultures all over the world ascribe menstruation an auspicious quality that is simultaneously worshipped and feared. The menstruating woman is a pure and holy being whose touch is somehow polluting. Menstrual taboos prevail, even in cultures that celebrate the onset of menarche. Taking the case of Assamese Hindu society, this paper tries to explore this juxtaposition through Victor Turner's ideas of the liminal being and Mary Douglas' conception of purity and pollution. Menstrual taboos thrive in Assamese culture, even as they celebrate *tuloni biya* (small wedding) when a girl reaches menarche, and worship the goddess Kamkhya's menstrual cycle. The argument is made that menstrual rites actively construct the idea of the female. Gender is constructed through this cyclical ritual to remind women of their biological destiny as child bearers and nurturers. The taboos become a way to punish the woman for 'wasting' her egg that month by not fertilizing it. The contradiction of purity and pollution arises from and perpetuates this idea of a powerful sexual female that must be tamed and controlled. The woman is thus reminded of her role to continue her husband's bloodline in the heteropatriarchal structure, affecting her self-perception. The conclusion explores how even as celebrations like *tuloni biya* decline, taboos continue to exist, perhaps affirming the idea of control as the primary motive of menstrual rituals. Menstrual rites become a tool in the hands of a heteropatriarchal structure to ensure women perform their duty of kinship production.

## Keywords

Menstruation rites, menarche, gender construction, taboos, *tuloni biya*

## Introduction

Many cultures all over the world mark the onset of puberty in girls through rites and rituals. Menarche, or the first menstrual period, is ascribed an auspicious quality that is simultaneously powerful and polluting. Menarche is rejoiced because the girl is now 'flowering' and capable of producing 'fruit',

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that is, fertile, and capable of bearing children (Dube, 1988). But every menstrual period after is regarded with suspicion and considered taboo. For the now pubescent girl, celebration is juxtaposed with seclusion. Hindu Assamese society cradles this contradiction. Unlike the customs of the Brahmins in north India that treat the onset of puberty as a hushed secret, menarche is marked by the joyous celebration of *tuloni biya* (small wedding). But this does not allow the women to escape the taboo of pollution surrounding menstruation. This paper tries to explain this phenomena through Victor Turner's idea of liminality and Mary Douglas' explanations of purity and pollution. The argument is made that the rites actively construct the idea of the female in any given society through these rituals, or a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988). This contradiction arrives as a result of, and actively constructs, the idea of a powerful female sexual power that must be tamed and controlled. The symbolic behaviour of the menstrual rites becomes an ideological commitment to public morality (Asad, 1988), constructing the female to maintain the heteropatriarchal structure, ensuring the continuation of the kinship system.

Mitoo Das' multiple works on the culture around menstruation have been referred to in this paper, supplemented by other works on *tuloni biya*. Works on the menstruation rites of *Nkula* (Turner, 1966) have been used to better situate the Assamese perception of menstruation in the wider context of womanhood. Aside from Judith Butler, Leela Dube and Julia Leslie are referred to to better understand gender construction specific to Hinduism. Iris Young's work on women's self-perception of female fragility is explored in the context of menstruation.

### **Why Tuloni Biya?**

For this paper, Assamese menstruation rites have been chosen because they represent the way purity and pollution interact and often contradict in liminal spaces. Menstruation is simultaneously seen as auspicious and polluting. There are many taboos and restrictions. For the first three days, the menstruating woman is isolated in a separate room and made to sleep on a bed made of straw. She cannot touch anything, and anything she does touch must be cleansed with holy water as her touch is polluting. She can only eat fruits and simple boiled food, in separate utensils that she must wash herself. She cannot enter any other rooms of the house for the first three days. From the fourth day, as the bleeding is less, she may enter the rooms but must carry her own stool to sit on. But the kitchen and prayer rooms are forbidden to her till the bleeding has stopped completely, or the eighth day (Das, 2008).

Despite this, menstruation is also celebrated. In Assam, menstruation is associated with the goddess Kamakhya. It is believed that when the goddess Sati immolated herself due to her father disrespecting

her husband, Lord Shiva, Shiva went mad with grief, unleashing his destructive Rudra form. To stop his rampage, the gods dismembered her into 52 pieces and each place where a piece fell became a holy site of the feminine force of *shakti*. The *yoni*, or cervix, fell where the Kamakhya temple now stands. In fact Kamakhya is not presented as an idol, but a block of stone with a crevice, kept moist and smeared with vermilion (Pradhan, 2021). She is believed to have a year-long cycle with her menstrual period occurring in June. This is the monsoon season, where the goddess' menstruating is actually the whole earth 'menstruating', that is, the rains. Her fertility symbolizes the fertility of the earth. This is commemorated through the celebration of the Ambubachi Mela. The Kamakhya temple is closed for the first three days, similar to a woman being isolated for the first three days of her cycle. Agricultural and ritual activities are not performed. The 'plough may not penetrate the soil' when the goddess is menstruating, paralleled to sexual intercourse being forbidden when the woman menstruates (Leslie, 1996). On the fourth day, the temple reopens and there is a grand celebration. A cloth soaked in red is kept as *prasad*, representing menstrual blood. This is ironic, considering the pollutant label given to it. (Das, 2008). In a later paper from 2014, Mitoo Das reflects on her own work on menstruation in Assam, adding that despite the taboos, Ambabuchi provides a space where the maternal and sexual aspects of women are celebrated as divine.

This contrasts menstruation and menarche rites in the Hindu communities of North India, especially Brahminical beliefs. While society is rife with taboos, menarche celebrations are not part of the culture. The origin of menstruation is not linked to a goddess, but to the god Indra. It is said that Indra killed Visvarupa, a Brahmin and was cursed as a result. Pleading for forgiveness, part of his curse was offloaded to the woman- an inherently 'wicked' and promiscuous being. This led to the monthly menstruation of the 'fetus-killers', as each menstrual period represents an egg that could have been fertilized as a child. Caste weaves itself into the conceptions of menstruation. It is advised that upper caste men not engage in intercourse with their wives during menses, as a child conceived during menses would be 'cursed with untouchability'. (Leslie, 1996). Caste creates differences within Assam as well. While *tuloni biya* is celebrated with grandeur among most Hindu Assamese communities, it is a more subdued affair among the Brahmins. They call it *shanti biya*, because the fact that the girl is now fertile is a matter of relief, rather than celebration (Das, 2025).

### **Description of *Tuloni Biya***

*Tuloni biya* is a ritual marking menarche, a celebration of a girl's entry into womanhood. It can be considered a rite of passage, that is, a transition from one status to another (Van Gennep, as cited in Goswami and Singh, 2023). Van Gennep's framework of rites of passage can be used to explain *tuloni biya*. The first three days are the separation or the preliminal period. The girl is separated from the rest

of society. She is made to sleep in a separate room on a bed of hay. She is not allowed to interact with any men. Even women are to keep distant from her. She cannot see the sun or moon. She may only leave the room to use the washroom, and she must not touch anything on her way. She cannot touch anything in the house, including her own things. The girl is often kept home from school. Her path must be sprinkled with holy water. During this time, she can only eat fruits, in utensils she has to clean herself. She cannot cut her nails. One is also not allowed to cut nails on a birthday because it is believed in certain sects of Hinduism that it can stunt growth. In this case, the fear is that it will stunt the girl's growth into a woman. Ceremonial offerings are kept in the eastern part of the room facing the sun- rice seeds, betel leaves and an earthen lamp.

On the fourth day, she enters the liminal or marginal stage of the rite. She has crossed the threshold of girlhood, but has not yet entered the realm of womanhood. She can now consume boiled food, with no or minimal oil and spices. She is given a ritual bath to cleanse her of her pollution. This bath is given by older women who have already achieved motherhood. Men are not involved in the ceremony. This bath is given in front of a banana tree which will go on to represent a groom on the seventh day.

On the seventh day, the reincorporation or postliminal stage of the rite begins. This is the day of celebration of *tuloni biya*, as the girl has now entered a new status of womanhood. The girl is dressed as a bride in the traditional Assamese garment, *mekhela chador*, and wears gold jewelry. Here too, the women conduct the rites with the assistance of a male priest. A motif is created on the floor with an idol of a Hindu god placed in the centre. The girl is then wed to the banana tree. Three red dots are made on it, representing the energy of the three gods. The bananas represent the male organ, and the girl holds a small doll, representing a baby (Goswami and Singh, 2023).

The priest then determines what kind of *kanya* (girl) the girl will be, according to what time of the day she began her menstruation. The best scenario is if she starts menstruating early in the morning which makes her a *padmini kanya*, and she will lead a peaceful life. If she started after nine, but before noon, she is *siprani kanya*, making her mischievous like the hustle and bustle of the day. If it was the afternoon, she would be *ugro kanya*, making her 'hot' and angry like the heat of the day. The one who starts in the evening is considered the most unlucky. She is *hostini kanya*, and all the tensions of the day have accumulated in her body. According to this time, as well as other planetary considerations (particularly the position of mars), the priest prescribes a fast to the girl. The exact diet ranges but is always vegetarian and the time may range from anywhere between three days to a year (Das, 2025).

The celebration includes a feast. While women play an active role, men play the passive role of guests. Guests who are invited typically give gifts to the girl, and sweets are distributed. Leela Dube points out that these gifts are symbols of the new role the girl is entering. The celebratory nature of the

‘small wedding’ entirely mimics the celebration of marital or ‘big’ weddings in Assam.

The purpose of the ceremony is to welcome the girl into womanhood, prepare her for its challenges, and bless her with fertility (Goswami and Singh, 2023). Historically, it was to announce to the community that the girl is ready for marriage. Ritual becomes a language through which the private becomes publicly accessible, ensuring social communication (Asad, 1988). The family wishes to share with the community that the girl is now capable of producing heirs. However, this principle is not overtly expressed anymore due to reduction of child marriages, as well as a fast declining age for menarche (Harrell, 1981). In some communities where child marriage was more prevalent, the girl may already have been married but would move into her marital home after the onset of menarche. This is similar to *Chisungu*, the menstrual rite of the Bemba where the girl is already married and the puberty ritual is to send her to her marital home. Food restrictions are also similar- both cultures advise avoiding foods that emit ‘heat’ (Richards, 1956).

*Tuloni biya* can therefore be understood as a ritual of status elevation as classified by Victor Turner. It is also a life-crisis rite (Warner, 1959 as cited in Turner, 1967). This is because it is a public ritual to announce the status elevation of an individual.

After the first menstruation, women in Assam are expected to follow the taboos of menstruation every month till menopause, though they are not as restricting. There is no celebration, except for during June, when the taboos may be stricter and women celebrate the goddess Kamakhya during the Ambubachi mela.

### **Menarche as a Site of Liminality: Purity and Pollution**

The ideas of purity and pollution govern menstrual rites in a complex way. It seems that the menstruating woman is both auspicious and polluting. As mentioned above, her fertility is celebrated but she is still considered a polluting force. The happiness that the girl is now fertile is intertwined with fears of being ‘barren’ (infertile) and not securing a groom. A pre-pubescent girl is considered the purest form of womanhood- so much so that she is often sent with the menstruating woman to offset her polluting effect (Dube, 1988). The reason for her purity is the fact that she is not yet a sexual being. A girl reaching menarche is finally fulfilling her purpose by gaining the power she is supposed to- but there are fears of her misusing or not using this power.

This idea is not unique to Assam or even Hinduism. Victor Turner made similar observations in his works on the Ndembu. They have a ritual called Nkula to help a girl with excessive menstrual bleeding. Similar to *tuloni biya*, the girl is handed a doll representing a baby. She wears a red feather on her hair during the ceremony, representing menstrual blood.

Turner then tries to isolate this element of the red feather to understand what the rite means by deconstructing it. He notes that although the ceremony seems to be celebrating a feminine force, the same feather is worn exclusively by male hunters. The girl even performs a dance with a bow and arrow. This is because in the minds of the Ndembu, she is behaving like a male killer and not a female nurturer. By ‘allowing’ her menstrual period to happen, she has wasted her egg which was a potential baby. Each menstrual period is a reminder that she is not fulfilling her purpose of childbearing. This is similar to menstruating women being deemed ‘fetus killers’ in Hinduism.

Turner then further isolates the colour red. He notes that red is seen as both a companion and opposing force to white. White is seen as pure. Red, on the other hand, is seen as powerful. Power is generally considered morally grey- it can be used for good or bad. He says this is often seen in other cultures as well, including Hinduism, saying that it is seen as the colour of energy. Although he calls it the ‘ancient world’, this is true even today. Red is generally associated with power in Hinduism and a force for change. It is a colour often adorned by warrior goddesses like Durga. It can be the blood of kinship, or it can be the blood of violence. This is why menstrual blood is ‘red’ - not just physically, but symbolically. A girl reaching menarche now has the power to continue her bloodline, but also the power *not* to. This is why *tuloni biya* is rejoiced because the woman is now fertile. But every consequent period is punished. It is a reminder that the woman is choosing not to procreate and wasting her fertility. Across Hindu subcultures a woman’s purpose is seen as childbirth (Dube, 1988).

It is interesting to note that the Nkula is a smaller ritual. For the Ndembu, the girl’s main puberty ritual, Nkang’a, happens when she develops breasts. This is because breastfeeding and nurturing and raising the child is seen as the main function of the woman, rather than birthing it. The Ndembu are matrilineal, and therefore tend to center the mother-child bond. On the other hand, the mother-child bond is not seen as completely ‘pure’ in Hinduism and the father-child bond takes precedence in this patrilineal society. Furthermore, sperm is seen as better than menstrual blood, but still a polluting substance (Leslie, 1996). This contrasts with the Ndembu who view sperm as pure (Turner, 1966).

The girl undergoing *tuloni biya* is therefore a liminal being as defined by Turner in *Forest of Symbols*. She is no longer classified- not a girl, but not yet a woman. She has no property- she is not allowed to use her own room, bed or things. She has the power to pollute. Mary Douglas explores this idea of pollution as being ‘potent’. Her power is dormant and not something she has the agency to wield, but only the agency to tame. The danger, therefore, lies in *not* taming it. Power is good when vested in legitimate authority but dangerous when acquired by a person in a subordinate position- which a woman is. Her egg, too, is dangerous as it is something dead that never lived. And the liminal is always dangerous because it puts the structure in question. The liminal being has a position in the *larger* structure of society, but is not performing their role in a crucial substructure (Douglas, 1966). In

this case, a woman is expected to menstruate. But by not fertilizing her egg she is failing her duty as the carrier of the bloodline. She is therefore putting the kinship structure in danger. The rites performed in this situation involve behaving anti-socially as “an expression of the marginal condition” (Douglas, 1966). For a menstruating woman, the anti-social behavior is not entering the kitchen or the prayer house, and not having sexual relations with her husband. The purpose of rituals such as *tuloni biya*, is to take the ‘not-yet-girl-but-not-yet-woman’ into the more defined status of a woman, as according to Douglas, liminal rites are to ease transitions.

### **Construction of the female**

A menstruating girl is also not a complete ‘woman’ as she is not using her fertility to reproduce. Her gender is therefore in question, as is the case for liminal beings (Turner, 1966). It can be argued that construction of the female sex is one of the prime reasons for this rite.

The anthropologist Barbara Harrell has tried to explore this question. She refutes other theories of menstrual rites. Many scholars have tried to attribute the worldwide taboo around menstruation to vaginal or womb envy, Karen Horney’s gender reversal of the Freudian concept of penis envy. According to this, men are envious of the primal bond a mother experiences with the child she grows in her own womb, and then births and nurtures with her own body. The claim is that womb envy leads to a degradation of biological functions associated with the female which gave rise to menstrual taboos. But Harrell rejects this (Harrell, 1981).

She says that it is about returning a woman to her fertile state. This is similar to Turner’s understanding of menstrual rites being performed to punish the woman for not fertilizing the egg she menstruated. Harrell rejects the idea of menses as the crux of womanhood and even deems pregnancy as ‘parasitic’ to the pregnant person. She says that womanhood is symbolically defined, rather than biologically.

This conception of gender is similar to Judith Butler’s. They say that gender as an identity is not a natural phenomena, but is actively created through a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988). Menstrual rites are an example of such acts cyclically enacted every month to remind the woman of her biological destiny. Emphasizing on the temporal and collective aspects of gender, they refer to Victor Turner and say that social action requires ritual and repeated performance. They theorize that gender roles are actively constructed to fulfil the heterosexual contract, which in turn ensures the reproduction of the kinship system. Not only gender, but even biological sex is specifically constructed as a clearly demarcated binary in service of the preservation of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990). Referring to Michel Foucault, Butler states that sex is artificially produced through power relations as regulative. Sex is the political use of the category of nature. It imposes an artificial unity on a set of attributes that are otherwise discontinuous. Neutral physical characteristics are marked by the social

system and interpreted in a gendered fashion. Monique Wittig refers to sex as a forcibly imposed abstraction as a result of a violent process. This imposition makes sex into a reified reality (Witting, 1980 as cited in Butler, 1990).

Performance of rites like *tuloni biya* become a gateway to access this imposed, larger-than-life idea of sex and gender. These performative and communicative acts both express and create gender. In fact, Butler's conception of gender as a performance is similar to the way Geertz conceived religion. They call gender a "compelling illusion and an object of belief" (Butler, 1988), referring to him directly. Although they do not refer to his concepts of 'model for' and 'model of', its influence is detectable. They say the repetition of gendered rites derives from meanings already socially embedded in the structure, but these rites also actively create meaning. This is also how Geertz imagined religion- a system of symbols creating meaning (Geertz, 1973). Butler is careful to point out that people are not passive recipients of gender, but their performances actively create the 'gender reality' they supposedly reveal. Their theorizing of gender almost mirrors theoretical explorations of religion, almost as if they view it *as* one. But that is a topic for another paper.

This active creation of gender is also noted by Leela Dube, as well as Mitoo Das. She points out that the men she interviewed for her work on menstrual taboos did not seem very concerned with the details of the norms followed by the women. She applied Foucault's idea of the docile body internalizing the (heteropatriarchal) gaze, as the women themselves are part of the structure imposing restrictions on them.

This heteropatriarchal gaze turns voyeuristic. The woman begins existing in distance from herself and self-perception turns into an act of surveillance. The woman performs repetitive acts to prove her femaleness, such as menstrual taboos. Iris Young explores how women tend to view their body as a fragile burden rather than a medium for aims. They tend to imagine the world in terms of its limits rather than its possibilities, reflecting their experience of confinement, whether that be during menstruation or otherwise. They also tend to have a greater fear of getting hurt (Young, 1980). Menstrual rites would add to this idea. Even when such taboos are rationalized through rest, they reinforce the fragility of the female body. This is not to say that menstruation is not physically painful. But when a cyclical pain is presented as inherently gendered and tied to identity, it affects the perception of the self.

Moreover, menstruation is presented in these rites as a loss, or failure of fertilization. The desired result is an offspring, and monthly bleeding is a proof of failure. Not just rites, even medical textbooks tend to present menstruation in negative terms, using vocabulary such as 'diminished', 'disintegration' and 'debris'. This directly contrasts with how digestion is described, even though it is physiologically a

similar process (Martin, 1987). This creates the perception of menstruation as an affliction rather than a routine bodily process, circling back to women viewing their bodies as something to cope with, rather than a means to an end.

## Conclusion

In recent times, there has been a decline in the *tuloni biya* celebrations. Multiple reasons can be speculated. One is that increasing division of labour relegates liminality to the religious sections of society, and loses its relevance in the larger structure (Turner, 1967). Another is increasing Brahminization of Hindu society. As mentioned before, Brahmin culture does not celebrate menarche, but still follows taboos. This can explain how even though *tuloni biya* declines, the taboos around menstruation continue. They have been rationalized as women needing rest, rather than ideas of pollution (Das, 2014). But whether women are segregated for their polluting powers or their supposed well-being, the result is materially the same- exclusion and discrimination. Douglas had pointed out that pollution is used to legitimize discrimination against the liminal. But now that that may not work everywhere, especially with the modern urban career-woman, discrimination is legitimized through the weaponization of concern. This concern, even if well meaning, can perpetuate the idea of female fragility.

Women being seen as fragile coexists uncomfortably with women having sexual power that must be tamed. How can society live in fear of something it views as inherently weak? Assamese menstrual rites try to bridge this contradiction. Menarche is celebrated because it is proof you can reproduce. Menses are punished because it is proof you did not.

Pain and discomfort entangle with the self-image of women. Fear of female agency has led to a gender construction of women as passive beings. The female body becomes an object who things happen *to*, juxtaposed with being a subject who initiations action (Young, 1980). Menstrual taboos become a way to manage and cope with a body that continuously betrays its inhabitant. The language and rituals around menstruation result in menses being a monthly reminder of undeniable femaleness and womanhood, one that is imposed. The only agency a woman has is to circumvent her destiny of reproduction. Even in rebellion, the woman can work against reproduction, but not independent of it.

Another rationalization of menstrual taboos is the emphasis of difference over discrimination- the idea of the two sexes being ‘separate but equal’. The same statement was used to justify racial segregation, so one can understand how ‘equal’ this truly is. One’s femininity is often defined and interrogated based on submissiveness and reproductive prowess. As Leela Dube points out, femininity is carefully constructed down to every minute detail. This leads to women walking on eggshells desperately trying to prove their womanhood, being feminine but not too sexual when femininity has been inherently

constructed as sexual in our cultures, specifically Hindu culture. This inherent sexuality is considered impure, and it is this pollution that is leaving the body during menses (Leslie, 1996). Women trying to prove their womanhood only continues to perpetuate the idea of the female being defined by her reproductive function. By actively creating their gender through such taboos, women often end up creating their own cage.

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# Writing the ‘Deep Story’: A Comparative Case Study of the Rise of Nationalist Extremism in the United States and India

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TRF - J

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## Abstract

This paper examines the global resurgence of far-right nationalist extremism, focusing on the rise of authoritarianism in the United States and India. Based on the theoretical framework of White Christian nationalism developed by Gorski and Perry (2022), which builds on Hochschild’s concept of ‘deep story’ (2016), the present analysis demonstrates how aspiring authoritarians strategically mobilize exclusionary ideologies to consolidate power. The ‘deep story’ of White Christian nationalism in the United States under Donald Trump can (1) provide valuable insight into the rise of Hindutva in Modi’s India and (2) shed light on the transnational nature of contemporary far-right nationalist ideologies. Central to the analysis is the identification of the building blocks of the deep story: religiousness without religiosity as a marker of ethno-traditional group boundaries; the deification of political figures; nostalgia for a mythical past greatness; and the justification of violence and exclusion as necessary for national preservation. These building blocks construct a narrative of grievance and existential threat in which the dominant group perceives loss of status and projects anxieties onto foreigners and foreignness. Ultimately, the deep story of nationalist extremism functions to secure the consent of the dominant group for the acceptance of authoritarian rule.

## Keywords

Hindutva, White Christian nationalism, India, United States, authoritarianism, populism

## Introduction

Since the 2010s, many democracies worldwide including the United States and India have undergone backsliding under right-wing populist leadership (Nord et al. 2025). Political actors such as Donald Trump and Narendra Modi have mobilized narratives of civilizational decline, portraying liberal democracy and pluralism as existential threats to rally supporters around exclusionary ideologies rooted in racial, ethnic, and cultural supremacy. These narratives frame dominant groups as victims of demographic shifts, cultural decay, and ‘foreign’ influences to sow divisions and secure consent for authoritarian power consolidation.

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In the United States, this has taken shape as White Christian nationalism, a form of nativist nationalism that legitimizes the supremacy of white Christian males (Gorski and Perry 2022). This ideology blames various groups such as immigrants, feminist movements, Black Lives Matter activists, and transgender people, for the perceived cultural, moral, and political decline of the nation. Through this narrative of grievance and victimhood, Trump and the Republican Party have consolidated political power while undermining democratic institutions.

Similarly, in India, Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have maintained political dominance since 2014 by advancing Hindutva, a Hindu supremacist ideology. Central to this is the constructed threat of a Muslim invasion that is portrayed as a demographic and cultural menace threatening Hindu society. This narrative alleges that Muslim men are seducing Hindu women, seizing land, and committing atrocities, thereby framing such actions as existential threats justifying authoritarian measures. The BJP has employed this rhetoric to weaken judicial independence, suppress political opposition, stifle the media, erode academic freedoms, and entrench authoritarian governance (Chacko 2018; Ganguly 2019).

Although extensive scholarship has examined far-right movements across historical and geographical contexts, less attention has focused on the transnational circulation and recombination of their narrative building blocks. This study expands on the framework of White Christian nationalism developed by Gorski and Perry's (2022), itself based on Hochschild's concept of the 'deep story' (2016) to analyze ideological parallels between White Christian nationalism in the United States and Hindutva in India. By deconstructing the deep story into modular components, the analysis traces how nationalist extremism narratives can circulate transnationally, reassemble with contextual adaptations, to be promoted by authoritarians to undermine democracy.

## **Framework and Methodology**

In *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (2022), Phillip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry borrow the concept of the 'deep story' developed by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (2016), which aims to understand the factors that shape the political preferences of white middle-class Americans in the southern US state of Louisiana. The story presented by Hochschild revolves around feelings of resentment and betrayal that white, middle-class Americans, especially conservative-leaning ones, hold toward those perceived to be undeservedly 'cutting in' the line to achieving the American Dream (Hochschild 2016). According to this narrative, white, middle-class Americans see their opportunities seized by the 'line-cutters,' loosely conceived as minorities,

immigrants, and women (Hochschild 2016). Their frustration with this perceived injustice is further compounded by a feeling of ‘cultural marginalization’ in which their traditional values and conservative worldviews are ridiculed, culminating in the impression that these individuals have become ‘strangers in their own land’ (Hochschild 2016, 221). Consequently, the white, middle-class, conservative-leaning electorate sought political representation that offered the promise to restore proper order in the ‘line,’ one which they found in Donald Trump.

In *The Flag and The Cross*, Gorski and Perry offer a ‘deep story’ of white Christian nationalism in the United States. They advance that American far-right nationalism is one in which white Christians (and predominantly males) view themselves as the true Americans who founded the country on the Christian values that made it a ‘shining city on a hill.’ This makes White Christian males believe in their sociopolitical, economic, and moral superiority, thus supremacy as a birthright. Forces that challenge this supremacy, ranging from immigration, feminism, Black emancipation, to religious freedom, and more, constitute an immoral attack on white Christians. This self-created narrative of victimhood justifies the use of violence against the agents of the forces that they perceive to be attempting to subvert White Christian male supremacy (Gorski and Perry 2022). White Christian nationalists come to embrace xenophobic, racist, misogynistic ideals and authoritarian politics to control others to retain their supremacy and the freedoms that supremacy conveys. The concept of white Christian nationalism in the United States provides a framework for understanding the rise of Hindutva, Hindu hegemonic nationalism, in India throughout the ongoing tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Deconstructing the deep story of White Christian nationalism allows for its conceptualization through modular ‘blocks’: elements of the deep story that travel across geopolitical boundaries and are reassembled in non-Western contexts adapted to local particularities. This body of research identifies seven ‘building blocks’ of the deep story: religiosity without religiousness, the deification of political figures, a promised return to a mythical past, the threat of interracial relationships and miscegenation, the threat of the non-heteronormative, the moral asymmetry of violence, and the weaponization of the digital space. A comparative case analysis of the rises of nationalist extremism in the United States and in India reveals the transnational character of the narratives put forward by aspiring authoritarian leaders to secure and consolidate power.

## **The Building Blocks of the ‘Deep Story’**

### **Religiousness without Religiosity**

The building blocks of the deep story reveal key narrative components that shape and sustain far-right

nationalist identities. An especially illuminating dimension of the White Christian nationalist framework, as developed by Gorski and Perry, is its emphasis on religiousness with minimal demonstrable religiosity. As they argue, the ‘myth of a Christian nation’ is more important to white Christian nationalists than religion itself because the adherence to white Christian nationalism is a reflection of ‘ethno-traditionalism’ (Gorski and Perry 2022). This identity prioritizes belonging based on perceived ancestral heritage and cultural affinity over actual religious practice or belief. The myth of the United States as a Christian nation works as a tribal marker that distinguishes ‘real Americans’ and sustains the idea of rightful American belonging among white Christian majorities.

This dynamic is mirrored in Hindutva, which, despite its name, is not a traditional Hindu religious ideology. The roots of the Hindu supremacist movement are found nearly a century ago in the philosophy and works of V.D. Savarkar, a revolutionary figure of the pre-independence era in India (Zafar, Ali, and Irfan 2018). Savarkar’s 1923 seminal book *Essentials of Hindutva* (later retitled *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*) laid the foundations for the construction of the Hindu identity based on ethnic, cultural, and geographic terms (Sharma 2002). Savarkar insisted on a clear distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism, as he believed the followers of any religion of Indian origins – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism – were deserving of the Hindu identity (Sharma 2002).

The first political iteration of Hindutva came through the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, henceforth referred to as RSS, a right-wing paramilitary group that self-identifies as a cultural organisation rather than a religious one (Jaffrelot 2010; Kamalakar 2025). The RSS was only a starting point: the organization rapidly sought to expand its influence and create wings operating in previously inactive areas like local and national politics (Jaffrelot 2010). The host of Hindu supremacist organizations that spawned from the RSS became collectively known as Sangh Parivar or the ‘family of the RSS’ (Jaffrelot 2010). One such organization is the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party headed by Prime Minister Modi. Although Hindutva was introduced to mainstream politics as part of the BJP’s rise to power in the 1990s under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Modi and the BJP embodied its principles arguably more closely and openly than any previous administration (Poddar 2024). Vajpayee, while sympathetic to Hindu supremacy, had to adopt a more moderate, conciliatory stance to project an image of consensus-building. Modi, in contrast, has made Hindutva a central pillar of his political appeal.

Thus, religiousness without religiosity represents the first building block of far-right nationalist deep stories, enabling both White Christian nationalism and Hindutva to harness sacred symbolism in the service of ethno-nationalist identity consolidation and exclusion.

## The Deification of Political Figures

The deification of political leaders constitutes another central building block of the deep stories underpinning both White Christian nationalism and Hindutva. In the United States, Donald Trump's elevation to a quasi-divine status has largely been driven by his most ardent, often Evangelical, supporters, who depict him as uniquely chosen and protected by God (McCarthy 2019; Jones 2024; Gorski and Perry 2022; Sharlet 2020; Gorski 2017). Trump has neither disavowed such portrayals nor consistently distanced himself from them; instead, he has periodically employed language that suggests a providential purpose to his political role, thereby reinforcing these interpretations among his partisans (McCarthy 2019). Contrary to earlier claims that Christian nationalists merely tolerated Trump as a lesser evil, recent scholarship shows that many embraced him enthusiastically as a saviour figure who would shield White Christians from perceived cultural marginalization and political persecution (Gorski and Perry 2022).

A comparable dynamic can be observed in India with the deification of Narendra Modi. Modi has actively contributed to a mythos of extraordinary, even celestial, origins by alluding to his exceptional birth and implying access to special, quasi-supernatural capacities (Yadav 2024). These narratives frame Modi as a savior sent to resolve India's social, cultural, and economic problems, while leaders within the BJP describe him using explicitly theological language, such as *avatari purusha*, or incarnation of God (*The Telegraph* 2022; Sen and Nielsen 2022). In both cases, Trump and Modi cultivate and benefit from a messianic image, presenting themselves as singularly capable of rescuing the nation and restoring its rightful moral and civilizational order (Appelbaum 2016; Mogul 2024; Kaul 2017).

The purpose of deifying political figures revolves around the affirmation of not just strength but also moral authority. Sherman (2023) explains: 'A deity is either all-powerful or the oppressed victim who will prevail in the end. Trump, like Christ, is the king of kings when he wins, and when he loses, he is the heroic victim of oppression who will inevitably prevail' (Sherman 2023, 4). Among supporters, the effect is incontestable: support for the personality cult surrounding the deified figure reinforces its authority by broadening support, while disagreement reinforces the martyrdom narrative, reinforcing the moral authority of the leader (Sherman 2023, 5; Sen and Nielsen 2022, 505). Narratives of sacrifice, persecution, and eventual vindication are powerful blocks in the deep stories of nationalist extremism.

## **A Promised Return to the Mythical Past**

Throughout his tenure as Prime Minister, Modi has repeatedly advanced a civilizational narrative in which India is said to have endured a thousand years of occupation and subjugation under successive foreign rulers, as illustrated by his 2023 Independence Day address describing the present as a ‘milestone between 1000 years of slavery and 1000 years of a grand future that is about to come’ (Modi 2023). This temporal framing departs significantly from conventional historiography, which typically locates the period of formal colonial subjugation in the roughly two centuries of British rule, and it represents a deliberate reconfiguration of India’s past that has gained prominence only under Modi’s leadership (Saleem 2023). By retroactively extending the duration of this period of slavery backward into the pre-colonial era, the narrative effectively recodes long stretches of Muslim rule as foreign occupation, thereby excluding the Mughal period from the repertoire of legitimate Indian pasts (Saleem 2023). It is nonetheless precisely this Mughal era, particularly from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, that many historians identify as a time of considerable prosperity, state capacity, and cultural efflorescence, and which would otherwise be a plausible candidate for a Golden Age of Indian civilization (Saleem 2023; Nanda 2003). Attributing such a golden age to a Muslim dynasty would fundamentally undermine the ideological logic of Hindu supremacy; the Hindutva narrative therefore displaces the locus of civilizational greatness onto a more remote and less historically specified Hindu past, imagined as pure, unified, and sovereign.

Within this reworked temporal imaginary, Modi presents Hindutva as the vehicle through which India can overcome a millennium of humiliation and reclaim its rightful place as a great Hindu civilization (Kaul 2017). The promise of rebirth rests on the idea that strict adherence to Hindutva’s principles will restore a moral, cultural, and political order that was disrupted by foreign incursions. Modi himself is cast in quasi-messianic terms as the leader uniquely appointed to guide Hindus back to that lost era of glory, thereby linking his personal authority to the broader project of civilizational redemption.

A structurally similar narrative is central to White Christian nationalism in the United States, which posits an earlier period of racial and moral purity prior to the corrosive influence of immigration, secularism, feminism, and racial equality (Gorski and Perry 2022). Here, too, the nation is imagined as having fallen from a divinely sanctioned order, and Donald Trump is framed by his supporters as the vanguard who will disrupt the existing liberal status quo and restore White Christian supremacy. The invocation of a mythical past thus functions as a crucial building block in both deep stories, providing a teleological script in which present conflict is a necessary passage on the road back to an idealized national community, and more broadly, to the ‘golden past as future’ (Kaul 2017).

This nostalgia for a mythologized, idealized past underpins a powerful drive toward traditionalism in both movements. In the American context, one visible manifestation is the proliferation of ‘tradwife’ content, where White Christian women publicly celebrate and aestheticize highly traditional gender roles, often through carefully curated depictions of domestic and rural life (Sykes and Hopner 2024). A similar preoccupation with traditional aesthetics permeates Hindu supremacist practices. Modi's own consistent choice of traditional Gujarati attire has been interpreted as a performative affirmation of Hindutva values (Vittorini 2022). In each case, the visual and sartorial revival of ‘tradition’ operates as a tangible representation of the imagined golden age and of the ‘purest’ iteration of the group's core identity.

The drive to return to a mythical past of racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious harmony is indivisible from the exclusionary ideas about those who fall outside of the dominant identity. The white Christian nationalists are, by default, proponents of intolerance. As Whitehead and Perry explain: ‘Christian nationalism idealizes a mythic society in which real Americans—white, native-born, mostly Protestants—maintain control over access to society's social, cultural, and political institutions, and ‘others’ remain in their proper place. It, therefore, seeks strong boundaries to separate ‘us’ from ‘them,’ preserving privilege for its rightful recipients while equating racial and religious outsiders with criminality, violence, and inferiority (Whitehead and Perry 2020). This dynamic is also consistent with the dominant views of Hindu supremacists.

### **The Threat of Interracial Relationships and Miscegenation**

Both White Christian nationalists in the United States and Hindu supremacists in India propagate narratives that frame interracial and interethnic relationships as inherently deviant or coercive. The perception of Black American men as sexually corruptive, driven by the British Empire-era trope of the ‘Black Peril,’ is not only a reflection of the notion of a sexual danger to white women but also that of the ‘political danger of challenge to white hegemony’ (Bland 2005; Majavu 2023). In modern times, this dynamic is better exemplified in the rhetoric surrounding migrants from the Southern border of the United States. Trump himself has made public statements characterizing Mexican immigrants, and other migrants from Latin American countries, as ‘bringing crime’ and being ‘rapists’ (Chouhy and Madero-Hernandez 2019).

Opposition to interracial relationships in the United States has certainly receded after the abolishment of anti-miscegenation laws and the legalization of interracial marriage with the 1967 Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia*. However, as Whitehead and Perry demonstrated, even in modern times, the closer an individual identifies with white Christian nationalism, the less likely they are to be

accepting of interracial relationships (Whitehead and Perry 2020).

A parallel construction operates in India under the concept of ‘Love Jihad’ or ‘Love Romeo,’ a key narrative in Hindu supremacist discourse that articulates a highly gendered and communalized anxiety regarding interfaith relationships, particularly between Hindu women and Muslim men. Hindu nationalists propagate the claim that Muslim men are deliberately engaging in a covert campaign to seduce Hindu women into marriage and conversion to Islam, not out of personal or religious choice but as a stratagem of political and demographic domination (Rao 2011; Amarasingam et al. 2022). This narrative contends that these purported ‘Love Jihad’ seeks to facilitate the acquisition of Hindu land and property by Muslims and contribute to a broader ‘demographic war’ aimed at the displacement or reduction of Hindu hegemony. The trope, combined with a generalized miscegenation panic, operates as a conspiracy theory that portrays Muslim men as predatory aggressors seeking to undermine the Hindu nation from within.

The ‘Love Jihad’ narrative echoes Renaud Camus’ ‘Great Replacement’ theory which is promulgated by white supremacists in the West to similarly warn of an orchestrated effort to takeover the nation through interracial relationships and migration (Amarasingam et al. 2022). Both discourses mobilize fears of racial or religious dilution, manifesting in the purported seduction of women, who are framed as bearers of collective identity and thus in need of protection. This convergence situates ‘Love Jihad’ within a global pattern wherein sexualized threat narratives serve as powerful mechanisms to galvanize ethno-nationalist in-group solidarity and justify exclusionary and often violent measures against out-groups.

The similarities between the narratives of the ‘Black Peril,’ the ‘Mexican rapists,’ and that of the ‘Love Jihad/Love Romeo’ are striking. In all cases, the women are not viewed as whole human beings with agency in their choice of partners. Instead, they are reduced to naïve, gullible, fragile prey (Amarasingam et al. 2022). They are assigned a purity representative of the ethnicity or race, one that must be defended. As Bhatt (2023) explains, the conclusion is meant to be that the nation itself is being ‘raped’ by the immoral foreign invader and that those who sit idly by are complicit in its violation, reinforcing the idea that the Hindu man must become this hypermasculine protector to defend the woman and the nation.

### **The Threat of the Non-Heteronormative**

White Christian nationalism and Hindu supremacism further converge in their ideological constructions of gender, particularly in their opposition to feminist movements and the broader

emancipation of women. While Gorski and Perry (2022) do not explicitly address feminism, they highlight a ‘crisis of white manhood’ as central to the maintenance of social and moral order within White Christian nationalism. Analogous to their hierarchical views on race and ethnicity, adherents of White Christian nationalism endorse a rigid gender hierarchy in which feminism is portrayed as an immoral and subversive force. Feminism is depicted not only as an ideological threat aiming to unseat the white Christian male from his ‘rightful’ position at the apex of social order but also as a pernicious influence that coerces women to abandon their presumed God-given roles within the family and domestic sphere (Whitehead and Perry 2020). This framework also underpins homophobic attitudes, wherein homosexuality is constructed as a deviation from the ‘natural’ order sanctioned by divine design (Whitehead and Perry 2020).

Hindutva articulates a commensurate model of gender relations that is based on a strict binary division wherein women are confined to the domestic sphere while men occupy the public domain (R. Sen and Jha 2024, 3). This gender order is justified as a divine and natural attribution of roles that reinforce traditional heteronormative gender norms and marginalize non-conforming sexualities. In this view, womanhood is strictly defined in relation to a woman’s place within the family structure as wives and mothers rather than as individuals. This mirrors the anti-feminism prevalent in White Christian nationalist discourse. Consistently, Hindutva’s condemnation of homosexuality also mirrors that articulated by White Christian nationalists, treating non-heterosexual identities as threats to the moral and social order.

The patriarchal foundations of both ideologies also shape their anti-feminist and homophobic stances. Within nationalist extremist discourse, women are symbols embodying the nation's honor, integrity, and reproductive future. Women are simultaneously idealized as pure and vulnerable but also portrayed as naïve and easily misled away from their God-given roles. They are 'sites of infiltration,' and their purported violation by out-group men signifies more than the violation of the body but the corruption of the homeland itself (Yuval-Davis 1997; Enloe 1989). Men are consequently cast as the protectors of the women and the nation, which is a role that is consistent with the hypermasculine ideals often promoted within far-right nationalist movements (Sen and Jha 2024). This dual dynamic reinforces a gendered social order designed to maintain male dominance and to regulate female sexuality and agency within both White Christian nationalist and Hindutva frameworks.

The trope of the defenceless woman who must be shielded from external threats exists alongside the narrative of the woman who must be protected from herself due to her susceptibility to corrupting forces such as feminism. This narrative complex not only legitimizes exclusionary attitudes towards

non-heteronormative individuals and movements but also aims to justify constraining women's autonomy by embedding them within a moral and political project aimed at reproducing traditional hierarchies. Such tropes have been historically central to nationalist imaginaries, where the woman-as-nation figure symbolizes both the promise and peril of the collective identity, reinforcing gendered expectations through symbolic and material practices.

### **Moral Asymmetry of Violence**

Narratives portraying an endangered in-group facing existential replacement inevitably generate moral imperatives for violence against the constructed antagonists. The virulent Islamophobia permeating Hindutva discourse predictably fosters calls for violence targeting Muslims alongside other outsiders, paralleling the xenophobic, racist, and anti-migrant aggression inherent in White Christian nationalism. Similarly, overt antagonism toward feminism and homosexuality in both contexts engenders violent rhetoric along lines of gender and sexual orientation.

Under Modi, anti-Muslim hate speech has proliferated markedly. In 2023 alone, the Washington, DC-based India Hate Lab documented 668 hate speech events targeting Muslims at political gatherings across India, with 36 percent featuring explicit calls to violence and 77 percent occurring in BJP-governed states (India Hate Lab 2024). Hindu supremacist actors have been known to orchestrate provocations, such as conducting religious ceremonies in minority enclaves, to elicit retaliatory responses, which are then recast as unprovoked assaults on peaceful Hindu gatherings (Wilkinson 2006). This narrative will be used to legitimize the use of violence in the repression of minorities, as the violence of the minority is immoral and unjust, but that of the Hindus is necessary for the protection of the nation.

This dynamic is not unlike what prevails in the United States, where white Christian nationalists claim the use of violence by their own as legitimate, while the use of violence by 'others' constitutes a threat that must be eliminated. Gorski and Perry highlight this dichotomy through the differential views on the violence of the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection in contrast with that of the Black Lives Matter protests that followed the murder of George Floyd (Gorski and Perry 2022). The scope and scale of the events, as well as the severity of the violence they were associated with, are hardly comparable, but differing opinions regarding these events make for great predictors of ideological associations.

White Christian nationalists view the violence of January 6<sup>th</sup> through the prism of righteousness; this violence is not threatening because it was done by those who wield it legitimately (Gorski and Perry 2022). In their eyes, violence was not what insurrectionists wanted, but they did what needed to be

done to protect the nation. In contrast, the Black Lives Matter protests, which were mostly peaceful with occasional incidents of violence, were harshly condemned and characterized as apocalyptic. This is especially revealing when contrasting the right-wing condemnations of the protests and their praise for violent armed vigilantes like Kyle Rittenhouse, the white teenager who shot and killed protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2020 (Thayer 2025).

The commonality with Hindu supremacist violence is found in how the use of violence by the in-group is legitimized and the violence of the out-group is condemned due to the perception of righteousness and morality that comes from the narrative of victimization that dominates both the white Christian nationalist and the Hindu supremacist ideologies. The logic wherein narratives of victimization confer a ‘moral license’ to the in-group for violence while demonizing the out-group agency constitutes a critical building block of the deep story of nationalist extremism.

### **The Weaponization of the Digital Space**

Far-right extremist and nationalist ideologies likely could not have ascended to mainstream politics without the help of social media. Whether it is Donald Trump’s Twitter account, communities on 4Chan and Reddit, blogs, or Facebook pages, these online spaces have become platforms for far-right radicalization in the United States (Rieger et al. 2021, 1). A similar pattern is observable in India, where social media is used to share racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, and misogynistic content promoted on far-right affiliated websites and channels (Amarasingam et al. 2022; Sen and Jha 2024). Not only that, but these platforms are also routinely used to bully, threaten, and even inflict psychological and incite physical violence on those perceived to be the enemies, usually ethnic, racial, sexual minorities or women (Rieger et al. 2021; Sen and Jha 2024).<sup>1</sup>

What the online space, and particularly social media, has done for the spread of far-right nationalist ideologies in the United States, India, and possibly elsewhere is drastically lower the barrier of entry into far-right ideology and the practice of extremist violence (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020). In the past, engaging with extremists required proper connections, attending meetings and gatherings in person, or even having physical access to literature. This thus required being in the right geographic and social area and exposing one’s identity. Contact with extremism had to be sought out. With the advent of the internet and social media, far-right content has become so pervasive that it is hard to avoid it entirely. Moreover, the cost of participating in extremist behaviour is much lower due to the anonymity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Practices in the online space that lead to psychological trauma include threats, with threats of sexual violence towards women being a particularly salient issue on social media platforms. It also includes the production of ‘deepfakes,’ or doctored videos, often featuring women engaging in pornographic acts (another issue that singularly affects women in the online space). Online practices that can lead to physical harm include ‘doxing,’ meaning the publication of private information of an individual on the internet, or even ‘swating,’ in which a false emergency call is made to authorities, prompting them to dispatch a SWAT team to the home of an unsuspecting person.

online space, as well as its accessibility and convenience. This allows for far-right nationalist narratives to reach more people, sustain their interests, and empower them to lash out against their perceived enemies.

Beyond propagation, these digital environments facilitate targeted harassment, psychological intimidation, and incitement to physical violence against perceived enemies, which typically consists of ethnic, racial, sexual minorities, or women. Common tactics include doxing (public disclosure of private information), swatting (fabricated emergency calls prompting armed police response), and the creation of deepfakes, particularly non-consensual pornographic content weaponized against women (Rieger et al. 2021; Sen and Jha 2024).

### **The Deep Story**

The deep story of nationalist extremism goes as follows: A majority ethnic or racial group with a cultural but not spiritual association with the dominant religion of its nation grows increasingly anxious about a perceived influx of foreigners and foreign influences that are demographically and culturally reshaping their society. The majority group comes to view itself as a vulnerable minority, despite its largely dominant socioeconomic and political position. Against this backdrop emerges a narrative in which these foreign agents and forces are seeking to overthrow the majority group. They want to seize the place atop the social, political, and cultural hierarchy and impose their immoral values and corrupted worldviews onto the dominant group. But the supremacy of the dominant group is its birthright. Its freedoms were deservedly bestowed upon them for the creation of this nation. Thus, it will not be relinquished without a fight. Though this dominant group is opposed to violence, it believes that violence can be justified when it comes to self-defence: that of its people and that of its nation. Violence is the necessary evil that will return the dominant group to the mythical times of glory that preceded foreign incursions and, with it, usher in a new era of peace, social harmony, and prosperity. Ultimately, the ‘deep story’ is a cautionary tale that reveals how the dominant group is led to relinquish power and embrace authoritarianism in a bid to protect its place atop the social hierarchy.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the contemporary ascendance of nationalist extremism in the forms of White Christian nationalism in the United States and Hindutva in India is best understood through the lens of the ‘deep story.’ By deconstructing these narratives, the analysis has shown how each movement narrates a mythic past of civilizational greatness, a period of decline engendered by outsiders and foreign forces, and a promised restoration under a leader who presents as a deified savior figure. These narratives transform majority populations into imagined victims, which legitimizes and

normalizes exclusionary ideologies and policies, and render authoritarian practices thinkable as necessary acts of collective self-defence.

A first contribution of the article has been to extend Gorski and Perry's theorization of White Christian nationalism and its use of Hochschild's deep story beyond the American case. Placing Hindutva in dialogue with this framework demonstrates that deep stories are not a peculiarly US phenomenon, but rather a powerful narrative form through which exclusionary projects articulate ethno-religious identity to legitimate illiberal, populist politics in diverse democratic settings. The comparison shows that an ostensibly Western conceptualization can travel productively to a non-Western context, while also requiring attention to local historical, cultural, social, and political particularities.

A second contribution has been to specify the internal structure of these deep stories as composed of recurrent building blocks that can circulate transnationally. Across both cases, the analysis identified religiousness without religiosity, leader deification, myths of a lost golden age and national rebirth, gendered and sexualized threat constructions, moral asymmetries of violence, and diffusion across cyberspace as key components that together give the deep story its coherence and political role. At the same time, the way these blocks are assembled and prioritized varies: White Christian nationalism leans heavily on anti-establishment rhetoric within a long settler-colonial imaginary, whereas Hindutva is articulated from within the state apparatus and reworks pre-colonial and colonial history into a narrative of a thousand years of 'slavery.' These differences matter for how authoritarianism is legitimized and experienced in each polity.

Conceptualizing far-right projects through modular building blocks of deep stories has broader implications for the study of nationalism, extremism, fascism, and democratic backsliding. It highlights how familiar elements, including the strategic mobilization of religiousness, patriarchal order, racialized or communalized enemies, and sanctified violence, can be recombined and updated through new media platforms for political purposes. It also suggests that, in addition to institutional safeguards, resisting authoritarianism requires competing stories that can unsettle the moral certainty and emotional appeal of the civilizational, 'deep story' myths. By making visible the building blocks of these deep stories and tracing their recombination across the United States and India, the article offers a framework for analyzing how exclusionary nationalist narratives travel, adapt, and threaten democracy anywhere.

Gorski and Perry wrote that 'white Christian nationalism is a 'deep story' of America's past and future' (2022, 3). So is the deep story of Hindutva in Modi's India. But all deep stories are myths told

to elicit anxiety, panic, and rage that interfere with logic, reason, and compassion. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the deep stories of white Christian nationalism and Hindutva have both ended with the ascent of aspiring authoritarian leaders to the highest offices of their nations.

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# **Elected to Govern and to Oppose: The Democratic Mandate of Opposition Parties in Ensuring Accountability and Inclusive Representation**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of legitimacy and the relationship between the ruling and the opposition parties is the intended focus of this research paper. It would be a mistake to consider democracies as only legitimizing the rule of the governors. To this endpoint, opposition also legitimizes democracies, as democracies also validate the challengers of executives and oppositional democracies. This paper contends that opposition parties have a parallel electoral mandate, equal to that of a ruling party, justified by the same democracy that authorizes the parties to govern. Considering Robert Dahl's Polyarchy, Giovanni Sartori's theory of party systems and Jurgen Habermas's deliberative democracy as the theoretical foundations, this paper treats the political opposition as an institution constitutionally and morally required to provide checks on accountability and continuous pluralism. It also highlights the role of opposition parties as guardians of minority and marginalized voices and their role in reinforcing inclusive representation. This paper investigates the opposition's contributions to democracy's consolidation in established and emerging democracies by examining democracy's scaffolding, notably legislative scrutiny, the contestation of policies and civic discourse. Ultimately, it argues that a ruling party should never suppress opposition claiming that the citizens have elected ruling party in power. Opposition parties too are elected by the citizens to be in opposition and keep check on arbitrary actions of the government. Acknowledging the opposition as an elected, accountable actor is crucial for maintaining the constitutional equilibrium, controlling arbitrary power and preserving democracy in a form that is responsive and representative to all peoples.

## **Keywords**

Democratic Legitimacy, Political Opposition, Accountability Mechanisms, Inclusive Representation, Constitutional Equilibrium.

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## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Rationale**

Within modern democratic theory, political opposition is incorporated as an integral part as they function as an institutionalized means through which contestation, accountability and pluralism are defended (Dahl, 1971; Sartori, 1987). Dahl views democracy and polyarchy as synonymous and does not limit democracy, as does some theorists, to the holding of elections (Dahl, 1989). Rather, democracy blooms in the absence of dictatorial regimes whereby new political actors challenge incumbents through legitimate, structured means of contestation. Within the polyarchy perspective, political opposition is not an amenity but a necessity, as the political system must remain responsive, competitive and open to critique (Dahl, 1971).

Nonetheless, the aberrational characteristic of electoral legitimacy still exists especially as it pertains to democratic authorization as a so-called electoral mandate to govern. From this perspective, the plurality of electoral choices is reduced to a single point of consent which is wholly misguided as democratic elections also authorize those who will not attain executive office (Held, 2006). Political opposition represents a large segment of the electorate whose political preferences, rights and needs desire an institutionalized expression. As equal representatives, they have the right to put forward different political alternatives and defend minority rights while also refraining from the executive overconcentration. Thus, for the sake of constitutional equilibrium, social equity and a healthy democratic atmosphere, the political opposition must also be regarded as a democratically authorized entity (Dahl, 1989).

### **1.2 Research Problem**

I have examined how the opposition's democratic mandate affects accountability, inclusivity, and balance within the constitution. Also analysed whether the opposition's legitimacy is simply a strategic factor tied to the results of an election, or whether it is an institutional right that is based on democratic principles. Further I have analysed how opposition actors review and critique the executive's actions, defend differing interests and how these functions interrelate across different arrangements of constitutions and party systems.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The first out of the three goals of the research paper is to incorporate the electoral, constitutional, and deliberative components to form a complete picture of the character of the opposition's democratic legitimacy. The second is to specially assess the opposition's normative and institutional roles in the

maintenance of legislative oversight and policy contestation and other secondary institutional functions in a bid to accomplish accountability and pluralism. The last objective is to describe the role of opposition in democratic consolidation in both the developed and the developing democracies in the context of the consolidators and the structural limitations.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The inquiry is guided by three research questions:

- (1) What is the nature and scope of the opposition's democratic mandate?
- (2) How do opposition parties achieve accountability, minority representation, and democratic deliberation?
- (3) What are the possible institutional, structural, and discursive factors that limit or facilitate the effectiveness of the opposition?

#### **1.5 Theoretical Foundations**

The research is informed by Dahl's polyarchy theory, which describes inclusiveness and contestation as essential for the legitimacy of democracy (Dahl, 1971, 1989). The classification of party systems by Giovanni Sartori describes how systematised parties have a clear understanding of weakening opposition (Sartori, 1976). Jurgen Habermas's conception of democracy adds a focus on reasonable communicative action and criticism as a form of legitimization for a political decision to provide a normative perspective (Habermas, 1996). Constitutionalism, the principle of checks and balances and agonistic pluralism of Chantal Mouffe, collectively position the opposition as a major stakeholder to sustain the democratic balance and to avoid the tyranny of the executive (Mouffe, 2000).

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The guiding theory of this study revolves around the definition of political opposition as an institution of democracy that is constitutionally embedded, normatively grounded and required through electoral means. The theory also sees political legitimacy, democratic mandate, and institutional opposition as separate concepts. It views the opposition as a politically relevant actor and not as an incidental product of losing an election.

The first pillar of the framework is the concept of political legitimacy. It has often been defined in a narrow sense as the right of the ruling party to control executive authority within a democratic regime. However, this concept of legitimacy is not unitary. Rather, it is dual. While it may empower a government to control the rule of law, it also simultaneously allows the opposition to interrogate,

challenge and critique that authority. Legitimacy, therefore, is not the sole property of governing parties. It is a joint possession with the opposition parties as well, who politically socialize the electorate and embody its will. It is in this regard that the position is taken that legitimacy is political. It also aligns with Robert Dahl's views in regard to the importance of democracy, in which the opposition's right to challenge the government and present alternative views is the essence of democracy (Dahl, 1971, 1989).

The democratic mandate of opposition (second pillar) is based on the notion that elections generate differentiations of coequal mandates. Governing parties receive a mandate to execute certain policy options, while opposition parties obtain a counter mandate to provide policy alternatives, defend the constitution and hold institutions to account. This reconceptualization contests the majoritarian view that winning elections bestows *carte blanche* power and, in addition, supports the view that opposition parties are legitimate stakeholders of the constituencies whose interests are primarily neglected.

The third pillar speaks to opposition as a system, reflecting the configurations of the party system and the constitution. Giovanni Sartori's classification of party systems offers a coherent framework to understand how opposition roles and functions shift and vary across systems that are classified as two party, multi-party, polarized or dominant party systems (Sartori, 1976). These types of arrangements characterize the strategic space in which actors of the opposition-enacted- opposition operate, as well as the levers and constraints to which they are subjected. Arrangements such as the make-up of committees, question time, document access, and procedural rights determine the degree to which opposition representatives can meaningfully supervise and constructively oppose the opposition in policy.

It is essential to discuss both deliberative and agonistic philosophies-Jurgen Habermas's deliberative democracy and Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism. 'Legitimizing democracy...rests on the rational-critical debate and its institutionalization' (Habermas, 1996). Mouffe argues that while conflict is integral to the political, it must be contained to legitimate/acceptable adversarial conflict (Mouffe, 2000). Collectively, these opportunities provide a unique perspective to understand the opposition as simultaneously legitimate in its contestation, defining a pluralism that furthers the idea of opposition as accountability and the opposition holds a balance of power within the constitution.

### **Theoretical Architecture Supporting the Opposition's Role**

This research draws on a pluralist, systemic and deliberative approaches to democracy and focuses on the more contemporary critiques that value politically organised conflict. These insights together

explain the different ways the opposition fulfils its democratic functions of accountability, pluralism and constitutional balance and provides different ways of understanding how opposition parties, in their own way, achieve democracy.

More than anything else, Robert Dahl's theory of polyarchy is most central to this research. Dahl identifies two core elements of democracy— the right and the ability to contest. Dahl affirms that democracy is contestation (Dahl, 1971, 1989). This is where the opposition comes in. It is this framework that highlights the necessity for democracy to have institutions where dissent can be articulated freely and openly, alternatives can be proposed and challenges to the incumbents be made. Therefore, in this context, the opposition holds a crucial role as it is this that provides the institutional form of democracy's need for contestation. The opposition in a democracy is a necessity because it makes the democratic political space contestable and, in a way, responsive and inclusive.

Sartori's recognition of how the governmental structure of a party system changes the configuration of the parties in opposition serves as the second analytical pillar of opposition theory. In this regard, Sartori's distinctions are made within the frameworks of two-party, dominant-party, moderate multiparty, polarized multiparty systems, which highlight the different degrees of opportunity and disadvantage opposition actors are embedded within (Sartori, 1976). For instance, in two-party systems, the opposition acts as a government-in-waiting, often having considerable informal control, while the opposition in dominant party systems must cope with structural disadvantages, a lack of media visibility and formal-instructional inequity, as they are the only party. Sartori conceptualizes the "irrelevance of the party of the opposition" to illustrate that the opposition is relevant and this relevance is often due to the ability to control the opposition, which in turn controls competition, discourse, and coalition formation.

The third pillar is Jürgen Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy which posits a clear normative significance of the inclusion of rational-critical discourse. For Habermas, the ideal democracy is one that obtains legitimacy in the enactment of a law, for which reason must be provided, in the enactment of a law through a communicative process and through discourse within a democracy (Habermas, 1996). In this regard, the opposition can be viewed as the primary actor of deliberation, to the extent that it is responsible for widening the discursive space within which government failures are addressed and alternative policies are provided in the public discourse. The character of this function not only improves the decision-making process, but also the quality of the democratic outcome, by providing legitimacy to the result.

Mouffe's agonistic pluralism addresses the contemporary discourse on democracy and, while incorporating the elements of the tradition, highlights the inevitability of political conflict and, more importantly, the democratic requirement to divert antagonism into legitimate, democratic struggles (Mouffe, 2000). Mouffe posits that opposition is more of an adversary than an enemy, as ongoing confrontation is not detrimental, but rather, if institutionalized, is beneficial for democratic deepening. This line of reasoning, in turn, helps to account for the durability of frameworks in which opposition actors are able to challenge and are not rendered as having no legitimacy.

### **Opposition, Accountability and Constitutional Equilibrium**

For there to be accountability, constitutionalism and a democratic equilibrium, there has to be a functioning opposition. The opposition, at least in the normative and institutional sense, is a democratic safety net (Norton, 2008). The opposition functions as a restraint on the governing entity. It exposes when a governing entity overreaches and it defends the interests of every member of the polity. It is, however, a significant role. It is not purely a hostile one, as there needs to be equilibrium in the framework of a democracy for it to operate efficiently (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

How opposition parties hold the governing body to account is a prime example of an aspect that is institutional. The opposition is, or at least should be, able to employ an arsenal of parliamentary and procedural tools to question the governing body. The opposition should be able to use tools of legislative oversight, such as question time, debates, committee inquiries, motions of censure and scrutiny of government budgets, in order to force the governing body to explain its actions and face accountability (Yamamoto, 2007). This should not be a trivial, procedural exercise as it is a vital aspect of public accountability that ensures that government power be answerable to the constitution and to the people. Where systems provide opposition leaders with committee chairs in order to incorporate public scrutiny, such as public accounts committee chairs or ethics committee chairs, there is a stronger, more systemic, and more institutionalized form of public accountability (Rozenberg & Martin, 2011). A lack of such systems indicates, or can be correlated, to an overreaching governing body and the decline of democracy (Diamond & Morlino, 2004).

Aside from overseeing procedure, the opposition also defends constitutionalism and maintains balance between the organs of the state and protects the balance of constitutionalism in the state from the arbitrary and unconstitutional actions of the other state organs (Ackerman, 2010). The opposition limits the threat of arbitrary actions of the state organs by challenging the legislation of the other organs of the state, which might affect the fundamental rights of citizens and by questioning the legality of the actions of the executive through the process of judicial review (Ferejohn & Pasquino,

2004). Opposition affects actions of other state organs which protects the benefits of the balance of power in the state. Opposition in the state also protect the balance of power in the centre and the units of government in federal states along with the opposition against the centralization of power (Lijphart, 1999).

The opposition also performs other important functions of defending major constitutional rights, other voices and minority rights, of the minority and those of the majorities. While majorities might have the right of the voice and control of the legislation, it is also important to emphasize that majorities do not have the right to do whatever they want. The opposition also protects the rights of other stratified and marginalized people (Young, 2000). This also strengthens the other important aspects of democracy, which are inclusivity and distributive part of democracy.

Encouraging active civic and political discourse is another notable contribution of the opposition. The opposition deepens the democratic debate by proposing alternative policy options, eliciting public discourse, and interacting with the public and the media (Dryzek, 2000). This engagement of the opposition improves the public discourse and reasoning but also increases the accountability and responsiveness of the government. A robust opposition promotes a political culture that encourages debate, dissent and compromise rather than the unification of political discourse.

The opposition's functions are also related to maintaining constitutional balance, which is articulated through its function as a democratic watchman-warning the public of constitutional deviations and also not passive while the democratic watchman cautions erosions of the institutional independence and counter mobilize public support against authoritarianism (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Where the ruling party limits the public criticism and centralizes the power, the opposition's activity becomes fundamental for maintaining democratic endurance.

### **Opposition and Inclusive Representation**

The opposition's role in democratic settings is to facilitate and advocate for voices that would be marginalized and/or neglected through the lens of the majority. While governing parties take a majority of the control and have to be cautious and politically correct with the policies they put forth and the concerns, they register in an attempt to remain in control and actually govern, oppositions have the unique and free ability to describe the concerns of the governing parties, their inequities and the unaddressed issues of the politically weaker constituencies (Pitkin, 1967). This role is an embodiment of the democratic axiom that speaks to the idea of representation being more than a multitude with a majority, but is instead an affirmation of the protection of a myriad of identities, interests and social

experiences (Phillips, 1995).

Oppositions are representatives of the minorities and the marginalized and that is a critical aspect of their role. In a pluralistic context where social, economic and cultural inequities and hierarchies exist, opposition actors focus on discrimination and exclusion, economic and rights violations and inequities (Kymlicka, 1995). Their involvement in legislative debates, committee meetings and public opposition, helps to ensure that the policy discussions and parliamentary debates the ruling government has to recognize are inclusive of perspectives that the ruling government and a majority of them would rather overlook. This provides a clear example of representation to the substance of representation, or qualitative representation, termed as, providing for the interests of a group, or the focus on a group and not just a numerical presence.

The opposition similarly strengthens representation by employing policy interventions in the legislation that expands the scope of substantive policy-making in opposition. Through amendments, critiques of legislation, alternative policy proposals and analyses of the budget, opposition parties seek to challenge the government's decisions that could lead to inequities and failures of a just distribution of social justice (Fraser, 2008). This helps them attain a more just legislative process, which allows equitable social justice and social welfare policies to be developed and implemented for disadvantaged groups. Even in cases when such legislative proposals are not adopted, there is a likelihood of raising public awareness and in the process, the proposals change the government's political priorities, thus affecting public policy for the better.

Also, the opposition provides support for the civic discourse by collaborating with social movements, civil society organizations and community groups that address a broad spectrum of social constituencies (Tarrow, 2011). This enables a more direct participation in democracy by strengthening the grassroots movements. Opposition parties often act as a bridge between the state and the public by promoting awareness and providing avenues for political dissent.

Finally, the contributions of the opposition to inclusive representation also deal with the restructuring of public narratives and the opposition of dominant discourses outside of... public/informal institutions. The opposition actors carry out public campaigns and deliberate forums. and participate in media to challenge the narratives that erase the marginal voices of the dominated others. They enrich the democracy of the citizens by epistemically diversifying the discourses and enabling the citizens to think about the policies put forth by the government (Benhabib, 1996).

## Challenges to Effective Opposition

In considering the attempts made by opposition parties to exercise their legally and democratically sanctioned activities these parties are often shaped by a range of interlocking structural, political and normative challenges. To understand these challenges and their interlocking impact are important in assessing the state of democracy and the democracy's health to make recommendations or reforms. These challenges may also inform the state of democracy in relation to its accountability, representation and democracy's ability to provide active participation by the citizenry (Schedler, 2013). The following challenges are a reflection of the challenges confronted by oppositional democracy in both developed and developing democracies.

**1. Structural Limitations:** Issues of a structural nature also relate to the design of the electoral system, the configuration of the political parties of the system and intra-system institutional asymmetries. Structural challenges suggest that opposition parties will encounter challenges of effectiveness and responsiveness, Majoritarian electoral systems, such as first-past-the-post, tend to create dominant party systems parliamentary systems where one ruling party dominates with overwhelming legislative and electoral strength (Norris, 2004). Such systems create a structural environment wherein there is numerical opposition that dominates in most parliamentary committees and opposition parties are restricted in their legislative outputs. On the other hand, there are also extreme cases where there are multi-party systems parliamentary systems where there is extreme fragmentation of the party opposition to a point where weak cohesive blocs are formed and capable of exercising minimal control and oversight, where there are a weak dispersed and attenuated oversights (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2005).

Differences in institutions also create limitations. Inadequate financial means, insufficient research, uneven visibility in the media and disinformation all decrease the opposition's ability to confront the executive. In some democracies, legislative policies and committee controls allow the dominant party to have complete control over the timing and scope of parliamentary discussions, accelerating the passage of legislation (Helmke & Levitsky, 2006). These factors work in tandem to create a weakening of the structural environment needed for effective parliamentary opposition.

**2. Political and Normative Constraints:** Alongside the structural aspects mentioned above, political and normative challenges applied by the government also affect opposition parties. The government can define dissent as an obstruction or as an obstacle to advancement, thus undermining the opposition's claim and the public's legitimacy on confrontational politics (Mounk, 2018). Such eschewed discourse, particularly prevalent within highly polarized and populist contexts, serves to

further close the democratic dispute space necessary for politically accountable governance.

There are also internal weaknesses of the opposition which include factionalism, leadership instability, inadequate ideological clarity and, in particular, an absence of strong organizational structures. These weaknesses diminish the ability to develop and offer the public viable political alternatives (Katz & Mair, 2018). In addition, the opposition parties may be subjected to informal constraints in the form of state surveillance, the intimidation of political activists and the circumvention of legal restrictions governing political financing, especially in hybrid or illiberal regimes (Bermeo, 2016).

**3. Media, Social Perception and Narrative Struggles:** How the media influences the effectiveness of the opposing parties. In the case of media concentration in the hands of the state, the public can be misinformed and opposing opinions can be sidelined (McNair, 2018). If the media coverage heavily favors one side, criticism can be seen as one sided, therefore losing the ability to influence public discussions or bring to the light issues that need to be discussed.

Public frustration with adversarial politics further fuels the narrative struggles. Opposition can be seen, in the case of walkouts, protests and filibustering as a disruption to the legislative process, which further alienates the public from the opposition and therefore frustrates the government from working in a constructive way (Mutz, 2015).

**4. Constraints in Civic and Institutional Space:** The opposition cannot work with civil society, Mobil the grassroots, or peacefully protest, because of the closing democratic spaces. Legal restrictions on assembly and the registration for an NGO, coupled with an increase in punitive responses to dissidents, are none of these win the opposition's effectiveness (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). Weakening institutional autonomy of the judiciary, electoral commissions, and other independent oversight, the fewer the mechanisms that opposition parties have to influence the executive overreach (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The main takeaway from the research is that political opposition should not be viewed as antagonistic to democracy. Instead, opposition is an integral part of the system that provides democracy with legitimacy, accountability, and the pluralistic representation of the constituents of the democracy (Dahl, 2020). Because opposition parties and governing parties derive their electoral mandates from the same voter base, that plurality of democratic mandates deepens the significance of the democratic existence of governance and opposition. This recognition is invaluable, especially with regard to

constitutively weak democracies, in guaranteeing that the democracy is one that provides balance in its power not totalizing in the political control it exerts, politically responsive to the complexities of the people and not actively apathetic to the people's will (Diamond, 2019).

The duties of opposition are not only electoral and transactional, but they must also include assessing the executive and providing an evaluation of the vision aimed at reinforcing the policy direction. Opposition also must ensure that the minorities and silenced are given an opportunity of representation. Opposition parties tend to carry out the minimum of what democracy ought to be by placing the executive under the scrutiny and accountability and thereby preventing the minimal democracy from being continued (Rosanvallon, 2008). This acknowledgment of democracy and of the accountability to the executive, is particularly necessary for many dominant political systems to hyper-criticize opposition, for its political minority.

The effectiveness and power of opposition parties are determined by institutional frameworks, party systems, and political culture. Older democracies such as the U.K., Canada, and Germany, which have well-established parliamentary systems, grant the opposition legal recognition and parliamentary privileges essential for effective opposition control over legislation (Powell, 2012). In the yet-to-be fully developed democracies of India, South Africa, Brazil and Indonesia, opposition parties encounter systematic, political, and procedural constraints, yet their partnerships for advocacy are instrumental as they seek to defend the constitutional framework, limit the power of the executive and mobilize the populace (Carothers, 2020). There has always been a balancing opposition, irrespective of the stage of democracy or the dominant party's control over the legislature. The opposition plays a crucial role in any democracy by countering authoritarian tendencies (Levitsky & Way, 2022).

Much work is required to achieve the theoretical functions of the opposition political parties. This study highlights the existence of political, structural, and discursive impositions on opposition political parties which limit the ability to achieve their systemic functions. These barriers include the lack of numbers, resource deprivation, a hostile media, political and procedural sidelining of dissent, intra-party weaknesses, and state-imposed restrictions on the democratic public sphere. This study urges the need to recognize opposition rights and their institutional and legal frameworks, to open up democratic spaces and expand the democratic domain to include unhindered public media, civic monitoring, and responsible state funding of politics (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Having an understanding of the political landscape, the opposition, and their role in defending the rights and freedoms of citizens and the concept of inclusive democracy are important. Without the

factual opposition, democracy is suffocated. Political democracy is not the result of just governing parties possessing and exercising their power. Power may be exercised legitimately but power may also be exercised damagingly. Autonomy is the precondition of democracy. These concepts are important for society, but they also fully justify the politics of democracy. These concepts complement each other in theory but, in practice, in the real politics of democracy, they contradict. They may not complement each other equally by all and may subsume each other in the practice of politics of democracy (Held & Hervey, 2021).

Information may be in opposition to institutional power. Information is a tool. Empowerment of the disempowered by democracy may result in opposition to the operational institutional powers. This may also result in the repositioning of the 'innocent citizen' to the 'political citizen'. This shift may in fact result in the concept of democracy. The political landscape may define the operational changes in democracy.

Digital democracy does this in real time. Interaction, engagement and opposition to the system in hybrid, polarized digital democracies allows for a constant evolution of democracy. Innovation and adaptation are crucial to understanding democracy. The evolution of opposition politics is crucial to the understanding of democracy. Adapting is survival. The study of the evolution of opposition politics is essential for the understanding of democracy and the politics of democracy. The study of this democracy and democracy may be a hybrid of real time, polarized, digital democracy. The study of the evolution of opposition to politics is crucial for understanding the evolving democracy.

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# Decolonized Arms Control and Disarmament in South Asia

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## Abstract

This paper studies the theoretical and practical outline of decolonizing arms control and disarmament in South Asia. It conveys that mainstream, West-centric models of arms control ineffectively address the historical, political, and epistemic specificity of the region. Building on decolonial theory and regional security studies, the paper outlines a framework that centers native security narratives, historical experiences of colonialism and symmetric power relations among state and external actors. The evaluation focuses on three arenas: nuclear arms and principals, conventional force stances along disputed borders, and multilateral regimes and norms. Depiction on policy literature and current regional analysis, the paper suggests a set of politically programmatic and ethically landed policy measures-ranging from confidence-building measures and bilateral consulting bodies to plural, region-led normative initiative that inclusively aim to reduce insecurity while reorganizing local environment. The paper concludes with suggestions for scholars, policy makers, and civil society aimed at reformulating arms control as a decolonial practice in south Asia.

## Keywords

Arms control, South Asia Decolonization, nuclear Politics, Postcolonial Disarmament.

## Introduction

Arm control and disarmament remain important to Transnational (global) security yet their relevance in South Asia, a region marked by nuclear proliferation, continuous conflict and deep skepticism between India and Pakistan presents a serious challenge. (Shouzad, 2018). Arms control and demilitarization discussion has conventionally been adopted by structures, foundations and normative dialects that appeared during the cold war and were concentrated within western multilateral institutions. While specialized and legal instruments developed in that space have tremendous value,

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their transplantation into south Asia without judgmental alteration risks producing policies that are ruthless to local histories strategic cultural and asymmetric power relations. South Asia's security landscape-marked by a legacy of colonial partition, enduring India-Pakistan hatred, a rising India-China strategic competition and significant external influences, requires an approach that interrogates the epistemic foundations of arms control itself. This paper develops the concept of decolonizing arms control: reorienting policy and learning towards ways that privilege region-specific histories, assimilate subaltern voices and redistribute agenda – setting power to regional actors and civil society. It also demands a fault finding rebuild of the foundation with the understanding, language, and goals of security policy to address the abiding impact of imperial rule (Connel, 2020).

## **1. Historical context: colonialism and the impost of western norms**

Colonialism, first and foremost accomplished by European powers from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was a practice of domination and operation that constitutionally transmuted the Transnational (global) political, social, and economic landscape. Inspired by a search for resources, trade, national reputation, and a self – confessed “civilizing mission “colonial power forced their rule over vast territories in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This process was never ending by an aggressive belief in western culture and racial superiority, which looked at a non-western society as “backward “or “civilized “and in need of external governance

### **1.1 The Inheritance of Imperialism in South Asia.**

Colonial rule considerably impacted South Asia by society's external control and breaking existing indigenous governance and security structure (Linstrum, 2019). Hannah Arendt in his essay “On non-violence (1969) has identified recurrent fear of western imperialism: view that “rule by violence in faraway lands would end by affecting the government of England where she argues that the control over South Asian regions heavily demanded on coercion, violence and legal, objections “that dangling ordinary law to overcome opposition and maintain colonial expert. (Arendt, 2020). The disruption of native systems by colonial power created power in equality and disputes persisted to these days. “According to Linstrum, the use of the colonial counter revolution strategy had an outstanding impact on the militarization of the police force. This militarization with the introduction of new forms of ribbons modifies the dynamics of conflicts and control in the region. The long-standing limitation between the “zero of law and imperial violence” came under pressure during this period, further intensifying the region’s security environment. The preface of tear gas as a mechanism for social control demonstrates the interactive relationship between western powers and their colonies, originally used in colonies to fight riots and insurgencies, tear gas finally creates its way back in the British Isles, emphasizing the” boomerang effect “of imperial politics. (linstrum 2019).

## **1.2. Opposition to Colonialism and the Seeds of Non-Alignment**

Notwithstanding the imposition of western norms, South Asia leaders and movement actively opposed colonial rule and pursued to affirm their own fantasy for the region's futures. This opposition created a critical role in tailoring the elements of non-alignment and the pursuit of an independent foreign policy, Jawaharlal Nehru a primary outline in the Indian independence movement. Imagined word beyond imperialism – rooted in his adventures with anti- imperialist and anti-fascist mobilization. This anti- imperialist emotion influenced India's International Relations (I.R) and its functions in the non-alignment movement (Louro, 2020). Nevertheless, after the cold war the non-alignment movement has been required to review itself and redesign its ideas in the concurrent global system, after discovering that it has truly to play against the western supremacy neo- colonization in a unipolar world. (Mital, 2016).

## **2. The Cold War and its Effect on South Asia**

The period of cold war is marked as transnational (global) geopolitical rivalry (Ideological war) between the United States and the U.S.S.R (Soviet Union) essentially transformed South Asia from Post- Colonial region into a crucial player for indirect conflict and superpower strategic competition. The region is recognized by the U.S for its strategic location, manpower and natural resources which became a significant playhouse in the formation of rigid cold war alliances that aggravate (to make matters worse) existing the regional tension, exceptionally between India and Pakistan, Shaping their geo-political fight path for decades.

### **2.1. South Asia as a Playhouse of Superpower Competition**

The cold war brought a new scope to the security dynamics of South Asia as the region became a playhouse of Superpower Competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both superpowers pursued to accumulate leverage in the region by delivering military and economic support to various countries leading to an arms race and increased strains. The intimacy of external powers then sophisticated the already interacting security landscape of South Asia. The competition between the U.S and U.S.S.R had a major impact on regional powers in Asia. The cold war competition between the U.S and U.S.S.R had a major impact on regional Power in Asia, the Middle East and Europe despite their aerial position after 1945, the superpower looked (toward) objections from decolonization. Asian-Africa Internationalism and regional conflicts. These challenges restricted the superpowers' capability to control the course of events and shaped the dynamics of the cold world war in different regions (M. luthi,2020). Basically, the period of cold war significantly impacted south Asia, creating regional competition between India and Pakistan because of intervention of both the

superpower (US and USSR) and Arms sales.

## **2.2. The Nuclearization of the Region**

The cold war also contributed to the nuclearization of South Asia as both India and Pakistan tracked nuclear weapons programs in response to perceived threats and security dilemmas because both fear about their security and they are attempting to pursue national interest against challenges given by external conditions reasoned by the three aspects.

1. Reserved weaponry: These aspects stable the need to deter the Pakistani atomic risk under the suppression charge by stretching the NPT regime
2. Responsible weaponry: These aspects are stable between New Delhi search to maintain plausible deterrent on the one hand and as well as urge to get seated in the global nuclear order on the other.
3. Resurgence weaponry: This aspect is considering the ongoing aspects which is best on India recalibration of its security necessity against China and Pakistan (Jushi, 2022)

It means that the nuclearization of the region elevated stresses and increased the risk of conflict. Besides intensifying the view for arms control disarmament, the legacy of the cold war continues to shape the nuclear policies and stances of India and Pakistan.

India's nuclear journey can be derived as a function of its leader's capability to sew the country through civilian (non-military) means, especially tactics that shields an international institution in the 1970s. India sought and received support from supreme power against China making the accession of nuclear weapons less pressing nevertheless at the end of cold war these measures ceased to be possible leading to the development of a more lucid nuclear capability in the 1990s ( Kennedy , 2011).

## **2.3. The Non-Alignment Movement (N.A.M) and the Tracking of Disarmament**

In reaction to the cold war and the supremacy of the supreme powers many South Asian countries joined the NAM which advocated for an independent foreign policy and the tracking of disarmament. The NAM gave a podium for South Asian countries to declare their own interest and to publish a more impartial international organization. The principle of NAM continues to implement the foreign policy of many countries in the region.

Yugoslavia played an instrumental role in the formation of NAM with Josip Beoz Tito's strategic reorientation towards NAM shaping the principle of active peaceful co-existence, Tito's trip to India

and Burma in 1954 specially his confront with indies Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru created a crucial role in transfiguring those principles into a global initiative (Rajak, 2014), was a milestone in the development of N.A.M. The period of the cold war divided the world into two rival sides where the U.S side was western alliance and the USSR; the soviet side was the eastern bloc. Those countries who are newly independent in Asia and Africa are pursuing the third way one would protect their sovereignty and avoid the non-colonial supremacy and by NAM they can promote peace and development.

The NAM delivered a stage for third world leaders to declare their choice and oppose supremacy by more powerful central actors. (Acharya, 2011) where Acharya states that NAM provided recently independent countries of the global South route to map their own program in global politics free from supreme powers and to sit together against tension of supremacy.

### **3. Nuclear Proliferation and Disarmament South Asia**

Nuclear proliferation in simple terms means briskly increasing the number or amount of something.

Nuclear proliferation consists of two types.

1. Horizontal Proliferation

2. Vertical Proliferation

- Horizontal Proliferation means nation state/non-state actors do not possess nuclear weapons rather they are gaining nuclear weapons or developing the competence and material for producing them.
- Vertical Proliferation means nation-states that have nuclear weapons are increasing their accumulate of these weapons, developing the technical Composure or authenticity of their weapon /developing now weapons at the same time nuclear disarmament refers to the process of abbreviating or dispose of nuclear weapons to promote Transnational (Global) security and prevent the possible cataclysmic Consequences of nuclear welfare. It encircles several efforts aimed at controlling and basically abandoning nuclear arsenals, with the end goal of achieving a nuclear-free world.

#### **3.1 Regional Disputes and Ammunition Dilemmas**

South Asia continues to be afflicted by regional conflicts and security dilemmas, which advise vital challenges to arms control and disarmament efforts. The operating disputes over Kashmir and other

territorial issues have generated an arms race between India and Pakistan, making it difficult to attain advance in arms control. The propinquity of non-state actors and the menace of terrorism further difficult the security topography of the region. The condition in Kashmir has been a major source of tension between India and Pakistan, obstructing efforts to promote regional peace and security, and also the conflicts has led to increased military paying elevated risk of amplification and making it difficult to achieve progress in arms Control and disarmament. The intimacy of external actors and the complicated political dynamics of the region further intensify the situation (Ganguly and Bajpai, 1994). This leads to the involvement of the external Powers, whose external powers continue to play a vital role in South Asia both as distributors of arms and as middlemen in regional conflicts/disputes. The intimacy of this power can have both positive and negative effects on arm control and disarmament effort, basing on their encouragement and precedence. It is significant for South Asian Countries to meticulously handle their relationship with external powers in order to publicize their own security interests. Africa has long been a deliberate frontier to the world in both economic and political, but there has been a continual stream of ideas and goods, between Africa, Europe, Asia and America, and South Asia and also has been impressed by external powers, with their intimacy shaping the region's political and security dynamics. ("Africa in International Politics" 2004).

### **3.2 Security Operator of Nuclear Proliferation**

The strategic rationale propelling nuclear proliferation in South Asia is hammered by a complicated give-and-take of security commerce/concerns, allies' dynamics. and regional conflict Monteiro and Debs, strategic theory postulate that nuclear armament requires both eagerness and opportunity unforeseen on conceivable threats and inadequate protection by allies ("Monteiro and Debs 2014). In the case of South Asian, both the countries India and Pakistan have anticipated dignified threats from each other and from weakening regional conditions inflaming their respective nuclear weapons programs.

### **4. Towards a Decolonized Approach to Arms Control and Disarmament**

Transcend the traditional appraisal of colonial science, the sketch of decolonization must also address Transnational (Global) governance structures including arms control and disarmament. Traditional approaches to Arms Control and Disarmament are deep-rooted in the same Eurocentric principles of universalism and state-centric security that explain the colonial era. An addiction or unhealthy need or craving for something based on established international norms and statecraft has, at times, led Scholarly communities - such as those in traditional security studies - to keep-going "Old Myth" and avoid scrutinizing how these norms confirm dominant structure. A decolonized approach reflects the

notion of "position-less science" and demands a shift from universalist policies, which often fail to safeguard the interest of marginalized groups, towards a framework of pluri-versalism. In-the-end, decolonizing Arms Control and Disarmament require deconstruct the Intellectual hierarchies that precedence the security interests of erstwhile colonial powers over the sovereignty and lived expertise of the colonized, by that mean ingrained principles of respect, give-and-take, and self-determination into global security praxis.

#### **4.1 Reclaiming Agency and Indigenous Knowledge**

A decolonized route to Arms Control and disarmament in South Asia requires reclaiming agency and understanding the value of native knowledge and practices. This means moving away from the imposition of western norms and principles and rather developing routes that are customized to the precise context of the region. It also means empowering local communities and civil society organizations to play a greater role in shaping arms control policies.

The discipline of International Relation (IR) often marginalizes the voices and experiences of societies and states outside the core countries of the west. Thus, Acharya said that the IR community is Complicit in the marginalization of the post-colonial world in developing the discipline. Where he posed a few questions.

- Why do we view the Cold War as a long pear? Acharya, 2014)
- Millions During the period of cold war thousands of lives lost in the battle which took place outside Europe, in the so called Third World? (Acharya, 2014).

A "Global IR" approach seeks to exceed the divide between the west and the rest by committing to pluralistic universalism, grounding theory in history and integrating the study of regions and regionalisms into the central Concerns, (Acharya, 2014). This route helps reclaim agency and recognize the value of distinctive viewpoints in arms control and disarmament efforts.

The article "The west and the Rest: A civilizational Mantra in Arms Control and Disarmament" basically talks about the how civilizational discussion structuring the world as " Civilized" vs. "barbaric", means "west" vs "Rest" (R. Mathur,2014) Mathur argues that where arms control and disarmament are not neutral, but are profoundly Knotted with civilizational bombast. This article presents the west as a civilized/Rational, responsible, and authorized weapon, while depicting non-western societies as irrational, dangerous and unfit to possess them. This structure helped nourish western military arrogance while marginalizing calls for Equality and justice from the Global South.

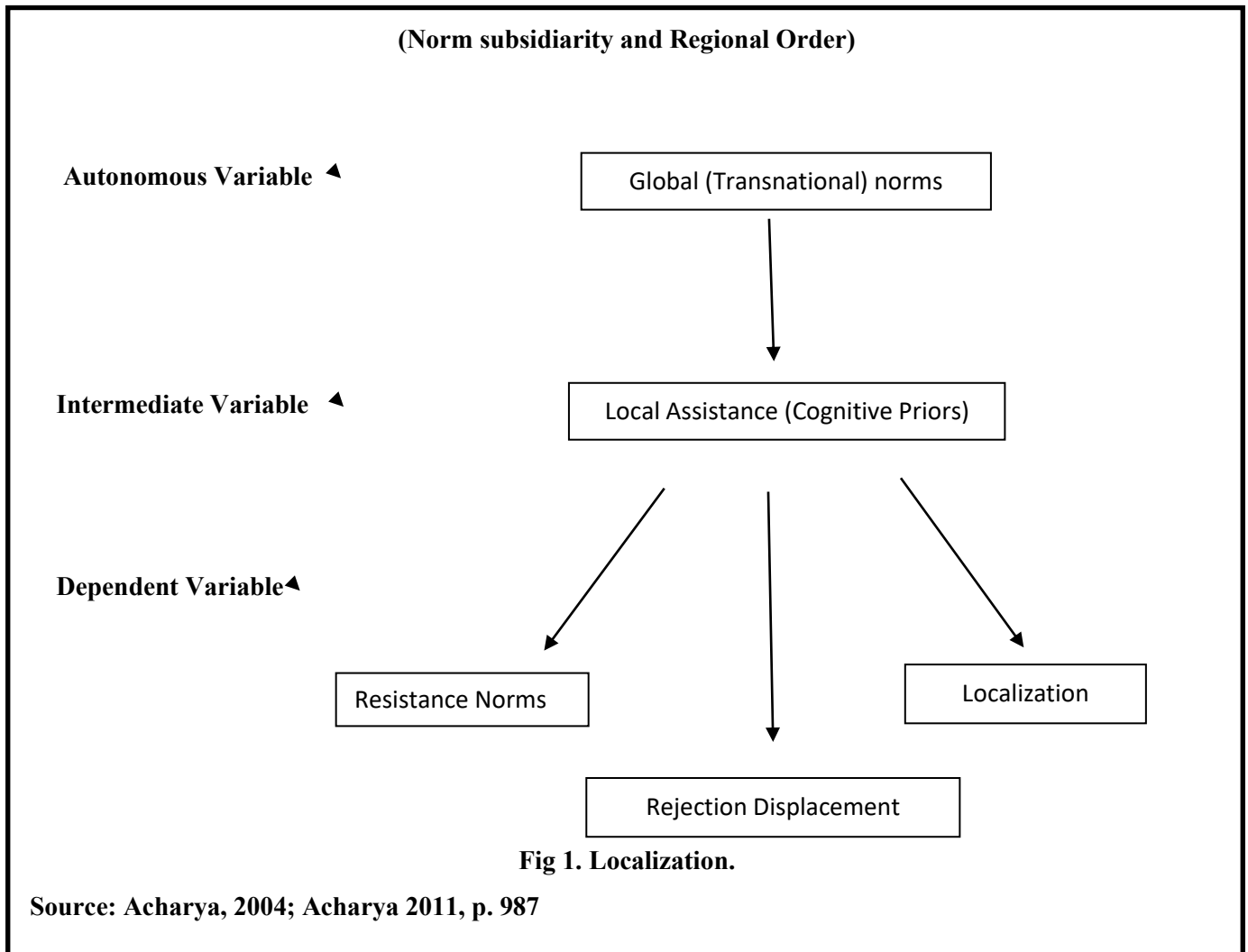
#### 4.2. Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Rule Making

Given the unique challenges facing South Asia, it is essential to publicize regional solution and cooperation in arms control and disarmament. This means promoting dialogue and trust between countries in the regions, as well as developing joint ambition to address Common security threats. Norm subsidiarity firm the process whereby local actors create rules with a view to conserve their autonomy from supremacy, despair violation, or abuse by more powerful central actor. In South Asia promoting regional solutions and cooperation can help countries conserve their autonomy and handle security threats without relying on external power. This approach can contribute to a more stable and peaceful regional order (Acharya, 2011), The concept of, norm subsidiarity Contrasts basically from that of norm localization, though the latter provides useful source point for refining the distinguishable features of the former. Norm localization refers to the "active Construction (through converse, structuring, inserting and cultural selection) of foreign thoughts by local actors, while results in the latter developing important accordance with local beliefs and practices" (Acharya, 2004, P.245). These both ideas highlight the centrality of lower department and they deviate important respects notably there are five differences that set norm subsidiarity apart from localization

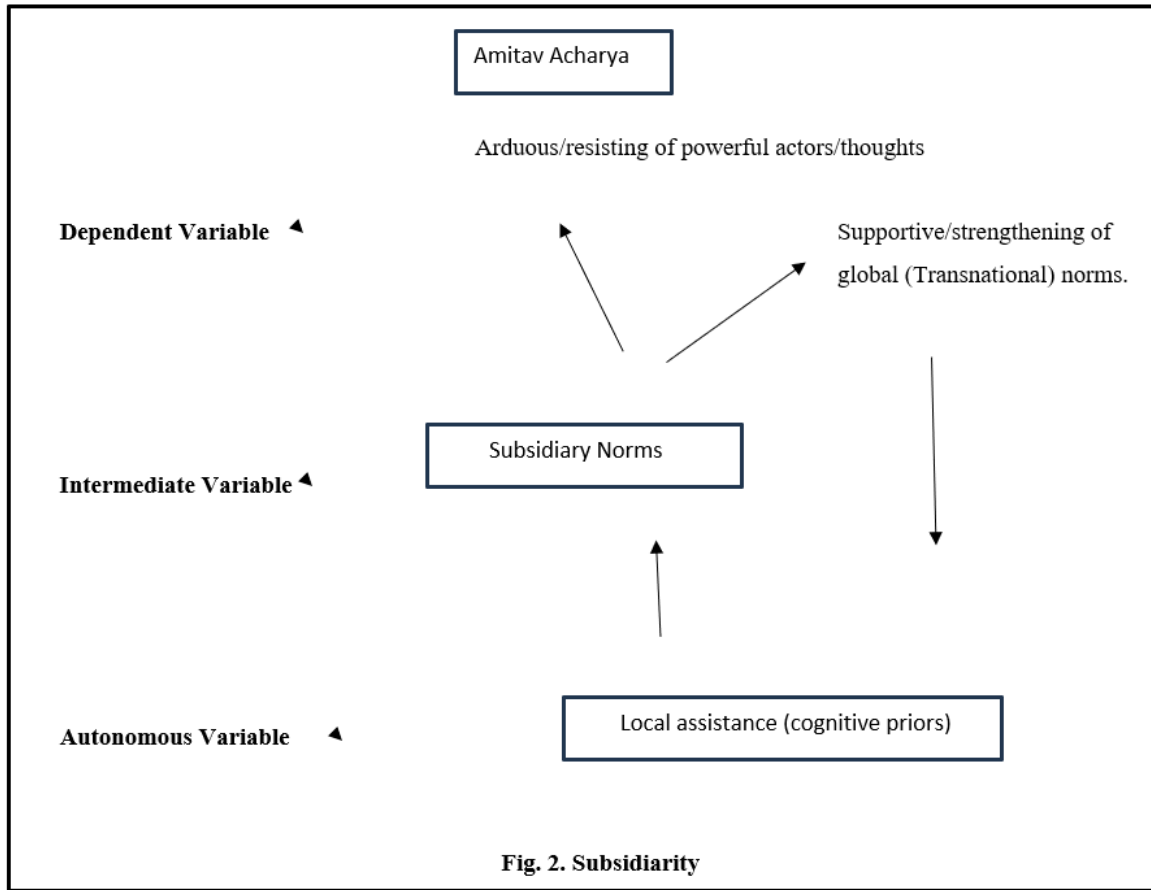
- Localization is primarily circumscribed inward looking as it explores to adjust foreign ideas and norms with an actual local emotional prior (Wolters, 1999; Acharya, 2009; Acharya 2011, p. 97) In contradiction, Subsidiarity is outward looking absorption not on the internal reworking of external but rather on the relational gesture between local actors and external powers, particularly in light of local fears of domination by the latter.

In the process of colocalization, local actors conduct mainly as norm - takers, adjusting and internalizing external norms into local situations. Contradiction to Subsidiarity allows Local actors to guess more confident role, positioning them not only as possible homes norm-rejecters but also as norm-makers in their own right, actively shaping substitutes to external instruction.

- Localization foreign norms are primarily imported and fitted for domestic use with their connotation largely restrained to the local situation (Acharya, 2004, p. 252; Acharya, 2011, P. 98). In Contract, subsidiarity Set-up local actors not only to build-up norms for internal purpose but also to export or "Universalize" those locally rising norms beyond their immediate settling (Kirsch, 1977). The outward forecast may take the form of advancement/developing actual global norms notably in challenging the Parochial or absolute ideas advanced by more powerful actors (see Figure 1 and 2).



- within localization local actors enlist in the redefinition of foreign norms that are anticipated consistent with pre-existing Cognitive structure, thereby necessitating modification for local acceptance, on the other hand subsidiarity bring-about a more against the gain viewpoint, wherein local actors reject external thought promoted by dominant powers of absolute, regarding them as in-appropriate of selection, adaptation or adoption in any form.



- Localization applies to all actors—largely or small— as it absorbs adapting global (Transnational) norms to fit local thoughts and practices wherever those norms converge with domestic situations. On the other hand, Subsidiarity nevertheless, is specific to weaker or tangential actors, or their autonomy is more face-down to being exposed. While localization does not require feelings of debarment or awareness of dominance, subsidiarity is bring-about as well by such experiences of neglect, abuse, or hypocrisy from stronger powers.

## 5. International Law, Statecraft, and the Coloniality of Norms

The intellectual appraisal of arms controls of course enlarged the wide frameworks of global (Transnational) governance and international law. These core institutions—often bestowed as neutral, universal and indispensable for global order - are in fact, products of the same Eurocentric hysterical give-and-take, that validate Colonialism. Decolonial examinations disclose that international norms related to statecraft, borders and economic property are thoroughly carved with the Coloniality of power, strengthening intellectual hierarchies that focus the security and economic interests of the Global North. By failing to examine their norms of Traditional Security and political scholarship can be Concerned in maintaining repressive Structure and "Old Myths" that fugitive anti-colonial opposition and naturalize certain political facts Therefore, a decolonized approach requires

Challenging the circumstantial perspicacity of these legal and governing systems, transcend Westphalian, state-Centric models to recognize and focus the epistemologies and material actuality of marginalized communities and the Global south.

### 5.1. United Nation (UN) and International Arms Control Regimes

- The United Nations (UN) has taken part in a multiplex role in casting arms control through quasi-legislative accomplishment declared by its General Assembly enabling the establishment of international norms and regulatory frameworks (Falk, 1966). Nonetheless its apparatus has been constrained by political realities, including the interests of powerful states that can Veto or get round multilateral commitments.
- UN peacekeeping and governance Structures have contributed to security and arms by-law efforts, yet their impact in South Asia has been mixed, throwback restriction in mandate, resources, and Political will ("chandra Lekho sopram et al., 2002) The institution's role thus manifest both the potential and the limit of Transnational (Global) governance in addressing Regional Arms Control.

### Case Studies

**The Indo-Pak Conflict:** The Indo-Pak conflict delivers an ambitious case study for understanding the ramification of arms control and disarmament in south Asia. The long-established conflict over Kashmir, germinated with historical enmity and security dilemmas which has inflamed the arms race between the two countries India and Pakistan. Both nations acquire nuclear weapons, aggregate the potential gains and losses at play in a political situation and increase the risk of acceleration. Efforts to decrease tensions and promote arms control have been hindered by a lack of trust and a history of failed agreements. The arrival of Narendra Modi as prime a minister has formed a considerable debate about the direction that Indian foreign policy might take, Despite his character as a come through Hindu Nationalist, Modi's foreign policy reverse Continuity with previous administrations, with a focus on strategic partnership and the hunt for higher status in the International system, so it le crucial to understand the fundamentals of Indian foreign policy for analyzing the prospects for arms comfort and Disarmament in the region (Bassur, 2017) In present times India believes in deterrence by Punishment. India for some time now has wanted to pursue or launch conventional attacks in case of sub-Convention by Pakistan (Terrorist attack). However, war stopped from pursuing the same because of fear of Pakistan resorting to use of tactical nuclear weapons against India. Such as any fear, conventional response by India could spiral into a nuclear war between the two countries, especially

since Pakistan is an irrational actor. However, Balakot Air Strike is thought to have been called Pakistan Nuclear bluff.

**The Sri Lankan Civil War:** The Sri Lankan Civil War, a long-term conflict between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), allows understanding into the challenges of arms control in coast-to-coast conflict. The conflict was described by the all over the place use of small arms and light weapons, as well as the engagement of external actors who supplied arms to both sides. Efforts to control the flow of weapons and promote disarmament were complicated by the complex political dynamics of the conflict and the presence of multiple armed groups.

Controlling weapons circulation in a post-colonial militarized world requires addressing the tension between arms transfer Control and militarism, therefore the negotiation process and eventual text of the UN Arms Trade Treaty testify to the contesting mode of governance, constructed by continuing stately relations. So, reframing the control of weapons dissemination requires a feminist, post-colonial and anti-militarist critique (Stavrianakis, 2018).

### **The Pahalgam Attack, (2025) - Amplification and the Suspension of CBMs.**

The recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam (Indian-administered Kashmir) in April 2025, which resulted in the Killing of civilians, and India's after while military response (Call "Operation Sindoor"), gives a stark instance of how enormously well-established post-colonial insecurity leads to the suspension and corrosion of CBMs in South Asia.

Amplification and the disintegration of Trust the Pahalgam attack which India assigned to Pakistan-based militants, provoked a four-day military conflict that became one of the most significant between the two nuclear-armed rivals in decades, comprehending air strikes and drone warfare approach demands a framework that tie-up security to political and diplomatic involvement on the root causes of insecurity, rather than solely managing the military symptom The Corrosion of Core agreements like the IWT highlights that without addressing the foundational security dilemma, no Technical CBM can sustainably endure.

Crises Features	Decolonized Arms control and Disarmament
Retaliation Threshold	India's reaction in corporate air strikes and operations deep-inside Pakistani territory (targeting establishment and terror camps). This action much like the Balakot strike in 2019 crosses a major step-up entrance, demonstrating India's enthusiasm to create space for sub-conventional military responses below the nuclear level. This wears away the established traditional deterrent firebreak and increases the risk of misunderstandings.
Decoupling from CMBs conflict resolution	<p>The forthwith and most vital reaction from India, was the decision to hold the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) in suspension. The IWT, an important Confidence-building measure thrashed out in Consensus 1960, had long been thought-out a bedrock of bilateral cooperation. Weaponizing a civilian-use treaty like the IWT Structurally consensus the trust needed for any Arms control and Disarmament. It demonstrates that the core issues of state legitimacy and cross-border terrorism (rooted in the post-colonial partition) remain unresolved, making all CBMs continually fragile.</p> <p>The Pahelgam crisis reasserting that long-established Arms Control and Disarmament measures between India and Pakistan are fragile and deposed to political postpone because they were never truly decoupled from the core, past-colonial conflict over Kashmir. for Arms Control and disarmament to be fruitful a decolonized</p>

## Methodology

This paper is a qualitative, theoretical as policy-oriented analysis that amalgamates scholarly literature, policy reports, and recent expert appraisal of South Asian security dynamics. It depends on comparative and historical methods to identify continuities between colonial legacies and present-day arms dynamics and on normative analysis to put-forward feasible policy pathways rooted in decolonial principles. This paper emphasizes state-centered and region-led measures rather than idealistic and on-the-spot disarmament steps that ignore triumph political constraints.

## Discussion

The foregoing examination gives-away that the security dilemma in South Asia is basically structural which is rooted in the tripartite crisis of colonial institutional continuity, neo-colonial global nuclear hierarchy, and the epistemological failure of imported arms control principles. The carry on of external threat penetration is remarkable for legitimizing the dominance of military and security institutions

where many of which are direct colonial legacy, by that means blocking the political space required for demilitarization and genuine conflict resolution. The strategic result of the Non-nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT's) colonial infrastructure is the initiation of a system where non-proliferation is applied to eclectic and compelling non-nuclear states to seek equality through the system censures. India and Pakistan's nuclear projects in consequence and functioned as calculated acts of self-affirmation and self-reliance against perceived neglect and imposed lower-tier status within the global system. This assertion of sovereign autonomy remains the central barrier to externally dictated arms control mechanisms.

Furthermore, conventional arm control and Disarmament replicas fail in the South Asian context because they give importance to technical arms management over conflict transformation. The region's unique geographical closeness and shared frightening history, and trilogy dynamic (India-China-Pakistan) ensure that technical controls cannot stabilize a condition defined by juxtaposed conflicts over resources and territory legacy from arbitrary colonial divisions, such as the Radcliffe Line. The present arms race, intensified by the introduction of Emerging Technologies (ETs) like AI and drones, risks re-importing strategic dependency on Global North technology, deepening the colonial security dilemma under the guise of modernization

## **Results**

**The Status of Resistance** The main result of the decolonial critique is the clear outline of South Asian states' opposition to externally imposed security regimes, notably those rooted in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT's) bigotry structure. This opposition is specifically displayed by the consolidated rivalry of both India and Pakistan to the TPNW (Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons) even though it is mounted by the Global South as a decolonial alternative to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). **Repudiate of the TPNW (Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons):** Both the countries, India and Pakistan being a nuclear-weapons states in the region assert a congruous policy of non-participation and repudiate of the TPNW, which straightaway challenges the global movement toward humanitarian disarmament: **India's stance:** India embargoes the TPNW (Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) deal in 2017 and persistently votes against the annual United Nation General Assembly resolutions welcoming it's taking in. India clearly declared in 2023 that it is not a party to the treaty and will not be bound by any of its duty and believes the treaty does not contribute to traditional international law. **Pakistan's Stances:** Pakistan likewise repudiates the TPNW negotiations and votes against annual resolutions. Pakistan substantiates its repudiation by arguing that the TPNW "reduces the discussion only to humanitarian extent while ignoring the legitimate security matters of States". Moreover, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN stated that the country cannot support the

TPNW as long as India vindicates a nuclear arsenal, underlining the local security domineering over global humanitarian demands. This combined rejection emphasizes that, while the decolonial thesis rejects the NPT's two-tier system and the sovereign assertion achieved through nuclearization that takes precedence over global prohibition efforts that are perceived as ignoring the region's unique, localized security dynamic.

## Conclusion

I comprehend the situation of the decolonization of arms control in South Asia, an extensive of the region's colonial military legacy and the intricate post-colonial security landscape. Amalgamating this historical inheritance with present-day geo-political and social-cultural realities is crucial for drafting Comprehensible and contingently relevant security policies. An effective decolonial arms control framework must declare local agency Inspiring regionally inheritance mechanisms and the formation of various normative orders that reflect South Asia's unique conditions ("Acharya 2011). Empowering civil society and encouraging bottom-up governance review dominant structures and advances unbiased arms governance, but if we think about Recommendations of Policies and future Research direction it is crucial for the government to conceptualization of policies should give vital to openness and transparency and fairness to overcome conventional arms control shortcomings. Further research is needed to intensify decolonial scholarship including empirical studies of existing ambition and traditional transformation. Repeated dialogue among scholars, policymakers and civil society will prompt the evolution of arms control strategies responsive to South Asia's aspirations for peace and security.

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# Epistemic Sovereignty in the Brahmaputra Valley: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Multi-Level Governance of Climate and Resource Justice in Assam

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## Abstract

This interdisciplinary study interrogates how centering epistemic sovereignty Indigenous communities' authority over their knowledge systems can reconfigure climate governance in Assam's Brahmaputra Valley. Facing rising flood threats and cross-border hydro political conflict, Mising and Dimas people are also poorly represented on policy for a despite their advanced socio-ecological knowledge: Mising stilt houses (chang ghar), community-based embankment management, and phenological predictions reported among Indigenous populations in Assam (e.g., Sonowal Kachari, Bodo). Political ecology and decolonial theories help us diagnose institutional obstacles to incorporating Indigenous relational/living waters ontologies into state tools such as the Climate Action Plan (SAPCC) in Assam. We propose co-governed knowledge-bridging institutions, operationalizing data sovereignty via CARE Principles and UNDRIP compliance to advance resource justice through decolonial governance praxis.

## Keywords

Epistemic sovereignty, CARE Principles, Indigenous data sovereignty, decolonial justice, Brahmaputra governance, Assam

## Introduction

### 1.1 Setting the Context: The Brahmaputra Valley as a Nexus of Crisis and Knowledge

Brahmaputra River is a river that flows in China, India, and Bangladesh, and its owner is the high Himalayas. It is a massive socio-ecological and geopolitical complex with great biodiversity and intense vulnerabilities. The river forms the base of livelihoods and a culture even though it forms the

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venue of mounting climate and resource disasters. It has been a geopolitical issue among the riparian states, where the upstream control of China and the massive dam construction put lot of doubts among the downstream communities in India and Bangladesh on the availability of water and the potential risks associated with floods. These issues are being compounded by climate change to which the largest of the north east part of the Indian states - Assam is particularly vulnerable. Researches have consistently ranked Assam as one of the most vulnerable regions in India for the temperature projected to not only rise - but to rise even higher (inconsistent rains and more flood with more than 25 per cent of it by the mid-century). In this context, the conventional and top-down governance frameworks used to address these challenges often are not up to the task. They are often alienated from the living realities of people most dependent on the river. The core issue stems from an overwhelming and serious disconnection between prevailing and state-centric forms of governance and the highly adaptive nature of the marginalized indigenous knowledge system (IKS) of the communities in the valley. To truly attain climate and resource justice it is necessary to move away from a fragmented approach and understand the river not only as a hydrological or geo-political entity, but rather as a system that encompasses issues of "sovereignty, equity, and the future of shared rivers".

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework: Epistemic Sovereignty and Climate Justice**

This paper is anchored on the theoretical concepts of epistemic sovereignty and decolonial environmental justice. Epistemic sovereignty, at its heart, is the right of a community "to define, value, and make use of their own knowledge system, particularly regarding a number of decisions that impact on their lives and environment". This concept means, not just owning the data; it is a notion of owning the basic structure through which the knowledge is being interpreted and given meaning. It contests the phenomenon of "epistemological colonialism" throughout history and into the present day; that is to say, the imposition of dominant and often Western knowledge systems as universal and superior, while invalidating other forms of knowing. Climate and resource justice create the need for epistemic sovereignty. According to a decolonial perspective, current issues and solutions to environmental problems are based on colonial structures in the past. It is only through dismantling these colonial structures of power and knowledge and making indigenous and marginalized voices central to environmental decision-making that there will be true environmental justice. This paper argues that the Brahmaputra Valley provides a compelling case study to analyze this critical relationship, where the failure to acknowledge epistemic sovereignty perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability and injustice.

## **1.3 Thesis and Scope of the Paper**

This paper argues that the prevailing multi-level governance framework for climate and resource management in Assam suffers from a critical epistemic deficit. A more just, resilient, and effective approach requires the formal recognition and integration of indigenous knowledge as a manifestation of epistemic sovereignty, guided by principles of co-governance and decolonization. To substantiate this thesis, the report will proceed as follows. The literature review will establish the theoretical foundations of decoloniality and epistemic justice, It will contextualise the socio-ecological and geopolitics of the Brahmaputra Valley. It will then capture the indigenous knowledge systems of the Mising and Dimasa communities and how the systems have served as living examples of adaptive place-based governance. This framework will be applied to a case study of mega-dam politics in the discussion section, which brings to light the severe epistemological clash between state-led and indigenous perspectives. Finally, the conclusion will propose a conceptual framework for integrating indigenous knowledge into state-led governance that respects epistemic sovereignty and facilitates a more just and resilient future for the Brahmaputra Valley.

## **Literature Review: The Politics of Knowledge and Place**

### **2.1 The Conceptual Terrain: Decoloniality and Epistemic Justice**

Decolonial theory provides a powerful lens through which to analyze environmental governance. The academic literature regards that the legacies of colonialism to this day still dominate modern forms of governance by systematically silencing and disenfranchising the voices and rights of the local people and privileging the global economic pressures. Epistemological colonialism refers to the historical means of installing the dominant and mostly Western epistemic forms as the only valid, legitimate ways of knowing, alongside reduce indigenous or traditional knowledge to the margins or branding it unscientific. This is a phenomenon that goes beyond historical contingency; it is a dynamic that has existed since then, to this time which is reflected to the present-day policy formulations and practices. Scholars are increasingly turning towards a different epistemic practicum fashioning the lived experience of the Global South in advance. It anticipates native ideas and questions the alleged dominance of Western paradigm. This argumentative logos holds that the most crucial sources of injustice, which include colonial histories of land dispossession, resource exploitation and the imposition of Eurocentric epistemic frameworks are not taken into account in canonical models of environmental justice. A critical examination of existing set of governance models on environmental management reveals a massive point of contention which lies in this epistemological split. Even though modern models often refer to the notion of sustainable development and green growth, a critical analysis shows that they might still be based on a colonial logic of resource control and extraction. As an example, large-scale projects, when placed as climate solutions, are often based on

technical, top-down approaches that ignore or erase the local knowledge and agency. The issue cannot be described as a lack of communication or consultation but as a deeper rooted structural conflict between two radically distinct modes of epistemology and ontological approaches to environmental relationship. The criticism of many modern development projects is more basic: their ultimately commercial character wherein complex socio-ecological issues are approached through measurable and quantifiable metrics and monetary rewards thus making sacred lands, neighbourhood ties, and even abstract cultural values a marketable commodity that can be traded. The following table, adapted from existing research, provides a clear conceptual comparison of the two dominant knowledge systems at play in this context.

Table 1: Comparison of Western Science (WS) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

	<b>Western Science (WS)</b>	<b>Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)</b>
<b>Epistemological Basis</b>	Objective, empirical, and quantitative.	Subjective, qualitative, relational, and holistic.
<b>Transmission</b>	Based on academic and literate methods.	Transmitted orally from one generation to the next, often by elders.
<b>Relationship to Environment</b>	The environment is an object for study and management.	The environment is a network of relations with which humans co-exist.
<b>Purpose</b>	To generate universal, abstract knowledge for control and prediction.	To advance community self-determination and collective benefit.
<b>Values</b>	Universality, replicability, and neutrality.	Context-specific, place-based, and purpose-oriented.

## 2.2 Contextualizing the Brahmaputra : Geopolitics and Climate Vulnerability

India fears that China could use its upstream position to “weaponize water,” potentially leading to a sharp reduction in water flows during the dry season or sudden, catastrophic floods from releases during the monsoon. Indian government analyses indicate that China’s proposed mega-dam could

reduce water flows by as much as 85% during the non-monsoon months, raising alarms for regional stability and millions of livelihoods.

Beyond the geopolitical concerns, the Brahmaputra Valley is at severe risk of climate change. Assam is also one of the most susceptible states in the Indian Himalayan Region. According to Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC), the average maximum temperature will be 2.4 o C in the middle of the century, and the extreme precipitation might be up 5-38 percent. Those socio-economic factors can worsen all these climatic hazards: catastrophes like floods and erosion unjustly impact those population groups, which are located far below the poverty line.

### **2.3 Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a Type of Adaptability**

The indigenous people of Brahmaputra Valley and especially the Mising and Dimasa community have elaborate and centuries old knowledge structures which testify to their innate versatility to the riverine habitat. Mising tribe is located on the side of Brahmaputra River which is a watercube that touches almost every other part of their lives. The amount of knowledge that they acquired over the years allows them to live in harmony with the unpredictable flow of the river. Such adaption can be traced in their homes, called Chang Gar or Kare Okum which are the stilt houses constructed on elevated bamboo frames shielding families against flood during rainy seasons. Their agricultural practises are quite versatile: the Mising grow numerous types of paddy strains, such as Lai aam during dry season, Aamdang Arig during wet fields, thus reducing the effect of rain variation on food security. Such practises are not only part of personal cultural customs but an individual, people led approach, which increases resilience and strengthen of disasters.

On the same note, a good example of a well-established socio-ecological association of individuals with nature in India is the Dimasa community living within the Dima Hassao district. Their conservation ethics are based on the belief in cosmology that forests and streams have spirits and deities which interact with humans in a reciprocal agency. The notion of Daikho which are recognised as intra-communal rangelands is based on this worldview. Managing community forests appropriately, although may not be part of a centralised governmental administration, community forests are still full reserves of biodiversity and medicinal herbs, frequently containing the type of species not found elsewhere in the forest patches. The ecosystem is maintained by traditional governance

structure which helps these patches of forests to be protected for humane purposes with little utilisation by human beings in the forms of Jhum farm or timber harvesting from forests.

## **2.4 The Multi-Level Governance Framework in India and Assam**

The Indian climate policy is based upon multi-level governance structure that connects national and local policies. Policies at the state level are drawn from the National Action Plan in Climate Change (NAPCC).

In Assam, the government introduced a State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC). It discusses local impacts in eight priority areas, while paying special attention to water and disaster management. The Science and Policy Platform for Climate Change (SAPCC) is a living document that seeks to connect new and changing climate change science, policy and practice and was developed through extensive stakeholder input, including NGOs, academic institutions and individual climate experts.

Nevertheless, the Assam SAPCC is found to suffer from a critical and systemic deficiency. While the plan recognises the state's increased vulnerability to climate change and the need for well-researched strategies to address it, there is no explicit mention of, or incorporation of, indigenous knowledge systems. While the document focuses on building institutional capacity and investing in technical solutions - such as embankment reinforcement and vertical evacuation structures - it does not acknowledge that the instinctive knowledge to adapt to hundreds of years of experience in building and living with disasters is already embedded in indigenous populations. The exclusion of the indigenous in a plan that seeks to protect the most vulnerable is a telling sign of underlying epistemology deficit. This is no coincidence; it is a sign of a structural preference for a Western, technical approach to climate change and a preference for large scale infrastructure and economic development over a more dynamic and holistic approach based on social and cultural realities.. This conceptual framework, while seemingly comprehensive on paper, is rendered incomplete and ineffective for the very people it purports to protect.

## **Objectives, Data Collection Methods, and Study Area**

### **3.1 Research Objectives**

This research is framed by three main objectives :

1. To make a thorough study of the nature of epistemic injustice and scope of the same that exists in the structure of multi-level governance organised to handle climatic and resource management in Assam today.
2. To organise and explain the expressions of epistemic sovereignty as illustrated by the indigenous knowledge system of the Mising and Dimasa communities.
3. To formulate and present a conceptual framework through which indigenous knowledge may be integrated into state-led governance, and thus in support of the principles of epistemic sovereignty and the enhancement of fairer and more resilient response to climate and resource management.

### **3.2 Methodology: A Qualitative and Decolonial Approach**

This study employs a qualitative, synthesis-based methodology, which is a form of secondary data analysis. This approach is strategically chosen to overcome the ethical and logistical constraints of conducting extensive field research, particularly in a politically sensitive region. The intent of this secondary analysis is to use existing, and often disparate, data to develop conclusions and knowledge that are different from those resulting from the original analysis.

The synthesis-based approach to the methodology is a conscious practise of decolonial work. Several traditional academic research, especially in the so-called global South, is often extractive in its nature. Scholars related to mainstream institutions might collect information on minority groups, and publish results in their own academic gain without considering mutual advantages or recognition of local epistemic creation. These practises are the best examples of data colonialism. Reconfiguring and re-integrating available knowledge through a decolonial process, the current study challenges established power frameworks in knowledge production and attempt to generate a more encompassing and fairer intellectual discourse.

This methodology implies a strict cross-analysis of various secondary data sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs about the decolonial theory, Brahmaputra hydro-political studies, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Official government reports and policy documents, including the Assam SAPCC and project reports released by the Asian Development Bank are also the focus of the inquiry. Besides, technical and ethnographic research is built into the study to provide factual information about particular Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and community-based programmes. The reports by news media and non-governmental organisations also are to be

analysed to provide contextual and real-life evidence to the theoretical arguments. This multifaceted compilation of non-homogenous sources is both a strong and sustainable approach to the creation of a unified argument, which is empirically based.

The study is informed by principles of decolonising research that rest on ethical considerations which question the hegemony of western paradigms and prepares the voices and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples. It also aligns with the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics). This ensures that the study advocates for a model where indigenous communities govern their own knowledge and data, and that all research is conducted in a non-extractive manner, designed to provide collective benefit to the communities from which the knowledge originates.

### **3.3 Study Area : The Brahmaputra Valley**

The study area is the Brahmaputra Valley in the state of Assam, with a specific focus on the Mising and Dimasa communities as representative case studies of indigenous knowledge and adaptation. To include the wider trans boundary picture of the Brahmaputra River Basin, and to give a detailed view of the forces thinkers in operation in the region, the trans boundary setting of China/India in the hydropolitical relations of these two countries is also factored in the analysis.

## **Discussion of Data and Results: Epistemic Conflicts and Assertions of Sovereignty**

### **4.1 The State's Epistemic Deficit: A Case Study in Mega-Dam Politics**

The conflict between the governmental planning and the epistemological constructs of the Indigenous communities is illustrated by the case of the Upper Siang Multipurpose Storage Dam project in Arunachal Pradesh, India. The Indian government has mostly written about the initiative with much technical and economical overtones, which is also a geo-political tool of employ. Some attempt to depict the project as a reaction to the intensive upstream projects by China, in which they were to achieve so-called water security and enable them to control floods. However, such rhetorics seem to be too simplistic and do not reflect hardships that can be observed on the ground. This argument is working with a more traditional state-centric paradigm that river water can be commodified like a resource and used as a strategic instrument to be created against geopolitical competitors.

The resistance of the local Adi villagers, in their turn, is based on the completely different value system. The community possesses alleged ancient divine rights to the river what they call Ane Siang or

Goddess Siang and do not want the dam to be built in the pretext of not killing their holy river in favour of the production of electricity. Their arguments are not simply of an economic nature, since the dam would submerge no less than sixteen villages and evict thousands of people, but rather are more spiritual and cultural in nature, based on the centrality of the river to their civilization, as well as its sacredness. As an option, they suggest smaller development projects in which they build hydro-electric power facilities on the tributaries of the river but ensuring that they do not alter the main flow in proving local contextual understanding to build on viable development.

The government response to this objection points to a deep misunderstanding. Rather than addressing the spiritual and cultural concerns that are relevant to the community, officials have focused on providing a high compensation package and livelihood programmes designed to train the displaced villagers on new skills such as horticulture and apiculture. This practice is the manifestation of transactional colonial mentality and an analogy for the measuring and expendable nature of the sacred river and our ancestral land rather than those intangible spiritual and cultural underpinnings. Consequently, the response is not addressing underlying the causes of the conflict - a clash of world-view, and is instead reproducing the epistemic injustice the communities are in conflict over.

#### **4.2 Indigenous Knowledge as an Exercise of Sovereignty**

The indigenous knowledge systems of the Mising and the Dimasa communities are not static traditions but living and dynamic systems that exhibit this immense assertion for epistemic sovereignty. They are frameworks for self - governance, resilience; developed over centuries of close observation and adaptation to the local environment.. The Mising community's architecture and agricultural methods are a form of applied science, a "knowledge bank" that enables co-existence with the "unpredictable 'moving ocean'" of the Brahmaputra. The construction of their Chang Ghar or Kare Okum stilt houses is a direct, community-led disaster risk reduction strategy. Similarly, their multi-crop cultivation techniques ensure food security in an unpredictable climate. The Mising's collective preparedness, including the building of raised platforms for cattle (Murong Okum), is a tangible manifestation of their right to self-govern their resource and disaster management. The Dimasa community's sacred groves (Daikho) are another powerful example of community based conservation and an assertion of sovereignty. These forests are managed by community groups, not by the government, and their preservation is guided by a belief in spirits and a reciprocal relationship with nature. This system, managed by a traditional hierarchy of priests and village headmen, is a clear assertion of the community's authority to control their own resources and knowledge. The spiritual beliefs serve as a moral and ethical framework for sustainable use, a concept that is often absent in state-led

conservation policies. The following table synthesizes these key practices and their underlying epistemological foundations.

Table 2: Community Indigenous Practice and Epistemic Underpinning

Community	Indigenous Practice	Epistemic Underpinning
Mising	Chang Ghar (stilt houses)	A deep, empirical knowledge of flood dynamics and river behavior, leading to a sophisticated form of community-led, climate-resilient architecture.
Mising	Multi-crop cultivation	An understanding of local soil-water cycles and rainfall patterns, enabling the development of climate-resilient agricultural practices for food security.
Dimasa	Daikho (sacred groves)	A holistic worldview where nature is imbued with spiritual power, leading to a community-based conservation ethic and the belief that the well-being of the people is tied to the health of the ecosystem.
Dimasa	Traditional village hierarchy	A governance structure that authorizes community leaders (Khunang, Dillik, Jonthaima) to manage resources and enforce sustainable practices in alignment with spiritual beliefs.

#### 4.3 Towards a New Paradigm: An Integrated Framework of Climate and Resource Justice.

This analysis suggests that a radical change is needed to ensure that the climate and resource problems of the Brahmaputra Valley are effectively dealt with. Neither can this be resolved by simply incorporating indigenous knowledge into the current policy framework since it would only consider this as a supplementary input as opposed to the basic worldview. Instead, it is to apply indigenous knowledge as a foundation to create a paradigm shift, shifting towards a disjointed, top-down model to one of co-creation.

The new framework should be anchored on a change towards tokenistic consultation to real and participatory engagement and co-governance. This demands a legal and ethical base to acknowledge indigenous people collective rights as stipulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). India was a voting member of the UNDRIP, but will officially say that

the declaration does not apply domestically (only because all citizens are indigenous). Such a contradictory stand is one of the key legal challenges that have to be overcome in case any improvement can be made.

The concept of epistemic sovereignty should be resolved with the help of a new model of managing data. The power of reference can be a strong tool, which is the CARE Principles of Indigenous Data Governance of Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics. By using these principles, native ethnic groups will be in a position to have full control of their data throughout the data collection, analysis, and utilisation process; hence enabling the unparalleled level of self-determination. In this paradigm, the indigenous communities are no longer viewed as social universe of research subjects to which the outside researchers can apply, but as the holders of knowledge.

This is aimed to shift to a paradigm where the state acts as a direct provider of climate action, to a paradigm where communities are active agents of change and co-producers of policy and intervention. That is the case with indigenous and community-based projects like the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP) and Institute of Integrated Resource Management (IIRM), the development of which has empirically proven this theory. An appealing pattern with which the governance structures can be reformed is livelihood management and resource utilisation grassroots programmes having a high level of scalability and replicability. This kind of holistic system with integrated consideration of the interconnection of different actors and systems represents the very spirit of a real multi-level governance.

## **Conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

The paper has substantiated that the existing crisis of climate and resource justice in the Brahmaputra Valley is fundamentally an epistemological crisis. The encounter shows that there is an acute incongruity between the state led governance, operating through a Western centric, technical and fragmented view of the world, and the native knowledge of the people like the Mising and Dimasa, which is holistic, relational and place based. This lack of epistemology can be found in the Assam State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC), which does not acknowledge indigenous knowledge despite its purportedly comprehensive nature, and in the transactional nature of the state in addressing mega-dam politics, which does not recognise the spiritual and cultural value of the land and the river. On the other hand, the adaptive politics of the local communities, in the form of building Chang Ghar

stilt houses and the preservation of Daikho sacred groves, are highly effective and durable claims to epistemic and resource sovereignty. They are not traditions, but dynamic systems of governance that are sophisticated and have allowed communities to co-exist with a volatile environment over centuries.

## 5.2 Recommendations for a Decolonial and Integrated Future

To resolve the long-standing epistemological tensions and come up with a more equitable and stronger future, the following paradigm shift towards a co-governance model is recommended in this report:

**a) Policy and Legal Reforms :** There should be a formal adoption and enforcement of the concepts of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) by government of India instead of its existing paradoxical approach. This would establish the legal framework that would permit indigenous people to practise their right to self-determination in making decisions about the environment. Assam SAPCC needs to be amended officially in order to incorporate indigenous knowledge where communities are no longer seen as mere victims of climate change but rather as active agents of change.

**b) Institutional Framework :** It is suggested that knowledge-bridging establishments should be established where a reciprocal non-extractive exchange exists between the traditional knowledge holders and the modern science. Such institutions would have the members of both the government and indigenous communities and thereby the design and implementation of climate solutions would be culturally sensitive and ecologically viable.

**c) Methodological Standards :** All the research and development works concerning the Brahmaputra Valley must follow a participatory and community-based approach that follows the principles of CARE Principles of Indigenous Data Governance. It ensures that the native peoples have control over their own knowledge and information, as well as the fact that all projects are planned to be carried out with benefit for the society as a whole and conducted by the highest ethical standards.

## 5.3 Areas for Future Research

This paper gives a background analysis, yet a number of avenues need further research. Future study must get to know the specific legal processes of implementing the UNDRIP principles into the federal Indian scheme. It is also necessary to have longitudinal case studies on the long term socio - economic and ecological implications of community - led co - governance schemes, based on successful

experiences of grass - roots efforts. Lastly, comparison between the adaptive approaches of different riverine societies in the Brahmaputra basin will yield desirable data towards the design of an inclusive pan-basin regime.

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# **Beyond formal membership: Morocco’s Shadow Alignment with core BRICS members**

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## **Abstract**

In the current multipolar international order, navigating amid emerging blocs and traditional alliances becomes a primary concern of middle powers. This study addresses the theoretical gap concerning the explanation of how countries such as Morocco achieve strategic benefits through engagement with BRICS bloc without any formal political commitment by offering a new concept of “Shadow Alignment”. This concept is characterized by three main empirical pillars: Functional Proximity strategy, the effective implementation of the Balancing Act with traditional allies and the maintenance of Non-Committed Autonomy. The main objective of this paper is to define and empirically examine this framework by analysing the engagement of Morocco with selected core BRICS members: China, Russia, India, Brazil, employing both quantitative and qualitative case study methodology that entails process tracing and comparative analysis, drawing on bilateral trade and arms transfers data, technological data, and diplomatic communiqués. The analysis revealed a significant Strategic Depth across economic, technological, security, and soft power dimensions, confirming high Functional Proximity. Concurrently, Morocco successfully managed the Balancing Act with western allies, notably United States (USA) and European Union, while preserving a Non-Committed Autonomy by maintaining institutional distance from the BRICS bloc, exercising diplomatic divergence, and safeguarding its sovereign international cooperation. The results indicate that “Shadow Alignment” provides a superior explanatory framework for such proactive statecraft, offering a strategy that can be replicated by the Global South, and signalling to traditional powers the necessity to adapt according to this subtle type of interaction.

## **Keywords**

BRICS; Morocco; Non-Committed Autonomy; Shadow Alignment; Western allies.

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## Introduction

With the emergence of new major power, the contemporary international regime become increasingly identified by deepening multipolarity, which placed major hegemonic power especially United States of America and European Union in a challenging status. A central alliance among these dynamics is the BRICS bloc whose economic, geopolitical, and soft power influence steadily persists in rising. In this regard, a detailed examination reveals that the founding quartet identified as BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) remains the heart and the fundamental primary structure expanding substantial influence across the world. This term BRIC was essentially coined by Jim O’Neill in 2001, but the formal bloc was not established till mid-2000s.

In parallel, Morocco has expanded its own cooperation and diplomatic relations with this core bloc as early as 1958, positioning the country one of the first African Arab states to institutionalize partnership with Republic of China. Thereafter, China-Morocco ties has intensified to include multidimensional sectors especially economy, that notably increasing in recent year through large-scale initiatives and infrastructure networks within the framework of belt and road initiative (BRI).

Similarly, Morocco's relations with India extend back to the 1950s: India recognized Morocco shortly after independence (June 1956), and formally established diplomatic relations in 1957. This partnership has since included technology transfer and development cooperation with some common projects in 2017, like the establishment of the Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) in Casablanca, which is operated jointly with Indian R&D institutions. In the same vein, the history of relations with Russia is also significant and have been long-established. While regular trade grew considerably in the 2000s, especially in the energy and agricultural sectors, bilateral visits and cooperation related to economic projects have been ongoing since at least the mid-2000s. On the same lines, the case of Brazil, even though high-level strategic formal frameworks in the technological domain are less documented, trade data in recent years indicate that economic exchanges are growing markedly, emphasizing Morocco’s increasing interest in broadening its partnerships within the BRIC core.

In this context, the foreign policy of Morocco an example of a middle power that historically has been allied to the west is an interesting analytical puzzle. On the one hand, Morocco is strongly connected with European and American partners; on the other hand, it actively develops high Strategic Depth with BRIC countries by means of economic, technology, and infrastructural interactions. This move is not typical hedging or simply non-alignment: it is a purposive, benefit-maximizing action which we call Shadow Alignment.

This research paper aims to dissect the ability of middle powers especially Morocco considered as a gateway of global powers to Africa, in maintaining strong and deep relations with emerging core BRIC countries threatening the hegemonic regime established by U.S.A and European Union in most crucial sectors such as trade, defense, technology and soft power diplomacy, without compromising its sovereignty by a formal integration within the Bloc, or creating tension with traditional allies, ensuring balancing act, and Non-committed autonomy.

Existing frameworks fail to elucidate and unequally defined the way Morocco develops multidimensional ties with BRIC countries without compromising its independence. Scholarship focuses on BRIC dynamics, member approaches or middle-power hedging, and fails to provide insight into the way these middle powers like Morocco maintains high functional proximity across different sectors, all without a formal membership. This strategic fact underscores the necessity of a more specific analytical approach.

For all these reasons, this paper not only broadens the perspective of the middle-power statecraft in the multipolar world, but also fills a major research gap by revealing the manner in which a state can forge firm partnerships with emerging powers without losing its official status of non-alignment and beyond a formal integration. From a theoretical standpoint, it puts forward Shadow Alignment, from an empirical standpoint, it investigates Morocco's BRIC deep relations through economic, technological, security and soft power dimensions. On a strategic level, it portrays Morocco's Balancing Act with traditional allies essentially with USA and the EU, to clarify partners selection, complementarity and policy-relevant insights for middle powers. These aspects together contribute to the analytical worth of establishing the connection between Morocco's involving partnership and the overall shift of global power structures.

The structure that drives the research is built on these foundations and is mirrored in these research questions:

**Conceptual-Analytical:** In what ways does the Shadow Alignment framework of Strategic Depth, Balancing Act, and Non-Committed Autonomy provide a better explanation of Morocco's relations with BRIC nations than the traditional IR concepts?

**Empirical-Strategic:** What economic, technological, security, and soft power indicators show Morocco's Strategic Depth and Balancing Act with each BRIC country, and how are these relations, along with ties with the West, managed to maintain Non-Committed Autonomy?

**Policy-Oriented:** What lessons from Morocco’s Shadow Alignment experience can inform middle-power strategies and future interactions with the major power?

In line with this trend, this paper develops three hypotheses:

H1: The involvement of Morocco in the BRIC nations indicates the presence of Strategic Depth on the economic, technological, security and soft powers levels.

H2: Although Morocco has reached Strategic Depth, the country remains non-committed and avoid formal to the BRIC membership, while retaining strong ties with the United States and the European Union.

H3: The interaction of high Strategic Depth, effective Balancing Act with Western powers, and maintenance of non-committed autonomy can be best described using the Shadow Alignment framework, but not traditional theories of hedging, soft balancing, or strategic Autonomy.

This research is structured into three axes: the first axis is about Integrative Functional Proximity and Coordinated Alliance Dynamics, which investigates the strategic depth and balance in Morocco across various policy dimensions; the second axis shed light on Alliance Flexibility and Limited Commitment, which evaluates how Morocco remains autonomous and balances the BRIC and Western interests; while the last axis highlights Systemic Interpretation of the Moroccan Shadow Alignment Trajectory synthesizing the functional depth, balance and non-committed autonomy to understand the overall strategy of the Moroccan posture.

### **The importance of BRICS bloc partnerships in recent literature:**

One of the main topics voiced in contemporary literatures is the importance of BRICS bloc. The debates about middle powers’ roles in a competitive international scenario have been influenced by studies that show the adaptations of these countries to the pressures of the great powers’ rivalries, especially in the case of the new emerging countries aiming to implement a multipolar model, and traditional power which objective is to maintain the unipolar regime leading by U.S.A.

The key point in this discussion is hedging (Hardy & Lyon, 1923), a theory that was formulated in East Asian IR and that was formalized in the early 2000s by Evelyn Goh (2005-20026), Kuik Cheng-Chwee (2008-2016), and recently by Murray and Gries (2012-2014). The Hedging is a tactical model according to which the states do not fully side with any of the great powers and can selectively interact to contain risks and reap advantages. It integrates bandwagoning (collaboration with more powerful countries) and balancing (preparation in case of threats), which enables middle powers to be flexible as

they interact with powerful countries.

Most recently, strategic autonomy has also been explored as an analytical lens rooted in European Union studies and broader international scholarships, which gained success in the 2000s and 2010s (Vitor Bento, 2023), describing the ability of states or regional actors to act independently in security, foreign policy, and defense without excessive reliance to external powers.

In connection with this, soft balancing represents a complementary analytical framework. Coined by Robert Pape and other IR theorists. It is a strategy where weaker or middle powers attempt to counteract powerful states, not by military means, but by other means such as economic engagement, alliances, or selective participation in institutions. Consequently, in their article *Papa and Han (2025), "The Evolution of Soft Balancing in Informal Institutions: The Case of BRICS" (International Affairs)* (Mihaela Papa, Zhen Han, 2025), depicted BRICS as an informal coalition that enables cumulative cooperation, without an actual formation of an alliance.

On a broader regional scale, *Mansour and Baiche (2025) in their research paper "BRICS expansion and its Implications for the Global South and North Africa"* (Imad Mansour & Abdelhadi Baiche, 2025), published in *Journal of Global Policy Studies*, evaluate the effects of BRICS expansion on the Global South and North Africa, showing how middle powers can expand their strategic possibilities as the distribution of global order become more diffuse and fragmented.

Policy-oriented institutional studies also add insights: On one hand, the report *"BRICS Expansion and the Future of World Order: Perspectives from Member States, Partners and Aspirants"* Carnegie Endowment (2025) (Carnegie endowment., 2025) highlights the opportunities of non-members to participate in BRICS governance reform, On other hand, the *chapter 6 "Digital statecraft of Middle Powers: Digital Sovereignty in the BRICS Countries"* by the Cambridge University Press (2025) (Doshi & Delgado, 2024), on digital statecraft provide insights on how non-members can use technological infrastructure to manoeuvres middle-power politics.

Although the extensive diversity of literature, there are still some obvious gaps at both theoretical and empirical levels. The Hedging theory deals with the management of risks and the selective involvement, but fails to provide the description of how to achieve a multidimensional level of strategy while maintaining the balance with Westerns partners. Soft Balancing which is about non-military coalition measures fails to explain how functional relations with BRICS can be established without official interactions. Strategic autonomy argues decision-making independence, but does not take into

account the simultaneous engagement with emerging powers and preservation of traditional alliances in an inclusive manner.

On an empirical level, the articles remain limited in examining the way middle powers navigate multipolar arena. Studies focused on a specific dimension related to emerging coalitions, regional impacts, governance reforms, and digital capacities. Without clarifying how a non-member middle power can engage deeply with the BRICS bloc without a formal engagement and preserving autonomy.

With respect to this matter, this research paper addresses these gaps by adopting a new concept which is Shadow Alignment, enabling the assessment of multidimensional functional proximity epitomized in strategic depth across four essential chosen sectors: economic, technological, security; and soft power. This methodological model figures out how middle powers like Morocco can leverage their strategic benefits via its cooperation with both western allies and BRICS bloc beyond formal membership.

### **Theoretical framework**

Addressing the gaps concerning middle-power interactions with BRIC countries identified in the literature, this research turns to the Shadow Alignment (SA) framework as a specific analytical instrument, which refers to a model, where a middle power has a high level of functional proximity and cooperation with a major power block (the BRIC states) on a variety of dimensions, without formally joining or becoming a subordinate member of the power block, to preserve its sovereignty, balanced partnership, and non-committed autonomy.

This concept is singled out by three core empirical pillars:

1. Functional proximity epitomized in Strategic Depth: Engagement could be across different main and selected dimensions, but in this study considers the most influential dimensions economic, technological, security, and soft power to demonstrate the areas where Morocco generates the greatest strategic leverage.
2. The Balancing Act: The conscious management of relations with traditional Western partners so as not to become strategically overdependent, along with maintaining a degree of autonomy, and decreasing political risks.
3. Non-Committed Autonomy: The maintenance of independent decision-making and policy discretion in regional, diplomatic, and institutional affairs, thus not taking on any obligations that compromise sovereignty.

The mechanisms of Shadow Alignment are based on strategic reasoning, that the BRIC bloc values the middle power's geographic position, regional influence, and non-aligned status more than formal membership. This, in turn, creates a successful negotiating position enabling Morocco to get the most out of the engagement without ceding political control or making compromises in its relations with traditional Western allies. Shadow Alignment, through the integration of these pillars, constitutes a single, empirically verifiable framework for the study of middle-power agency in multipolar environments, thus providing a well-defined methodology for operational analysis, and at the same time addressing the gaps left by the existing IR theories.

### **Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework of this paper is based on the new theory of Shadow Alignment, that has been formulated to clarify how a middle power (Morocco) can be substantially involved in major power blocs (BRIC) without being institutionally subordinated. This framework is innovative in the sense that it operationalizes the concept of Shadow Alignment as a multidimensional analytical prism that explicitly connects the engagement of Morocco into BRIC, its relations with Western powers (USA and EU), and its ability to make independent policy decisions. In this way, it contributes crucially in filling a substantial gap in the literature on middle-power strategy, providing a systematic framework that supports empirical research and informs policy decisions.

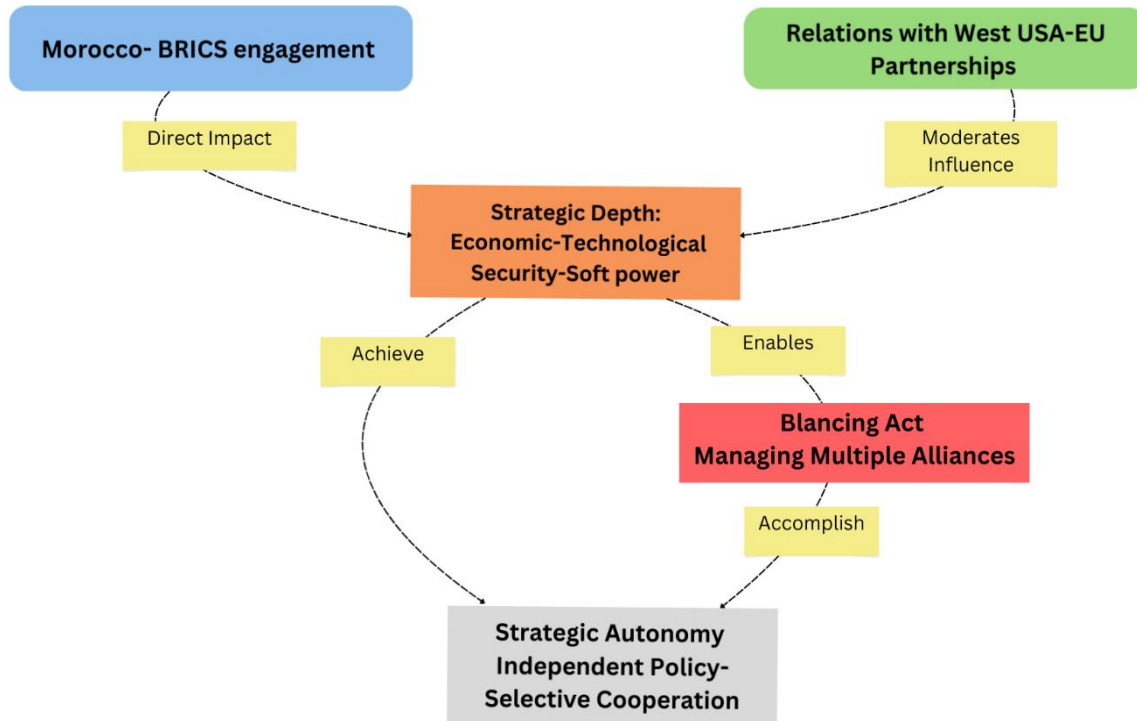
This framework comprises three main interrelated groups of concepts:

1. The involvement of Morocco in BRIC: this is the main and independent variable which comprises trade, investment, infrastructure, technological collaboration, defense relations, and soft power influence.
2. Relations with Western powers (USA, EU): this symbolizes the intermediate variable that determine strategic impact and influence of BRIC engagement.
3. The dependent variables manifested through:
  - Strategic Depth: operationalized in the economic, technological, security, and soft power spheres.
  - Balancing Act: the ability to maintain relations with both BRIC and Western allies.
  - Non-Committed Autonomy: degree of autonomy of decisions and selective involvement.

We could translate the relationship between these three variables as following:

On the one side, the Interaction with BRIC will improve Strategic Depth which will be moderated by

the ties of Morocco with Western powers. On the other side, the level of Non-Committed Autonomy is determined by Strategic Depth in conjunction with the Balancing Act, which clarifies the potential of Morocco to achieve the best strategic benefits without infringing on its sovereignty (**Figure1**).



**Figure1.** conceptual Framework of research variables and their intersection.  
Source: Author’s analysis

## Methodology

This research is based on dual methodological approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative analysis, underpinned by a structural-deductive approach that generates the concept of Shadow Alignment using secondary data. A comparative case study design from 2020 to 2025, which would enable longitudinal evaluation of evolving strategic dynamics, with a focus on bilateral and multilateral relations between Morocco and BRIC states China, Russia, India, and Brazil considered as the original core of the group later to be renamed BRICS. This study would illustrate the strategic relations that Morocco maintains with these four countries, which are more in depth and consistent than subsequent members.

- **The qualitative approach:**

The qualitative aspect is based on primary and secondary documentary literature, such as national and international news, official governmental reports, policy briefs, research papers and diplomatic statements. The formulation of Shadow Alignment concept was based on the abductive reasoning,

which enables the conceptual framework to be formulated from the convergence of the existing theories and empirical data. Data were arranged using thematic coding to determine patterns and categories pertinent to the Moroccan intermediate position, such as trade, investment, technological cooperation, balancing policies, and practices that reflect autonomy such as UN voting behaviour. This assessment is relied on Selective Depth Analysis with a focus on countries that tie a strong strategic relation with Morocco across various dimensions, combined with a critical discourse analysis facilitating the explanation of policy language and diplomatic distancing of Morocco regarding BRICS bloc. Consequently, these analytical tools facilitate the explanation of the status of Morocco between BRICS four core countries (Brazil, Russia, China, India) and traditional powers (the United States and Europe) while maintaining its strategic balance.

- **The quantitative approach:**

The quantitative approach considers measurements of the numerical aspects of strategic depth of Morocco and balancing calibration with BRIC nations through secondary data of WTO trade and UN Comtrade. On the one part, a descriptive statistic was used to estimate the trade, investment, while time-series analysis was employed to track the development of Morocco-BRIC relations throughout the years especially between 2020-2024, emphasizing the cumulative character of functional proximity. On the other part, a Correlation analysis was adopted to compare the involvement of Morocco with BRIC to its relations with the USA, and European Union. In addition to that, Strategic Depth is measured using composite indices, through economic, technological, security, and soft power dimensions. While, the Balancing Act is assessed based on the active involvement of Morocco with BRIC, USA, and EU, as well as joint projects. Simultaneously, Non-Committed Autonomy was evaluated through Moroccan independent policies and non-membership of BRIC. In the discussion part a SWOT analysis is employed to analyse different focal point of strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats dissecting internal and external actors of this strategy. All these data sources were cross-verified through triangulation, which confirm that the quantitative indices accurately reflect strategic intent.

This study is subject to different methodological limitations: firstly, the research is limited to the examination of only four original BRIC countries. Secondly, the study relies especially on publicly available data, which is in the realm of diplomacy and strategic cooperation, as sensitive topic related to defense, intelligence remain difficult to obtain. Secondly, the special focus on Morocco as a case study still limited despite its deep and significant analysis, which necessitates an examination of other middle powers cases. Thirdly, the rapid expansion of BRICS bloc could make the study time bounded, which call for future deep research. Finally, due to the different methodologies, reporting standards,

and re-exporting issues related to commercial exchanges, creates a slight disparity between the percentages. Although these limitations, this study point out an important foundational analysis of a meaningful and evolving perspectives of Morocco’s foreign Policy.

**1. Integrative Functional Proximity and Coordinated Alliance Dynamics**

This analysis examines four primary dimensions of the external outlook of Morocco in the changing external position of the country; economic (particularly, in respect of trade), technological, security and soft power. These dimensions allow us to realize the intensity and arrangement of the partnerships of Morocco. We analyse them based on two lenses: strategic depth (functional proximity) and balancing act, to view how Morocco approaches its relations with BRICS and Western countries. The data reveals that Morocco's partners are involved in varied ways and in different extents through the four major fields of interaction which are economic (mainly trade), technology, security, and soft power. Each partner, despite the differences, has a particular function that is supportive and complemented to the others. In unison, they provide Morocco with a wider range of strategic options, and thus maintain a balanced and effective global cooperation alliances.

we have grounded this analysis on the principle of *Selective Depth Analysis*, including countries that have strong strategic relations with Morocco in each dimension. This method assists in comprehending how Morocco’s acts as a middle ground state between the BRICS countries and the Western allies (the United States and Europe), and also how it balances its strategic position within a Shadow alignment framework. **The table 1** below was developed based on different sources and reports (especially the ones released by foreign ministries of each country), and reflect three indicators which vary from high to medium to low, related to the intensity and depth degree of Morocco’s strategic relations between 2020 to 2024, to demonstrates the way relations vary across the four dimensions for each BRIC country and western partners (U.S.A and E.U).

<b>Country/dimension</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Economy (Trade)</b>	<b>Security/military</b>	<b>Soft Power (Culture and Education)</b>
<b>Brazil</b>	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
<b>Russia</b>	Medium-Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
<b>India</b>	High	Medium-high	Medium	Medium
<b>China</b>	Medium-High	High	Medium	High

<b>United States</b>	Medium-High	High	High	Medium-High
<b>European Union</b>	Medium-High	High	Medium	High

**Table1. Reference table for Morocco’s Strategic Relations between (2020-2024)**

Source: Visualized by the Author.

According to the results presented in (**Table 1**), Morocco has balanced and diversified relationships with the BRICS nations, Europe, and the United States. Morocco is technologically and economically involved with China and India and is economically supported and stable by Europe and the United States. In trade, Europe is Morocco’s largest partner, While India, Russia and Brazil cooperate moderately. At the level of security United States is the strongest one, followed by Russia, whereas Europe and other countries are more limited. For soft power, China and Europe lead in cultural exchange and educational partnership, complemented by other countries by medium to high partnership. By diversifying its partnership with multiple stakeholders across various dimension, Morocco becomes less dependent on any single country, thereby enhancing its bargaining power on the international scale.

### 1.1. Economic dimension (Trade)

This study emphasizes the economic aspect in particular by the examination of trade dynamics, which is recognized as the most efficient indicator for measuring connectivity and spotting interest areas among others. The reasoning behind this is that trade is by far the most stable and measurable channel in bilateral economic relations, thus it is a good reflection of the partners’ ability to establish sustainable strategic depth. Correspondingly, the results are presented in (**Table 2**), which demonstrates the trade value evolution (2020-2024), these data are complemented by a (**Table 3**) representing the performance and growth averages, along with a (**Table 4**) concerning the relative share and coverage rates in the same period between Morocco-BRIC, United States, and Europe.

<b>Year/ Blocs</b>	<b>BRIC (Brazil; Russia; India; China)</b>			<b>Western Powers (U.E/U.S. A)</b>		
	<b>Imports</b>	<b>Exports</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Imports</b>	<b>Exports</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2020</b>	8.485.5	2.800.1	11.285.6	25.465.3	18.686.2	44.151.5
<b>2021</b>	10.809.7	4.387.8	15.197.5	32.505.1	22.873.7	55.378.8
<b>2022</b>	12.400.4	4.804.4	17.202.8	38.366.9	25.417.6	63.784.5

<b>2023</b>	11.436.9	2.870.2	14.307.1	40.002.9	28.198.7	68.201.6
<b>2024</b>	11.400.8	2.772.5	14.173.3	39.469.4	27.845.6	67.315.0

**Table 2. Morocco’s Trade with BRIC vs Western Powers (2020-2024, Million dollars)**

Source: Author’s analysis based on WTO Trade data and Comtrade

<b>Bloc</b>	<b>Avg. exports (%)</b>	<b>Avg.Imports (%)</b>	<b>Avg.Coverage (%)</b>	<b>Imports Growth (%)</b>	<b>Total Growth (%)</b>
<b>BRIC</b>	9.41	17.47	36.06	+34.35	+25.59
<b>United States</b>	3.20	7.53	26.48	+123.41	+98.68
<b>European Union</b>	61.81	48.69	76.68	+46.52	+48.12

**Table 3. table of performance and growth averages (%) (2020-2024).**

Source: Author’s analysis based on WTO Trade data

<b>Year/Bloc</b>	<b>BRIC</b>			<b>United States</b>			<b>European Union</b>		
<b>Shares</b>	<b>Export Share (%)</b>	<b>Import Share (%)</b>	<b>Global Share (%)</b>	<b>Export Share (%)</b>	<b>Import Share (%)</b>	<b>Global Share (%)</b>	<b>Export Share (%)</b>	<b>Import Share (%)</b>	<b>Global Share (%)</b>
<b>2020</b>	10.11	19.06	15.18	3.56	6.28	5.09	63.89	50.91	56.33
<b>2021</b>	11.99	18.38	15.61	3.02	6.35	4.95	59.51	48.92	53.39
<b>2022</b>	11.39	17.09	14.62	3.35	7.42	5.76	56.90	45.45	50.27
<b>2023</b>	6.76	16.18	12.13	2.95	8.45	6.09	63.46	49.59	55.73
<b>2024</b>	6.81	16.66	12.37	2.12	9.13	6.59	65.29	48.56	55.90

**Table 4. Evolution of relative shares table (2020-2024)**

Source: Author’s analysis based on WTO Trade data.

Based on the depth analysis shown in these figure and tables related to Moroccan trade data between 2020 and 2024 reveal significant findings, indicating considerable success in the establishment of a multipolar trade model. This achievement is the fruit of Morocco's excellent diplomatic and commercial skills in international economic relations.

This success has been also reflected in the extensive and cohesive network of strategic partnerships

developed by Morocco, through which it has been able to secure and maximize the most economic advantages within a multipolar international system.

#### **A. An integrated model of strategic partnerships**

The **(Table 2)** of trade exchanges clearly reflects the quantitative and qualitative growth of Morocco's economic relations. In this regard, trade with the European Union has increased significantly from \$40.37 billion in 2020 to \$59.80 billion in 2024, thus achieving a total increase of \$19.43 billion. In addition to that, the United States has witnessed a drastic shift in its relationship with Morocco. Trade exchanges fluctuated from \$3.78 billion to \$7.52 billion, accompanied by a staggering increase of \$3.74 billion. This acceleration reflects the success of Morocco's strategy in establishing a foothold in the US market and thus diversifying its export base.

One of the most notable achievements is reflected in relations between BRICS countries and Morocco, which saw total trade grow from \$11.29 billion to \$14.17 billion, with a total increase of \$2.88 billion. This development therefore demonstrates the effectiveness of Morocco's strategy to strengthen its economic independence and diversify its trading partners.

#### **B. A careful balance in the distribution of relative shares**

The analysis of **(table 4)** regarding relative shares indicates that Morocco is very cautious in managing its trade. The country has maintained an effective relationship with the European Union, with its percentage of total imports and exports remaining at an average of around 54.32 %, in parallel with the positive development in the trade balance structure.

Concerning this point, Morocco has developed very tight relations with BRIC core countries (China, Brazil, Russia, India), which account for an average of 13.98% of its total trade.

This figure shows a delicate balance between maintaining old partners and developing new ones. As for the United States which has seen a significant increase in its relative share, from 5.09% to 6.59%, demonstrating its success in penetrating the dynamic Moroccan market without disrupting overall trade relations.

#### **C. Advanced analysis of performance and efficiency indicators**

A comprehensive analysis of performance indicators **(Table 3)** during the study period allows for the development of an integrated model for managing international trade relations. For the Analysis of

BRIC core countries, data highlights Morocco's success in developing a balanced strategic partnership, with average exports 9.41%, whilst recording strong imports growth of 34.35% indicating increased reliance on these markets for production inputs. The coverage rate of 36.06%, illustrates the nature of this partnership, which relies on strategic imports, while maintaining stable exports despite international fluctuations and challenges.

In the case of the United States, the analysis shows very significant growth dynamics, with exports recording remarkable growth of 28.66%, while imports rose by 123.41%, indicating a deepening of trade relations and an increase in the number of products exchanged. The coverage rate of only 26.48% indicates the need to achieve greater balance in trade exchange with this important partner.

As it concerns the European Union, the analysis testifies the robust nature of the strategic partnership, indicated by the very high average of export coverage at 61.81% and a corresponded balanced growth in the exports and imports at 50.14% and 46.52%, respectively. The extremely high coverage rate of 76.68% indicates that the partnership is highly effective and capable of achieving near-complete trade balance.

#### **D. A comprehensive strategic vision and integration between Poles**

Together these findings form an integrated model of Morocco's trade policy, which demonstrate the interdependence and functional interaction between countries. The European Union constitutes the pillar of trade stability, a steady market for Moroccan exports, and a reliable source of advanced technologies and capital goods.

Whilst, the BRICS group represents an ally for diversification, providing sources of energy, raw materials, fuel, fertilizers, chemical products, wide mechanical and electrical equipment, along with agriculture and industrial products.

As regards this matter, The United States acts as an engine for future economic growth, as evidenced by the significant growth in the trade exchange rate, which reinforces the prospects for high development, particularly in the field of technological innovations and high-value services. This integration between the two poles allows Morocco to benefit from the comparative advantages of its partners, while maintaining the strategic flexibility necessary to overcome international economic shocks.

#### **Key findings:**

The in-depth trade analysis (2020-2024) yielded the following key conclusions regarding Morocco's strategic trade position:

**A. Strategic depth through functional proximity:** the findings confirm that Morocco has been able to create a significant strategic depth through its functional proximity with different economic blocs. This is shown through the partnership with the EU, and United States characterized by deep integration (average share 60,02%, coverage 68,12%) which provides predictability, stability, and economic efficiency. Complemented by the exchange trade partnership, with the BRIC countries (average share 13.98%, coverage 36,06%) that ensures the import of energy and goods from different sources, providing geopolitical options, alternative sources and safeguard against the state's external economic shocks.

**B. Masterful balancing Act:** Morocco strikes an optimal equilibrium, enabling it to coordinate competing partnerships perfectly without forfeiting the endorsement of its traditional allies, translated in its ability to preserve its main alliance with the West avoiding any undermining of its partnerships with BRIC core countries.

### 1.1) Technological dimension

The findings indicate full-scale support from both BRIC and Western allies, based on the reference table compiled and compared with several official reports, presents a picture of Morocco technological partnerships with key players in the world. Morocco comes out as a strategic middle ground, with the deployment of selective depth in its interactions with the BRICS nations, especially China, and India, along with the conventional Western actors, including the United States and Europe. The technological aspect shows a subtle system of interactions, comprising of industrial, digital, and innovation-oriented projects in order to achieve the best strategic benefits.

In its partnership with China, Morocco has established Tangier Tech City, a model smart industrial city, which was inaugurated in the period between 2019 and 2022, and has more than 200 Chinese enterprises, occupying more than 2,100 hectares of space designed for industrial and service projects (mcinet, 2025). There are major projects such as the Gotion High Tech gigafactory (2024) with the initial capacity of 20 GWh and possible extension to 100 GWh, manufacturing lithium-ion batteries, cathodes, anodes, and battery components (reuters, 2025). These initiatives combine advanced technological production with infrastructural buildup, making Morocco one of the supply chain centers in the manufacturing of electric vehicles, given its closeness to Europe and its access to strategic raw materials like phosphate and lithium.

The partnership with India, though less tangible at the level of industry scale, it is more focused on the digital transformation and information technology. In this regard, in Casablanca, the Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) was founded in 2017 and has trained more than 675 Moroccan experts in software engineering and IT, and continues to exchange experience in digital public infrastructure and governance (Centre of Excellence in Information Technology, 2022). Although there are no large-scale industrial undertakings, India plays a key role as one of main source of software, IT services, and digital expertise that might sustain the emerging tech ecosystem in Morocco.

In addition to this, Technological infrastructure, and innovation are fully supported by European Union. The European Investment Bank funding, as well as the involvement in projects like PRIMA (2025-2027) (ec.europa.eu, 2010), increases the Moroccan research potential, digital skills, and ecosystem of innovations. While Collaboration with AI leader's firms such as Mistral AI also enhances the digital governance, smart city projects, and entrepreneurship of Morocco (telquel, 2025). According to that, the European initiative has extended to education, rural digital infrastructure, and startup support which providing a framework of sustainable, standards-compliant technological development.

With United states of America, Morocco has strengthened its AI, cloud computing, cybersecurity, and e-government capacity. This advancement was additionally supported by the new agreements of scientific and technical cooperation 2023-2033 and above-level negotiations in March 2025, which are intended to unify the digital sovereignty of Morocco by means of secure data infrastructure and all-encompassing AI systems. As a result, U.S. activity guaranteed the access of Morocco to the cutting-edge technologies, professional skills, and effective forms of governance, which supplemented the industrial and digital investments of other foreign partners (maroc.ma, 2025).

Overall, this multi-vector strategy illustrates a balancing act under the shadow alignment model. Through its multiple active interactions with competing BRICS and Western powers, Morocco effectively neutralizes their effects, implementing Western standards to balance Chinese industrial scale.

This allows it to stand as a regional hub, maneuvered through complexed geopolitics, and solidify its position as a central node in the global technological networks, as well as keep its strategic independence and operational flexibility.

## 1.2) Security and military dimensions

As the analysis shows, Morocco's international relations include an important strategic aspect in military and security cooperation, and there is a clear desire to improve and modernize its air capabilities. The existence of such a network of relations reflects a multidirectional diplomatic strategy in which the United States is a traditional partner, China a new power, and India a new strategic partner in defense, with Morocco maintaining a balanced alliance. In the case of the United States, this cooperation is manifested in a long-term relationship.

The strategic framework was established by a defense cooperation roadmap (2020-2030), followed by a series of major agreements in 2024-2025. These included high-tech air-to-air missiles (AIM-120C-8) worth \$88.37 million, precision bombs (GBU-39/B) worth \$86 million, and Javelin anti-tank missiles (612 units) in June 2025 (dsca, 2024). This culminated in a colossal \$25 million contract in 2025 for 25 F-16C/D Block 72 fighter jets, 36 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, 18 HIMARS rocket launchers, and FIM-92K Stinger Block I air defense missiles worth \$825 million. Other forms of cooperation also include various forms of military support and assistance between 2013 and 2025, amounting to \$478 million.

Other forms of cooperation also include various forms of military support and assistance between 2013 and 2025, worth \$478 million, as well as training worth \$32 million. This partnership is supported by a sophisticated fleet of combat drones, including MQ-9 Reapers and RQ-4 Global Hawks, and is reinforced in practice by periodic joint exercises, including African Lion (since 2007) and amphibious exercises in Al Hoceima (November 2025) (Foreign military sales, n.d.).

Similarly, the results confirm that China and Morocco partnerships is more focused on strengthening air capabilities by providing medium- and long-range drones. In 2022, Morocco acquired Wing Loong II drones at a comparable price of \$280,000, and in March 2025, TB-001 (Twin-Tailed Scorpion) drones were acquired at an estimated cost of \$280,000 per unit (.military.africa, 2022). these aerial vehicles (UAV) are characterised by a versatile reconnaissance and attack platforms capable of flying for 35 to 40 hours. to further empower the security cooperation Morocco took the initiative to acquire Wing Loong X drones, specialized in electronic warfare, in 2025, in order to diversify weapons sources and increase defense technological capacities.

To consolidate these schemes, Collaboration with India gained considerable strategic importance in September 2025, when India signed a comprehensive defense memorandum of understanding (MoU).

This collaboration is not limited to the field of security (counterterrorism, maritime security, cybersecurity), but also covers important industrial aspects in the form of a defense industrial agreement. An agreement with Tata Advanced Systems to build a factory in Berrechid to manufacture 400 WhAP 8x8 armored vehicles (investment), including technology transfer and training for 100 Moroccans in India (September 2024), is evidence of this (pib.gov, 2025). Ultimately, Morocco's strategy is based on strategic depth within the framework of diversified military partnerships. It is developing its main base using advanced American technology, acquiring rapid deterrence capabilities through specialized Chinese drones, and localizing its industry by collaborating with India. This reflects a complex balancing act between competing powers around the world. Morocco has strengthened its security sovereignty, minimized its unilateral dependence, and established its status as a key players and flexible regional partner by balancing American technological superiority with Chinese flexibility and Indian industrial cooperation, reflecting a high level of diplomatic pragmatism.

### **1.3) Soft Power dimensions**

As the results reveals, Morocco's international relations in the fields of education and culture exchange constitute a flexible, multipolar network of strategic relationships based on consideration of the comparative advantages of its partners.

Concerning China, collaboration focuses on improving academic and linguistic interactions. Chinese language courses and cultural activities are offered at three Confucius Institutes in Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangier. The Chinese government scholarship (CSC) covers all tuition fees, accommodation, and a monthly allowance (2,500-3,500 yuan), and seven scholarships are awarded to Moroccans for the 2025-2026 academic year. Others are also considering cooperation, such as a joint program between Beijing Foreign Studies University and Mohammed V University to train tour guides, and cultural events such as Chinese Cultural Weeks and the Shanghai Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition in Casablanca (2025) (Fatima Zohra ALAOUI MAHREZ, 2023).

With regard to European Union, thanks to the Erasmus+ program, students can study in 27 European countries with full coverage of tuition fees and a living allowance (from €500 to €900). Full or partial funding is available in countries such as Switzerland (University of Bern scholarships), Sweden (SEK 10,000 per month), and Germany (DAAD/Humboldt scholarships). Engineering scholarships are funded by France through ONOUCS engineering scholarships (MAD 1,750 allowance, MAD 500 housing allowance). This collaboration is supported by initiatives such as the partnership agreement

for vocational training (2025), with a budget of €75 million, the FORCAP program (2020), and the advanced status agreement (2008), which provides for cultural and educational cooperation.

In cooperation with the United States, the Moroccan-American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (MACECE) was created in 1982 and is at the forefront of promoting exchange programs such as the Fulbright Program, which offers 50 scholarships to Moroccans annually, and the Global UGRAD and YES programs, which target young people. Under the AFCP, up to 11 projects worth up to \$860,000 are funded, including English language instruction in eight Moroccan cities and celebrations for former Fulbright scholars.

Cooperation in the case of Brazil is not very active, but it still strategic and appropriate. There is a joint declaration on strategic dialogue (2024) and collaboration between tourism and cultural cooperation as part of the “Brasil Soft Power” campaign (2025). It also includes participation in COP30, where it has a Moroccan pavilion 8.9 million dirhams, a digital cooperation agreement (2025) (maroc-diplomatique, 2025), and a military education memorandum of understanding (2023) between the Royal College of Higher Military Studies and the Brazilian Defense School.

All of this indicates that Morocco is in a position to gain strategic depth in its educational and cultural policy, which consists of diversifying its partners. While China offers language teaching facilities and fully funded scholarships, Europe provides comprehensive institutional support for academic exchanges and multinational research agreements. The United States offers elite exchange programs and endowment funding, while Brazil as a new partner in cultural tourism and digital collaboration offers different opportunities especially in the field of military education. These relationships constitute a new form of alliance balancing, in which Morocco is keen to maintain relationships with rival educational and cultural systems. Long-standing relationships with traditional blocs (the United States and Europe) are counterbalanced by strategic alliances with emerging players (China and Brazil). This intelligent distribution helps Morocco extend its cultural sovereignty, reduce its dependence on a specific model, create versatile human resources, and consolidate its role as a cultural intermediary between continents and the global system.

## **2. Alliance Flexibility and Limited Commitment**

To substantiate these policies, empirical analysis of Morocco's implementation of a Non-Committed Autonomy approach towards BRICS countries has been demonstrated at three levels of application: 1) non-institutional membership, but pursuing a selective economic cooperation; 2) Diplomatic autonomy through strategic divergence in voting processes in multilateral forums; and 3) Management of

regional partnerships through sovereign initiatives. These results confirm the success of Morocco's economic balancing, security partnership preservation, and soft power cooperation promotion.

### **A. Non-institutional membership and structural rejection of integration**

The results confirm the existence of a consistent policy of informal institutional orientation. On 19 August 2023, the official statement of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Kingdom had not submitted a formal application for membership of the BRICS group, but had sought selective economic cooperation rather than full political cooperation. This structural rejection was also evident in the attendance of the Minister of Industry and trade, Riad Mezzour, at the BRICS 2024 Forum on Partnership for the New Industrial Revolution in Xiamen, where there were no interactions other than industrial and technical ones. This distance has been seen as a strategic move to ensure its financial and political independence, particularly with regard to the case of Moroccan Sahara region, which is more reliant on United States and the European Union support.

### **B. Diplomatic Divergence in Multilateral Forums**

The analysis indicate that Morocco is likely to pursue a calculated, nuanced diplomatic approach, A major example is demonstrated through the stance of Morocco towards conflict between Russia and Ukraine, reflected in taking a neutral positive epitomized in its absence during the vote in the UN General Assembly on a resolution condemning the Russian invasion in March 2022. Furthermore, the results show that Morocco has not taken any steps at the UN to condemn Chinese policies in Xinjiang. Similarly, both countries recently acted the same way during the vote on the security council Resolution 2797 (30 October 2025) regarding the autonomy plan for Western Sahara, so, both countries abstained from voting. This one-sided tendency proves that Morocco relies on multilateral forums to protect its national interests, especially with regard to Western Sahara, and does not take a hardline approach towards BRICS members on other geopolitical issues.

### **C. Sovereign Regional Leadership Amidst Cooperation**

The results highlighted that Morocco can enter into economic partnerships with BRICS members without losing control over the region, this pattern is essentially reflected in the ports of Nador and Tangier Med, which have seen Chinese and Russian technological participation and investment. More specifically, the results point to the launch of the Royal Atlantic Programme in November 2023, which represents a sovereign policy for Morocco allowing landlocked countries in the Sahel region (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad) to benefit from its maritime infrastructure. This line was institutionalised during the ministerial meeting held in Marrakesh in December 2023, led by Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, demonstrating that Morocco has the independent capacity to set its own agenda. This project will serve as a compensatory variable in long term, as bilateral cooperation with

BRICS countries will enhance, rather than undermine, Morocco's strategic freedom and leadership in West Africa and the Sahel.

Overall, the results of these three indicators attest the functioning of the parallel convergence model. Systematic engagement with BRICS countries is beneficial to the Moroccan economy, while political integration is structurally rejected, leading to diplomatic overreach on serious issues, while regional sovereign initiatives reinforce sovereign autonomy.

### **3. Interpreting Morocco's Shadow Alignment Strategy**

The results presented in this paper constitute comprehensive evidence supporting the validity of the new theoretical framework of shadow alignment, as validated by the independent confirmation of the three empirical pillars. The cumulative data confirm that functional convergence in the case of the four core BRIC countries (Russia, India, China and Brazil) on a multidimensional scale was not achieved at the expense of traditional allies, as Morocco did not experience any significant negative consequences or decline in its relations with the EU or the US, and its ability to manoeuvre strategic adaptation without provoking punitive reactions indicates that it has mastered the art of maintaining a balance between diplomacy and strategic management.

Above all, Non-Committed Autonomy preservation is also affirmed as a third autonomous pillar. Declining full membership of the BRICS, the obvious lack of convergence in voting patterns on contentious matters and the demand to impose its sovereign agenda in Africa indicate that functional depth has not been converted into political dependency, which is the real meaning of the Shadow in the strategy.

Findings of the current research point to Morocco's involvement in intersecting spheres of influence, which is supported by convergent results of previous research, thus contradicted by others. The research paper presented by Linggarwati and Hadiansyah (2025) (Tundjung Linggarwati, Nabil Hadiansyah, 2025) which frames BRICS as a bloc capable to balance the hegemonic system implemented with westerns countries, totally confirms and aligns with the results highlighted through both functional proximities reflected in the four strategic depths dimensions .In the same vain, both Bamidele (2024)(Seun Bamidele, 2024) and Mansour and Baiche (2025)(Imad Mansour & Abdelhadi Baiche, 2025) in their studies revealed that the cooperation promote a diversified partnerships across Africa especially North Africa, which intersect with the balancing acts previously mentioned in the results part. Yet, according to Delcourt (2024) study(Delcourt, 2024), the cooperation with of the BRICS+ can replicate the process of dependency and unequal extraction of resources, posing a

strategic threat, which diverge from the Non-committed Autonomy clarified in the analysis, as Morocco represents middle powers that could effectively and successfully tie strong relations with BRICS countries without any formal membership.

These findings have geopolitical implications for some major actors in the international system. The achievement of the Shadow Alignment policy proves that the impact of BRICS is not limited to its formal membership countries, as it can also have a powerful economic and security effect through functional partnership with intermediary states. In addition, the case of Morocco can serve as an example that other middle powers can follow to maximise their benefits in a multipolar system without relinquishing their sovereignty when making decisions. Conversely, these results, indicate to traditional Western allies that they need to reconsider their policies, since traditional methods of deterrence or dictation will not be effective against states that adopt versatile and smart means of calculation by focusing on practical and sovereign decisions instead of narrow ideological commitments.

The strategic implications of this research encompass an important theoretical aspect. Ideologically, the shadow alignment theory makes a qualitative contribution to the literature on international relations by providing a more precise analytical framework for the actions of middle powers in a multipolar system. It not only reveals the conceptual shortcomings of terms such as 'Hedging' or 'soft balancing', but also proposes a dynamic model showing how these states can transform their non-engagement, a source of weakness, into a means of negotiation, thus filling the gap in the theoretical explanation of effective and profitable strategies that avoid formal political commitments.

In order to strategically define these implications, a SWOT analysis of the model can be provided, with internal factors considered in terms of the nature of the strategy itself (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors in terms of the presence of the geopolitical environment (opportunities and threats):

<b>Internal Factors</b>	<b>strengths</b>	<b>weaknesses</b>
	-The maximization of material and strategic gains with full preservation of sovereignty. -Diversifying partners so as to improve bargaining power and lessen dependence on one pole.	-Strong reliance on diplomatic skill and quality of governance, which made it vulnerable to internal political risks. -Refusal of the full benefits of membership in institutions affiliated in the

	-Flexibility and strategically dealing with various problems without being bound to a formal membership.	blocs like access NDB financing. -Threat of the rising of internal policy disputes due to the engagement with numerous partners that have conflicting interests.
<b>External Factors</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
	-Taking advantage of the multipolar geopolitical context to maximize benefits of the rivalry among great powers. -Establishing flexible, short-term partnerships with different actors around specific issues with different actors. -Demonstrating a model in term which attract new partnerships where countries value active neutrality.	- Major powers moving towards more aggressive policies to coerce states to choose a side. -Growing uncertainty of global policies, making it difficult to maintain balance. - Danger of intensifying competition between great powers, diminishing the maneuvering space available to the middle powers.

**Table 5. SWOT Analysis of shadow Alignment Model**

Source: Author’s Analysis

**Limits of the Study and Future Prospects**

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, it is not without methodological limitations. First, although the data analysis demonstrates a strong relationship between the “Shadow alignment” strategy and the observed outcomes, establishing causality conclusively remains challenging. Inferring strategic intent behind state behaviour necessarily relies on deduction and interpretation within the framework of qualitative research. Second, the study encountered obstacles related to the lack of transparent data on certain aspects of cooperation, particularly in sensitive security and military areas or details of technology transfers with Russia and China, necessitating reliance on secondary sources and proxy data that may not provide a complete picture. Finally, the empirical testing of the proposed concept is limited to a single case study of Morocco, which limits the possibility of generalising the results to other contexts. Overall verification of the validity of the "Shadow alignment" concept remains contingent on its subsequent subjection to comparative studies in diverse regional and political contexts.

In order to overcome these constraints, it is necessary to identify future research paths to guide this

ambitious strategic project:

### **1. Comparative studies:**

- A comparative analysis of shadow alignment in different regions: The theoretical framework has to be applied to other countries that may adopt similar strategies, such as the UAE, Vietnam, Turkey, or Singapore, and compare similarities and differences in implementation and outcomes.
- Evaluating the Shadow alignment with other Blocs: Determine whether the concept can be applied to other middle power relations with bloc other than BRICS, like relations with European Union or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and

### **2. Theoretical and Conceptual Formulation:**

- Intersection with international relations theories: Deeper intersection of the concept with other well-known theories in international relations, such as constructivism (to analyze the construction of the “Non-committed partner” identity) or complex interdependence theory, in order to strengthen the theoretical basis of the concept.
- Develop more accurate quantitative indicators: Developing more sophisticated and more complex quantitative measures of strategic depth and Non-committed autonomy, perhaps using network analysis or big data, in order to overcome data limitations.

### **3. Research on limits and implications:**

- Examine the implicit costs of the shadow alliance approach: systematically examine the forfeited opportunities or political or economic losses to the state by its failure to give full commitment (e.g., its refusal to provide funding to large projects via the BRICS New Development Bank).
- Strategic limits and risks boundaries: Exploration of instances where this strategy has failed or collapsed, with the aim of inferring the circumstances in which a shadow alignment is sustainable and unsustainable.

### **4. Geopolitical consequences in the long term:**

- Effects of the strategy diffusion on the equilibrium of the international system: Investigate the effect of the diffusion of the “Shadow alignment” model across a number of middle powers on the equilibrium of the traditional alliances and the balance of power in a multipolar system.
- Response of the great powers: Examine how the major powers (Western and within the BRICS group) develop their mechanisms and instruments to manage the phenomenon of the Shadow alignment, either to promote it, or to restrain its effectiveness.

These avenues allow future research to build on the findings of this study and transform the concept of “Shadow Alignment”, which until now has been a descriptive observation of a specific phenomenon, into a well-developed theory capable of describing one of the most widespread and significant trends in international behavior in the 21st century.

## **Conclusion**

This research fills a theoretical gap in understanding how middle powers such as Morocco can establish deep functional relationships with geopolitical blocs such as BRICS without entering into formal political commitments a phenomenon that is not explained by existing concepts such as hedging or non-alignment.

The main objective was to test and validate the “shadow alliance” framework empirically, which examines how Morocco can create strategic depth, balance, and non-Committed autonomy in its interactions with BRICS countries. The assessment confirms the validity of the three pillars of the shadow alliance: Morocco has already demonstrated considerable strategic depth in terms of trade, technological cooperation, diversifying its sources of arms, and exchanging soft power. It has already achieved balance by strengthening relations with BRICS countries without provoking punitive reactions from traditional Western partners; and non-committal autonomy by refusing to join BRICS, engaging in diplomatic deviation in the context of UN voting, and imposing its sovereign agenda in Africa.

These results have three implications. In theoretical term, the hidden alliance provides a better analytical approach to understanding the politics of middle powers in a multipolar world. In practical terms, the Moroccan model offers a template that can be replicated by countries in the Global South that aim to diversify their partnerships without losing sovereignty, while the brief strategic analysis highlights the model's strength in maximising benefits and relying on effective diplomacy. For traditional allies, these findings point to the need for a policy shift toward more flexible models of engagement. Thus, this study has limitations, including fundamental issues of causality in qualitative analysis, data constraints on sensitive security and technology agreements, and the narrow scope of a single case study that makes immediate generalisation difficult, it does provide directions for future research. Future research should conduct comparative studies of shadow alliances in other regional contexts, develop quantitative measures of strategic depth and autonomy, and examine the potential costs of declining membership in formal blocs. In conclusion, shadow alliances are an advanced and effective approach to foreign policy in the complex geopolitical circumstances of the contemporary

world, demonstrating that strategic non-alignment, if professionally managed, can be an important source of strength and influence for medium powers in a multipolar world.

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# Sacred Cures: Perceptions of Illness and Remedy in Medieval India

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## Abstract

The history of medicine in medieval India has often been written through the lens of court physicians, imperial patronage, and established systems such as the Unani system of medicine. However, beyond these formal structures existed an entire world of healing that was spiritual, affective, and deeply interwoven with popular belief. This paper examines the entangled domains of medicine, spirituality, and moral thought to explore perceptions of illness and healing in medieval India. While scholars of medieval Indian history have extensively examined formal medical systems, particularly the role of Unani physicians and court-sponsored treatments, less attention has been paid to the diverse body of traditional healing practices outside these institutional frameworks. Often dismissed as superstition or witchcraft by contemporaries and modern scholars alike, these remedies played a central role in everyday experiences of illness and recovery. This paper also explores how such practices were embedded in the religious and cultural consciousness of the period and are preserved in letter collections, Sufi writings, and European travel accounts. This paper argues that healing in medieval India was perceived not solely as a physical intervention but as a moral and spiritual responsibility. These spiritual practices were not merely remedies for illness, but reflections of a moral universe shaped by Indo-Islamic conceptions of divine proximity, ethical healing, and the human condition.

## Keywords

Medicine, Spiritual Healing, Sufism, Mughal India, Epistolary Literature.

## Introduction: Spiritual Healing and The Islamic Moral Universe

How did spiritual healing practices in Medieval India reflect and reproduce Indo-Islamic moral thought? As earlier studies have shown, many scholars have explored medicine and medical professionals throughout the centuries. During the Medieval Indian period, such professionals were called *hakims*, while others knew them by various other names.<sup>2</sup> Before the coming of English

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Medicine in India, people relied heavily on the traditional medical system and professionals. There was a third category of professionals called the *bazār* physicians, who did not have any structured training but were regarded with respect due to their experience in the field.<sup>3</sup> Some call this method spiritual healing. Where no medicine was given but other methods were adopted, such as holy water, repetition of a particular verse from the Quran, or sometimes writing the verse on paper. As stated, spiritual healing was a therapeutic and ethical practice rooted in Quranic, Sufi, and Indo-Islamic cosmologies.<sup>4</sup>

Seema Alavi presents a nuanced historiographical intervention that challenges dominant colonial and state-centric narratives that portray indigenous medical traditions, such as Unani, as stagnant or wholly displaced by Western Medicine. Instead, she situates Unani within a complex Indo-Muslim intellectual and cultural milieu, emphasising its evolution through internal contestations and textual shifts rather than solely colonial disruption. Her central argument is that Unani healing was not just a system of Medicine but a moral, social, and spiritual framework deeply woven into Mughal court culture and elite Muslim identities. Alavi's work enables a reading of Unani medicine as simultaneously scientific and devotional, where the body's healing was inseparable from comportment, ethics, and divine cosmology. This perspective supports the argument that Islamic medical epistemologies in medieval India were animated by religious principles, social hierarchies, and cultural negotiations that extended

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<sup>2</sup>Rezavi notes that within the imperial service, the medical establishment of a Mughal prince operated through a clearly defined hierarchy. At its apex stood the chief physician, under whose supervision worked several subordinate physicians and surgeons, all required to follow his directives. In Mughal administrative terminology, this chief physician was referred to as the *saramad-i aqibba* or *saramad-i hukāma*. A similar hierarchical structure can also be observed within the imperial household, where the title *Hakim al-Mulk* (chief of physicians) is mentioned. See, Rezavi, S.A. Nadeem. "Physicians as Professionals in Medieval India." *Disease and Medicine in India: A Historical Overview*. Indian History Congress, 2001, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Rezavi observes that private practice appears to have been the primary source of income for *bazār* physicians. Badauni, for instance, uses the expression *mutatabib-Sirhindi*, a private practitioner from Sirhind, when referring to Shaikh Hasan, the father of the surgeon Shaikh Bhina. Similarly, Banarsi Das, in his *Ardha Kathānak*, recalls being treated in his youth by a *baidh* (physician) from Jaunpur. He further refers to a *nāi* (literally, barber), a term commonly applied to local surgeons, who treated him for syphilis at Khairabad in 1602. See, Rezavi, "Physicians as Professionals in Medieval India," p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Nizami highlights the deep entrenchment of superstition in the medieval Indian imagination, noting that even prominent religious thinkers of the time were not entirely free from such beliefs. Faith in witchcraft, sorcery, and magical influences was widespread, and serious illnesses were often attributed to supernatural causes. Nizami cites the example of Shihab, a magician from Ajothhan, who was believed to have caused a prolonged ailment of Shaikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar; the supposed effects of this magic were dispelled only after the saint's disciples uncovered a needle-studded effigy from a graveyard and removed its pins. A similar episode is recorded for Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, whose illness prompted the summoning of a magician who traced objects believed to contain harmful magical influence. Nizami further notes that in some instances, state authorities even considered prosecuting individuals accused of deploying such magical practices. He also remarks on the extent to which superstition permeated the lives of medieval Indian Muslims, observing that the fabricated *mal'uz* literature of the period portrays nearly every sphere of life through a superstitious lens. Celestial phenomena were interpreted as manifestations of divine wrath, and their supposed impact on human affairs was framed as a series of punishments for moral failings. See, Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Aligarh: Department of History, Muslim University, 1961), pp. 300–302.

beyond clinical practice into broader understandings of well-being, civility, and divine order.<sup>5</sup>

She further argues that it is essential to recognise that Islamic medical writing in South Asia underwent a gradual yet significant transformation, particularly from the Delhi Sultanate to the early Mughal period. She remarks that scholars have observed that, while medical treatises continued to follow the stylistic conventions of the Persianate encyclopedic tradition, such as those found in Avicenna's *Canon* or al-Jurjani's *Zakhirah Khwarzmshah*, the content of these works began to incorporate distinctly Indian healing elements. Texts like *Tibb-i Firoz Shāhi*, commissioned by Sultan Firuz Tughlaq, included treatments involving Quranic amulets, charms, *talismans*, and ritual diagram elements not traditionally part of the classical Unani canon. During the Lodi period, physicians such as Bahwa bin Khwas Khan actively engaged with Sanskrit texts to broaden their medical repertoire. By the time of Babur's reign, figures like Hakim al-Tabib Khurasani wrote confidently on both Unani and Ayurvedic systems. His *Qasidah dar hifz-i-sihhat*, dedicated to Babur, exemplifies this synthesis. Such examples underscore the intellectual and therapeutic pluralism that shaped Indo-Islamic medical discourse, situating popular spiritual remedies within a broader framework of scholarly and intercultural medical exchange.<sup>6</sup>

Michael Dols argues that Islamic Medicine in the medieval period was not merely a continuation of Greco-Roman Galenism but a dynamic system that reflected Islamic society's intellectual, religious, and environmental contexts. He uses Ibn Ridwan's treatise as a lens to explore how Medicine functioned in practice, focusing on preventive care, humoral theory, and medical ethics. Importantly, Dols emphasises that Ibn Ridwan applied Hippocratic-Galenic theory abstractly as a practical response to the local Egyptian environment and social conditions. This challenges simplistic binaries between rational/Islamic and spiritual/folk medicine, instead illustrating a composite system where environmental determinism, medical empiricism, and Islamic ethical responsibility converged. Dols's work offers a comparative historiographical framework; it provides evidence of how Islamic medical authorities in one part of the medieval Islamic world articulated disease not as divine punishment but as a natural phenomenon influenced by climate, diet, and regimen, filtered through religiously inflected but scientifically grounded paradigms. This can be fruitfully juxtaposed with South Asian Islamic texts to examine regional continuities and divergences in Islamic medical thought regarding illness and healing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Alavi, Seema. *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600–1900*. Permanent Black. Ranikhet. 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Alavi. *Islam and Healing*. P. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Adil S. Gamal and Michael W. Dols. *Medieval Islamic Medicine Ibn Ridwan's Treatise On The Prevention Of Bodily Ills In Egypt*. University of California Press. 1984.

Abul Fazl presents a gloomy portrayal of a world marked by diverse natures, increasing distractions, and societal dishonour. Moreover, in this context, it is argued that the only remedy for such chaos is autocracy, specifically in the form of just monarchs. The metaphor of a "fiery wilderness of talismanic power" describes a realm inhabited by spells and sorcerers, unleashing storms of confusion.<sup>8</sup> The author contends that, despite skepticism towards supernatural solutions, historical reality indicates that a well-ordered administration requires sovereign monarchs. The talismanic imagery underscores the pervasive influence of mystical forces in the tumultuous human experience, shaping the narrative's perspective on the necessity of autocratic rule for societal order.<sup>9</sup>

While explaining the twelve *subās*, Abul Fazl describes the magical properties ascribed to the people of Bengal *subā*.<sup>10</sup> He states, "The inhabitants are, as a race, looking and addicted to the practice of magic. Strange stories are told regarding them; for example, there is a peculiar belief that houses are constructed using human components, pillars, walls, and roofs. Individuals are either compelled through sorcery, or criminals deserving of death are utilised for this purpose. Surprisingly, those who willingly surrender for this construction are granted a reprieve from retribution for a year and receive certain conveniences. The process involves armed individuals cutting down these individuals, and their reactions supposedly provide insights into future events."<sup>11</sup>

This multifaceted view of healing in the medieval Indian context reveals that traditional and spiritual practices were not simply peripheral or superstitious alternatives but deeply embedded responses rooted in ethical, intellectual, and cosmological frameworks. Whether using Quranic verses as protective charms or incorporating Ayurvedic knowledge into Unani texts, these healing practices reflect a larger attempt to understand human suffering within divine and empirical paradigms. Through the examples ranging from the learned *bazār* physicians to the elite courtly *hakims*, one sees a vibrant world where treatment was not limited to pharmacological remedies but extended into the realm of moral comportment, ritual, and divine intercession. This intersection of popular belief and scholarly medicine also allowed healing to function as a means of navigating grief, uncertainty, and existential fear issues as relevant to commoners as they were to emperors.

### **Insha Literature and The Language of Remedy**

The *insha* literature of Mughal India, often relegated to political and administrative correspondence, also serves as a repository of social imagination and healing practices. One such compelling example

<sup>8</sup> Allāmi, Abul Fazl. *Ain-i Akbari*. Translated by H. Blochman and S.L. Goomer. Calcutta. P. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Allāmi. *Ain-i Akbari*. P. 51.

<sup>10</sup> Allāmi. *Ain-i Akbari*. P. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Allāmi. *Ain-i Akbari*. P. 117.

is *Munshāt-i Namakin*, a voluminous collection compiled by Abul Qasim Namakin, a courtier under Akbar and Jahangir. While the bulk of the collection conforms to conventional epistolary norms, the *khātimah* (concluding section) marks a deliberate departure from elitist boundaries of knowledge, including spiritual remedies, amulets, and vernacular spells. This literary inclusion not only disrupts genre expectations but also reveals how courtly knowledge production was in conversation with popular, localised traditions of healing and protection. These texts, positioned at the intersection of administrative language and cultural ethos, reflect a syncretic sensibility characteristic of Akbar's reign, where Indo-Islamic beliefs and folk practices could coexist.

The treatment of smallpox or *judāri*, which the author refers to as *sitla* in Hindi, has been given prominence in this section. The treatment of this dreadful disease includes a detailed prescription consisting of items that may be available to people experiencing poverty. Additionally, it prescribes the diet to be followed by the patient during the treatment period. An amulet, which should be placed under the patient's pillow, is also prescribed to treat smallpox.<sup>12</sup> The most interesting part of this section consists of two scorpion bite spells, referred to as *afsun* by the author. They are not written in Persian but in Hindi. However, it is surprising that these two spells contravene the basic Islamic belief in monotheism as they appeal, among other things, to Mahadev and contain references to Luna Chamari and Dhanwanter Ved, remarks Zilli.<sup>13</sup>

Following this are prayers for the poor, and this set begins with a brief description of smallpox, a disease that typically appears during growth, which can be prevented or mitigated by bleeding children and infants, avoiding meat and sweets, and maintaining a moderate environment. Treatment involves cumin, butter, pomegranate seeds, lentils, and chickpeas, along with additional measures such as rolling in ashes and consuming specific foods. After this, a couple more *duas* were recited, one for protection from enemies and another for other diseases. Then, some *naqsh* appears, which must be tied around the afflicted area. The first is for the disease of *nāf* (naval), which appears to be a combination of numbers and words. Nevertheless, the author has chosen to include them in his work. It is surprising to find this entry in a section completely out of place in the book. In contrast to the content of the first letter, the second, according to the author, contains some words and concepts from the Muslim Cultural tradition, such as

<sup>12</sup> Belief in amulets has a long-standing presence in Islamic cultural and esoteric traditions. Among the most commonly referenced is the *naqsh-i Sulaimāni*, a term applied to a variety of occult diagrams and talismanic designs believed to possess protective or supernatural properties. Its attribution to Prophet Sulaiman venerated for his wisdom and his divinely granted authority over supernatural beings has further reinforced its perceived efficacy within popular belief. Yet, as scholars note, the historicity of the *naqsh-i Sulaimāni* rests more upon inherited cosmological and spiritual traditions than on verifiable historical evidence, even though the use of talismans and protective symbols is well attested across numerous cultures and periods. See, Ali, Muhammad Ashraf. *Naqsh-i Sulaimāni*. Lucknow: Matba' Samar-e-Hind, 1873.

<sup>13</sup> Zilli, Ishtiyāq Ahmad. *The Mughal State and Culture, 1556–1598*. Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors. 2007. P. 82.

*takht-i Sulaiman and pāk pāni*.<sup>14</sup>

What is more surprising, says Zilli, is that such a collection is coming from Abul Qasim. It is evident from the book's contents that he was a deeply religious person. He hailed from a strong religious background. Still, he was not only familiar with these spells but also had no reservations about including them in his work. The origins of this highly eclectic approach, Zilli remarks, are rooted in an open-minded appreciation for the cultural norms of other segments of society and respect for local traditions, which can be traced to the religious policies of Akbar. Such developments do not happen overnight; they evolve over a long period. It was part and parcel of the new cultural ethos that had emerged as a result of the two communities coming together and developing a mutual appreciation for each other's religion and culture. This process of assimilation was facilitated and made possible by the very sensible policies of the majority of the Delhi Sultans, as well as the Sufi and Bhakti movements.<sup>15</sup> There is a letter in which a *dua* is prescribed for the protection of the Sultan, and it begins with the tradition of the Prophet, and it says: the Prophet once said that he heard the Angel Gabriel saying that whoever keeps this *dua* in their proximity, no evil could touch them if they recite this *dua* thrice a day. Another *dua* is to be tied on the arm in the form of an amulet, and whosoever would do that, no enemy or evil would be able to touch them. One *dua* is for the revival of a runaway slave or their safety, in which a person should recite the *Surah waz-zuha* forty-one times, standing beside the wall. In the next letter, a *dua* is prescribed for the lost, which has to be recited six times.

Then one *naqsh* is prescribed for protection from evil spirits, which again resembles a combination of words and numbers. Other amulets are also included, which have references to Quranic verses. Such as Prayer to get rid of fear, Prayer to ward off devils, fairies, and dawns, *Naqsh* for removal of evil of fairies, Prayer and *Naqsh* for protection of horses and others.

The documents found in the *khātimah* of *Munshāt-i Namakin* thus offer valuable insight into the broader epistemologies of healing in medieval India. They demonstrate how even a devout and high-ranking official like Abul Qasim Namkin could bridge textual authority with lived, popular practice. Whether through *duas* grounded in Quranic and prophetic traditions or vernacular spells invoking Hindu deities, these entries reflect a cultural milieu shaped by interreligious exchange, embodied piety, and shared cosmologies of affliction and cure. The conscious decision to preserve such diverse remedies, especially those for the poor and powerless, underscores a deeper ethical and moral vision of care. Far from being peripheral, these texts reveal how *insha* literature can serve as a healing medium,

<sup>14</sup> Zilli. *The Mughal State and Culture*. Document No. 264, p. 392.

<sup>15</sup> Zilli. *The Mughal State and Culture*. P. 83.

embodying the intellectual breadth of Mughal court culture and its subjects' spiritual anxieties. They invite us to rethink the boundaries between state documents and sacred knowledge, revealing how healing was a multifaceted practice that combined textual and affective elements in the Indo-Islamic world.

### **Hakim Fateh: Physician and Statesman**

Among the many physicians and healers who shaped the medical landscape of Mughal India, the figure of Hakim Fateh Gilani stands out not only for his expertise in Unani medicine but also for his proximity to power and his influence on statecraft and imperial culture. His career offers a compelling example of how medical practitioners during the Mughal period often occupied roles that extended beyond the clinic and into the political and intellectual fabric of the Court. This paper aims to highlight his life and contributions among the many noteworthy figures of the time, as his writings, primarily through letters and practical interventions, reflect the larger themes of this paper: the entanglement of faith, healing, and authority in medieval India.

Hakim Fateh was a doctor at the Mughal court under Emperor Akbar and rose high in the emperor's favour. He is also credited with inventing the *huqqā* (the water pipe).<sup>16</sup> He rose higher and higher in Akbar's favour and greatly influenced state matters. Though only a commander of One Thousand, he is said to have had the power of a *vakil*.<sup>17</sup> Hakim Fateh Gilani's letters, *Ruqāt-i Hakim Fateh Gilani*, are an essential source of historical, biographical, cultural, and literary information. These letters record many events not mentioned in any other source. Hakim Fateh's life conditions, morals, and habits are described in this text only.<sup>18</sup> The significance of this position is reflected in the letters he wrote to his brothers, friends, and acquaintances, which comprise seventy-two letters in the collection.

As a physician, he made a concerted effort to help those in need. It seemed as if his job was to treat everyone with kindness.<sup>19</sup> Famous for his formula of *roghan-i deodār*, he had also prepared *sharbat-i kairnāk*, which helped remove exhaustion. He also possessed considerable knowledge in fields such as osteology (the study of bone structures), Myology (the study of muscles), Angiology, neurology, and the digestive system.<sup>20</sup> Abul Fazl writes that although all three brothers were distinguished by their age for the customary excellencies, Hakim Fateh was especially remarkable for his tact and power to read

<sup>16</sup> Gilani, Abul Fateh. *Ruqāt-i Hakīm Abul Fateh Gilani*, ed. Dr. Mohd. Bashir Ahmad. Idara-i Tahqiqat Pakistan. Lahore. 1967. Pp. 4-9.

<sup>17</sup> Allāmi. *Ain-i Akbari*. Pp. 468-469.

<sup>18</sup> Gilani. *Ruqāt-i Hakīm Abul Fateh Gilani* P. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Chandpuri. *Attibaye Ahd-i Mughaliya*. Pp. 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Rezavi. "Physicians as Professionals in Medieval India". P. 54.

the lines of the forehead.<sup>21</sup>

### **Tobacco and Medical experimentation at Akbar's Court**

An interesting case highlighting the complexity of medical encounters in the Mughal court and the cautious curiosity with which new substances were examined is the arrival of tobacco in India during Akbar's reign. The following historical accounts offer valuable insights into how such introductions were negotiated through the lens of healing, religious propriety, and emerging empirical observation. These narratives, centred around Hakim Fateh's response to tobacco as a potential medicine, shed light on the intellectual climate of the time and the careful balance between innovation and traditional medical ethics. In his historical account, Mirza Asad Beg has written about the situation in India.<sup>22</sup> Till the *Akbari* era, Tobacco was not practised in India, and no one was aware of its use, but smoking probably started in England in the fifteenth century. Asad Beg wrote:

"In Bijapur, he found some tobacco and presented it to the king for excellent smoking in his service. When the king saw his belongings, he was surprised to see the Tobacco kept in the *chilam* and asked where he got it. Khan Zamān Khan said it was *tambākoo*. Hakim thought it was a medicine. The king ordered it to be prepared, and I prepared the filling. The king was about to inhale when a physician forbade the king from drinking it, but the king denied it. The physician eagerly said that he would not let him drink more. The king took it out of his mouth and gave it to Khan Zamān Khan. Then, the king sent him to his Hakim to make a medical examination of his properties. The Hakim claimed that this had not been mentioned in our medical books, and the effects of not doing so have not yet been investigated. How can I describe the properties of such an unknown drug? In my opinion, its use is not appropriate for the Emperor. After that, Asad Beg continued to debate with *Amir-ul Hukma* and argued that foreign physicians greatly praised Tobacco. The people of *farang* are not so stupid that they have not investigated Tobacco.<sup>23</sup> Hakim, we do not want to imitate the foreigners. Despite reasonable arguments, Asad Beg could not win, and the discussion ended with the king's intervention."<sup>24</sup>

### **Another tradition of Tobacco reaching the Court is:**

<sup>21</sup> Chandpuri. *Attibaye Ahd-i Mughaliya*. Pp. 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Asad Beg Qazvini was a Persian poet and a minor *mansabdār* who flourished during the reigns of the Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir. He is chiefly known to modern historians for his memoirs, later compiled under the title *Ahvāl-i Asad Beg* (The Accounts of Asad Beg).

<sup>23</sup> Kewal Ram's *Tazkirāt-ul Umara* records several individuals who held the titles *amir-ul mulk* or *hakim-ul mulk* during the Mughal period, indicating the prominence of these designations within the imperial hierarchy (Kewal Ram, *Tazkirāt-ul Umara*, trans. S.M. Azizuddin Husain, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2020, p. 197). Rezavi further notes that the chief physician in Mughal administrative terminology was referred to as *saramad-i aqibba* or *saramad-i hukama*. This hierarchical structure is also evident within the imperial household, where the title *hakim-ul mulk* denoting the chief of physicians functioned independently of the *mansab* held by its bearer.

<sup>24</sup> Chandpuri. *Attibaye Ahd-i Mughaliya*. P. 34.

"A Portuguese youth brought it to Akbar's Court and asked the king to let him present a show. The king was quite fond of such a thing. He built a fire and secretly lit Tobacco, then placed his hand on the bowl of the pipe and smoked; he began to take it out. The king said, "This is not a strange spectacle; this kind of spectacle do our orbiters do, who emit not only smoke but also flames from their noses". The Portuguese said he had not shown a spectacle, but this smoke tasted good. He removed his hand and showed the clay pipe and Tobacco. The king gave it to Hakim Fateh and asked him to test it. Badauni told Abul Fateh that Satan had devised this trick of seduction and that he should never try Tobacco. Hakim Fateh saw that the king was coughing. Hakim Fateh experienced the effects of Tobacco with great seriousness and wisdom and said that it tastes good and is healthy, but its smoke is harmful. If it is washed away with water, the harm can be removed. The king agreed with Hakim Fateh's opinion. Thus, it became the *huqqā* that has survived and will probably remain so despite the abundance and ubiquity of cigars. It is clear from this that Hakim Fateh was aware of the dangers, but suggested that the harmful effects could be reduced if the smoke passed through the water."<sup>25</sup>

This historical account also shows that *Amir-ul Hukma* was a position during the Mughal period. In the courts of Hyderabad and Bhopal, this post continued to exist even after the decline of the Mughal Empire. Furthermore, it was also necessary to have *Amir-ul Hukma*, where *Malik-us Shura* lived.

These accounts offer insight into the early encounters with tobacco in Mughal India and highlight the evolving role of court physicians, such as Hakim Fateh, in navigating new substances and medical uncertainties. His cautious yet pragmatic response to tobacco, acknowledging its appeal and potential harm, reflects the measured intellectual ethos of Mughal medical culture, which was grounded in empirical observation, moral responsibility, and a deference to established tradition. Moreover, these narratives highlight the permeability of medical knowledge at the time, as new global commodities, such as tobacco, entered the court through diplomatic and commercial exchanges.

The historical debates around the introduction of tobacco, particularly through the lens of Hakim Fateh's medical caution, highlight the epistemic tensions between emerging substances, empirical knowledge, and religious boundaries of healing. This episode is not merely about the arrival of a new plant or medical controversy, but also about how Muslim physicians negotiated unfamiliar remedies within an Islamic moral framework. The ambivalence shown by *hakīms*, along with their insistence on aligning medical judgments with divine accountability and empirical caution, opens up a broader conversation on the intellectual scaffolding of Islamic medicine, rooted in concepts such as *shifa* (healing), *amānah* (trust), and *karāmāt* (divinely endowed grace). These ideas inform elite discourse and shape the vernacular and spiritual strategies of cure that permeated Indo-Islamic society.

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<sup>25</sup> Chandpuri. *Attibaye Ahd-i Mughaliya*. P. 35.

## Sufi Saints, Letters, and Syncretic Practices

Among the Sufi texts, the letter collection of Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri is prominent. The tradition of letter writing among Sufis has a long history within and beyond South Asian Islam. They also guided people regarding the cleansing of the soul and often prescribed some methods to eliminate diseases. Yahya Maneri wrote many letters. In addition to his famous collection, *Maktubāt-i sadi* (The Hundred Letters), he wrote a series of two hundred letters, many of which dealt with topics similar to those covered in *Maktubāt-i sadi*. He also composed a small collection of twenty-eight letters addressed to his principal disciple and eventual successor, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi.<sup>26</sup> It is reported that Yahya Maneri included some *Hindu mantras* in his correspondence, as the masses influenced him.<sup>27</sup> He spent some years in the forests and consequently adapted to the traditional practices, but his teachings never lost the Islamic touch, so his attitude seems hybrid.

*Siyār-ul Auliya* discusses three elements through which miracles are attained, focusing on knowledge acquired without formal education, the perception of common people in dreams, and the impact of ordinary thoughts on saints. It categorises supernatural phenomena into four levels: miracles, wonders, assistance, and deception. Miracles are unique to prophets, who possess the perfection of both knowledge and action, whereas saints receive divine support but do not possess the same level of perfection in knowledge and action. In addition, the text discusses the purification of impurities by invoking the name of the Prophet Muhammad and the divine tradition.<sup>28</sup> It highlights instances when Prophet Muhammad invited people under his cloak, signifying their elevated spiritual status. This text also discusses concealing and revealing spiritual grace *Karāmāt*, emphasising the importance of sincerity, steadfastness, and love in spiritual development.<sup>29</sup> It provides examples and anecdotes about different Sufi saints, illustrating their humility, selflessness, and concealment of spiritual experiences. The text focuses on detachment from worldly possessions and the profound insights of Sufi saints. The ability of saints to convey spiritual teachings through simple yet profound actions encourages

<sup>26</sup> Paul Jackson, in the foreword to *The Hundred Letters*, introduces the collection known as *Maktubāt-i Bist-o Hasht*, a series of twenty-eight letters composed in response to queries from a disciple. Each letter addresses specific concerns and offers guidance on Sufi principles, spiritual discipline, and devotional practice (Jackson, *The Hundred Letters*, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, 2002). A more recent edited version of the text is available in Danish Balkhi's *Maktubāt-e Bist o Hasht* (Maktaba-i Sharf, Bihar, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Haqq, Maulvi Abdul. *Urdu ki Ibtidāi nashunuma me sufīyā-i karām ka kaam*. Anjuman-i Taraqqi-i Urdu Pakistan. Karachi. 2008. P. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Kirmani, Syed Mubarak. *Siyār-ul Auliya*. Tr. Ghulam Ahmad. Mushtaq Book Corner. Lahore. Pp. 485-503.

<sup>29</sup> Jamaluddin observes that Badauni adopts a markedly restrained approach toward reporting miracles in his *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*. Rather than endorsing such accounts, Badauni notes that people often attribute unusual or extraordinary acts (*khawāriq al-ada*) to the Sufis, without himself affirming their credibility. He refers to certain figures as *ṣāhib-i karamāt*, but typically in a formulaic manner. The sole miracle he explicitly recounts regarding Shaikh Salim Chishti concerns the thin garment the Shaikh is said to have worn during winter. More generally, he describes various *mashāyikh* as *ṣāhib-i barakat* (saintly or blessed), without detailing any specific miraculous acts attributed to them. In the case of Shaikh Arif Husaini, Badauni prefaces his account by noting that many miracles circulate among the people about him, yet he remains non-committal about their veracity. See, Jamaluddin, Syed. "Representation of the Lives and Morals of Sufis in Badauni's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 80 (2019): 368–87.

followers to prioritise inner purity over external manifestations of miracles.

*Mādanul Māni* describes an incident in which two angels descended when the Prophet Muhammad was affected by magic during a specific time.<sup>30</sup> The angels informed each other about the situation, stating that the Prophet appeared unwell due to the effects. Seeking a remedy, one angel revealed that a statue had been created with seven knots tied in seven places, causing discomfort to the blessed body of the Prophet. The angels explained that the cure involved removing the statue, reciting specific verses at each knot, and blowing on it. Upon following these instructions, the Prophet immediately recovered. The text then discusses the concept of *wilāyat* and the limitations of human understanding in recognising the status of a *wali*. It emphasises that the secrets and meanings between a *wali* and Allah are so profound that others are often unaware. It further mentions that the knowledge of some saints is hidden, and they can discern between divine light and deception. Caliph Ali is mentioned as being instructed to remove the statue and successfully implement the cure. The narrative then transitions to seeking spiritual guidance for internal ailments.

The text distinguishes between physical and spiritual healers, emphasising the importance of understanding the causes and nature of diseases before prescribing appropriate remedies. It also discusses the role of spiritual healers, mentioning that they diagnose internal diseases and provide suitable treatments. An example of a person seeking reform for their inner self through the guidance of a spiritual mentor is provided. The spiritual guide examines the individual's internal state, identifies spiritual diseases, and initiates reform. Recognising and understanding the nature of spiritual ailments is emphasised, as effective remedies cannot be prescribed without such knowledge. The text stresses the parallel between physical and spiritual healing, highlighting that just as physical ailments require proper diagnosis for effective treatment, spiritual ailments also necessitate understanding and addressing their root causes.

## European Observers and Indigenous Healing

The experiences of foreign travellers highlight the role of traditional medical methods as well. John Fryer, a medical professional, analysed the impact of climate on health and the strengths and deficiencies of medical practices in the regions he visited.<sup>31</sup> He highlighted the intricate relationship

<sup>30</sup> Maneri, Sharfuddin Yahya. *Mādanul Māni*. Tr. Syed Shah Qasimuddin Ahmad. Maktaba-i Sharf. Bihar. 2011.

<sup>31</sup> John Fryer's letters later published under the title *A New Account of East-India and Persia* offer a vivid and detailed portrayal of the cultural, climatic, and medical worlds of seventeenth-century East India and Persia. His observations, grounded in firsthand experience, constitute an important source for understanding early modern scientific and medical knowledge in these regions. Geoffrey Fryer provides a comprehensive study of John Fryer's scientific work in his article, "John Fryer, F.R.S. and His Scientific Observations, Made Chiefly in India and Persia between 1672 and 1682," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 33, no. 2 (1979): 175–206.

between climate and health, cataloguing diseases that are prevalent at different times of the year and emphasising the influence of climate on specific diseases. Fryer also critiqued medical practices, highlighting the lack of anatomical understanding, unskilled phlebotomy, and questionable pharmacy practices. His exploration provided insights into the prevalence of diseases like syphilis, elephantiasis, Guinea Worm, and the rarity of gout. Fryer's study of traditional medical practices highlights the link between seasonal changes and disease prevalence. During North winds, dry weather promotes health, while extreme heat causes afflictions like coughs, catarrhs, and smallpox. He says, "Locals combat these maladies with *hing*, a liquid form of *Assa Foetida*. Traditional treatments include garlic and ginger oil, ventosoes, and escarotics".<sup>32</sup> However, medical care lacks formal regulation, and practitioners often rely on familial knowledge or past experiences. The lack of anatomical knowledge and the use of leeches can lead to chronic ailments. Surgery is viewed with horror, and pharmacy lacks a formal structure. Traditional practices, such as barbers and spells, are also prevalent. Midwifery is valued mainly among the affluent, while less privileged women handle childbirth independently.

Jean Baptiste Tavernier states that Brahmans possess extensive knowledge of astrology and are skilled in predicting solar and lunar eclipses for the people. He states, "Every Brahmin has his book of magic, in which there are some circles and semicircles, squares and triangles, and many other figures".<sup>33</sup> Generally, all have a string, or tress, round the shoulders, from which hangs a small box of silver in the form of a reliquary, of the size of a good hazelnut, in which they keep a superstitious writing that their priest has enclosed. They also place them on their oxen, which are enclosed in it. They also place them on their oxen and the other animals born in their herds, for which they entertain a special affection, loving them as dearly as they would their children, especially when they are childless.<sup>34</sup>

Francois Bernier, describing Delhi, says, "Here too is held a bazaar or market for an endless variety of things; it is the rendezvous for all sorts of mountebanks and jugglers. Hither, likewise, the astrologers resort to both Mahometan and Gentile. These wise doctors remain seated in the sun, on a dusty carpet, handling some old mathematical instruments and opening a large book representing the signs of the zodiac before them. In this way, they attract the passengers' attention and impose upon the people by whom they are considered so many infallible oracles. They tell a poor person his fortune for a *paysa* (about one sol). After examining the hand and face of the applicant, turning over the leaves of the large book, and pretending to make certain calculations, these impostors decide upon the *sahet* or propitious moment of commencing the business he may have in hand. Silly women, wrapping themselves in a

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<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey. "John Fryer, F.R.S. and His Scientific Observations". P. 286.

<sup>33</sup> Tavernier, Jean Baptiste. *Travels in India*. Tr. V. Ball. 1889. P. 247-248.

<sup>34</sup> Fisher, Michael H. *Beyond the Three Seas: Travellers' Tales of Mughal India*. Random House India. 2008. P. 167.

white cloth from head to foot, flock to the astrologers, whisper to them all the transactions of their lives, and disclose every secret with no more reserve than is practised by a scrupulous penitent in the presence of her confessor. The ignorant and infatuated people believe that the stars have an influence which the astrologers can control".<sup>35</sup>

The most ridiculous of these pretenders to divination, Bernier states, was a half-caste Portuguese, a fugitive from Goa.<sup>36</sup> He states, "This fellow sat on his carpet as gravely as the rest and had many customers, notwithstanding that he could neither read nor write. His only instrument was an old mariner's compass, and his astrology books were a couple of old Romish prayer books in Portuguese, the pictures of which he pointed out as the signs of the European zodiac. For these astrologers, Bernier used the proverb "*jaisa des waisahi bhes*" (Like master, like a man).

Niccolao Manucci, while recording the mystical incidents and critiquing them, reveals a series of intriguing and disturbing events, shedding light on the pervasive influence of superstitious beliefs and practices within the described cultural context.<sup>37</sup> The author, presumably an observer within a predominantly Christian community, articulates a concern over the prevalence of practices rooted in what is characterised as diabolical arts, manifesting as magical rituals and manipulations. The narrative explores the entanglement between individuals and the mystical realm, highlighting the gravity of supernatural interventions. It tells stories of a woman's pregnancy linked to a tree's sterility, a woman's quest for legacy, a bewitched friar's enchantment, and a nocturnal encounter with a magician. The author condemns those who succumb to magic, emphasising the erosion of faith and rationality. The narrative also highlights the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as faith and scepticism. It is a cautionary tale for readers to consider the consequences of yielding to the mystical and supernatural.

Steeped in curiosity, scepticism, and colonial superiority, these European accounts offer valuable insights into the widespread and deeply rooted belief in traditional healing practices in medieval India. What emerges is not simply a critique of native medicine but also a reluctant recognition of its pervasiveness and its close ties to local cosmologies, seasonal rhythms, and lived realities. Whether through Fryer's clinical observations, Tavernier's ethnographic remarks, Bernier's ironic commentaries, or Manucci's moral anxieties, a complex portrait of healing emerges that transcends medicine and enters the realms of ritual, faith, and everyday survival. These descriptions, although often filtered

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<sup>35</sup> Bernier, Francois. *Travels in the Mogull Empire 1656-1668*. Tr. Vincent Smith. Oxford University Press. 1916. Pp. 243-245.

<sup>36</sup> Bernier. *Travels in the Mogull Empire*. P. 244.

<sup>37</sup> Manucci, Niccolao. *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India: 1653-1708*. Tr. William Irvine. Royal Asiatic Society. 1907. P. 200-213.

through a European perspective, reaffirm the central thesis of this paper: that spiritual and traditional modes of healing in medieval India were not marginal or irrational, but meaningful and negotiated practices rooted in a shared understanding of divine will, natural order, and human vulnerability.

## Conclusion

While we lack concrete clinical data to ascertain the effectiveness of spiritual and traditional healing methods in medieval India, their widespread use across social classes and communities cannot be ignored. The sheer abundance of references in *maktubāt*, *insha* literature, Sufi correspondence, and foreign travel accounts speaks volumes about their cultural significance and emotional resonance. These healing methods, reciting Quranic verses, wearing amulets, seeking blessings from saints, and performing ritual acts, were not seen as alternatives to formal Medicine but as accessible, spiritually sanctioned remedies embedded within everyday life.

One of the most compelling reasons for their popularity was the absence or inaccessibility of trained physicians, especially those well-versed in Unani or emerging Western medical systems. These physicians were often concentrated in urban or courtly spaces and remained out of reach for much of the rural and economically weaker population. In contrast, traditional spiritual practices required little to no financial investment. A mother could recite *Ayat al-Kursi* for her feverish child; a peasant could place a handwritten amulet beneath his pillow without seeking a formal prescription. These practices were affordable, familiar, and rooted in a cosmology that offered hope and reassurance.

Gradually, these methods transcended their utilitarian origins to become normative ways of dealing with affliction. They were not merely rituals of desperation but expressions of faith, continuity, and resilience. They allowed individuals to feel seen, heard, and protected even in the face of uncertainty. Moreover, perhaps this was their greatest strength: the capacity to restore psychological balance, instil spiritual comfort, and offer the afflicted and their families the assurance that recovery was possible and divinely ordained, even if delayed.

The examples discussed in this paper range from the protective *dua* found in letters to the healing practices recorded, and even the testimonies of European travellers who themselves consulted Indian healers, collectively illustrating the article's central argument: that these remedies were not marginal but deeply woven into the social and spiritual fabric of the time. Even references to the healing of animals such as horses and oxen, which were vital to the empire's military and agrarian economy, show how this worldview extended beyond human bodies, reflecting a broader understanding of healing as a divine trust and responsibility.

Indeed, for many who had exhausted material remedies or lost faith in formal Medicine, these spiritual practices remained a final source of solace. The quiet conviction that divine mercy might heal what human hands could not offered a kind of emotional and metaphysical closure. In this way, healing was not just about the body but about restoring order in a moral and cosmological sense. These practices served as both remedy and reassurance, framing illness as a shared human experience infused with moral purpose, religious belief, and cultural meaning.

In revisiting these traditions, we are not merely studying the past but re-engaging with a worldview in which Medicine, ethics, and the divine were intimately connected. It challenges modern assumptions about the binary between science and superstition, inviting us to explore the rich and layered terrain where faith, healing, and everyday life converged in medieval Islamic India.

# The Regional Stabilizer: The Protests of Institutional Resilience and Fragmentation in South Asia

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## Abstract

The Arab Spring of 2010-2011 sparked a worldwide debate on whether or not a wave of political contagion could sweep through other parts of the world, especially where there are similar socio-economic and political vulnerabilities. South Asia, with its common problems of corruption, youth unemployment, and political instability are compelling reasons for such a comparative analysis. This paper deals with a crucial question of research or enquiry: Why is there no uniform, region-wide "Spring" in South Asia even though we have the same grievances? What has been the role of institutional resilience and leading power of India in determining these outcomes? Employing a comparative case study methodology, spanning the countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, and based on a Realist theoretical framework (Waltz 1979, pp. 88-112; Gilpin 2001, pp. 45-69), this analysis goes beyond descriptive analyses to argue that despite the fact that there are many similarities between South Asia and the Arab Spring in terms of the drivers of change, the analogy is fundamentally complicated by the power structure of the region. The findings suggest that India's institutional durability is a powerful counter-force that blocks systemic collapse, However, its stabilizing role is contested. India's security-driven behavior towards its smaller neighbours gives rise to a 'Perception Dilemma', meaning its actions are often interpreted as hegemonic, reducing its influence in the subcontinent and creating opportunities for competitors such as China. The key contribution of the study is a nuanced comparative perspective that bridges the gap between area studies and international relations theory, and thus addresses a significant gap in the academic literature on South Asian politics.

## Keywords

South Asian Geopolitics; Institutional Resilience; Regional Stabilizer; Comparative Political Analysis; Arab Spring Analogy

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## **Introduction**

### **1.1 'South Asian Spring' The Spectre of the Arab Spring Analogy**

The Arab Spring, a wave of anti-government protests that swept across the West Asia and North Africa beginning in 2010, had a common grievance: rampant corruption and high youth unemployment under authoritarian rule which was compounded by digital communication (Bellin 2004, pp. 139-157). This phenomenon raised an important question to scholars of comparative politics: could similar "political contagion" occur in other parts of the world with similar socio-economic and political vulnerabilities? South Asia, a region marked by its own history of political instability along with a vast population of disaffected youth, seemed to be a likely candidate for such a wave of systemic change. Recent political upheavals in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, though all very different, have sometimes been hailed by some as a regional manifestation of the Arab Spring-p. - Angenieux et al. (2020). (in Asian Survey 2020, pp. 650-678), South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 2023 (pp. 120-145). This paper provides a critical look into how true this analogy is.

### **1.2 South Asian Geopolitics Paradox and the destiny of India**

The geopolitics of South Asia has an incredible paradox. On one hand India as a vast, diverse and complex democratic state has been able to assure a relative level of political stability on the basis of its constitutional and institutional framework (Jalal 2013, pp. 12-35). On the other, its immediate neighbours, i.e. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal have been marred by persistent and profound instability (Cohen 1998, pp. 22-57; Haqqani 2005, pp. 110-136). This report is a comparative analysis of how the presence of underlying domestic fragility in these states results in a self-perpetuating cycle of instability, vis-a-vis the institutional resilience of India. In doing so, it explores the controversial role of India in the power dynamics of the region.

### **1.3 Research Questions and Thesis Statement**

This paper deals with a central research question: Why there has not been a similar, region-wide "Spring" in South Asia despite the similar grievances? What contributions do India's institutional resilience and primary power make to these outcomes? The existing literature has largely been focused on individual case studies which provide a descriptive account of regional instability (Gause 2011, pp. 73-101). This study seeks to partially address a significant gap by presenting a comparative analysis based on a theoretical framework that helps explain why the spectre of a "South Asian Spring" has not fully realized.

This paper suggests that although South Asia shares many of the socio-economic and political causes of the Arab Spring, the analogy is fundamentally complicated by South Asia's power structure. India's

post-independence institutional durability provides a powerful counter-model to regional volatility, but its actions, motivated by a complex amalgam of self-interest and power projection, make its role as a regional stabilizer contentious and ultimately a source of anxiety to its smaller neighbours. The analysis concludes that the status of a regional power and the strength of its institutional bulwark prevent India from a uniform and region-wide political contagion which makes any comparison with the Arab Spring incomplete. World Bank Governance Indicators (2023) reveal the PII goes into India being fourfold that of Pakistan (-1.12), Sri Lanka (-0.25) and Nepal (-0.58) which go into quantitative support for the argument of relative institutional resilience for India.

## **2. A Theoretical Framework for the Analysis of Regional Instability: A Realist Approach**

To examine this complex regional dynamic, this paper draws on a Realist theoretical framework, which argues that international relations are an eternal struggle for power and security in an anarchic system where there is no overarching authority to enforce order (Waltz 1979, pp. 88 - 112). In this context, the security of a state is intrinsically connected with its position in the regional power structure.

### **2.1 the security dilemma and the primary power of the region.**

Realist scholars, such as Kenneth Waltz, argue that in a state of anarchy, states put their self-interest and survival first, and thus perpetually find themselves in a "security dilemma" (Waltz 1979, pp. 95-98). Efforts by one state to increase its security, for example by building up its military or pursuing strategic alliances, are frequently viewed as a threat by its neighbours, who respond in turn by increasing their own capabilities, and this response feeds back into a cycle of mutual distrust and arms races. This dynamic is especially marked in South Asia because of the natural power imbalance between India and its neighbours, especially Pakistan (Cohen 1998, pp. 32-40).

With a Neoclassical Realist perspective, this analysis recognizes that if India is the region's preeminent power, its foreign policy is less based on coercive power projection and more so based on a complex dealing of national interest which also includes stability in the region (Taliaferro, Lobell, & Ripsman, 2009). India's role, it seems, can be interpreted as the role of a regional stabilizer, whose actions are influenced by the dichotomy that exists both between the anarchic international system and India's democratic institutional restraints. Its interventions in this respect, such as those in the Maldives (1988) and Sri Lanka (during the peace process) lie in keeping with this dual objective for an orderly region, providing security for its interests.

A 'Perception Dilemma' thus poses itself such that India's legitimate efforts at security and stabilization arising from the enormous power imbalance in the region, is often read by its small neighbours as

heavy-handedness. This perception is certainly not indicative of India's intention but is a natural consequence of the fact that asymmetric relationships are characterized by the security dilemma (Jervis, 1978). That is further complicated by the existence of other extra-regional powers who offer the smaller states strategic alternatives and can influence their perception of India's actions.

## **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

### **Drivers of Instability --> Risk of Regional Contagion --> Counter Forces --> Outcomes**

This paper privileges a Realist lens as it does a good job of explaining the fundamental dynamics of power, security, and self-interest that have characterized South Asian geopolitics since independence. A Liberal perspective focusing on cooperation and international institutions is challenged by the history of persistent conflict the region has experienced and the low effectiveness of institutions such as SAARC (Keohane 1984, pp. 33-54). While the liberal institutionalist perspective may look to SAARC as a sphere of co-operation, its chronic ineffectiveness is a reason why Realism offers a far better explanatory frame. Similarly, a Constructivist approach, which emphasizes common identities and norms, has a difficult time explaining the serious rivalries and competing nationalisms that have fueled regional instability (Wendt 1992, pp. 401-431).

## **3. Comparative South Asian Instability Analysis**

### **3.1 Pakistan: The Military Prerogative, and the Institutionalized Crisis of the Civilian Rule**

Pakistan's political history has been characterized by a fundamental imbalance in civil-military relations, in which a powerful military-bureaucrat alliance has worked to undermine tenuous civilian institutions. Since its birth, the country has been ruled by the military for nearly half of its existence with a history of coups and interventions as far back as 1958. This military establishment has a powerful and pervasive hold on important spheres of government, particularly in areas of foreign policy and national security, in which civilian governments have struggled to exercise their authority. This institutional decay is compounded by internal dysfunction in the hands of civilian leaders, whose rivalries as factions and inability to establish control in their hands have created a power vacuum that has been readily filled in by non-elected institutions.

### **3.2 Afghanistan: Collapse of the State & Lack of Authorized Power**

The collapse of the U.S.-backed government in Afghanistan in August 2021 was not a result simply of the U.S. pulling its troops out of the country, but of the former government's failure to obtain popular support because of the rampant corruption and ineffectiveness. A legitimacy crisis years in the making was at the heart of the government: a centralised system of Kabul-centric government alienated tribal and local loyalties. Widespread corruption, nepotism and creation of "ghost soldiers" to syphon off

funds, seriously eroded the public trust and the capacity of the state. The fast return of the Taliban was therefore a product of the power vacuum created by the weakness of the government and not solely their military prowess.

### **3.3 Sri Lanka: Economic Collapse, The Crisis of Trust**

The 2022 crisis in Sri Lanka was initially triggered by an extreme economic crisis, which was characterised by a collapse in foreign reserves as well as a lack of essential goods (Crawford School 2025). This economic slump was a catalyst for a mass uprising called the "Aragalaya" movement which led to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa stepping down. While the precipitating cause of the protests was economic collapse, they mobilized longstanding systemic problems, including a toxic combination of unsustainable borrowing, weak exports, and a series of disastrous policy errors. These included "swingeing tax cuts" in 2019 which decimated government revenue and a "ill-conceived" ban on chemical fertilizers in 2021 which resulted in a dramatic collapse in rice and tea production.

### **3.4 Bangladesh: politicization of institutions & democratic precarity**

In August of 2024, Ex Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina was ousted by a revolt of students bringing about a major political change (International Crisis Group 2023). The protests, which had begun in response to a Supreme Court decision to restore a controversial job quota system, quickly turned into a larger movement, stoked by anger at corruption and economic mismanagement. The government's violent reaction, comprising the "July massacre" and the blackout of the internet, only added to the public outrage. The crisis underscores the history of fragile democracy and deep political polarization between the two major political parties, which has frequently brought institutions like the judiciary into play as a means of acquiring power and limiting the scope of democracy. India's strategic intervention in January 2012, when a coup attempt was thwarted through intelligence sharing (India Today 2012) throws into focus, its role as a regional stabilizer albeit through actions sometimes perceived as domineering.

### **3.5 Nepal: Political Disunity & Generational Discontent**

Since the abolition of the monarchy in 2008, Nepal experienced the dramatic breakup in the political scene, with the recognition of 13 Governments in a row, with the failure of bringing about any long-term stability (South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 2023, pp. 120-145). Protests in 2025, led by "Gen Z," were provoked, at first, by a social media ban, but were fueled by deeper structural grievances. A viral "Nepo Kid" social media campaign had already highlighted rampant corruption, nepotism, and elite capture at the expense of the youth grappling with a hopeless job market and mass unemployment and the luxurious lifestyles of the children of politicians. This echoes the role of youth-led movements during the Arab Spring and emphasizes the impact that generational dynamics have on

political mobilization.

*Table 1. A Comparative Architecture of Instability Drivers in South Asia and Institutional Fitness in India.*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Drivers of Instability</b>	<b>Contrast with India's Stability</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	Military dominance, weak civilian institutions, political corruption	Firm civilian supremacy over military
<b>Afghanistan</b>	State collapse, weak governance, civil-military conflict	Robust state capacity and popular support for governance
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	Economic mismanagement, foreign debt, ethnic tensions	Stable economic policy and self-reliance
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Fragile democracy, political polarization, politicized military	Institutionalized civilian control over military
<b>Nepal</b>	Political fragmentation, institutional fragility, youth unemployment	Consistent democratic governance and institutional endurance

#### **4. India's Contested Role**

##### **4.1 the Basis of Indian Durability**

India's political stability stands in great contrast to that of its neighbours. It is its institutional strength, the cultural pluralism, and the endurance that is anchoring its durability (Jalal 2013, pp. 12-35). The democracy system owes legitimacy to its Constitution, independent judiciary and civilian control of the military. India's foreign policy towards its neighbours is driven by its "Neighbourhood First" approach which looks at regional stability as the cornerstone for its global leadership aspirations. This

policy works on the idea of "widening concentric circles" with the immediate neighbourhood being the centre. While India preaches democracy in the region, it also realises that it cannot impose its political model on others. Historically, this has been based on its own security concerns as well as on the deeply interlinked economic and cultural ties it shares with its neighbours.

#### **4.2 Interventions as a Form of primary power**

India, as a primary power in the region, is engaged in stabilizing smaller neighbouring countries, as with the originating events in the Maldives (1988) and Sri Lanka but this leads to an on-going 'Perception Dilemma' of smaller neighbouring countries, which readily view India's security-driven behaviours as domineering, thus hindering its regional leadership while creating opportunities for Chinese activity strategically. These actions, that are couched under the strategic interest, generate regional apprehension together with the cooperative outcomes. One notable example is the military intervention of India in 1971 which led to the liberation of Bangladesh which became an important turning point in the regional power balance. More recently one can see the importance of India as a regional partner, but also of a destination for exiles with the political upheaval in Bangladesh in 2024, in which Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India. India has also dealt with instability by showing increased vigilance, such as with its increased border security following the protests in Nepal in 2025.

#### **4.3 Challenges Remain, Regional Perceptions**

Even with substantial economic support, there is a 'Perception Dilemma' in some neighbouring states where India's leadership is distrusted for reasons, often sharpened by outside strategic competition. Good-faith efforts are sometimes misinterpreted as efforts to create greater leverage or dependency. This is being compounded by the increasing influence of China, which through programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has gained an economic and political foothold in countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. This strategic competition with China poses a great challenge to India's regional influence. Smaller states often prefer to do business within multilateral forums such as SAARC so as to collectively balance against the power of India in bilateral relations, where their bargaining capacity is less. India's preference for the bilateral approach, which derives from a fear of "unreasonable collective leverage", makes these relationships even more complicated. This presents the challenge, therefore, for India to balance power and patience and influence and trust.

#### **4.4 Addressing Critical Perspective**

A critical view might argue that India's pre-eminence and size of India itself and inherently causes the structural friction in the region. Still, this approach has had the effect of downplaying India's proactive role in its 'Neighbourhood First' approach, the provision of much needed economic support, including the creation of infrastructure and disaster management assistance to partnering states. The fundamental

causes of instability in neighbouring states, including economic crisis, civil-military tensions, and political fragmentation, are indigenously generated. So while India is not a pull factor in this neighbourhood, when it tries to play the role of a net security provider, it gets deep beset by a frustrating conundrum called Perception Dilemma and the sovereign decisions of its neighbours-Just Atoms that make up the Powerful Neighbourhood.

## **5. Conclusion and Theoretical Contribution**

As the analysis confirms, even though South Asia and the Arab Spring countries are similar in many socio-economic causes of instability such as the rampant corruption and the high rate of unemployment in the youth, the analogy falls short because of the overwhelming pro-forma pressure that comes as a result of the stabilizing system of the area, which is based on the institutional and military sustainability of India. But the most interesting thing about the study is the challenge of the purely stabilizing preventive to this leading and the big political paradox identified by the token at the regional level, and a theoretical shift of the purely realist evaluation into a theoretically critical evaluation of political global economy understanding.

### **5.1. The Paradox of Contested Primary Power: Stabilizing the Instabilities.**

This paper identifies a 'Stability-Perception Paradox': while India's institutional resilience prevents regional collapse, its security strategies create a dilemma. Its legitimate stabilization efforts are often perceived as dominance by neighbours, complicating its leadership. This paradox highlights that regional stability depends not just on power, but on managing complex perceptions.

It does not mean that India is the main contributor to instability among its neighbours because the source of instability is by far internal that is, corruption, poor economic management and institutional corruption. Instead, it implies that the organization of engagement, which is typically bilateral to deal with the immediate security issues, may become obstructive to the elite entities that are rooted in creating the discontent among people. The ubiquitous issue with Indian foreign policy is that in its attempt to convey its apparent stability, it is its own core problem as it attempts to create perception driven backlash and in the era of intensified geopolitical rivalry.

The population explosion of such misrule, cushioned by the geopolitical interests of the primary power, forms a pressure cooker inside the country, which ultimately bursts like a volcano into anti-systemic, youth-led uprisings. The abrupt collapse of the Hasina government in Bangladesh in 2024 resulting from a student-led "Monsoon Revolution", driven by widespread anti-corruption and anti-management feeling, revealed the underlying fragility of this co-option strategy. The Gen Z-led

movements in Nepal in 2025, spurred by long-held hostility towards elite capture and nepotism ("Nepo Kid" campaigns), similarly demonstrate a legitimacy crisis beyond traditional political hard divisions. The political price of the preference of the leading power to the strategy rather than democracy builds up to the point where the outcome is instability. India's containment of external contagion not only unleashes a new kind of legitimacy crisis, that is undermining the structures of its own influence, but also creates chances for its competitors such as China and Pakistan to achieve volatility in India. The localized form of Pre-eminence is thus perhaps described as contested power in which measures are supposed to be taken to stabilize, which are viewed as an infringement, thus creating local instability and political backlash.

*Table 2: Theoretical Paradox India's Leading Role in South Asian.*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Original Realist Thesis (Section 2/3)</b>	<b>Refined Theoretical Contribution (Section 5.1)</b>
<b>Stabilizing Role</b>	Stabilizer and counter-force to systemic collapse (HST)	Paradoxical source of localized instability (Contested Leader)
<b>Primary Mechanism</b>	Institutional durability and military strength	Strategic co-option of regional elites, enabling institutional decay in neighbours
<b>Nature of Instability Prevented</b>	State collapse / military coups (Arab Spring Analogy)	Youth-led, anti-corruption, anti-elite (Gen Z) movements (BD 2024, NP 2025)

## 5.2. Future Directions: Structure of Vulnerability and Policy Reorientation:

This contested stability is structurally fragile in the sense that it cannot be maintained over a long period of time. This paper cannot take it for granted that Indian institutions will balance out the volatility of the region forever, especially given empirical evidence of democratic regression in India with the rise of crony capitalism and the declaration of India as an "Electoral Autocracy" by some international agencies. This causes the phenomenon of Contested Institutional Resilience, whereby not only the risk of a sustained stabilizing counter-force is a danger to the political integrity of the region, but the stabilizing counter-force itself is losing the ability to project legitimate counter-stabilizing influence.

The aforesaid structural deficiency is further aggravated by India's continued insistence on maintaining

the bilateral approach in desire to have maximum leverage and to avoid perceived threat of "unreasonable collective leverage". This preference perpetuates the security dilemma and has been a direct reason for the near-paralysis of the regional bodies like SAARC since 2014. Consequently, smaller states are forced to externalize their developmental and security concerns and very actively use the geopolitical competition between India, China (through the Belt and Road Initiative), and the US, in their efforts to attract development finance and hedging strategies.

Future research therefore needs to move beyond correlational analysis and utilize methodologies that follow through the years to delineate causal paths between India's internal political economic dynamics (e.g. changes in governance accountability) and subsequently its capacity for maintaining legitimate influence in the area. Thus, the key conclusion for policy suggestions is that regional stability cannot be achieved through partisan backing of incumbents. To turn from the primacy, contested leader to a multi-trusted regional Pre-eminence, a shift in policy is required that focuses its efforts on structural reforms indicating inclusion of multilateral mechanisms. The revitalization of a multilateral platform would require a necessary diffusion of bilateral power in India, in return for promoting a sincere trust and institutionalized justice within the region. This return to policy is the most feasible long-term antidote to the structural vulnerability and generational alienation that form the breeding ground for the new wave of anti-elite revolt.

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# Contrasting Models of Urban Governance: A Comparative Study of Noida and Gurugram

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## Abstract

Post-liberalisation India has witnessed a significant increase in urban centres across the country driven by the inflow of Multinational Companies (MNCs), easing of laws to promote private sector-led growth and the rapid influx of migrants moving to these urban centres in search for new employment avenues. This article seeks to explore the evolution of two important urban centres located in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi — Noida and Gurugram. Both the cities developed under different frameworks and trajectories, leading to two contrasting models of urban governance. While Noida is characterized by a centralized-technocratic model of governance, in contrast, Gurugram is characterized by an entrepreneurial-fragmented model of governance. Through a qualitative, comparative analysis based on institutional frameworks, planning instruments and democratic participation, the article attempts to understand the key differences in the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram. It also seeks to relate the urban governance models of the two cities with the foundational literature on urban governance, given by scholars like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. Finally, the article attempts to understand the challenges encountered both by Noida and Gurugram with respect to their distinct urban governance models, and the recommendations proposed to mitigate these issues

## Keywords

Urban governance, decentralization, centralized, fragmented, development, planning

## Introduction

Urbanization in India has been one of the most profound transformations of the post-independence period, which has affected the spatial distributions, job opportunities, and systems of governance in the entire nation. The uneven and fast urbanization has posed considerable problems with planning, the

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provision of infrastructure and the successful governance of the cities, which have led to the subsequent policy interventions and the institutional reforms. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 intended to institutionalize decentralization in the urban areas and strengthen the urban local bodies. Three decades later, the urban governance landscape across the major cities of the country remains highly heterogeneous. Within this academic discourse, the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi has emerged as a fascinating area of study amongst academicians who focus on the various contradictions which shaped the present model of governance and development in the city of Delhi and its adjoining NCR cities.

While existing scholarship has discussed at length the rise of neoliberal urban culture and metropolitan governance in Delhi, there exists a dearth of academic research on how different models of urban planning shape urban outcomes in Delhi's NCR cities. Noida and Gurugram, both satellite cities of Delhi, remain relatively underexplored as contrasting archetypes of governance- one highly technocratic and centralized while the other marked by several fragmented layers of governance respectively. Moreover, the implications of these different governance models on infrastructural development, citizen participation and democratic accountability remain insufficiently analyzed.

This article seeks to address this gap by offering a comparative, theoretically informed analysis of the two cities- Noida and Gurugram. The article attempts to understand how the different institutional design of the two cities produces different models of urban governance which in turn, leads to differing trajectories of development and participation. In addition to that, the original contribution of this article is its attempt to link the theories of urban governance given by David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel Foucault to empirical cases in the Indian context- Noida and Gurugram. The article employs the qualitative, comparative case study method to examine and compare the urban governance models of the two-satellite cities of Delhi.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The article seeks to explore the theoretical modules of urban governance as put forward by scholars- Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey- and attempts to link these theories in the context of the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram. Michel Foucault (1978) argues that governance is not just concerned with territory (like sovereignty), but with the "right disposition of things". "Things" refers to a complex composed of men in their relations and imbrications with resources, means of subsistence, territory, climate, customs, habits, industry, and accidents. Foucault argues that governance relies on employing tactics to achieve its ends, unlike sovereignty which operates through law. In urban contexts, this lens enables us to understand how urban local bodies,

planning agencies as well as development agencies enact disciplinary control over the urban population through zoning laws, planning instruments and infrastructural regimes.

The social crisis in the city and the possibility of urban-based transformation were the primary concerns of Henri Lefebvre (1991), whose major idea is *The Right to the City*. The right to the city, he defined, was a cry to the existential agony of the crisis of everyday life in the city, and an appeal to examine the crisis and establish an alternative urban life which is less alienated, more significant, and open to change and novelty. He thought that citizens are entitled to democratically create and occupy urban space. The concept of right to the city was subsequently transformed into the question of the manufacture of space which became universal. This lens can help us to view urban governance in the light of how space is socially constructed and politically struggles in the city.

David Harvey (2012) substantially relies on Lefebvre but combines the concepts with his study of the forces of capitalism and consumption of economic surpluses. Harvey states that the process of urbanization and capitalism are inter-related to one another — the process of capitalism constantly produces surplus product, and urbanization is needed to consume the surplus. According to Harvey, this gives rise to creative destruction under capitalism where excess capital is consumed at the expense of stripping the urban masses of their right to the city. In cities, the conceptualization of urban governance in neoliberalism by Harvey is entrepreneurial in which cities are competitive in terms of investment, branding, and real estate capital. Here, the governance is transformed towards controlling the common good to the encouragement of urban growth coalitions — collaboration between state, business, and global capital.

Besides the foundational literature on urban governance as formulated by Foucault, Lefebvre and Harvey, the article also examines the research undertaken by other scholars in order to investigate the peculiarities of the processes of governance and development that the cities of Noida and Gurugram have. As the ethnographic study to be used in the case of Noida, the book *The Politics of Community-making in New Urban India* by Ritanjan Das (2023) can be used to comprehend the process of city-making in Noida under the conditions of the post-liberalization urbanization of India, when a small-scale industrial township was converted into a real-estate based modern town. While the book also focuses on the various forms of community-making in the city, for our study, we primarily focus on the growth story of Noida as a new urban centre in the vicinity of Delhi and its unique urban governance model, with occasional references to how the process shaped the idea of space and community in the city. Despite lack of academic literature, the article builds upon several relevant news and op-ed articles from different news portals like *The Wire* and *The Times of India* to understand the urban governance model of Noida and how it has evolved over the decades, despite facing several challenges.

While navigating the urban landscape of Gurugram, the article *Neoliberal Spatialities in Gurgaon* by Anamica Singh, Tathagata Chatterjee and Hilde Heynen (2020) serves as a foundational literature to understand a more hybrid case of urban development in Gurugram, where the attitudes of native land-owning villagers have evolved to accommodate a new landscape of neoliberal accumulation under mutually beneficial and negotiable conditions. In addition to that, *Lessons from Gurgaon, India's private city* by Shruti Rajagopalan and Alexander Tabarrok (2014) serves as another important read to understand the nature of urban governance in contemporary Gurugram. Despite a dearth of academic literature, the article builds upon several relevant news and op-ed articles from different news portals like The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, and several others.

## **Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative, small-N comparative case study design to examine the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram. A qualitative, small-N comparative case study is an in-depth research design that analyzes a few selected cases (small-N) — in the present study, the two cases analyzed are the cities of Noida and Gurugram — to understand a complex phenomenon by comparing them in their natural context. The two cities are similar in terms of socio-economic and geographic background, being planned urban centers in the area surrounding Delhi, but they also differ greatly in terms of the institutional and administrative structure. This study is based on the logic of the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) - the selection of two general similar cases to describe the differences in the performance of the governance structure and institutional strategies.

The study will solely use secondary data sources, with a major focus on scholarly sources and media reports that will illustrate the urban governance models in Gurugram and Noida. Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books form the analytical foundation to understand the models of urban governance and its evolution in both the cities. In addition to that, media reports are used to track contemporary developments, stakeholder perspectives as well as public opinion on urban governance and management. Supplementary sources like the Master Plan documents, official websites have also been referred to for the purposes of the study.

The analysis employs a qualitative comparative case study approach under which the urban governance models of both the cities are traced on the basis of several parameters, which include institutional design, decision-making, infrastructural governance, citizen participation, and accountability mechanisms. Considering the fact that it has used secondary data as the study has a limitation in terms of primary insight depth, it is compensated by comprehensive analysis of pertinent academic sources as well as media and official reports.

## Case Study

Both Noida and Gurugram developed as satellite cities in the vicinity of Delhi, the capital of India, with the primary objective of decongesting the national capital by shifting businesses, industries and population to these nearby cities. The population of Delhi reached an all-time high during the decade of 1971-81, when the rate of growth of population in Delhi was highest at 53.00 per cent (Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24). As a result, it became imperative on the part of the authorities to draft appropriate plans to decongest the city. It was in this respect that the places surrounding the city of Delhi, in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana were selected to evolve into modern day Noida and Gurugram respectively. For the purposes of the study, we take the case studies of Noida and Gurugram, both developed around similar time frames, and attempt to compare and analyse how two different cities gave birth to contrasting models of governance and development.

### The Story of Noida

Noida is a satellite city of Delhi located in the Gautam Buddha Nagar district of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It lies in the south-eastern direction to the city of Delhi. It is bounded by the river Yamuna and Delhi in the west and the southwest, National Highway 24 and the city of Ghaziabad in the north, river Hindon and the sister city of Greater Noida in the east and the confluence of the rivers Yamuna and Hindon in the south. According to Das (2023), the development of Noida can be approached dating as far as 1972, when the state government of U.P., having noticed the growing population pressure in Delhi, declared the area of 36 villages of the Meerut-Bulandshahr region as the Yamuna Hindon-Delhi Border Regulated Area in the frames of the UP Regulation of Building Organisations Act (1958). However, no urban centre was planned in the area during that time. It was only on 17 April 1976 that the UP government constituted an industrial development authority under the provisions of the UP Industrial Area Development Act (1976) for the entire area and issued land acquisition notification to the 36 villages within it. This area was named New Okhla Industrial Development Area (N.O.I.D.A.), from which the name of the city Noida is derived. This industrial development authority was established as a statutory authority and entrusted with the responsibility to oversee all development activities.

The formation of Noida Authority was a unique exercise in post-colonial Indian experience, whereby the various functions of an industrial township which were hitherto the functions of multiple state agencies were brought under the authority of a single entity (Das 2023). The Noida Authority was not only the nodal planning agency, but it was also to function as a state industrial development corporation, an urban development authority as well as a municipal corporation, all rolled into one (Master Plan 1976–1992). It wields enormous powers over land, planning, infrastructure and even

civic services. Das notes that as of 2022, the Authority is led by 17 members including a chairman (who is an IAS Officer), CEO (who is also an IAS Officer) and six officers on special duty from the UP government. Even after more than four decades of its formation, no public representation was ever felt necessary in the Authority. As a result, Noida lacks a municipal democracy till date, with no local public representation in the governance of the city.

Over the last four and half decades, the Authority has laid out its planning priorities via five Master Plans of Noida: 1976–1992, 2001, 2011, 2021 and 2031. All these Master Plans have together led the evolution of the city of Noida into its current form. A close reading of these plans reveals that the adoption of a flexible planning approach, with periodic shifts in planning objectives and revisions in land allocation for different categories, transformed the city from an industrial to a low-cost residential hub during the 1980s and 1990s, and eventually into a premium real estate destination post-2000 (Das 2023). Observers claim that the Noida Authority has transformed Noida into a world-class city today, with a more coherent and consistent nature of development, as witnessed by well-organized spatial development, superior road and drainage infrastructure, and effective service delivery compared to its other NCR counterparts. Das argues that the present-day picture of Noida with its highly organized spatial development and infrastructure has been largely possible because of the far-sighted vision of the officials of the Noida Authority, who meticulously drafted the Master Plans. The Master Plans present a vivid picture of the present-day city, where industrial and residential zones occupy the central and northern parts of the city, while agricultural fields lay interspersed with rural settlements in the southern parts. The city is divided into 163 sectors, with each sector being developed for a particular purpose as laid out in the Master Plans. Overall, the Master Plans of Noida portray a smooth and orderly urban development process that has led to the emergence of Noida as one of the premier urban destinations of the country in just over four decades.

However, beyond the orderly world of the Master Plans and the Authority-championed harmony, Noida depicts a completely different picture. A bustling urban centre like Noida lacks a municipal corporation of its own, leading to absence of democratic decentralization, limited citizen participation, and lack of accountability. In addition to that, the existence of a powerful ‘builder-politician-bureaucrat’ nexus in Noida has been well established through various judicial pronouncements, reports of CAG and various investigative agencies (Kumar 2025). Most importantly, over time, the city has become a commodified space of built forms exemplifying the post-war ‘rupture’ in urban restructuring in advanced economies (Lefebvre 1991), whereby the city exhibits a particular form of spatial Organisation that favours the middle classes and elites at the expense of the poor and the dispossessed, producing a city space that is fundamentally unequal. Besides that, the development of Noida is in line with Foucault’s (1978) concept of governmentality where power is exerted through bureaucratic

mechanisms, planning norms and regulatory practices as seen when pronouncing Master Plans, zoning laws, and many others.

### **The Story of Gurugram**

Gurugram is a satellite city of Delhi located in the Indian state of Haryana. It lies in the south-western direction to the city of Delhi. Popularly known as the “Millennium City” of India, the city was officially renamed “Gurugram” in 2016 by the then Chief Minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar. Singh et al. (2020) notes that the development of Gurugram can be traced back to the 1960s, when it was included in the 1962 Masterplan of the Delhi Metropolitan Area (DMA). However, for a very long time, Gurugram remained an agricultural suburb with no signs of industrial development and urbanization. It was only in 1982, after the public-sector automobile manufacturer Maruti Udyog Limited (in collaboration with Suzuki Motors of Japan) set up a manufacturing unit in Gurugram, that Gurugram started to take its first serious steps toward industrial development. It was also around this time that private developers like DLF and Ansals began to look for opportunities in Gurugram. Rigid laws in Delhi forced these private developers to look beyond Delhi for survival. Under these circumstances, Gurugram emerged as a viable alternative, with its close proximity to the capital, IGI Airport as well as the Delhi-Jaipur Highway.

Rajagopalan and Tabarrok (2014) argues that the liberal policies adopted by the Haryana government in the 1970s as well as the ease to get licenses for large-scale private sector projects greatly facilitated the urban development of Gurugram. First, in the 1970s, the Haryana state government removed the tedious non-agricultural use clearance (NAC) requirement. Second, the state was authorized by the Haryana Urban Development Authority Act of 1977 to take over the agricultural land to build townships. At the same time the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act (1975) allowed the development of the townships with the large parcels of adjacent land under the licence of the developers. In addition to that, the period of liberalization that followed during the decade of the 1990s transformed Gurugram from an agricultural hinterland to a corporate powerhouse. However, this development of Gurugram was largely facilitated by the private sector and in this process, local villagers were also active participants.

In most cases, the government takes over village land for urban development through mechanisms like land acquisition which involves compulsory transfer of land for public purposes in lieu of compensation. However, the story of Gurugram is quite fascinating where the private developers took the initiative to acquire land from the villagers. In the late 1970s, villagers of Nathupur (over which DLF Cyber City, parts of DLF Phase 3 and the Ambience Mall complex is built) anticipated their lands would be acquired for urban development. So, when K.P. Singh, the former Chairman and CEO of

DLF approached them in the 1980s, they were cautious about selling to a private developer, fearing the loss of their ancestral “mother land.” DLF had to build trust gradually, spending months persuading farmers of the benefits. Singh et al. (2020) notes that because DLF needed financial support to advance the process of land acquisition, K.P. Singh conceptualized a partnership model with the villagers whereby he proposed that the villagers invest in DLF and become shareholders. DLF offered a whopping 12 percent interest for the villagers who invested in the company. This became a win-win situation for both the company as well as the villagers. The villagers, thus, became a part of the process of urbanization and greatly benefitted from it. Hence, it might be plausible to argue that it was this model of partnership with the villagers that DLF developed which made it possible for them to acquire vast acres of land in Gurugram without much cases of litigation or protest against them.

The urban governance model of Gurugram comprises multiple authorities. These include the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG). All these authorities are entrusted with specific responsibilities, but in many cases, this has led to overlapping duties, delays in service delivery, and weak coordination. Rajagopalan and Tabarrok (2014) observes that while HUDA and private developers are supposed to hand over infrastructure to the MCG for maintenance, there is no clear timeframe or agreement on this process, leading to uncertainty over the responsibility of public utilities. Residents in HUDA areas often lack any effective grievance redressal mechanism, while the MCG has one but no authority there. Often, this fragmentation results in coordination issues, leaving jurisdiction and accountability undefined. The formation of GMDA in 2017 was believed to be a solution to these problems. In the initial period, both the MCG and the GMDA were operating separately. However, they soon realised that their objectives and work largely overlapped, often creating confusion. The two agencies have common functions in the maintenance of roads, drainage, street light and water supply systems. Although the GMDA is in charge of city and arterial infrastructure (such as bulk water supply and sewage treatment), the MCG deals with local distribution, internal roads, sanitation and property taxation. Nevertheless, their jurisdictions are not clearly defined, thus causing problems with coordination and gaps in responsibility. Citizens are often confused with whom to address in terms of civic matters especially in an industry where the two agencies are involved. Consequently, this decentralized system of governance has been greatly criticized because it slows down the service delivery system and hinders the coordination of urban planning within Gurugram (Kumar 2021).

Infrastructural deficiencies, inadequate drainage, and haphazard planning are some of the issues experienced in Gurugram, denting its image of a global city. Analysts blame the fragmented model of urban governance responsible for the current state of Gurugram. At the same time, state-led planning

has often taken a backseat in the case of Gurugram, the city has primarily prospered due to the initiatives taken by the private sector. Private sector-led development has come with its own set of challenges which need to be addressed at the earliest. Besides, the fact that Noida is a commodified urban space that corresponds to Lefebvre (1991) concept of post-war urban restructuring (Das 2023) can be used to describe Gurugram even more strongly. The urban development, which is mostly fueled by the privately owned capital, has created a spatial structure that favors the elites at the expense of the urban poor, thus causing repetition of the deep socio-spatial inequalities. In addition to Lefebvre, the governance model of Gurugram closely resembles the entrepreneurial model of urban governance advocated by Harvey (2012). Gurugram's development has been facilitated largely by the private sector (DLF, Ansals) taking advantage of the liberal policies of the Haryana state government, implying the transformation of the role of the state from welfare provision to the facilitation of capital accumulation.

### **Discussion: Comparative Analysis of Noida and Gurugram**

Today, Noida and Gurugram have emerged as key urban centres surrounding Delhi, despite different models of urban governance and development histories. Noida is ruled by one centralized organization- Noida Authority that has massive powers on land, planning, infrastructure, licensing and even civic services. The Noida Authority is not only the nodal planning agency, but it also functions as a state industrial development corporation, an urban development authority as well as a municipal corporation. In contrast, the urban governance model of Gurugram comprises multiple authorities. These include the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG). While all these authorities are entrusted with specific responsibilities, this fragmentation has often led to overlapping duties, delays in service delivery, and weak coordination.

A focal point of comparison between the urban governance models of the two cities can be traced to the demarcation of responsibilities. In Noida, urban governance is more centralized and streamlined. Noida Authority has acted as a single window for planning, infrastructure, approvals, allowing stable planning and implementation as well as it reduced inter-jurisdictional conflict which is common to multi-agency systems. The Noida Authority can fulfill the functions of a planner, developer, and regulator at the same time, so coordination among departments is quite efficient, which allows quicker decision making. The model enables uniformity in the urban design, greater predictability in the provision of infrastructure and the reduction of bureaucratic barriers to both investors and the residents. In contrast, local governance arrived quite late in Gurugram to manage public services. While the city started attracting international companies and investors in the 1990s, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) was created only in 2008. Urban governance is highly fragmented in

Gurugram. Gurugram is struggling with the jurisdictional conflicts between GMDA, HUDA and MCG. The establishment of GMDA in 2017 was aimed at centralizing planning and approvals, however, in practice, its role is duplicated with MCG and other institutions. According to Kumar (2021), the GMDA deals with the city-level and arterial infrastructure, such as bulk water supply and sewage, whereas the MCG is in charge of the local distribution, internal roads, sanitation and property taxation. However, often a lack of clear demarcation of responsibilities have led to coordination issues between the two bodies. He cites an instance, if the arterial drains leading to a master drain or vice versa were in a bad condition, there was no outlet for stormwater or sewage to flow. Often, the MCG and GMDA officials would clear their respective lines only to find that the line ahead was choked, making the entire project redundant. Such instances of anomaly in coordination and accountability gaps have proved to be a major roadblock in the governance of Gurugram. Union minister and Gurugram MP Rao Inderjit Singh, as stated in *The Times of India* (2025), notes that the existence of both the GMDA and the MCG has led to the lack of clarity on the precise areas of their responsibility and administration. The Gurugram MP also noted the lackadaisical attitude on the part of GMDA officials to conduct frequent meetings which has severely hampered the vision with which GMDA was formed.

In addition, another key axis of divergence in the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram stems from the difference over fiscal authority in both the cities. In Noida, the fiscal power resides with the Noida Authority that was created under the UP Industrial Area Development Act (1976). The Act also allows the Noida Authority to earn its own revenue mainly by way of allotment of land, rent of leases, transfer of properties, development fees and user fee. At the same time, the Authority is allowed to retain these revenues with them rather than transferring them to the state exchequer. This allows the Noida Authority to enjoy sufficient fiscal autonomy to manage their own affairs without having to depend extensively on the state government. In Gurugram, on the contrary, there are several agencies that have fiscal power — the MCG, GMDA as well as the Finance Department of the state. Although the MCG is officially authorized to collect property taxes, user charges, and advertisement fees (*The Times of India* 2025), significant fiscal resources, in particular, infrastructure and massive urban development are governed by GMDA and directly allocated by the state government and developers of individual projects. This has resulted in overlapping fiscal jurisdiction in Gurugram, which acts as a major roadblock affecting the local government's responsiveness to civic issues in the city.

The governance models of the two cities also portray large differences in the service delivery outcomes. *Realty Plus Magazine* (2025) opined that Noida was designed as a city planned in the grid layout by the government with controlled land distribution, while Gurugram emerged as a boom town

of the private sector - established by developers such as DLF on the farmland. The expansion of the free-market economy brought about by the era of liberalisation in Gurugram attracted Fortune 500 corporations and flying executives, whereas Noida grew at a slower pace due to the control of the public. Gurugram has encountered several challenges due to the lack of a state-led planning, with crumbling public infrastructure, poorly managed drainage, encroachments, and waterlogging. Kumar (2021) argues that the city remains heavily affected due to lack of proper urban planning and the absence of a municipal body for a long time. Over the last 15 years, MCG has always been playing catch-up to Gurugram's civic mess. Each time there is heavy rain, the city is inevitably waterlogged due to either absence of drainage lines or choked drains. Kumar points out that the newer areas of the city (sectors 58-115) where over half a million people are estimated to be living, continue to be hampered by civic issues such as poor road connectivity and absence of streetlights. In some of the newer sectors, condominiums and societies are yet to get direct water or sewerage connections, and remain heavily dependent on private water tankers and septic tanks. The state government of Haryana has recently launched several action plans to address Gurugram's civic issues including drainage, roads and sanitation (Brij 2025), the implications of which are yet to be witnessed. In Noida, urban services in comparison, are far more structured. The Noida Authority enforces zoning, regulates construction quality, and ensures that new sectors come equipped with roads, power, and sewage. Older sectors are being upgraded, but newer ones already enjoy world-class infrastructure.

The governance models in Noida and Gurugram also underscore significant differences in the degree of citizen participation in the two cities. Noida lacks a strong elected municipal body. The Noida Authority performs many civic functions that in other cities lie with municipalities. This has resulted in limited citizen voice and weak accountability. Kumar (2025) notes that in the case of Noida, the Uttar Pradesh government has craftily used the exception clause (1) in Article 243Q to subvert the constitutional direction regarding setting up of rural and urban local governments. Through State Act 4 of 2001 and State Act 10 of 2016, among several other amendments, sections 12A and 12B have been inserted in the Uttar Pradesh Industrial Area Development Act, 1976 to provide for immediate cessation of Gram Panchayats and urban local self-governments once their area is notified. As a result, even after so many decades, Noida lacks a municipal body of its own. The lack of an elected municipal authority has resulted in the existence of a powerful 'builder-politician-bureaucrat' nexus in Noida, which has been well established through various judicial pronouncements, reports of CAG and various investigative agencies. While the Supreme Court has suggested converting Noida into a metropolitan corporation for more democratic accountability (Mahapatra 2025), no concrete steps have been taken in this direction. Dev (2025) claims that this institutional vacuum has resulted in grave charges of collusion among the Noida Authority officials, builders and different layers of government. In the DND Flyway toll scandal, Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd (NTBCL) had already recovered its

investment back but still kept on operating by illegally collecting tolls under agreements enabled by the Noida Authority and the state governments. Similarly, in the Twin Towers (Supertech), the Noida Authority was heavily criticized for turning a blind eye to breaking of building norms, with the court referring to the “nefarious cooperation” between the developer and the Authority. These are some of the many instances of corruption persistent in the Noida Authority, most of which can be attributed to the lack of a municipal body. Gurugram, in contrast, has greater scope for democratic participation of the people through the MCG. Elections are held to the post of Mayor of MCG. This creates more opportunity for local politics even though actual power of elected bodies is undermined by state and bureaucratic control. The presence of Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) in both the cities have fostered some form of citizen participation, but they have often been met with mixed results and surpassed under bureaucratic authority.

The growth stories of Noida and Gurugram closely resemble the theories of urban governance put forward by Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey. Lefebvre (1991) allows us to see urban governance through the prism of how space is socially produced and politically contested. He defined the right to the city as a response to the existential pain of the crisis of everyday life in the city and a call to look at the crisis and create an alternative urban life. Over the decades, one can observe that the city of Noida too has become a commodified space exhibiting a particular form of spatial organisation that favours the middle classes and elites at the expense of the poor and the dispossessed, producing a city space that is fundamentally unequal. Lefebvre’s idea of a commodified urban space becomes even more pronounced in the case of Gurugram. The development of Gurugram has created a spatial pattern which favours the elites at the expense of the urban poor, thus recreating the profound levels of socio-spatial disparities.

Along with Lefebvre, the Gurugram model of governance is quite similar to the entrepreneurial form of urban governance proposed by Harvey (2012), where the role of the state is redefined as the one of facilitating the growth of capital instead of providing welfare. The growth of Gurugram has been enabled to a great extent by the private sector (DLF, Ansals) exploiting the liberal policies of the Haryana state government, resembling a capitalist system that constantly produces surplus and urbanization is needed to consume this surplus. The neoliberal trace in the case of Gurugram is rather noticeable: growth is valued more than equity and profit is valued more than health. Conversely, the development of Noida falls in line with the idea of governmentality introduced by Foucault (1978) in which the power is exercised by the bureaucratic machine, planning rules, and regulation practices. The centralized nature of control of the Noida Authority coupled with the use of technocratic tools such as Master Plans, zoning laws and many more, show governance by use of administrative knowledge and tools. While Gurugram is a manifestation of market-driven logic of governance, Noida

is an embodiment of a statist, technocratic one. They all embody divergent paradigms of neoliberal urbanism in post-liberal India.

## Conclusion

The comparative study of the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram reveals the fact that urban governance in India has been a heterogeneous process. This heterogeneity can be attributed to both administrative as well as political factors, reflecting differing configurations of state power, market forces, and institutional authority across urban spaces. While Noida represents the technocratic-centralized model of governance based on Foucault's (1978) idea of governmentality, privileging order and efficiency at the expense of democratic participation; Gurugram, on the other hand, embodies the entrepreneurial-fragmented model of Harvey (2012), where governance is dispersed among several state as well as private actors, resulting in spatial and institutional chaos. In Noida, governmentality is exercised through bureaucratic expertise, master planning, and regulatory control, producing a disciplined urban order. In contrast, Gurugram's entrepreneurial governance prioritizes capital accumulation, real estate interests, and flexible regulation, often at the cost of coherent public infrastructure and social equity.

Both governance models have encountered distinct challenges, prompting the formulation of various recommendations aimed at addressing these shortcomings. In the case of Noida, the key challenge lies in its democratic deficit and the concentration of decision-making power in unelected authorities, whereas in Gurugram, the core challenge emerges from overlapping jurisdictions and weak coordination among the various local bodies. Recently, the Supreme Court has suggested converting Noida into a metropolitan corporation for more democratic accountability (Mahapatra 2025). This reflects a growing judicial recognition that technocratic efficiency alone cannot be a substitute for democratic decision-making and decentralized governance. Similarly, the state government of Haryana has recently launched action plans to address Gurugram's civic issues including drainage, roads and sanitation (Brij 2025). These initiatives, on the part of the government of Haryana, reflect an attempt by the state government to strengthen coordination among the various urban bodies in the wake of persistent civic failures arising out of fragmented institutional arrangements. In addition to that, there has been mounting pressure to demarcate and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the GMDA and the MCG and improve coordination. Overall, the comparative trajectories of the two emerging urban centres foreground the structural weakness at the heart of the 74th Amendment — formal decentralization without substantive political, fiscal, and administrative devolution. Urban decentralization in India, as the cases of Noida and Gurugram reveal, remains less a regime of self-government than a carefully managed illusion of it.

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# Trump's mercantilism? Post-Cold War reshaping of the politics and Economy of India in South Asia

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## Abstract

The current global shifts in the economic sphere, with the imposition of tariff duties by the USA on some countries, especially India in South Asia, can bring about a lot of changes in the international political economy. The dependency in trade and commerce in this neo-colonialist order is from both sides. It's actually a zero-sum game, which attracts the strong states towards weaker ones. This paper dives into certain important questions: Is it really going back towards the mercantilist approach of the state by adopting protectionist measures, or is it just a way to assert power in the post-Cold War period by impacting global supply chains? What are the impacts on the South Asian countries, especially India (domestically or internationally), as most of them are the suppliers of finished products to the USA?

The application of secondary tariffs on countries like India to stop them from importing Russian oil is one of the reasons given by the USA. This paper uses the current trends in growth of an economy, followed by political ideas behind it and how this decision can impact the major political decisions in future, such as bilateral meetings, trade agreements and deepening the structural inequality in the economy. How a country like India will react to it, if the tariff policy is not revised, can shatter the domestic market through demand and supply, and this will create greater problems for the people. This paper will also analyze whether India is truly an emerging power in the world and a major power in South Asia, or if this tariff policy has the capacity to take this title from it. Will this economic change have an impact on the regime or the political system of the country? How does the media is shaping this issue in the eyes of its people are the two points on which the conclusion and prospects are built? The economy doesn't operate in a vacuum: politics shape it, whether we talk about mercantilist theory, fall apart due to economic liberalism or capitalist ideas criticized by Marxian understanding.

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As Francis Fukuyama said *The End of History* on liberal ideology with the end of the Cold War, so is it really the end of history on liberal ideas, or is the world order evolving into something new? This is now a critical question to understand.

## **Keywords**

Tariff Duties, Mercantilist, Secondary Tariffs, End of history, South Asia, Liberal Ideas

## **Mercantilism as an idea or period**

Mercantilism, as an economic theory, was not propounded by any one thinker like capitalism by Adam Smith. It was an idea that got spread in Europe in the early 15th century. The definition carries differing views, but as per Eli F. Heckscher, Swedish free-trade proponent, mercantilism is the age that arrived between the Middle Ages and the laissez-faire system. In the book named "*Mercantilism*" by Eli F. Heckscher, volume I, where he talks about Mercantilism as a unifying mechanism, and in the beginning, economists like Smith and Keynes favoured the idea of the mercantilist economy. He wrote two volumes on this theory, and an evolution of thesis can be clearly seen in his work, but as per Heckscher, mercantilism was the "system of power", and to whom? No one but the state, because it's the state that was the custodian of wealth and bullion. It can be understood like this: initially, he defined mercantilism as a unifying system, then as a system of power, then balance of trade and how the mercantilist approach only talks about money yield. On the notion of political ideology, he defined a line of difference which made mercantilism different from liberalism, and that is that in the latter state, it is considered as a watchman, while in the former state, it is powerful to control the trade of the country. It's a period in the history of medieval Europe. With the onset of the capitalist idea, the mercantilist thesis faded away from the arena, and that's what happens when alternatives are given in forms of theory or system; they replace the preceding ones with new notions and understandings. But the alternative doesn't suggest that the previous doctrine was null or void. In fact, what the cycle suggests is the repetition of one or the other idea in a different forum or by different leaders. Heckscher was not the only thinker to speak on mercantilism; there are many. Here, the idea is how one can say that the mercantilist approach gets revised in Trump's vision or imposition of tariffs on most countries and especially India in South Asia. Many of the speculations suggest that it's the protectionist measure that Trump's government is taking by imposing an extra 25% tariff on Indian goods, and that's what mercantilism was all about: protection and accumulation of one's own wealth. But, it's also correct to say that it cannot only be a reason to say that Trump's idea is mercantilist. There are other reasons too which satisfy this understanding.

## Reasons behind Trump's tariff policy

Donald Trump, the powerful yet criticised President of the USA, is not only criticised by non-Western forces but from within as well. The book named "*Fire and Fury, Inside the Trump White House*", written by *Michael Wolff*, an American journalist, is a satirical presentation of his policies and how he deals with matters in a Presidential address. As Machiavelli suggested, civic virtues are different from personal virtues; how one behaves in a public space matters more for a ruler than how one behaves in personal space. Hence, the idea is not to project his personal figure but to show the public image through the policies he adopted in the past and present. It's important because the USA behaves like a sole power in a polycentric world order. I wouldn't say the superpower because there are many states that can give competition to the USA in terms of currency, defence, foreign policy, trade rules, visa policies, climate issues, and so on. The policy decisions, if traced from 2017, his first presidential tenure, it can be stated that many decisions faced a lot of grim consequences, for instance, the withdrawal from the 2015 Paris agreement, a step back from the **UN Human Rights Council**, recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the US's embassy over there, etc. Despite being an ardent supporter of human rights, freedom, and democracy, the state has shown a decline in its way of articulation and working mechanisms.

Tariffs and sanctions are important tools that the USA has used tremendously to oppose or to stop the flow of money or resources from any country. The current imposition of tariffs on India in the name of a Russian penalty has created economic problems for the Indian state.

In 2018, Trump's administration-imposed tariffs on Chinese products, and based on this, one could analyse the reasons why the USA started a trade war with many emerging economies of the world. Then, it was also considered a protectionist measure taken by the USA towards other states. The reasons were as follows:

*First* is the **trade deficit problem** of the USA. Trade deficit and trade surplus are two contrasting terms. The former means higher imports than exports, and the latter means more exports than imports for any state. It depends on the savings and investment part of the country, but not exclusively on this parameter.

*Second* is the **role of the dollar**, it has both positive and negative impacts; a strong dollar means that foreigners have to pay more currency to buy USA products, making it expensive for them, while on the side of imports, the nationals have to pay less amount to buy their own products, which creates more

demand and encourage more imports into the country. When imposed tariffs allow Americans to buy domestic products, it allows other states to invest in their economy. This justification is used by Trump for the Indian tariffs policy so that in some products, they directly invest in America.

*Third* is to **protect one's own economy** from **gross national debt**. As described by the US Treasury of Fiscal data, "The national debt is the amount of money the federal government has borrowed to cover the outstanding balance of expenses incurred over time". Generally, any state faces a debt-like situation when spending is greater than revenue; the country will face a deficit, and with time, these deficits accumulate and form national debt. From 1924 to 2024, it has increased from \$370 billion to \$35.36 trillion<sup>38</sup>. Trump had also made the point that taxing imported goods can reduce the debt by \$4 trillion. However, domestically, the economy could have a bad impact in terms of wage decline, in a way that the state can stop all trading agreements, which leads to a fall in demand for any particular good, creating a kind of wedge between production and demand, leading to many losing their jobs or a decline in wages. In the globalizing world, the imposition of tariffs not only damages the domestic economy but also international markets, which ultimately will lead to a decrease in the contribution of GDP internationally. The main reason used by Trump's government is that India is promoting the Russia-Ukraine war by importing oil from Russia. But is this really a reason? If analyzing the trade balances of the USA and Russia, the imports from Russia increased many fold from February to June, then started decreasing from July, and it was only in August that the USA imposed tariffs on Russian imports of oil. After the war started in February 2022 between Russia and Ukraine, a notable change happened as the figures of imports went down from thousands to hundreds, and within that, also the fluctuations were noticeable and due to this, the trade balance got reduced (negative figures)<sup>39</sup>. According to U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis data, the imports from Russia fell to \$2.50 billion in the first half of 2025 from \$14.14 billion four years earlier. U.S. goods and services trade with Russia totalled an estimated \$5.2 billion in 2024, down 25.8 per cent (\$1.8 billion) from 2023, according to the Office of the United States Trade Representative<sup>40</sup>.

The imposition of tariffs should happen right after the start of the war. Why did the USA wait for three long years to force India economically? Keeping this aside, the Modi-Trump government share cordial ties with one another, so why has India been put under a different taxing slab except for other Asian nations (for whom it's only 20%)? The consequences of the draft future prospect, the Indian state has to look for the profit that it gets, whether by importing oil from Russia or by accepting US tariff

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<sup>38</sup> <https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/national-debt/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4621.html>

<sup>40</sup> <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/europe-middle-east/russia-and-eurasia/russia>

imposition, which is again very unfair.

### India: Counterargument

India, a South Asian country and said to be an emerging economy, has been under the US's eye since the 20th century. The tariff policy adopted by the USA doesn't surprise the nation much, but the aggressive implementation in the pharmaceutical sector is a noticeable act. Geopolitically, India can't come under the Global North, not because it doesn't lie, but simply because it's still a third-world country. *Mohammad Ayoob* rightly pointed out the **dependence-domination relationship** between the Third World and the rest of the world in his book "*The Third World Security Predicament*". It talks about the autonomy of political elites from external pressure. In the globalized era where the flow of economy, culture, and ideas is so rooted that one can't help but be affected by any policy. After the arrival of the Modi government in India, the ties between the two are so evident through political campaigning of elections, use of slogans, and counter-China's role in the Pacific region. The USA is also the fourth largest partner of defence to India after Russia, Israel and France. On the lines of Indian educated people migration to USA Trump imposed temporary ban on work visa so to boost his policy of employing Americans in America which is another measure to protect its economy and now after the announcement of tariff, another decision by him was the increment in the price of H1B visa from \$10,000 to \$100,000 – a hike which is not normal. The pharmaceutical industry was exempted from it, but a 100% tariff is levied on patented drugs, and if India wants to trade, then they have to set up a plant in the USA (manufactured in the US), which again costs India high in terms of capital, land, machinery, production, labour, etc. Experts say that it doesn't harm India in the short run, as the US accounts for 40 per cent of Indian pharmaceutical products, but the use of **Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962** is harming the steel and aluminium industry, as it faces higher tariffs in the US. It's been said that the tariffs are more sectoral in nature rather than country-specific. On 23rd September 2025, the meeting of *External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar* with the *US Secretary of State Marco Rubio* in New York was on positive lines. Parallel to this, Trump shifted his move from multilateralism to unilateralism and talked of India and China being responsible for the continuation of the Russia-Ukraine war in his 80th UNGA speech.

In terms of economic challenge to India, *Crisil* estimates that the textiles, gems and jewellery, seafood industry accounts for 25% exports to the US, which will be most affected by tariffs, MSMEs share 70% and the chemical sector, where MSMEs share 40% will also feel the blow of impact. But, on the positive side, New Delhi is looking to diversify its economy by including more trading partners whose borders are free for exports, for instance, **the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**. *Second*, the cost of Indian goods will increase in the US market, which ultimately will lead to lesser demand for

Indian goods, and hence exports to the US will decline. In terms of investment, foreign investors will hesitate to invest in affected sectors, leading to less exposure of the Indian market abroad in some sectors. Market volatility (price fluctuations) will rise owing to the change in demand and supply patterns between the two countries.

Back in 2019, India was in a trade war with the USA when the capital refused to exempt the Indian steel industry from taxes. But what's now? Whether going into a trade war will be good or bad for India will be discussed later in this paper. The matter of concern is whether India is willing to focus on deepening its ties with EU nations and major countries across borders, and it's also a suggestion by experts.

## Analysis

The stand taken by Mr. Trump in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war cited towards the idea of protectionism and revival of mercantilism, in which countries were only focused upon the notion of accumulation of their own wealth and bullion (gold), and it defined the prosperity of any state, which was followed in early stages before capitalism. Now, the question which can come to mind is if it's a revival of the periodic cycle whereby again the world has to see mercantilism working in contrast with capitalism. The current observation says that in term of economic ideology, it creates contradiction between the two ideologies as mercantilism is more about protection and command of economy in the hands of state while capitalism is more about free market and less state intervention and as far as US's economy is concerned in contemporary times as it's an ardent supporter of liberal-capitalist economy but critically tariffs is about protection and closing of economy. And he said it clearly through his "**America first**" policy by hiking the price of the H1B visa so that only Americans can utilize its manpower. Another major reason for this is the proclamation of the idea that the US is still the sole power in the world by showing the dependency of emerging economies of the world on it, for example, China, India, Bangladesh (not an emerging but a supplier of cheap labour force and part of triangular economies). Almost 69 countries come under the umbrella of tariff policy, and within it, India faces a stark differentiation from other countries, i.e., 50%. Syria comes second in this with 41% and Switzerland comes third with 39%. Under the 30-40% tariff slab, around 7 countries come (Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Serbia, South Africa)<sup>41</sup>. As per my analysis, the **US dependency on the MENA** region is quite low in terms of percentage. In 2024, the U.S. total goods trade with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was an estimated \$141.7 billion, according to

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<sup>41</sup> TOI Business Desk. 2025. "Trump tariffs hit dozens of countries: Which are the most and least affected? Check if India makes it to either list." The Times of India. August 1.  
[https://www.google.com/amp/s/timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/international-business/trump-tariffs-hit-dozens-of-countries-which-are-the-most-and-least-affected-check-if-india-makes-it-to-either-list/amp\\_articleshow/123034197.cms](https://www.google.com/amp/s/timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/international-business/trump-tariffs-hit-dozens-of-countries-which-are-the-most-and-least-affected-check-if-india-makes-it-to-either-list/amp_articleshow/123034197.cms)

the Office of the United States Trade Representative<sup>42</sup>. However, the US's economy accounts for \$30 trillion, which means roughly it forms only 0.47 per cent of the US's economy. The trade balance which the USA shared with the MENA region was in surplus, which was \$19.1 billion as per the United States Trade Representative (USTR). MENA is known for oil and gas supplies, as the tariffs don't affect the economy directly, but they affect the exports of these supplies in the long run. But another reason could be the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, which is shattering the Middle Eastern region to a greater degree. The tariffs are more on Syria because of the recent conflict, which can be cited as an effort to hinder these economies, and the dependency factor applies here as well. It could be a major blow to the MENA region due to the Islamophobic notion of the USA, which was triggered in the 9/11 attacks, and somehow defines the past experiences of the state. The overall impact will also be felt in the US because it will become the reason for a rise in inflation. The projections are many and can't be depicted clearly due to a hazy picture.

*Second*, the point of contention is the relationship of Trump-Modi government as one can see the portrayal of their personalities in front of the world showed that the relation between the two are stable and friendly and the credit that Trump gave to himself for stopping the recent Indo-Pak war and his quest to get Noble peace prize, if India support it or not is another question of discussion. Furthermore, one can ask if these relations that India has with the US can save the economic plight in future. It can also be considered as a warning for India in the post-Cold War era, this tariff policy seeing whose side India will take: Russia or the USA. I would talk a little about NAM here. Previously, this policy prevented India from being involved in any power bloc, but the signing of the Treaty of Friendship by Indira Gandhi with the USSR created bitterness in India-US relations. India has to go back to its roots and revive NAM for the sake of maintaining cordial relations with these two blocs, as it's not in a position to be a part of any new cold war. The reason is very obvious, the USA will support Ukraine more than India because the opportunity cost for it is higher if it goes with India and why not with Ukraine, it wanted to be a part of NATO, which ultimately comes under the USA.

*Third*, the **impact on South Asia**, as the economy accounts for \$6 trillion and the Indian economy is \$4 trillion, which contributes to 80 per cent of this region. Hence, the impact can be seen in fewer jobs in the textile and pharmaceutical industries, which can lead to jobless growth in the region, too. Geopolitically, South Asia is a very important region not only economic but also political stakes are also high. For instance, the coldness in Indo-Pak relations is beneficial to the USA to some extent, and Pakistan has always been a supporter of US policy since the Cold War period. States like Nepal and Sri

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<sup>42</sup> <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/europe-middle-east/middle-east/north-africa>

Lanka were always in the list of the CIA, and one of the reasons for conflict in these regions was mainly because of the capture of activists, political elites, young people, etc., which allows the US to intervene in the political decisions of South Asian states. On similar lines, sanctions and tariffs are tools to shatter the economy so when the economy is shattered, it will be later followed by political disorder in the state or region, and that's what the British did with India, they first captured the economy by setting up East India company and then captured it politically by exploiting the economy and understanding the administrative work.

*Fourth*, the change can be seen in the policy of the US in terms of the **rise in price of the H1B visa** right after the tariff policy and China's introduction of a new visa category named K-visa at the same time. It lowers the barriers for young people in the state for STEM purposes, and this takeover by China can counteract the US's actions and can reverse the effect of tariffs through migration of labour. After all these measured consequences, the probability of getting a different result in future is quite high. In fact, the global shifts after the arrival of this policy might differ to a large extent. The above analysis and interpretation are the result of arguments and counterarguments presented by both states in today's scenario; however, it doesn't have a clear picture or statistical data, but whatever data is present right now, from all these sources, this analysis is drawn. But the chances of both economies getting affected badly are high if this policy runs for a long time.

## **Conclusion**

The paper presents the current status of Trump's tariff policy and analyses it, especially from the perspective of India. It provides the arguments provided by both countries. In the USA, it was in defence of why the taxation is high in India, and all the reasons for that are highlighted above. In contrast to this, the Indian counterargument is taken from the affected version as to how this policy will hinder the economic and political activities between states. And, in the analytical part, I have interpreted from a dual perspective and arrived at the above-mentioned results, which are not very accurate but predictable. Whatever happens on the global platform will definitely have regional and sub-regional impact, and sometimes the results are non-negotiable in nature. We have to see how global shifts will happen in the economic paradigm of these two states. India need to dig deep in this policy framework and take its decision based on the interest of its people not who are living despite the relations the country share with it and the state need to maintain its neutrality in world forums so to be on a safer side if the time of conflict may arise not because the country is not capable but because India has been a supporter of non-violent practices all over the world since the time of independence. The revival of NAM is the need of the hour at this point in time.

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# Reconstructing the Forgotten Uprising of Doomureeagunj (1858): Local Resistance and Colonial Erasure in Eastern Uttar Pradesh

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## Abstract

The historiography of the 1857–58 uprising in North India has largely emphasized metropolitan centers such as Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Jhansi, while numerous localized episodes of resistance remain obscure. This paper reconstructs one such forgotten episode, the armed encounter at *Doomureeagunj* (a site near Dumariaganj, now known as Amargarh, in present-day Siddharthnagar district, Uttar Pradesh), where local freedom fighters confronted the British army in November 1858. Drawing upon British archival sources, including *The London Gazette* (1859), *The Cruise of the Pearl* by E.A. Williams, and regional *Gazetteers*, alongside oral traditions and field surveys, this study situates the Doomureeagunj uprising within the larger framework of the First War of Independence. It foregrounds the leadership of Muhammad Hasan, his nephew Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao (the younger brother of Nana Sahib), whose contributions have been overshadowed by mainstream historiography. Through a comparative reading of colonial documentation and local memory, this paper explores how regional narratives were marginalized and argues for the inclusion of Doomureeagunj in the broader discourse of subaltern resistance in India's nationalist history.

## Keywords

Doomureeagunj Uprising; 1857 Revolt; Dumariaganj; Muhammad Hasan; Muhammad Nawaz; Subaltern Historiography; British Colonial Records; Local Memory.

## Introduction

The revolt of 1857 remains a landmark event in the historiography of India's struggle against British colonialism. Often referred to as the First War of Independence, it marked not only a military uprising but also a socio-political and cultural confrontation that reshaped colonial authority and -

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indigenous resistance. While canonical scholarship—from S.N. Sen and R.C. Majumdar to Eric Stokes and Rudrangshu Mukherjee, has examined the military campaigns and political leadership concentrated in Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Jhansi, micro-regional revolts across northern India continue to occupy a marginal position in mainstream historical narratives. One such neglected yet significant site is *Doomureeagunj*, a small settlement near present-day Dumariaganj in the Siddharthnagar district of eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Situated along the banks of the Rapti River, Doomureeagunj was part of the Gorakhpur Sarkar under the *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* during the mid-nineteenth century. In November 1858, this otherwise obscure locality witnessed an intense confrontation between local revolutionaries and the British forces led by Brigadier Rowcroft and Captain Giffard. Contemporary British correspondence, later printed in *The London Gazette* and *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (1859), records this battle in striking detail. These dispatches mention a rebel force of about one thousand men under Muhammad Hasan and his nephew Muhammad Nawaz—identified as “nephew of Mahommed Hoossen”—who held the area “for some time.”<sup>43</sup> Yet, despite such explicit documentation, Doomureeagunj has rarely appeared in Indian nationalist historiography, nor in state-sponsored memorialization of the 1857 Rebellion.

This lacuna is symptomatic of a larger historiographical bias. The mainstream nationalist and Marxist interpretations of 1857, while divergent in causation and class analysis—share an urban-centric perspective that privileges the political theatres of the Mughal heartland. In contrast, eastern Uttar Pradesh and adjoining Nepali Tarai regions have largely been represented as peripheral or passive zones. Recent scholarship in subaltern and regional studies, however, insists that the 1857 Rebellion was not a uniform, top-down phenomenon but a mosaic of localized struggles grounded in agrarian grievances, religious sentiment, and local leadership.<sup>44</sup> In this context, Doomureeagunj deserves scholarly attention not merely as an extension of the northern revolt but as an independent node of anti-colonial consciousness.

The rebellion at Doomureeagunj also invites a reconsideration of *memory and erasure* in colonial historiography. British officers’ reports—such as Brigadier Rowcroft’s dispatch dated 28 November 1858, describe in cold bureaucratic precision the killing of approximately eighty rebels and the

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<sup>43</sup> *The London Gazette*, 1859, pp. 240–243.

<sup>44</sup> See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983); Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857–1858* (1984).

drowning of others in the Rapti River.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, oral narratives preserved among residents recall a massacre in which hundreds of villagers were executed or driven into the river after the deaths of Captain Giffard and other British officers. The divergence between these two traditions illustrates how colonial records sought to legitimize punitive violence as a military necessity, while local memory enshrined it as martyrdom.

Furthermore, the figures of Muhammad Hasan, his nephew Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao (the younger brother of Nana Sahib) embody the complex intersection of regional loyalties and pan-Indian nationalism. Hasan's position as a former *sarkar* official of Oudh, Nawaz's death in combat, and Balaji Rao's affiliation with the Maratha leadership connect Doomureeagunj to wider revolutionary circuits stretching from Lucknow and Faizabad to Bundelkhand and Central India. Their coordinated yet locally rooted resistance challenges the colonial portrayal of the revolt as an unorganized outburst and instead underscores its structured networks of mobilization.

Finally, the recent renaming of the site as *Amargarh* underscores the continuing negotiation between history, heritage, and identity. The new toponym—literally “the abode of the immortal”—symbolically restores recognition to those who perished anonymously in 1858. This act of commemoration aligns with a growing public interest in local freedom sites across northern India, revealing how collective memory continues to shape regional historiography.

The present study, therefore, seeks to reconstruct the events at Doomureeagunj through a triangulation of archival sources, colonial correspondences, district gazetteers, and oral testimonies gathered through fieldwork. By juxtaposing British official narratives with local memory, it aims to reclaim Doomureeagunj's rightful place in the subaltern cartography of India's First War of Independence. The analysis that follows will demonstrate that the encounter of November 1858 was not a marginal skirmish but a microcosm of India's broader struggle for sovereignty, where peasants, local elites, and soldiers converged in a shared, if short-lived, vision of liberation.

## **Research Problem, Objectives, and Methodology**

### **Research Problem**

Despite the vast corpus of literature on the Revolt of 1857, the micro-histories of eastern Uttar Pradesh remain conspicuously underrepresented in both colonial and postcolonial historiography. Existing

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<sup>45</sup> *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence*, London Gazette (1859).

works, such as those by S.N. Sen, R.C. Majumdar, and Rudrangshu Mukherjee, focus primarily on the military and political developments in Delhi, Lucknow, and Kanpur. However, the events that unfolded at *Doomureeagunj* (then within Gorakhpur district) in November 1858 are barely mentioned, even though British sources themselves document the encounter. This neglect has resulted in a historical void that obscures the contribution of local revolutionaries like Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao to the broader anti-colonial movement.

The core research problem, therefore, lies in the **absence of Doomureeagunj from the mainstream narrative of India’s First War of Independence**. The episode has neither been incorporated into academic syllabi nor received due recognition in national commemorations. Furthermore, the British accounts, though detailed, remain heavily biased, often portraying the rebels as “mutineers” or “fanatics” and minimizing the scale of the violence inflicted upon them. The lack of indigenous written documentation, combined with colonial censorship, has perpetuated this historiographical silence. Hence, the present research seeks to recover this suppressed episode and to re-evaluate the Doomureeagunj encounter within the context of subaltern resistance and regional nationalism.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. **To reconstruct the historical events** of the November 1858 encounter at Doomureeagunj using both colonial records and local oral traditions.
2. **To identify and document the local leaders**—especially Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao—and analyse their roles in organizing the revolt.
3. **To examine the representation of Doomureeagunj** in British military correspondences, gazetteers, and other archival sources, and compare these narratives with indigenous memories.
4. **To understand the socio-political context** of Siddharthnagar and eastern Uttar Pradesh during the 1857–58 revolt, including agrarian discontent, religious mobilization, and regional power structures.
5. **To explore the processes of historical erasure** that led to Doomureeagunj’s marginalization in national historiography and public memory.
6. **To highlight the significance of local uprisings** as integral components of the larger framework of India’s First War of Independence, thus contributing to a more inclusive nationalist history.

## Research Methodology

This paper adopts a **qualitative and historical-analytical methodology**, integrating archival research with ethnographic fieldwork. The approach is interdisciplinary, drawing from history, oral tradition, and cultural memory studies to provide a holistic reconstruction of the Doomureeagunj uprising.

### 1. Primary Sources:

- **British Colonial Records:** The principal archival materials include *The London Gazette* (1859), *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (1859), and the *British Library Archives*, which contain Brigadier Rowcroft's dispatches and Captain Giffard's reports on the encounter.
- **District Gazetteers:** The *Gorakhpur* and *Basti District Gazetteers* provide valuable administrative and topographical context.
- **Memoirs and Travelogues:** E.A. Williams' *The Cruise of the Pearl* (1860) and *The Indian Army List* contain first-hand accounts of the operations at Doomureeagunj.
- **Inscriptions and Field Evidence:** The study includes on-site observation of the 1858 tombstone and inscription near the Rapti River, which corroborates the colonial accounts of the battle.

### 2. Secondary Sources:

- Scholarly works on the 1857 revolt by S.N. Sen (1957), R.C. Majumdar (1963), Eric Stokes (1980), Rudrangshu Mukherjee (1984), and Tapti Roy (1994) were consulted for comparative analysis.
- Regional and subaltern perspectives were examined through Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983) and Shahid Amin's *Event, Metaphor, Memory* (1995).

- ### 3. Oral History and Field Interviews:
- Field visits were conducted at Doomureeagunj (present-day Amargarh) in 2021–2022, where interviews were held with elderly residents, local historians, and custodians of the memorial site. Their testimonies, while shaped by generational transmission, offer insights into the local remembrance of the 1858 massacre and the identity of the martyrs.

4. **Analytical Framework:** The study employs **comparative historiography** to juxtapose colonial narratives with oral traditions. It also draws upon **subaltern studies** to interpret Doomureeagunj as a site of popular insurgency rather than a mere military confrontation. The framework acknowledges that while colonial documentation privileges the perspective of authority, local memory restores agency to those who resisted imperial domination.
5. **Limitations:** The research acknowledges the challenges of limited archival accessibility, particularly regarding Indian perspectives suppressed in colonial administration. Oral narratives, though invaluable, are treated critically and cross-referenced with textual sources to ensure historical reliability.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research contributes to the decolonization of Indian historiography by relocating the centre of historical inquiry from metropolitan nodes to peripheral regions like Doomureeagunj. It not only fills a gap in the study of the 1857–58 revolt but also exemplifies how local memory and archival reconstruction can coexist to produce a more inclusive understanding of India's nationalist past. The investigation thus extends beyond historical retrieval; it participates in the larger intellectual movement to democratize historical knowledge by acknowledging the sacrifices of those rendered invisible in official records.

### **Historical Background of Doomureeagunj and Its Regional Context**

The locality historically known as *Doomureeagunj*, now identified with the renamed site *Amargarh* near Dumariaganj in Siddharthnagar district, lay on the north-eastern frontier of the mid-nineteenth-century *Gorakhpur Sarkar*. Its geographic position between the Rapti and Burhi Rapti rivers made it both agriculturally fertile and strategically significant. Situated roughly 30 kilometres from the Nepal border, Doomureeagunj functioned as a crucial node between the plains of Awadh and the Terai region. This frontier character shaped its historical trajectory: it became a meeting ground for agrarian settlers, displaced soldiers of Oudh, Sufi lineages, and itinerant traders who collectively contributed to the socio-political fabric that would later foster rebellion in 1858.

### **Socio-Political Setting of Eastern Uttar Pradesh before 1857**

The pre-1857 political climate of eastern Uttar Pradesh was defined by a complex interplay of declining Mughal administrative structures, expanding British control, and localized resistance to agrarian and revenue reforms. Following the annexation of Awadh in 1856, British revenue policies,

enforced by newly appointed *tahsildars* and *zamindars*, disrupted the older landholding patterns that had sustained rural society. The *Permanent Settlement* and the imposition of cash revenue collection created economic insecurity among peasants and small proprietors. Doomureeagunj, like much of Gorakhpur and Basti, was populated by cultivators from various castes, Ahirs, Kurmis, and Muslims, whose livelihoods were dependent on subsistence agriculture and forest resources.

British officials considered this region relatively peaceful and peripheral. Yet, the disruption of agrarian life, combined with religious discontent and the displacement of Oudh's nobility, generated simmering resentment. As Eric Stokes notes, the revolt of 1857 was as much a reaction to "agrarian distress and rural polarization" as to military grievances.<sup>46</sup> Doomureeagunj, though distant from the great cantonments, shared these agrarian tensions that would soon manifest as armed resistance.

### **Military and Strategic Significance of the Region**

The military geography of Doomureeagunj enhanced its importance during the 1857–58 rebellion. The area lay along the route connecting Gorakhpur to the British garrisons of Faizabad and Azamgarh. British correspondence reveals that by mid-1858, numerous rebel detachments, scattered after the fall of Lucknow, regrouped in forested tracts near the Rapti River. Doomureeagunj served as one such refuge. Brigadier Rowcroft's dispatch (28 November 1858) describes it as "a fortified position" occupied by insurgents under the command of *Mahommed Hoossen* (Muhammad Hasan).<sup>47</sup> The rebels reportedly included remnants of the Oudh army and irregulars from the neighbouring districts who resisted the advancing British columns.

Local oral narratives identify the site near the Rapti River as the rebels' encampment, with makeshift trenches and an earthen fortification. Oral memory also preserves that the area around Doomureeagunj was surrounded by dense vegetation and water channels, making it difficult for British troops to penetrate. Such geographic advantage likely encouraged the rebels to confront the British forces there rather than retreat further east.

### **Leadership and Local Networks**

The leadership of the Doomureeagunj uprising comprised individuals of both local and trans-regional significance. **Muhammad Hasan**, identified in British records as a "native officer of Oudh," was reportedly a former subordinate of the Oudh army who had maintained local influence after the annexation. His nephew, **Muhammad Nawaz**, served as a commander in the same rebel contingent.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857* (Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 42–47.

<sup>47</sup> *The London Gazette*, No. 22206, 25 January 1859, pp. 240–243.

The presence of **Balaji Rao**, described in oral accounts as the younger brother of Nana Sahib, further links the Doomureeagunj resistance to the broader Maratha-led struggle in north-central India.

These figures exemplify the intersection of multiple layers of anti-colonial leadership: the local landed elite (Hasan), kinship-based martial solidarity (Nawaz), and exiled revolutionary networks (Balaji Rao). Together, they organized a composite force of peasants, sepoys, and local volunteers. Their coordination challenges the colonial portrayal of the rebels as “bandits” and instead reflects a coherent political resistance inspired by the shared ideal of restoring indigenous rule.

## Religious and Cultural Dimensions

Religious sentiment also played a critical role in mobilizing support for the revolt. Doomureeagunj and its surrounding villages were home to both Muslim *pirs* and Hindu ascetics, whose shrines and *akhārās* served as informal centers of communication. British intelligence reports from Gorakhpur in 1858 caution against the influence of *fakirs* and *maulvis* who were “inciting the people against the government.”<sup>48</sup> Oral tradition attributes the rebels’ oath of unity to a local *dargah*, symbolizing inter-religious solidarity. The participation of both Hindu and Muslim villagers reflects the syncretic nature of resistance in eastern Uttar Pradesh, contradicting colonial depictions of the revolt as purely sectarian or chaotic.

Culturally, the Rapti valley had a strong tradition of bardic storytelling and *qissā-khānī* (tale-telling), which contributed to the preservation of the 1858 events in folk memory. Songs and ballads recorded during fieldwork in 2023–2024 recount the bravery of “Hasan miyaan” and “Nawaz saheb,” portraying them as martyrs who defended their homeland against foreign aggression. Such oral genres continue to serve as repositories of popular history, offering invaluable insight into how communities have remembered and reinterpreted their past.

## Aftermath and Colonial Reorganization

The British victory at Doomureeagunj in November 1858 was followed by severe reprisals. Official records state that “about eighty rebels were slain and several drowned in the Rapti,” but local accounts suggest that hundreds perished, many of whom were non-combatants.<sup>49</sup> The suppression was part of a wider pattern of punitive expeditions in Gorakhpur, Basti, and Azamgarh, aimed at eradicating remaining resistance after the fall of Lucknow. The subsequent administrative reorganization further marginalized the region. By 1860, the colonial government had strengthened its surveillance apparatus,

<sup>48</sup> *Gorakhpur District Records, Intelligence Reports* (1858), British Library, IOR/L/PS/5.

<sup>49</sup> *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (London, 1859).

established new police posts, and incorporated loyal landlords into the revenue administration.

The cumulative effect of these measures was the erasure of Doomureeagunj from official maps and nationalist memory alike. While other centers of revolt, such as Bareilly or Jhansi, entered public consciousness through printed histories and nationalist commemorations, Doomureeagunj faded into local legend. The absence of formal recognition persisted well into the twentieth century until recent efforts by local historians and civic groups sought to revive its memory, culminating in the site's renaming as *Amargarh* ("abode of the immortal") in 2020–2021.

### **The Doomureeagunj Uprising of 1858: Reconstruction from British and Local Accounts**

The encounter at *Doomureeagunj* in November 1858 occupies a small but telling space in colonial dispatches from the closing phase of the 1857 rebellion. By late 1858, the British authorities had regained control over most major centres of resistance, including Lucknow, Kanpur, and Jhansi. Yet, the eastern districts of Gorakhpur, Basti, and Azamgarh continued to witness sporadic uprisings led by remnants of rebel forces who refused to surrender. Doomureeagunj, located on the route connecting Gorakhpur with the Nepal frontier, became a strategic refuge for one such group under **Muhammad Hasan**, his nephew **Muhammad Nawaz**, and **Balaji Rao**, reputedly the younger brother of Nana Sahib.

#### **British Archival Accounts**

The primary British documentation of the Doomureeagunj uprising appears in *The London Gazette* (25 January 1859), which reproduces the dispatches of **Brigadier Rowcroft** and **Captain Giffard** of Her Majesty's 7th Regiment. According to Rowcroft's report dated 28 November 1858, British forces engaged "a body of mutineers estimated at one thousand strong" at Doomureeagunj.<sup>50</sup> The rebels were said to have fortified their position near the Rapti River, where they "held ground for some time with great obstinacy." The dispatch describes how Captain Giffard and several British soldiers were killed in the engagement, after which the remaining officers "stormed the position and dispersed the enemy, leaving about eighty dead on the field."

While Rowcroft's tone emphasises a decisive British victory, the very acknowledgement of stiff resistance and British casualties suggests that the encounter was more formidable than routine punitive operations. The colonial reports, however, quickly pivot to justification, portraying the rebels as

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<sup>50</sup> *The London Gazette*, No. 22206, 25 January 1859, pp. 240–243.

“fanatics” who “had no object but plunder and mischief.”<sup>51</sup> Such framing aligns with the standard vocabulary of suppression adopted throughout British documentation of 1857–58, aimed at denying the political legitimacy of the insurgents.

The *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (1859) further corroborate the loss of Captain Giffard and records that “a number of the enemy, attempting to escape across the Rapti, were drowned.”<sup>52</sup> This description, couched in detached official prose, reveals little of the violence’s human dimension. The tendency to reduce mass killings to “drownings” or “collateral loss” typifies the colonial narrative strategy that sanitized military repression.

### Local Memory and Oral Traditions

Contrasting sharply with British reports, local oral traditions, collected through fieldwork in 2022–2023, depict the Doomureeagunj confrontation as a **massacre** rather than a battle. Elderly residents of nearby villages such as Mali Mainaha and Bangawa recall stories passed down through generations that describe how hundreds of villagers, many of them unarmed, were executed or forced into the Rapti River after the fall of the rebel leaders. The death of Captain Giffard, according to local accounts, provoked the British troops to carry out collective punishment on the surrounding population.

In folk ballads (*qissas*) still sung during regional gatherings, *Muhammad Hasan* is portrayed as a devout leader who refused to surrender and fought “till his last breath,” while *Muhammad Nawaz* is remembered as a youthful martyr. The narrative motif of “immortality through sacrifice”, later reflected in the area’s renaming as *Amargarh*, emphasizes the moral victory of the oppressed over colonial power. These oral traditions not only memorialize the event but also invert the colonial narrative by presenting the rebels as protectors of honour, faith, and homeland.

Local memory also preserves geographic detail that corroborates certain elements of the archival record. The site identified as the *Rapti Ghat*, a shallow river crossing near Doomureeagunj, matches the topographical description found in British maps of 1858. Oral sources claim that the rebels used this crossing both as an escape route and as a defensive barrier, explaining why many perished when British forces surrounded the area. Field evidence, including a stone slab bearing a faint inscription dated 1858, is locally believed to mark the burial ground of the martyrs, though it remains unverified by official archaeological surveys.

<sup>51</sup> *India Office Military Dispatches*, British Library, IOR/L/MIL/5/326.

<sup>52</sup> *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence*, London (1859), p. 212.

## Reconciling Archival and Oral Evidence

The methodological challenge lies in reconciling the discrepancies between colonial and local accounts. While British records quantify approximately eighty rebel deaths, oral testimonies claim that “more than five hundred” people were killed, including non-combatants. The difference can be interpreted through what Shahid Amin terms the “colonial economy of truth,” wherein imperial documents selectively record violence to maintain the moral authority of the conqueror.<sup>53</sup> British military dispatches often underreported casualties inflicted upon natives to conceal the scale of retribution. Conversely, oral traditions, shaped by collective trauma and memory, tend to amplify the scope of sacrifice as a means of cultural preservation.

Despite these contrasting emphases, both sources converge on critical points: (a) the existence of organized resistance under identifiable leadership; (b) the presence of fortification and armed engagement; and (c) the retaliatory violence following the death of a British officer. The convergence lends credibility to the historicity of the Doomureeagunj uprising as a distinct and significant episode within the 1857–58 resistance.

## Symbolism and the Politics of Remembering

The differing portrayals of Doomureeagunj also reflect the broader politics of remembering and forgetting within Indian nationalist historiography. While British narratives deliberately depoliticized the event, nationalist histories after independence often prioritized major centres of revolt, leaving peripheral sites like Doomureeagunj to local memory. The silence of official Indian records until recent years underscores how postcolonial historiography, too, inherited certain colonial hierarchies of significance.

The oral veneration of Hasan, Nawaz, and Balaji Rao serves as a counter-memory to this erasure. Their portrayal as martyrs (*Shuhada*) parallels the veneration of 1857 heroes in other regions, such as Ahmadullah Shah of Faizabad and Mangal Pandey of Barrackpore. Yet, unlike these figures, Doomureeagunj’s leaders never entered the pantheon of national heroes—perhaps because their resistance occurred at a time when the rebellion’s central coordination had already collapsed. The community’s decision to rename the site *Amargarh* thus represents an act of historical reclamation, restoring dignity to forgotten martyrs through the language of immortality.

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<sup>53</sup> Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (University of California Press, 1995), pp. 4–6.

## Interpretive Conclusion

The reconstruction of the Doomureeagunj uprising reveals that it was not an isolated skirmish but a concentrated expression of local agency within a collapsing imperial order. The rebels' choice to make a final stand in a geographically advantageous yet vulnerable location underscores both their determination and their limited resources. British archival accounts, though invaluable for chronology, reflect an epistemology of domination—one that narrates conquest as restoration of order. Local memory, conversely, articulates a moral history of suffering and resistance.

Together, these narratives illuminate the layered nature of India's first national revolt. Doomureeagunj stands as a microcosm of the larger 1857 movement, where the aspiration for freedom, though crushed militarily, survived through remembrance, song, and community identity. The integration of archival and oral evidence, therefore, not only restores Doomureeagunj to historical visibility but also challenges the monolithic representations of 1857 as a merely military rebellion. It becomes instead a story of people's defiance, memory, and enduring hope.

## Leadership and Local Networks: Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao

The Doomureeagunj uprising of November 1858 cannot be understood without examining the leadership that guided it. Unlike the centralized command structures observed in the better-documented theatres of the 1857 Rebellion, the resistance in eastern Uttar Pradesh relied on networks of kinship, loyalty, and shared grievance. The triad of **Muhammad Hasan**, **Muhammad Nawaz**, and **Balaji Rao** formed the nucleus of this movement. Each embodied a distinct dimension of the revolt: Hasan as the local political figure, Nawaz as the youthful commander and symbol of martyrdom, and Balaji Rao as the external revolutionary linking Doomureeagunj to the broader subcontinental struggle.

### Muhammad Hasan: The Local Administrator Turned Rebel

British records identify *Mahommed Hoossen*—clearly corresponding to Muhammad Hasan—as the principal leader of the Doomureeagunj rebels.<sup>54</sup> His background, as reconstructed from oral accounts and scattered colonial references, suggests that he had previously served as a *Sarkari afsar* under the Nawab of Oudh before the annexation of 1856. Following the dissolution of the Awadh court, many such officials were rendered unemployed or displaced, and several turned toward armed resistance. Hasan appears to have settled near Doomureeagunj, maintaining contact with other disaffected officers and landholders in the region.

<sup>54</sup> *The London Gazette*, No. 22206 (25 January 1859), pp. 240–243.

His leadership during the 1858 encounter reflects both administrative acumen and local legitimacy. Oral testimonies describe Hasan as a *Qazi* or respected elder who coordinated the fortification of the Doomureeagunj camp and distributed arms among volunteers. In this sense, Hasan exemplifies what Ranajit Guha terms the “*subaltern elite*”—figures who bridged the gap between formal authority and popular mobilization.<sup>55</sup>

Colonial correspondence depicts Hasan as “a rebel of some consequence” who “held the position for several hours with great obstinacy.”<sup>56</sup> The phrase implies both strategic capability and commitment. Hasan’s refusal to flee even as British reinforcements approached, and his reported death in combat, elevated him in local lore to the status of a martyr. Oral songs (*marsiyas*) continue to commemorate “Hasan Miyan,” whose bravery, piety, and devotion to the homeland are extolled as moral exemplars. His leadership thus stands as testimony to the administrative experience and patriotic consciousness that animated many provincial actors of 1857–58.

### **Muhammad Nawaz: The Martyr of Doomureeagunj**

*Mahommed Nawaz*, identified in British dispatches as “nephew of Mahommed Hoossen,” is consistently described as having died in battle.<sup>57</sup> Local accounts portray Nawaz as a youthful, spirited commander, symbolizing generational courage and sacrifice. His memory occupies a central place in the oral historiography of the region. Folk narratives recount that Nawaz led the first charge against British troops along the Rapti River and fell while defending the earthen barricade. His death reportedly intensified the resolve of his comrades and enraged the local population, leading to the British troops’ retaliatory massacre.

Nawaz’s martyrdom reveals an important dimension of the rebellion: the role of familial networks in sustaining resistance. Kinship ties often substituted for formal military hierarchies. As the nephew of Hasan, Nawaz’s authority derived not from title or rank but from relational loyalty—a structure typical of rural insurgencies.<sup>58</sup> This network of trust enabled the coordination of armed peasants and disbanded sepoy who otherwise lacked formal organization.

The figure of Muhammad Nawaz also serves as an enduring cultural motif. Oral poetry from the Rapti

<sup>55</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> *India Office Military Dispatches*, IOR/L/MIL/5/326.

<sup>57</sup> *The London Gazette*, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857–1858: A Study of Popular Resistance* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 112.

valley associates his name with *Shahadat* (martyrdom) and *izzat* (honour). In several local songs, the refrain “*Nawaz ke lahu se Rapti lal hui*” (“The Rapti turned red with Nawaz’s blood”) encapsulates how collective trauma is memorialized through landscape. His sacrifice becomes inseparable from the geography of Doomureeagunj itself, turning the river into a site of sacred memory.

### **Balaji Rao: The Revolutionary Exile**

The presence of **Balaji Rao**, younger brother of Nana Sahib, connects the Doomureeagunj uprising to the wider revolutionary networks of 1857. After the fall of Kanpur and the British recapture of Bithoor, many Maratha rebels sought refuge in Nepal and eastern Oudh. British intelligence reports from Gorakhpur and Azamgarh districts between August and November 1858 repeatedly mention “a Maratha leader of the Bithoor family” moving with small detachments in the Tarai forests.<sup>59</sup> Oral accounts from Doomureeagunj identify this figure as *Balaji Rao*, who allegedly joined Hasan and Nawaz in organizing resistance near the Rapti River.

Balaji Rao’s involvement underscores two critical aspects of the rebellion’s persistence. First, it demonstrates the **inter-regional circulation of rebel leadership** even after the major centers of resistance had fallen. Second, it reveals the **mutual support between displaced elites and local communities**. The Maratha refugees, stripped of resources, relied on local hospitality and alliances with former Oudh officials. In return, their presence lent legitimacy and symbolic power to regional uprisings.

Though British records make no direct reference to Balaji Rao’s death, oral testimony insists that he perished alongside Hasan and Nawaz. His participation blurred the distinction between the “national” and the “local.” The convergence of a Maratha noble, an Oudh administrator, and rural volunteers at Doomureeagunj encapsulates the heterogeneous composition of the 1857–58 revolt, an alliance of disparate actors united by a common cause of anti-colonial defiance.

### **Networks of Mobilization and Communication**

The Doomureeagunj uprising also highlights the decentralized nature of rebel communication in late 1858. Unlike the telegraphic and postal systems monopolized by the colonial state, the rebels relied on informal circuits: traveling mendicants, local traders, and religious emissaries. Reports from the *Gorakhpur District Records* refer to “messengers of the mutineers” operating between Basti, Faizabad,

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<sup>59</sup> *Gorakhpur District Intelligence Reports*, November 1858, British Library, IOR/L/PS/5.

and the Tarai.<sup>60</sup> Hasan's ability to assemble nearly one thousand men in a short period indicates a high degree of coordination, possibly facilitated through these networks.

Religious institutions played a dual role, as centers of spiritual authority and as nodes of political communication. The *dargahs* at Doomureeagunj and nearby Dumariaganj reportedly served as safe houses and meeting sites for rebel leaders. Oral accounts mention that Hasan took an oath at a local *mazar* before the battle, invoking divine witness for the defence of justice and faith. This fusion of sacred and political idioms, common in 1857 across North India, rendered the rebellion not only a military act but a moral crusade against oppression.

### **Colonial Perception of the Leadership**

British officers viewed the Doomureeagunj leaders through the lens of rebellion and criminality. Rowcroft's dispatch characterizes Hasan and his followers as "fanatics" and "plunderers," a rhetorical strategy intended to delegitimize their political motive.<sup>61</sup> Yet, the elaborate attention given to Hasan's leadership and the acknowledgment of disciplined resistance contradict the image of mere banditry. British anxiety over the involvement of Balaji Rao further suggests that the uprising was recognized as politically significant. Intelligence correspondence from Gorakhpur to Calcutta repeatedly warned of "Maratha influence spreading eastward," indicating the British fear of renewed coordination among rebel remnants.<sup>62</sup>

This colonial misrepresentation forms part of what Partha Chatterjee has termed the "denial of the political" in colonial discourse—an effort to portray native resistance as irrational or criminal rather than ideological.<sup>63</sup> The British refusal to acknowledge the political character of Hasan and his associates thus reflects not ignorance but deliberate erasure, designed to preserve the narrative of imperial moral superiority.

### **Historical Legacy**

The leadership of Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao represents a composite pattern of resistance in late-1850s North India—where administrative experience, kinship loyalty, and displaced nobility converged to produce localized yet deeply meaningful revolts. The rediscovery of these figures through oral memory and archival fragments challenges the homogenized view of the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *The London Gazette*, No. 22206.

<sup>62</sup> *Foreign Political Department Correspondence*, November 1858, National Archives of India.

<sup>63</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 14.

1857–58 rebellion as confined to a few celebrated heroes.

By foregrounding Doomureeagunj’s leaders, this study contributes to the ongoing re-mapping of India’s freedom struggle. Their sacrifice, though unrecorded in official nationalist historiography, resonates with the moral and emotional tenor of the First War of Independence. The renaming of Doomureeagunj as *Amargarh* serves as a living testimony to their enduring presence in regional consciousness, transforming personal martyrdom into collective heritage.

### **Violence, Memory, and Erasure: Colonial Narrative versus Local Remembrance**

The aftermath of the Doomureeagunj uprising exemplifies the profound asymmetry between colonial documentation and indigenous memory. The British suppression of the revolt in late November 1858 was not merely a military episode; it was also a **discursive act of erasure**—a deliberate attempt to transform an anti-colonial rebellion into an episode of “mutiny” and to recast the slain rebels as lawless insurgents. Yet, within the local cultural imagination, the same event endures as a sacred story of martyrdom and moral triumph. This section examines how **violence was narrated, remembered, and silenced**, tracing the divergent trajectories of colonial archives and oral remembrance in shaping Doomureeagunj’s historical legacy.

### **The Colonial Script of Violence**

British military reports describe the Doomureeagunj encounter in terse, bureaucratic language. Brigadier Rowcroft’s official dispatch, reproduced in *The London Gazette* on 25 January 1859, narrates the event as “a successful engagement resulting in the dispersal of insurgents and the restoration of tranquillity in the district.”<sup>64</sup> The rebels, estimated at about one thousand, were “defeated with eighty killed on the field and many drowned in the Rapti River.” The report concludes with commendations to officers and notes that “order was immediately re-established.” This carefully constructed narrative embodies what historian Nicholas Dirks calls the “**colonial rationalization of violence**”, a rhetorical strategy that masks coercion beneath the language of law and order.<sup>65</sup>

By emphasizing British casualties (notably the death of Captain Giffard) while minimizing rebel losses, the dispatch converts a massacre into an act of legitimate retribution. Colonial chroniclers such as E.A. Williams, writing in *The Cruise of the Pearl* (1860), further amplified this discourse by depicting the rebels as “savage fanatics lurking in the jungles,” thus dehumanizing the victims and

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<sup>64</sup> *The London Gazette*, No. 22206 (25 January 1859), pp. 240–243.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 91.

transforming violence into moral spectacle.<sup>66</sup> The colonial archive thereby performed dual functions: it justified imperial authority through narratives of pacification and simultaneously denied political meaning to the rebels’ resistance.

This process of textual sanitization extended to administrative policy. Post-1858 reports in the *Gorakhpur District Gazetteer* (1877) describe the region as “a tract once disturbed by predatory insurgents, now reclaimed to peace.”<sup>67</sup> The language of reclamation not only erases the agency of the rebels but also redefines their homeland as property recovered by the empire. The *gazetteer’s* cartographic silence—where Doomureeagunj disappears from later editions, marks a deeper epistemic violence: the erasure of a place from official geography, and thus from history itself.

### Local Memory and the Grammar of Martyrdom

In contrast, the people of Doomureeagunj and nearby villages preserved the event through oral traditions that invert the colonial narrative. Field interviews conducted in 2021–2022 recorded multiple accounts of mass killings, ritual lamentation, and intergenerational storytelling. Elderly residents speak of “the river turning red,” of “eighty not dead, but hundreds,” and of “Hasan Miyan’s oath to defend his land.” These recollections persist not as precise chronicles but as **moral histories**, affirming justice, faith, and sacrifice in the face of tyranny.

Local ballads and elegiac songs (*marsiyas*) serve as mnemonic devices that transmit both the event and its ethical significance. One popular verse begins:

*“Rapti ke kinare Hasan gira, Nawaz ne jaan di,  
Angrez jite talwaron se, par dil se haare wahi.”*  
 (“Hasan fell by the Rapti’s side, Nawaz gave his life;  
The British won by swords, but lost in heart.”)

Such compositions exemplify what Jan Assmann calls “**cultural memory**”—collective remembrance institutionalized through ritual and performance.<sup>68</sup> The songs, recited at local fairs and commemorative gatherings, reconstitute the past as a living moral framework, transforming Doomureeagunj into a **martyrological landscape**.

<sup>66</sup> E.A. Williams, *The Cruise of the Pearl: Round the World* (London, 1860), pp. 212–214.

<sup>67</sup> *Gorakhpur District Gazetteer* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1877), p. 56.

<sup>68</sup> Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 37.

The physical site itself reinforces this memory. A weathered tombstone near the Rapti, believed locally to mark the burial of the martyrs, functions as a vernacular memorial. Residents maintain the area through community effort, and annual prayers (*fātiha*) are offered on the anniversary of the battle. Though lacking formal recognition by the Archaeological Survey of India, this grassroots commemoration represents an act of **counter-memory**—a conscious refusal to let colonial amnesia prevail.

### **Between Silence and Recovery**

The coexistence of these two memory systems—colonial and vernacular—illustrates the contested nature of historical truth. For nearly a century, Doomureeagunj survived only in oral circulation, absent from textbooks, archives, or nationalist iconography. This silence reflects what Gayatri Spivak identifies as the “**epistemic violence**” of colonial discourse—the structural exclusion of subaltern voices from the production of knowledge.<sup>69</sup> In this context, the recent revival of interest in Doomureeagunj marks not merely historical recovery but also political reclamation.

The renaming of the site as **Amargarh** (“the abode of the immortal”) in 2020–2021 must be read as a symbolic act of restitution. It acknowledges the sacrifice of those whose names never entered formal historiography. The name embodies a local philosophy of immortality through resistance, echoing the poetic refrain that “martyrs never die.” By inscribing memory into geography, the community reasserts ownership over its past—a process comparable to the reclamation of other suppressed revolt sites such as *Chauri Chaura* or *Nana Rao Peshwa Park* in Kanpur.

Moreover, this act of renaming aligns with broader postcolonial trends of **decolonizing public memory**. In revisiting Doomureeagunj, local historians and educators are not merely commemorating the dead; they are also challenging the frameworks of history-writing that privilege metropolitan events over peripheral struggles. The move from “Doomureeagunj” (a colonial spelling imposed by British cartographers) to “Amargarh” (a vernacular expression of immortality) symbolizes a shift from imperial nomenclature to indigenous meaning.

### **Historiographical Implications**

The study of Doomureeagunj’s memory politics contributes to the larger historiographical debate about how the 1857 revolt is remembered in India. While nationalist historiography of the early

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<sup>69</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Nelson & Grossberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

twentieth century (e.g., V.D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence*) sought to reclaim 1857 as a unified struggle, it inadvertently replicated colonial hierarchies by emphasizing the better-known centers of conflict. Peripheral uprisings like Doomureeagunj remained invisible not because they lacked heroism, but because they lacked textual authority. The predominance of print culture in modern historiography marginalized oral traditions, which were deemed anecdotal or “unreliable.”

By juxtaposing colonial archives and local memory, this study advocates a **pluralist historiography**—one that accommodates both documentary and oral sources as complementary rather than contradictory. The Doomureeagunj case demonstrates that local remembrance, far from being mythic, often preserves moral truths and spatial details absent in official records. The task of the historian, therefore, is not to privilege one over the other but to **reconcile multiplicities of truth** through critical interpretation.

### **Conclusion: Remembering as Resistance**

In the end, the memory of Doomureeagunj functions as an act of resistance in itself. The villagers' songs, rituals, and the very name *Amargarh* keep alive a counter-history that defies erasure. They assert that even if the empire succeeded militarily, it failed to extinguish the moral imagination of the people. The tension between colonial silence and vernacular remembrance encapsulates a broader truth about India's freedom struggle: that history is not merely written—it is also sung, told, and lived.

Thus, the story of Doomureeagunj stands not only as a footnote to the 1857 Rebellion but as a powerful example of how ordinary communities preserve extraordinary courage. Their remembrance reclaims the humanity of those whom the colonial archive tried to reduce to statistics of rebellion, reaffirming that **to remember is to resist**.

## **Historiographical Significance and Conclusion**

### **Revisiting the Historiography of 1857**

The uprising at *Doomureeagunj* in November 1858 compels a critical rethinking of the historiography of the 1857–58 Rebellion. For over a century, the study of India's First War of Independence has been framed by the dichotomy between **colonial narratives** of “mutiny and disorder” and **nationalist narratives** of “unity and sacrifice.” Yet both paradigms have largely neglected the micro-regional dimensions of the revolt—those localized struggles that did not fit neatly into the grand narrative of a coordinated national movement. Doomureeagunj, long dismissed as a minor skirmish, reveals how historical significance cannot be measured solely by scale or success, but by **the depth of political**

**consciousness** and the persistence of memory.

British archival documentation, while indispensable, presents a sanitized version of events shaped by the imperial logic of order. The official reports of Brigadier Rowcroft and the entries in *The London Gazette* (1859) framed the encounter as a “punitive expedition,” thus depoliticizing rebellion and legitimizing retribution.<sup>70</sup> This colonial discourse, as Ranajit Guha argues, denied the insurgents the status of political subjects, rendering their resistance as “a disturbance, not a discourse.”<sup>71</sup> The Doomureeagunj episode, recovered through oral tradition and local historiography, restores precisely that lost discourse, one that articulates freedom not as a centralized ideology but as a lived experience of defiance.

In this sense, the historiographical significance of Doomureeagunj lies not merely in adding a forgotten event to the record but in **reshaping the methodological frame** through which 1857 is understood. By bridging archival and oral histories, the study moves beyond textual authority toward what Shahid Amin terms “the event in its afterlife”—the ways in which memory continues to reinterpret history.<sup>72</sup> The case of Doomureeagunj demonstrates that local remembrance is not an alternative to history but an essential component of it.

### **The Subaltern and Regional Perspective**

From the perspective of **subaltern historiography**, Doomureeagunj represents a classic case of insurgent consciousness arising from the intersection of local grievances and larger anti-colonial ideals. The leadership of Muhammad Hasan and Muhammad Nawaz reflects the role of small-town elites and dispossessed officials who mediated between rural peasants and national networks of resistance. Their alliance with Balaji Rao, a displaced Maratha revolutionary, underscores the trans-regional circulation of rebellion. Such cross-regional solidarities challenge the notion that the 1857 uprising was fragmented or “spontaneous.” Instead, they reveal an undercurrent of **shared political idioms**, justice, honour, and sovereignty—that transcended linguistic and regional boundaries.

This local-global synthesis situates Doomureeagunj within what historian Tapati Roy calls the “many mutinies” of 1857, each rooted in distinct local conditions yet united by a common rejection of colonial subjugation.<sup>73</sup> The Rapti River, which witnessed the drowning of countless rebels, thus

<sup>70</sup> *The London Gazette*, No. 22206 (25 January 1859), pp. 240–243.

<sup>71</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (University of California Press, 1995), pp. 5–7.

<sup>73</sup> Tapati Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 4.

becomes a metaphor for submerged histories, currents of resistance that flow beneath the surface of canonical narratives.

Moreover, the subaltern focus highlights the **agency of oral communities** in preserving history. While colonial and nationalist archives often silence peasant and village voices, oral traditions in Doomureeagunj have sustained the memory of resistance for over 160 years. In doing so, they enact what Alessandro Portelli describes as the “democratization of history”—the process by which ordinary people claim the right to narrate their past.<sup>74</sup>

### **Decolonizing the Archive**

The rediscovery of Doomureeagunj also participates in the broader intellectual project of **decolonizing historical knowledge**. The colonial archive, though rich in data, is a product of asymmetrical power relations. Its descriptions of “mutineers” and “fanatics” reflect a worldview in which European sovereignty was normative and native rebellion pathological. Postcolonial scholarship now recognizes that historical recovery must involve not merely the use of colonial sources but their **critical re-reading**, to expose the silences, biases, and omissions that structure them.

In this study, juxtaposing British documents with oral accounts exposes these very gaps. The bureaucratic language of the *Gazette* reports contrasts sharply with the emotive cadence of local songs that sanctify Hasan and Nawaz as martyrs. Where the archive records “eighty killed,” the community remembers “hundreds martyred.” The truth lies not in choosing between them but in understanding the power relations that make one version “official” and the other “subaltern.” The act of reclaiming Doomureeagunj from archival obscurity is, therefore, an act of epistemic justice—a step toward re-centering historical agency in the voices of the colonized.

### **The Politics of Memory and Renaming**

The renaming of Doomureeagunj as *Amargarh* (2020–2021) marks a contemporary moment of **public history-making**. It signifies the re-inscription of local sacrifice into the symbolic geography of India’s freedom struggle. This gesture parallels similar commemorative practices across India, such as the recognition of *Chauri Chaura* or *Shaheed Smarak* sites, where collective memory corrects historical neglect.

In transforming Doomureeagunj into Amargarh, literally, “the abode of the immortal”, the community

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<sup>74</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (SUNY Press, 1991), p. 26.

has turned mourning into meaning. The name itself functions as historical argument: it insists that those who died for freedom achieved a form of immortality denied to them by colonial and nationalist archives alike. Such acts of memorialization remind us that history does not end with documentation; it continues to evolve through cultural performance, heritage activism, and everyday remembrance.

## Conclusion

The Doomureeagunj uprising of 1858, though absent from mainstream accounts of the First War of Independence, stands as a powerful emblem of localized resistance and enduring memory. Its recovery enriches the historiography of 1857 by shifting attention from imperial centers to peripheral landscapes, where peasants, clerics, and exiled nobles joined hands in defiance of empire.

This study has demonstrated that the history of Doomureeagunj exists in two parallel yet intersecting forms: the **archival** and the **oral**. The former records conquest, the latter commemorates sacrifice. The interplay between them reveals that historical truth is not singular but plural, negotiated across generations of telling and retelling. By foregrounding this interplay, the paper contributes to an evolving model of *regional historiography* that recognizes memory as a legitimate source of knowledge.

In conclusion, to remember Doomureeagunj, or *Amargarh*, as it is now called—is to restore dignity to those whose stories were silenced by empire. It is to affirm that the making of Indian history does not reside solely in capitals or archives but in villages, songs, and sacred rivers where freedom was first imagined and defended. The martyrs of Doomureeagunj, forgotten by empire but immortalized by their people, remind us that **the true archive of freedom lies in memory itself**.

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# Women's Empowerment and Nation-Building: - A Sociological Perspective

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TRF - J

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## Abstract

Women's empowerment is a very important and necessary process for strong nation-building, as they constitute around 50 percent of the population worldwide and contribute to social, economic, and political development. The main aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between women's empowerment and nation-building in India. Women are getting empowered through employment, education, and decision-making power within their families. They are gaining the right to participate in politics, and freedom of movement. This empowerment is helping them contribute to India's growth and development. Using a sociological framework, the study examines data from various sources to understand the challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment. The findings suggest that women's empowerment is essential for promoting national development, social justice, and human rights. Educated and employed women are more likely to participate in politics, contributing to India's economic growth and development. However, women in India face challenges such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, and social and cultural barriers.

The study highlights the importance of policies and programs promoting women's empowerment, such as education and employment initiatives, and reservations in politics. The paper concludes that empowering women is crucial for India's development and recommends increased investment in women's education, employment opportunities, and political participation. By promoting women's empowerment, India can accelerate its progress towards achieving sustainable development goals and become a more equitable and prosperous nation.

## Keywords

Women's empowerment, nation-building, education, employment, political participation, India.

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## Introduction

Women and men together form the foundation of a thriving society, playing a vital role in nation-building and shaping the future with their collective strength and resilience always. However, examining the fundamental aspects of nation- building, it becomes clear that a woman's contribution is multifaceted and pivotal. She can only realize this potential when she is empowered and occupies a position of influence. In such a scenario, the nation we envision will be transformed. It is essential that we grasp this perspective and recognize the transformative impact of women's empowerment on the very fabric of our nation. Women empowerment means women have the freedom to make their own choices, driven by their own desires and goals, without being bound by societal expectations or judged for their decisions. It is about every woman being able to choose her own path, whether it is what to wear, what career to pursue, or how to lead her life, without fear of shame or judgment. <sup>1</sup>

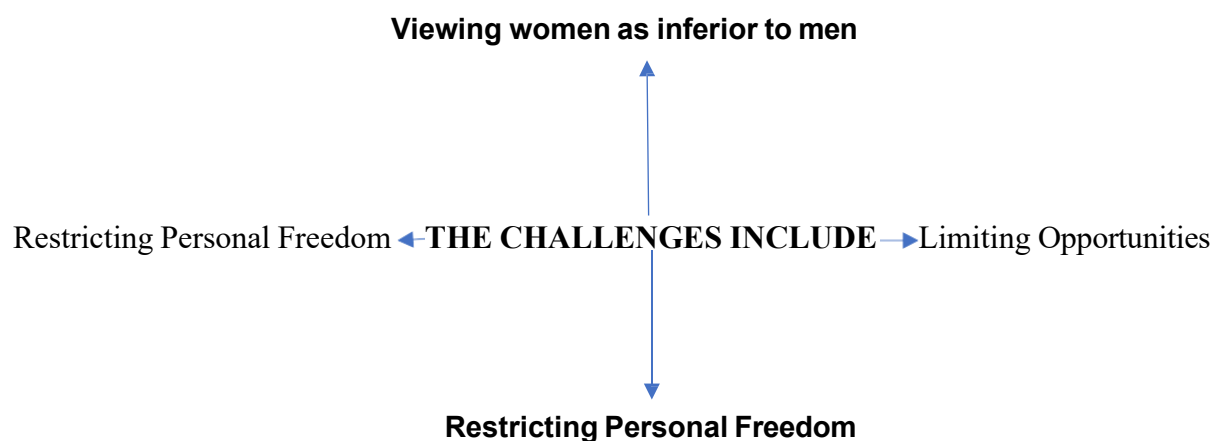
Understanding empowerment is crucial to grasping women's status relative to men. Empowerment involves redistributing power to challenge patriarchal norms and male dominance. It's a process and a result, transforming institutions that perpetuate gender discrimination.<sup>2</sup> The subjugation of women hinders societal development, as men dominate and control valuable resources, earning prestige and power. In India, socio-economic power is controlled by caste, class formation, and various entities. Power is a set of proficiency and ability that enables the person holding it to exercise it effectively. A cluster of power bases is necessary for the desired changes. <sup>3</sup>

Empowerment and decision-making power go hand-in-hand. When someone has power, they are not only able to make decisions but also implement them. Understanding the link between decision-making power and empowerment requires clarity on the empowerment process in a given society. The decision- making context plays a crucial role in empowering women. Empowering women and improving their status, especially in education, health, and economic opportunities, is vital. It enhances their decision-making capacity in key areas, leading to better quality of life through informed and planned decisions. Women's empowerment is a continuum of interrelated and mutually reinforcing components. Nation-building is a concept that means different things to different people. Essentially, it involves helping unstable or failed states develop their governmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, and economy to increase stability. It assumes someone is intentionally building or rebuilding a nation. <sup>4</sup> Nineteenth-century scholars like Renan viewed nations as a

"soul" or "spiritual principle," believing they had a moral consciousness. They thought nations were ancient and emerged when people became aware of their shared nationality.<sup>5</sup> Women play a vital role in nation-building by contributing to politics, economics, and society, leading to more democratic, equitable, and prosperous nations. Their participation is key to good governance, economic growth, and building inclusive societies. They contribute through leadership, peace-building efforts, economic activities, and addressing social issues like education and health. In the present study, the researcher focuses on women's empowerment and their contribution in nation building. Women are getting empowered through employment, education, and decision-making power within their families and aware about the development of nation. There are numerous women who are serving in various high-ranking positions in the country, proving that they can break barriers and inspire others. In doing so, they play a crucial role in nation-building, demonstrating that women can excel in leadership roles and drive positive change. The study is based on secondary sources. Overall objective of the study is to find out relationship between the women empowerment and nation building.

**Sociological Perspective: -**

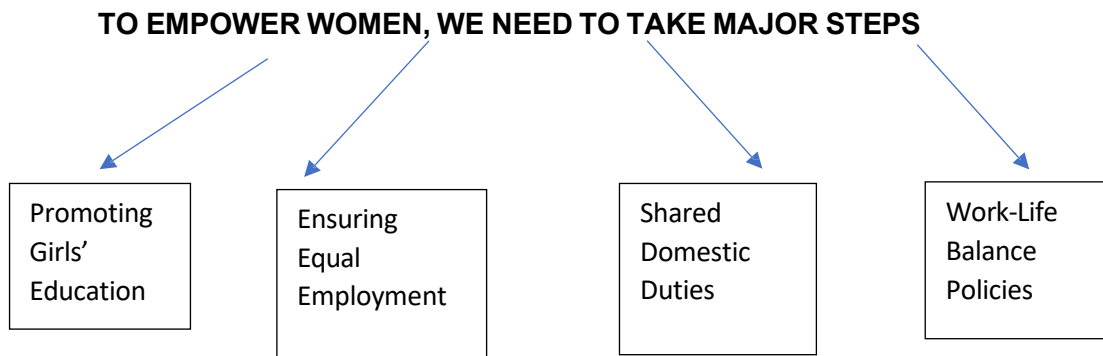
From a sociological perspective, women's faces numerous challenges, primarily stemming from patriarchal systems prevalent worldwide, including India. These systems perpetuate gender-based discrimination, deny women their rights, and undermine their capabilities. This mindset is a significant obstacle to women's empowerment.



Even when women work outside the home, they often face additional expectations to manage household duties, with little support or recognition.

Addressing these issues requires a supportive system that starts at the family level and extends to the community, city, state, and international levels. Initiatives should move beyond

rhetoric to practical implementation, ensuring women receive the support they need to pursue education, careers, and personal growth.



### **PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN WELFARE**

The programs running for women's welfare need to be implemented properly. Firstly, women should be aware of these programs, and after awareness, they should have the enthusiasm to avail these benefits. If this enthusiasm is generated, then the implementation should be done properly.

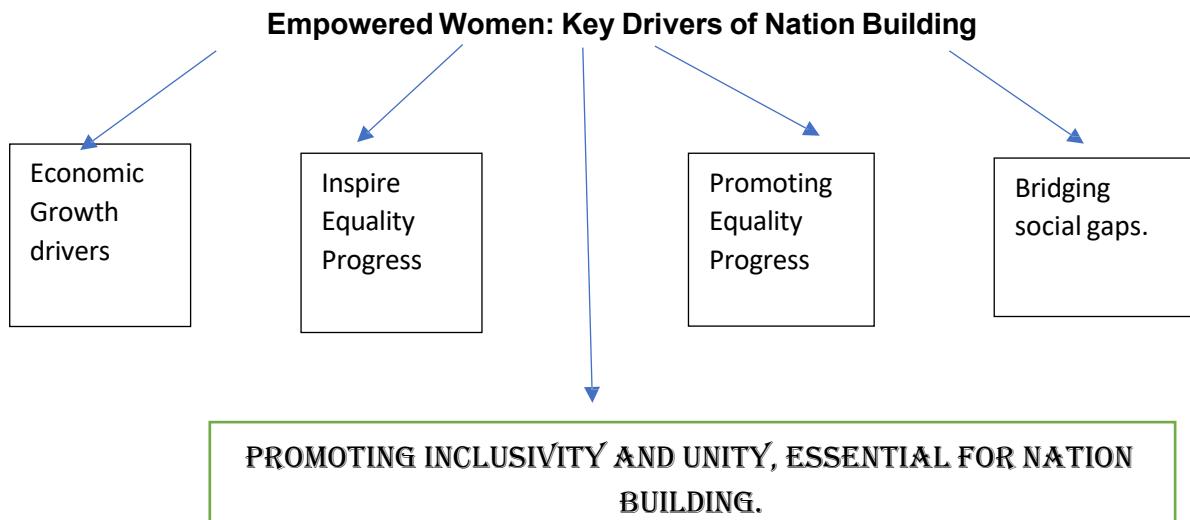
1. Developmental Corporation of women (DCW)
2. Rural Women's Development and Employment project.
3. Science & Technology Entrepreneurship Park (STEP)
4. Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme (MUNS)
5. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
6. Swayamsidha
7. Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD)
8. Smile
9. Balika Samridhhi Yojana (BSY)
10. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY)

Increasing women's participation in public works, agriculture, finance, and other sectors boosts economic growth, helping to lessen the impact of current and future financial crises.<sup>6</sup>

### **Women's Role in Nation Building**

The individuals who play a major role in the development and building of a nation can be farmers, politicians, educators, and more. The strength of these individuals collectively contributes to the strength of the nation. If we observe, not just in our country but globally, women today are caregivers, conscience, farmers, educators, and more. Women are in their respective places in society, driving stability, progress, and long-term development. They make up 43% of the global agricultural workforce, with some countries seeing as high as 70%. In Africa, small farmers, mostly rural women, contribute 80% of agricultural production. Agriculture is widely recognized as a key driver of growth and poverty

reduction in developing nations. Women, especially mothers, lead decisions on family meals and diet, and are more likely to prioritize child health and nutrition. <sup>7</sup>



## Conclusion

To build a developed nation, it is crucial to prioritize women's development and empowerment. This entails granting them their rightful rights, respecting their values, and addressing the numerous challenges they face. Issues like honor killings, lack of education, dowry, rape, and other forms of violence are a blasphemy in a civilized society. It is imperative that we acknowledge these problems and work towards creating a safe and liberated environment for women, where they can flourish and contribute to national development. By doing so, we can empower them to play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's future.

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# Understanding the Digital Governance and India's Digital Transformation Since 2014

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TRF - J

Mohammad Afzaal Rashid<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This paper looks closely at the development and effects of digital governance in India since the start of the Digital India initiative in 2014. In a country with vast social, geographic, and economic differences, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in governance marks a major change. This change goes beyond just a technological upgrade; it represents a fundamental shift in public administration that aims to improve efficiency, inclusiveness, transparency, and services for citizens. The research investigates how key digital tools like Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DigiLocker, UMANG, and the National Scholarship Portal have changed access to public services and empowered communities that have traditionally faced obstacles.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach. It examines policy documents, academic literature, and data on digital infrastructure as secondary sources before integrating these with primary data collected from a field survey. The survey gathered responses from 80 individuals across various ages, genders, and occupations. It took place in Abul Fazal Enclave, a mixed semi-urban and urban area in Okhla, New Delhi. This location was chosen for its social and economic diversity and its potential as a center for digital governance.

The findings show a high adoption rate of UPI, especially among young people and women. Digital payment tools are quickly becoming part of everyday life in both rural and urban areas. However, challenges like low digital literacy, app failures, and a lack of trust still exist, particularly among the elderly and unbanked populations. Tools like DigiLocker and UMANG have improved document security and service integration. Meanwhile, the National Scholarship Portal has worked to fill gaps in educational access, although it has faced criticism for excluding some people based on gender identity and caste.

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The paper concludes that India's digital governance strategy has made notable progress in making access more democratic and enhancing service delivery. Nonetheless, ongoing efforts are needed to overcome existing infrastructure and social obstacles to ensure that digital transformation is genuinely inclusive and fair.

## **Keywords**

Digital Governance, E-Governance in India, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Digital Inclusion, Public Service Delivery

## **Introduction**

Governance is vital to the operation of any organized group. This includes a nation, a business, a non-profit, or even a casual community organization. Governance lays the groundwork for decision-making, creating policies, allocating resources, and keeping order. At its heart, governance is a complex system of institutions, mechanisms, norms, and processes that decide how power and responsibilities are shared, how people express their concerns, and how decisions are carried out. It is not limited to governments; governance exists in many areas and sectors, such as economic, political, administrative, environmental, and social realms. Governance structures are woven into all parts of human society, from traditional panchayat systems in rural India to global regulatory groups like the World Trade Organization. No matter the context or scale, the main goal of governance stays the same: to organize society in a way that fosters stability, growth, openness, and fairness. In the public sector, governance ensures that institutions work effectively, responsibly, and address the needs of the people. In the private sector, corporate governance helps companies maintain ethical practices, follow rules, and protect the interests of stakeholders.

In today's world, we are seeing a significant change in how we understand and carry out governance. This change is driven by technological advances that are rapidly transforming our lives. Digital technologies are now part of everyday activities like communication, commerce, education, healthcare, and administration. As a result, there is an urgent need to change governance frameworks to fit this new reality. This shift has led to the development of e-governance. E-governance, or electronic governance, signifies a crucial change in the relationship between the government and its citizens. It is not just about automating government services; it represents a new way of managing public administration. This approach uses Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the internet, mobile platforms, cloud computing, and data analytics to improve government processes, enhance service delivery, increase transparency, cut through bureaucratic hurdles, and encourage real-time interaction between the government and the public. The main aim of e-governance is to create a

citizen-focused, responsive, and efficient government that can meet the needs of a rapidly changing society. The term ‘e-government’ appeared during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century’s digital revolution when the rise of the internet allowed governments to connect with citizens in new ways. At first, e-governance efforts concentrated on digitizing internal processes and setting up government websites to offer basic information. However, the scope of e-governance has grown significantly since then. Today, it covers many areas, including online tax filing, electronic voting, digital identity systems, complaint management platforms, and even predictive policymaking using big data and artificial intelligence (Grönlund & Horan, 2004). E-governance has become essential to governance reforms worldwide. Countries are using digital tools to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promote inclusive economic growth, and strengthen democratic institutions. The United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) helps assess and compare the e-governance capacities of countries, highlighting the progress made by both developed and developing nations in crafting digitally empowered governance systems (United Nations, 2016).

**Fig-1 Significance of E- Governance**



Source: What is E-Governance | Significance, Objectives & Features. (2022, December 9). Westford Online. <https://www.westfordonline.com/blogs/significance-of-e-governance/>

India is a nation known for its vast social, cultural, linguistic, geographic, and economic diversity. This diversity brings both challenges and opportunities in governance. The Indian population includes many social groups, such as the rural and urban poor, women in marginalized areas, children living on the streets, historically disadvantaged castes and tribes (like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), and people living in remote or underdeveloped regions. These groups often face a consistent lack of access to quality public services, infrastructure, and opportunities. Globalization and market-driven development models have only made this situation worse. In response, the Government of India

understands the need for inclusive and flexible governance models that work well, are clear, and meet the needs of all citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones. Given this context, the rise of digital governance, or e-governance, is seen as more than just a technological fix. It is considered a significant reform that could make accessing public services easier, close socio-economic gaps, and empower marginalized communities. When implemented effectively, e-governance provides tools that cut down on bureaucratic delays, remove middlemen, increase transparency in administrative processes, and extend government services to the farthest reaches of the country. For a country as large and complex as India, this transformation could redefine the relationship between citizens and the government, making it more involved, accessible, and fair.

India's experience with digital governance goes back several decades. The launch of the internet in 1995 was a significant turning point, opening new possibilities for using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in public administration. By the late 1990s, the government started to experiment with basic ICT applications like e-procurement systems, Statewide Area Networks (SWANs), and Common Service Centres (CSCs). These efforts were mostly uncoordinated, with different states and ministries acting independently and often without a central guiding framework. However, the approval of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006 introduced much-needed order and direction to India's digital governance goals. The NeGP aimed to make government services available to everyday people in their local areas through common service delivery outlets, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and reliability at affordable costs (Das, 2022). Despite its successes, the NeGP had limitations in scope and reach. Acknowledging the need to expand and unify digital governance under a clear framework, the Government of India launched the Digital India Programme on July 1, 2015. This initiative was a crucial moment in India's e-governance development. Digital India was more than just a rebranding effort. It brought together, broadened, and enhanced previous ICT initiatives under one comprehensive program. The main goal was to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. This way, every citizen, no matter their socio-economic status, could access government services online without facing complicated administrative barriers.

**Fig-2 9 Pillar of Digital India**



Source: Manoj Kumar K. (2023, February 6). Digital India - The path forward. AVIXA Xchange; AVIXA. <https://xchange.avixa.org/posts/digital-india-the-path-forward>

The Digital India initiative rests on nine key pillars, each focusing on an important area of governance and digital inclusion (a) Broadband Highways: ensuring connectivity for everyone. (b) Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity: closing the gap in mobile access between rural and urban areas. (c) Public Internet Access Programme: expanding common service centers and digital libraries. (d) E-Governance: Reforming Government through Technology: simplifying processes and enabling them with technology. (e) Information for All: promoting open data and proactive sharing of information. (f) Electronics Manufacturing: encouraging local production of electronics. (g) IT for Jobs: providing skill development and digital literacy for better job opportunities. (h) Early Harvest Programmes: implementing quick projects like biometric attendance and Wi-Fi in universities. (i) e-Kranti: Electronic delivery of services: focusing on digital health, education, and agricultural services. These pillars are backed by essential digital infrastructure systems such as Aadhaar (a unique digital identity), DigiLocker (cloud-based document storage), e-Pramaan (an authentication system), and Unified Payments Interface (UPI), a groundbreaking real-time payment platform that has changed the financial inclusion landscape in India (Walia, 2025).

The impact of Digital India has been significant. Millions of citizens now have access to online services such as filing income taxes, paying electricity bills, using public grievance portals, and applying for scholarships. Rural areas, especially in states with lower Human Development Indices, have seen increased digital access through Common Service Centers. Women and youth, often overlooked in traditional development models, are now more involved in governance and accessing services through digital platforms. The government continues to expand and improve the program. In August 2023, the Union Cabinet approved an extension and expansion of Digital India with a budget of ₹14,903 crore. This funding aims to further develop digital public infrastructure and scale important platforms like UPI, Aadhaar, and DigiLocker. The expansion shows the government's commitment to integrating digital governance across ministries, states, and sectors. It also highlights the need for collaboration among institutions to promote real-time service delivery and citizen-focused innovations (Vikaspedia.in, 2025).

Digital governance in India is becoming a reform tool and an inclusive development strategy. It has empowered communities that were previously underserved, encouraged localized innovation, and laid the groundwork for a fairer and more efficient public administration system. For a country like India, which still faces significant inequalities and regional differences, using digital governance can drive long-term, inclusive socio-economic change. Since the launch of the Digital India initiative in 2014, the country has embarked on a transformative path to create a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. This transformation has modernized government processes and changed how

citizens engage with the state. Key initiatives such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DigiLocker, and MyGov have led to more transparent, efficient, and inclusive public service delivery. Digital tools are increasingly reaching rural and underserved communities through platforms like Common Service Centers (CSCs), which help close the last-mile gap. While disparities in access and digital literacy still exist, the trend has been one of increased inclusion. Women, youth, and marginalized groups are getting more involved with digital platforms, supported by specific government policies and infrastructure improvements. For instance, mobile payment systems have changed financial transactions in cities and are slowly reaching informal economies in rural India. Likewise, e-governance platforms have made it easier for people to access essential services, encouraging transparency and citizen involvement throughout the country. This paper critically examines India's digital governance since 2014, focusing on the transformational potential of key digital tools like UPI and their growing impact at the grassroots level. By looking at how digital systems are being expanded and integrated, the study illustrates how India is moving from a digitally divided society to a more digitally inclusive and empowered nation.

## **1.1 Research Objective**

1.1.1 To trace the evolution of digital governance in India since 2014, focusing on major policy shifts, technological developments, and administrative reforms.

1.1.2 To examine how flagship digital platforms are changing public service delivery and promoting citizen-focused governance in India.

1.1.3 To evaluate the real-world impact of digital tools and platforms, especially UPI, in improving service delivery and financial inclusion at the grassroots level.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1.2.1 How has digital governance evolved in India since 2014?

1.2.2 What is the nature and impact of digital transformation in India since 2014, especially concerning major government initiatives aimed at improving digital infrastructure and public service delivery?

1.2.3 How effective are digital tools like UPI in reaching and empowering marginalized communities, such as local vendors and informal workers?

## **1.3 Hypothesis**

H-1 The adoption of UPI has indirectly increased bank account ownership and has led to a rise in active bank users in India.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Åke Grönlund & Thomas A Horan (2004): Introducing e-Gov: History, Definitions, and Issues**

The literature on e-Government (e-Gov) has changed a lot since the late 1990s. It started with practical applications in public administration and has grown into a complex research area. Grönlund and Horan (2004) discuss this change. They point out that e-Gov began as a field driven by practitioners. It was a response to the internet revolution and has attracted more academic attention over time. Initially, the focus was on improving efficiency, service delivery, and democratic participation using digital tools. However, the discussion has broadened to include more social and technical aspects, such as governance, institutional change, and citizen engagement. The literature presents many definitions and frameworks. These range from narrow technological views to broader perspectives that involve organizational change and governance reform. Important international organizations like the OECD, World Bank, and EU define e-Gov in ways that go beyond technology. They see it as a systemic change in how governments engage with citizens and other stakeholders. Academic work remains scattered across fields like information systems, public administration, political science, and sociology. Despite these differences, a common theme is the need for integrated, cross-disciplinary approaches. These should balance technical progress with the institutional context and focus on governance that serves citizens. The research also brings up important questions about measuring performance, ensuring democratic accountability, and the dangers of focusing too narrowly on digital service delivery. Therefore, the literature shows that e-Government is not just about implementing ICT. It's a transformative process that needs careful thought regarding societal, political, and administrative factors.

### **2.2 Dr. Shyam Lal Das (2022): A Brief Study of the Evolution and Development of E-Governance in India**

The evolution of e-Governance in India is a complex and transformative journey driven by policy vision, technological progress, and administrative reform. The literature shows e-Governance as more than just the digitalization of services; it represents a strategic shift in governance aimed at improving transparency, efficiency, and inclusiveness. Starting with the introduction of the Internet in India in 1995, the concept gained structure through important initiatives like the establishment of the Department of Information Technology in 1998 and the launch of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006. Scholars like Das (2022) highlight the crucial role of the NeGP and Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) in establishing e-Governance across different sectors and states. The framework focuses on decentralized implementation along with centralized planning, reflecting a practical way to tackle India's diverse social and economic landscape. Additionally, the literature points out the role of

supportive laws such as the IT Act (2000) and the Right to Information Act (2005) in promoting transparency and citizen engagement. However, a closer look reveals ongoing issues with building capacity, coordinating between departments, and improving digital literacy, especially among marginalized groups. The National Knowledge Commission's call for rethinking processes and creating a citizen-focused model further grounds the discussion in administrative reform, rather than just in technological deployment.

### **2.3 Harekrishna Misra (2015): Livelihood Perspective of Rural Information Infrastructure and E-Governance Readiness in India**

A review of the literature on rural information infrastructure and e-governance readiness in India reveals a complex relationship between technological progress, governance strategies, and the socio-economic realities of rural communities. Worldwide, e-governance has become an important driver for development. International organizations like the United Nations and the European Union stress the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in improving citizen-centric services, promoting digital inclusion, and closing the digital divide. However, despite these global goals, the actual implementation of e-governance initiatives, especially in developing countries, faces serious challenges. Research shows that many e-governance projects in these areas end in partial or complete failure. This often happens because of a gap between project design and real-world conditions, known as the "design-reality gap." In India, the situation is more complicated due to the diversity of rural livelihoods and the limited involvement of rural communities with ICT-driven efforts. The success of rural e-governance depends not just on having technological infrastructure but on how well it meets the livelihood needs and views of rural people. Information infrastructure that responds to demand and supports various livelihood systems is crucial for the effective use and ongoing engagement with e-governance services. Empirical studies highlight the need to connect ICT initiatives with workable business practices and service-focused opportunities. This ensures that information becomes a real asset for rural livelihood security. Even with improvements in policy frameworks and infrastructure, challenges such as low latent demand, inadequate usage, and ongoing divides in access continue to hinder inclusive and impactful e-governance in rural India. The literature recommends a more nuanced approach that focuses on local context, user readiness, and the collaboration between technology and rural communities. This approach moves away from supply-driven models toward truly participatory and sustainable e-governance systems.

### **2.4 Archana G. Gulati (2023): Digital Governance an Indian Perspective**

This literature on India's digital transformation highlights the country's rapid rise as a digital powerhouse. Experts estimate it could become a USD one trillion digital economy by 2030. The

growth of digital public infrastructure, driven by Aadhaar, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and various banking initiatives, has led to nearly universal digital financial inclusion, even among those with low digital skills. For instance, in May 2023, UPI processed over 941 million transactions worth about ₹14.9 trillion. This shows the scale of digital payments in daily life. However, despite a dramatic rise in internet and smartphone usage an eighteenfold increase and a sevenfold rise in screen time from 2016 to 2022, less than 60% of Indians are online. Rural internet access remains around 30%, creating a persistent digital divide. This disparity is compounded by women’s relatively low level of mobile phone ownership and low digital literacy in a lot of communities, which creates issues around equity, access, and inclusion. The literature also highlights some of the concerns around the need for consumer trust and safety, indicating that growth in digital commerce was not progressing as quickly as the growth of digital payments because of issues related to delivery, complaint management, and ecosystem reliability. The evidence of regulatory interventions regarding predatory lending apps and coercive design elements on websites and apps have highlighted that ensuring adequate consumer protection especially as the digital landscape evolves can be problematic. Scholars argue that it is imperative that discussions about India's digital future center around inclusion, trust, and consumer-centric governance to ensure that its continued technological evolution leads to sustained and inclusive empowerment of all its citizens.

### **3. Methodology**

This report deployed a mixed-method research design to investigate the evolution of India's digital governance in the hemisphere of digital transformation since 2014 and the potential impacts generated from a key digital tool the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) on public service delivery and financial inclusion. By using a mixed-method approach comprising of qualitative and quantitative techniques, the research study has both theoretical depth and empirical evidence. Primary data derived from the Abul Fazal Enclave in an area mixed urban and semirural in Okhla, New Delhi which was selected due to the socio-economic diversity of the population in the area and its potential to serve as a hub reflecting the promises as well as challenges of digital governance. The survey had 80 respondents and included variables of twelve multiple-choice questions that were aimed at understanding (1) the use of digital platforms in a mostly digital economy especially UPI, (2) the engagement with digital services in the daily lives of participants, (3) ease of accessibility of individuals to digital services, (4) and issues around digital awareness, literacy, or connectivity. Random sampling was used to select participants to ensure there was diversity in age gender and occupation as well as educational background by surveying a range of genders, occupations and ages. The reporting on the survey allowed for insights as to how people, use specific digital tools in their daily lives; how digital tools support service inclusion and impact their financial inclusion.

Secondary data sources included some credible literature and government papers, including policy papers and research articles. Significant sources included the Digital India Programme reports, the Eleventh Report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, and academic research related to digital governance and inclusion. Taken together, the papers and reports stroke a reasonable background to make an assessment of the overarching policy context and the framework for implementation of India's digital transformation programmes.

The data produced from the survey were analyzed through basic descriptive statistical techniques, including percentages and mode, simply to determine the post usage experience and commonalities of experience. The findings were compared and interpreted alongside the secondary sources to relate the individual-level data to governance and design strategies and social - economic trends. This combined strategy was important in contextualizing what we learned of digital technology as improving the access of users to interactions with various services and a form of inclusive development.

## **4. Understanding E-Governance in India**

### **4.1 Conceptual Foundation of Digital Governance**

Governance has changed a lot in the digital age. Traditional methods that relied on manual processes, bureaucracy, and in-person meetings are increasingly being replaced or improved with digital systems. This change has led to what we now call e-governance, digital governance, or electronic governance. Although the terms "electronic government," "digital governance," "e-government," and "open governance" tend to be used interchangeably, they are focused on a singular concept: improving the operation and delivery of government services with information and communication technology (ICT) in terms of functionality, responsiveness, transparency, and efficiency. For some time now, many have pursued an interest in e-government; however, the definition of e-government can vary widely according to the objectives of different institutions. The following definitions summarize some commonly accepted meanings:

#### **1. According to the World Bank**

*'E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions'* (ARC-2, 2008).

The World Bank's definition highlights how using information technologies can make government more efficient, transparent, and responsive to citizens and businesses.

## **2. UNESCO defines e-Governance as**

*'Governance is the use of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs. This includes how citizens express their interests and fulfill their legal rights and responsibilities. E-Governance refers to carrying out governance through electronic means. It aims to make information available to the public and agencies quickly, efficiently, and clearly. It also involves carrying out government administration tasks.'*

UNESCO defines e-governance as using electronic tools to improve efficiency, transparency, and public service delivery.

## **3. Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, has visualized e-Governance in the Indian context to mean:**

*"A transparent smart e-Governance with seamless access, secure and authentic flow of information crossing the interdepartmental barrier and providing a fair and unbiased service to the citizen" (ARC-2, 2008).*

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam saw e-Governance as a clear, smooth, and secure digital system. It aims to remove bureaucratic obstacles and provide efficient and fair services to citizens.

These different definitions, though worded uniquely, share the common idea that e-governance is about using information and communication technologies to improve governance processes, enhance service delivery, and boost public accountability. At its essence, digital governance refers to the integration of digital technologies into traditional governance frameworks to provide services to the public, engage the public and non-state actors, and hold government accountable for performance. Digital governance encompasses various interactions between the arts, sciences, professions and the public, business or private sector, and intra-governmental connectivity. Specifically, digital governance makes it possible to engage more deeply and meaningfully with public stakeholders. It has also been called e-governance, internet governance, online governance, transformational governance, and connected governance. While these labels matter, digital governance represents a new way of operating and relating to the public. Digital governance is more than a transition of existing governance systems to digitized systems and integrated digital services. It is a transition of the entire governance model into a more SMART (simple, moral, accountable, responsive, transparent) governance model. Digital governance emphasizes delivering services that meet public needs and

public expectations through a variety of platforms and technologies, including ICT (information and communication technology) tools and all aspects of online government services, mobile apps, digital cloud technologies, and the interoperability of multiple data. The argument that digital governance is only about computers, hardware, and software is incorrect; it is about creating a government that is more participatory, more user-friendly, more efficient, and more transparent (Kaushal, 2020). The main goal of e-governance is to enhance the performance and effectiveness of government agencies. This includes simplifying internal processes, reducing inefficiencies, minimizing physical interaction (which can lead to corruption), and broadening access to public services. In developing countries like India, where geographical, economic, and social disparities still exist, the potential of digital governance is particularly important as it can close gaps and provide government services to those who have often been overlooked.

## **4.2 Stages of E-Governance Evolution**

The development of e-governance has not happened overnight. It has progressed in stages, often alongside technological advancements:

### **1<sup>st</sup> Phase: Computerization**

The first step involved giving government departments personal computers for internal use. This phase focused on word processing and data entry, setting the stage for digital workflows.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Phase: Networking**

As computer systems became more common, intranet and local area network (LAN) connections enabled data sharing within departments. Information flowed more quickly, leading to better coordination in government operations.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Phase: Online Presence**

The rising popularity of the internet led to a demand for websites and digital information portals. Departments started creating online platforms to share basic information about their structures, goals, policies, and contact details.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Phase: Interactive Presence**

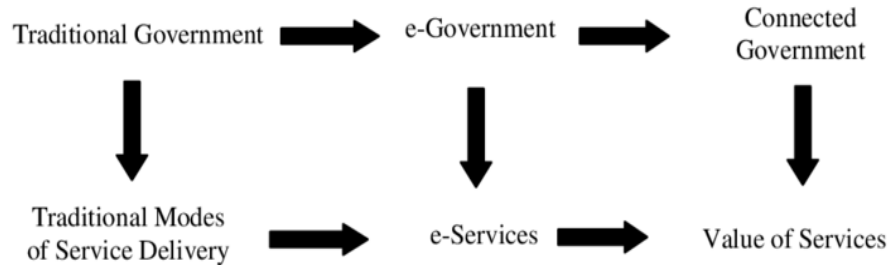
With changing digital capabilities, governments initiated two-way communication with citizens. Citizens began to use downloadable forms, online feedback systems, and emails instead of in-person contact, saving time and money.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Phase: Transactional Phase (ongoing)**

The new phase of engagement is now relying upon total online service delivery including services such as online tax payments, online identity verification where people must be connected to Aadhaar, electronic KYC, mobile governance applications, and in India, Total Digital Payment systems such as UPI, and so on. While the citizen is able to now communicate with a government entity in the online

space, where the transaction does not happen at the government office, it can now be completed online (ARC-2, 2008).

**Fig-3 Evolution of Governance**



Source: Misra, Harekrishna. (2015). *Livelihood Perspective of Rural Information Infrastructure and E-Governance Readiness In India*. 10.13140/RG.2.1.2571.6321.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280096530\\_Livelihood\\_Perspective\\_of\\_Rural\\_Information\\_Infrastructure\\_and\\_E-Governance\\_Readiness\\_In\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280096530_Livelihood_Perspective_of_Rural_Information_Infrastructure_and_E-Governance_Readiness_In_India)

### 4.3 Key Components of E-Governance

Effective digital governance relies on four main pillars:

- 1. People:** Leadership, vision, commitment, and building skills are key. Government staff must receive training, stay motivated, and be flexible with new digital tools.
- 2. Process:** All processes should be simple, focus on citizens, be cost-effective, and sustainable. Cutting red tape and automating services is vital for efficiency.
- 3. Technology:** Technology should follow open standards, be secure, scalable, reliable, and work well across departments.
- 4. Resources:** Properly allocating financial, human, and technological resources is important. Governments should adopt a comprehensive, service-oriented approach that ensures continuity and improvement (ARC-2, 2008).

### 4.4 Traditional Governance vs. Digital Governance

**Table 1: Difference between Traditional Governance & Digital Governance**

Aspect	Traditional Governance	Digital Governance
Process Medium	Manual, paper-based systems	Digital platforms (web, mobile apps, cloud, databases)
Accessibility	Physical office visits required	24/7 online access from anywhere
Speed & Efficiency	Slow, bureaucratic delays	Faster, automated processes
Transparency	Low (prone to corruption due to human interface)	High (digitized records, real-time tracking)
Service Delivery	In-person, limited working hours	Remote, on-demand services

Citizen Interaction	Face-to-face, long queues	Virtual (chatbots, video calls, helplines)
Data Management	Manual record-keeping, prone to errors	Real-time data analytics for evidence-based policies
Cost	High (paper, storage, manpower)	Reduced (automation minimizes operational costs)
Accountability	Weak (opaque processes)	Strong (audit trails, digital footprints)
Objective	Maintain bureaucratic procedures	SMART Governance: Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, Transparent
Inclusivity	Limited reach (urban-centric, privileged access)	Wider reach (bridges rural-urban gaps)
Corruption Risks	High (human discretion in processes)	Low (reduced human intervention)

*Source: Traditional government vs digital government: Which is best? (2023, October 5). Jotform. <https://www.jotform.com/blog/traditional-government-vs-digital-government/>*

#### 4.5 Models of E-Governance

Governance, at its core, is not just a one-way function carried out by the state. It is an interactive process that involves many stakeholders, including citizens, businesses, and government institutions. Governance aims to create opportunities for engagement, ensure fair distribution of resources and chances, and provide public services effectively. In today’s digital world, e-governance acts as a connector, using technology to link government with all relevant parties. A good way to understand e-governance is to analyze patterns of interaction. E-governance refers to structured interactions between governments and their various stakeholders, which collectively represent e-governance models of interaction. Types of interactions can be categorized into four main types of interaction: 1) Government to Government (G2G); 2) Government to Citizens (G2C); 3) Government to Business (G2B); and 4) Government to Employees. All types of interaction contribute to the enabling conditions for a full e-governance system to operate.

##### A. Government to Government (G2G)

G2G interaction is a concept that occurs strictly within the government and can be vertical and horizontal. It often implicates the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate seamless data, services, and directions among various departments, ministries, or levels of government, such as central and state and local authorities, and that they connect to streamline the internal process, improve information exchange, and carry less turnovers.

An example would be digital platforms that connect tax departments to municipalities or ministries to

their subordinate agencies to enable real-time communication and coordination to promote effective decision-making and facilitate consistent policies while avoiding delays in bureaucracy. Initiatives such as State Wide Area Networks (SWANs) and the Integrated Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) under India's National e-Governance Plan are good examples of G2G interactions (ARC- 2, 2008).

### **B. Government to Citizens (G2C)**

The G2C model is one of the most visible and valued aspects of e-governance. It refers to the digital interface between the government and the citizens and provides the public with direct and easy access to a variety of services and information with increased transparency. G2C models tend to prioritize making services available to everyone, reducing reliance on intermediaries, and ensuring that citizens are at the core of public service delivery.

With the G2C model, citizens can now determine how, when, and where they engage with their government. The G2C model encompasses services such as birth certificate registrations, passport applications, lodging complaints, e-filing income tax, and land records digitization. There are examples in India through platforms such as DigiLocker, UMANG, and Aadhaar-enabled services. These platforms have significantly increased citizen access to crucial services, which is especially important in rural and underserved areas. Moreover, services through digital platforms will not be restricted by office hours, the need to visit physically, or long wait times. It is through these innovations that G2C models can address the problem of corruption, save time and resources, and empower citizens (ARC-2, 2008).

### **C. Government to Business (G2B)**

The G2B interaction model focuses on the relationship between government agencies and businesses. E-governance makes it easier for companies to follow regulations, manage business processes, and provide services efficiently. With digitalization, businesses can now apply for licenses, pay taxes, file reports, and participate in procurement processes more easily and openly.

The main goal is to create a supportive environment for business growth. This is done by cutting down on red tape, making government interactions more predictable, and encouraging accountability. Examples include e-tendering, online permits, and real-time tracking of applications. These systems often add promotional features like trade promotion, tourism support, and investment tracking. The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is a groundbreaking G2B initiative that provides an online procurement platform for government buyers and vendors. These efforts not only boost economic efficiency but also enhance India's position in global rankings, such as the Ease of Doing Business

rankings (ARC- 2, 2008).

#### **D. Government to Employees (G2E)**

The government is one of the largest employers in India, and it has an obligation to regularly and effectively communicate with its employees. The G2E model portrays and describes the framework which facilitates the interactions of government institutions with their employees and uses Information and Communication Technologies to facilitate the employment life cycle in terms of HRM, Payroll, Employee Grievance Redressal, and Performance Evaluation.

The use of digital platforms facilitates prompt dissemination of orders, automatic payment processing, electronic self-service records, and online training modules for skills acquisition. Such examples include the Central Government Employees Pension Portal, as well as HRMS portals in various departments to facilitate a timely flow of information and service to employees. G2E initiatives are very important for the overall satisfaction of employees (efficiency), accountability of the organization, and the development of a digitally literate and skilled administrative workforce. Complementarity between the organization (government) and its employees through a robust and effective employee-management system, augmented by digital technologies, leads to a responsive and responsible public governance structure (ARC- 2, 2008).

### **5. Post 2014 Reforms in Digital Governance**

The roots of e-governance in India go back to the 1990s with initiatives like the National Informatics Centre (NIC), the computerization of government offices, and the beginnings of an online presence. However, the period after 2014 marks a significant change. With the launch of the Digital India Mission in 2015, the Government of India aimed not just to computerize services, but also to empower citizens digitally, improve access across the country, and ensure governance is participatory, inclusive, and efficient. This era saw a major shift in both the scale and depth of digital governance. It focused on connecting the most remote parts of the nation, closing the digital gap, and making access easier through platforms designed for citizens.

#### **5.1 UMANG: Bridging Governance and Citizens through One Platform**

A key initiative to result of this vision is UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance). UMANG was developed by the National e-Governance Division (NeGD) under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) as a single platform to combine multiple government services within a single mobile interface. The ideology behind the platform is "less government, more governance," reflecting the current objective to minimize red tape while

simultaneously increasing the quality and accessibility of the public services (Jadeja & IMPRI Desk, 2024).

Introduced to simplify and centralize government services, UMANG is a pivotal milestone toward a seamless, universal, and efficient interaction between residents and their government. As of December 31st, 2023, UMANG had over 6.31 crore registered users and provided over 418.31 crore departmental transactions. This demonstrates the scale and acceptance of UMANG. UMANG's core function is the integration of over 1984 services from 207 Central and State departments. Services include passport services, Aadhaar updates, utility bill payments, income tax filings, health and education services. These various services provide the unique opportunity for citizens to accomplish many types of transactions from a single app which saves time, money, and effort. UMANG is available on Android, iOS, and web browsers, thus improving UMANG's reach and facilitating the intent of making services universal and inclusive. Citizens can access essential services from anywhere and at any time whether they are using a smartphone or a basic web-enabled device. This is invaluable in rural and semi-urban areas of India, where digital realization is still growing (Jadeja & IMPRI Desk, 2024).

One great feature of UMANG is the multilingual support, which makes sure that users do not face any issues related to language while accessing government services. At this point, 23 languages are supported by the site, these are Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, and English, among others. The linguistic diversity of India is covered by this policy as a lot of people are not fluent in Hindi and English, which are the two most widely used languages in government platforms. Another feature that allows the app to be user-friendly is service bookmarking; it allows users to save the services that are visited the most. This not only makes interacting with the government more personal but also improves their digital experience. The design of the app allows it to be utilized by a large number of demographic groups since it is very easy to use even for newbies and those who have little or no experience with digital technology (Jadeja & IMPRI Desk, 2024).

UMANG is a term more than a mere app—a whole digital ecosystem. Its connection with DigiLocker and MyScheme shows how various pieces of India's e-governance machinery work together to present a consistent user experience. On DigiLocker, one stores and safekeeps all-important documents like the driving license, academic records, and ID proofs. With MyScheme, under some simplistic inputs, a user can find welfare schemes and programs he/she may qualify for. The growth of UMANG and others since 2014 also tells of the government's intent of spreading high-speed internet in the rural areas and in promoting digital literacy. With BharatNet, the idea is to provide broadband connectivity to 2.5 lakh plus Gram Panchayats, thus putting the infrastructure required for UMANG to run (Jadeja & IMPRI Desk, 2024).

## **5.2 DigiLocker: Advancing Paperless, Secure, and Citizen-Centric Governance**

Another flagship project that represents this shift is DigiLocker, a cloud-based digital document storage platform launched on 1st July 2015 under the Digital India initiative. Created and developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), DigiLocker has changed the way citizens manage, access, and share their official documents. Essentially, DigiLocker aims to remove the reliance on physical paperwork, reduce administrative delays, and prevent forgery by providing government-authenticated digital documents.

DigiLocker is a secure, Aadhaar-linked repository that offers each user 1 GB of cloud storage space. Using DigiLocker, people can store documents such as the Aadhaar cards and driving licenses that are issued by government departments automatically under their names along with academic certificates, PAN card or health records. If we take a step back to see where Bhamashah started as what originally was intended as a simple ID Manager, over the years it expanded into an access channel for education resources, healthcare systems and ecosystem of financial services and distribution network. Passport offices, banks and telecom companies are some of the entities that can ask for a user's copy from the digilocker where they need a file on priority but only after getting explicit consent to do so. The architecture ensures data privacy yet enables users to, quite literally – have their own identity management gear that eliminates the need whereby for repeated document submissions and physical verifications (IMPRI, 2025).

To build trust and security, DigiLocker uses Aadhaar-based OTP verification and the MeriPehchaan Single Sign-On (SSO) system for strong identity verification. The platform features two main repositories: Issued Documents and Uploaded Documents. The Issued Documents repository contains digitally signed records from registered issuers, which ensures authenticity and reliability. On the other hand, the Uploaded Documents section allows users to upload scanned copies of legacy or offline documents. This enables a complete transition to digital records without losing any important documents (IMPRI, 2025).

DigiLocker operates on three digital governance principles: paperless operations, electronic authentication, and service integration. It replaces physical documents with verified digital ones, reducing paper use, aiding sustainability, and streamlining administration. Documents are legally valid and electronically verifiable, minimizing forgery and impersonation. Its integration with public and private services makes access easier and more convenient especially for those who struggle with managing physical records, like the elderly, rural residents, and students needing verified academic documents (IMPRI, 2025).

The biggest strength of DigiLocker is that it plays well with other digital platforms. An important breakthrough came in October 2024 with the signing of MoU with UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance). This enabled users on DigiLocker to now use more than 1,658 services from a single mobile B interface. This app-within-app function led to reduced friction and made digital engagement with government services easier for non-multiplex users. Furthermore, DigiLocker was integrated to Level 2 with Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) in November 2022. This enabled over 130 million ABHA users to keep and manage their health records, such as vaccination certificates,ad test results, and prescriptions, directly from hospitals and diagnostic labs. This health-tech merger is one of the key factors working towards a citizen-centric digital healthcare system. DigiLocker has rapidly grown since its inception. As on March 2022, the platform had 1,783 issuers and stored some 494 crore digital documents. As of November 2022, there were 13.5 crore registered users and the digital repository reached 562 crore records. As of March 2025, the number of DigiLocker users saw an upsurge to 51.52 crore and kept growing, even while more than 943.36 crore documents being issued. This was an almost quadrupling in the space of three years. The platform achieved peak of 1,936 active issuers and linking to 2,407 requesters, fulfilling its scale and maturity of building digital governance system interconnected (IMPRI, 2025).

According to the user reviews, the platform has an 85% satisfaction rate from the users. Also, 78% was the number of users who responded after successfully using DigiLocker that they have avoided at least one physical visit per transaction. These statistics show that DigiLocker has made it easy for citizens to interact with government services as if they are just a mere push of the button and that leads to a more effective and citizen-friendly governing ecosystem. A significant area of DigiLocker's work has been in the use of the education sector where in the line of being a National Academic Depository (NAD) DigiLocker is now holding that position. By 2025, more than 90 crore academic certificates from 2,906 institutions have been placed on the platform. The process not only reduces the instance of counterfeit degrees and academic fraud but it also makes it quick and accessible to confirm the authenticity of the degrees by universities, employers, and government agencies (IMPRI, 2025).

### **5.3 Unified Payments Interface (UPI): Revolutionizing India's Digital Payment**

The launch of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in 2016 was a significant step in India's move towards a cashless and inclusive digital economy. Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI is an instant real-time payment system that allows inter-bank transactions through a single mobile app. It combines various banking features, enables easy fund routing, supports merchant payments, and allows users to schedule and settle peer-to-peer (P2P) collect requests at their convenience. The initial release of UPI took place on 11th April 2016, with Dr. Raghuram G. Rajan,

who was the Governor of the RBI, at the helm, in Mumbai. At first, only 21 banks were a part of the pilot program. From 25th August 2016, UPI-enabled apps appeared on the Google Play Store, thus announcing the public phase of the service. UPI is a technology built on the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) architecture, which NPCI (National Payments Corporation of India) has also developed for real-time money transfers between accounts... and without customers having to use IFSC codes or bank details (NPCI, 2023). Unlike UPI, other digital payment systems focus on just the user's payment needs and they have a different concept of money delivery means. Instead of being stuck with one bank's or platform's account, UPI has the distinct advantage of working across all the banks that are a part of it and maintaining their multiple bank accounts through a single interface. UPI, by subordinating the convenience... of mobile applications to the complexity of banking infrastructure, does not only reach real-time digital payments but also makes its accessibility and scalability the highest for a diverse population UDAY KOTAK, the founder of the innovative Kotak UPI, who possesses an exceptionally brilliant financial mind, was constantly thinking well ahead of time for the complete transformation of the financial services industry in India. The scenario where the payments sector in India was fragmented and the digital transactions were very few in number was precisely understood by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and NPCI. It became a joint decision to build a unified payment ecosystem. Close to the hugely successful Immediate Payment System (IMPS) that already existed, NPCI was the organization that was responsible for the simplified payment platform in the domestic market of India at that time when it was set up in April 2009 (Prasanna, 2023).

The issue became quite noticeable in March 2011 when on average an Indian only performed six non-cash transactions per year, and almost 145 million families remained out of the formal banking system. It was in the same period that the high degrees of the black money flow and the corruption, which was mainly in cash, were reiterating the need for a secure and traceable digital alternative. In 2012, RBI introduced a four-year vision document, showing that the bank is committed to the establishment of a secure, efficient, inclusive, and interoperable payment system as part of its Green Initiative, which aimed to reduce paper use in the domestic transaction business. Following this course of action, UPI was created as the payment system and digital innovation through the means of which the digital divide was going to be bridged, digital transactions were going to become easier, disappearing, and more secure to everyone, from the tech-savvy urban youth to the digitally underserved rural citizens. UPI utilizes the VPA (Virtual Payment Address) model, which gives users the opportunity to establish simple, easy to remember identifiers (e.g., name@bank) that are linked to their bank accounts. These VPAs are used as a digital equivalent for the personal account data and when doing so, they protect themselves from any misuse of the data and the account. Besides, with UPI, payments can be executed via QR code scan, mobile number, or account details, which is very helpful to users who have different

preferences for modes of payments (Prasanna, 2023).

The technological architecture of UPI is based on a four-pillar interoperable model, consisting of:

**A. Remitter Front-end PSP (Payment Service Provider)**

**B. Remitter Back-end Bank**

**C. Beneficiary Front-end PSP**

**D. Beneficiary Back-end Bank**

In just a few years, UPI has changed from a niche innovation to a widely used digital tool. Its user-friendly interface, ability to work across banks, and no-cost feature for customers helped it grow quickly. According to ACI Worldwide and Global Data, India became the world's largest real-time payment market in 2020, recording 25.5 billion transactions in a year. This surpassed both China and the United States (Prasanna, 2023).

UPI's impact on making finance more accessible was solidified in January 2019, when it was added as a payment option for Initial Public Offerings (IPOs). This expanded its use beyond regular consumer payments to include investment and capital markets, increasing digital participation across different economic sectors. In March 2020, the transaction limit increased from ₹1,00,000 to ₹2,00,000, and later to ₹5,00,000 in December 2021 for the Retail Direct Scheme and IPO applications. This change allowed for larger financial transactions (Prasanna, 2023).

**Table- 2: No of Banks Live on UPI from 2016 – 2021**

Year	No. of Banks live on UPI	Transaction volume (in Mn)	INR Value (in Cr.)	USD Value (in Billions)
2021	282	38,744.55	7,159,285.80	966.17
2020	207	18,880.89	3,387,744.72	457.19
2019	144	10,787.54	1,836,638.18	247.86
2018	129	3,746.32	585,710.45	79.04
2017	67	418.8	57,020.87	7.7
2016	35	2.65	893.07	0.12

Source: Prasanna, T. R. (2023). THE HISTORY OF UPI. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, 11(5), 2320–2882. <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2305935.pdf>

UPI's impact goes beyond just transaction volumes. It has played a key role in financial inclusion, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where traditional banking is limited. By enabling micro-merchants, street vendors, and gig economy workers to accept digital payments without needing Point-

of-Sale machines or credit card systems, UPI has helped bring millions into the formal financial system. Another important feature of UPI is its open architecture. This allows third-party apps like PhonePe, Google Pay, Paytm, and BHIM to provide UPI services. This not only fosters innovation in the private sector but also offers users a choice-driven ecosystem, which boosts adoption across different demographics.

**Table- 3: App Wise Market Share**

App	Transaction Value (Rs)	%	Rank	Transaction Number (In Million)	%	Rank
PhonePe	5,247,424,900,000	49.25%	1	2,993.83	47.33%	1
Google Pay	3,666,690,900,000	34.42%	2	2,130.63	33.68%	2
Paytm	1,111,496,600,000	10.43%	3	933.88	14.76%	3
Amazon Pay	67,518,000,000	0.63%	8	68.77	1.09%	4

*Source: Prasanna, T. R. (2023). THE HISTORY OF UPI. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT), 11(5), 2320–2882. <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2305935.pdf>*

UPI has been vital during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital payments became key to reducing contact. It allowed the government to send welfare payments directly to beneficiaries' accounts, which improved transparency and cut down on losses in public distribution. UPI transactions follow strict rules to ensure safety and honesty. The system uses two-factor authentication, end-to-end encryption, and real-time fraud detection. The connection with Aadhaar and mobile verification provides extra layers of security. UPI also works under the Digital Payments Security Control Guidelines from the RBI. These guidelines require strong complaint handling processes, data privacy measures, and compliance checks for all service providers. These standards have helped keep public trust in digital finance and built a solid foundation for a safe digital economy.

#### **5.4 National Scholarship Portal: Every Student Matters, Every Student Counts!**

One of the most impactful initiatives for youth is the development of the National Scholarship Portal (NSP). Launched in 2016 as part of the Digital India initiative and the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), the portal marks a significant change in how educational benefits are distributed across the country. This particular program is designed to revolutionize the scholarship sector so that it can be more effective, open, and welcoming to everyone. One of the functions of the platform is to ensure that all students, most notably those who are underprivileged in both social and economic contexts, can avail themselves of the scholarship system without any hassle and with equity. The NSP is formulated on the principle that education is a human right and an efficient instrument for individual and societal

development. By taking the aid of digital tech, it frees up monetary hindrances to obtaining an education. Through the platform, not only is the access to information and application raised, but the public fund distribution is also made more transparent and secure. The latter is effectively done by the platform which works to minimize the fraud, inefficiency, and corruption that might have occurred in the execution of the scholarship program in India (IMPRI Desk & Jadeja, 2025).

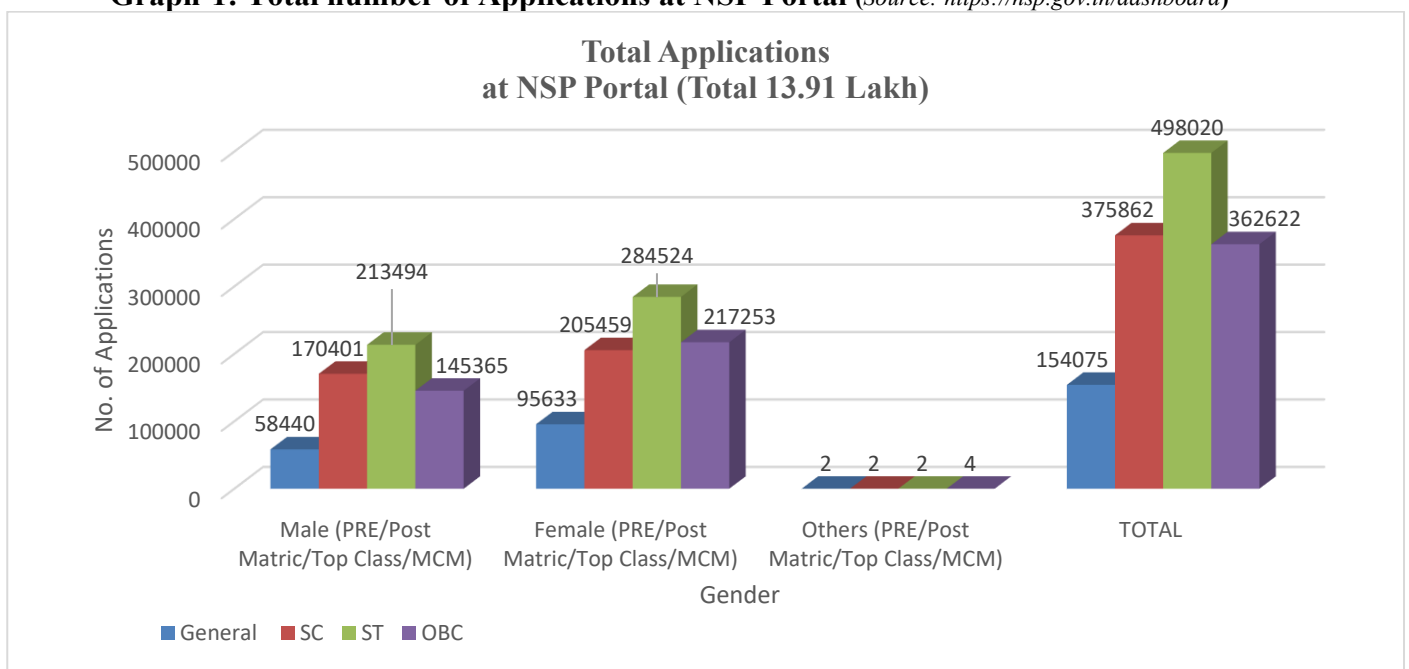
The National Scholarship Portal is a one-stop place for Government of India scholarships. This is the place where you can find scholarships like the ones from the central ministries, states and union territories. The Mission Mode Project (MMP) falls under the Ministry of Minority Affairs. It is mission-based, transparent and accountable, following the SMART principle: the governance should be Simplified, Mission-oriented, Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent. NSP has a feature uniqueness through which the student has access to the entire lifecycle of a scholarship from one-stop. This involves application submission, document verification, merit-based or criteria-based assessment, sanctioning and fund disbursement. The platform is fully digital and every part of it can be implemented via the Digital India initiative. By transferring scholarship money directly into the students' bank accounts through the use of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), NSP is able to eliminate the middlemen and prevent scholarship funds from being misappropriated. This not only speeds up the process but also helps in making it more fraud-proof. Furthermore, the NSP platform is comprehensive, containing scholarships for students from all levels of education, from pre-matriculation to post-graduation. It also includes scholarships specifically aimed at the communities of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and minority groups. This framework is available to everyone alike, so that every student who qualifies to get support can find the right assistance despite their socio-economic background (IMPRI Desk & Jadeja, 2025).

One of the primary aims of the platform is to act as a one-stop-shop for scholarship information that will come from a credible source and which will be of the students' knowledge about all the available opportunities. The online portal is a medium of visibility guarantee and honesty in as much as scholarship operations are concerned. The automation of the application and disbursement of funds processes, on the other hand, makes it an issue of transparency and accountability and in this way, the chances of manipulation and deliberate bias are minimized. The whole process is merit-based whereby a student qualifies only if they pass an objective test. The NSP system, by using Aadhaar and bank verification, enables scholarships to be directly deposited (DBT). It is more convenient and quicker for funds to be released directly without the need for dealing with intermediaries. The portal, in addition, has an intuitive user interface that has the application process and the procedures thereof, among other links, and being the significant player in the whole process of accessing the services, the students find

it convenient. The National Scholarship Portal provides information about your scholarships and allows you to track the current status of your application, hence, the user has a guarantee of communication and is assured of the service delivery flux (IMPRI Desk & Jadeja, 2025).

Increasingly, as globalization progresses, the students of India, not only look for scholarships in domestic colleges, but also apply for those abroad. In order to cater to this rising demand, the NSP ecosystem initiates ties with national and international educational gateways that render help to students seeking opportunities abroad. As a result, students will be able to access scholarship searches (which are generally directed to the university), undergo profile evaluation, and receive a realistic assessment of chances of admission. These platforms come in handy when students are making choices thus assisting them to make well-thought-out decisions. This makes the concepts easier for a student but also links Indian scholarship systems with global standards of quality. Thus, this tactical move opens the way for streamlined education access on an international scale which will put the Indian students in a competitive position globally besides maintaining a transparent and efficient process. Both the accounts retrieved from the field research and the records indicate unarguably that the portal is the major driving factor that accounts for delays being decreased and the number of beneficiaries increased. Furthermore, this significant reduction has arguably been the unseen force that has driven the coalition advocating for gender parity more girls, especially from the minority, getting to be beneficiaries of the targeted scholarships. The National Scholarship Portal apart from the digital platform is also collaborating with other environmental changes such as DigiLocker for saving grades and cv and UMANG, which provides mobile access to different government services. These services are coordinated to create a system of empowerment in education (IMPRI Desk & Jadeja, 2025).

**Graph-1: Total number of Applications at NSP Portal** (Source: <https://nsp.gov.in/dashboard>)



According to the National Scholarship Portal (NSP) data, the total number of applications is 13.91 lakh. Clearly, there is a great need for support for education expenses. But there is an alarming gender divide. The non-binary and transgender category (others) had surprisingly low applications 1 to 4 in all. This stark underrepresentation is caused by an entrenched social stigma and structural hurdles. Discrimination, ignorance and exclusion continue for gender minorities in India.

Even extra distressing is the intersectional marginalization amongst this population. "Others" gender has 2 applications each in General, SC and ST applicants. OBC candidates fared barely better at 4, showing how caste compounds pre-existing risks. This is a -layered exclusion: on the one hand for gender identification, on the other it goes any other layer down, it is down cased, caste-primarily based barriers. The extremely low numbers imply that scholarship applications are both failing to attain this needy network via negative outreach, bureaucratic limitations, social stigma, or a bit of all 3. We want reforms urgently: focused attention with L.G.B.T.Q. And Dalit rights organizations, streamlining the software manner, and education for officers. The facts expose how systemic prejudices are nonetheless going for walks rife in educational inequalities, and strengthens the argument that energetic policy adjustments are needed to address the hassle if we in reality want to attain out to India's most marginalized students.

Before this, the traditional method of scholarships had the major drawback of having no real-time view shared across other institutions and areas; this usually leads students to miss deadlines or simply could not find programs for which they qualified. Real-time observation of the NSP now gives students and administrators better insight into their situations, where quick interventions can be provided as solutions. Although education is constitutionally guaranteed as a fundamental right, economic hurdles still bar millions of Indian students from receiving such education. The problem becomes more serious in rural, tribal, and underdeveloped areas where socioeconomic hindrances often prevent talented students from procuring higher education. Hence, through digitizing and bringing the scholarship system under one umbrella, the NSP becomes a major force in the promotion of a fairer environment for education.

The NSP constitutes an enormous step forward, but there are remaining issues to be addressed. Lack of access to good internet service outside of cities, lack of tech skills and language barriers stand in the way of broader deployment. Data discrepancy forms have to be checked and more delays occur. We need ongoing training more awareness better infrastructure and other steps to solve these problems. Future phases of the NSP will be more powered by AI, smart data analysis to find potential scholarships, and they will be checking rights things via blockchain. All of this is intended to make the entire process more open, and function better (IMPRI Desk & Jadeja, 2025).

## 6. India's Digital Transformation

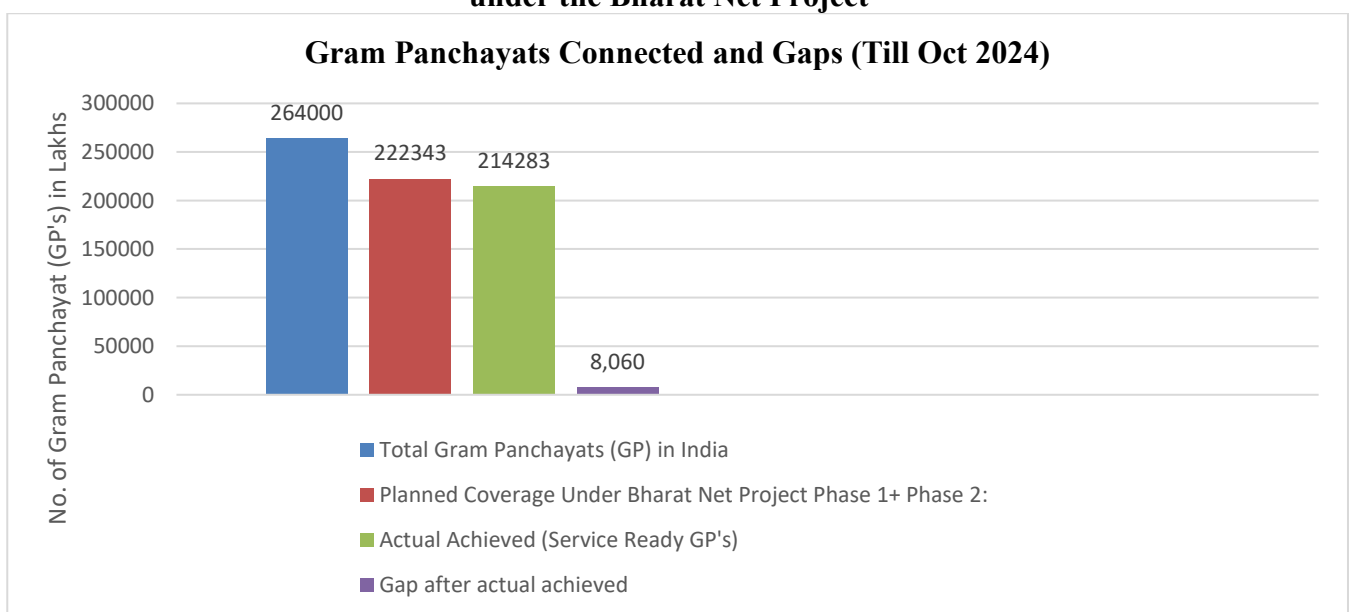
India has undergone a huge digital transformation in the last decade. It has moved from conventional administration based approach to an approach of e-governance, digital inclusion and, technology enabled service delivery. The nation is rapidly getting to its citizens' ready access to internet as well, as part of the grand vision of Digital India. It is also ensuring that the dividends of digitization are available to all and do not discriminate between those in the city and those far away in hinterland, between the rich and the poor, or between men and women. One unmistakable sign of this shift is the rapid expansion of India's internet user base. India on track have 900 million active internet users by 2025: Report India could cross the 900 million mark in terms of active internet users by 2025, thanks to growing digital adoption and usage in rural area! That number is on course to be at 886 million by 2024 already growing at a robust 8% each year. And it is rural India that is now driving this surge, accounting for 55 percent of all internet users, or some 488 million users. This expansion shows that the government is serious about increasing digital outreach and developing infrastructure in rural regions. One of the unique facets of India's digital revolution is the rise of the Indic languages in the consumption of the internet. Today, 98% of users are consuming content in regional languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Bengali. Language is more democratized in the digital world. In urban areas, even 57% of users only engage with content in their mother tongue. "That's an indication of a change in cultural approach to more appropriate digitally driven communication. Language inclusion not only makes a digital platform more user-friendly but also makes it culturally resonant for the user. The transition has also helped cut the gender divide in digital accessibility. So far, it's the highest percentage recorded: women now represent 47% of all internet users in India. In rural areas, nearly 58% of women across users sharing devices indicates encouraging growth of women in the digital ecosystem. This development indicates increased social mobility, information flow and facilitation by digital tools. Cities have already adopted the internet, and now they are driving the next wave of the digital economy. Products such as smart TVs, voice assistants and smart speakers have ballooned by 54% between 2023 and 2024. And mobile phones are still the most common way for rural and urban users alike to go online. Urban India accounts for e-commerce, digital payments and online education. Invariably, rural India is fast bridging the gap, particularly in OTT content consumption, social media and online communication (IBEF, 2025).

For citizens to acquire skills necessary for survival in the digital world, the GOI has initiated major programs, such as the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA). The objective was to make at least one member of each household digitally literate in rural India. As of March 31, 2024, the programme overachieved its target, by training 6.39 crore people in all parts of the

India. This initiative has created a digitally-literate rural community that can avail of e-governance services, use digital payments, and access online courses. Concurrently, efforts to generate employment have also been made through India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS) and North East BPO Promotion Scheme (NEBPS). These programmes have contributed to increasing IT, ITES penetration in even small towns by providing financial assistance up to ₹1 lakh per seat. These schemes are riding on local entrepreneurship and women participation to democratize access to the digital economy and have created several thousands of jobs in Tier II and Tier III cities (Press Information Bureau, 2024).

Digital Literacy According to the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM), digital literacy is ‘the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers’. It becomes even more reinforced into believing this. Digital literacy rates for Indians 15 and older have increased in recent years, from 18.4% in 2017-18 to 24.7% in 2020-21. The proportion in rural areas increased from 11.1% to 18.1%, and urban regions from 34.7% to 39.6%, both presenting an increasing tendency. Halsey Public-private partnerships have played a key role as well in accelerating digital empowerment. For instance, NIIT Foundation in collaboration with Mahindra Finance has started a Financial and Digital Literacy Program for 30,000 low-income gig workers. Similarly, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages (HCCB) in collaboration with the Y4D Foundation trained over 2,000 women from five villages in Hajipur, Bihar in basic digital and financial literacy. These efforts complement those of governments and help to ensure that the most marginalized groups are reached (Bhattacharya, 2024).

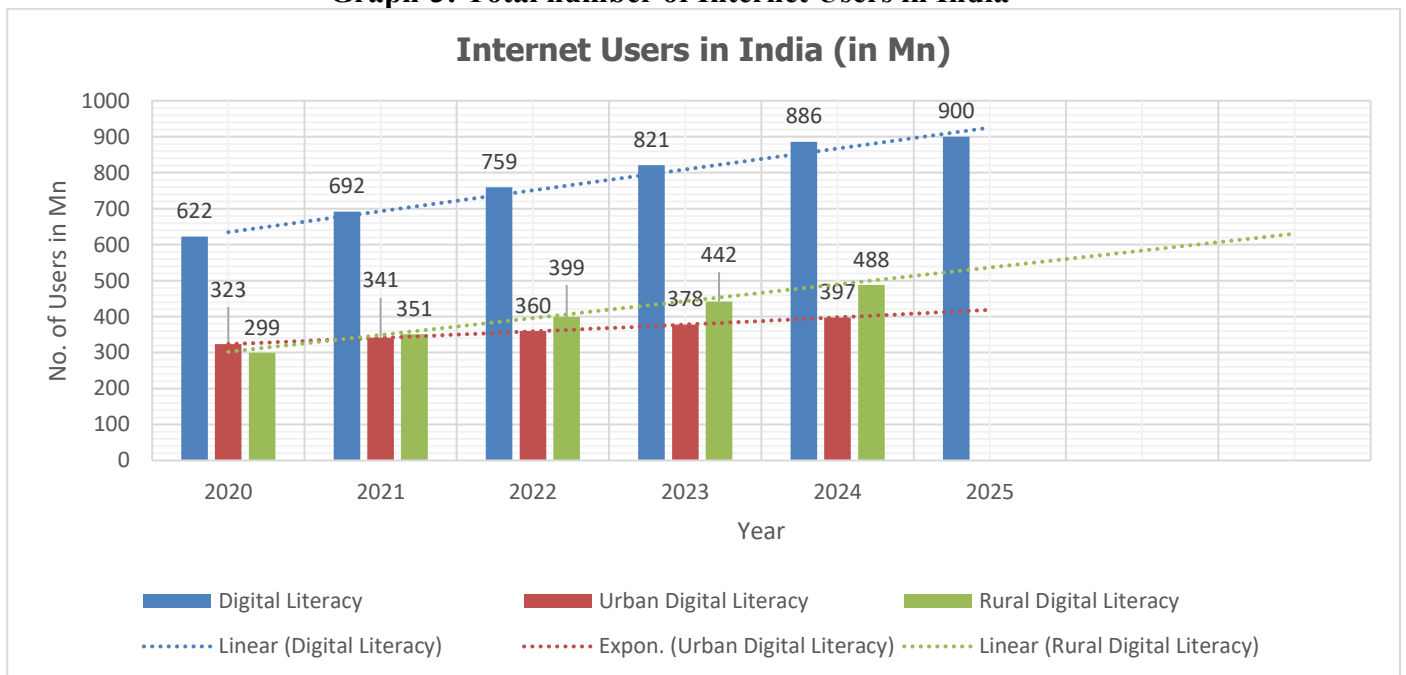
**Graph-2: Total number of Gram Panchayats connected by Optical Fibre Cable/Satellite link under the Bharat Net Project**



Source: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2077908>

At the infrastructure level, the BharatNet Project has played a key role in establishing the groundwork for last-mile internet connectivity. Phase III is currently ongoing. The program aims to integrate 5G technologies, expand bandwidth, and ensure reliable internet access even in remote areas. The BharatNet initiative has been implemented in three unique phases, each building on the previous one to improve digital infrastructure in rural India. Phase I concluded in December 2017 and focused on laying optical fiber cables to connect 1 lakh Gram Panchayats by using existing infrastructure. Now, Phase II is in progress. It aims to extend coverage to another 1.5 lakh Gram Panchayats using a combination of optical fiber, radio, and satellite technologies. This phase emphasizes cooperation, bringing together state governments and private companies to improve efficiency and reach. Meanwhile, Phase III is also being developed, with the goal of future-proofing the network by incorporating 5G technologies, increasing bandwidth capacity, and ensuring reliable last-mile connectivity to the most remote areas. A key aspect of this phase is the Amended BharatNet Program (ABP), which received approval in August 2023 (National Payments Corporation of India [NPCI], 2025).

**Graph-3: Total number of Internet Users in India**



Source: Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar<sup>75</sup>

The graph illustrates the significant growth of internet users in India, projected to reach 900 million by 2025. It also points out the digital literacy divide between rural and urban. The rate of digital literacy in urban areas increases fast, reaching 61% by 2022. It now has risen only because we are equipped with a robust infrastructure, common acceptance of digital payments like UPI, and user-friendly e-

<sup>75</sup> Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantar  
 (2020) <https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/IAMAI-KANTAR-ICUBE-2020-Report.pdf>  
 (2021 & 22) [https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/Internet%20in%20India%202022\\_Print%20version.pdf](https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/Internet%20in%20India%202022_Print%20version.pdf)  
 (2023) <https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/INTERNET%20IN%20INDIA%202023.pdf>  
 (2024) [https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/Kantar\\_%20IAMAI%20report\\_2024\\_.pdf](https://www.iamai.in/sites/default/files/research/Kantar_%20IAMAI%20report_2024_.pdf)

governance platforms such as UMANG. Rural areas, on the other hand, are advancing at a slower pace, where digital literacy stands at just 25% in 2022. This is because of problems such as limited access, reduced knowledge, and language differences. Government programs play a crucial role in addressing this gap. The BharatNet project is providing broadband connectivity to the rural Gram Panchayats. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) has digitally literated more than 6.39 crore persons. The increase in the number of female internet users (47% women as against 43% in 2018) also suggests that such inclusive programmes as the National Scholarship Portal (NSP) are working.

However, challenges such as affordability, device access, and the need for localized digital content still exist. Digital literacy is becoming increasingly important not just for accessing services, but also for achieving professional success. In rural India, 53% of digitally literate households earn regular wages from non-agricultural jobs. The steady growth of digital awareness is helping agricultural workers, marginalized communities, and youth to take part in the digital economy. According to 2022 data, urban digital literacy stands at 61%, while rural literacy is quickly improving, currently at 25% (Dattopant Thengadi National Board for Workers Education & Development, n.d.).

## **7. Case study: Digital payments in practices in India**

In recent years, digital payments in India have evolved from being mainly urban to becoming a widely accepted practice across various socio-economic and age groups. While adult users are still the majority, there is a notable increase in participation among minors, especially teenagers over 15 years old, in digital financial systems. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) now allows individuals 10 years and older to open savings accounts in Indian banks. More importantly, those over 15 can conduct UPI-based transactions independently, following certain guidelines. Minors under 15 can hold joint accounts with parents but are not allowed to use UPI directly. This change is significant for India's financial inclusion efforts, highlighting the growing recognition of the changing needs and independence of Gen Z users (Digit Insurance, 2025). This case study looks at how young users engage with UPI and digital payment platforms through a survey of 80 respondents from urban and semi-urban areas of Abul Fazal, Okhla, New Delhi. The 12-question survey aimed to assess how often UPI is used, which platforms are preferred, how easy users find them to use, and what barriers they face. The target group included young adults aged 18 to 25, and notably, it also included minors aged 15 to 18, who reported active use of UPI services, either through individual platforms or under parental supervision. Involving both minors and young adults is crucial for fostering early financial literacy and independence among India's youth, supported by user-friendly and secure digital tools. As India's Gen Z got access to more digital financial tools now which are becoming essential to their everyday lives.

UPI becomes a necessity than luxury with option to scan QR codes at local shops, ordering online or splitting bills with friends. Apps like FamPay, India's first neobank for teenagers, are redefining the space. FamPay enables minors to do UPI transactions and provided them with an app in addition to an linked card which parents can use to monitor transactions and set limits. The app strikes the balance between autonomy and parent control financial empowerment without compromise on safety. Other services such as Akudo and Junio are gaining traction, targeting the UPI services for teenagers, with apps that in some cases include gamified features to encourage savings and responsible spending (Thakur, 2025). But even though FamPay, Akudo and Junio grant minors access to UPI and prepaid cards under parental supervision, they rely on a presupposition: an operational bank account. While this remains a hurdle for many in rural India and for the country's most vulnerable, keeping them from fully participating in the digital payment's world.

Satisfactory bank account provision is a vital prerequisite for being active in an ecosystem as a member of the UPI platform. This has been, for many people in India, particularly in the rural and marginalised communities, a major obstacle throughout history. To mitigate this, the Government of India has introduced PMJanDhan Yojana on 15th August 2014. This programme is designed to drive financial inclusion for all. PMJDY is not only a scheme, but also a National Mission, with objectives of ensuring access to those financial products and services to citizen who does not have a saving or current account at bank. Its hybrid approach has greatly expanded the financial safety net, enabling millions previously outside the formal financial system to enter the economic mainstream.

The scheme was launched and its first phase was internationally acclaimed as Guinness world record had confirmed that as many as 18,096,130 number of accounts were opened in a week by the Department of Financial Services, which is first-ever since the inception of the department (Prime Minister of India, n.d.). Over the last 10 years, PMJDY has not only achieved its principal objective but also laid the foundation for the digital revolution in the country. As on 14 August 2024, the total number of Jan Dhan accounts became 53.14 crore (a 3.6-fold increase from 15.67 crore accounts in March 2015). Most significantly, the scheme has facilitated inclusion for women and rural areas, with women making up 55.6% of account holders and almost 66.6% of accounts in rural and semi-urban areas. These figures illustrate the extent to which the scheme has played a crucial role in driving the adoption of UPI and other digital financial solutions among previously-underserved groups.

Through the provision of a bank identity and digital and financial literacy programs, PMJDY is reaching tens of millions of first-time users particularly women, farmers, laborers, and young people introducing them to mobile banking, digital wallets, and UPI-based accepted platforms. In summary,

the Jan Dhan Yojana has not only democratized financial services but also given the necessary institutional backing to foster the steep trajectory of digital payments in the country. Had the bedrock groundwork laid by PMJDY not existed, the UPI penetration and UPI effect would have merely been an urban phenomenon, confined to urban and semi urban accountholders. In this context, PMJDY is a critical anchor in India’s transformational quest for digital financial empowerment (Press Information Bureau, 2015).

## 7.1 Findings

**Table- 4: Age Group & Usage of UPI**

Age Group	No. of Responders	Usage of UPI	Percentage
Below 18 (Minors)	10	5	50%
18-25 (Entry level professionals/ Students)	62	58	93.54%
26-35 (Early Career Professionals)	3	3	100%
36-60 (Mid- Career to Retirees)	5	3	60%

The data in Table 4 highlight the different adoption rates of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) across age groups in India. This reflects wider trends in digital financial inclusion. The highest UPI usage, at 93.54%, is seen among young adults aged 18 to 25. This group mainly includes students and entry-level workers, showing a strong level of digital skills and a preference for mobile transactions in this tech-savvy age group. The complete adoption by early-career professionals aged 26 to 35 further confirms UPI’s popularity in urban, economically active populations. However, the use among minors, those below age 18, is only 50%. This is likely due to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) rules that restrict UPI access to teens aged 15 and older with parental supervision, as well as their lower financial independence.

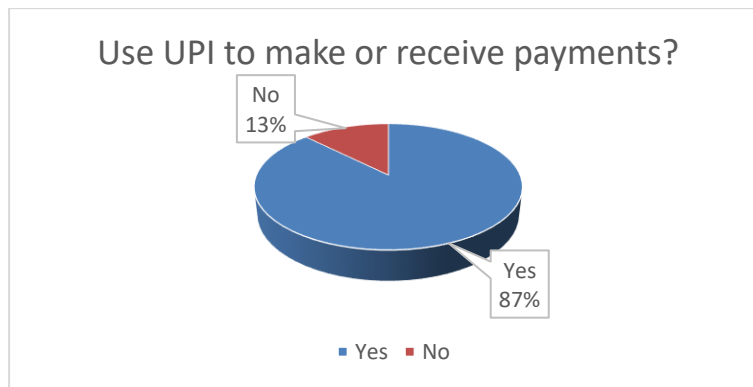
The 60% uptake among older adults, aged 36 to 60, indicates ongoing issues such as trust in digital methods, a preference for cash, and limited digital skills. These results support the idea that UPI promotes financial inclusion while also showing gaps related to age and policy limitations. The data suggests a need for focused initiatives, such as digital literacy programs for older adults and UPI apps for teenagers, like FamPay, to ensure fair access. This is an important part of India’s Digital India transformation.

**Table- 5: Gender & Usage of UPI**

Gender	Responses	UPI Usage	Percentage
Male	50	41	82%
Female	30	29	96%

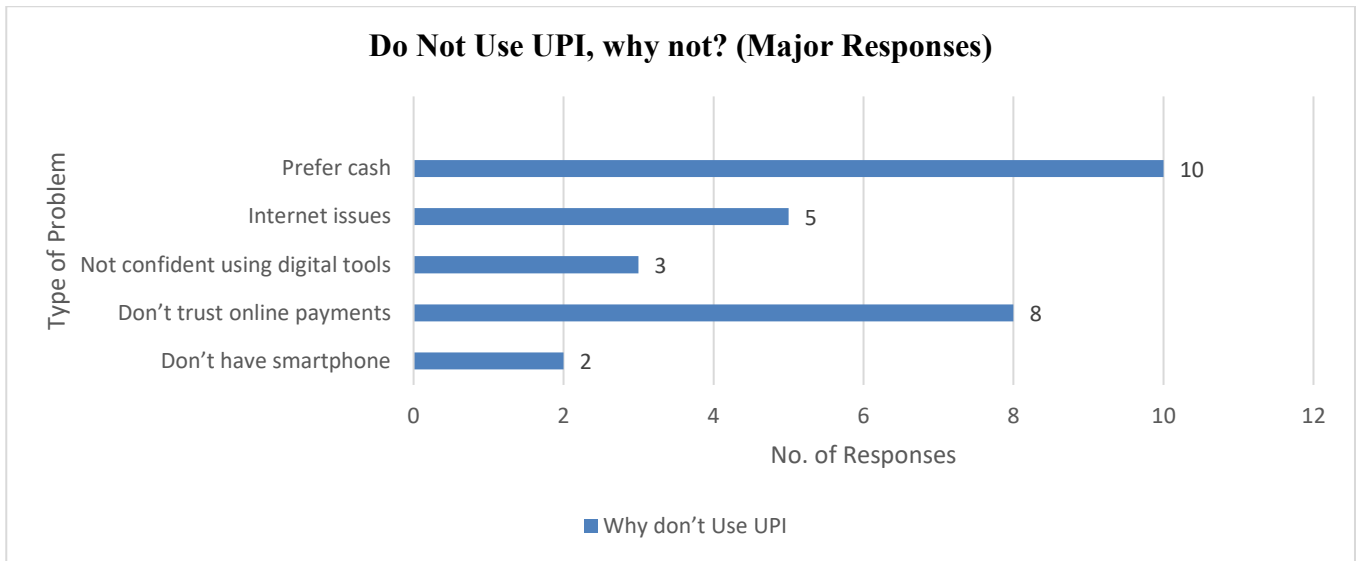
The data in Table 5 shows a surprising trend in UPI adoption among different genders. Ninety-six percent of female respondents use UPI, while only eighty-two percent of male respondents do. This higher usage rate among women challenges the usual views on gender gaps in digital finance. It also supports the paper's findings about India's efforts to narrow the digital gender gap. The almost universal use of UPI by women may point to the convenience and safety of digital payments. This is especially true in urban and semi-urban areas, where UPI reduces the need for cash and cuts down on visits to banks. This benefit is highlighted in the paper's discussion on governance focused on citizens. However, the smaller number of female respondents (30 compared to 50 males) calls for caution. If this trend is representative, it could indicate successful programs like PMGDISHA and UMANG's multilingual support, which empower women through easy-to-use platforms.

**Graph-4: No. of People use UPI**



The data shown in Graph 4 reveals important insights about UPI adoption among the surveyed population. Out of 80 respondents, 70 individuals (87%) reported using UPI for payments, while only 10 respondents (13%) said they do not use the platform. This high adoption rate of nearly 9 out of 10 respondents strongly confirms UPI's success as India's leading digital payment system, as discussed in Section 5.3 of the research paper. The significant penetration rate indicates that UPI has evolved from an innovative payment option to a common financial tool, fulfilling the Digital India program's goal of creating a digitally empowered society (Section 5). However, the 10 non-users represent an important group that needs further attention. These individuals may face challenges such as limited digital literacy (covered in Section 6), lack of access to smartphones or internet, especially in rural areas, security worries, or they may belong to demographic groups like elderly citizens who struggle with digital adoption. Although this data does not show usage frequency or transaction volumes, the total number of adopters (70 out of 80) offers strong evidence supporting the paper's claims about UPI's significant impact on India's financial landscape and digital governance.

**Graph-5: Do Not Use UPI, why not?**



The data from Graph 5 offers insights into the barriers that stop non-users from fully adopting UPI. Those who do not use UPI Of the 10 respondents who replied in the negative, the reasons cited include a liking for dealing with cash (10 responses), lack of faith in making payment online (8 responses), lack of confidence in using digital tools (3 responses) and lack of a smartphone (2 responses). These results correspond to the barriers to digital inclusion discussed in Section 6 of the paper. The nearly unanimous preference for cash (100% of non-users) reflects continuing cultural and behavioral attachments to banknotes. Trust Issues, which affects 80% of non-users, are the drivers for stronger security and public information campaigns. The smaller differences on technology barriers (20% don't have a smartphone) and skill deficiencies (30% don't feel confident) provided additional support to the arguments in the paper about infrastructure and literacy barriers to digital payment adoption universality. These findings re-enforce the claims of the paper about UPI's deficiencies. They argue that material solutions such as UPI have had impressive success but that mental and schooling challenges remain formidable barriers to India's digital transformation. The findings support as well the argument in section 7.1 around the necessity of targeted interventions to on-board non-users into a digital payments ecosystem.

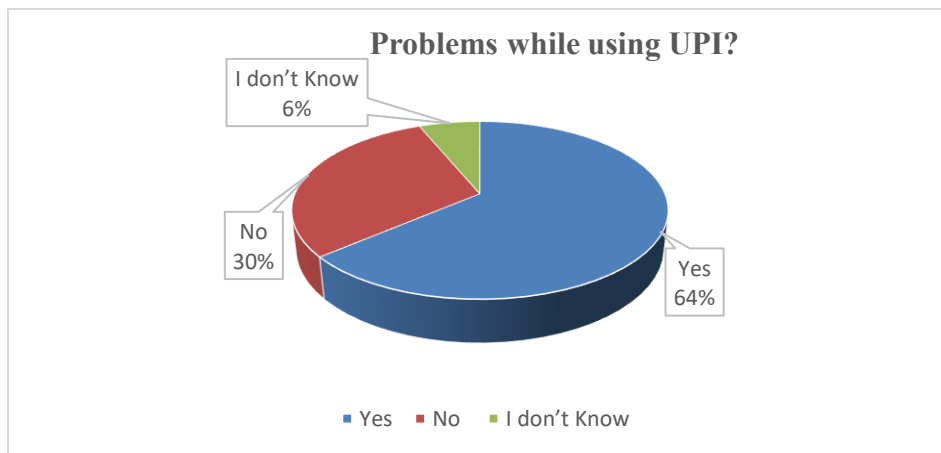
**Table- 6: Usage of UPI Apps**

UPI App	Responses	Percentage
PhonePe	29	36.3%
Google Pay	21	26.3%
Paytm	15	18.8%
Fampay	4	5%
WhatsApp	1	

Omni Card	1	6.25%
Kotak	1	
Iranian UPI	1	
Supermoney	1	
Total	74	92.65%

The data clearly shows market segmentation among UPI payment platforms. PhonePe leads the way with 29 respondents, or 36.3%, followed by Google Pay with 21 respondents, at 26.3%, and Paytm with 15 respondents, making up 18.8%. Together, these three major platforms hold 81.4% of the UPI market share among the surveyed users. This highlights the concentrated nature of India's digital payments ecosystem. The remaining 18.6% goes to smaller players like Fampay, which has 4 respondents at 5%, Kotak with 1 respondent at 1.25%, and various niche platforms with very few users. This pattern supports the discussion in Section 5.3 about UPI's open structure encouraging private sector innovation while keeping NPCI's regulatory oversight. The strong performance of domestic platforms, like PhonePe and Paytm, compared to global players like Google Pay, shows the effectiveness of localization strategies in the Digital India initiative. However, the presence of minor platforms, with 6 different apps covering only 11.25% of usage, indicates that newer competitors face challenges in gaining traction. This may be due to network effects and the advantages in brand recognition held by established companies.

**Graph-6: Do you face any problem while using UPI?**

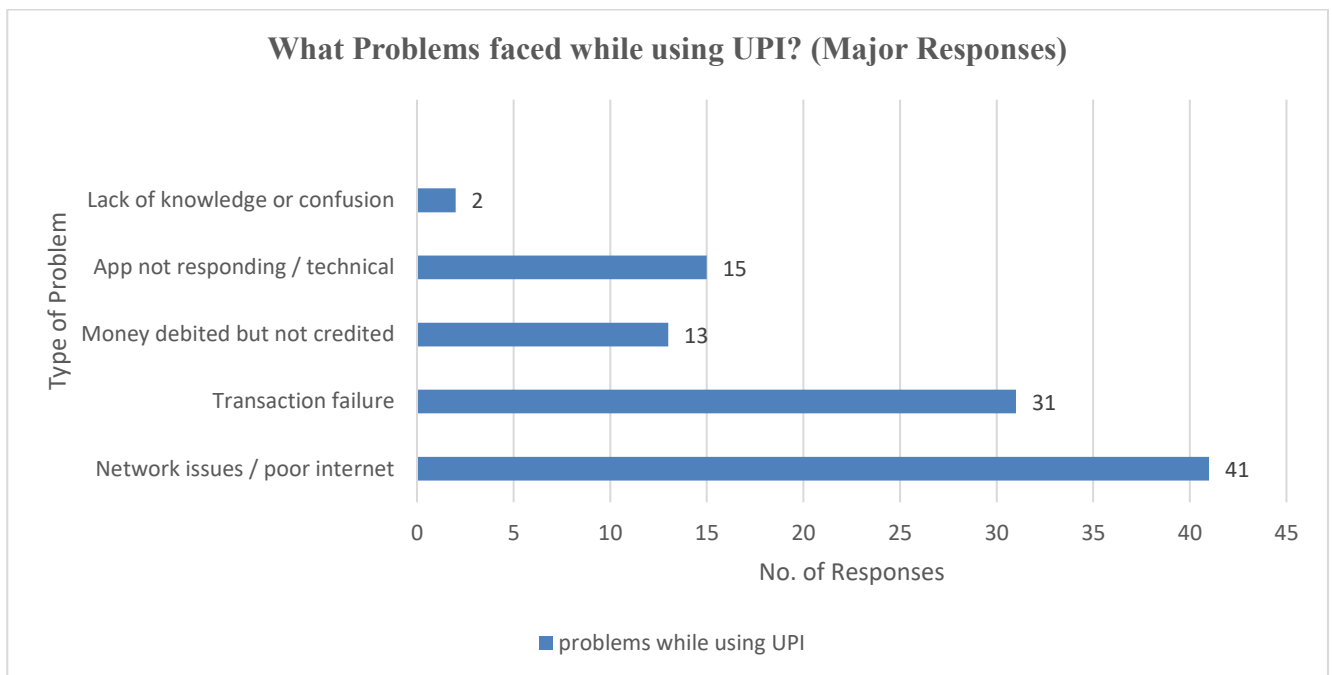


The data from Graph 6 provides important insights about user experiences with UPI. Among the 80 people surveyed, 51 (64%) reported facing problems while using UPI. In contrast, 24 respondents (30%) said they encountered no issues. Notably, 5 respondents (6%) answered “I don't know.” This group likely consists of individuals who do not own UPI apps but use digital payments through friends' or relatives' accounts, making them less familiar with the platform’s features and challenges.

This breakdown highlights several key points. First, the majority of users (64%) experience some

difficulties with UPI. This suggests there is room to improve user experience and support for troubleshooting. Second, the “I don't know” responses (6%) indicate an important demographic secondary users who depend on others’ accounts instead of having their own UPI profiles. This indirect usage pattern could signal either temporary adoption or barriers to independent usage, such as a lack of personal bank accounts or smartphones. The data particularly emphasizes UPI's accessibility challenges. Although the platform is widely used, many users still encounter operational difficulties or rely on informal sharing arrangements to access digital payments.

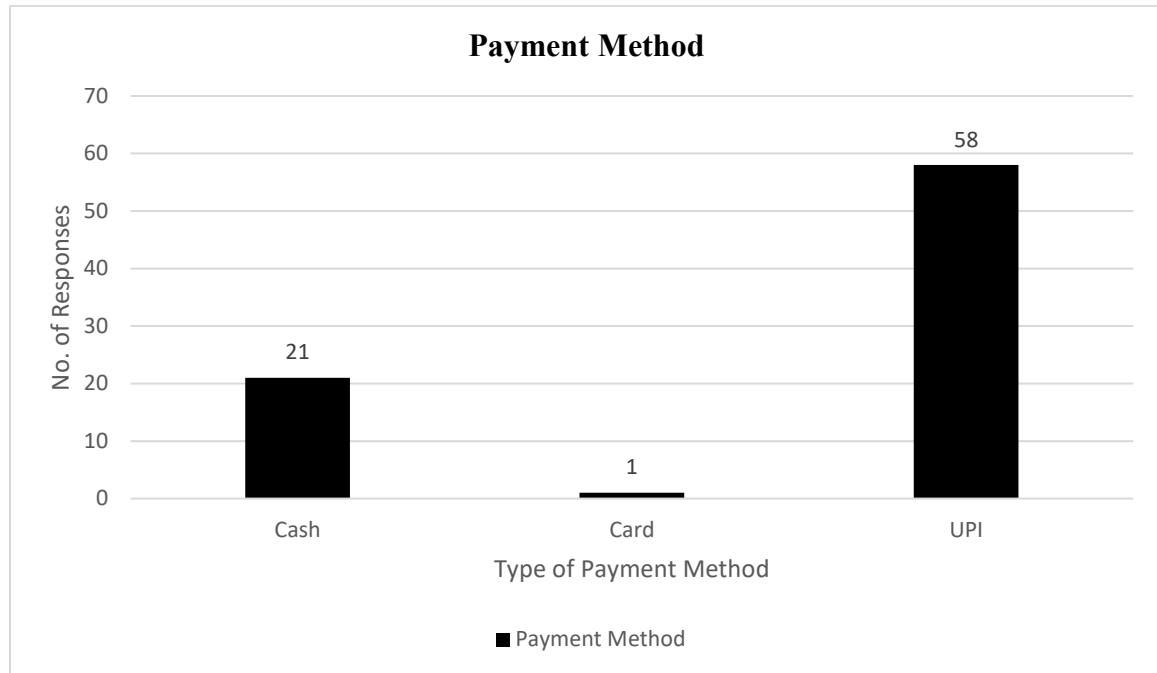
**Graph-7: What type of problems faced while using UPI?**



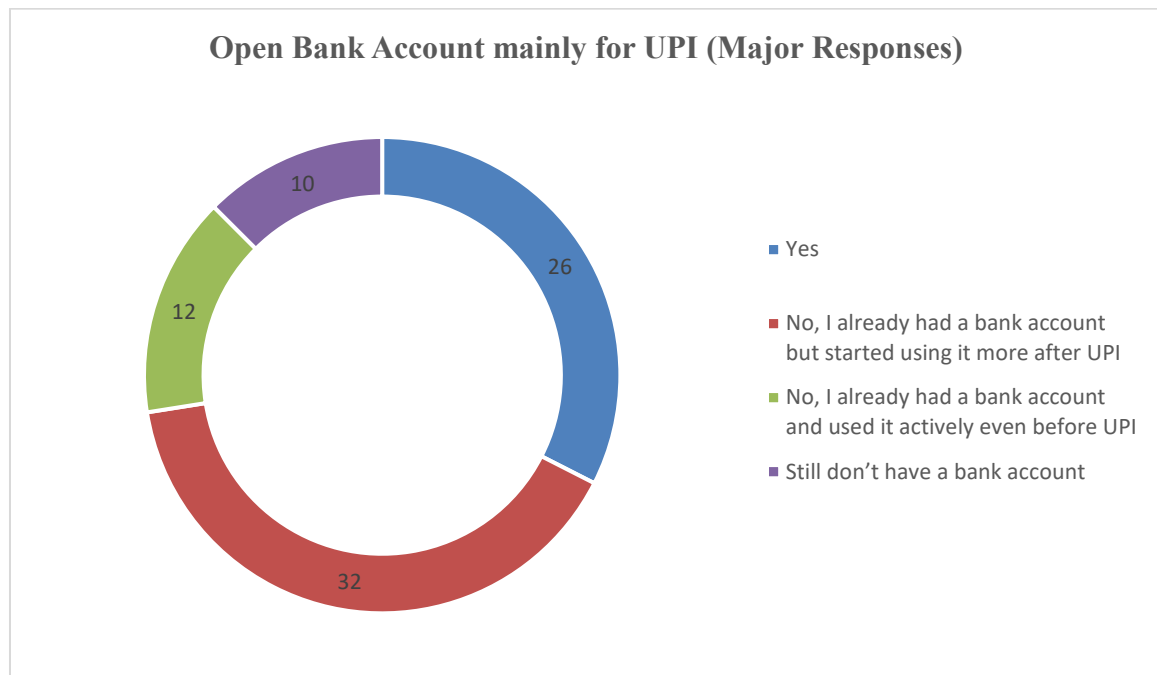
The data from Graph 7 provides an important look into the operational challenges in UPI usage that could undermine its impressive adoption. Network and connectivity issues are the most common problem, affecting 41 respondents, which makes up 51% of the sample. This highlights the infrastructure issues that remain despite India’s push for digital advancements. Transaction failures are the second most frequent issue, impacting 31 respondents or 39%. This indicates serious gaps in the reliability of payment processing. More concerning, 13 users, or 16%, reported that money was debited but not credited to recipients. This serious flaw could harm public trust in digital payments. Technical glitches, such as app unresponsiveness, impacted 15 respondents, or 19%. Interestingly, only 2 respondents, or 3%, pointed to knowledge gaps as their main challenge. This suggests that UPI's interface is generally user-friendly, but its technical implementation needs improvement. These findings call for urgent policy action in three main areas: first, speeding up the development of digital infrastructure to close connectivity gaps; second, enforcing stricter transaction verification systems to reduce payment failures; and third, creating offline transaction options to lessen reliance on network

access.

**Graph-8: What type of Payment method generally use?**



The data from Graph 8 shows a clear change in payment preferences among respondents. Digital payments are clearly more popular than traditional methods. UPI stands out as the leader, used by 58 respondents, or 87.5% of the sample. Cash transactions follow, with 21 respondents, making up 26.3%. Card payments are the least favored, with only 1 respondent, at 1.3%. This distribution strongly supports the paper's main argument about India's fast shift to a digital-first economy, especially the significant role of UPI. The strong preference for UPI, which is nearly 9 times more popular than cash, demonstrates its successful reach in urban and semi-urban areas, as shown in Table 5. However, around a quarter of respondents still prefer cash, aligning with findings in Graph 5 about trust issues and habitual use. This suggests that while digital payments have gained popularity, cash still has a role for certain transactions or user groups. The almost nonexistent use of cards, with only 1 respondent, highlights how UPI has effectively surpassed traditional card payments in India's financial scene. These results collectively strengthen the paper's points about the disruptive effect of UPI on payment behaviors while also indicating that cash is slowly being replaced, rather than completely eliminated, in India's digital transformation journey.

**Graph-9: Open Bank Account mainly for UPI?**

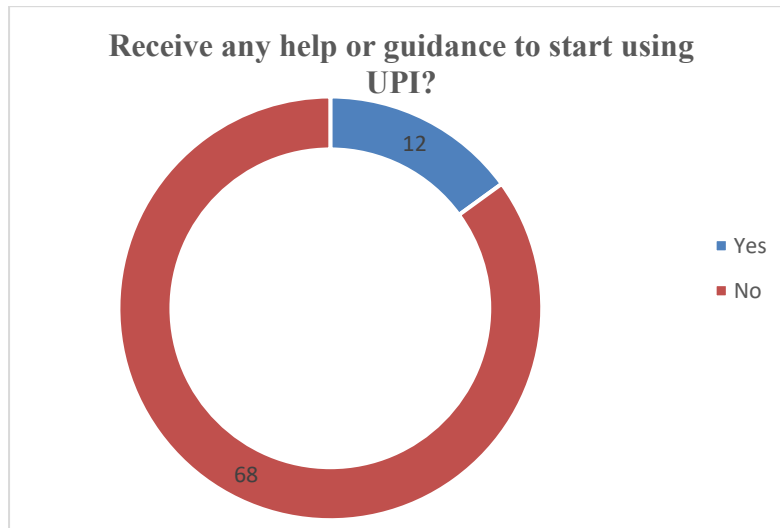
The data shows four clear patterns in the relationship between UPI adoption and banking behavior. First, 26 respondents (32.5%) opened bank accounts to access UPI services. This provides direct evidence that UPI is a key factor in improving financial inclusion, as we expected. A larger group of 32 respondents (40%) who already had bank accounts increased their banking activity after adopting UPI. This shows that UPI can activate accounts that were not used much. Meanwhile, 12 respondents (15%) maintained consistent banking activity regardless of UPI adoption. These individuals make up the traditionally banked population. However, 10 respondents (12.5%) remain unbanked, showing ongoing gaps in financial inclusion despite UPI's widespread reach.

These findings strongly support the research hypothesis but also reveal important limitations. First, the total of 58 respondents (72.5%) whose banking behavior changed due to UPI—either by opening accounts or using them more clearly shows UPI's transformative effect on financial engagement. Second, the 40% who shifted from passive to active banking highlights UPI's unique role in boosting digital financial participation. However, the 12.5% who are still unbanked point to systemic barriers. This suggests that while UPI has considerably improved access, it has not yet achieved complete financial inclusion.

This analysis supports the paper's balanced view on digital financial inclusion, celebrating UPI's successes while recognizing ongoing challenges, as discussed in Sections 5.3 (UPI's impact) and 6 (digital divides). The data not only backs the hypothesis but also clearly illustrates its limitations. This

reinforces the need for focused actions to address remaining gaps.

**Graph-10: Receive any help or guidance to start using UPI?**



The data from Graph 10 shows important insights about the support systems that help people adopt UPI. Out of the surveyed respondents, 12 individuals (15%) reported receiving some form of assistance or guidance when they started using UPI. The remaining 68 respondents (85%) adopted the platform without any external help. This distribution reveals two main points that relate to the paper's broader arguments. First, the majority's independent adoption (85%) indicates that UPI has a generally intuitive design and has become successful in mainstream use. This supports claims in Section 5.3 about its user-friendly interface, which contributes to its rapid spread. Second, the 15% who needed guidance probably includes less tech-savvy or older users. This highlights the ongoing importance of support mechanisms like Common Service Centers (discussed in Section 5.1) and digital literacy programs (Section 6) for achieving truly inclusive adoption. These results complement the paper's analysis of UPI's accessibility strengths and the barriers that some user groups still face in India's digital transformation journey. The data reinforces the need for diverse onboarding methods as digital governance systems expand to serve all segments of India's varied population.

## Conclusion

India's digital governance journey has transformed since the Digital India initiative launched in 2014. The government has taken significant steps to make governance more inclusive, transparent, and efficient by using tools like UPI, DigiLocker, UMANG, and the National Scholarship Portal. These platforms have reduced bureaucratic red tape, empowered citizens, and fostered a more participatory public service environment. However, challenges still exist that limit the full potential of e-governance, particularly for the elderly, digitally illiterate, and rural populations.

One major issue highlighted by this study is the lack of guidance and user education in implementing digital tools like UPI. Although UPI is praised for its user-friendly design and smooth integration, many senior citizens and users with little technology experience find it hard to use. The government and private UPI service providers have not introduced structured awareness campaigns or training programs to help this demographic adapt to digital payment systems. The belief that intuitive design is enough has proven insufficient in a country with significant gaps in digital literacy. To address this, the government must make digital literacy a key part of expanding e-governance. While efforts like PMGDISHA have made progress, these programs should be strengthened and tailored to reach specific underserved groups, such as the elderly, homemakers, and agricultural workers. Digital literacy must not be seen merely as a tool for youth empowerment; in modern democratic societies, it is a basic need for all citizens, allowing them to access essential services and exercise their rights effectively. Furthermore, there is a strong need to improve the completeness and accessibility of digital services. Currently, many government services are only partially digital, and citizens often still need to visit offices physically for verification, approvals, or document submissions. A more inclusive and integrated approach is necessary to ensure that end-to-end processes can be completed digitally whenever possible. This can be done by digitizing the remaining legacy procedures, enhancing interdepartmental data sharing, and strengthening authentication systems like Aadhaar and DigiLocker. Another key recommendation is to introduce government-led UPI orientation centers or helpdesks, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. These centers can work with Common Service Centers (CSCs) to offer hands-on training for digital payments and e-services. They can help boost confidence and promote safe online behavior. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged, with leading UPI providers like PhonePe, Paytm, and Google Pay playing a role in user education and support for complaints. Additionally, the security and trust framework of digital platforms must be improved continuously. Many people who don't use UPI mentioned distrust in online payments as a significant barrier. This highlights the need for stronger cybersecurity policies, real-time fraud alerts, and widespread promotion of complaint resolution systems to build public confidence.

Lastly, inclusivity should guide the future of e-governance. Platforms must support multiple regional languages, assist people with disabilities through voice and text-to-speech technologies, and ensure that gender minorities and marginalized communities are not left out. The success of e-governance relies not just on digital advancements but also on making sure no one is left behind. While India has become a global leader in digital transformation, the next phase of progress must focus on increasing inclusivity, expanding service coverage, and improving digital skills across all segments of society. By addressing structural, social, and infrastructure gaps, India can achieve the true promise of e-governance—governance that is not only digital but also democratic, fair, and centered on the people

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# Influence of Social Media on Classroom Discipline

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## Abstract

This study explores how social media influences the classroom discipline of middle school students. Using a mixed-methods approach, it analyzes student behavior patterns, attention spans, and teacher observations to evaluate the extent of digital distraction. Results reveal a significant correlation between excessive social media use and reduced academic focus, peer conflicts, and behavioral issues. The findings underscore the importance of digital awareness, structured media use policies, and teacher-parent collaboration in maintaining classroom discipline.

## Keywords

Social Media, Classroom Discipline, Student Behavior, Digital Distraction, Educational Impact

## Introduction

As we all know, the importance of discipline in classroom learning is evident. Classroom discipline has always been a discussion-provoking issue. Since it is considered that discipline is responsible for strong academic gains of a student, and also it enhances the efficiency of the education. It not only helps students in successful learning but also affects their life and helps them in staying active. Further, discipline encourages a positive academic performance and makes them more focused on their goals. It enhances self-control among them as they get hold of their stress and anxiety. They start learning how to control themselves from overthinking discipline and enhance students' concentration.

It is enough to understand that classroom discipline is the prerequisite for effective learning in a classroom but in the present scenario, it is observed that the classroom discipline is getting affected. One among the many reasons for the disturbed classroom discipline is the excessive use of social media among the students.

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## Literature review

Different studies on social media and education reveal mixed outcomes regarding its impact on student behavior and classroom discipline. According to Smith & Anderson (2022), “Increased smartphone and social media usage correlates with decreased student attention spans and higher levels of classroom disruption”. Other studies (e.g., Johnson, 2020; Lee & Gupta, 2021) suggest that platforms like Instagram and Snapchat contribute to off-task behavior, leading to lower academic performance and frequent disciplinary interventions. Conversely, some researchers highlight potential benefits when social media is used constructively in the classroom, such as improved student collaboration and communication (Brown & Miller, 2019). However, the literature largely agrees that without proper guidelines, the negative effects of social media outweigh its advantages in traditional classroom settings.

According to the Stratford study, The revolution of ICT emphasised upon the methodology of teachers in imparting education to students as the central role of teachers’ role in delivering knowledge (Patel, 2020). The traditional methods of classroom teaching used by the teachers made the students passive listeners. Therefore, the upgraded practice of teaching was developed in most countries where the teaching materials were improvised, this made the teaching effective and improved the student retention in the classroom learning. Schgurenky (1997) reported that “Conventional teaching practices contribute to the unemployment rate and reduced economic growth due to the lack of sufficient skills among students in order to become more professional.”

## Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods strategy constituting quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of social media on classroom discipline. A total of 80 students from 6 standard to 9 standard and 25 teachers from an urban school were asked to participate in the survey using stratified random sampling. The student survey consisted of Likert-scale questions measuring frequency of social media use during class, perceived distractions, and experiences with cyber-related conflicts. Teacher interviews were semi-structured and focused on observed changes in student behavior, disciplinary challenges, and strategies implemented to manage technology-related disruptions. Descriptive statistics and thematic coding were applied to the data to examine key patterns.

## **Research Objectives:**

1. To examine the relationship between students' social media engagement and classroom discipline.
2. To identify the negative and positive aspects of social media on students' behavioral patterns and academic gains.
3. To assess how social media affects students' attention span, peer relationships, and learning preferences.
4. To evaluate teachers' observations regarding students' behavioral changes linked to social media use.
5. To suggest strategies for managing social media influence in educational settings to enhance classroom discipline.

## **Significance of the study**

The rising use of social media among students has posed a significant challenge in maintaining classroom discipline. This unregulated screen time has affected the students' behaviour negatively. This has been argued that the increased concentration of students on social media platforms has led to the diminished interaction within the community, distraction from the academics, eventually affecting their academic growth (Margaret, 2021). Many observations have been made regarding the disturbed behavioural patterns of the students by the discipline incharges, teachers, and even the parents. Class attendance and the attention span of students are majorly affected as per the data received from the respondents which resulted in poor discipline among the students. This disturbing behavioural pattern of students has to be studied thoroughly.

Scholars like Schon (1983) highlighted how poor discipline in the classroom can obstruct both teaching and learning. According to Kohlberg (1981), the aim of education is discipline and students should be trained towards positive thought of actions. Dewey (1938), argued that to make education more valuable, students should be trained properly during the classroom learning process. Margaret (2021) claimed that "Social media has become an inevitable part of their daily life, and most of the students like it".

## **Impact of Social Media in Education**

### **Positive impact**

Social media impacts the students for everywhere the students can become more with computers and other electronic devices where the social media will help them learn the technology they can use other gadgets and they can be more AI friendly. This gives an opportunity to the students to improve their

skills in the digital world. Learning from a wide variety of educators will help in promoting the plurality among the ideas of the students.

### **Negative impact**

Students due to their frequent checking on social media platforms lack concentration on learning activities. This also causes a bad attitude among the students. Students faced bullying in class inspired from the social media trends. Furthermore, the distraction caused by social media due to skewed sleeping patterns and late-night usage of social media affect the functioning of the brain adversely impacting their mental health.

### **Research Findings**

All are students, and the questionnaire was filled by the students themselves only. Most students are between 11-16 years old. Mixed responses with both male and female participants.

#### **6<sup>th</sup>Grade Class Analytics**

- Average Age: 11.8 years
- Most Common Preferred Device: Android
- Percentage Using Social Media: 75.0%
- Most Common Learning Preference: YouTube
- Percentage Bullied by Friends: 33.3%
- Percentage Bullied via Social Media: 41.7%

#### **7<sup>th</sup> Grade Class Analytics:**

- Average Age: 12.7 years
- Most Common Preferred Device: Android
- Percentage Using Social Media: 66.7%
- Most Common Learning Preference: YouTube
- Percentage Bullied by Friends: 46.7%
- Percentage Bullied via Social Media: 40.0%

#### **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Class Analytics:**

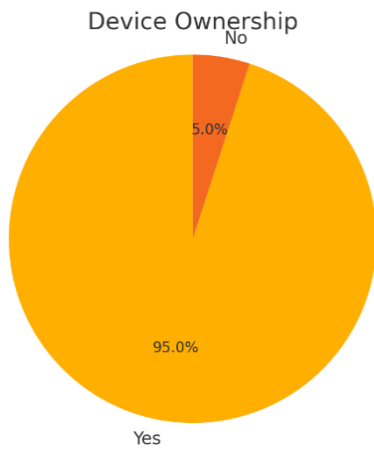
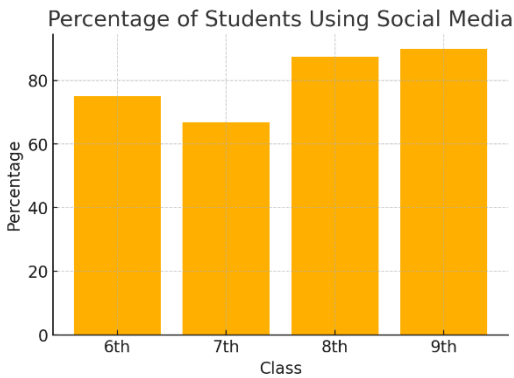
- Average Age: 13.6 year
- Most Common Preferred Device: Android
- Percentage Using Social Media: 87.5%
- Most Common Learning Preference: Classroom
- Percentage Bullied by Friends: 87.5%
- Percentage Bullied via Social Media: 62.5%

### 9th Grade Class Analytics:

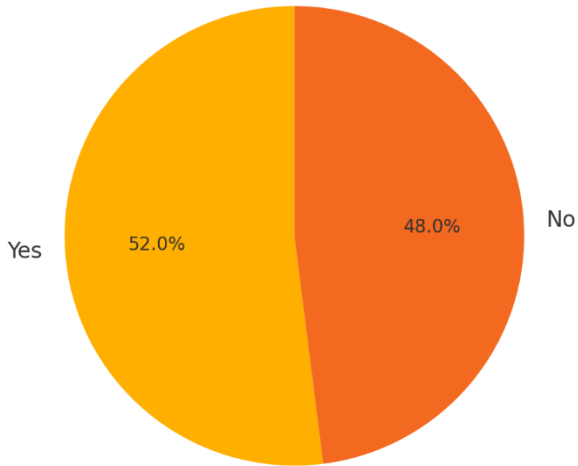
- Average Age: 14.4 years
- Most Common Preferred Device: Android
- Percentage Using Social Media: 90.0%
- Most Common Learning Preference: Classroom
- Percentage Bullied by Friends: 40.0%
- Percentage Bullied via Social Media: 30.0%

### Overall Student Data Analytics (Classes 6 to 9):

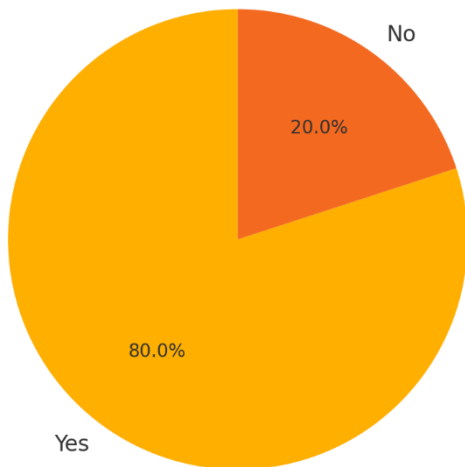
- Average Age: 13.1 years
- Most Common Preferred Device: Android
- Percentage Using Social Media: 79.8%
- Most Common Learning Preference: Classroom
- Percentage Bullied by Friends: 51.9%
- Percentage Bullied via Social Media: 43.5%



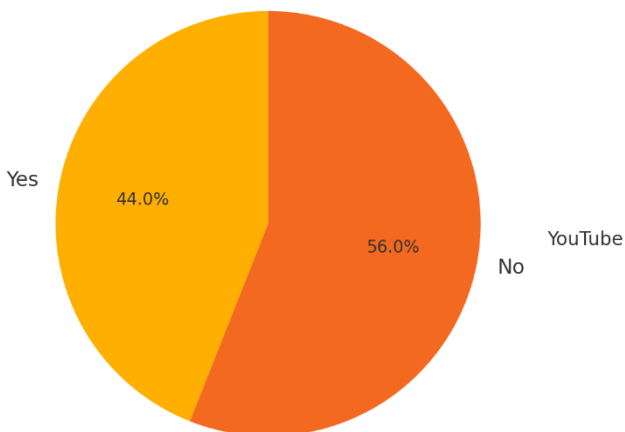
Bullied by Friends



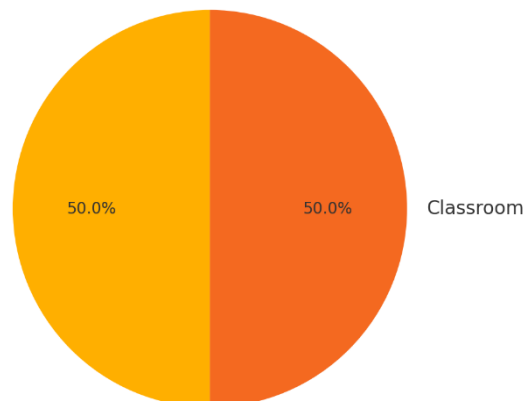
Social Media Usage



Bullied via Social Media



Learning Preference



The study analyzed responses from students across Classes 6 to 9 regarding their digital learning habits, device usage, social media engagement, and experiences with online influence and bullying.

On average, the students surveyed were **13.1 years old**. A strong majority reported owning digital devices, with **Android phones being the most preferred device for learning** across all grade levels. This indicates a consistent reliance on mobile technology for educational purposes.

**Social media usage was high**, with **nearly 80% of students actively engaged on platforms** such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. Despite the widespread use, the primary learning preference slightly shifted from **YouTube in lower classes to traditional classroom learning** in higher grades, suggesting a balancing act between digital and formal education methods.

However, the findings also raise concerns:

- About **52% of students reported being bullied by peers**, and
- **44% experienced bullying influenced by social media**.

These statistics emphasize the need for stronger digital citizenship education and monitoring of online interactions within the student community.

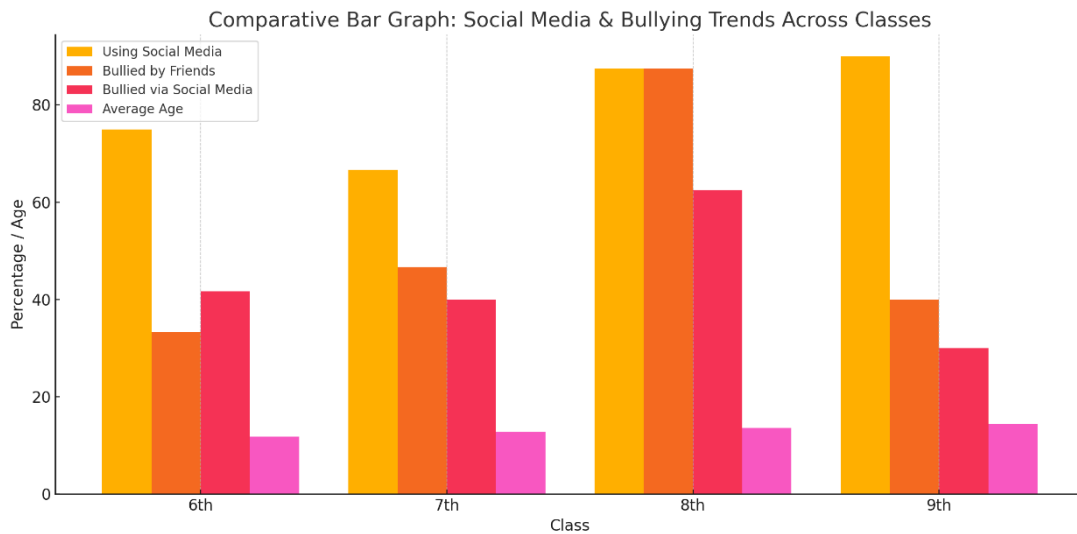
Overall, the data reflects a generation highly immersed in digital tools but also vulnerable to their adverse effects. The insights call for integrated teaching strategies that responsibly harness technology while safeguarding students' emotional and social well-being.

### Comparative Analysis Report: Classes 6 to 9

Comparative Table

Class	Average Age	Most Common Preferred Device	Percentage Using Social Media	Most Common Learning Preference	Percentage Bullied by Friends	Percentage Bullied via Social Media
6th	11.8	Android	75.0	YouTube	33.3	41.7
7th	12.7	Android	66.7	YouTube	46.7	40.0
8th	13.6	Android	87.5	Classroom	87.5	62.5
9th	14.4	Android	90.0	Classroom	40.0	30.0

## Trend Analysis



The trend graph highlights key behavioral and demographic shifts among students from **Class 6 to Class 9**:

- **Social media usage** shows a steady **increase with grade level**, peaking at **90% in Class 9**, indicating greater digital exposure as students grow older.
- **Average age** naturally increases from **11.8 to 14.4 years**, reflecting the expected academic progression.
- Interestingly, **bullying by friends** spikes sharply in **Class 8 (87.5%)**, before dropping again in Class 9. This suggests a possible **emotional or social volatility during early adolescence**.
- Similarly, **bullying via social media** is highest in Class 8 (**62.5%**) and lowest in Class 9 (**30%**), indicating a critical point where **intervention may be most needed**.

Overall, the graph reveals that **middle school years (especially Class 8)** are a sensitive period in terms of peer dynamics and online exposure. This calls for **targeted awareness, digital education, and emotional support strategies** in these classes.

### Hypothesis Testing:

H1: Increased social media usage among students negatively affects classroom discipline.

This has been supported by the above research findings, as nearly 80% of the students actively engage in social media platforms. Teachers have observed that this use leads to students lacking attention in the classroom and imitation of online behaviour affecting the overall classroom discipline.

H2: Students who frequently use social media exhibit reduced academic attention and increased behavioral issues.

This hypothesis has been validated through the above data analysis that students who are having regular access to social media, find it difficult to focus in the classroom. Teachers have observed that students have demonstrated hyperactivity and have copied assignments from online sources due to lack of academic focus.

H3: There is a strong relation between social media trends and peer bullying behaviors in classrooms. The above statement has been validated through the above findings as a large number of students, specifically in class 8 reported bullying by their peers and experienced online trolling.

H4: Teachers perceive social media as a major contributor to declining student discipline and originality in assignments.

The above statement has been supported through the above findings as students copied assignments from the internet using AI with zero understanding of the concept, adding concerns of originality and killing class time.

The above insights affirm that social media has become a serious challenge influencing the classroom behaviour of the students.

**Teachers' participation includes the questionnaire with questions on their observations and suggestions on improving students' behavior.**

Many teachers mentioned reduced attention span and increased distraction due to social media. Some noted students imitating influencers, adopting inappropriate behavior, slang, or fashion. Teachers observed that students are becoming hyperactive or overly engaged when discussing trending topics.

A significant number of teachers reported that students copy homework directly from social media or AI tools, showing reduced originality and effort. Social media was seen as reducing study time, leading to a drop in academic performance.

A few responses highlighted concerns about students using platforms to complete homework or assignments without understanding the concepts. Teachers emphasized the lack of parental supervision and called for parents to guide students on media consumption. There were suggestions that schools should adopt rules or filters to control excessive. Strong support for teacher training programs on how to handle social media issues in class. Some teachers proposed counseling sessions, workshops, or awareness programs for students. One teacher called for strict actions or policies to limit the misuse of

social media in the school context.

## Conclusion

The findings of this research confirm that social media has a substantial impact on classroom discipline. While it offers certain educational benefits when used appropriately, its unregulated use during school hours often leads to distractions, behavioral issues, and disciplinary concerns. Teachers report increasing difficulty maintaining student focus and note that online conflicts frequently spill into classroom dynamics. The study highlights the need for clear school policies, regular digital citizenship training, and strategies to integrate social media in ways that support rather than hinder learning. Further studies should explore the long-term consequences of these interventions and the role of parental involvement in managing students' digital behavior.

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# Clicktivism and Control: The Governance Illusion in the Social Media Era.

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## Abstract

In the classical administrative era of the early 2000s, governance systems depended heavily on structured feedback loops, documentary, hierarchical, and mediated through multiple bureaucratic layers to assess the impact of policies and programmes on target groups. Yet, such inputs were often filtered, adjusted, or diluted to suit institutional comfort zones, leaving critical shortcomings unaddressed. With the rise of social media, e-governance tools, and networked governance paradigms, a new form of public feedback has emerged. This paper argues that social media enables immediate, visible, and largely unmediated channels of citizen input, compelling traditional bureaucracies to acknowledge that digital narratives can no longer be ignored or suppressed. In this sense, social media appears to bridge key governance gaps by allowing primary stakeholders to signal failures in policy design or implementation and by pressuring policymakers to respond for reasons of legitimacy and public optics.

However, this shift is double-edged. While scholarship shows that social media can enhance transparency, facilitate citizen–state interaction, and strengthen accountability, research on “clicktivism” reveals that low-effort digital engagement may create an illusion of participation without substantive impact. Studies from Sri Lanka and Nigeria indicate that although social media mobilizes awareness, its capacity to generate sustained civic engagement or policy change is modest.

Thus, this paper examines whether social media-driven feedback mechanisms genuinely reform governance processes or merely construct a governance illusion. It concludes that the central challenge for democratic governance is converting online voice into offline accountability.

## Keywords

Digital Governance; Citizen Engagement; Feedback Mechanisms; Clicktivism; Accountability

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## Introduction

For most of the twentieth century, the everyday practice of public administration revolved around files, registers and formal correspondence. Citizens who wished to complain about a failed service, an abusive official or a faulty policy did so through written petitions, personal visits to offices and various layers of paper documentation. These complaints entered a bureaucratic chain: they were received at a counter, entered into a register, forwarded to a section, examined by a dealing hand, commented on by superiors and eventually placed before a competent authority. Only after this chain of documentation had run its full course could administrators begin to see the patterns of policy failure or institutional malfunction that those complaints signalled. The state's knowledge of itself and its own shortcomings emerged slowly and selectively from this archive of paper.

This classical model of administration possessed an internal rationality – it ensured records, hierarchical responsibility and procedural regularity – but it was also structurally slow and often opaque. The citizen's grievance disappeared into the file system. Months or years later, parts of it might reappear in the form of internal reviews, committee reports or policy amendments, but the connection between the original complaint and the eventual reform was rarely clear, even to those inside the system. The feedback loop between citizen and state was thus delayed, mediated and tightly controlled by bureaucratic procedures.

The diffusion of information and communication technologies into public administration has disrupted this pattern. E-governance programmes around the world have digitized records, automated workflows and opened online interfaces for citizen complaints. In India, for example, the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) operates as a single online portal through which citizens may submit grievances related to central and many state government services, track their status and evaluate the timeliness of responses. Gujarat's SWAGAT initiative, launched in 2003, similarly integrates digital and communication technologies to enable citizens to submit complaints that are reviewed directly at different levels including by the Chief Minister, backed by a largely paperless workflow and real-time monitoring.

These systems exemplify a more general reconfiguration of feedback in governance. Instead of waiting for complaints to accumulate in files, administrators encounter them as constantly refreshing data on dashboards. Instead of seeing policy problems only after years of implementation, they can observe them emerging almost in real time. Decisions become, in your apt phrase, "switchable": easier to modify, withdraw or recalibrate because their consequences appear quickly in digital form rather than as archival sediment years later.

Social media platforms add yet another layer to this transformation. When a resident films a flooded road, tags a municipal corporation on X, and the video is shared thousands of times within a few hours, the grievance bypasses not only the older paper-based system but also the formal digital portal. It enters a hybrid realm in which citizens, journalists, opposition politicians and administrators are all part of the same public audience. Government agencies themselves increasingly maintain official accounts, respond publicly to complaints, and use these spaces to project an image of responsiveness.

The core question of this paper is how this environment of social media and e-governance generates an illusion of control. Citizens may feel that by clicking, tagging and sharing they are directly shaping public policy; administrators may feel that by responding to a selection of visible complaints and curating success stories they are demonstrating accountability. But beneath these mutual perceptions, the deeper structures of power, capacity and inequality may remain remarkably unchanged.

### **Digital Governance and the Transformation of Feedback**

The first step in understanding the governance illusion is to examine how digital technologies have altered the basic mechanics of administrative feedback. Classical administration, as noted, relied on documentation and the physical movement of files. The feedback loop was reactive and episodic: only when complaints reached a certain volume, or when a particularly egregious case attracted elite attention, did the system mobilize to reconsider its rules or policies. Much of the time, routine implementation proceeded with limited awareness of citizen experience.

E-governance reforms promised to change this by embedding feedback in the very architecture of service delivery. Portals like CPGRAMS are available 24×7 and are formally open to any citizen with internet access. Complaints can be lodged without needing to know which specific office is responsible; the system itself routes them to the appropriate authority. Ministries and departments gain access to consolidated data: how many complaints they have received, on what subjects, from which regions, and how quickly they have responded. SWAGAT's multi-level design, combining village, district and state hearings supported by ICT, similarly aims to create a time-bound, transparent chain of responsibility.

This datafication of grievances has at least three important effects. First, it compresses time. Administrators no longer have to wait for periodic reviews to discover recurring issues; dashboards display them continuously. Second, it makes feedback more legible to the system. Complaints are categorized, geocoded and aggregated in ways that make patterns visible at a glance. Third, it increases the formal accountability of officials: response timelines and pendency figures can be monitored by

higher authorities, and in principle linked to performance assessment.

Your insight that this makes administration “switchable” is significant. When feedback becomes fast and legible, it becomes rational for decision-makers to treat policy not as a fixed product but as something to be tested, adjusted and iterated. E-governance thus nudges bureaucracy toward what might be called a reflexive style of rule: one that repeatedly asks why a particular decision is generating complaints, how implementation on the ground diverges from intention, and what alterations might improve acceptance and feasibility.

Yet even as e-governance compresses time and increases visibility, it remains largely within the formal institutional sphere. The state controls the portal, defines acceptable complaint formats and retains discretion over how data will be interpreted and acted upon. Social media breaks open this enclosed circuit. Platforms like X, Facebook or Instagram are not designed as grievance systems, yet they have become de facto channels of complaint and publicity. Users post photographs of potholes, failing hospitals or arbitrary policing; they tag official accounts and journalists; they mobilize mockery and outrage through memes and hashtags.

One of the most striking developments in many democracies has been the emergence of accounts that specialize in highlighting such grievances and publicly pressuring authorities. In your own research you note an account whose slogan roughly translates as “show us by doing it,” where citizens submit issues like bad roads or waste mismanagement and the account tags relevant departments, often eliciting rapid responses. Whether or not such cases are statistically representative, they symbolize a crucial shift: recognition is no longer entirely at the discretion of the bureaucracy. Visibility can be imposed on the administration through public posts, forcing it to acknowledge problems that might otherwise have remained buried in files.

What social media contributes, then, is not just speed but spectacle. Grievances become performances addressed simultaneously to the state and to a watching public. Administrators do not simply receive complaints; they are seen to receive them. Solutions are not merely implemented; they are displayed and circulated as evidence of responsiveness. It is at this point that the boundary between genuine accountability and its simulation begins to blur.

### **Clicktivism, Slacktivism and the Ambivalence of Digital Participation**

The term “clicktivism,” popularized by Micah White, captures one dimension of this blur. Writing from within activist circles, White criticizes the trend of reducing political engagement to online

actions that can be easily quantified – signatures, clicks, shares – and optimized using the logic of advertising. In his view, campaigns built around such metrics offer “the illusion that surfing the web can change the world” and risk producing political passivity by substituting marketing tactics for deeper organizing.

Evgeny Morozov’s critique of “cyber-utopianism” in *The Net Delusion* extends this line of argument to the geopolitical arena. Morozov shows how regimes can manipulate online spaces, infiltrate digital movements and use the internet for surveillance and propaganda, thereby turning supposed tools of liberation into instruments of control. From this perspective, simply increasing digital connectivity or online expression does not guarantee more democratic outcomes; it may equally enable more sophisticated forms of domination.

Empirical research on so-called “slacktivism” complicates, but does not entirely overturn, these critiques. Henrik Serup Christensen’s widely cited study “Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means?” finds that online activism is often positively correlated with offline participation, suggesting that for many individuals, digital acts complement rather than replace other forms of engagement. Other work points to the role of social media in facilitating large-scale protests, from the Arab uprisings to various recent movements, by lowering coordination costs and enabling rapid diffusion of information. Zeynep Tufekci, in *Twitter and Tear Gas*, emphasizes both the power and the fragility of such networked protests: they can mobilize quickly and at scale, yet often struggle to translate visibility into durable organizational capacity or institutional change.

Taken together, this scholarship suggests that digital participation is ambivalent rather than simply empty. Clicks and shares can be gateways to deeper involvement, but they can also be endpoints that satisfy the desire to “do something” without demanding sustained commitment. From a governance point of view, the key question is not simply whether clicktivism is “real” activism, but how administrations interpret and respond to the signals it generates. If governments treat trending hashtags as indicators of public mood, they may reorient attention to whatever becomes most visible, regardless of its structural importance. If they learn to manage such visibility strategically, they may convert social media into a stage on which responsiveness is performed rather than fully enacted.

### **The Governance Illusion: Selective Responsiveness and Algorithmic Bias**

Your observation that social media can create bias in governance goes to the heart of this problem.

Visibility on platforms is not neutral. Algorithms prioritize content that generates engagement; political actors invest resources in shaping narratives; and governments may pressure platforms directly or indirectly. In such an environment, the grievances that rise to prominence are not necessarily those that reflect the most severe injustices or failures. They may instead be those that are most easily dramatized, most aligned with dominant narratives or most compatible with the interests of powerful actors.

This selectivity opens the possibility of what might be called curated accountability. Administrations can respond quickly and visibly to certain complaints – typically those that are concrete, solvable at low cost and photogenic – while ignoring or deflecting more complex structural issues. A broken road can be repaired for the camera; a deeply unequal land regime or a discriminatory policing pattern cannot be remedied overnight. Yet the images of repair circulate, producing an impression of energetic, citizen-oriented governance.

At the same time, state agencies and ruling parties deploy their own communication strategies on social media. They highlight policy successes, amplify testimonials from beneficiaries and promote carefully crafted narratives of efficiency and benevolence. During election periods, these efforts intensify into sophisticated digital campaigns involving targeted advertisements, influencers and coordinated content. Studies of such campaigns suggest that while they may not always flip partisan loyalties, they can strongly shape perceptions of leadership competence and agenda.

When the curated narratives promoted by governments intersect with algorithmic systems that reward engagement, the result can be a public sphere in which citizens predominantly encounter images of a responsive state, interspersed with highly publicized interventions in selected grievances. Critical or uncomfortable voices may still exist, but they are relatively harder to find, more easily dismissed as “negative” or “anti-national”, or drowned out by orchestrated counter-messaging. The comparison you draw with tightly controlled media environments in authoritarian states such as North Korea is provocative, yet it underscores an important warning: even in formally democratic contexts, media systems can be structured in ways that limit what is easily visible and thinkable. The difference is that control is exerted less through overt censorship than through the more subtle mechanisms of algorithmic curation, platform governance and political communication.

The illusion here is twofold. Citizens may come to believe that because they see many stories of grievances being resolved and officials responding online, governance as a whole must be functioning effectively. Administrators, in turn, may persuade themselves that by addressing visible issues and

maintaining an active social media presence, they are genuinely accountable, even if the deeper institutional obstacles to justice – inadequate resources, entrenched power hierarchies, inequality in access to complaint channels – remain largely intact. The digital layer becomes a mirror that reflects an edited version of governance back to both rulers and ruled.

### **Performance, Capacity and the Dark Edge of Digital Governance**

The distinction between real and performed accountability becomes sharper when we consider the underlying capacity of the administrative system. ICT-enabled grievance mechanisms like CPGRAMS and SWAGAT demonstrate that digital tools can significantly improve the handling of complaints when they are embedded in serious institutional reforms: clear timelines, defined responsibilities, regular monitoring and escalation, and political backing from the top leadership. Such systems, if implemented sincerely, reduce opportunities for grievances to be ignored, create data for systemic improvements, and make it harder for officials to treat complaints as discretionary favors.

However, not all digital initiatives are grounded in equivalent capacity or commitment. Instances of prolonged delays in grievance resolution, even when the complaints are lodged through online systems, reveal that technology by itself does not dissolve bureaucratic inertia. Recent scrutiny of a six-year delay by an urban development authority in resolving a payment issue despite the use of digital records, for example, led a state right-to-service commission to criticize the agency for undermining citizens' rights, underscoring that digitization without administrative responsiveness simply produces a more visible record of failure.

In the realm of social media, the tension between performance and capacity is even more pronounced. Government departments may form social media cells, train officials in crafting posts, and collaborate with platform companies on best practices for digital engagement, as seen in workshops where Meta's India team trains state-level information departments on content strategy and analytics. These efforts undoubtedly improve the quality and reach of government communication. Yet they also risk prioritizing the appearance of connectivity and listening over the hard work of restructuring institutions, reallocating budgets and confronting entrenched interests. It is easier, after all, to reply to a tweet than to reform a corrupt supply chain or address deep regional disparities.

Your concluding warning that administrations which persist in avoiding people's real problems while hiding behind rigid processes and digital façades risk dragging their societies into a darker age of governance is therefore not hyperbole. The darkness you evoke is not the absence of information, but its distortion. Citizens may be better informed about certain things – they might know which

complaints have been “resolved” this week or which schemes have been launched – yet less able to see the structural continuities that reproduce injustice. Administrators may be immersed in streams of online feedback yet shielded from voices that lack digital access or algorithmic visibility.

If this trajectory continues unchecked, the result could be a form of post-democratic governance in which electoral competition and online participation coexist with a hollowing out of meaningful accountability. Participation is reduced to clicktivism; responsiveness is reduced to social media replies; legitimacy is reduced to favorable engagement metrics. Beneath the surface, the “system failures” you emphasize – chronic underfunding of public goods, capture of state institutions by narrow interests, violence against marginalized communities – continue largely unaltered.

## **Conclusion**

The rise of social media and e-governance has undeniably transformed the landscape of governance. Classical public administration, with its slow, paper-based feedback loops, has been overlain by a dense web of digital portals, email channels and online dashboards. Administrators today confront complaints not as distant echoes in archival files but as immediate notifications and real-time data. Decisions have become more “switchable”, at least at the margins, because their consequences are visible much sooner.

At the same time, social media has opened an unruly public arena in which citizens can broadcast grievances, demand action and publicly evaluate responses. Your example of the “show us by doing” style of account on X captures the spirit of this shift: the insistence that the state must not only promise but visibly perform. In many cases, this pressure has led to real improvements: roads repaired, garbage cleared, delinquent officials disciplined. Digital tools have thus enlarged the repertoire through which citizens can press claims and administrators can demonstrate responsiveness.

Yet the very features that make digital governance powerful also make it prone to illusion. Clicktivism enables individuals to feel politically engaged through minimal gestures whose connection to structural change is often tenuous. Critiques by White and Morozov remind us that online activism can degenerate into marketing metrics and that regimes can appropriate the internet for surveillance and propaganda. Empirical work on slacktivism and networked protest shows a more ambivalent picture, in which online participation sometimes complements offline action but frequently struggles to translate visibility into durable institutional reform.

From a governance perspective, the risk is that administrations learn to govern appearances rather than

realities. They may respond energetically to those complaints that surface prominently on social media while allowing less visible injustices to persist. They may invest heavily in cultivating an image of efficiency and empathy online, even as underlying organizational cultures and incentive structures remain resistant to change. Platform algorithms and communication strategies may converge to present citizens with a curated view of governance in which success stories and symbolic interventions dominate over critical scrutiny.

Avoiding this fate requires more than skepticism about clicktivism. It demands a deliberate effort to integrate digital feedback into robust, transparent and inclusive institutional frameworks of accountability. Grievances voiced on social media need systematic pathways into formal redressal systems; data from e-governance portals must be used not only for public relations but for policy redesign and resource allocation. Regulation of platforms, as seen in initiatives like India's IT Rules and the Grievance Appellate Committee, must strike a careful balance between ensuring a "safe, trusted and accountable" online environment and preserving space for dissent and critical journalism. Above all, governments must recognise that the legitimacy of governance ultimately depends less on how responsive they appear in timelines than on whether citizens experience justice, dignity and effective services in their everyday lives.

The social media era, in this sense, is not predetermined. It can become a time in which administrations truly learn from citizens in real time, rethinking policies in the light of lived experience and reshaping institutions to be more democratic. Or it can become an age in which the glow of screens masks the hardening of systems, and the promise of digital participation dissolves into the governance illusion you have rightly identified. The direction taken will depend on whether public administration treats digital tools as an opportunity for deeper transformation or merely as a new technology of control wrapped in the language of engagement.

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# Westernocene: A Capitalocene critique of climate change

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## Abstract

Climate change, globally recognized as a defining crisis of the contemporary era, is mostly viewed under the understanding of what the West calls the 'Anthropocene', which regards nature as a 'cheap value' or 'natural resource' for human progress. This view acknowledges human exceptionalism and the general accountability of humans towards the catastrophic condition of nature. But this paper counters this 'misleading generalization', bringing the notion of 'Capitalocene' and 'Westernocene' into frame. Broadly, these two concepts question the capitalist structure and also the industrialist definition of development as recognized by the West. This paper aims to critique the Anthropocene narrative through a 'Westernocene' in blend with 'Capitalocene' perspective, showing how capitalism, rather than humanity in general, constitutes the primary driver of climate change. It argues that any account of planetary crisis must foreground the roles of capitalist accumulation, global inequality, and histories of colonial exploitation. This paper also brings The Capitalocene as a Critique of Hegemonic Approaches to the Climate Crisis.

The methodology of this study adopts a critical theoretical methodology, synthesizing insights from political ecology, environmental humanities, and analysis of the theories of climate justice. This article also makes an account of all major empirical data and global reports (UNFCCC, SIPRI, HDI, GDP, etc.), and it interrogates narratives of the West to glorify the 'universal burden' of humankind in the label of 'Sustainable development'.

By advancing these notions of 'Westernocene' and 'Capitalocene', we build a conceptual framework that constitutes an 'Anti-Anthropocene' argument for climate justice by reframing climate change as a political-economic project. It confronts that climate change requires more than just technological adaptation; it also demands systemic transformation, which brings an 'uneven burden' of West and East that addresses capitalism itself, intersecting it with ecological critique, with decolonial thought, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

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## Keywords

Westernocene, Capitalocene, Anthropocene, Climate colonialism, Green colonialism, Climate finance, Indigenous sovereignty, Global South, International financial institutions, Climate justice, transformative climate justice, Lithium Triangle (Bolivia, Argentina, Chile.)

## Introduction

Since the advent of modern policy-making, academic analysis, and international governance, a certain narrative has gained overarching priority: the Anthropocene, which assumes human species as a geological agent and a global actor on the planet, whose overall activity has created a new epoch. This framing achieves this through a desirable universalism, where a problem is seen to afflict all humans and requires solutions by humanity as a whole. The same universalism that makes the Anthropocene intellectually alluring, however, blurs an important fact. When addressing the influence of humanity regarding climate change, there is a difference between a billionaire fossil-fuel magnate and a subsistence farmer, a country with centuries of accrued industrial emissions and one with decades of industrialization that has just begun, between the colonizing forces that instilled capitalism worldwide and the colonized nations whose resources were taken to power them is discursively equated.

This paper claims that the Anthropocene narrative is insufficient, misguided, and politically handicapped. It is not a human crisis, but a crisis of capitalism and Western imperialism. To gain an insight into climate change, we have to go beyond the Anthropocene into a Capitalocene plus Westernocene synthesis that explains the structural demands of the capitalist system of unlimited accumulation and the capitalist role in enforcing this model on the world in general. It is only through this kind of analysis that clarity can be produced that will produce truly transformative climate-justice politics.

## The Depoliticizing Narrative of the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene, which can alternatively be defined as the geological age in which man has become a formidable force on the planet, has attained massive discursive ascendancy in modern climate discussion. Since its formalization by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000), the framework has disseminated throughout academic fields, policy organizations, and popular culture, providing “an apparent tenaciously satisfactory explanation of planetary ecological crisis: the geologically important effects of humanity itself” (Steffen et al., 2007). There is a problem in this very universalism, however. The Anthropocene narrative achieves a lethal rhetorical sleight of hand by projecting the destruction of the environment onto people as an undifferentiated mass: it dismantles essential historical-level lines of responsibility and political authority.

By positing the Anthropocene as a universal epoch, the discourse collapses distinctions between radically unequal agents, rendering the fossil fuel billionaire and the subsistence farmer discursively equivalent. An industrialized nation with centuries of accumulating emissions and the country facing the effects of climate change that has the least historical responsibility, the West that has imposed capitalism on the rest of the world and the colonized Global South that has inherited subordination. The political impacts of such a universalizing move are immense. Following their path-setting critique, San Román and Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) state that the Anthropocene ‘de-politicizes’ and ‘de-historicizes’ the ecological destruction due to the crisis of humanity as a whole, which skips the question of historically specific agents and mechanisms that bring this crisis into being. Such depoliticization closes radical questions of transformation in the system and allows gross actors to escape responsibility through claims to universal human nature.

### **The Capitalocene: Naming the System**

In reaction to these incompetences, critical scholars have presented the Capitalocene as an alternative describing framework. The main theorist of the concept, Jason W. Moore (2016, 2023), also fundamentally opposes the Anthropocene as analytically sufficient, arguing that, in fact, it is capitalism, not merely as an economic system, but as a historically specific socio-ecological system, that is the real motor of modern ecological destruction. It is an essential epistemological shift and a radical break with mainstream climate analysis (Moore and Antonacci, 2024).

According to Moore (2014), the idea of Cheap Nature, historical capitalism, relied on the availability of cheap natural resources and labour by means of colonial and imperial expansion. The successive accumulation regimes, the ‘Plantation World’ (16th-18th centuries), Mercantile Capitalism, Industrial Capitalism, and Fossil Fuel Capitalism reorganized nature to make a profit by systematic appropriation. The end of Cheap Nature heralds, in the eyes of Moore, a terminal crisis of capitalism as it is currently constituted. As soon as frontier expansion exhausts available cheap resources to rob, the profit rate declines, and the accumulation of capital goes into systemic contradiction. The ecological crisis of capitalism, as described by Moore (2022) in his analysis of the terms Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and the flight from world history, manifests due to the depletion of appropriable nature on the planetary level.

The conclusions made by Moore are attempts to politically unbend the ecological crisis by means of sustainable development, green capitalism, or technological solutions, are essentially a misconception of the issue due to their assumption of the conciliability of capitalism with ecological restrictions

(Moore, 2016), that capitalism must in ceaseless development, continue to cheapen nature, this reconciliation is ontologically impossible.

### **The Westernocene: Western Power, Colonialism, and Capitalism**

As discussed by San Román and Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) in the article “An Anthropocene, Capitalocene or Westernocene?” The ideological implications of terminology. On the ideological foundations of the contemporary climate crisis, terminology also has particular ideological implications in explaining causality and apportionment of responsibility. Whereas the Capitalocene attributes ecological destruction to the structural needs of capitalism, the Westernocene attributes the same not solely to the needs of capitalism but to the historical actors and institutions of the West, such as colonialism, imperialism, epistemologies of the European Enlightenment, and Western modernity itself that enforced the logic of capitalism on a global scale and contributes to the subordination of non-Western peoples and lands via financial architecture, the conditionality of policies and an epistemic violence.

Adelman (2020) offers the “theoretical source of such synthesis, stating that the crux of the matter is not only that of capitalism but that of modernity in its entirety”, which needs to be comprehended as the primary cause of contemporary crisis. Modernity as a project of epistemics and politics (which began in Western Europe and diffused to other parts of the world due to colonialism) is reliant upon: (1) division of nature and society, (2) control of non-human nature, (3) growth based on progress, and (4) universalization of Western categories (Adelman, 2020). “The Westernocene is what is referred to as a dual formation, capitalism as an economic mode, and Western power as a geopolitical mode” (San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2023). These have a long-standing history of being intertwined with capitalism developed out of colonialism, colonialism was penalized to serve capitalistic processes of accumulation, and “Western hegemony struggles to remain in place through capitalist structures and financial design” (Siddiqui, 2025).

### **Climate Colonialism, Financial Imperialism**

The conflation of Capitalocene and Westernocene paradigms demonstrates something important that cannot fully be explained either by climate change, not largely as an environmental issue, but as a political-economic initiative that has a South-century history of Western capitalistic imperialism. The industrial richness, technological superiority, and geopolitical and economic power of the Global North had been constituted literally by ecological and labor exploitation of the Global South. Slavery, colonialism, the plantation system, imperial wars, and modern economic relations as a debt have

diligently relocated the wealth, resources, and environmental expenses of the South to the North.

This pattern of structure is preserved in modern financial processes. These organizations are mechanisms of perpetual subordination, as Moyo (2024) illustrates with the World Bank, IMF, and WTO as Agents of Financial Imperialism. Siddiqui (2025) asserts that the "International Financial Institutions and Western Hegemony" take advantage of the Global South by means of debt formats that cause exploitation. "The Western economic hegemony is preserved by the architecture of global finance, which was laid out by the Bretton Woods and its heirs" (Germain, 1997; Murau & Van't Klooster, 2023). According to Vasudevan (2008) Finance, Imperialism, and the Hegemony of the Dollar is an illustration of the power within monetary systems per se.

The idea of climate coloniality summarizes the way colonial dynamics of extraction, subordination, and epistemic violence continue to exist both in modern climate governance and the climate crisis.

### **The Common But Differentiated Responsibilities Principle**

The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) is the most justice-oriented mechanism that can be given to climate governance because developed countries have the major responsibility in solving the issue of climate change, considering the historical emissions and wealth they hold. However, CBDR has been undermined systematically as a result of climate agreements made one after another. The Westernocene-Capitalocene synthesis can explain why: all three conditions would have to be met to accept full CBDR: the Global north would have to embark on deep, rapid, unilateral decarbonization without preconditioning it on compliance by the Global South; debt cancellation and reparations of ecological destruction and extraction would have to be made; transfer of technology would have to be made without restraining intellectual property; genuine redistribution of planetary resources and sovereignty would have to be made.

This would view such changes as systemic change, rather than technical adjustment. They would need to dismantle the financial architecture on which Western dominance has been designed and reorganize the global relations on the principles of equity and decolonization (Herzog, 2021). It is not surprising that the leading actors oppose such a framing, and, on the contrary, they propagate models, such as the Anthropocene, green growth, the market-based mechanisms, etc., that redistribute the burden of responsibility everywhere and maintain a certain balance of power.

### **Central argument**

The present paper states that the Capitalocene and Westernocene paradigms allow seeing aspects of the

climate crisis that are not well represented by the framework of the Anthropocene, as well as methodological approaches based entirely on single-axis models. In particular:

- (1) The demands of capitalism for endless accumulation and the appropriation of inexpensive nature are necessarily linked to the modern ecological destruction.
- (2) The Western or European power that functions through colonialism, imperialism, and financial architecture has constituted capitalism and promotes its perpetuation.
- (3) The modern climate governance institutions and mechanisms reproduce climate coloniality; in other words, the continuation of colonial extraction and epistemic violence through the very operations of climate governance has to be seen through multiple synonomic processes.
- (4) The paper also argues that transformative climate justice politics requires not merely technical decarbonization but simultaneous systemic transformation addressing capitalism and Western dominance, grounded in Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and centered on the Global South and indigenous leadership.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **1. Thematic Literature Review**

#### **Theme 1: Conceptual Frameworks-Competing Epoch Terms, and Their Political Stakes**

##### **1. Anthropocene: Contributions and Insufficiencies:**

The Anthropocene notion, coined by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) and developed by Steffen et al. (2007), reached a phenomenon of discursive dominance quickly by presenting humanity as a geologic actor. It is much stronger in that human activity turned out to be geologically important as it influences climate regimes, biodiversity, and geochemical cycles on a planetary level (Steffen et al., 2007). However, according to the critical scholars, there is a fatal flaw in this: universalizing agency to the whole of humanity, the Anthropocene hides the specific actors, power structures, and economic frameworks that caused the crisis (San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2023).

San Román and Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) show how the Anthropocene narrative is successful in a perilous way: it portrays a human-generated destruction of the planet on a general level, making discursively, in other words, equal a fossil fuel tycoon billionaire and a subsistence farmer, a several-hundred-year-old industrialized nation and a developing one. It allows the strong actors to avoid responsibility by referring to the existence of universal human nature, precludes radical criticisms of the system, and makes climate governance technocratic and managerial (San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2023). The language we use, as they argue, has different ideological connotations towards

causality and assigning accountability- each generation term defines the political solution, which becomes possible (San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2023, p. 45).

## **2. The Capitalocene: Calling the Economic System:**

In reaction to Anthropocene failures, Jason W. Moore (2014, 2016, 2022, 2023) suggests the Capitalocene be used instead of the Anthropocene. Moore does not appeal to humanity in general but highlights capitalism as a socio-economic system, as something historically specific, and specifically identifies capitalism as the actual cause of the modern-day ecological destruction (Moore, 2016). This is an important epistemological transformation of the blame at the species level to the system-level blame.

The world-ecology is a methodological innovation of Moore, denying the liberal division of nature and society. According to Moore (2016), capitalism is the result of the sloppy and arbitrary interactions between people and the rest of nature, according to which the accumulation of capital is inherently ecological, which, structurally, requires the property and constant devaluation of nature. The capital has to grow continuously, nature has to become constantly, relentlessly, cheapened and commodified to generate profit, and ecological sustainability cannot at all coincide with the logic of capitalism (Moore, 2016, 2023).

At the heart of the analysis is the book "Cheap Nature" by Moore (Moore, 2014, 2022), which follows the historical reliance of capitalism on the availability of cheap sources of natural resources and the human body via colonial and imperial growth. Every new regime: the Plantation World (16th-18th centuries), Mercantile Capitalism, Industrial capitalism, Fossil Fuel Capitalism, reordered nature to remain profitable via systematic appropriation (Moore, 2022). Regarding the political incompatibility of the conclusions made by Moore, the ideas of sustainable development and green capitalism (or technological solutions) to the ecological crisis are essentially mistaken in understanding the problem, since the nature of capitalism is the insatiable growth (Moore, 2016, 2023). Due to the incompatibility of ecological sustainability with capitalist ontology, systemic change is the sole means by which the Capitalocene can be transcended, thereby being outside the bounds of reform (Moore & Antonacci, 2024).

## **3. The Westernocene: Inserting the Western Power and Colonialism:**

But even the Capitalocene model, although it is analytically better than the Anthropocene, is not comprehensive. San Román and Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) state that it establishes the economic system that ensued the crisis, but it creates the risk of excessive geopolitical and colonial specifications by

which capitalism invested in organizing the world of nature. At this point, the Westernocene comes into being. Although Capitalocene tends to attribute the cause of destruction to structural imperatives of capitalism, the Westernocene tends to attribute the cause to not only capitalism but to concrete historical actors and institutions of the West, such as colonialism, imperialism, and Enlightenment epistemologies of the West and Western modernity in general, which entailed the imposition of capitalist logic on the rest of the world (San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2023, p. 48).

This synthesis has theoretical basis (as given by Sam Adelman (2020)) as the theory hypothesizes that modernity (the understanding of modernity as an epistemic and political project), which began in Western Europe, was foisted upon the entire world through colonialism, is founded upon: (1) the separation of nature and society, (2) domination of non-human nature, (3) progress through endless growth, and (4) universalization of Western categories. A twofold form is then called the Westernocene, both flawed capitalism as an economic system and Western power as a geopolitical system (Adelman, 2020). All are historically bound together; capitalism rose to power by way of colonialism, and colonialism was being enforced by the means of capitalist accumulation, and the financial architecture is the reason why Western hegemony endures (Siddiqui, 2025).

## **Theme 2: The Historical Logic of Capitalist Extraction and "Cheap Nature"**

### **1. Structural Reliance on Nature Appropriation Capitalism:**

The idea of Cheap Nature described by Moore can be followed to subsequent capitalist regimes (Moore, 2014, 2022). Historical capitalism relied on having access to inexpensive natural resources and labor, which were made available through colonial and imperial expansion. Plantation World (16th-18th centuries): this type of commodification of land, labor, and non-human nature was specifically in the Americas (Moore, 2014, 2022). Later governments, Mercantile, Industrial, Fossil Fuel Capitalism, restructured nature to continue to make a profit: forest harvesting, fossil mining, farming intensification (Moore, 2022). Every eastward stretching exploration until the verge of the universe. According to Moore, the end of Cheap Nature marks the terminal crisis of the currently constituted capitalism since, once the cheap natures have been exploited by means of frontier expansion, the rate of profit is getting low, and capital accumulation initiates systemic contradiction (Moore, 2014 and 2022).

Parenti (2016) builds on this by analyzing the environment-making in the Capitalocene, which indicates that capitalism not only consumes nature but is also an active producer of environmental conditions, reconfiguring the ecosystems by its production process, producing waste as an externality, and dumping the environmental costs on the least powerful populations (Parenti, 2016).

## **2. Agricultural Systems and Development as Extraction Machines:**

La Viña and Reyes (2022) relate this logic of extraction by capitalists to developmental trends, suggesting that the current crisis is a result of a specific model of Western development that the Global South has been exposed to. The model focuses on the growth of the North rather than the flourishing of people, takes resources of the South to feed the North, and forms export-driven monocultures prone to climate change (La Viña & Reyes, 2022). Agro-industrial monocultures are found to be collapsing under the impact of climate, and diverse agroecological systems were found to be resilient, indicating that the form of development is the issue (La Viña & Reyes, 2022).

Plantationocene framework stretches this discussion into the past and demonstrates that plantation agriculture did not conclude but instead was moved to the industrial: colonial plantations turned into industrial agriculture; slave labor into the exploitation of migrant farmworkers; tropical colonies into the agricultural zones of the Global South; but nowadays the food system still mines the South to feed the North, relying on racialized labor and immigrant labor, and causing ecological devastation (Davis et al., 2019). The study of climate change cannot be done in isolation from the history that saw extractive patterns that began with colonialism, through capitalism, into the modern food systems.

## **Theme 3: Financial Hegemony- Bretton Woods to Modern Monetary Subordination.**

### **1. Bretton Woods System and Institutionalized U.S. Dominance:**

To comprehend the Westernocene, one will need to examine the functioning of Western (or U.S. domination using finance. Michael D. Bordo (1993) gives a historical account of the Bretton Woods system (1944-1971), showing how it institutionalised U.S. monetary hegemony. Bretton Woods set the exchange rates fixed and pegged the exchange rate to all currencies pegged to the U.S. dollar, and which could be moved to gold valued at 35 dollars per ounce (Bordo, 1993). This one-sided arrangement granted the U.S. extraordinary advantages, the fact that the country could virtually print its money to cover the deficits when the rest of the world was forced to earn its dollars either through trade or by currency crises. This created great seigniorage advantages to the U.S., which other countries did not enjoy (profit earned by issuing currency) (Bordo, 1993).

With fatal contradictions within the system, the U.S. experienced increases in deficit (through the Vietnam War and social expenditure) in a time with less and less gold in America, and the dollar-gold convertibility became less trusted. President Nixon, however, unilaterally abandoned convertibility by closing the gold window in 1971 (Bordo, 1993). Nevertheless, the formal downfall of Bretton Woods failed to kill U.S. monetary dominance because it was able to adapt and succeed in other ways.

## **2. Modern Dollar Hegemony by Shadow Banking and Private Networks.**

To understand how dollar dominance insists on Bretton Woods downfall, Steffen Murau (2025) creates the Global Credit View based on shadow banking, offshore money, and global credit markets. What is defined by centralization within U.S. state institutions becomes decentralized, with the networks of private banks, investment funds, hedge funds, and financial corporations becoming more influential globally, who, together, insist on the use of dollars to conduct international trade (Murau, 2025). The dollar is global credit money (IOUs traded on the private financial markets in dollar denominations) and, therefore, dollar dominance is deeply implicated in infrastructure, making it hard to challenge (Murau, 2025). This is noteworthy as it demonstrates the evolution of western financial hegemony in the form of privatized, decentralized networks that are more difficult to challenge than formal institutions.

Murau and Van't Klooster (2023) illustrate how this cripples even the non-Western states that are trying to enjoy monetary autonomy. States have monetary sovereignty on paper, but their ability to adopt it is terribly constrained by financial markets around the globe that they refer to as the sovereignty paradox. When the central bank of a country adopts policies that do not match its expectations of Western financial markets, it is likely to encounter capital flight, currency crises, and external pressure (Murau & van't Klooster, 2023).

### ***Theme 5: Climatic Coloniality and Green Colonialism:***

The Capitalocene-Westernocene framework creation shows that climate change should not be perceived as a mere political-economic initiative; it is based on centuries of Western capitalist imperialism. Ecological and work exploitation of the Global South was the foundation of the material abundance of the Global North. There have been transfers of wealth, resources, and environmental costs between South and North, systematically, in slavery, colonialism, plantation systems, imperial wars, and modern-day debt relations.

This continuity is theorized with the help of the concept of climate coloniality, which is voiced by Farhana Sultana (2022, cited in materials). Sultana believes that climate change cannot be divorced from the colonial past that organizes the modern inequality. Green colonialism, which may represent one of the most prominent forms of climate coloniality, is the exploitation of territories of the Global South as a source of renewable energy (lithium, rare earth minerals, cobalt) with the usual displacement of the local population and the reproduction of the colonial patterns of extraction under the guise of greenness (Coburger, 2025). *Imperial Money and the Making of Currency Hierarchies* by Carla Coburger (2025) looks at the hierarchies built into monetary systems that made the extraction of

resources easy, which were based on colonial hierarchies. Nigeria will be a case study of how imperial money forms appropriates the wealth as it recreates domination (Coburger, 2025).

- **Non-Thematic Literature Review**

### **STRAND 1: Chronological Development of Scholarship.**

The history of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Westernocene scholarship is that of a temporal advancement scale of theories, with each theory building on and criticizing, and growing before it.

#### **Phase 1: Anthropocene Emergence (2000-2007)**

The background moment commences with the name Anthropocene as coined by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), which has then taken time to circumvent all institutional levels through Steffen et al. (2007). This stage made humanity a geological force that can impact planetary systems on a large scale, which had been its prerogative before the physical processes (Steffen et al., 2007). The Anthropocene narrative became dominant across fields, passing into being the hegemonic mode of conceptualizing planetary crisis (Steffen et al., 2007; Chakrabarty, 2015).

#### **Phase 2: Critical Responses and Capitalocene Alternative (2013-2016).**

Since about 2013-2016, a cohort of academics has expressed basic criticisms of Anthropocene framing. Jason W. Moore (2013, 2014, 2016) became the hub theorist, suggesting the substitution of the ideas of the capitalistic center with the concept of the Capitalocene. The key term used by Moore was methodological: instead of the human agency of geology in general, he recognized capitalism itself as the real force and structurally reliant on the appropriation of cheap nature (Moore, 2014, 2016). This time was characterized by the multiplication of the foundational texts of Moore: *The Capitalocene* (2014), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* (2016), which has built the paradigm that prevails in critical literature.

Malm (2016) has given a decisive historical underpinning, how the addiction to fossil fuels was a capitalist decision, and not based on technology. Hartley (2016) and Cocciolo (2019) applied the ideas of Capitalocene to legal and cultural aspects. This step turned the Capitalocene into a complex alternative that had significant academic flourishing (Baer, 2017; Antonacci, 2021).

#### **Phase 3: Westernocene Addition and Synthesis (2023-2025)**

The last development started approximately in 2023 and indicates explicit Westernocene cognitive development. The essay written by San Román and Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) contains the original argument that neither the Anthropocene nor Capitalocene can be considered a sufficiently valid term to

describe how Western/European power and colonialism have been constitutive. At the same time, financial scholarship (Murau, 2025; Siddiqui, 2025; Moyo, 2024) followed the material way of Westernocene subordination, following the monetary systems and financial institutions. This step captures the work done before into wholesome analysis: Capitalocene (economic order), Westernocene (geopolitical agent), Plantationocene (racialized aspects), Chthulucene (multipolar options), each of these to build a matrix and not a single frame.

## **STRAND 2: Methodological Diversity.**

The various methodologies that are used by the scholars who publish on these frameworks show very different aspects of the crisis.

### **Approach 1: Historical- Materialist Analysis:**

A good example of this practice is provided by Moore (2014, 2016, 2022), who followed the history of capitalism and its effects on the environment. This approach follows long-term trends (Plantation World 16th-18th centuries through Fossil Fuel Capitalism) rather than snapshots, and indicates structural logics of accumulation. Malm (2016) uses the same methodology, looking at certain historical events (3rd-18th century adoption of the steam engine) to demonstrate how fossil dependence was a result of capitalist decisions rather than technological determinism. This is applied by Bordo (1993, 1997) to follow institutionalization by Bretton Woods. The strength of this methodology lies in seeing modern structures as the outcome of past decisions, but its disadvantage is that it can give way to a big story, which removes contingency.

### **Approach 2: Political Economy of Financial System:**

An alternative approach, such as Murau (2025), Siddiqui (2025), and Moyo (2024), uses them as a fine-grained analysis of the organisational mechanisms and financial flows. Murau follows the history of shadow banking networks, offshore finance, and global credit markets to demonstrate how dollar hegemony operates without being backed by gold. Siddiqui breaks down IMF structural adjustment conditionality, where a subordination is enforced through technical-looking requirements. Moyo follows the debt trap reasoning and capital flight. The strong point of this methodology is that it brings out tangible mechanisms of power; the weakness is that it runs the risk of economism, which diminishes cultural/epistemological aspects.

### **Approach 3: Conceptual-linguistic Analysis:**

The methodological focus (as applied to political possibility) used in San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) and Janković (cited in materials) is how terminology contributes to political possibility. They

examine the rhetoric and politics achieved by the various epoch terms. The same analysis is done by Chakrabarty (2015), who explores the nature of the Anthropocene framing, establishing certain friction with postcolonial theory. Possenti (2024) goes back to trace the genealogy of conceptual developments and their implications. The advantage of this methodology is the disclosure of the manner in which language/framing constrains/enables possibilities; the weakness of the approach is the possible material consequences of abstraction.

## **RESEARCH GAP:**

- **Thematic Research Gaps**

### **Gap 1: Westernocene Conceptualization Lacking Empirical Operationalization**

San Román and Molinero-Gerbeau (2023) have performed a theoretically necessary rounding error to Capitalocentric analysis concerning the Western/European institutional, financial, and epistemological preeminence, arguing that Western/European is co-constitutional to capitalism and continues to organize climate injustice. However, the idea is still held in most cases as a hypothetical suggestion (Adelman, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, scholarship has not yet theorized/lizated the Westernocene structure systematically by comparative policy analysis, institutional ethnography, or quantitative evaluation of Western power in the particular mechanisms of climate governance- such as climate finance, carbon markets, the transition to green energy, or international negotiation. As a result, Westernocene is not analytically persuasive but relies on empirical evidence in a wide climate setting.

However, there is a lack of empirical case studies linking Westernocene analysis and instrumental outcomes, such as concrete climate policies, financial and institutional practices in the Global South, to real and empirical effects are necessary for the testing, refinement, and theorized/lization of the explanatory framework's power.

### **Gap 2: Climate Finance and CBDR Disconnected from Debt Trap and Financial Subordination Analysis**

Although a large portion of the literature usually focuses on climate finance shortcomings (OECD climate finance tracking, UNFCCC reporting) and discussions of the undermining of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (Herzog, 2021), most of it exists in isolation of critical political-economic studies of debt, structural adjustment, and financial imperialism (Siddiqui, 2025; Moyo, 2024; Cain, 2022). In this regard, a lack of an integrated performative exposing of how IMF/World Bank conditionality inhibits Global South climate action capacity, how debt servicing is diverting

resources to climate mitigation and adaptation, or how currency hierarchies restrain climate finance access and autonomy is deficient. The connection between financial subordination and climate injustice has not been sufficiently theorized and empirically studied. Also, these works could not draw any unified response that integrating climate finance tracking with their debt data and monetary subordination data (at least on a country or regional scale) would help to shed light on the role of the financial architecture in perpetrating climate coloniality.

### **Gap 3: Green Colonialism Lacking Granular Institutional and Distributional Analysis**

Coburger (2025), among other critical analysts, appreciates green colonialism, that is, the mining of minerals to generate renewable energy (lithium, cobalt, rare earths) in the lands of the Global South with displacement and ecological destruction as a modern expression of climate colonialism. However, the literature widely available is still more abstract and descriptive rather than systematic record of (1) the ownership structures and profit movements of green mineral mining; (2) the distributional effects on indigenous people and local ecologies and ecosystems; (3) the processes by which Western corporations and Northern governments facilitate or even profit off these extractive patterns; and (4) the interaction of green colonialism and climate politics, carbon markets, and development finance. There is a lack of depth in case studies.

- **Non-Thematic Research Gaps**

### **Gap 4: Methodological Pluralism Calcified or Non-operationalised.**

The diversity of methodological approaches is proven in the literature review: historical-materialist analysis (Moore, Malm, Bordo), political economy of finance (Murau, Siddiqui, Moyo), conceptual-linguistic analysis (San Román & Molinero-Gerbeau), intersectional-feminist analysis (Davis et al., Dillard-Wright et al.), and speculative approaches (Haraway/Chtulucene). Nevertheless, none of these are widely applied in studies; not many studies have managed to combine them. As a result, studies are either better at macro-structural critique with no focus on embodied experience and agency, or precursors of lived experience with no focus on political-economic analysis. The discipline does not offer paradigms of consolidated multi-method studies that would involve materialist assessment, intersection, qualitative fieldwork, and participatory techniques of comprehending and transforming climate injustice. However, Critical political economy methodologically integrated research designs incorporating intersectional, ethnographic, and participatory methodology, especially in Global South countries, would contribute to the development of theoretical insights as well as justice-based practice.

### **Gap 5: Political Implications of Framework Pluralism Uninvestigated.**

Scholarship is changing the type of epoch names to pluralistic (Capitalocene, Westernocene,

Plantationocene, Chthulucene, Thermocene). Although such conceptual extension improves the capacity of analysis, the impact of pluralism on politics has been least studied. How are frameworks for contesting for climate justice defined in competition with each other? What frameworks control the space of policy, and which ones are assigned to the limited ones' idea? What does the choice of a framework entail as capable or incapable of supporting or even foreclosing this or that political strategy? The connection between scholarly conceptual discourse and activist/policy-makers oriented framing, agenda-setting, and strategic decision-making is under-theorised.

More insights are needed for reflexive meta-analysis- Analyzing the circulation of frameworks across academic, policy, and activist spheres and the resulting political implications would help make clear the stakes of the process of choosing a framework to return to climate justice movements.

## **ANALYSIS:**

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

- **Central Research Question**

- 1) How does the Capitalocentric structure of the west operate through specific climate governance mechanisms (CBRD, climate finance, carbon markets, and international financial institution conditionality) in the Global South?

- **Subsequent research question**

- 2) How do these international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank) and Western monetary architecture (dollar hegemony, debt servicing obligations) constrain Global South national climate action capacity, transformative climate justice politics; and how it facilitates ongoing resource extraction through green energy transitions and technical decarbonization?
- 3) How do renewable energy transitions and green mineral extraction construct colonial patterns of dispossession and labor exploitation, and how does this differently affect indigenous migrant workers, and racialized communities in specific Global South contexts?

This section operationalises the Capitalocene Westernocene synthesis with the help of a combined analysis of empirical data and policy documents and comparing case studies that answer three interconnected research questions. It is analysed in terms of macro institutional mechanisms, such as international financial institutions, climate-finance architecture, and the undermining of the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities principle, then progresses to meso-level mechanisms, such as green

energy transitions and mineral extraction, and then finally, the distribution impacts at the ground level, including that of indigenous peoples, women, and marginalised people in the Global South.

The paper brings different case studies following the approach given by Robert Yin (2018) in his work, “Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.)”, the current analysis will be based on the case-study methodology, but it employs case studies, which involve the analysis of cases across multiple levels, and a comparative case analysis that aims to determine patterns in cases. The cases are chosen based on their theoretical applicability to Western financial subordination; they depict Western-based financial subordination, green colonialism and climate injustice at work into real life examples, thus, allowing the theory to be empirically operationalised.

## **Part I: International Financial Intuitions and Climate Action Constraint.**

### **1. Institutional-Financial Dimension**

The Bretton Woods Banking (1944-1968) and Western Monetary Westernised Dominance has a historical background and still have its relevance in modern times. The International monetary system which codified the Western dominance in finance was solidified in the Bretton Woods conference of 1944 and led to the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and a fixed exchange rate system pegged to the U.S. dollar. The dominance of the U.S. monetary authority has not declined since 1971 (Nixon Shock), but it has transformed (Bordo, 1993; Murau, 2025). Recent dollar hegemony follows what Murau (2025) refers to as the “Global Credit View - a decentralised system of shadow banking, offshore finance and global credit markets”, where all significant transactions are conducted in dollars, resulting in what Vasudevan (2008) has termed as “monetary imperialism”.

### **Case Study 1: Sri Lanka (2020 -2025) -The Debt-Climate Trap**

Sri Lanka is an excellent example of how subordination of debts is a direct limitation of climate-fighting capability. There is also a sovereign debt distress (debt-to-GDP ratio of 113 per cent in 2022), IMF conditionality, and excessive vulnerability of climate (South Asian cyclones, sea level rise that threatens coastal infrastructure and livelihoods) which the country faces simultaneously.

After capital flight and the global financial crisis, Sri Lanka had accrued a lot of borrowing by China, Western banks and international markets. By 2022, the country witnessed extreme crises of foreign-exchange, thus requiring an IMF bailout. However, The IMF Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreement signed in 2023 imposed conditionalities including the privatization of state enterprises, reductions in public spending—particularly in climate adaptation programmes—and the liberalization of trade and subsidies (IMF, 2023). By looking through the statistics from the Sri Lankan Ministry of Finance

(2023), public expenditure on environmental protection declined to 1.2 percent of the government budget in 2023, directly undermining climate adaptation initiatives (Sri Lanka, 2023). Funding for climate adaptation targeted at vulnerable coastal communities was reduced by 67 percent in the fiscal year 2023–24 (Government of Sri Lanka, 2024).

But eventually this burden of debt servicing further diverted resources away from climate action. In 2022, Sri Lanka spent 4.1 billion U.S.D on external debt servicing, amounting to 67 percent of government revenues (World Bank, 2023). Under IMF conditionality, any increase in climate-related spending was contingent upon prioritizing debt repayment, resulting in the suspension or termination of climate mitigation projects such as renewable energy transitions and coastal protection.

These challenges were even more exacerbated through constraints imposed by the dollar hierarchy. The depreciation of the Sri Lankan rupee from 200 to over 330 against the U.S. dollar between 2020 and 2023 increased the cost of imported renewable-energy equipment by 65 percent (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023). “This dynamic entrenched dollar-denominated debt obligations, incentivizing resource extraction including fossil fuels and minerals to generate dollar profits, thereby undermining climate action” (Siddiqui, 2025). The distributional consequences of these policies were severe. Marine fishing societies, predominantly composed of women, lost support for climate adaptation programmes, leaving them more vulnerable to cyclones (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2023). Moreover, IMF-imposed spending cuts contributed to the deterioration of public healthcare and water systems, disproportionately affecting poorer communities reliant on public services (World Bank, 2023).

## **2. Weaknesses in Climate Finance and CBDR Ferment.**

### **a. Promised vs. Delivered: The Gap in the Billion Dollar promise.**

The Paris Agreement set the goal and aimed at having the developed countries commit to mobilizing 100 billion U.S dollars a year to conquer climate change in the South by 2020 (UNFCCC, 2016). Although, the statistics provided by OECD (2024), explicitly showed that in between the years 2019 to 2022, developed countries delivered an average of 89.5 billion a year, which does not meet the 100 billion target (OECD Climate Action Tracker, 2024).

Also, it was always merely 25 -30 % in the form of grants; 70 75 % loans or export credits (World Resources Institute, 2023) which contributes to the continued entrapment in debt instead of promoting justice oriented climate action. Moreover, climate finance was commonly provided on the condition that the recipient privatise utilities, use certain energy technologies, or open markets to Western-based

corporations (Bretton Woods Project, 2023).

### **b. CBDR Erosion Over Three Historical Phase thousand years.**

Kyoto Protocol Era (1997-2005): CBDR was most robust. The developing countries (Annex 2) were not bound by any emission targets and the developed countries (Annex 1) bound themselves with a set amount. The CBDR principle was clearly based on the principle of historical responsibility.

Copenhagen/ Cancun Era ( 2009- 2015): CBDR started to weaken. Nationally determined efforts were all made, which undermined differentiation. LDCs and SIDS were the opponents, yet the lack of power caused them to have a weak influence (UNFCCC negotiation records, 2009-2015).

Paris Era Agreement (2015-present): CBDR is close to being abandoned. All decisions and rulings post-Paris Rulebook (2018) eliminated binding differentiation; no country has a superior dissipation to NDCs. Ironically, NDCs of the Global South (their emissions are lowest per capita) can offer much more profound reductions than more affluent countries (Fransen et al., 2019).

## **Part II: Green Colonialism-Intersectional Dimension.**

### ***Mineral Requirements and World Supply Chains of The Green Energy Transition.***

Lithium, Cobalt, Rare Earths: The Non-technical Architecture of Clean Energy. The shift towards renewable energy requires new amounts of mineral mining as never experienced before. The growth in the lithium demand is expected to increase by seven folds with a reduction of half a million tonnes in 2020 to three point half million tons in 2050 (International Energy Agency, 2021). Market demand of cobalt that is used in battery-grade applications will grow by 500 percent until 2050 (IEA, 2021). The rare earth elements, especially neodymium and dysprosium needed in wind-turbines magnet consumption are in an exponential demand growth (USGS, 2023).

Geographic Concentration and Subordination: It is geographically concentrated in the Global South that these critical minerals are lithium in Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile, cobalt in Democratic Republic of Congo, and rare earth in China, Myanmar, Tanzania, etc. More than 80 percent of these minerals are used in production of renewable technology by Western actors, more so, the European Union, the United States, and Japan (Watari et al., 2020). This means that the Global South will have no option but to seek resources to feed the North-western clean energy transition, thus repeating colonial resource extraction methods in the name of sustainability when it comes to the environment.

## **Case Study 2: Lithium Production in Bolivia and Argentina (2010-2025) -The Lithium Triangle**

Following Yin's (2018) principles of case study selection, the Lithium Triangle—comprising Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, which together contain approximately 58 percent of global lithium reserves—provides a critical site for comparative analysis. The diversity of extraction projects in this region, characterized by varying degrees of exploitation and distinct models of governmental regulation, enables an examination of corporate control, state intervention, and community impacts. The scale of extraction has expanded dramatically over the past decade. Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, the largest lithium deposit in the world, and the Jujuy province in Argentina both witnessed significant increases in production between 2010 and 2020. By 2020, Argentina had become the third-largest global producer of lithium, generating more than 120,000 tonnes annually, following Australia and Chile (USGS, 2021).

In contrast, Argentina's extraction model is dominated by privately held foreign corporations, primarily from the United States, China, and Australia. These firms captured 70–80 percent of lithium revenues, while the Argentine government received only about 15 percent through taxes and royalties, leaving local communities with negligible benefits (CEPAL, 2022). Profits were largely repatriated to parent companies abroad, with minimal reinvestment in local economies or processing infrastructure (CEPAL, 2022).

Both cases exemplify the Westernocene, wherein Northern domination is manifested through technological and market control despite nominally nationalist ownership. Labor exploitation and working conditions further underscore global inequalities. Lithium miners in Argentina earned approximately U.S.D 400–600 per month, while cobalt miners in the Democratic Republic of Congo earned only U.S.D 30–100 per month (Artisanal Gold Council, 2023), workers faced 12-hour shifts, inadequate safety equipment, high injury rates, and widespread respiratory diseases due to mineral dust exposure (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Independent unions were absent, with weak labor agreements negotiated by “company-controlled associations” (SUDAMIN, 2023).

## **Case Study 3: Cobalt Mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2010-25)**

The cobalt industry in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) represents a paradigmatic case of what has been termed ‘green colonialism’ (Blanc, G, 2022). Artisanal mining, which is small-scale and often reliant on child labor, operates in parallel with industrial mining, thereby creating a stark dichotomy between formalized and informal extraction processes. This contrast is analytically useful in highlighting the structural inequalities embedded in global resource economies (International

Labour Organization, 2020)

The DRC holds approximately 70 percent of global cobalt reserves, positioning the country at the center of the renewable energy transition (USGS, 2024). Global demand for cobalt has surged due to its indispensability in the production of lithium-ion batteries used by major manufacturers such as Tesla, Panasonic, and CATL. Prices of cobalt rose dramatically, increasing from 3 U.S.D per pound in 2016 to 15 U.S.D in 2018, and fluctuating between 10 U.S.D and 14 U.S.D from 2020 to 2024, creating irresistible incentives for intensified extraction (USGS, 2024). Ownership and profit capture in the DRC cobalt sector reveal entrenched patterns of subordination. Indigenous and ethnic dimensions reveal further inequities, communities in Katanga and Kasai provinces have been displaced by mining activities, forcing them into informal labor markets (Oxfam, 2015). Local populations are systematically excluded from decision-making processes, as the central government and foreign corporations determine mining policies without meaningful consultation (Ombak Foundation, 2021). Environmental devastation is another defining feature of cobalt extraction. Mining activities have led to severe water pollution through groundwater leaching, air pollution from cobalt dust, and soil contamination, rendering drinking water toxic and agricultural land unusable (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2019). Taken together, these dynamics illustrate how the DRC cobalt industry exemplifies an extreme variant of Westernocene *green colonialism*. The renewable energy transitions in the Global North rely on cobalt mined in the Global South under conditions of child labor, gender-based violence, and environmental destruction. While the benefits accrue to Northern corporations and consumers, the costs are borne disproportionately by vulnerable communities in the DRC. The cobalt industry of the DRC is an example of an extreme variant of Westernocene green colonialism.

### **Part III: Synthesis (Operationalizing Religion Through Empirical Evidence):**

#### **Westernocentrism, Evidence-Based Synthesis:**

Western institutional power creates conditions which affect climate action in the Global South through a series of interlocked mechanisms which counter the autonomy of states. First, conditionality demands of the IMF and the World Bank include privatization, austerity and liberalization directly limiting the ability of a country to pay for climate adaptation and mitigation. The case of Sri Lanka is an example of this sort: under the aegis of the IMF's Extended Fund Facility, the country was forced to make severe cuts in public spending including climate programmes, while the IMF and World Bank imposed trade liberalization and subsidy reforms (Bretton Woods Project 2025; IMF 2025; World Bank 2025). Second, that monetary subordination works in terms of the hegemony of the U.S. dollar. Currency devaluation of debtor states makes climate friendly policies economically unviable. Since

resource extraction becomes a necessity to earn foreign exchange, the extractive industries become a government's priority over environmental protection. This "currency earnings imperative" leaves them with no choice but profits over the planet (Siddiqui, 2025). Third, climate finance institutionalization privileges corporations of the West. Funds also frequently flow to producers of renewable technologies as well as consulting companies located in the Global North, with little to no assistance flowing to vulnerable populations based in the South. Much of this aid is being channelled back into debt repayment, reinforcing dependency, rather than facilitating autonomous climate action (Murau & van 't Klooster, 2023). Fourth, carbon markets enable Northern states and corporations to continue with their emissions, burning by buying cheap offsets. These shifts often harm indigenous communities. As for the REDD+ programme in Tanzania, it is an example of offset programmes that displace local people of forest territory, while allowing for continued emissions in the North (Blanc, 2022).

**Core Result:** The key processes that characterize the Westernocene Western-controlled financial institutions limit climate action as well as lock in debt in the Global South to ensure resource extraction under exploitative terms. The transition to green energy means more minerals mined by the colonial regimes of labour Western corporations reap profits throughout the length of the supply chain, while communities in the South suffer the environmental, social and economic burden. This is not "green development" but a new variant of colonialism disguised as environmentalism (Blanc, 2022; Murau & van 't Klooster, 2023).

## FINAL DISCUSSION

### Westernocene - A Capitalocene Rebuke of Climate Change

1. ***Synthesis of Findings & Addressing the Westernocene Framework*** :The empirical analysis in four embedded case studies of the debt-climate tradeoffs in Sri Lanka, the REDD+ induced displacement of indigenous communities in Tanzania, the subordination of lithium extraction operations in Bolivia and Argentina and the exploitation of cobalt mining labour in the Democratic Republic of Congo shows that the Westernocene is not only an abstraction but one that is operationalized and materially consequential. It explicates the reproduction of colonial patterns within supposedly 'green' climate governance via the workings of institutional power of Western powers, financial subordination and the logic of capitalism.
2. ***The overarching issue is sobering:*** Prevailing mechanisms of climate action - built to address the ecological crisis - on the one hand reproduce and exacerbate extraction, dispossession and racialised labour exploitation in the Global South. Firstly, International financial institutions

(IMF, World Bank) limit the ability of countries to act on climate through structural adjustment conditionality, leading to imposition of restructured debt servicing on Global South nations to the detriment of climate action investments (e.g. in mitigation and adaptation strategies), as in the case of Sri Lanka which lost 67% of its spending on environmental protection after concluding IMF agreements. Dollar hegemony and monetary architecture produce what Murau & van 't Klooster (2023) termed the “sovereignty paradox”.

Global South monetary desired coverage is theoretically recognised nonetheless it is de facto curtailed in practical terms by the threat of capital outflow, with the corresponding currency devaluation pressure and incentive systems, and subsequently resulting in resource extraction as an incentive for resource extraction instead of climate compatible development. Secondly, the climate finance mechanisms, which have been promised at 100 billion U.S.D a year, have a quantitative as well as a qualitative shortfall. The nature of the composition -70 to 75 per cent loans rather than grants - supports debt subordination instead of justice-oriented climate action. Carbon markets and REDD+ programmes as a form of climate solution are reproducing colonial displacement: the case of Tanzania, The REDD+ programmes excluded the indigenous Maasai communities from lands that they sustainably managed for hundreds of years and provided them with the carbon credits bought by Northern corporations such as aviation and energy companies, who continued to maintain, not to reduce, emission levels. This operationalises the central thesis Western actors use climate mechanisms to sustain accumulation under the auspices of crisis intervention. Third, Green-energy transitions are the latest version of colonialism extraction. Renewable energy infrastructure needs unprecedented mineral extraction to be concentrated in territories of the Global South. The profit extraction follows the classic model of new colonialist appropriation: primary resources are extracted from the Global South through the means of exploitative labour in exchange for resource extraction, processed by Northern technology, and sold as products on the global market; while 70-80% of the profit is retained in the North, where extraction communities suffer the environmental and social consequences.

### **Theoretical Implications of Capitalocene - Westernocene Integration**

This analysis shows that neither Capitalocene nor Westernocene analysis is sufficient, they must go together. Capitalocene uncovers the structural imperatives of capitalism for endlessly accumulating and seizing control of nature; Westernocene uncovers how Western institutional power-imposed through processes ranging from colonialism to imperialism, to financial architecture and epistemological dominance-run are continuing to impose this logic on the rest of the world today. The

synthesis brings out the climate crisis as simultaneously the problem of the logic of the capitalist system and the problem of the geopolitics of Western power - historically entwined, structurally co-constitutive and empirically inseparable.

The universalisation of the Anthropocene (unnamed attribution of destruction to amorphous 'humanity') arises as not innocent scientific entrenchment but rather as an ideological weapon that allows the Western players to avoid the fault for continuing the extraction under the pretext of 'green'. Westernocene - Capitalocene analysis breaks this depoliticisation by naming specific actors (IMF, World Bank, Western governments and corporations) and mechanisms (loan conditionality, carbon markets, mineral extraction contracts) that have specific consequences in specific communities - not universals hidden by frames of planetary science and global commons, but foci in specific struggles in which distribution of climate crisis is not global but political economy of colonialism (technology is not the solution to the climate crisis maybe also not that European).

### **Transformative climate justice: A Diagnosis to a Transformation**

Transformative climate justice means going beyond the diagnoses for the Westernocene and its dismantlement; it requires debt cancellation, reparations towards the legacies of the past and current extraction, the recognition of indigenous sovereignty over land and resources, unhindered technology transfer, and the decolonisation of international financial architecture.

The dominant path, that involves achieving "green growth" and carbon markets and renewals framed through a framework of extractive paradigms - maintains colonial dependence while erasing it as environmental development. Westernocene--Capitalocene framework is used as an analytical tool to present this recognition. Climate action without an accompanying struggle against structures of western power and capitalist sense is doomed to repeat the injustices recorded here. In contrast, a climate justice paradigm centred on indigenous sovereignty and leadership from the Global South, and a concern with systemic change of both capitalism and Western hegemony, has the potential to address substantive ecological and political change.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This paper lays the foundation in the form of theoretical frameworks and analyses the existing documents, policy records, and secondary data; nevertheless, this paper does not involve ground-based empirical research. The true contribution to climate justice will be made through future participatory research with affected communities. Empirical spaces to close: community-based participatory research documenting experiences on the ground in places where cobalt is mined; ethnographic studies

on climate negotiations to understand how Western power works, institutionally; comparative institutional analysis between countries on how different governments resist or accommodate Western climate subordination; research centring indigenous and feminist leadership in climate justice alternatives.

The analysis focuses on climate mechanisms (finance, carbon markets, IFI conditionality) and mineral extraction. Complementary research on technology transfer restrictions, intellectual property barriers and food systems colonialism would make the framework all-encompassing.

## **CONCLUSION**

The modern planetary climate crisis is a radical challenge for humankind: either to reshape the systems that cause ecological destruction, or to settle for planetary decapitation. Nonetheless, the current climate discourse - which is organised around the concept of the Anthropocene - tends to cloud the reality of what transformation entails, namely the specific needs, by attributing ecological destruction to an unspecified "humanity" as opposed to specific economic systems and geopolitical actors. This paper argues that the narrative of the Anthropocene is insufficient analytically and politically disempowering, and that a combination of the Capitalocene and Westernocene framework provides crucial analytical leverage to think about the climate crisis as a problem of capitalism and of Western imperial dominance, instead of one of human nature.

Empirical analysis shows that this framework can explain by-having connected frameworks of climate injustice. International financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank use structural adjustment conditionalities to limit the capacity for Global South climate action whilst continuing the subordination of debt, as seen with the case of Sri Lanka, which lost 67% of its environmental spend after IMF agreements came into being. Western monetary architecture in which dollar hegemony, threats of capital flight, and currencies are devalued promote what the scholars have called the "sovereignty paradox," wherein nations in the Global South can pretend to have monetary sovereignty, but must de facto subject themselves to extorted resource extraction to pay dollar-based debt. Climate funding mechanisms in spite of promises of U.S.D 100 billion a year of financing, are chronically defaulting, in quantitative terms and qualitative terms; 70%-75% of the money comes as loans, not grants, causing extraction, rather than justice.

Carbon markets and REDD+ programmes-claimed to be environmental/ climate mitigation solutions for the world-are reproduction of colonial displacement. The Westernocene is not a product of mere fantasy, but is concretised operationally as climate governance mechanisms that act as a perpetrator of colonialism while pretending to work for the climate crisis. This paper has formed the analytical and empirical basis for the recognition of this pattern. The task at hand requires transformative climate

justice action: debt cancellation, reparations for extraction, indigenous sovereignty of land and resources, technology transfer with the removal of intellectual property restrictions and systemic decolonisation of international financial architecture.

The present course, "green growth", carbon markets, renewable transitions premised on extractive terms OD continue the tradition of Western subordination of the Global South under the aegis of Nature. Transformative climate action requires shifting away from technical decarbonisation and moving toward systemic transformation that helps address the accumulation imperatives of capitalism while also tackling the geopolitical domination of the West at the same time. This transformation is possible only if it is centred on indigenous leadership, knowledge from the Global South and indigenous sovereignty and is organised by movements demanding justice rather than just sustainability in colonial terms.

The Westernocene - Capitalocene framework throws some light on what universal stories about climate prevent: Ecological crisis is the political economy of colonialism. Tackling it requires not technological solutions but political change. The problem before climate movements, policy makers, and scholars, is not bothering to determine whether this transformation is technically possible-it is. The question is if there is political will to destroy the institutions and power structures that are creating crisis. That question is for Global South people and indigenous communities and social movements against capitalism in climate leadership: For climate justice and the power to protect Earth.

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# Writing Smarter or Losing Skills? The Impact of AI in Academia

Shamstabrej Siddiquee<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In recent years, AI (Artificial intelligence) tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, Grok, and others have slowly become a regular part of how students and teachers work in colleges. This study looks into how these tools are being used in academic writing, what benefits they bring, and what problems or concerns come with them. The main goals of this research are to understand how people are using AI in their studies and teaching, how helpful these tools really are, and what ethical questions they raise like fairness, plagiarism, and originality. To explore these questions, a survey with 25 simple and direct questions was shared with 100 people from different academic backgrounds. This included undergraduate and postgraduate students, PhD scholars, and teaching staff from different subjects. Their responses were studied using basic methods to find clear patterns and views. This study doesn't just talk about how AI helps in writing faster or making content better, but also highlights the worries people have like over-dependence on these tools or the lack of rules in colleges about how they should be used. It suggests that while AI can support learning, there needs to be more awareness, training, and proper guidelines to make sure it's being used in the right way.

## Keywords

AI tools, academic writing, ChatGPT, plagiarism, ethical concerns, higher education,

## Introduction

Education is essential pillar in modern times and growing dependence in technology paved the new ways in the education field the tradition ways no longer engage students and so does faculties, the emergence of AI tools in academic writing drastically transform the academic writings. AI tools such as ChatGPT, Meta, Grok etc. are playing immense role in generating research draft, proposal and generate text and research idea, it helps researcher to enhance their research efficiency.

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However academic and research writing is tough task, writing for academia especially as beginner can be very challenging, academic writing involving a structured method of expressing ideas. It is commonly used by researchers and educators in scholarly works to present data-driven arguments and logical reasoning. This form of writing helps readers to understand a topic thoroughly and deeply. It allows authors to deeply analyse concepts, leading to a well-explained theory or conclusion. Different fields use academic writing for various purposes. For example, scientists use it to explain their research and findings, while literary analysts use it to create fact-based critiques (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024), further maintaining academic integrity through proper citation and referencing source from literature is crucial, consideration of these things can be very challenging and time-consuming and practically for those who just started to write, it would be so hectic for them. Additionally, the pressure to publish in academia, known as the "publish or perish" ethos, adds stress and can lead to burnout. Writer should balance being informative with keeping the reader engaged. They are also expected to bring originality and creativity to their work, which can be demanding under strict deadlines. Structural coherence, ensuring that ideas flow logically, is essential in academic writing, especially in long documents like theses or dissertations. This need for coherence must be balanced with effective time management, as academic writing often competes with other responsibilities. The process of academic writing often involves revisions based on feedback from peers and advisors. This requires openness to criticism and the ability to integrate feedback effectively. When engaging in interdisciplinary research, writers face the challenge of combining different methodologies, terminologies, and concepts from various fields, adding complexity to their work (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). But these challenges have Aid the uses of AI tools in academic writing; therefore, AI-powered writing tools help with grammar, structure, logical flow, citations, and adherence to disciplinary standards. These tools are not just helpful but necessary to improving the efficiency and quality 3 | Page of academic writing. They enable writers to focus on the critical and innovative aspects of their research but over reliance on AI tools can hamper academic integrity and critical thinking and original research works further, AI tools are designed to assist, not replace, the researcher's critical judgment. However, there is a risk that users might become overly dependent on these systems, assuming that their work is error-free if it passes an AI scan. This reliance can discourage researchers from thoroughly reviewing their work or considering other aspects of quality, such as logical consistency and coherence. Moreover, excessive reliance on AI can create a false sense of security, where researchers believe that passing a plagiarism check equates to maintaining academic integrity. This misconception overlooks the broader ethical responsibilities of originality and intellectual honesty (The Role of AI in Academic Research, 2024).

The study examines through a critical lens following advantages and ethical challenges through a data

analysis approach, both of considerations and recommendations on how to employ best practice in the AI world.

## Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach. The quantitative component The quantitative aspect of the study involved an online survey administered to 100 participants with diverse academic backgrounds, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers, and faculty members. The survey focused on participants' academic profiles, familiarity with AI tools, frequency of use, and perceptions regarding ethical use, authorship, and plagiarism risks. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents had relevant academic experience and exposure to AI tools in an educational context. The survey consisted of both closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items designed to capture measurable attitudes, behaviours, and awareness levels. Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify key trends and patterns related to AI usage in academic writing.

To complement this, the qualitative aspect draws on existing literature, including peer reviewed journal articles, newspaper reports, and academic books to explore the ethical challenges and perceived benefits of using AI in scholarly work. The study also employs used of mathematical formulas for better data interpretation on some respondents' responses to analyse for a better understanding, especially in Likert rating values.

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\sum(x_i \times f_i)}{\sum f_i}$$

Where:

- $x_i$  = rating value
- $f_i$  = frequency of that rating

## Rationale of the Study

AI tools are increasingly used in academic writing, but their effects are not yet fully understood. Although they contribute to faster and better-quality writing, they also create issues related to plagiarism, originality, and fairness.

The purpose of this study is to investigate:

→ How students and instructors make use of AI tools in academic writing,

- What advantages these tools provide, and
- What ethical issues do they create?

Through the synthesis of survey information and academic literature, the study offers a balanced vision of AI's contribution to higher education and proposes the necessity for precise institutional guidelines.

## **Hypothesis**

H1: AI tools have positively impacted the respondent to enhance their academic writing efficiency in terms of clarity, time management, and content organisation.

H2: Over-reliance on AI tools in academic writing negatively correlate with students' development of critical thinking and original argumentation skills.

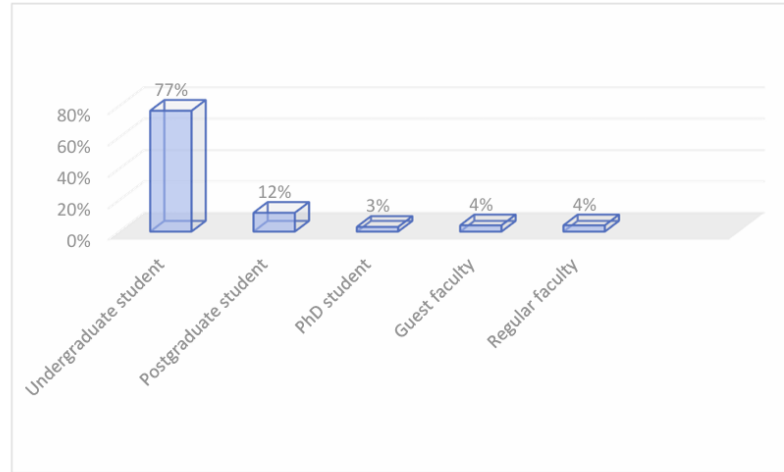
## **Literature review**

1. Mizumoto (2024) compared ChatGPT with Grammarly and determined that though ChatGPT works well in enhancing sentence fluency and clarity, it over-corrects or alters the meaning at other times. This is both its strength and weakness in academic writing.
2. Aritonang and Toisuta (2025) discovered that students copying AI-produced texts without critical thinking experienced the most severe writing quality declines. Their research indicated problems such as poor coherence, superficial arguments, and 5 | Page mechanical conclusions. They highlighted the importance of AI literacy and ethical standards to avoid skill erosion in academics.
3. Jain and Nawani (2023) discussed current controversies surrounding how AI influences natural human intelligence. They explained concerns regarding excessive dependence on AI lowering critical thinking, decision-making abilities, and causing skill decline. Nevertheless, they also pointed to the strength of AI in augmenting human abilities in healthcare and education sectors. The authors underlined the necessity for ethical control, human monitoring, and equilibrated approaches to make sure that AI helps instead of hindering human welfare.

## **Findings**

- 1. Demography profile:**
  - 1.1 Academic designation**

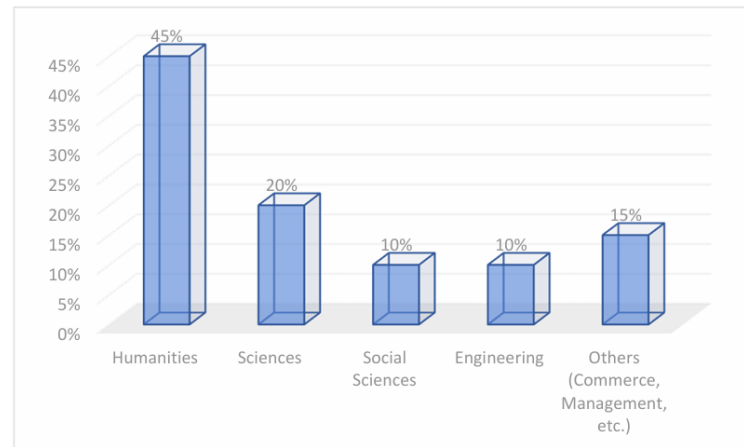
Figure-01



Most respondents are undergraduate students (77%), followed by postgraduate students (12%). There are a few PhD students (3%) and faculty (8% total: 4 guests, 4 regular).

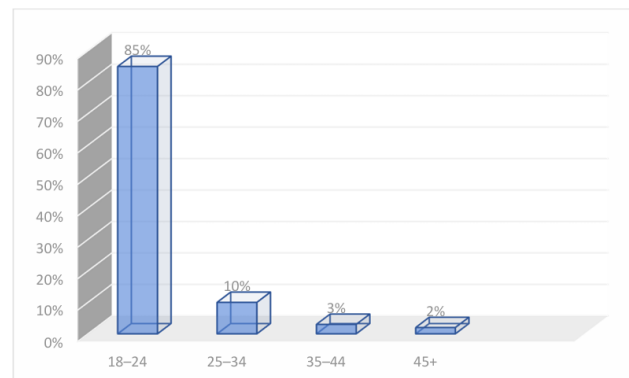
## 1.2 Academic discipline

Figure-02



## 1.3 Age group

6.1.3 Figure-03



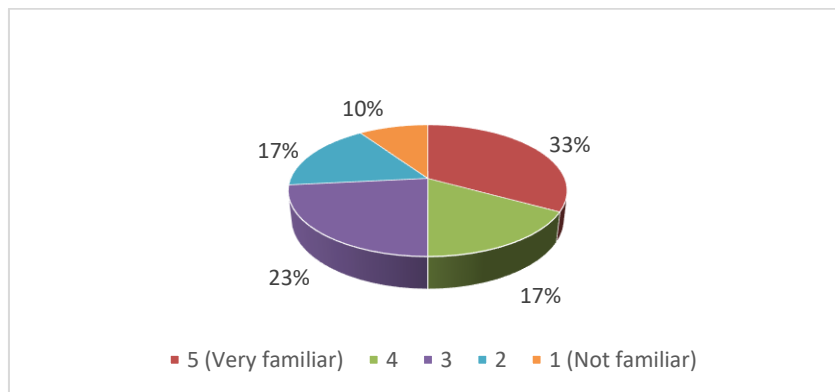
Many are from humanities (45%), then sciences (20%), social sciences (10%), and engineering (10%). Other subjects, like commerce, management, journalism, and law, make up 15%. Most are young, aged 18–24 (85%), with 10% aged 25–34.

## 2. Artificial intelligence usage pattern

### 2.1 Respondent familiarity with AI tools in academic writing

A survey was conducted on the basis of rating Likert scale, very familiar(5), not familiar(1).

Fig.4



MEAN VALUE =3.47

The respondents were very familiar with the use of AI tools in academic writing. Over 47% of respondents agreed they were familiar with AI tools, and 22% showed a neutral response. Among the respondents, 9% showed unfamiliarity with AI tools in academic writing. The overall mean of the response is 3.47.

### 2.2 Frequency of AI Tool Usage in Academic Writing

The respondents demonstrated a moderate to high level of familiarity with the use of AI tools in academic writing. A majority, 44%, reported using AI tools on a **weekly basis**, while 13% indicated **daily use**, reflecting strong engagement with these technologies. Around 22% of the participants mentioned using AI tools on a **monthly basis**, whereas 17% used them **yearly**. Only a small portion, 4%, reported that they **never** used AI tools. The overall **mean score of 3.45** suggests that most respondents engage with AI tools at least monthly, indicating a growing integration of AI in academic practices.

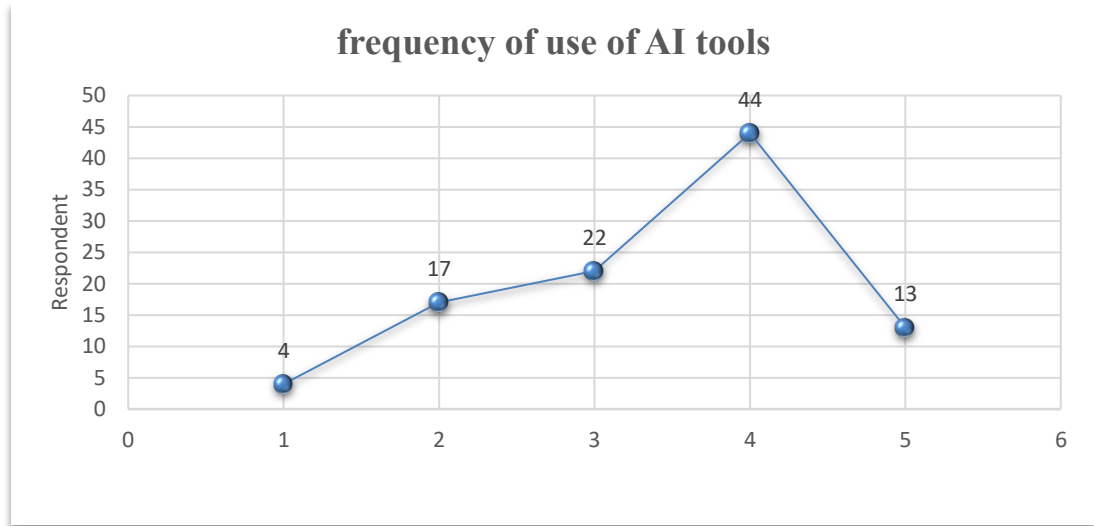


Figure-05

MEAN VALUE - 3.45

### 2.3 Preferred AI Tools in Academic Writing

ChatGPT is the most popular (91%), followed by Grammarly (32%), Gemini (23%), and Grok AI (19%). Undergraduates use ChatGPT (94%) more than faculty (75%). Faculty use Grammarly (50%) more than undergraduates (30%). Humanities students use ChatGPT (93%) slightly more than science students (90%).

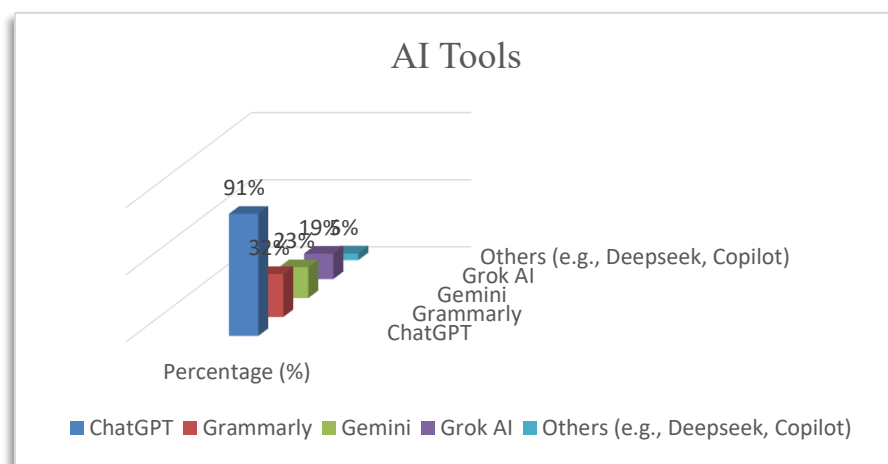


Fig. 6

The Respondents with the majority of 91% can be possible reason as follow by study of the implications of these findings are twofold. First, these findings highlight generative AI's potential, like

ChatGPT, to act as a sophisticated complement in language learning research, enhancing efficiency, objectivity, and replicability. Second, they underscore the necessity for prudent application and human oversight, with further validation required across diverse texts and larger datasets (Mizumoto et al., 2024). ChatGPT is preferable for student due to its advancements in natural language processing (NLP) technologies. The author compares ChatGPT and Grammarly and human to analyse language proficiency how much error they can persist.

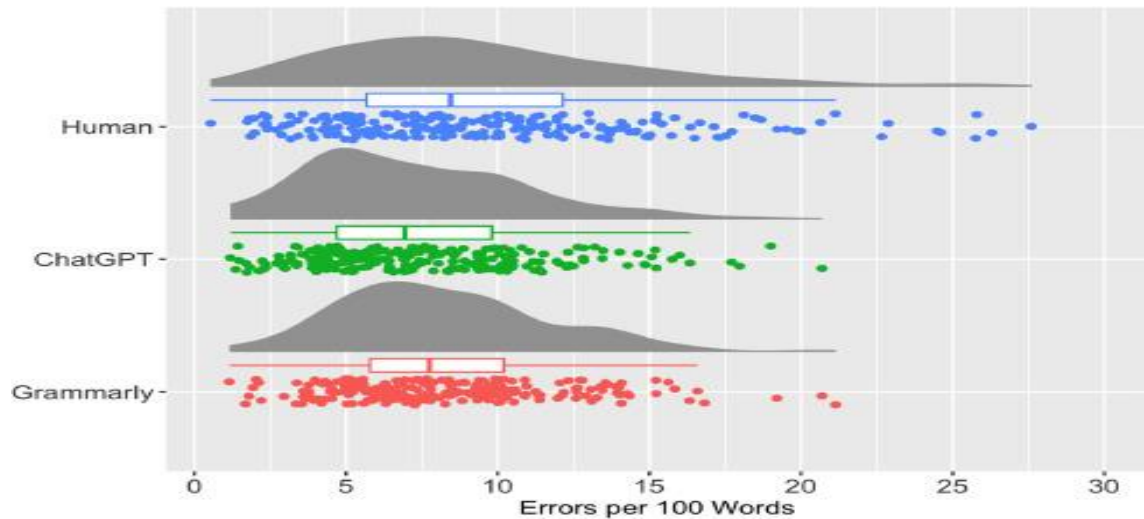


Figure-07 (Distribution of errors per 100 words across Human, ChatGPT, and Grammarly (Rain Cloud Plot))

Figure 7 indicates the number of errors found per 100 words by three different evaluators: Human, ChatGPT, and Grammarly. The author uses rain cloud plots to display the spread and consistency of errors detected. Each point represents one writing sample, and the box plots show the typical range of errors.

The human evaluations show the widest range of error counts, indicating inconsistency while some evaluators found very few errors, while others found many. In while in variation, ChatGPT and Grammarly are more consistent in the number of errors they detect. On average, the finding suggest human tend to more errors per 100 words, while ChatGPT found fewer, and Grammarly reported slightly more than ChatGPT.

These variations suggest that each evaluates on different standards to define what counts as an error. Humans tend to focus more on subjective meaning and context, while ChatGPT and Grammarly prioritize grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

## 2.4 Academic Tasks Delegated to AI Tools

The primary purpose for which respondents used AI tools was generating text or ideas, as reported by 64% of the participants. This was followed by proofreading and grammar correction, with 47% of users relying on AI tools for this task. A notable 42% of respondents mentioned using AI to summarise research articles, reflecting a growing trend of AI assistance in digesting academic content. Additionally, 24% of participants used AI tools for managing citations and references, indicating their integration into various stages of academic writing.

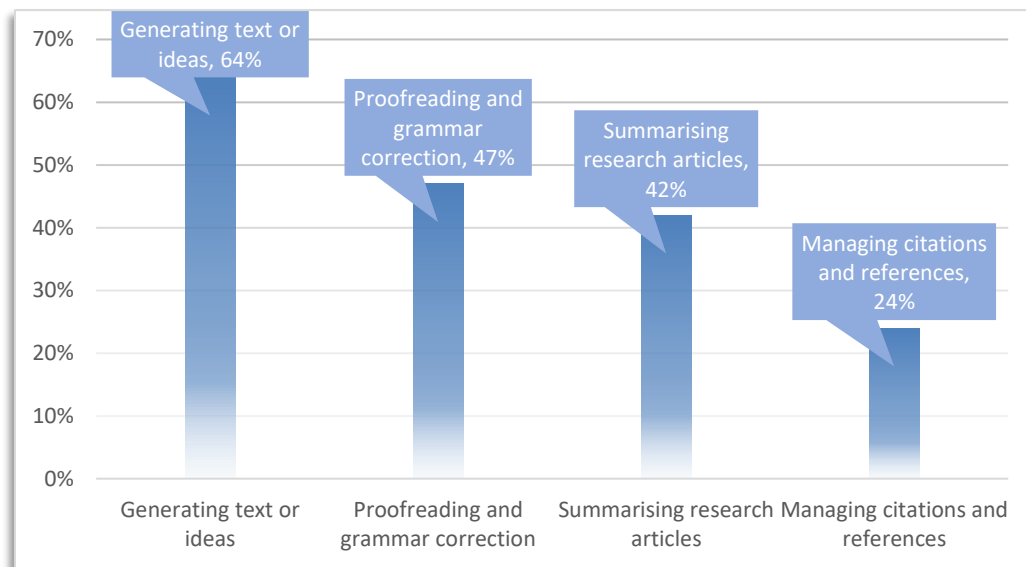


Figure-08

Further, most respondents shared that they turn to AI tools mainly for writing assignments or essays, with 59% using them for this purpose. A good number—46%—also mentioned using AI to help prepare lecture notes or teaching materials, highlighting how these tools are supporting not just students but educators too. When it comes to more serious academic work, like research papers or theses, 44% of participants said they rely on AI assistance. Interestingly, only 16% said they've used AI for grant proposals or reports, showing that while AI is gaining ground in everyday academic tasks, its use in more formal or institutional writing is still growing.

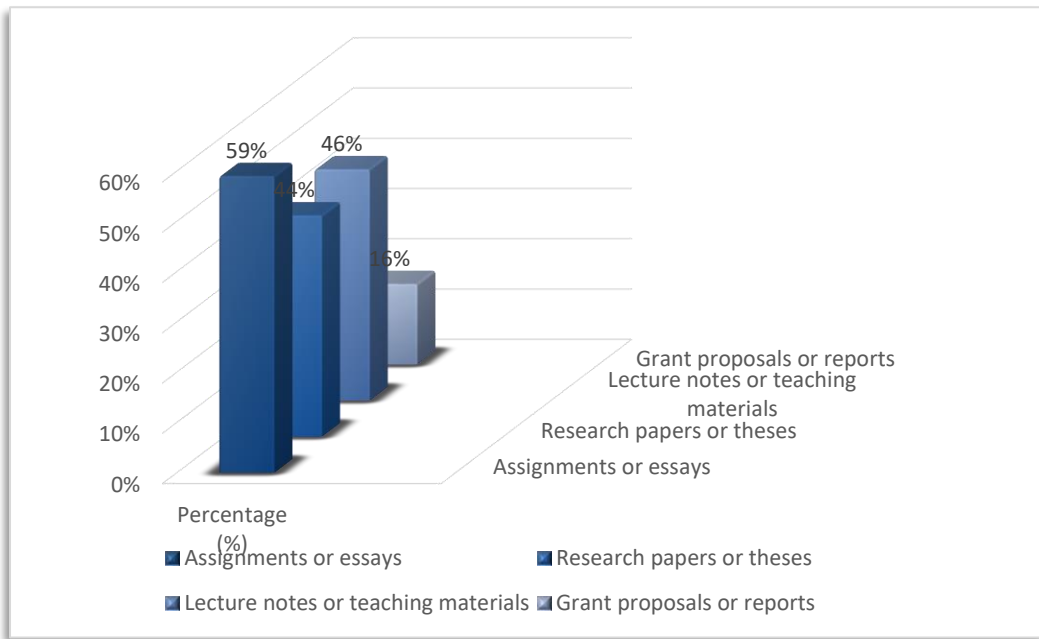


Figure -09

### 2.5 How much time responded spend on using AI tools in writing?

The information reports significant differences in the amount of time spent using AI tools among different groups of users. In the case of undergraduates, almost half of them (49%) used AI tools for 15–30 minutes, and it was the most prevalent duration among this group of users. A lesser percentage (31%) utilized them for 30–60 minutes, with 10% each spending less than 15 minutes or more than 60 minutes. By contrast, the faculty had a somewhat different profile—38% employed AI tools for under 15 minutes, indicating more time-constrained or task-oriented use. 25% of the faculty indicated use within both the 15–30 minute and 30–60 minute ranges, and 12% used the tools for longer than one hour. Considering the distribution as a whole, 47% of the total respondents utilized AI tools between 15–30 minutes, 31% for 30–60 minutes, 11% for over 60 minutes, and 11% for less than 15 minutes. From this, it can be inferred that undergraduates are more actively involved with AI tools, whereas faculty members utilize them in shorter, targeted segments.

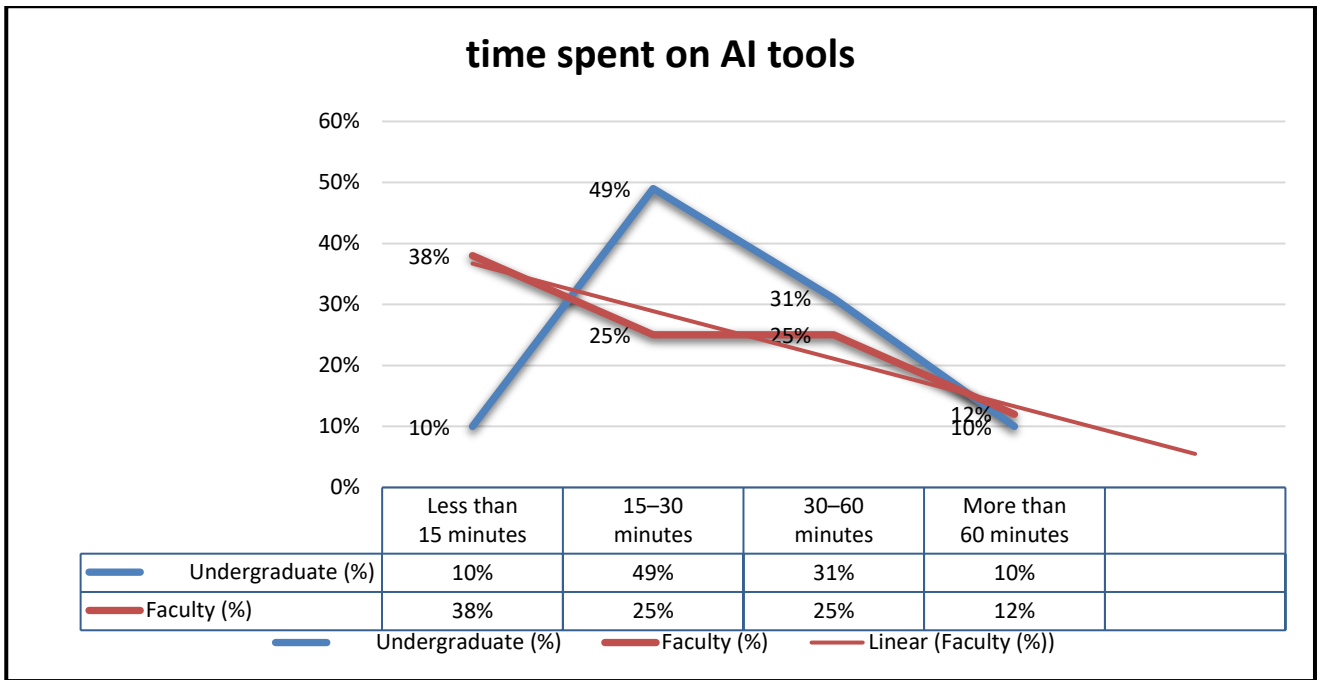


Figure-10

### 3 Pros of AI

#### 3.1 Perceived Benefits of AI in Enhancing Academic Writing

The research findings reveal that the respondents overwhelmingly view AI tools as useful in improving their academic writing skills.

The results indicate that respondents strongly perceive AI as a helpful tool improving clarity, efficiency, and the overall quality of their academic work. A large majority 81% believed that AI helps improve the overall quality of their writing with strong satisfied respondent where 44% and least satisfied responded where 19%, and similarly an equal percentage of 81% felt it help them in writing more clearly and concisely with strongly satisfied where 56% while 19% respondents where least satisfied by the role of Ai writing concise and clearly. Further, respondent When it came to reducing the time spent on writing, 89% of participants agreed that AI significantly aids in streamlining the writing process. Similarly, 86% reported that AI tools enhance their academic language, helping them produce more polished and professional content. The most significant area was response in research efficiency, where majority 92% of respondents acknowledged that how AI aids them to to improve their research efficiency. Additionally, 89% stated that AI tools help in organizing research and writing, making the overall academic workflow smoother while 11% where least satisfied with that in organizing research and writing, making the overall academic workflow smoother. An encouraging 87% of respondents felt that AI tools had a positive impact on their academic performance overall. While strong satisfaction levels (ratings of 4 and 5) remained high ranging from 44% to 66% across different categories the percentage of respondents who were least satisfied (ratings of 1 and 2) was

relatively low, with the highest dissatisfaction recorded at 19% and the lowest at just 8%. These findings collectively suggest that AI tools are not only widely adopted but are also valued for their effectiveness in improving clarity, saving time, and enhancing the quality of academic writing.

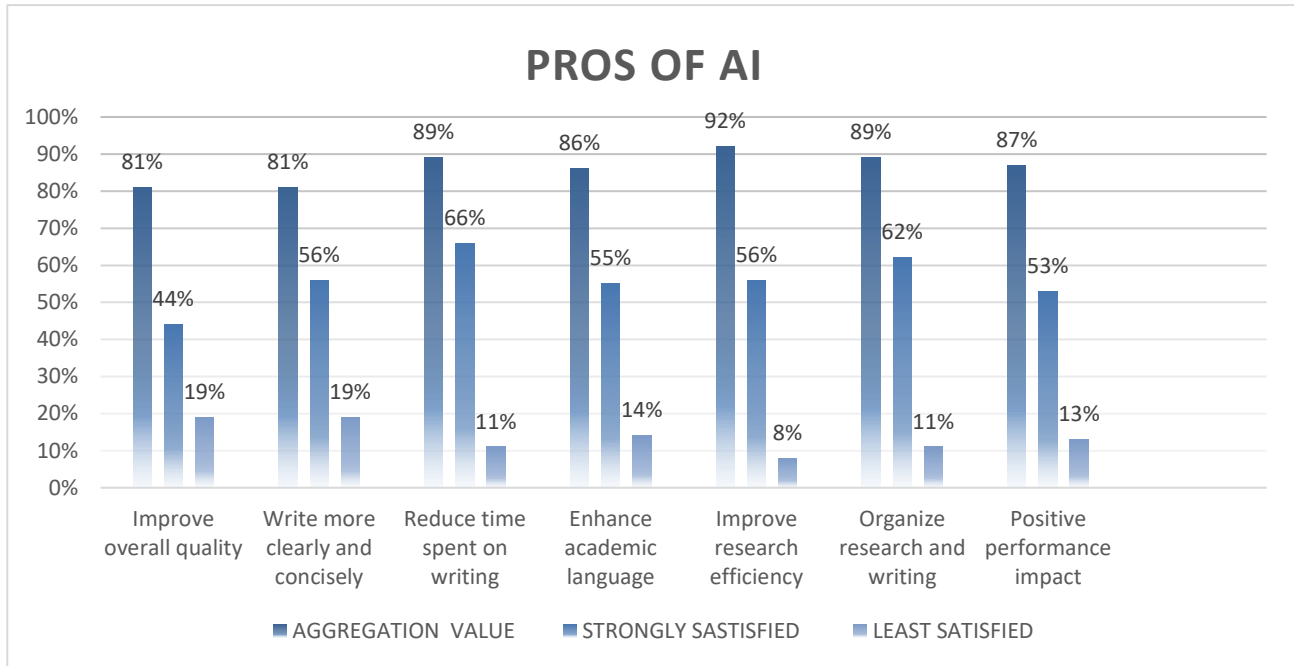


Figure-11

Note:- The analysis was performed by a 5-point Likert scale, under which responses were grouped into aggregate (ratings 3, 4, and 5), strong satisfaction (ratings 4 and 5), and least satisfaction (ratings 1 and 2).

Considering the advancement and benefit of AI respondents and various research across globe have significantly enhance their ability that can't be ignored , further authors comprise systematic reviews of literature to understand how AI helped for enhancement of their productivity tools, Mohamed khalifa and Mona Albadawy have analysed the 6 domain where AI could have enhanced the research productivity.

### 3.2 Domain 1: Idea Development and Research Design

AI's capability to identify gaps in literature is invaluable. Through advanced natural language processing, it can scrutinize thousands of documents, revealing overlooked or under-researched areas(Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). AI supports idea generation by identifying research gaps and helping form hypotheses. It guides research design by suggesting methods, sample sizes, and data collection strategies. However, over-reliance can mislead research direction, so human oversight is essential.

### 3.3 Domain 2: Content Development and Structuring

In the second domain of Content Development and Structuring, AI plays a critical role in enhancing the quality and efficiency of creating and organising research content. AI tools assist in writing by expanding text, suggesting outlines, and improving grammar and style. They also help structure content logically and adjust tone for different audiences. Visuals like charts and infographics can also be generated. Yet, ethical use and originality must be ensured.

### **3.4 Domain 3: Literature Review and Synthesis**

AI quickly analyses large volumes of research, extracts key findings, and identifies trends and gaps. It helps in summarizing literature, but accuracy and integrity must be maintained to avoid false or misleading outputs. AI tools, such as ChatGPT, has the capacity to analyse large sets of data and generate high-quality content, albeit with a need for careful oversight to prevent the production of fraudulent material.

### **3.5 Domain 4: Data Management and Analysis**

Data Interpretation, a critical component of this domain, involves AI's ability to provide detailed descriptions and visualizations of data. AI handles large datasets efficiently, offering deep insights through analysis and visualization. It supports fields like radiology and epidemiology, but requires ethical management of data.

### **3.6 Domain 5: Editing, Review, and Publishing Support**

The fifth domain, Editing, Review, and Publishing Support, is integral to the research process, ensuring the clarity, coherence, and quality of academic output. This domain can be broadly categorised into Writing Refinement and Publishing Assistance, each playing a vital role in the journey from manuscript drafting to publication. Writing Refinement involves enhancing the textual quality of manuscripts, where AI tools are increasingly used for proofreading and editing. AI-driven software like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Paperpal can correct grammatical errors and improve writing style, especially beneficial for non-native English speakers. These tools help refine the language, making manuscripts clearer and more concise, which is crucial for conveying complex scientific ideas effectively. Additionally, AI can assist in drafting abstracts and summaries, ensuring that the key findings and implications of research are communicated succinctly and accurately (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024)

### **Domain 6: Communication, Outreach, and Ethics**

The sixth domain, focusing on Communication, Outreach, and Ethical Compliance, plays a critical role in both spreading research findings and upholding ethical standards in today's digital world. It covers

two key areas: Dissemination and Outreach, and Ethical and Integrity Assurance. These areas tackle distinct challenges faced in modern research environments. This domain emphasises the need for effective communication of research to a varied audience, maintaining a commitment to ethical principles(Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024).At last AI tools are instrumental in this domain, enhancing outreach and ensuring ethical conduct in research AI helps share research widely and ensures ethical standards like plagiarism detection and disclosure. Still, human values and transparency are key to responsible use.

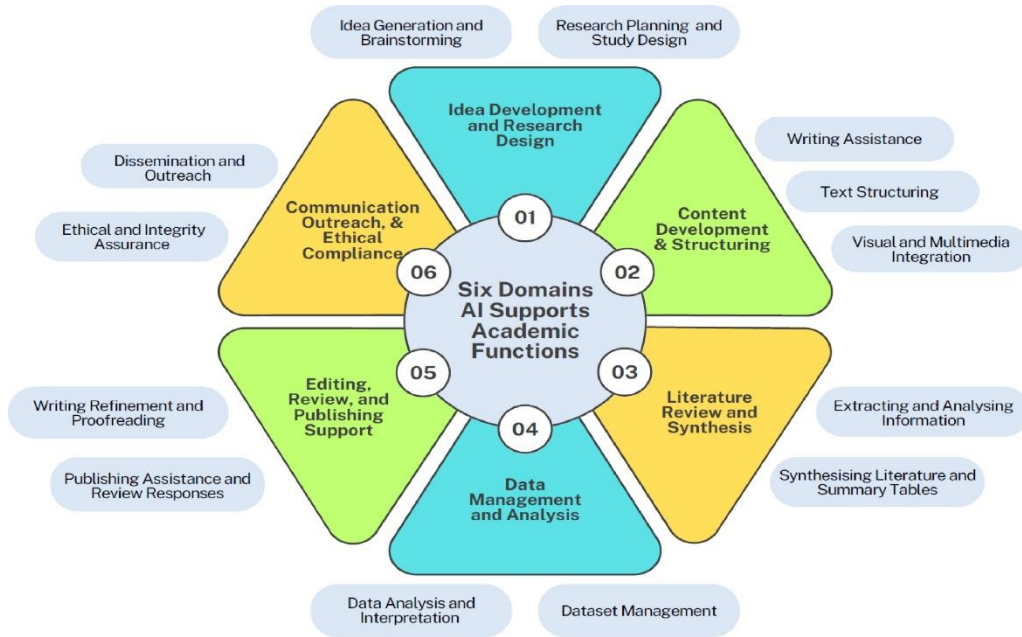


Figure-12

## 4 Ethical considerations

### 4.1 Perceived Ethical Concerns of AI in Academic Integrity and Critical Thinking

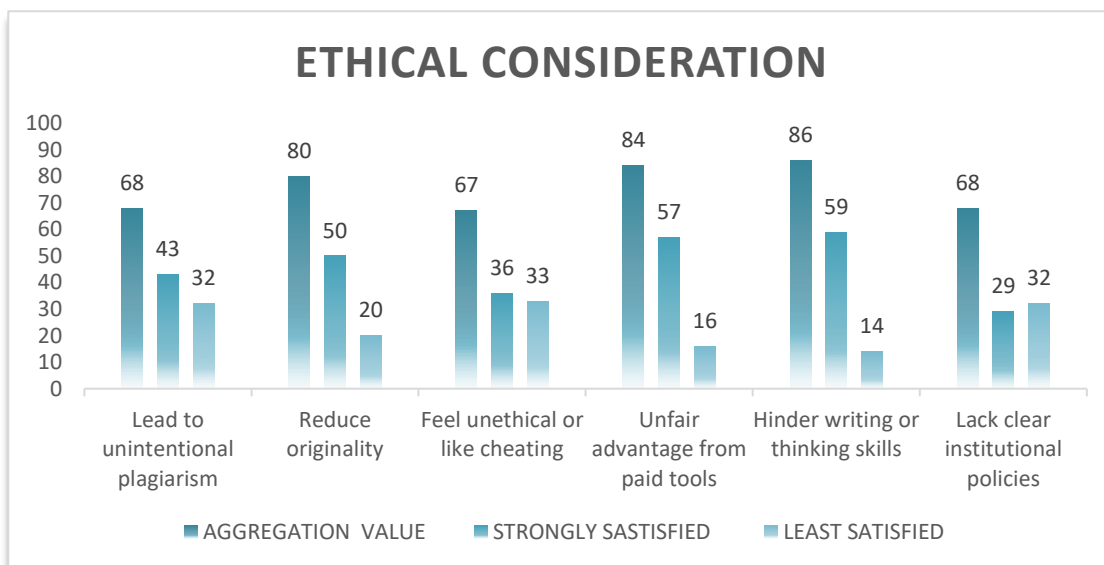


Figure-13

The respondents were asked 6 questions related to ethical consideration, plagiarism, and critical thinking concerns.

### **Lead to Unintentional Plagiarism**

- Aggregation Value: 68
- Strongly Satisfied: 43
- Least Satisfied: 32

Plagiarism is known as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, faculty as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. This graph suggest that a significant majority of respondents believe these tools can accidentally promote plagiarism, even when not intended. The high aggregation value indicates a collective concern. With 43% strongly satisfied with this issue, it's clear that many users are deeply aware of the hazy lines between inspiration and duplication. The 32% who are least satisfied may feel that this concern is overstated or manageable with proper use. Further, Plagiarism is a serious ethical violation in academia, and the use of AI tools presents new challenges in this area. AI systems generate text based on large data sets, and although they aim to produce original content, there is always the risk of unintentional plagiarism if the AI-generated text closely resembles existing works.<sup>3</sup> Academic journals including all of ACG's journals use plagiarism detection software to monitor submissions, and any AI-generated content that overlaps significantly with previously published works could be flagged as plagiarism. To address this, the authors should practice transparency and proper attribution when AI tools are used To ensure the originality of their work and to prevent charges of dishonesty, the authors must disclose the usage of AI. Additionally, because AI might produce information that sounds authoritative but is inaccurate or biased, researchers need to carefully check that the content these technologies produce satisfies academic norms.(Yousaf, 2025).

### **Reduce Originality**

- Aggregation Value: 80
- Strongly Satisfied: 50
- Largest Satisfied: 20

This group indicates an even higher level of ethical concern. An overwhelming 80% aggregation indicates that the respondents largely perceive these tools as reducing creativity and originality. Fifty percent of the participants strongly agree, perhaps indicating fears that users will overly rely on

technology instead of developing their own concepts. The comparatively low percentage of least satisfied individuals (20%) indicates fewer people reject this issue. Further, A study found that amongst 30 short medical papers generated by ChatGPT, nearly half of the references were fabricated, while 46% of the references were authentic but inaccurate. Amongst the inaccurate references, 48% were errors with the title, 52% represented errors with authorship, and 93% of these references had the wrong PMID. Only 7% of all the references generated by ChatGPT were completely authentic and accurate, (Cheng et al., 2025).

### **Feel Unethical or Like Cheating**

- Aggregation Value: 67
- Strongly Satisfied: 36
- Least Satisfied: 33

The issue of concern here is over the moral unease in adopting such tools. The very close division between those strongly satisfied and least satisfied indicates that public opinion is divided. While some obviously feel that it violates academic or professional ethics, others are perhaps more at ease with the changing times of tool usage and might view it as a valid resource. Further, unethical AI use in academic writing constitutes a fundamental violation of academic integrity, undermining the core principles of honesty, originality, and responsible scholarship. Beyond this ethical breach, however, lies a more insidious and pedagogically damaging consequence: the systematic corrosion of foundational writing skills essential for critical thinking and effective communication. When students habitually substitute AI-generated content for their own intellectual labour through verbatim copying, minimally altered paraphrasing, or uncritical submission of AI outputs—they deprive themselves of the deliberate practice necessary to develop and maintain core competencies. This dependency creates a cycle of skill atrophy, where the very abilities academic writing seeks to cultivate weaken through disuse (Aritonang & Toisuta, 2025).

### **Unfair Advantage from Paid Tools**

- Aggregation Value: 84
- Strongly Satisfied: 57
- Least Satisfied: 16

This category points to economic inequality and access issues. The strong 84% aggregation shows there is a general consensus that paid tools give unfair advantages. The 57% who strongly agree emphasize that cost barriers can lead to uneven playing fields, especially in the educational sphere. The extremely low least satisfied percentage (16%) indicates this is one of the least disputed ethical issues

in the dataset.

### Hinder Writing or Thinking Ability

- Aggregation Value: 86
- Strongly Satisfied: 59
- Least Satisfied: 14

It is the strongest concern in all categories. An overwhelming 86% feel that excessive dependency on electronic tools can deteriorate cognitive powers, particularly writing and thinking. A massive 59% strongly agree with this concern, reflecting that most feel there is a real threat to mental development. The very low least satisfied rate of 14% ensures that this is an issue that has been largely agreed on. Students using AI to generate content may miss out on essential writing and critical thinking skills, though depending on how it is used (*The Role of AI in Academic Research*, 2024). Moreover, The over-reliance on ai tools can hamper cognitive and logical ability A study conducted on this theme finds over-reliance on AI for content generation. Firstly, argumentation suffers significantly. Students exhibit a reduced capacity to formulate nuanced, defensible claims and support them with relevant, well-integrated, and critically evaluated evidence The process of constructing a logical argument identifying a stance, anticipating counterpoints, selecting and synthesizing sources is bypassed, leading to superficial or ill-supported assertions. Secondly, cohesion deteriorates. Research indicates a weakened ability to create logical flow within and between sentences and paragraphs. This manifests as a reduced or inaccurate use of transitional phrases and conjunctions, alongside underdeveloped lexical chains (repetition of key concepts using synonyms or related terms), resulting in disjointed and difficult-to-follow text The AI might provide transitions, but the student fails to understand or replicate the underlying logical connections they represent. Thirdly, originality diminishes markedly. Over-dependence on AI tools leads to homogenized syntax (repetitive, simplistic, or formulaic sentence structures) and idea expression (generic, unoriginal content lacking unique perspective or critical analysis). Students lose their authentic voice and the ability to generate novel insights or articulate complex thoughts in distinctive ways (Aritonang & Toisuta, 2025).

Table -01 source-(Aritonang & Toisuta, 2025)

<i>Rationale</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Representative Quote</i>
<i>Efficiency</i>	15	75%	"Why spend 3 hours writing when AI gives a draft in 5 minutes?"
<i>Language Insecurity</i>	12	60%	"My English isn't strong enough for academic essays."
<i>Grade Pressure</i>	10	50%	"Everyone uses it. I can't compete without AI."
<i>Topic Complexity</i>	8	40%	"I don't understand the theory well enough to write."

*Analysis:* Efficiency dominated justifications, though linguistic anxiety and competitive pressure revealed systemic stressors. 65% cited  $\geq 2$  rationales.

While AI is capable of performing certain tasks more efficiently than humans, such as data processing and analysis, human intelligence remains superior in many areas. Humans, for example, have emotional intelligence and creativity that are currently beyond the capabilities of AI. Furthermore, AI technology development is not a zero-sum game in which AI gains must necessarily come at the expense of human intelligence. Rather, the two can co-exist and complement each other, with AI performing tasks better suited to machines and humans concentrating on areas where our unique abilities are most valuable. Overall, the advancement of AI is unlikely to result in a loss of natural intelligence in humans. Instead, we should focus on harnessing the potential of AI to augment our own abilities and create a better future for all (Jain & Nawani, 2023).

### **Lack Clear Institutional Policies**

- Aggregation Value: 68
- Strongly Satisfied: 29
- Least Satisfied: 32

Further, there is a common complaint about the lack of well-defined policies or guidelines within institutions concerning the use of tools. Though the value of aggregation is quite satisfactory at 68, the very low strongly satisfied (29%) and similar least satisfied (32%) indicators hint towards a state of confusion or indecision among users. It can be an indication of uneven policy implementation or inadequate communication and policy-making by institutions. Various institutions and publications have implemented the clear policy guideline to what extent AI can be used in academic papers. Further, Ms. Laher, based on her analysis of different publications and institutions she conveyed that AI can be used for routine tasks like improving grammar, revising sentence structure, or assisting with literature searches. These applications do not require specific acknowledgement, but can't be used for content generation unless until clear reason should be referenced in manuscript further Sage and the Committee on Publication Ethics emphasise that authors must disclose when AI-generated content is used by citing this appropriately (Laher, 2025).

## **5 Policy recommendation**

The research investigates mainly two policy frameworks for recommendations

1. Proposition for the OTHA Framework
2. General recommendation for institutional policies

### **5.1 Openness**

Openness in AI implies that creative, participatory and inclusive process. This philosophy requires

universities to involve all stakeholders, such as faculty, students, IT professionals, and administrative staff, during the planning and implementation phases. By including different points of view, institutions are able to ascertain better the likely applications and counter the issues associated with using AI.

In addition, promoting local innovations and the research and development of AI applications that are suited to the unique educational environments is important. (costa & Pat Ntsohi, 2024)

## **5.2 Transparency**

Transparency is a crucial aspect for sustaining confidence and ensuring ethical AI utilization. Building and sharing detailed policies regarding AI use in education, as proposed by Imran and Almusharraf (2023), is important. The policies need to cover data privacy, ethical application, and handling of AI-content, making sure that all the stakeholders understand the expectations and guidelines. Disclosure is another essential feature of transparency. Users have to disclose the level of involvement of AI in their academic activities, including uniform disclosure statements for all submissions with AI content. outputs, institutions can ensure the values of honesty and accountability (costa & Pat Ntsohi, 2024).

## **5.3 Honesty**

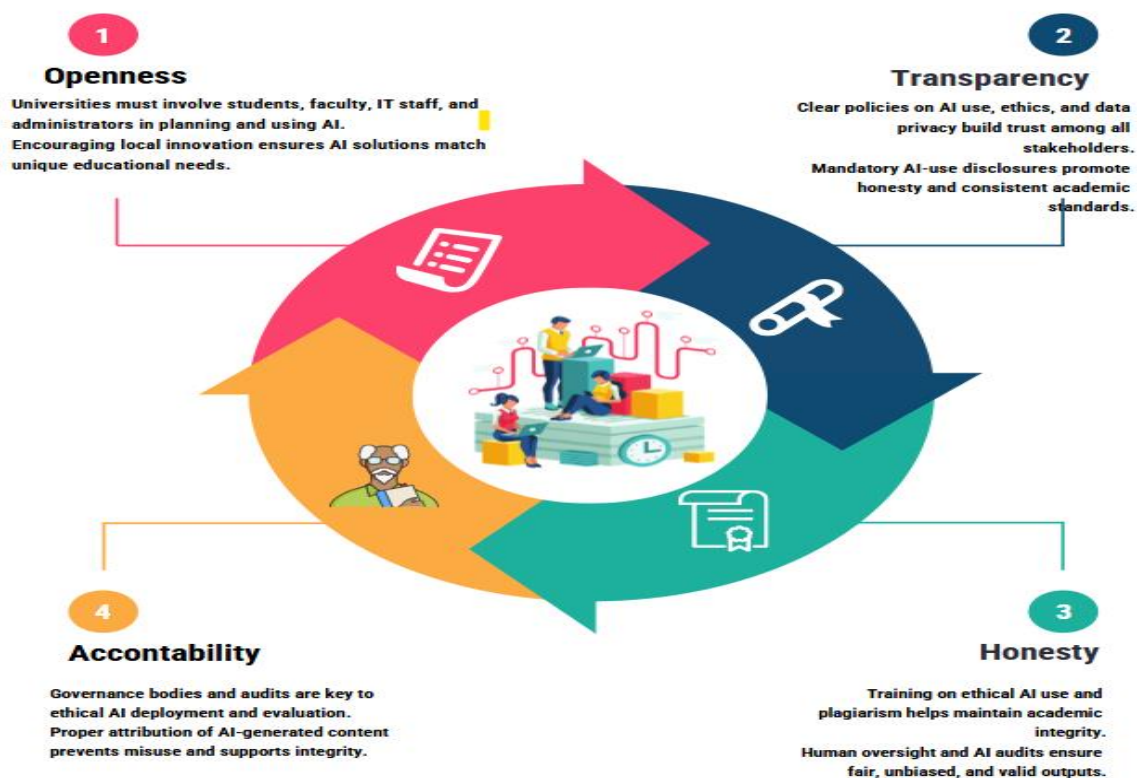
Honesty in AI integration is all about ethical training and quality assurance. The provision of training on the ethical use of AI tools, focusing on academic integrity, and the dangers of plagiarism are essential elements of this principle. Quality assurance entails having a strict review process that incorporates human oversight to guarantee the reliability and validity of AI outputs. Lew (2023) highlights the need for human monitoring to ensure the quality and integrity of AI-created content. Automated audits of AI-created content can detect and minimize biases, facilitating fairness and inclusivity in scholarly work. Institutionally facilitating the use of AI tools in an ethical and responsible manner can enable institutions to uphold high academic standards while embracing a culture of integrity. (costa & Pat Ntsohi, 2024)

## **5.4 Accountability**

Accountability is way more essential to putting in place governance frameworks to regulate the deployment of AI, including committees or working groups tasked with tracking AI adoption and adherence to ethical standards, is crucial. Nazer et al. (2023) posit that periodical audits and checks can guarantee that AI-generated content is equitable and non-discriminatory. Processes of monitoring and evaluation are required to gauge the effect of AI adoption. Carrying out regular evaluations, as

advised by Johnston et al. (2024), may give important feedback regarding the efficacy of AI solutions and guide choices about how to enhance their utilisation. Explicit attribution of the content created by AI is another important element of accountability. That authorship should be clear and rightly attributed has the effect of inhibiting misuse and encouraging scholarly integrity. The OTHA Framework, founded on the values of Openness, Transparency, Honesty, and Accountability, offers a paradigm for ethical and successful integration of ChatGPT and associated AI tools in higher education. (costa & Pat Ntsohi, 2024).

Figure-14



OTHA framework

## 5.6 General recommendation for institutional policies

- i. *Mandatory Disclosure of AI Use:* Institutions must make it mandatory for researchers and students to explicitly disclose when they use AI tools in their research work. This entails mentioning the tools used and how they impacted the final product via through a additional manuscript. Where the author discloses and declare the contribution of AI and how it has been used in research.

- ii. *Guidelines for Citing AI Contributions:* Policies need to give clear guidelines on how to attribute AI-generated content just as we cite the human authors—by adhering to proper citation formats.
- iii. *Openness Regarding AI Weaknesses:* Policies should foster publicity concerning the vulnerabilities of AI tools, including the potential for bias, inaccuracy, or absence of context in the output.
- iv. *Accuracy through Peer Review:* Policies should mandate extensive proofreading and fact-checking of content generated with AI to ensure it is reliable and correct according to academic requirements (So, 2025).
- v. *Respecting Copyright Laws:* The institutions must ensure that AI-generated content is in accordance with intellectual property laws and does not infringe on copyright protection.
- vi. *Refining Definitions of Plagiarism:* Policies against plagiarism must be updated to account for differences between appropriate use of AI for assistance and inappropriate usage that includes presenting AI work as one's own.
- vii. *Establishing Acceptable Use Parameters:* Proper boundaries must be established on what is considered acceptable usage of AI such as enabling AI to assist with clarifying grammar or organisation but not to create new ideas or analysis.
- viii. *Protecting Human Authorship:* Protocols must safeguard the integrity of authorship by ensuring that the fundamental intellectual contributions are provided by the human author rather than AI.
- ix. *Promoting Critical Thinking:* Students must be made to critically evaluate the products generated by AI, such as checking facts and arguments against authentic primary sources.
- x. *Transparent Punishments for Offences:* Institutions must establish clear consequences for the abuse of AI or refusal to reveal its use, including penalties in grades, resubmission, or

scholastic disciplinary measures (So, 2025).

## Conclusion

The advanced generation of computer science and data science has led to the Emergence of AI. Using AI in education can significantly transform our education system and produce more advanced results. Similarly, using AI in academic research writing is very crucial to improve research efficiency, generating of idea and structuring and improving content, this research shows that people who use AI for their writing they have witnessed that using AI hampers their critical thinking and they feel like cheating, unethical practice, and lead to erosion for their original content further various research also indicate that over reliance on AI for academic writing threaten the academic integrity. Further, this study suggests policy recommendations for institutions and publishing houses and how academicians and researchers can use AI to enhance their ability and enhance their research efficiency without hampering academic integrity.

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