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Editor's Report

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It is with great pleasure that we present the twenty-third issue of Explorations, which brings together a rigorous and diverse collection of ten research articles and two book reviews that critically examine the structural production of inequality, precarity, and marginalisation across contemporary Indian society. This issue engages with urgent and enduring sociological concerns from education policy, livelihood precarity to caste violence, religious marginalisation, entrepreneurial challenges, and the rationalisation of religion through a range of epistemologies and methodologies.

This issue covers around a central, recurring theme: the structural production of precarity and the everyday negotiations of dignity. Whether examining Gandhian principles in early childhood education, the livelihood struggles of private school teachers during COVID-19, the dual exclusion faced by Muslim classical dancers, the invariable caste structure in Tamil Nadu, or the entrepreneurial challenges in Nagaland, the articles collectively demonstrate how caste, class, gender, religion, institutional arrangements, and market asymmetries shape unequal access to resources, opportunities, and social recognition.

Several contributions revisit and extend classical sociological frameworks. Sipra Sagarika and Karishma Sahoo explore Gandhi's Nai Talim philosophy, demonstrating its remarkable resonance with contemporary educational policies such as NEP 2020. Their analysis of the Wardha scheme and its emphasis on holistic development integrating the head, heart, and hand offers a timely critique of the persistent gap between educational policy and practice in India. Parupally Anjaneyulu examines the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on private school teachers in Telangana, revealing how the absence of job security, formal contracts, and social safety nets rendered this educated workforce acutely vulnerable. The study documents the coping strategies of teachers from borrowing money at interest to working as daily wage labourers and highlights the inadequacy of government relief measures. This article contributes significantly to understanding the precarity of India's vast private education sector.

A second cluster of papers interrogates the persistence of caste and religious hierarchies in contemporary India. C. Sathish, in "Invariable Caste Structure in Tamil Nadu", provides a comprehensive analysis of caste atrocities through secondary data, revealing how caste operates as a "state of mind" rooted in tradition and social relations. The article documents the multiple manifestations of caste discrimination: rape, honour killing, denial of temple entry, the two-tumbler system,

political exclusion, and caste-based discrimination in schools, arguing that socio-psychological factors, rather than merely exploitative social structures, reproduce caste hierarchy in Tamil society.

Mona Sedwal and Dattatraya B. Thite present a compelling case study of the transformation of Zilla Parishad International School in Wablewadi, Maharashtra, from a dilapidated government school into an internationally recognised institution. Through the lens of social capital theory, the article demonstrates how visionary leadership, community participation, parental engagement, and innovative pedagogical practices can revitalise public education. The school's recognition as India's first Zero Energy School and its adoption of tablet-based learning, multilingual instruction, and STEAM education offer an inspiring model for government schools across the country.

Nikita Malhan and Anindya Jayanta Mishra examine neighbourhood influences on educational outcomes in Delhi's slums, using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to analyse how weak collective socialisation, violence, gender discrimination, and infrastructure gaps constrain children's educational development. The study reveals how children in slums become easy targets of criminal gangs, are exploited as cheap labour, and face gender-based discrimination, all of which perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty. The article's policy recommendations, including child-centred services, improved infrastructure, and strengthened community participation, offer practical pathways for educational reform.

Inatoli Ghushapu and A. Wati Walling investigate the socio-political and cultural factors impacting entrepreneurship in Nagaland, highlighting how enduring community values, social responsibilities, and cultural traditions influence entrepreneurial conduct. The study documents how church fundraising, tribal affiliations, insurgency, nepotism, and inadequate policies constrain enterprise expansion. Drawing on Granovetter's embeddedness theory and Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the article reveals how Nagaland's intricate institutional landscape shaped by colonialism, Christianity, and compressed modernity persistently impedes the growth of entrepreneurial ethos. The research offers critical insights into the challenges of economic development in India's Northeast.

Gurram Srinivas and Parvathi K. Iyer offer a philosophical exposition of Ambedkarian Buddhism as a scientific religion, examining Ambedkar's rationalisation of religion and his reconstruction of Buddhism as a liberatory framework for addressing caste inequality. The article explores Ambedkar's comparative analysis of scientific socialism and Buddhism, his critique of Hinduism, and his vision of a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. This contribution deepens our understanding of Ambedkar's intellectual project and the enduring relevance of Navayana Buddhism for social justice.

R. Maruthakutti and Myclin Mary examine loneliness and life satisfaction among the rural elderly in Tamil Nadu, revealing how gender, marital status, living arrangements, and migration shape the experience of ageing. The study documents how widows are disproportionately vulnerable to loneliness, with living alone emerging as a significant predictor of low life satisfaction. The article's rich ethnographic accounts and case studies illuminate the everyday struggles of elderly individuals navigating changing family structures and social support systems.

Al Ameen J offers a sophisticated ethnographic study of Muslim classical dancers in Kerala, drawing on Sara Ahmed's framework of "hated bodies" and affective economies to examine how performers navigate dual rejection from dominant Hindu classical dance establishments and conservative elements within their own religious communities. The study reveals how transnational mobility, particularly to the Middle East, serves as a strategy of resistance, allowing performers to construct alternative spaces where artistic practice and religious identity can coexist more harmoniously. This article makes a significant contribution to understanding religious minorities in the arts and the politics of cultural inclusion.

The articles in this issue demonstrate remarkable theoretical and methodological diversity. From secondary data analysis and case study approaches to ethnographic fieldwork, multi-sited ethnography, and mixed-methods designs, the contributors deploy a range of strategies to examine complex social phenomena. Several articles stand out for their engagement with classical sociological frameworks from Weber and Granovetter to Ahmed and Ambedkar, while others contribute to emerging areas of inquiry, including the sociology of sleep, digital ethnography, and transnational artistic migration.

Akankhya Panigrahi paper wishes to contribute to the sociological understanding of state and state violence with an analysis of police-inflicted violence in contemporary India. It attempts to question the relationship between state and violence as 'given' and explores how they are shaped in the context of neoliberalism in India. It focuses on two major issues concerning police violence in the state of Odisha: violent suppression of social movements which resist large-scale corporate industries and state violence against Maoism. Using secondary sources, this piece reflects on case examples resonating these issues to understand the relationship between state, capitalism and violence. The cases reflect how the context of neoliberalism provides space for legitimising extreme and arbitrary state violence. They reveal that the state engages in perpetuating capitalist exploitation and social marginalisation through police violence, thereby embedding policing in structural violence.

This issue reflects the journal's continued commitment to publishing rigorous, policy-relevant, and socially engaged sociological research. We are particularly pleased to feature contributions from early-career researchers and scholars working in under-represented regions and institutions. The articles demonstrate that grounded, interdisciplinary, and context-sensitive sociological inquiry remains essential for understanding and addressing the challenges confronting contemporary Indian society. We extend our deepest gratitude to all contributors for their scholarship and patience throughout the review and revision process. We also thank the peer reviewers for their rigorous engagement and constructive feedback, which have significantly strengthened the articles in this issue. Finally, we thank our readers for their continued support and engagement with Explorations.

We welcome submissions for future issues that continue to expand the sociological imagination, particularly from early-career researchers and scholars working in under-represented regions and institutions. As we navigate an era of profound social, economic, and political transformation, the need for critical, empirically grounded, and theoretically informed sociological research has never been greater.

Thank you for your continued support.

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Article: Gandhian Lensing of Early Childhood Education: A
Socio-Philosophical Analysis

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Gandhian Lensing of Early Childhood Education: A Socio-Philosophical Analysis

--Sipra Sagarika & Karishma Sahoo

Abstract

Education plays a vital role in human life, enabling individuals to develop literacy, critical thinking, and wisdom, leading to personal and social growth. Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent political leader and social reformer, recognized the significance of education in character-building and achieving life goals. His philosophy of education, rooted in Indian cultural heritage and personal experiences, aimed to promote moral, individual, social, political, and economic progress. Gandhi's approach to education, known as 'Nai Talim' or Basic Education, emphasizes vocational training, indigenous schools, and education for girls, focusing on self-reliance and all-round development. This paper explores Gandhi's philosophy of basic education and its relevance to the current Indian education system, highlighting the simplicity and practicality of his approach to childhood education.

Keywords: *Mahatma Gandhi, Pre School-Education, Basic Education, Nai-Talim, Gandhian Ideology.*

Introduction:

"By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man - body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I would, therefore, begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. I hold that the highest development of mind and the soul is possible under such system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically as is done today, but scientifically, i.e. the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process."

-M.K. Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi's unwavering belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings and his devotion to God, truth, and non-violence guided him to lead a life of discipline and moral integrity. He envisioned a society free from exploitation and injustice, built on ethical and equitable principles. Through his unshakeable commitment to his principles, even in challenging times, Gandhi was able to turn his ideals into reality (Gandhi, 1927). His educational philosophy, as outlined in his work, aimed to create a spiritual society as a means to realize truth or God. Gandhi's comprehensive educational system was a cohesive and dynamic aspect of his philosophy, reflecting a unified approach to achieving his ideals.

To understand Gandhi's educational views, it's essential to consider the British-era educational system that replaced India's traditional and indigenous system by the late 19th century. The British introduced English language instruction, leading to the decline of India's cultural heritage and the erosion of village-based public institutions like temples, monasteries, hospitals, and schools (Kripalini, 1971). Upon his return to India, Gandhi travelled extensively to understand the society and its people. During a 1931 visit to England, he addressed the Council on Constitutional Reforms and criticized the British for disrupting India's educational system. In a speech at Chatham House, Gandhi likened the British approach to scraping the ground and inspecting roots, ultimately destroying the tree of education. He highlighted the flaws of the British system, including its disconnection from social surroundings, creation of new castes, emphasis on literary education, and neglect of mass education. Gandhi's educational philosophy emerged as a response to these shortcomings (Patel, 1953).

Review of Literature

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of early childhood education was deeply rooted in his broader ideals of truth, non-violence, self-reliance, and simplicity. Unlike the colonial education system that prioritized rote learning and detachment from local realities, Gandhi envisioned a child-centric, life-oriented model where learning was inseparable from moral and community life. Chandrashekhar (2005) emphasizes that Gandhi saw ethics as the foundation of all education, particularly in the formative years, where children should internalize values such as *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) through lived experiences and moral instruction.

Gandhi's *Nai Talim* or Basic Education model advocated "learning by doing," where children engaged in craft-based activities like spinning or gardening to learn not only literacy and numeracy but also dignity of labor and social cooperation (Desai, 1996). This approach encouraged holistic development of the hand, heart, and head and rejected artificial distinctions between physical and intellectual labor (Thakur, 2007). Gupta (2001) highlights Gandhi's emphasis on simple living and how this translated into the minimalistic, self-sufficient nature of school environments, particularly for rural and underprivileged children.

Community played a vital role in Gandhi's educational framework. As Chavan (2014) and Joshi (2009) note, Gandhi believed that early education must be organically tied to the child's social and cultural surroundings. He encouraged community participation in schooling and learning from local artisans and elders, which cultivated a sense of belonging and civic responsibility from a young age. Mothers, too, were regarded as first teachers and moral guides (Dasgupta, 2006; Nanda, 1999), reflecting Gandhi's emphasis on family and women's roles in shaping a child's early worldview.

Gandhi's vision remains highly relevant today, especially in conversations about ethical pedagogy, inclusive learning, and culturally rooted early childhood care. Contemporary scholars like Kaul & Sankar (2009) and Kumar & Jhingran (2012) argue for a revival of Gandhian principles in modern ECCE policies to address inequalities and reconnect education with values, community, and holistic child development. Gandhi's philosophy offers not just a historical model, but a living framework for nurturing socially conscious, morally grounded individuals from the earliest stages of life.

Bhattacharya, S. (2008) Gandhi and Maria Montessori both believed in the spiritual and moral potential of every child. While Montessori developed a scientific method for child-centered learning, Gandhi resonated with her view of the child as inherently peaceful and capable of self-discipline. During Montessori's visits to India, Gandhi publicly supported her approach, recognizing its compatibility with his own values of simplicity, non-violence, and autonomy. Montessori schools in India often integrated Gandhian ideals such as self-reliance and moral education alongside sensorial learning.

Pattanayak, D. P. (1990). Gandhi was a strong proponent of using the **mother tongue** as the medium of instruction during the early years. He argued that education in a foreign language alienated children from their cultural roots and hindered comprehension. Gandhi's advocacy for vernacular instruction emphasized the emotional, cognitive, and moral development of children. His views are especially significant in multilingual countries like India, where early education in one's first language is now considered essential for foundational literacy and cultural identity.

Sharma, R. (2003). Gandhi regarded nature as a vital teacher in a child's life. He believed that children should grow in harmony with their environment, learning values like simplicity, sustainability, and empathy through direct engagement with the natural world. Activities such as gardening, animal care, and nature walks were not just practical tasks but part of moral and environmental education. In today's ecological crisis, Gandhi's ideas align with global movements promoting nature-based learning in early childhood education.

Objectives of the Study:

This paper explores Gandhi's philosophy of basic education and its relevance to the current Indian education system, highlighting the simplicity and practicality of his approach to childhood education.

Historical Advancement of Educational Thought:

Gandhi's life was a continuous process of experimentation, where he tested his ideas and actions through personal experience before sharing them with others. His educational principles were no exception, shaped by his time in South Africa,

a pivotal period for his personal growth and development of the concept of Satyagraha (Gandhi, 1953). Gandhi refined his thoughts on education through experimentation and reflection, which eventually evolved into the National Education Movement. This movement inspired the establishment of various institutions, such as Vidyapeeths and Veda Pathshalas, dedicated to promoting his educational ideals. Under Gandhi's leadership, these efforts laid the foundation for the development of Indian education. After four decades of experimentation and refinement, spanning his time in South Africa and India, Gandhi's views on education matured into a comprehensive philosophy in 1937. This philosophy culminated in his lifelong pursuit of truth and his commitment to empowering individuals through education (Young India, 2021).

Elementary Components of Education: An Analysis of Gandhian Vision

Mahatma Gandhi's ground breaking book, *Hind Swaraj*, marked the first comprehensive exposition of his educational philosophy, presenting a clear and definitive outline of his vision for learning. Notably, the fundamental aims of his educational approach, as articulated in this seminal work, remained remarkably consistent and unchanged throughout his life's journey, even as his ideas evolved and adapted to new contexts (Dehury, 2006). Despite traversing various stages and phases, Gandhi's educational philosophy retained its core objectives, unwavering in its commitment to empowering individuals and fostering a more just and equitable society through the transformative power of education. The objectives of his education is:

Individual Growth: Gandhi believed the individual is the center of all transformation spiritual, social, and political. He emphasized the importance of self-purification, truthfulness (*satya*), and non-violence (*ahimsa*) in shaping individual character. For Gandhi, every person has an innate divine spark, and individual development should focus on realizing this moral and spiritual potential. Education, self-discipline, and simple living were the pathways he advocated for personal growth (Iyer, 2000).

Development of Personality: According to Gandhi, the fundamental purpose of education is to cultivate individuals who embody the true essence of humanity. He believed that education should focus on fostering human virtues, leading to the holistic development of a person's character, intellect, and spirit. In his view, education that neglects the development of moral character and fails to promote overall growth is ineffective. Gandhi emphasized that the primary goal of education is to instil humanity in individuals, making character development the cornerstone of the educational process (Hazra, 2018).

Gandhi's View on Society: Gandhi envisioned society as an organic whole based on cooperation, harmony, and moral order. He opposed social divisions such as caste, class, and untouchability, advocating instead for a just, inclusive, and

egalitarian community. He believed that true societal reform must begin with ethical individuals who embody non-violence and truth. For Gandhi, social welfare was not the responsibility of the state alone but of each morally conscious individual (Parekh, 1997)

Collective Development: Gandhi supported collective development through local self-governance, cooperation, and shared responsibility. His idea of *Sarvodaya* the welfare of all focused on ensuring that development reaches the last person in the society (*Antyodaya*). He promoted rural upliftment, decentralized planning, and equitable distribution of resources. In Gandhi's view, collective progress should not come at the cost of individual dignity or environmental destruction (Taneja, 2004).

Self-Independence (Swavlamban): Self-independence (*Swavlamban*) was a core pillar of Gandhi's thought. He believed that individuals and villages should be economically and morally self-reliant. Through the *Charkha* (spinning wheel), he symbolized self-sufficiency, rejecting dependence on industrial and colonial economies. Self-dependence also extended to education and spiritual life, where Gandhi encouraged self-study, manual labor, and autonomy in thought and action (Parel, 1997).

Group and Community Life: Gandhi valued group life as a site for moral development and mutual support. He believed in *communitarianism* where small, self-sustaining groups like ashrams and villages formed the backbone of national life. Group life, according to Gandhi, should be based on principles of cooperation, truth, mutual service, and non-violence. He rejected competitive individualism and promoted group decision-making rooted in consensus and moral reasoning (Bondurant, 1988)

Developing Self-Reliant Citizen: Gandhi's vision for education emphasized the importance of instilling a strong work ethic in individuals, aiming to cultivate skilled and productive citizens. He believed that every person should engage in physical labor and contribute to the betterment of society through meaningful work. To achieve this, Gandhi advocated for an educational system that introduces children to practical and useful activities from a young age, enabling them to develop a sense of purpose and responsibility (Pandey, 2008). By involving children in productive enterprises that benefit both themselves and society, Gandhi hoped to foster a lifelong commitment to hard work, self-sufficiency, and community service. This approach would not only equip individuals with valuable skills but also promote a sense of social responsibility, ultimately leading to the development of a more productive and harmonious society.

Creation of Self-Governing Villages (Gram Swaraj): He envisioned a *Sarvodaya* Society, where human beings could develop their full potential, physically and morally. To achieve this, he advocated for *Gram Swaraj*, a self-

governing system where villages would harness local resources and rural economy to become self-sufficient. His goal was to encourage every individual to contribute to the growth of their family and society, utilizing their unique strengths and abilities. Gandhiji believed that education was the key to unlocking human potential, enabling individuals to develop their better instincts and abilities, and ultimately leading to the creation of a thriving, self-reliant society (G. Vedanthadesikan,2018).

Establishment of a Society with Universal Well-being (Sarvodaya Samaj):

Gandhi's vision was to create a society where everyone had the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential, regardless of their background or circumstances. He aimed to establish a Sarvodaya society, where every individual had access to equal opportunities for growth and development, and where everyone enjoyed the fundamental rights of equality and freedom (G. Geethika,2022). In this society, all human beings would be treated with dignity and respect, and would be empowered to live a life of purpose and fulfilment.

Educational Philosophy rooted in Gandhian Philosophy:

Gandhi firmly believed that the primary objective of education should be to nurture the comprehensive development of children, encompassing their intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth. He envisioned education as a holistic process that unlocks the full potential of individuals, fostering the harmonious development of their mind, heart, and body. In his 1937 article in Harijan, Gandhi elaborated on his understanding of education, emphasizing that it entails the all-round blossoming of human capabilities, transcending mere literacy (Shah,2017). He viewed literacy as a mere tool, not the ultimate goal or even the starting point of education. True education, according to Gandhi, empowers individuals to think critically, cultivate emotional intelligence, and develop a deep understanding of human values and relationships. It also enables them to contribute meaningfully to their personal growth, family, society, and nation through purposeful physical labor and responsible work. In essence, Gandhi's concept of education is about unlocking human potential, fostering well-rounded development, and preparing individuals to lead purposeful, socially responsible lives (Vijaylakshmi,2016).

Gandhi emphasized that education of the heart is crucial and cannot be taught through books alone. It requires the guidance of teachers who embody faith and character. He questioned whether teachers in pre-schools and primary schools possess these qualities and have received training in character development themselves (Saxena,2003). Gandhi believed that when children enter school, they need hands-on experience with simple tools, not just academic instruction. He argued that mere knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic is insufficient for a fulfilling life. Instead, he proposed a holistic approach to education, including:

- Integrated learning through manual work and practical activities
- Co-education for boys and girls
- Emphasis on understanding the "why" and "how" behind processes
- Gradual introduction to literacy skills, with handwriting taught as an art form
- General knowledge imparted in a way that fosters curiosity and understanding
- Children should learn to draw geometric shapes before writing, laying the foundation for good handwriting from the start.
- Kids should recognize letters as visual symbols, like pictures, before learning to write them. This approach, combined with oral storytelling, enables children to absorb knowledge naturally.
- Children should be encouraged to explore and learn at their own pace, without coercion or force. Curiosity and interest should drive their educational journey.
- The teaching process should be engaging, interactive, and enjoyable, making learning a delightful experience.
- Education should be imparted in the child's native language, facilitating a deeper understanding and connection with the material.

Gandhi's Wardha scheme (1937) outlined these practical methods and exercises for child development, prioritizing hands-on learning, critical thinking, and character building. He recognized the importance of good handwriting in boosting a child's confidence and overall development.

Education, Policies and Scheme: Gandhian Contemporary Quest

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of education commonly referred to as *Nai Talim* or Basic Education remains a critical reference point for understanding India's educational journey. Although post-independence policies have not always followed his model in letter, several policies and schemes have reflected his spirit in principle. Gandhi's ideals of **holistic development, craft-based learning, moral education, rural upliftment, and self-reliance** have found resonance in the evolution of India's education system, particularly in policies related to **universal access, vocational training, value-based education, and rural education.**

1. Mahatma Gandhi's Educational Philosophy: The Foundation

Gandhi's *Nai Talim*, introduced in 1937, proposed a radical departure from the colonial education system, which he viewed as alienating and decontextualized from Indian life. In his model, education was to begin at age seven and include practical, manual work like spinning, carpentry, or farming integrated with literacy and numeracy. He insisted that education must develop the **head, heart, and hand** and that it should be **free, compulsory, and conducted in the mother tongue** (Desai, 1996).

Gandhi emphasized self-reliance (*Swavlamban*) and believed in **education for life**, not merely for jobs. His focus on **moral development, simplicity, and community-based learning** is echoed in many modern schemes and policy efforts in India (Pathak, 2013).

2. National Policy on Education (1968, 1986, 2020)

The **National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968**, India's first comprehensive education policy, recognized the importance of moral and value education a direct echo of Gandhian ideals. It emphasized **social cohesion, national integration, and the removal of disparities** in education. Gandhi's influence is particularly visible in the focus on **regional languages** and **promotion of equality in education** (MHRD, 1968).

The **NPE 1986** went further to include **work experience and vocational training**, both key aspects of *Nai Talim*. It emphasized **Operation Blackboard**, focusing on universal primary education and infrastructural support, aligning with Gandhi's vision of inclusive, grassroots education.

The most recent National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 **deeply resonates with Gandhian thought. It proposes** foundational literacy and numeracy, **emphasizes** vocational education from Grade 6, **promotes** education in the mother tongue/local language until at least Grade 5, **and strongly advocates** experiential learning all of which mirror Gandhi's educational goals (MHRD, 2020).

"Education should be of the heart, the hands, and the head," Gandhi once said, and NEP 2020 tries to capture that holistic spirit.

3. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Launched in 2001, the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** aimed to provide **universal elementary education** for all children aged 6–14. The Gandhian influence is evident in its stress on **community involvement, decentralization**, and the **right to education as a human right**. Gandhi believed that education was not the sole responsibility of the government but of the entire society, particularly local communities (Gupta, 2001).

SSA's approach to **context-specific, locally relevant education** resonates with Gandhi's *Nai Talim*, which promoted **learning from the environment, crafts, and local resources**.

4. Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) & Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP)

The **MGNF**, launched in collaboration with IIMs, is a skill development and rural transformation program that carries Gandhi's legacy forward. The fellowship

embeds young professionals in districts to strengthen **vocational education and local economic ecosystems**, aligned with Gandhi's focus on **rural self-reliance and education linked to livelihoods**.

Similarly, the **UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP)** focuses on **education for global citizenship, sustainability, and non-violence** themes that Gandhi championed. MGIEP's work on **social-emotional learning (SEL)** directly reflects Gandhi's belief that **true education is that which draws out the best in the child's body, mind, and spirit** (Sharma, 2011).

5. Nai Talim Curriculum (2018) and Experiential Learning Initiatives

In 2018, the **NCERT and Mahatma Gandhi National Council of Rural Education (MGNCRE)** launched the **Nai Talim Curriculum**, aimed at reviving Gandhi's educational philosophy. The curriculum emphasized **work education, experiential learning, dignity of labor, and values of sustainability** in school curricula from primary to teacher education levels.

This effort reflects a direct and modern application of Gandhian ideals in India's educational landscape. Schools and universities were encouraged to integrate **service-learning** and **skill-based learning** to foster not just employment but ethical and socially responsible citizens.

6. Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Gandhian Ethics of Care

Introduced nationally in 1995, the **Mid-Day Meal Scheme** aims to enhance **nutrition, school attendance, and social equity** all values that Gandhi championed. Gandhi believed that education could not be separated from basic needs like food and health. Providing a **nutritious meal at school**, particularly to underprivileged children, reflects his ethics of **care, compassion, and equality**.

Moreover, the scheme fosters **communal harmony** as children from diverse backgrounds eat together thus echoing Gandhi's vision of **unity in diversity** and **social integration** from a young age.

Gandhi's Legacy in Today's Educational Framework

While India's educational system has evolved significantly since Gandhi's time, the **foundational ethos** of *Nai Talim* self-reliance, moral development, craft-based learning, and holistic growth continues to inform and inspire various **educational policies and missions**. Initiatives like NEP 2020, Nai Talim Curriculum 2018, MGIEP, SSA, and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme all reflect Gandhi's belief that **education is the key to human dignity and national development**.

To truly honor Gandhi's vision, future policies must continue to promote **contextual, value-based, community-rooted, and inclusive education**, especially at the early childhood and primary levels. His timeless message "*By education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man—body, mind and spirit*" should remain the guiding principle for educational reform in the 21st century.

Current Trends and Scenario of Pre-School Education:

Preschool education in India refers to the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children typically in the age group of 3 to 6 years. It is increasingly recognized as a critical stage for cognitive, emotional, and social development, laying the foundation for formal schooling and lifelong learning. According to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, ECCE is now considered an integral part of the formal education system, with a renewed emphasis on universal access, quality curriculum, and play-based pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The origins of organized preschool education in India can be traced back to the Balwadi movement initiated by Tarabai Modak and Gijubhai Badheka during the early 20th century. Influenced by Gandhian ideals, these pioneers emphasized child-centered learning, use of local materials, community participation, and education through craft and play. Their efforts were rooted in the belief that early childhood learning must be holistic and closely tied to the environment and culture of the child (Patel, 2004).

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, launched in 1975, marked a significant turning point in preschool education in India. As one of the world's largest early childhood programs, ICDS provides non-formal preschool education, nutrition, health checkups, and immunization through Anganwadi centers. These services focus on children from vulnerable and marginalized communities, aiming to reduce dropout rates and ensure readiness for primary school (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015).

However, preschool education in India faces several challenges. These include inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained ECCE educators, variability in quality across public and private institutions, and poor integration between health, nutrition, and educational services. Many Anganwadi centers are underfunded, and preschool curricula often lack age-appropriate, play-based learning methods, especially in rural and tribal areas (Kaul & Sankar, 2009). Moreover, access to quality pre-primary education remains unequal across caste, class, and gender lines.

The NEP 2020 attempts to address these concerns by proposing the creation of a National Curricular Framework for ECCE, standardization of preschool teacher

training, and the integration of Anganwadis with primary schools. It also promotes multilingual learning, mother tongue instruction, and experiential education—principles long advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that learning through activity, simplicity, and moral values should begin in early childhood (Pathak, 2013).

The newly introduced National Education Policy (NEP 2020) prioritizes Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), aiming to provide universal access to quality early childhood development and education for all children aged 3-8 by 2030 (Mallik, 2023). To achieve this, the policy proposes a four-fold expansion strategy:

1. Independent Anganwadis
2. Anganwadis integrated with primary schools
3. Pre-primary sections within primary schools
4. Standalone pre-schools

Pre-school education plays a vital role in a child's overall development, encompassing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Research highlights the significant impact of early education on future learning outcomes, making pre-school education a crucial foundation for formal schooling. By laying a strong foundation, pre-school education prepares children for future academic success and lifelong learning (Calman. et al, 2005).

Gandhi's views and research findings suggest that children between 4-6 years old are mentally prepared for structured, play-based learning. At this stage, a school readiness program tailored to their interests and needs is crucial, especially for disadvantaged children (Kumarappa. et al, 2005). India has a large population of children (158.8 million) in the 0-6 age group, with 60 million between 3-6 years old. Despite a 55% gross enrollment ratio in pre-school, around 20 million children (27% of the 3-6 age group) do not attend pre-school, highlighting the need for increased enrollment to improve education outcomes (SK. et al, 2023).

The UNICEF report (2016) notes that marginalized communities, including the poorest families, are often left behind. Disparities in pre-school attendance exist across religious and social groups, with 34% of Muslim children, 25.9% of Hindu children, and 25.6% of Christian children not attending pre-school. Scheduled Castes also face barriers, with 30% of children not attending pre-school. Anganwadi centers, which cater to 3.7 crore children through 13.7 lakh centers (45% co-located within school complexes), play a vital role in addressing these disparities. Table 1.1 provides a statistical overview of the status of pre-school education in India, emphasizing the need for targeted efforts to increase enrollment and accessibility (Aithal. et al, 2020).

Table 1.1 Status of Pre-School Education in India

Sl.No	Data	No.	Source
1	Total No. of Anganwadi centres Operational	13,77,595	ICDS report updated as on 30 th June 2019
2	Total child population of 6 months to 3 years age cohort	3,82,03,017	ICDS report updated as on 30 th June 2019
3	Total child population of age 3-6 years	3,05,09,301	ICDS report updated as on 30 th June 2019
4	Total No. of Anganwadi workers	13,77,595	ICDS report updated as on 30 th June 2019
5	Total No. of Schools	11,68,292	UDISE (2018-19) (Provisional)
6	Total Schools with primary sections	8,26,842	UDISE (2018-19) (Provisional)
7	Total primary schools with pre-primary sections	1,94,768	UDISE (2018-19) (Provisional)
8	Total No. of schools to be covered for preparatory class	7,01,537	Schools excluded having already pre-primary sections
9	Total No. of children enrolled in the attached pre-primary	29,94,751	UDISE (2018-19) (Provisional)

Source: NCERT and MHRD

Issues and Challenges:

Currently, Anganwadi workers lack the necessary training to provide school readiness programs or pre-school education for children aged 3-6, posing a significant challenge. It is essential to improve access to pre-school education, as the early years are critical for cognitive and intellectual development, which occurs rapidly during this period(Kaul,2000).

A notable concern is the disparity in access to pre-primary education, with only 32.7% of children attending government schools, indicating unequal access based on school management. Additional challenges include:

1. Ensuring adequate quality pre-schools with necessary infrastructure, such as:

- Play materials and teaching-learning resources
- Barrier-free access to all indoor and outdoor spaces
- Separate toilets for boys and girls, catering to different age groups
- Safe and comfortable school environments
- Appropriate accessories and facilities for children with special needs

2. Developing a comprehensive curriculum and planning its effective implementation in pre-schools.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to:

- Enhance the capacity of Anganwadi workers through training and orientation
- Increase access to quality pre-school education, particularly in government schools
- Ensure inclusive and barrier-free infrastructure
- Develop and implement a comprehensive curriculum tailored to the needs of children aged 3-6 years

By addressing these challenges, we can provide a strong foundation for future learning and development, ensuring that all children have access to quality pre-school education.

Conclusion:

Gandhi viewed education as a transformative process that awakens the soul and strengthens one's inner voice. He believed that true education harmoniously develops the body, heart, mind, and soul, nurturing spiritual, intellectual, and physical growth. Gandhi criticized India's education system as harmful, wasteful, and artificial, arguing that it prioritizes one aspect over others, hindering self-development. He lamented that this system leads children astray, fostering bad habits and superficial knowledge. Gandhi advocated for an education that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual growth through hands-on learning, such as handicrafts. He believed that practical skills development is essential for intellectual growth, stating that "the intelligent use of bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing their intellect." In essence, Gandhi's vision for education is a holistic approach that cultivates the whole person, promoting a balanced and harmonious development of body, mind, and spirit.

Gandhi's educational philosophy is rooted in humanism, aiming to empower individuals and society through self-reliance. He believed that education is the foundation of a strong society, and his vision was to create a non-violent, self-sufficient community through a new educational system. Gandhi emphasized the

importance of linking education to real life, focusing on the holistic development of mind, body, and soul. He recognized the immense potential in children and advocated for practical, experiential learning that leverages their natural environment and societal context.

By embracing Gandhi's principles of pre-school education and child development, we can work towards universal access to quality early childhood education. Implementing the National Education Policy 2020 in its entirety can be achieved by adopting Gandhian ideology, which prioritizes: 1. Self-reliance and community empowerment, 2. Holistic development through integrated learning, 3. Practical, experiential education, 4. Environmental and societal context-based learning, 5. Recognizing and nurturing children's inherent potential etc

By aligning our approach with Gandhi's humanistic philosophy, we can create a comprehensive and effective education system that benefits all children and society as a whole.

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Article: Pandemic, Precarity, and Private School Teachers: A Study of Livelihoods in Telangana

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Pandemic, Precarity, and Private School Teachers: A Study of Livelihoods in Telangana

-- Parupally Anjaneyulu

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions have had a detrimental effect on the livelihoods of a sizable portion of the population, workers in different sectors, particularly workforce in informal sector, migrant labour, private employees in service sector like school teachers. This study examines the effects of this pandemic on Telangana State's private teachers and their coping strategies. In this regard, a total 218 private teachers were interviewed in June, 2021. The study finds, two thirds of teachers were renters who had serious trouble covering the costs of their house rent. There was pressure on nearly thirty percent to find other sources of income. Half of the respondents did not receive any salary at all during the lockdown. Majority of the remaining received only some part of the salary of the lockdown period. Sudden job loss, unemployment and indebtedness became serious concern of the affected workforce. For coping with the crisis, the teachers depended on tuitions, or borrowed money from others, depended on their parents or spouses' incomes; few tapping into their savings; work as wage labour in both farm and non-farm sectors; joined or started petty business or street vending. Economic support scheme from the Government reached half of the teachers.

Key Words: Covid-19, Private teachers, livelihood, Teaching, Online

Introduction: The majority of countries in the world are affected by COVID-19. The first and second waves resulted in thousands of deaths and millions of people suffering from the disease. India is the world's most severely impacted country during the second wave. A large number of people died, while others had to fight for bread and butter. Migrant labour, private employees working in the unorganised and organised sectors, small and medium-scale industrial labour, daily wage labourers, and other vulnerable communities have been subjected to suffering and significant challenges even after a year of declaring nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020.

The private teacher community, for example, is one of the most affected communities in India. The UNESCO (2020) states that the COVID-19 shutdown in India had affected around 2.7 million teachers, of whom about 95 percent were employed by private institutions. Over 190 countries on all continents and almost 1.6 billion students are affected. A total 94 percent of unorganized sector workers are women who were forced to labour for no salary or without a job (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - 2020). Based on the existing literature, an impact assessment is conducted on the primary, secondary, and service sectors as well as the effects on the environment, the informal sector, health, job losses, and migrants (Aneja et al. 2020).

Who is a teacher: Teaching profession is considered a noble profession and teachers commanded respected from different sections of the society. Traditionally, the teaching profession was not measured on the incomes earned by the practitioners and they were not paid high in Telangana or erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. In fact, up to 1980s teachers, in both Government and private schools, were paid less than other professionals like engineers, doctors, and others. “One who is not fit for better living becomes a teacher” (Bataka Leka Badi Pantulu) goes the Telugu saying explaining the poor earnings of a teacher. However, salary for Government teachers have improved manifold and today they are better paid than other professionals. But the teachers in private schools continue to earn low income and feel pacified with the non-financial rewards and respect from the pupils. Significant number of teachers in private schools take pride in the profession because it is white collar job. Social norms do not approve educated persons to engage in manual jobs.

Educational institutions exist to provide quality education as well as to guide pupils from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. The Teacher has a critical role in transforming understanding in this process. The teacher is the most crucial factor in any educational programme in Quality Concerns in Secondary Teacher Education (NCTE-1998). At any point in the educational process, the teacher is primarily accountable for its implementation. The Teachers have a significant impact on our children's futures and, by extension, the future of our country (NEP-2020). Teachers are often professional teachers with degrees in a variety of topics. The duty of teachers is the same whether they work for the Government or for the private sector, although there are differences in salary, work conditions and job security.

Private Schools: The private schools are classified as non-public, get no support from the Government, and are managed by a single organisation or board (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016). The three main categories of private schools include schools that are religious; schools that cater to particular demographics; and schools that use particular pedagogies and curriculum (CAPE Private School Facts). In India, there are 14.8 lakh schools open with 95.0 lakh teachers and 26.5 crore students. This includes 8.2 crore students, 35.4 lakh teachers, and about 3.3 lakh unaided private schools. Telangana State is home to 42,917 schools with 3.2 lakh teachers and 69.6 lakh students. There are 1.7 lakh teachers working in the private schools, which account for one fourth (28 percent-12193) of the total State schools. The data says that, nearly half (46 percent) of all children in the country attend private schools (U-DISE 2021-22). The COVID-19 has forced the closure of private management schools around the country, in addition to all Government institutions.

Status of Private Teachers: Teachers are the primary source of instruction and student learning for education stakeholders, including parents, students, and administrators (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006). The literature

generally agrees that in the Global South, commercial providers salary their teachers less than the public sector does (Crawford & Pugatch, 2020). Teachers around the world are finding themselves employed by private providers, as the private education industry continues to expand (UNESCO, 2019). In general, private teachers may be hired on a full-time or part-time basis in schools or colleges, while in Government schools; teachers are hired on a permanent basis and receive government benefits. Ninety percent of public-school teachers work permanently, compared to about forty percent who said their positions are transitory. Additionally, compared to nearly three fourth (70 percent) of public-school teachers, only one third (33 percent) of private school teachers have formal contracts, and those contracts are for shorter duration (Amita Chudgar et al 2021).

The studies indicates that, job security is non-existent in private schools and colleges in India. In addition to this insecurity, marginalised employees face additional challenges including not having access to emergency funds in the event of a sudden risk, like as the COVID-19 outbreak. To deal with these kinds of problems in the near or distant future, one must be prepared. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 was also implemented; however, it did not address these difficulties anymore.

Review of Literature: Low-cost private schools (LCPS) have been particularly adversely struck by COVID-19. As a result, the LCPS experienced severe financial strain; educators reported being underpaid, losing their jobs, or receiving salary reductions and numerous LCPS have already closed. This sector also had trouble offering its pupils remote learning help, and there's a good chance that returning students may suffer significant learning losses. In addition to having funding constraints, LCPS will have trouble offering remedial learning support to make up for this learning loss (UNICEF, 2021).

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, teachers had to deal with a significant rise in working hours (from 8 to 12 hours) in order to prepare for online instruction, grade assignments, and other tasks. Over 80 percent of teachers stated they were incurring extra costs as a result of using their own funds required to adapt to online/ remote teaching approach. This meant that teachers experienced a significant financial burden as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to salary cuts. Nevertheless, throughout the pandemic, there have been inadequate guidelines and support for teachers employed by the commercial sector (Paycheck.in, 2021). There were around 11,700 Government-recognised private schools in the Telangana State employing around 1.50 lakh teachers and they had not got their salaries since March 15, 2020. As most of the teachers shifted to urban areas from villages, they do not even have ration cards which made them ineligible to receive Government assistance, including rice and financial aid, specially announced for the poor during the lockdown (Hindustan Times, Hyderabad, 2020).

The challenges that teachers faced when enrolled in online courses have highlighted a number of complex and multifaceted issues, including access, usage, and skill gaps for teachers in both public and private schools; the digital divide; and the role of Ed-Tech companies, which are attempting to replace teachers rather than support them in their work (Samta Jain et al. 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the education sector to adopt a new online teaching and learning model. For all parties involved, the abrupt departure from the conventional approach to teaching and learning has presented both difficulties and opportunities (Sheema Kumari et al. 2021). The Bharat Dekho organisation (2021) stated that, nearly one fourth (22.5 percent) of Telangana's private teachers received the govt Rs 2,000/- cash relief and overwhelming (80) percentage of teachers did not receive the promised 25 kg rice. It has also been revealed that certain school administrations have taken advantage of the situation and abused the help. Given this backdrop, an attempt is made to study the perception of private teachers about impact of COVID-19 on their life and livelihood conditions in Telangana State.

Objectives: The main objectives of the study are

1. To map the socioeconomic situation of private teachers
2. To analyse the issues & challenges in organising traditional and online teaching modes
3. To examine the impact of govt beneficiary system on the livelihoods of private teachers

Methodology: A structured questionnaire/instrument has been administered to collect data on socioeconomic variables, online teaching procedures, and Government benefits for private teachers in Telangana. The data was collected from May 15, 2021 to June 6, 2021. During this time, the private school teachers faced a large number of problems. The sample comprised 218 respondents spread across the Telangana State. Relatively a larger number of the respondents were employed in primary and high schools and located in Rangareddy, and Medak districts. Half of the teachers (51percent) teach in high schools, followed by one third (31 percent) in primary school. Remaining one sixth (18 percent) are involved in colleges - intermediate (11 percent), degree (four percent), postgraduate (one percent), and other (two percent) programmes, such as B. Ed, TTC, etc (see table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Type of School and district

Total Respondents			Levels of Teaching by Respondents					
Erstwhile District	Respondents	Percentage	Primary	Secondary	Intermediate	Degree	PG level	Others
Rangareddy	38	17.4	10	21	3	2	0	2
Medak	35	16.1	14	16	1	3	1	0
Karimnagar	24	11	6	15	2	0	0	1
Nizamabad	23	10.6	8	13	1	0	1	0
Hyderabad	20	9.2	3	15	2	0	0	0
Mahbubnagar	20	9.2	10	7	2	1	0	0
Adilabad	19	8.7	5	7	6	1	0	0
Nalgonda	18	8.3	6	8	2	1	0	1
Warangal	14	6.4	4	7	3	0	0	0
Khammam	7	3.2	2	3	1	0	1	0
Total	218	100	68 (31.2)	112 (51.4)	23 (10.6)	8 (3.7)	3 (1.4)	4 (1.8)

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

The outcomes are divided into five sections: Teachers' background; Livelihood situation during the Covid-19; Challenges; Coping mechanism; and Summary. The background information covered the following elements: age group, educational level, housing concern, family and salary of the household. Livelihood sources section deals with online classes and its difficulties; the salary situation was discussed in the third section. The Govt financial assistance scheme is analysed in the fourth section while the last section presents summary.

Section-I – Background of Teachers

The sample comprised 218 respondents spread across the Telangana State. Among them, there are three fourth respondents (167) from rural and one fourth respondents (51) from urban areas.

Housing Status: Teachers did not receive salary as a result of the State's closure of educational institutions, due to Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, many did not have enough money to cover their household expenses. The study reveals that, one-third (33 percent) teachers live in their own houses, while remaining 67 percent live in rented houses.

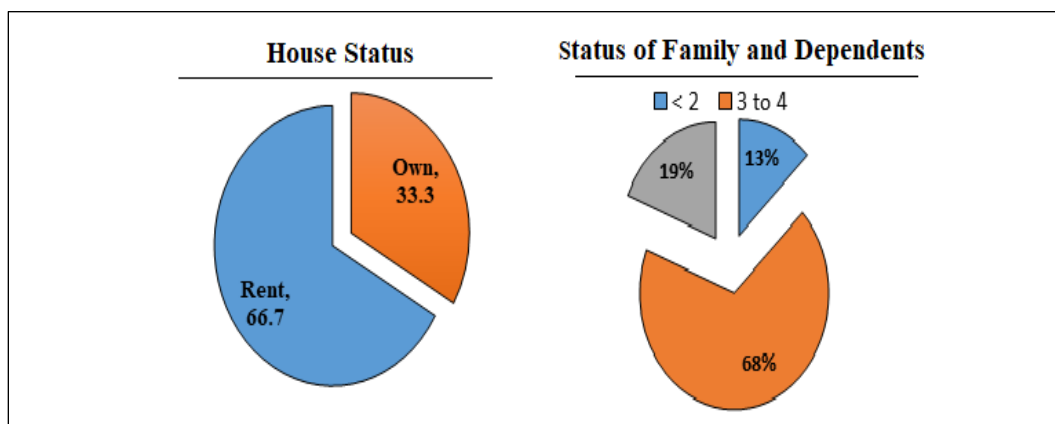
Table 2: Distribution of Teachers by rural/ urban area

Location	Respondents	Percent	Own House	Rented House
Rural	167	76.6	34.1	65.9
Urban	51	23.4	8.4	22.2
Total	218	100.0	42.5	88.0

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

The tenants had embarrassing situations and difficulty in paying the house rent. Due to this reason, a few teachers vacated their houses within a few months and moved to their villages, while others reported paying rent by mobilising money from other sources. A few are engaged in online teaching, using personal savings, and relying on their parents' or brothers' salaries to run their families.

The study also examined the problems faced by housing rentals, since media reports mentioned of many teachers having trouble making ends meet because of unemployment, irregular income and lack of savings. Paying monthly rent for their housing in cities or towns where most of the teachers inhabit was assumed to have become a serious concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the data, one-third (73 percent) of teachers in rural areas pay rent up to Rs. 5000, one-fourth (26 percent) live in rented houses paying monthly between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 10,000, and the remaining one percent pay rent in semi-urban areas exceeding Rs. 10,000.

Fig 1: Status of housing and family and dependents of the teachers

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Small houses like two bed room housing with basic amenities was costing around Rs 5000 a month even in towns and up to Rs 10000 in cities. The teachers reported that, they are either living in nice houses with decent amenities or in semi-urban areas. As contrasting to this, in metropolitan regions or urban areas 38

percent of teachers pay a monthly rent of Rs. 5,000, 57 percent pay between Rs 5000 and Rs 10000, and a smaller section comprising six percent of teachers spend more than Rs 10,000. Teachers in urban areas were paying relatively higher rent than teachers in rural areas while the amenities were more or less same. Overall, 64 percent of teachers pay less than Rs 5,000 a month, one third (33 percent) pay between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000, and the remaining two percent pay more than Rs 10,000.

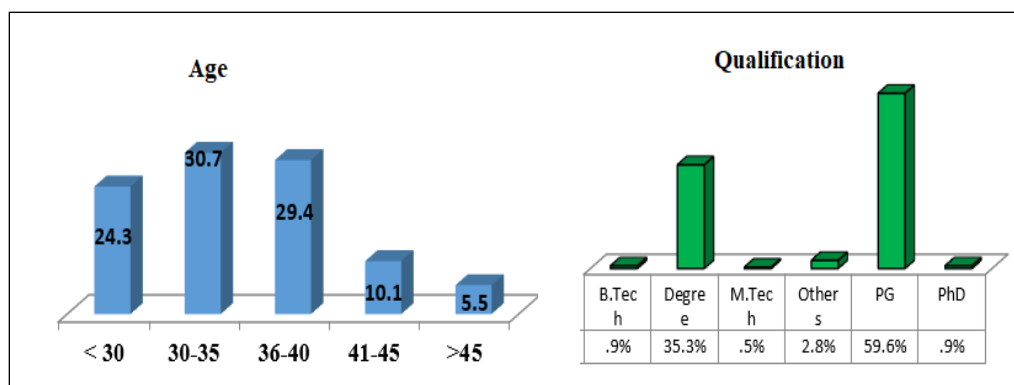
Table 3: Details of paying rents in the study areas

Paying Rent	Rural	Urban	Total
< 5000	72.6	37.8	63.6
5000-10000	26.4	56.8	34.3
>10000	0.9	5.4	2.1
Grand Total	100 (167)	100 (51)	100 (218)

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Family and Dependents on the Respondents: The private teachers in general are compelled to seek alternative sources of income to support their families. Most serious hardship faced by the respondents is supporting the family dependent on them with no source of employment or income ever since the closure of schools was announced. Nearly one fourth (28 percent) were involved in teaching-related activities or not having the pressure to seek alternate sources of incomes during the lockdown. Around two-thirds (68 percent) of the private teachers had to support three to four members dependent on them. One fifth of the respondents had to support more than five members, while 13 percent of the respondents had less than two members.

Fig 2: Distribution of Private School Teachers by Age and Qualification



Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Age and Qualification: A large percentage (84 percent) of teachers in the study were under 40, indicating that the working conditions were not particularly appealing to those who were older and those with relatively higher family responsibilities. More particularly around half (55 percent) of the teachers were aged below 35 years; one third (30 percent) were aged under 30 years; 10 percent were between 41 to 45 years and five percent were over the age of 45.

Qualification: The private school teachers must also have comparable qualifications via TET, an interview or demonstration, and proficiency in the local language or languages (NEP-2020). The present study revealed that, the majority of the teachers (60 percent) have completed their post-graduate education (PG); one-third (35 percent) have completed graduation; while the remaining five percent have completed B. Tech, M. Tech, Ph.D., and other degrees. Teachers with postgraduate qualifications are employed relatively more in urban areas than in rural ones, and that degree holders are employed more in rural areas than in urban areas. In addition, two percent of PhD holders and the equivalent percentage of B. Tech holders only teach in urban areas (see Table 4). The study also reveals that higher level teachers work in cities, whereas teachers qualified up to degree level are found only in rural areas.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Qualification

Qualification	Rural	Urban	Total
B. Tech	0.6	2.0	0.9
Degree	37.1	29.4	35.3
M.Tech	0.6	0.0	0.5
Others	3.0	2.0	2.8
PG	58.1	64.7	59.6
PhD	0.6	2.0	0.9
Grand Total	100 (16)	100 (51)	100 (218)

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Section II- Livelihood situation during the Covid-19

During the COVID-19 scenario, the private teaching community has been the hardest hit. India had one of the most extensive and severe COVID-19 lockdowns in history when its national Government imposed a sudden countrywide shutdown from March 24, 2020, to May 31, 2020. First concern of the Government when it closed down was saving lives, rather than protecting livelihoods. How lives and livelihoods of the people are affected by lockdown was not appreciated properly as there was no resident of such exigency. Because economic activity was suspended countrywide, the lockout had a major aggregate supply and demand shock to the economy. Food production was threatened by disturbances in the

supply chain, and the inability to maintain employment stability damaged livelihoods. Reduced salaries, job loss, and contract restrictions all raised the risk of food insecurity. The risks and losses were high among the private school teachers.

Table 5: Status of Online teaching process across the State

Levels of Education	No. of teachers Involved	Percent to total participated teachers
Primary	16	27.6
Secondary	34	58.6
Intermediate	1	1.7
Degree	4	6.9
Others	3	5.2
Total	58	100

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

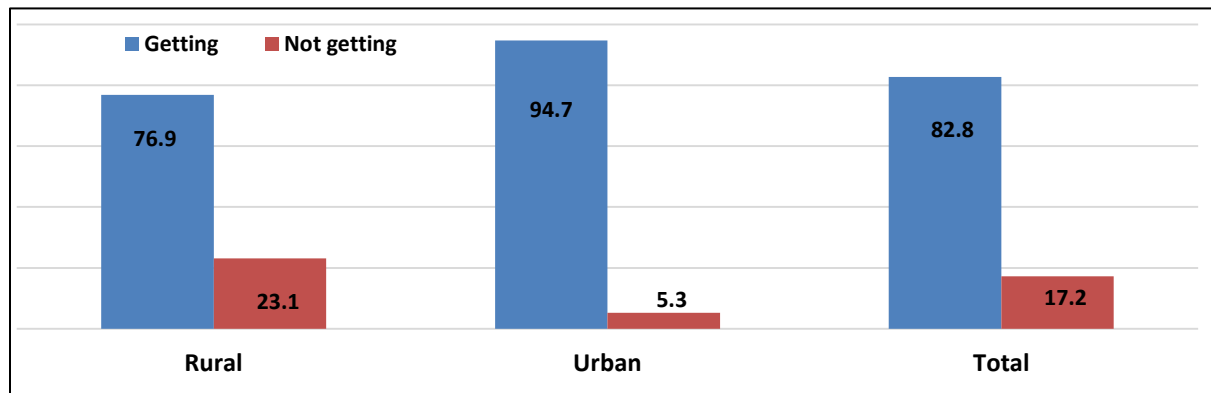
Mode of Teaching: The present study said that, only one fourth (27 percent- 58) of 218 teachers involved in online classes. The study also revealed that online teaching was most prevalent at the primary and secondary level of school, with 59 percent and one fourth (28 percent), respectively. The online teaching style has been adopted in around two percent of the intermediate lessons. The primary data revealed that, college administrations are also supporting online teaching at the degree level, with seven percent of the state's colleges using this method and around four percent of Post Graduate students received online instruction.

Financial status and Salary of Teachers: UNESCO Education Report for India (2020) said that, 42 percent of teachers were self-employed in private and public sectors and received less than Rs. 10,000 per month. Only 8 percent of teachers had contracts for one to two years in length. The situation was worse in private schools, where up to 69 percent of employees lack contracts, leaving them without any benefits and susceptible to unforeseen layoffs, salary reductions, abusive working conditions, or delayed salary. One of the study's surprising findings was the difference between teachers in private and Government schools. Salaries for elementary and general secondary school teachers in private institutions were almost 43 percent lower than those in Government institutions.

The present study disclosed that, remuneration and job security is very poor in private schools and colleges. Precarious conditions of the private teachers reflected in the low salaries they earn. Beyond salary comparisons, there is, however, a lack of rigorous data regarding the working conditions of private school teachers in low- and middle-income nations in relation to Government teachers. The study finds that, out of 218 private teachers, a total 83 percent got

the salaries¹ which includes, 95 percent urban teachers and three fourth (77 percent) rural private teachers. The study revealed that, four of the seven teachers work in secondary school, while the other three teach at the university level.

Fig 3: Area wise Salary Status of Private Teachers



Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Since last 12 months, 42 percent of them have been paid 50 percent of their income, and one fourth (27 percent) have been paid 40 percent of their salary. A total 12 percent teachers earn less than Rs. 6,000 per month. While one third (35 percent) teachers earn between Rs. 6,000 and Rs.10,000/- per month, the largest section of them (40 percent) earns between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 20000/-. Other six percent received a monthly salary ranging from Rs.20,000 to Rs.25,000/-. Teachers earning more than Rs. 25,000/- each month constitute just 7.5 percent.

Online teacher's salary status: Out of 58 online teaching participated teacher, a total 10 percent did not receive a salary, which is higher in rural than in urban areas. Approximately five percent were paid between 20 and 25 percent salary. In rural places, it is likewise higher. More than half of teachers (57 percent) received salaries between 25 and 50 percent, according to the study. In comparison to rural areas, this is 10 percent higher in urban settings. It shows that teachers in urban areas are primarily paid half as much. A total of 15 percent of teachers were paid between 50 percent and 75 percent of their salaries. Teachers in rural areas reported higher than those in urban areas in this category. 12 percent of teachers are paid more than three fourth (75 percent) of their total salary. There are more urban teachers in this category than rural area teachers. From an urban-rural

¹ No matter how much money the private teacher received in rupees, it would still be considered a salary if it came from the management.

perspective, 87 percent paid in rural areas, while salaries in urban areas are significantly higher, reaching nearly 95 percent. This is because urban school and college frameworks are prepared to offer online teaching services.

Table 6: Rural and Urban Online Teacher's Salary

Getting Salary range (Percent)	Rural	Urban	Total
No Salary	12.8	5.3	10.3
20 to 25	7.7	0.0	5.2
25 to 50	53.8	63.2	56.9
50 to 75	17.9	10.5	15.5
> 75	7.7	21.1	12.1
Total	100 (39)	100 (19)	100 (58)

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Section III- Challenges

As per Dr. Poonam (2022), teachers During Covid-19 confront a variety of problems because of the needs of diverse student groups, but digitization has also given them the opportunity to take on new duties. With the use of technology, teachers may now enhance a variety of abilities necessary to provide students with a high-quality education. The internet has allowed them to contact a large number of specialists and learners. Teachers now have more freedom to explore with the design and delivery of the curriculum thanks to the difficulties and opportunities. Education has undergone a transformation with the physical closure of schools and the replacement of in-person instruction at home (P.R Ujianti 2021). It is necessary for educators, parents, students, and school administrators to transition to digital or online learning platforms, sometimes referred to as online learning, "pembelajaran daring" in Indonesian, or e-learning. During the Covid-19, nearly half (47 percent) of teachers reported that online learning was somewhat stressful, one fifth (21 percent) reported that it was moderately difficult, one fourth (25 percent) reported that it was not stressful at all, and seven percent reported that it was extremely stressful (Kumari, S 2021). Due to their lack of legalese understanding, management sometimes raises employee working hours without providing overtime salary, thereby exploiting and forcing private teachers to labour at the whims of these organizations. Additionally, they put employees through painful experiences by pressuring them to resign so that management can escape potential legal implications. Teachers' suffering is not new; they have frequently experienced notice less terminations from private schools and frequent denials of PFs (Provident Funds), gratuities, and ESI benefits (Shobhit Rawat, 2020).

Salary adequacy: The present study disclosed that, out of 58 online teaching involved teachers, the majority (81percent) stated that their salary is insufficient

to run a family or meet their needs, while the remaining one fifth (19 percent) said it was adequate. The salaries of the teachers are also taken into consideration by the school management. As a results of inadequate salaries, teachers dedicated time to tuitions, wage labour, business, and self-employment. A few teachers relied on their parents' or spouse's salary and interest-bearing loans. Teachers are changing employment every year or relocating to different schools at an alarming pace as a result of low salary and job insecurity (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). To earn money, a respondent (teacher) has been taking jobs as a cook at people's homes, which is a troubling aspect of the pandemic scenario. The study found that necessity has forced the teachers to take odd jobs and shifted into unexpected professions.

Table 7: Status of other income sources for the livelihood purposes

Income Source	No of Teachers	Percent	Figure (In Percent)
Depending on husband	12	20.7	
No Source	10	17.2	
By tuitions	9	15.5	
Borrowing money on Interest	5	8.6	
Daily labour	5	8.6	
Business	4	6.9	
Depending on parents/Brothers	4	6.9	
Self-Employment	4	6.9	
Agriculture	3	5.2	
Cooking in others house	1	1.7	
Private Job	1	1.7	
Total	58	100.0	

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

The study also reveals that, nearly one fourth (28 percent) of respondents relied on the income of their parents, brothers, or spouse. Another one sixth (15 percent) earned money via home or online tuition. Surprisingly, nearly 14 percent of teachers said they are engaged in agricultural or daily wage labour and another 14 percent run their own firm or engage in self-employment activities. Approximately nine percent are providing financial support to their family by taking on interest-bearing debt. One sixth (17 percent) do not have a source of income and are seeking assistance. When asked about other family members who works, one fourth (49 members) said that other family members such as brothers or father's works. Among all 49 employees, 80 percent received remuneration, while the remaining one fifth (20 percent-10) did not.

Table 8: Status of other employees in the family and salary situation (N=218)

Other employees in Family		Getting salary or not	
Yes	No	Yes	No
23.1 (49)	76.9 (169)	79.6 (39)	20.4 (10)

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Difficulties in conducting online classes: The Covid-19 also gives school management and teachers the ability to suggest and implement improvements in teaching and learning approaches. The educational institutions up to the primary or secondary level has only one option i.e., online education or virtual learning. Many challenges with online teaching, such as a lack of appropriate infrastructure at home and network-related issues, are highlighted in the preceding analysis. As a result of Covid-19, the Government as well as school administrators started encouraging online teaching. Schools in Telangana adopted online education or virtual education from March 2020 to October 2021. The vast majority of teachers and students were unfamiliar with this kind of education. Because of high-level infrastructure, the new teaching style in remote places became an enigmatic experience for students.

The most educators worldwide lack the skills necessary to promote ongoing learning and change their methods of instruction. When compelled to give in-person instruction for the children of important workers and vulnerable youngsters, teachers' physical health was put at danger. Nearly two-thirds of the 93 teacher unions from 67 different countries said that education employees in private schools had been negatively impacted, with temporary teachers and support staff suffering the most. However, some school administrators were motivated to pick up the knowledge and keep instructing students. Some children have purchased smartphones and are enrolled in online courses offered by the school administration because private school administrators and parents are in a better financial position (Education International survey-2020). The majority of children in rural areas lack access to smart phones or mobile phones and also said lack of internet or Wi-Fi connectivity is a major impediment to continuing the online education process. The majority of students said that they were unable to purchase a new smartphone; the cost of recharging was also a financial strain (CESS-2020).

The present study also asked about challenges encountered while online teaching, more than half of the respondents (55 percent) stated that they not faced any difficulties during online classes, whereas 40 percent said they experienced network issues. While other five percent were concerned about the children not attending classes on a regular basis, this is due to the fact that children's mobile phones were not always available and another factor is travel. The network issues were reported more in rural areas than urban areas.

Table 9: Difficulties in conducting online classes across the State (N=58)

Involving in Online Classes		Difficulties in conducting online classes		
Yes	No	Network Issues	Irregular Classes	No Issues
27.0	73.0	39.7	5.2	55.2

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

Section IV- Coping Mechanism

During the Covid-19 scenario, the private teaching community has been the hardest hit. Many teachers were faced with a financial crisis and some of the teachers were involved in online classes and some of them engaged in low aspirant jobs to run their families. Some private teachers were left with no choice except to work as agricultural labourers in the villages (Hindustan Times, 2020). In one case, a teacher in the Yadadri-Bhongir area had taken up the task of clearing an unwanted tree in a community due to the drought. Although circulars were issued stating that teachers shall be paid salary in accordance with Government orders given while announcing lockdown, the teacher's association has conveyed the issue to the Government and officials in the districts.

Table 10: Cope up mechanism during the COVID_19 in Telangana State

Description	Respondents	Share	Rural (N=167)	Urban (N=51)
Borrowing money on Interest	103	47.2	43.7	58.8
Depending parents	59	27.1	29.9	17.6
Bank Savings	18	8.3	8.4	7.8
No Source	15	6.9	5.4	11.8
Agriculture or daily labour	10	4.6	4.8	3.9
Depending on parents/Brothers	6	2.8	3.6	0.0
By tuitions	4	1.8	2.4	0.0
Auto driving	1	0.5	0.6	0.0
Part-time job	1	0.5	0.6	0.0
Chit fund	1	0.5	0.6	0.0
Grand Total	218	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Primary data, May- June 2021

The primary data revealed that, one fourth (25 percent) of private teachers were dependent on their parents' income, and nearly half (47 percent) private teachers borrowed money at interest. Eight percent are draining the bank accounts of their relatives. Around five percent of the respondents worked in construction and agriculture on a daily basis. The study data also revealed that, three percent relied on their parents' or brothers' salaries to support their families, while two percent relied on tuition. Some teachers also undertook odd jobs such as auto driving and part-time jobs and delivery boy. One teacher said that he is maintaining the Chit fund. One private teacher said that he recently got married and had to return to his

hometown due to the lockdown, whereupon he lost his job suddenly due to the COVID-19. He is now embarrassed to explain his in-laws why he is still in the village instead of going to his school.

The study revealed that 60 percent of urban private teachers and 44 percent of rural private teachers, rely on interest-bearing loans to get through the difficult times. While one-sixth of teachers in urban areas and almost one-third of teachers in rural areas were dependent on their parents' salaries. Remarkably, in both rural and urban locations, just eight percent of teachers relied on their personal savings. In both rural (five percent) and urban (four percent) areas, there were very few teachers engaged in daily labour activities. Additionally, the data showed that rural areas teachers had a higher percentage of teachers who did not find any sources compared to the teachers in urban areas. In urban areas, a small number of teachers participated in activities including chit funds, part-time jobs, auto driving, and tuition.

Financial Assistance Scheme: The Telangana State Government provided COVID-19 relief package comprising financial assistance and dry ration in response to several requests from private teachers and other staff who work under the auspices of recognised private educational institutions by providing. Private school teachers availed Rs. 2000 and 25 kg rice free of charge through fair nearest ration shops upon presentation of Identity Card issued by the recognised schools. Financial assistance was provided on a monthly basis to schools that reopen. In the month of April 2021, financial assistance began and was operational till schools reopen i.e., June, 2021. Direct Beneficiary Transfer (DBT) mode was adopted to provide financial assistance. To be eligible for these benefits, private teachers were required to fill out an online application which had to be confirmed by the District Education Officers (DEO) According to Government estimates, close to 1.5 lakh school teachers and staff in Telangana were benefitted. (<https://schooledu.telangana.gov.in/ISMS/>).

All schools have been closed as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak. Due to this, a large proportion of teachers experienced difficulties. Out of the 218 teachers, only 180 teachers (82 percent) were engaged in the primary and high school grades, disclosed by the present study. Among this, nearly half (47 percent-84) said that they were benefitted from the scheme, while the remaining were still waiting to receive the assistance. Out of 84 benefitted teachers, a total of 81 percent (69) of teachers received financial assistance in April 2021, while others were hoping to receive the money in May 2021. The analysis found that Government support does not meet the minimal expenditure. The study found that, some school administrators use their relatives' or administrative staff's names in COVID-19 to benefit from the scheme. If they submit regular teacher names to the Government, they would face a slew of problems in the future if the teachers demand regularisation of their services. However, management considers the

circumstances of the teachers in this case, as the teachers have long been supportive of management.

Section V- Conclusion

The private teacher community is one of the most severely affected communities by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study finds that, majority of teachers could not get sufficient remuneration. The rented housing teachers faced many financial difficulties. The UN and UNESCO studies also confirmed these conditions. The teachers who were not active in online or offline modes were faced a number of challenges that threatened their livelihood. The study concludes that, private teachers who don't make enough money took on other jobs such as tuition, interest-bearing loans, day-to-day work, business, several informal jobs, and self-employment. Few also rely on their parents' or spouse' income; worked as wage labour in farm and non-farm sectors and surprisingly, and only one-fifth received adequate salary. Online teaching imposed new responsibilities and caused stress among many teachers. During online classes, majority teachers did not experience any network or internet troubles. Due to travel and lack of mobile phones, students aren't regularly attending classes. More teachers from urban areas stated that online mode teaching, salary, availability of alternative part time jobs, network availability etc are good compared to the rural areas.

The study concluded that, majority of teachers could not receive full remuneration during the online teaching mode. So, the private teachers faced a lot of issues. To overcome the Government has extended financial and rationing assistance (Rs. 2000/- and 25kgs rice) to private teachers. Half the teachers received Government benefits in April to May, 2021. Due to the management's failure to disclose all of the teachers' personal information, the financial assistance programme was misused and several teachers excluded from the social safeguards. As a result, private teachers are pleading with the Government and school administrations to initiative effective measures to address the difficulties faced by the teachers. The Government's relief measures have helped just a small percentage of teachers, and the effort does not provide them with financial security to face the risks, and the scheme excludes a big number of vulnerable teachers.

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Article: Invariable Caste Structure in Tamil Nadu: Issues & Challenges

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Invariable Caste Structure in Tamil Nadu: Issues & Challenges

--C. Sathish

Abstract

Despite Tamil Nadu being a developing state, the caste atrocities against Dalits have been alarming day-by-day due to the exploitative nature of the dominant caste. Dalit community entry into the higher socio-economic ladder has been revolted by the dominant caste through the caste structure in Tamil Nadu. Against this backdrop, this article makes an attempt to decode the invariable caste structure in Tamil Nadu under the theoretical framework of caste as a state of mind, traditional and its exploitative nature through the secondary sources of data. This study reveals that the caste structure has been deeply institutionalized in the form of atrocities such as rape, honour killing, denial of temple entry, two tumbler system, politics and caste identity in schools. This study argues that the dominant caste exploitative nature towards the Dalit community is one of the social factors but it is not the sufficient social factors for the invariable caste structure. There are other socio-psychological factors which determines the invariable caste structure in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Caste Structure, Issues, Atrocities, Politics and Caste identity.

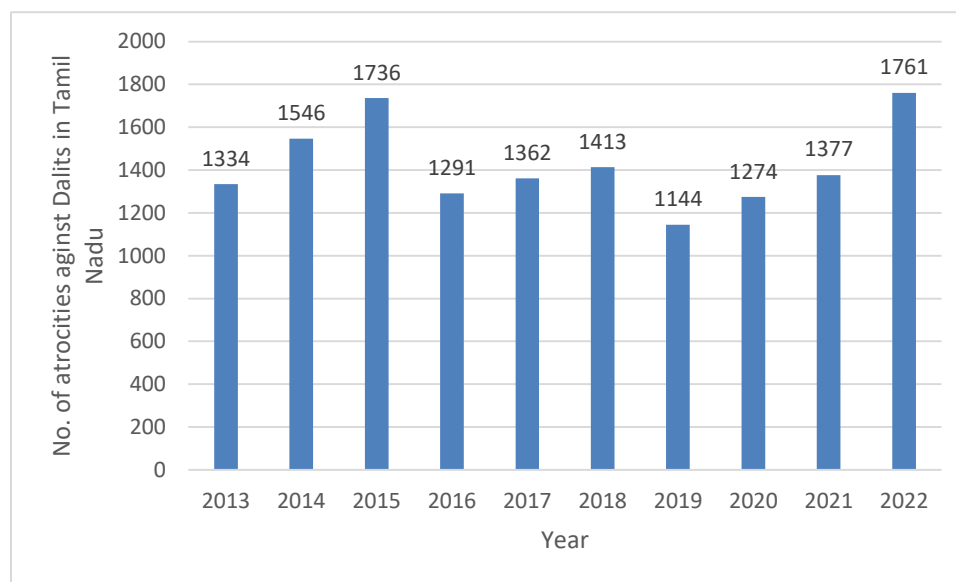
Introduction

“Don’t hit us, don’t hit us, no, oh god, save us”. These are the words in a scene from the Tamil movie *Maamannan*, where the four Dalit children, who were taking a bath in the dominant caste¹ temple well were rounded up and three out of four of them were stoned to death by the dominant caste men (Selvaraj, 2023). Likewise, there are many Tamil movies which have been depicting the deeply institutionalized caste structure against Dalits in Tamil Nadu. Movies not only reflect the existing social reality but they also document how caste structure is evolving and taking different forms in our day-to-day social life. Tamil Nadu has performed well regarding higher education, health care, rural infrastructure, nutrition, reduction of poverty compared to the last five decades due to the Dravidian ideologies of rationality, social justice and equality. However, caste as a social factor continued to pose challenges for achieving egalitarian society and by reiterating the existing social boundaries of caste cleavages between the dominant caste and the Dalits.

There is a dialectical socio-psychological conflict between the dominant caste and the Dalits due to Dalit assertion on one side regarding their participation in education, government jobs, access to decision making in lower and higher levels of governance and on the other hand, the dominant caste revolt against them in

Tamil Nadu (Pai, 2013). Ambedkar (2019: 68) argues that the *caste is a state of mind and it is notional. It is rooted in the religious text of Shastras and the real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras*. Therefore, Ambedkar argues that caste system is rooted in the tradition of Indian society. Similarly, Xaxa (1999: 1519) also argues that *caste has been rooted in the consciousness and the social relations of the people at large*. Conversely, Jodhka (2012) argues that it is very difficult to erase caste, especially for the Dalit, because of its exploitative nature of discrimination, deprivation and denial. The inability of the dominant caste to exercise power over the Dalit leads to violence (Pandian, 2013). Whenever Dalit witness upward socio-economic mobility, they face violent physical attack, murder and different kinds of humiliation by the dominant caste (Gundemeda, 2020). Against this theoretical framework, this article theoretically² seeks to investigate the invariable caste structure in Tamil Nadu. In specific, it attempts to understand how the caste structure is still prevailing in Tamil Nadu?

Atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu

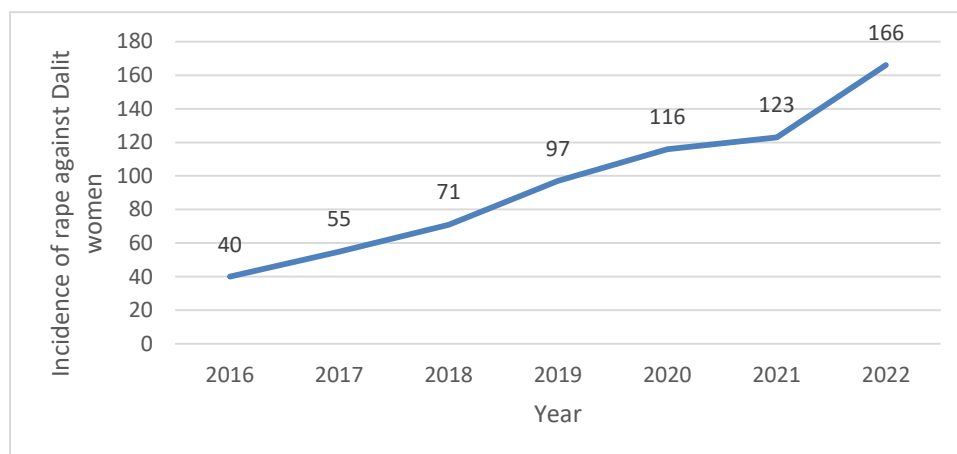


Source: National Crime Records Bureau, 2022

Figure 1 Atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu

Figure 1 shows that the atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu have been alarming since 2014. A comparative analysis of atrocities from 2013 to 2022 reveals that it increased against Dalits during 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2021 and 2022 respectively. Due to COVID-19, the atrocities against Dalits decreased because people stayed within households. However, according to the Ministry of

Social Justice & Empowerment (2022) nearly 345 villages in 37 districts and 27 villages in seven Commissionerates were classified as atrocity prone areas in Tamil Nadu. Untouchability is practiced in nearly 640 villages in Tamil Nadu (Dravidian politics and casteism, 2019). This is only the tip of the iceberg and most of the time, atrocities against Dalits are not being reported due to the fear of retaliation and lack of awareness. A probe into the nature of atrocities unfolds that Dalits in Kilamangalam village of Thanjavur District complained against the ban of haircuts in salons. With the help of the District Administration, they were able to get access to the salon, but the Non-Dalits refused hair cutting (Untouchability Surpasses the economic progress, 2023). In another incident, Dalit community people appealed to the government to remove the untouchability wall in their village between them and the dominant caste group members in Tiruppur district (Saravanan, 2024b). Unprecedentedly, when Dalits defied the temple entry ban posed by the Caste Hindus in Gemmankuppam village in Vellore District, the Caste Hindus demolished the temple (Sampath, 2024). The younger generation of Dalits, due to education and globalization got employment opportunity in Singapore, Malaysia and other foreign countries which facilitated in construction of new modern concrete houses like the dominant *Kallar* caste community houses in *Tanjore* but the two-tumbler system practice does continue in their locality (Shahina, 2023). The Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK)³ founder and party president Thol. Thirumavalan appealed to the ruling party to take strict action against the perpetrators for inflicting caste atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu (Take strict action against caste atrocities, 2023). The preceding analysis shows that these atrocities against Dalits are due to caste as the state of mind and are rooted in Tamil tradition.



Source: National Crime Records Bureau, 2022

Figure 2 Incidence of rape against Dalit women in Tamil Nadu

The figure 2 unfolds there is a fourfold increase in rape against Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. Dalit women face exclusion because they are poor, women and Dalit. Rape against them is due to their caste position and it is also considered to be the main viciousness (Chakraborty, Pal, & Pal, 2024). Dalit women are the victims of different kinds of abuse, viz. caste based abuse, obscene words, sexual harassment, brutal attacks, rape, sexual attempts, and molestation in Tamil Nadu. A thirty-two year old upper caste man was in a relationship with a 20 year old Dalit woman and when he approached her for a physical relationship, she refused. Since he could not tolerate her refusal, he along with his friend raped her, tied her both the hands, legs and smashed her head with a brick in Tanjore District (Madhav, 2016). A Dalit woman was not only raped but also an attempt was made to murder her by a 31 year old man in Villupuram district. Therefore, he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for the crime (Dominique, 2024). A group of eight people, including two men and four minors' raped a Dalit woman for a year by blackmailing and creating a fear of revelation in Virudhunagar District (Janardhanan, 2022). The foregoing analysis shows that rape against Dalit women is used as a tool due to their caste position and the patriarchal mindset of the people to control over them.

Honour Killing

A significant proportion (97 per cent) of marriages are still endogamous in Tamil Nadu (Shoaib, 2018) due to the social stigma of purity and pollution. Nevertheless, very few inter-caste marriages also takes place but in most of the cases, it is opposed through the social structure of honour killings. The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) evidence reported 195 incidents of honour killings in the last 5 years since 2019 (Radhakrishna, 2024). From 2020 to 2022, 18 cases of honour killings were recorded by Evidence NGO in Tamil Nadu (Pandian, 2023). Mr. Kathir from the Evidence NGO says that every month six to seven cases of honour killings are taking place due to inter-caste marriages in Tamil Nadu (Arulappan, 2023). The Madras High Court lamented that "*honour killing is taking place every now and then*" in Tamil Nadu (Honour killing still on in TN, 2023). There are several incidents of honour killings that have taken place in Tamil Nadu.

The girl's parents from the *Agamudaiyar* community orchestrated the plan to murder a Dalit man for marrying her daughter in 2016 in Tiruppur District, Tamil Nadu. As a result, a group of men attacked a couple due to which the Dalit man died on the spot while his wife suffered heavy injuries and survived due to the support of the State Government (Radhakrishna, 2024). Interesting, a boy from the Dalit community and a girl from another community were in a relationship and decided to marry against their parents wish. They left their home but the next morning the boy was found dead in Ranipet (Honour Killings in Ranipet, 2024).

Likewise, Subhas from *Nadar* community married Anasuya from Dalit community, due to which Subhas's father Dhandapani killed not only his son subhas, and but also his mother who intervened to prevent the murder, was also killed in Krishnagiri District (Honour Killing: Man kills mother, son in Tamil Nadu, 2023). Honour killings are not only taking place in rural areas but also in urban areas like Chennai city. Praveen, a 22 year old Dalit fell in love with a 20 year old girl Sharmila from the *Yadava* community in Pallikaranai and they solemnized Self-Respect Marriage in 2023 against Sharmila's parents wish. Therefore, her elder brother arranged a group of men and they murdered Praveen in February, 2024 for inter-caste marriage. Sharmila said "I was happily married but my husband was killed due to the caste issue" (Selvarajan, 2024). Honour killings also took place in Krishnagiri, Ariyalur and Dharmapuri districts in Tamil Nadu (Arulappan, 2023).

Caste based violence is alarming day-by-day and such kind of violence is inflicted by the dominant caste against the Dalits in Tamil Nadu (Honour Killings in Ranipet, 2024). Prof. Anandhi, from Madras Institute of Development Studies, says that the honour killings are due to the heightened sensitivity to inter-caste marriages in Tamil Nadu compared to the other states in India (Radhakrishna, 2024) and also to maintain the purity of caste, power, social status, tradition and patriarchy (Abraham, 2014). Besides, political parties, caste organizations and parents are always annoyed with inter-caste marriages in India (Fighting Caste, 2013).

Denial of Temple Entry

The denial of temple entry for the Dalit has also been deeply institutionalized and the same has been followed from the pre-independence period to till now in most of the villages. The Dalit community attempt to temple entry was opposed by the dominant caste group members in villages in Tamil Nadu. Such incidents also took place in Villupuram District which forced the District Administration to seal the temple completely to prevent law and order problems (Nair, 2023). This is only the reported cases, whereas there are many unreported cases where Dalit community members were unable to enter the temple in their respective village. A clash broke out after the peace meeting between the dominant caste and the Dalit over the temple entry issue in Salem District. Dalit community members wanted to enter the temple during the upcoming temple festival, which was opposed by the dominant caste, which led to stone pelting, two-wheeler damage and strike. Police arrested nearly 31 people from both groups and remanded them in jail (Tamilarasu, 2024). However, in Pudukottai District, the District Magistrate along with the Dalit community visited the *Sri Ayyanar* Temple which was banned for the Dalit for the past twenty years by the dominant caste group (Rajaram, 2022). It happened because of the efforts undertaken by the District Administration, political parties and civil society members.

Even after gaining access to temple entry with the support of different stakeholders, the caste structure finds its avenues to socially exclude Dalit and reiterate the existing caste structure. Due to the temple entry of Dalit community members in Tiruvannamalai District in Tamil Nadu, the Caste Hindus not only boycotted from entering the temple but also carved a new idol by collecting bronze utensils from each one of their households. The Caste Hindus wanted to construct a new temple exclusively for them (Rajasekaran, 2024). Such sort of an activity also amounts to a kind of atrocity against the Dalit community members (The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act), 1989). Further, the Tamil Nadu Temple Entry Authorization Act, (1947) bestows rights for all classes of Hindus for temple entry in Tamil Nadu. However, punishment for obstructing the Hindus from entering the temple for the first time is Rs.100/- (Rupees hundred only) and for subsequent offences, six months imprisonment / fine of Rs.500/- (Rupees Five hundred only) or both. This act came into force on May 13th, 1947 and it needs to be amended to increase the fine and punishment so that this will act as a deterrent for people opposing Dalits in temple entry. The irony is that the Dalit community members are employed for the manual laboring work outside the temple in the event of renovation, cleaning and temple functions but they are not allowed inside the temple due its traditional practice barring a few instances where they gain entry only with the help of District Magistrates in a very few districts in Tamil Nadu.

Two tumbler system

Evidence (2012), an NGO found that 83 per cent of villages systematically follow the two tumbler system in Madurai District; 45 per cent of tea shops have separate seating arrangements for Dalit and dominant caste groups. Further, 91 per cent of Dalits were not allowed to sit while drinking tea and they were only forced to wash their tea cups after drinking tea, but it was not the case for the persons belonging to the same caste group. This shows that the two-tumbler system is equally evident in most villages due to the existence of caste. A tea shop owner from the *Thevar* community was involved in practicing two-tumbler practice against a Dalit youth who had completed post-graduation and was working for a private company in Madurai (Karthikeyan, 2016). Not only do dominant caste men practice the two-tumbler system, but the dominant caste women also serve tea to the Dalit women working on their agricultural land in coconut shells in Dharmapuri District, Tamil Nadu. The Dalit women lamented they had been discriminated by the dominant caste people in temples and also in the workplace. The dominant caste women were arrested by the police for serving tea in coconut shells to the Dalit women (Double tumbler system, 2024). Similarly, a two tumbler system is practiced against the Dalit by the *Kallar* community in Kilamangalam village in Thanjavur District (Untouchability Surpasses the economic progress, 2023).

Further, two tumbler systems were practiced by Dalit and intermediary caste groups in Vengaivayal village in Pudukkottai District in Tamil Nadu due to which the police registered a First Information Register (FIR) against the shop owner for practicing the caste system (Koushik, 2023). Even a government servant of Tamil Nadu's Public Works Department was not allowed to drink water using the same tumbler, denied access to use the restroom and he was not allowed to use the desktop for the reasons that he hails from the *Kuravar* community in Virudhunagar District in Tamil Nadu by the Non-Dalit caste members. As a result, six of their colleagues were arrested for caste discrimination in government offices (Dalit Staffer barred from using tumbler and restroom, 2023). The Pudukkottai District Magistrate, during an inspection to the vengaivayal village, found the practice of a two-tumbler system and directed for the registration of a case against the tea shop owner (Rajaram, 2022). Even the VCK which works for the liberation of Dalit from the rest of the caste groups, submitted a written complaint to the District Magistrate about the prevailing two tumbler system in Krishnagiri District in Tamil Nadu (Two-tumbler system practiced in 11 Anchetin Villages, 2023). This shows that caste acts as a social factor of discrimination, ill-treatment and humiliation for Dalits in Tamil Nadu.

Politics

Caste plays a very crucial role not only for the candidate selection by the regional and national political parties but also for electing them at the village Panchayat, urban Panchayat, assembly election and parliamentary election levels respectively (Sathish, 2019, Sathish, 2020 & Manikandan, 2016). Accordingly, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)⁴ alliance nominated 47.4 per cent & DMK alliance also nominated 38.46 per cent of candidates' for Tamil Nadu assembly elections 2021 from the dominant caste namely *Vanniyars*, *Thevars* and *Gounders* respectively (Ramakrishnan, 2021). There are some exceptions to this, especially in the urban constituencies but not for the rural constituencies. Such kinds of seat allocation by the political parties on the dominant caste lines at the constituency level invokes the caste in-group feelings amongst the community members and this caste structure has been reproduced by the political parties and community members during elections. Therefore, caste structures get strengthened at grass root level and also revolting against such a caste structure by the Dalits invites discrimination and violence in the hands of dominant caste members in Tamil Nadu.

A significant proportion of Dalit representatives have access to the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) of which more than 40 per cent are women. However, the challenges against them in general regarding caste discrimination and in particular against the Dalit elected women representatives are they face violence, sexual exploitation and no confidence motion are being unleashed by

the dominant caste groups in village Panchayat (Tandon, 2008). During 2023, Evidence NGO conducted research on 114 Dalit village Panchayat presidents in 19 districts of Tamil Nadu. They found that Dalits were barred in 12 panchayats from hoisting the National flag, 39 per cent of them were not allowed to attend the temple functions, nearly 94 panchayats lack common cremation, 40 village Panchayat presidents faced caste slurs, both Dalit men and women representatives faced hindrance in the hands of dominant caste people (Pandian & Shubshiksha, 2023). Similarly, a Dalit woman village Panchayat president of Athupakkam village in Tiruvallur district also faced discrimination, namely denial of chair in the Panchayat office, not being allowed to write her name on the panchayat office name board and not allowed to exercise the power of village Panchayat president by the dominant caste members. The real power at the village panchayats is vested with the Vice-President from the dominant caste who prevents Dalit village Panchayat president from exercising their duties (Anbuselvan & Saravanan, 2020).

Further, a Dalit woman village Panchayat president was not allowed to hoist the National flag during Independence Day by the dominant caste in Eduthavainatham village of Kallakurichi District, Tamil Nadu (Rajkumar, 2022). Likewise, a Dalit woman village Panchayat president elect of Nayakaneri village in Tirupur District was prevented for two years from taking the Oath by the dominant caste people due to their case against the village Panchayat rotational seat reservation for Dalit in Madras High Court (Neelambaran, 2023). Nearly 20 Dalit representatives were not allowed to hoist the national flag during the Independence Day celebration and many of them were devoid of office chairs or denied access to the official files by the dominant caste members in the village (Sivarajah, 2022). Moreover, the political emancipation of Dalit women village Panchayat presidents' faces challenges due to the dominant caste entrenched social structure in Tamil Nadu. After the implementation of the Tamil Nadu Village Panchayat 1994, many Dalit representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions were killed and they were coerced and controlled by the Dominant caste members in their respective village Panchayat (PRIs) (Rajasekaran, 2020).

Caste identity in Schools

A uniform system has been introduced in schools to create a sense of belongingness among the students to overcome the class inequality. However, at times, students identify themselves with others through caste identity. To escape from caste discrimination, the Dalit students avoid going to their hamlet higher secondary schools, rather they go to a school which is far away from their village in Tirunelveli District (Sivapriyan, 2023). A significant proportion of students have refused to eat food cooked by a Dalit woman at Panchayat Union Primary School in Velanchettiyur in Karur District. A few parents hailing from the Backward Caste and Most Backward Caste refused to send their children to

school just to prevent them from eating the food cooked by a Dalit woman (Students at Karur school, 2023).

Table 1 Caste Identity Practices in Tamil Nadu Schools

Caste identity	No. of Schools
Students boost caste pride	38
Students wearing colored arm bands	33
Students caste-conflict brought to the notice of School authorities	25
Students interact about their caste to their peers	23
Schools without tumblers for drinking water	19
Dalit students involved in cleaning toilets	15

Source: The Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front Survey (reported in the Hindu Bureau, 2023)

Table 1 reveals that students boosted their caste pride, used colored arm bands, engaged in caste conflict, interacted about their caste with their peer group and Dalit students were made to clean toilets in Tamil Nadu schools. The Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front reported that 30 per cent of schools practice caste discrimination against Dalit students. Nearly 25 schools have faced caste conflict in the districts such as Dindigul, Tenkasi, Ramanathapuram, Tiruvannamalai and Cuddalore respectively. In specific, compared to the urban schools, the rural schools witnessed more caste based discrimination (Caste discrimination in 30% TN Schools, 2023). Caste discrimination has also taken place with regard to eating cooked food. Dalit woman says that *“I am a member of the Self-Help Group but students are now avoiding me. One student told me that he will move out of his village, if he eats the food cooked by me”* This incident has been reported from a government primary school in Usilampatti, Madurai district (Madhav, 2023). Prof. Samuel Asir Raj argues that the children of intermediary castes are socialized in such a way that they are superior to the Dalit. Therefore, caste differences are found in the educational institutions due to caste

hegemonic socialization and the intermediary caste access to political power (Sivapriyan, 2023). The One-Man Committee headed by Justice K. Chandru to study caste discrimination in Tamil Nadu schools recommended to remove the caste names as prefixes and suffixes, caste names of the students should be kept confidential, students should not wear any coloured wristbands, rings or forehead marks, seating arrangements in class rooms should be based on the alphabetical order, school curriculum need to be revised to include topics on social justice, equality and non-discrimination of caste as well as orientation program for school teachers for inclusivity (Jain, 2024).

Conclusion

The invariable caste structure in Tamil Nadu comprises of atrocities, namely rape against Dalit women, honour killing, denial of temple entry, two tumbler system, politics and caste identity in schools. This study rejects the argument of Jodhka (2012) that the caste structure is still prevailing due to its exploitative nature of discrimination, deprivation and denial. Since there are other socio-psychological factors, namely caste as a complete state of mind, it is deeply rooted in the tradition as well as the social relations of the people at large, which reproduce the caste structure in Tamil society (Ambedkar, 2019: 68 & Xaxa, 1999:1519). The dominant caste exploitative nature against the Dalit community is one of the social factors, but it is not an adequate social factors, there are other socio-psychological factors which contributes to the invariable caste structure in Tamil Nadu. Though the social reformers, namely Periyar and Annadurai have fought against the caste system, it is still continuing due to socio-psychological factors in Tamil society. However, empirical research needs to be undertaken to have a holistic understanding of the dialectical relationship between the Dalit community and the dominant caste in Tamil Nadu.

Notes:

1. Dominant caste refers to a caste that has the highest numerical preponderant and also has ownership to a large size of arable land in villages (Srinivas, 1995).
2. This study is carried out through the secondary sources of data viz. National Crime Records Bureau, newspapers articles, books, journals, State and Central Governments records.
3. VCK was founded in 1982 and it is a regional political party in Tamil Nadu.
4. AIADMK is a regional political party and it was founded by M.G Ramachandran in 1972.

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Article: Exploring Factors for Achieving Quality Education: A Case Study of Zilla Parishad International School Wablewadi, Maharashtra

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Exploring Factors for Achieving Quality Education: A Case Study of Zilla Parishad International School Wablewadi, Maharashtra

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Abstract

Quality education serves as the foundation for a school's success, embodying an institution that caters to parental aspirations and provides a conducive learning environment for children. This paper is centered on the exploration of factors contributing to achieving quality education, focusing on the case study of Zilla Parishad International School in Wablewadi, Maharashtra. The paper delves into the state of the education system in India and the background of Zilla Parishad International School based on the literature analysis related to the Wablewadi case study. It further scrutinises the success of the Wablewadi model across selected parameters to analyze the outcomes from this paper provides a concluding note suggesting the future perspectives. The paper recognizes the influence of various societal intersections, such as caste, financial condition, gender affiliation, and social location, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the demand and will for quality education while concurrently addressing overarching concerns in reaching the target. Against this backdrop, this paper traces the transformation of a government-operated Zilla Parishad school in Wablewadi, Maharashtra, into an internationally recognized institution adhering to high standards. Through an in-depth case study with the lens of social capital theory, the evolution of a dilapidated government school into a government-recognized international school is elucidated, offering insights for other educational institutions seeking to elevate their quality standards, recognizing the contextual nuances influencing each school's trajectory. The paper systematically examines six distinct parameters to achieve the quality education namely: key stakeholders and leadership dynamics; infrastructure and resources; teacher pedagogy and methodologies; education quality; parental and community participation; and strategies employed for improving quality of education.

Key Words: Quality Education, School Management, Educational Reforms, Education Policy, Stakeholders in Education

Introduction

Education assumes a crucial role in poverty alleviation and contributes significantly to enhancing the overall quality of life. Moreover, it serves as a catalyst for good practices and societal progress, necessitating a focus on the

attainment of quality in educational endeavours. The promotion of inclusive societies is a direct outcome of quality education, and a standardized approach is proposed as a means to achieve this objective. The establishment of a singular set of quality standards in education requires consideration within the global context, acknowledging the diverse cultural and belief systems influencing curricular frameworks and instructional methodologies.

In the contemporary era marked by rapid economic and social transformations, closely intertwined with technological advancements, a shift in emphasis towards assessing school performance becomes imperative. The challenges faced by students today differ significantly from those of earlier times, necessitating a re-evaluation of educational paradigms. Quality in education is characterized by a blend of creativity and knowledge acquisition, encompassing the development of foundational skills in literacy and mathematics. A child exposed to quality education is anticipated to lead a healthier and more fulfilling life, equipped with heightened analytical, problem-solving, and advanced cognitive skills conducive to informed decision-making during challenges. However, in the Indian context, the perception of quality education often correlates with the financial investment made by parents, particularly in a select few international schools distinguished by superior infrastructure and human resources

With this backdrop, this paper traces the transformation of a government-operated Zilla Parishad school in Wablewadi, Maharashtra, into an internationally recognized institution adhering to high standards. Through an in-depth case study, the evolution of this dilapidated government school into a prestigious, government-recognized international school is elucidated. The findings offer valuable insights for other educational institutions aiming to elevate their quality standards, while also recognizing the contextual nuances that influence each school's unique trajectory.

Review of Literature

Education serves as a fundamental necessity for a child's growth and societal integration. However, the current state of education, as previously discussed, is marked by significant shortcomings. The existing system is characterized by high levels of inequity and inaccessibility, disproportionately affecting marginalized individuals especially children, pushing them to the fringes of society. This situation leaves them susceptible to abuse and violence, contributing to the perpetuation of poverty.

Nihalani M. (2011) enunciates the essential role of education in the development of human society. According to Nihalani, education is not merely a process but the very soul of society, cultivating minds capable of leading human life with dignity and respect. Ensuring the delivery of quality education is paramount, yet defining "quality" proves challenging due to varied interpretations, as noted by

The Commonwealth (2017). The Universal Standards for Quality in Education define it as a system or product meeting specific criteria or principles.

The Indian education system faces multifaceted challenges, including outdated classrooms, child teacher-centred learning, prevalence of rote learning, corporal punishment, and discrimination. Students often lack essential numeracy and literacy skills crucial for the contemporary world, as highlighted by Creemers and Kyriakides (2013). They advocated for dynamic approaches to school improvement, presenting a theoretically and empirically grounded strategy with practical guidance. This approach integrates traditions of school effectiveness research and school improvement practice. Establishing a child-friendly environment in schools is imperative, fostering learning, growth, and the development of a diverse skill set in children. Adequate facilities, encompassing proper sanitation and drinking water, are essential. The Right to Education Act (RTE) of 2009 is noteworthy for its emphasis on providing essential physical and social infrastructure to foster a conducive learning environment. Importantly, it directs heightened attention toward marginalized sections of society, including SC, ST, minorities, and girls. This paper emphasizes the pressing need to address these issues, emphasizing that doing so is vital for enhancing the overall quality and inclusivity of the education system. The act serves as a crucial framework to ensure that education is not only accessible but also equitable, particularly for those historically underrepresented or disadvantaged in the educational landscape.

In recent years, both Central and State governments have undertaken extensive learning assessments, intending to gain insights into the state of education. However, a persistent challenge lies in treating this exercise solely as a data collection effort, with the gathered data often left untapped for improving educational quality. Abdullah, N.A. (2019), in the *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, underscores the critical need to go beyond mere data collection and emphasizes the importance of utilizing this information to shape policies aimed at enhancing the quality of education.

The global interest in quality education involves the active engagement of educationists, policymakers, parents, and students, each playing a vital role in the discourse. The overarching objective is to empower children to effectively navigate contemporary challenges while seizing available opportunities. This necessitates a systematic evaluation of the actual on-the-ground educational situation. Moody et. al. (2003), in "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Learning Interventions: An Information Systems Case Study," challenges the conventional belief that a standard instrument exists for evaluating learning effectiveness. They question the exclusive reliance on end-semester exams and propose an alternative in the form of the Learning Effectiveness Survey. This survey takes a comprehensive approach, evaluating learning by considering course goals, the overall educational program, and the long-term utility for students. Notably, it incorporates a feedback mechanism designed to improve learning outcomes. The

instrument's high validity and reliability over the long-term position it as a primary determinant in assessing the effectiveness of learning interventions. This need is to emphasize the importance of moving beyond the mere collection of educational data, urging the utilization of such information to inform policies and actively improve the quality of education. It underscores the collaborative effort needed among stakeholders to ensure a more effective and impactful education system.

The observed divergence between the school curriculum and market demand highlights a crucial issue of relevance. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes and addresses this concern by placing increased emphasis on a "learning by doing" approach. Eagleton (2017), in "Designing Blended learning Activities in the 21st Centuries," stresses on the challenge of educating a diverse group of children and advocates for the design of dynamic learning interventions tailored to the needs of 21st-century students. A model was designed to assist newly recruited educators in employing blended learning approaches effectively. The model's purpose is to systematically develop learning interventions using conceptual and communication tools to achieve operational learning outcomes. It highlights the incorporation of a whole brain approach, encouraging engagement with all four quadrants. To construct the model, Eagleton emphasizes the importance of determining learning task requirements, guiding the design and development of learning interventions that facilitate both learning and assessment. Notably, the content delivery is grounded in a blended approach. This underscores the critical importance of aligning education with contemporary demands, as recognized by the NEP, 2020. Eagleton's model provides a practical framework for educators to adapt and employ blended learning approaches, aiming to bridge the gap between traditional curriculum and the evolving needs of 21st-century students. The emphasis on a whole brain approach and careful consideration of learning task requirements contribute to the holistic development of effective learning interventions.

Lobo (2017) echoes a similar asserting that active learning stands as the gold standard for student engagement. However, he notes the ambiguity regarding students' acceptance of this approach. Lobo's exploration involves designing a lecture-based course with research-supported active learning strategies, seeking student feedback on their perceptions. While results indicate that most students strongly agreed that the implementation of good practices enhanced their learning, the overall course evaluation ranked lower compared to traditional lecture-based formats. Khunyakari, R.P. (2015) addresses the challenge of enabling meaningful learning experiences for teachers. She outlines three key characteristics of Design and Technology (D&T) that balance the conceptual and hands-on aspects, embedded within problem-solving contexts. Highlighting D&T education as a noble contribution to the curriculum, Khunyakari aligns these ideas with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005. There is a need for a unified recognition across multiple studies of the necessity to adapt educational

approaches to contemporary needs. Eagleton's model, Lobo's insights on active learning, and Khunyakari's work on Design and Technology collectively underscore the ongoing efforts to enhance learning experiences, catering to the evolving demands of today's world.

Mohapatra and Acharya's (2011) case study delves into the transformative impact of a Public-Private Partnership in Odisha. This collaboration, comprising the Odisha Primary Education Program Authority (OPEA), the Orissa Government agency, Azim Premji Foundation, and NIIT, not only successfully revitalized government primary schools but also garnered a presidential award for its commendable achievements. The study advocates for the replication of the cluster approach implemented in Odisha across different states with varying language instructions. This approach, as outlined in the paper, holds the potential to simultaneously address the challenges of rising dropout rates and declining learning standards. By presenting a comprehensive model that integrates public and private resources, the case study provides valuable insights for policymakers grappling with the complexities of post-coronavirus education dynamics.

Chadwick (2003) addresses the global shortage of educators within government schools and emphasizes the pivotal role of community engagement in fostering school development. While acknowledging the challenges arising from mounting pressures, the core principle is to enhance community participation, particularly involving parents and community members. The overarching goal is to encourage a greater number of adults to actively participate in the educational journey of children, extending their involvement beyond traditional classroom settings. The publication advocates for proactive public involvement, creating a conducive environment for more productive discussions on effective approaches to education. This approach not only benefits the immediate educational landscape but also equips policymakers with insights to better address the evolving demands for school improvement in a holistic manner. Thus, enhancing the quality of education is intricately linked to the improvement of not just physical but the social infrastructure within schools. This involves cultivating positive classroom dynamics, nurturing healthy student relationships, and fostering supportive interactions between teachers and students. The framework also encompasses the establishment of a school culture based on shared values and traditions, influencing the broader social atmosphere. Contributions from extracurricular activities, parental involvement, and inclusive practices further enhance the overall educational experience.

Kremer and Glennerster (2013) address challenges in children's education in developing countries. Their approach advocates not only for educational improvements but also for addressing health problems simultaneously. They emphasize the practical utility of education and call for schools to be accountable, transparent, and efficient. This involves having professional teachers, reliable textbooks, and effective management of government grants. Technological

innovation is highlighted as a crucial element in bringing schools up to international standards.

Methodology

The paper is based on field-based research which employed a case study approach and purposive sampling, utilizing observation and interviews. Data collection tools, including researcher-made questionnaires and interview schedules, were crafted to gather perspectives from teachers, headmasters, School Management Committee (SMC) members, local bodies, cluster heads, BEOs, and DEOs regarding quality education at Wablewadi School. It further focuses on understanding the transformation of government schools into international schools, exploring innovative practices and factors contributing to educational quality. The methodology centers on assessing successful leadership qualities for overall student development in Zilla Parishad School.

The transformation of the Zilla Parishad school in Wablewadi can be best understood through the lens of social capital theory, which emphasizes the value of social networks, trust, norms, and collective action in achieving shared goals. This case exemplifies how the strategic mobilization of social capital among teachers, parents, community members, and government stakeholders—catalyzed a shift from institutional neglect to global recognition. The school's journey illustrates that when educational change is anchored in strong relational networks and community engagement, it generates a sustainable ecosystem of trust, shared responsibility, and innovation. Through inclusive participation from different stakeholders enabling environment for quality education this case offers a suggestive model for other government schools to transform and harnesses the power of social relationships for systemic and sustainable educational advancement.

The paper systematically examines six distinct parameters to achieve the quality education namely: key stakeholders and leadership dynamics; infrastructure and resources; teacher pedagogy and methodologies; education quality; parental and community participation; and strategies employed for improving quality of education. It may be noted that these parameters in this context have been very crucial and are discussed in detail in the following section of the paper keeping in view the overall national scenario.

Educational Landscape in Indian Context

India has emerged as the world's most populous nation, with a significant population of 1.4 billion individuals, constituting approximately 18 percent of the global populace, as reported by the UNFPA's State of World Population Report 2023. Despite 75 years of independence, India has yet to achieve the universalization of education, a foundational goal envisaged by the nation's

founding fathers. The concurrent jurisdiction of education, shared between state and Union governments, has resulted in a non-uniform governance structure. As India stands on the cusp of a demographic dividend, characterized by an average age of 28.5 years, the education system faces significant challenges posed by this demographic scale and diversity. Ensuring widespread access to education for such a diverse and large population necessitates critical measures. Historical initiatives, such as the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (2000) and the Right to Education Act (2009), have aimed to address these challenges. Nevertheless, concerns regarding the overall quality of education and disparities in infrastructure and resources between urban and rural areas persist

The integration of technology and ongoing policy reforms, particularly those outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, are essential to harness the demographic dividend effectively. These reforms emphasize inclusivity, skill development, and responsiveness to the dynamic needs of the youthful population. However, the education system must balance quantity with quality to meet the diverse educational aspirations of the nation's people. The twenty-first century presents numerous opportunities and formidable challenges in education. A significant constraint is the persistently low combined expenditure on education by the Centre and States, which has stagnated at 2.9% of GDP according to the Economic Survey 2023. The Swaminathan Committee has recommended increasing this to 6%, highlighting the urgent need for greater financial commitment to education (GoI, 2013).

The Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) remains a critical issue. The Right to Education Act (2009) prescribes an optimal ratio of 1:30 for primary schools and 1:35 for elementary schools. However, the national PTR, as reported in the UDISE 2021-22, is 26 for primary and 27 for higher secondary schools. There are concerns regarding the equitable distribution of teachers, leading to regional imbalances. The shortage of trained teachers further hampers the delivery of quality education, emphasizing the need for robust teacher training programs. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure in government-run schools, particularly the lack of basic amenities like separate toilets and appropriate classrooms for girls and physically challenged students, demands urgent attention to create child-centric, healthy, and safe learning environments (GoI, 2022).

Curriculum design requires careful refinement to address contemporary challenges and opportunities. Emphasizing aspects such as gender, health, diseases, and peace is crucial for providing holistic and relevant education. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are indispensable for fostering educational excellence. The utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has become essential in the digital era, requiring educators to integrate digital elements into pedagogical approaches effectively. The State of Elementary Education in Rural India - 2023 report indicates that 49.3% of students have access to smartphones. However, 76.7% of parents report that their children predominantly use smartphones for recreational purposes, such as

playing video games, rather than for educational activities. Motivational challenges among teachers and students persist, necessitating strategic interventions such as increased teacher remuneration and the integration of vocational training to enhance student engagement with the curriculum (DIU, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and targeted strategy to strengthen India's education system and ensure the effective delivery of quality education. The constitutional commitment to providing every child in India with the fundamental Right to Education (RtE), regardless of socio-economic background, is a cornerstone principle. Despite this constitutional guarantee, the nation faces a significant deficit in quality education, resulting in poor learning outcomes that disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged and vulnerable children, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. According to the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), the secondary level dropout rate in India stands at a concerning 13% during 2021-22, a figure exacerbated due to global pandemic. UNESCO has expressed concerns about the potential loss of an entire generation of schoolchildren, particularly affecting female students.

The quality of education is intricately tied to the mode of teaching, and unfortunately, the Indian education system finds itself entrenched in a stagnant state. Traditional and outdated teaching methods persist, lacking relevance in the contemporary educational landscape. Surveys underscore a deficiency in imparting valuable lessons for holistic development, notably lacking STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) learning. Inadequately equipped with modern pedagogical approaches, teachers contribute significantly to this stagnation.

Furthermore, the school environment proves unsatisfactory, lacking child-friendly attributes, inclusive classrooms, and basic amenities such as drinking water and sanitation facilities. Despite reduction in school dropout rates since 2013-2014, the COVID-19 pandemic has regrettably led to a reversal of gains. According to the ASER Report of 2021, a staggering 1 in 3 children in Classes I and II has never participated in an in-person class. Additionally, 65.4% of teachers identified the challenge of children being “unable to catch up” as one of their prominent concerns. Critical facilities, including girls' toilets, electricity connections, and adequate drinking water, remain deficient in a considerable percentage of schools, adversely impacting the overall quality of education.

Following the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) reforms, an evident education gap has emerged concerning access and equity. The proliferation of private schools, constituting around 60 percent of educational institutions, has intensified competition. Government expenditure reductions in the social sector, particularly in education, have propelled private players towards a profit-centric orientation, exacerbating the decline of government schools. The

resulting dichotomy between private and government schools detrimentally affects the accessibility and equity of education.

In a linguistically diverse nation like India, the language medium of education has become a focal point of debate. The preference for English as a medium of instruction contends with the desire for regional languages. Any educational policy must address these linguistic nuances and align with local aspirations. The global aspiration articulated in Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which aims for inclusive and equitable education, faces unprecedented challenges intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. India, with its already delicate education system, confronts an accelerated crisis. The imperative to eliminate regional disparities and ensure inclusive education, as envisioned by the UN, becomes increasingly vital in navigating the educational landscape post-pandemic.

Zilla Parishad International School: An Overview

Established in 1980, Zilla Parishad School Wablewadi is a co-educational institution situated in the small village of Wablewadi within the Shirur block of the Pune (Rural) district. Affiliated with the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, the school offers education from classes 1 to 8 in Marathi medium. The school gained international recognition for its innovative practices and commitment to quality education. The transformative journey began in 2012 when there was a change in leadership as a catalyst-initiated improvements in the pre-primary section and introduced activity-based learning, significantly increasing student enrolment. He actively engaged parents, emphasizing the importance of quality education, leading to a surge in demand for admissions. The school, once catering to 25-30 students, now has a waiting list with over 1,000 students from 25 to 26 surrounding villages.

The school's sustained growth and excellence over the years can be attributed to the cohesive involvement of villagers, parents, teachers, NGOs, students, and well-wishers, all guided by dedicated leadership. Key strengths lie in the robust community engagement, where villagers actively contributed by donating land, providing financial support, and investing their time. This collaborative effort ensured that children in the village could access education up to higher secondary levels, highlighting the impactful synergy between various stakeholders in the educational journey.

The challenges towards stereotypes associated with government schools, aiming to showcase that they can provide quality education with community involvement and dedication. The school's remarkable transformation culminated in its recognition as India's first Zero Energy School. The collaborative efforts of the village community, teachers, parents, and NGOs played a pivotal role in this journey. The paper underscores the collective commitment of stakeholders—

students, parents, and school personnel—in fostering an environment that nurtures self-respect, self-confidence, and mutual respect among students.

The profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education is evident, with a stark contrast in the ability of urban and rural schools to adapt. The disparity in access to online learning became particularly pronounced, posing significant challenges for students in underprivileged areas due to resource constraints. Recognizing these issues, government initiatives were implemented, leveraging mediums like television, educational apps, and radios to bridge the accessibility gap. The paper underscores the need for a comprehensive strategy to meet students' needs and foster sustainable development. It presents a case study as a practical pathway for collaboration between the government and communities to improve the quality of education, detailing the roles of various stakeholders. Overall, the literature provides a holistic understanding of the developmental process required to enhance the quality of education in diverse contexts.

Key Stakeholders and Leadership Dynamics

Wablewadi, situated approximately 2.5 km from Shikrapur in the Shirur taluka of Pune district, Maharashtra, is a relatively modest village characterized by its population of around 315 individuals residing in 67 families. Comprising 167 males and 148 females, the village faces a demographic distribution that presents an average Sex Ratio of 978, exceeding the state average of 929 (2011 census). The village encountered educational challenges before 2012, notably within the Zilla Parishad School, which had only two deteriorating rooms with leakages and fallen walls. Despite these conditions, the village children continued with school education with minimal means

While Wablewadi demonstrates a higher-than-average Sex Ratio, the Child Sex Ratio is notably lower at 780, contrasting with the Maharashtra average of 894. In terms of literacy, the village reported a rate of 75.61 percent in 2011, trailing behind the state's literacy rate of 82.34 percent. The gender disparity is evident in the literacy figures, with male literacy at 87.23 percent and female literacy at 64.05 percent. Wablewadi School epitomizes a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, guided by a structured framework that prioritizes students, educators, and administrators.

Amidst multifaceted responsibilities, faculty members are encouraged to foreground their core role as educators, recognizing their profound influence on students' academic trajectories. At the heart of this educational philosophy lies the imperative of effective communication. A clear and well-defined vision is meticulously conveyed to staff, parents, and students, fostering a collective understanding of the school's strategic goals. This communication strategy serves as a linchpin for aligning all stakeholders with the institution's mission and objectives. A paramount emphasis is placed on instilling a culture that welcomes

change. Educators are motivated to cultivate an environment responsive to evolving educational needs, underscoring the significance of adaptability in the face of educational advancements and societal shifts. This necessitates a nuanced balance between decisive action and thoughtful consideration. The skill of delegation is endorsed as a pivotal leadership quality, facilitating efficient workload management and contributing to the professional development of staff.

The role of leadership is central as it identifies the potential of teachers for building creative and supportive academic community. Effective priority management is deemed indispensable to direct time and resources towards tasks of paramount importance, aligning endeavours with overarching goals related to student and faculty welfare. Active listening is championed as an invaluable skill, encouraging a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives within the academic community. Acknowledging the inevitability of risks, successful principals adopt a forward-looking approach, anticipating potential challenges and opportunities that may impact the school's overall academic well-being. These foundational principles collectively underpin a dynamic and effective educational leadership model at Wablewadi School, promoting adaptability, collaboration, and an unwavering focus on ensuring academic success.

Infrastructure and Resources

The transformative expansion initiative undertaken at the Wablewadi Zilla Parishad School, orchestrated by leadership initiatives which elevated the school's infrastructure from a modest three-room structure to a more expansive and contemporary facility. This ambitious project involved the integration of eight modern classrooms into the existing framework with the efforts of the school leader. A distinguishing feature of this expansion is the introduction of innovative zero-energy classrooms, a concept envisioned and designed by the leader. These classrooms, characterized by a minimalist aesthetic, deliberately forgo conventional features like lights and fans. The design philosophy is rooted in an understanding of children's preferences for studying in open spaces, challenging traditional norms of classroom environments.

Environmental consciousness is a central theme of this project, evident in the incorporation of rainwater harvesting systems within specific classrooms. Underground tanks dedicated to rainwater harvesting contribute to sustainable water practices. Beyond the classrooms, the expansive area surrounding the school serves a dual purpose with a substantial artificial turf, functioning as both a park and a sports court. This versatile space accommodates activities such as volleyball, tennis, and badminton, promoting both recreation and physical education. Adding to the environmental initiative, the entire section is adorned with planted saplings representing 350 varieties of indigenous trees. This afforestation effort not only enhances the greenery of the school surroundings but also contributes to biodiversity and ecological sustainability.

In essence, the expansion initiative at Wablewadi Zilla Parishad School under leadership goes beyond mere infrastructure enhancement. It represents a holistic approach that integrates innovative design, environmental consciousness, and a commitment to providing students with an enriched and sustainable learning environment. The school's overall infrastructure stands as a testament to its commitment to sustainability, featuring eco-friendly buildings and an extensive, verdant playground. The restoration of the previously dilapidated school building has elevated it to a world-class standard, equipped with essential amenities for an enhanced educational environment. (Table 1)

Table 1: Infrastructure Facilities in the School

Building	Government	Boundary Wall	Pucca
Number of Toilets	3	Number of Girls Toilets	5
Number of CWSN Toilets	3	Drinking Water Availability	Yes
Hand Wash Facility	Yes	Generator (Functional)	3
Library	Yes	Reading Corner	Yes
Book Bank	Yes	Laptop (Functional)	10
Desktop (Functional)	2	Tablet (Functional)	100
Scanner	0	Printer	1
LED (Functional)	10	Digi Board (Functional)	2
Internet	Yes	DTH	Yes
Web Cam (Functional)	0	Classrooms	15 + 1

Source: UDISE + 2019-20, GoI.

Owing to the aforementioned facilities integrated into the school infrastructure, it has garnered substantial interest from parents seeking to enroll their children. Notably, in the academic year 2021-22, the school has experienced a surge in demand, resulting in an extensive waiting list with nearly 4000 children vying for enrolment. A considerable portion of these prospective students have endured a waiting period of at least three years.

Table 2: Enrolment

Class/ Year	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Class 1-8
2021-2022	78	76	75	64	68	57	56	47	521

Source: UDISE+ 2021-22, GoI.

The enrolment statistics for the academic year 2021-22 are outlined in Table 2, highlighting the notable demand and prolonged waiting times experienced by aspiring students.

Teacher Pedagogy and Methodologies

The central role of teachers in the educational sphere is paramount, and the success of student's knowledge acquisition is intricately connected to the expertise and dedication of educators. A proficiently trained teacher, coupled with a genuine passion for the subject matter, has the capacity to captivate student's attention, resulting in a more effective and expedient knowledge acquisition process. Conversely, a teacher with inadequate training and lacking enthusiasm for the subject may encounter challenges in engaging students, hindering their understanding within the classroom setting.

Beyond the influence of teachers, the educational content assumes critical significance, demanding relevance and excitement. Learning materials should comprehensively cover fundamental literacy and numeracy components. Moreover, the learning environment itself plays a pivotal role, with a positive, secure, and nurturing setting contributing significantly to an enriched school experience. Recent discussions in education emphasize the focus on special needs children, underlining the importance of inclusive arrangements that promote respect, bonding, and positive impacts on all pupils.

The school's educational approach incorporates a distinctive teaching methodology, introducing the concept of a "subject friend" or "Vishay Mitra" to provide academic support. Acknowledging the diversity in students' understanding, this approach empowers high-performing students to take on the responsibility of teaching their peers, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Teaching and learning interactions extend beyond classrooms, utilizing the school premises for a comprehensive and enriched learning experience.

Group learning, featuring small groups of 4-5 students, promotes communication and the exchange of perspectives, thereby enhancing the depth and meaning of learning experiences. Peer learning is actively encouraged, enabling students to collaboratively navigate new concepts, broadening perspectives, and fostering meaningful connections. The emphasis on self-learning recognizes it as a valuable process, allowing children to take charge of their own learning journey. The school further champions an integrated curriculum approach, enabling holistic learning experiences without being constrained by traditional subject boundaries. In essence, the school's educational philosophy integrates considerations of funding, unique teaching methodologies, and a comprehensive learning approach to create an environment conducive to holistic and meaningful education.

Education Quality

In the Indian education scenario, substandard education is leading to poor learning outcomes, pushing children out of the system and exposing them to child labour,

abuse, and violence. Many classrooms still rely on teacher-centred, rote learning, corporal punishment, and discrimination. Learning assessments reveal that even among those attending school, many lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, as mandated by the Right to Education Act. In order to ensure a child-friendly environment with gender-sensitive, inclusive classrooms, improved facilities, and proper nutrition, there is much work to be done. This initiative at Wablewadi ZP School represents a revolutionary approach to dispensing quality education, marked by innovative practices.

Wablewadi Zilla Parishad School stands as a beacon of comprehensive and innovative education, particularly emphasizing Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) learning. STEAM education is not just a concept but a practical endeavour to impart meaningful skills and stimulate good practices among students. The school's commitment to providing a holistic learning environment is evident in the creation of an eco-friendly campus, featuring rainwater harvesting, solar panels, a plastic-free setup, and initiatives like plantation and botanical gardens.

Academic excellence is at the forefront, demonstrated through students' active participation in competitive examinations, scholarships, Olympiads, Navodaya, and Manthan. The school adopts a unique multilingual approach, encouraging effective communication in four national languages (Gujarati, Telugu, Bengali, and Sanskrit) and four foreign languages (Spanish, Japanese, French, and Spoken English). This linguistic diversity is complemented by a range of extracurricular activities like Art, Craft, and Music, designed to nurture and bring out the diverse talents of the students.

The school has achieved notable distinctions, earning recognition as India's First Tablet School. Students, starting from the first standard, engage exclusively with tablet-based learning methodologies. The school's commitment to quality systems is validated by its ISO certification in 2012, marking it as the inaugural ISO-certified Government School in the region. Addressing the prevalent issue of teacher shortages, the school has implemented the "Subject Friend" initiative. Under this program, students proficient in specific subjects assume the role of instructors, imparting knowledge to their peers under the guidance of school authorities. Another ground breaking initiative is the "Foundation Course," grooming students for competitive exams like JEE and NIT right from the seventh standard. This initiative aims to prepare at least 40 students from Wablewadi Zilla Parishad School for admission to prestigious colleges.

Looking toward the future, the school envisions expanding its premises, constructing classrooms up to the 12th standard, and exploring collaborations with international schools. The institution places significant emphasis on the holistic well-being of its students, incorporating early morning yoga sessions, judo training, and a diverse range of sports activities. The school actively

participates in a Student Exchange Program with 'Orchids- The International School, Pune,' facilitating cross-cultural learning experiences. Moreover, Wablewadi ZP School has embraced emerging fields by incorporating subjects like Artificial Intelligence, Programming, and Robotics into its curriculum. Students participate in various robotics competitions from a young age, utilizing technology to enhance their knowledge. This multifaceted educational approach exemplifies the school's unwavering commitment to providing a comprehensive, enriching, and forward-thinking academic experience for its students.

Today, the school has been declared as an international school under the OJAS International School Project of the Government of Maharashtra. Contrary to the norm in other government schools, students in this school not only attend classes during holidays but also extend their school hours, showcasing a remarkable commitment to learning. What might seem implausible elsewhere is a reality in this unique educational institution. This Zilla Parishad School has become an experimental hub since its renovation, attracting attention for its innovative approach. Remarkably, it has achieved the distinction of being the country's first Zero Energy School. This recognition is a testament to its pioneering efforts in sustainable and energy-efficient practices, setting a noteworthy precedent in the field of education.

Parental and Community Participation

School management emerges as a fundamental determinant of operational efficiency. Transparent and accountable school management, particularly concerning funding allocation and resource management, is of paramount importance. Effective management ensures adherence to national guidelines, contributing to a well-organized and smoothly functioning school system. Efficient school management is integral to operational effectiveness, emphasizing the need for transparency and accountability, especially in the realms of funding allocation and resource management. This commitment ensures that schools adhere to national guidelines, fostering a well-organized and smoothly functioning educational system. The bedrock of the educational framework lies in funding and organizational aspects, wielding substantial influence over the overall efficacy of the system. Adequate funding is a linchpin in this context, serving as a catalyst for timely teacher compensation, the provision of up-to-date educational materials, and the delivery of high-quality education. Schools facing financial constraints may encounter difficulties in offering the enhanced educational experiences essential for effective learning outcomes.

In the case of Wablewadi village in 2012, a pioneering initiative unfolded as 19 women's self-help groups committed to contributing their profits over a three-year period to the local school. This unique collaboration between the community and the school, marked by transparency and trust, proved revolutionary. The village's youth actively supported endeavours to reduce festival costs and generate funds

for the school, contributing to increased student enrolment as the school embraced experimental teaching methods. The village's unwavering support extended further, with the organization of a spectacle for the *Yatra*¹ resulting in a significant fund of Rs 15 lakh through the *Yatra* Committee. This fund played a pivotal role in establishing the first Tablet school in Maharashtra, showcasing the village's commitment to innovative educational practices. The school's location is a testament to the community's generosity, as villagers allocated the land for its construction. When expansion plans emerged, Mr. Ware engaged with the villagers, resulting in a donation of an additional 1.5 acres of land—a significant gesture valued at over two and a half crore rupees, considering local land prices. Despite initial challenges, the school gained momentum, with the community offering another 1.5 acres of land. At this stage, the school, with approximately two hundred students, managed with only two teachers. Undeterred, these educators pioneered innovative teaching methods. They formed groups of ten students, each assigned an upper-class student as a mentor, fostering collaborative learning. Science concepts were introduced through hands-on experiments, enhancing the educational experience.

The school's reputation attracted the attention of Bank of New York officials, who expressed a desire to contribute. They presented the school's design, leading to its transformation into the world's third Zero Energy School, meeting international standards. The pedagogical approach shifted towards experiential learning, evident in initiatives such as offering swimming lessons during Diwali holidays. Environmental responsibility was instilled through projects like planting five crore trees, while cultural activities and the provision of free education contributed to a holistic education. The school's success led to the state government appointing ten additional teachers, bringing the total to twelve. Next leader's initiative further expanded the school, now offering classes up to the eighth standard—a noteworthy achievement, making Wablewadi school the first in the state to provide education up to this level.

¹ A *Yatra* (or *Jatra*) is a religious procession undertaken by devotees to sacred places during the festival. Typically, *Yatras* are funded collectively by villagers through contributions or by spending from the *Gram Panchayat* or temple funds. In Wablewadi village, Pune the community collectively deliberated on how best to improve their children's future. With the collaborative decision from local leadership, school principal, teachers, youth groups and progressive farmers rather than letting financial resources go into temporary celebrations, the idea was born to pause the *Yatra* for three years and redirect funds towards building a model school supported unanimously by the villagers in a Gram Sabha. Estimated expenditure on the *Yatra* about Rs. 12 lakh per year was saved each year and a total of Rs. 36 lakh was pooled over three years. These funds were donated to the village school for: improving infrastructure (classrooms, sanitation, playground, digital tools), procuring educational materials, enhancing facilities like libraries and science labs, supporting innovative educational initiatives and teacher training. The funds acted as seed capital that attracted additional government and NGO support, further accelerating school development. Since the entire community contributed for the school, there was greater involvement in monitoring, supporting, and sustaining its quality. The school evolved into a model school noted for: child-friendly environment, emphasis on skill development, integration of technology and experiential learning, awards and recognition at district, state, and national levels.

The community's substantial contributions to the school have been instrumental in its development. Their generosity has facilitated the establishment of crucial facilities, including a science lab, a dual-purpose computer lab doubling as a music room, and a modest library. The community's donations also played a pivotal role in installing a solar energy panel, providing power for lights, fans, and Wi-Fi within the school. Notably, the construction of the new section was made possible on land donated by 23 farmers. Recognizing a shortage of teachers, parents have voluntarily assumed roles as support staff and educators, with their remuneration covered by the community. This collaborative effort fosters a sense of closeness and ownership among villagers towards the school. Regular communication ensures that the community is informed about various aspects, ranging from the school's construction to the availability of physical facilities and the intricacies of teaching and learning experiments. This collective journey vividly underscores the transformative impact of community engagement and innovative educational practices in cultivating a comprehensive and impactful learning environment. The commitment and active participation of the community members play a central role in shaping the success and sustainability of the school.

Strategies Employed for Improving Quality of Education

The school adopted innovative strategies with the support of the different stakeholders and collaborating with different organizations during the academic year 2018-19 for quality improvement. *Avishkar* an academic initiative aimed at fostering "research-oriented students" through the early identification of their talents. This program operates beyond regular school hours and features a meticulously crafted daily schedule that encompasses ten areas of multiple intelligences. It strives to provide students with a holistic learning experience that goes beyond conventional academic boundaries. In addition, the school has introduced Foundation Batches for students starting from the seventh standard, with a specific focus on grooming interests in engineering and medical careers. The foundation batches are facilitated by local young engineers, and the curriculum is structured to prepare students for competitive exams such as JEE and NEET. This proactive approach aims to channel students' interests and aspirations towards successful careers in these fields.

Another noteworthy program introduced by the school was "Palak Balak Friends," implemented in the previous academic year. This innovative and need-based initiative, developed in collaboration with Spirit Global, reflects the school's commitment to addressing specific educational needs and enhancing the overall learning experience. Such initiatives helped in fostering the quality dimensions in the school. Furthermore, the school has achieved a remarkable milestone by establishing the first Zero Energy School in the country. Characterized by walls made of sliding glasses and a double-layered roof comprising tensile membrane and polycarbonate, the Zero Energy School

eliminates the reliance on conventional electricity, including the absence of tube lights and fans. This environmentally conscious design includes rainwater harvesting capabilities, with the capacity to collect up to 4 lac litres, ensuring a sustainable water supply for the entire academic year. Collaborations with entities like the Bank of New York and NGOs such as Art of Living have played a pivotal role in securing funds for the construction of the Zero Energy School. From a visionary concept on paper, this project has materialized into a ground breaking and innovative reality, showcasing the school's commitment to progressive and sustainable education practices.

The profound exploration of Zilla Parishad School's transformative journey provides invaluable insights into critical considerations for enhancing the quality of education. The various suggestions derived from this analysis are described below. Foremost among these considerations is the imperative need for a robust infrastructure, addressing evident deficits in essential amenities like girls' toilets, electricity connectivity, and drinking water facilities. The electrification of schools is highlighted as a priority, recognizing the contemporary necessity of digital connectivity. Urgent measures are emphasized to augment facilities crucial for the impartation of quality education, aligning with the evolving needs of the educational landscape.

Secondly, the role of competent teachers emerges as a central focus, with the acknowledgment that teacher competence directly influences students' subject preferences and interests. To this end, the paper advocates for substantial investments in teacher training, encompassing modern aids, tools, and technology-integrated methodologies. This investment is deemed crucial for cultivating a vibrant and engaging learning atmosphere that aligns with the evolving needs of students in the digital age.

Thirdly, moving beyond the confines of traditional classrooms, the school analysis advocates for provisions in extracurricular activities. These activities are recognized not only for providing mental refreshment but also for contributing significantly to holistic personality development. Platforms such as debates, extemporaneous activities, painting, essay writing, and cultural and sports events are identified as avenues for skill development and talent expression. This multifaceted approach aims to sustain student interest and engagement beyond conventional academic pursuits.

Fourthly, the achievement of high enrolment and attendance rates is posited as contingent on both improved infrastructure and the presence of competitive, qualified teachers. Policymakers are urged to actively formulate education-related policies, placing emphasis on increased spending that aligns with the recommended 6 percent of GDP allocation. Additionally, the role of para teachers in government schools is suggested for re-evaluation, considering their potential impact on student motivation and learning outcomes. Thus, the importance of

restoring the perception of teaching as a prestigious and lucrative profession to attract capable and competent individuals is crucial. A broader focus on improving the quality of teaching is emphasized, recognizing its pivotal role in the overall enhancement of education.

Fifthly, community participation, as exemplified in the Zilla Parishad School case study, is considered an essential pillar. The paper recommends active engagement, dialogue initiation, and the establishment of constructive feedback mechanisms between schools and communities. The community's capacity development to identify and propose solutions for issues in school education is actively encouraged, fostering a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship.

Finally, the spread of education is reframed as a transformative movement. Drawing insights from global examples, the paper suggests that the emphasis should not solely be on universalization but also on elevating the quality of education. Technological advancements, particularly in internet connectivity, are prioritized to address shortcomings in online education. A collaborative effort involving government, teachers, communities, and students is strongly urged to effect substantial improvements in education, aligning with the educational aspirations envisioned by the founding fathers of the nation. This comprehensive approach seeks to address challenges holistically and promote a forward-looking vision for the enhancement of educational quality

Way Forward

The inherent importance of education quality in facilitating a robust foundation of literacy, numeracy, and a spectrum of cognitive skills cannot be overstated. Beyond imparting foundational knowledge, quality education instils vital skills, values, and attitudes in students, enabling them to competently navigate future challenges. A strong educational foundation not only facilitates the acquisition of analytical and problem-solving skills but also nurtures informed citizenship. Against this backdrop, the current case study assumes significance in delineating the transformation of Zilla Parishad School into an innovative international institution, providing valuable insights for educators, students, parents, and school administrators grappling with contemporary educational challenges. The paper reveals significant strides taken by Wablewadi Zilla Parishad School over the past decade, with enrolment growing from 32 students a decade ago to 521 students in recent years. This transformation is attributed to visionary leadership and active community participation, positioning the school as a global educational institution. Proactive measures in infrastructure development are evident, transforming dilapidated rooms into well-maintained classrooms, providing separate accommodations for the Head and teachers, establishing a secure boundary wall, and creating an expansive playground. Essential amenities like safe drinking water, stable electricity, and gender-segregated toilets have been ensured. The human resource aspect reflects a commitment to quality education,

with qualified and experienced principals and teachers prioritizing Science and Technology (STEM) teachings.

The school distinguishes itself by offering multilingual subjects, including national and foreign languages, preparing students for a competitive global landscape. The emphasis on spoken English in a rural Indian village government school is a noteworthy initiative. Collaborative endeavours with institutions like Orchids- The International School, Pune, underscore the school's commitment to providing exposure and knowledge enhancement for its students. Beyond infrastructure, active involvement from parents, villagers, NGOs, and other stakeholders exemplifies a high degree of community participation, amplifying the school's performance and transformative journey.

Leadership emerges as a key determinant in elevating the school to international standards. Dynamic leadership supportive of innovative ideas attracts both teachers and the local community. Transparent administration facilitates external funding and institutional support, while visionary leadership crafts a concrete vision for the school. An inclusive and participative approach, coupled with a willingness to embrace suggestions, reflects the leadership's commitment to effective governance. The permanence and stability of the school administration contribute to its sustained success. In conclusion, the transformation of Wablewadi Zilla Parishad School into an international educational institution serves as an inspiring model for schools nationwide. The paper highlights the interplay of visionary leadership, community participation, infrastructure development, and inclusive educational practices, collectively contributing to the evolution of a government-run school into an exemplary global educational institution.

This case study not only illustrates the potential for revitalizing public schools but also emphasizes that meaningful reform is possible when contextual realities are thoughtfully addressed. The journey from a neglected institution to an internationally recognized school offers replicable strategies and inspiration for stakeholders across the education system, underscoring the importance of locally grounded, innovation-driven, and inclusive approaches to school development. The decentralization policies and community empowerment with participation of different stakeholders leads to sustainability in the school functioning and learning outcomes.

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Article: Poverty and Schooling: Neighborhood Influences on Educational Outcomes in Delhi's Slums

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Poverty and Schooling: Neighborhood Influences on Educational Outcomes in Delhi's Slums

-- Nikita Malhan & Anindya Jayanta Mishra

Abstract

Millions of children worldwide living in urban slums and informal settlements lack the basic social services, face overcrowding and health issues which affect their educational outcomes, thus, inevitability of analysis of responsible elements arises. The study aims: i) to examine the structural shortcomings, environmental barriers in the slums of Delhi and ii) to suggest tailored measures which ensure every child has a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education irrespective of their economic, social standing and place of resident. The study uses the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to understand the factors responsible in the neighborhood of children living in urban slums of Delhi which hinder their educational outcomes. The study is qualitative research and has used purposive sampling and snowball sampling to interview a total of 80 children, parents and NGO members working and living in these low socio-economic neighborhoods. The findings reveal these children are living in unsafe, violent and poor infrastructure neighborhoods. The children are easy targets of criminal gangs and alcoholics, and are also exploited as cheap labor by the shop owners in the area. Also, the slums have a lot of addiction and practices gender discrimination and sexual assault against the girls. The government's ground workers do not have the motivation or the will to improve the condition of these children. Due to all these factors the children in these areas are not able to develop their capabilities to become academically successful and break the vicious cycle of poverty.

Keywords- violence, poor infrastructure, gender discrimination, neighborhood socialization, role model, addiction

Introduction

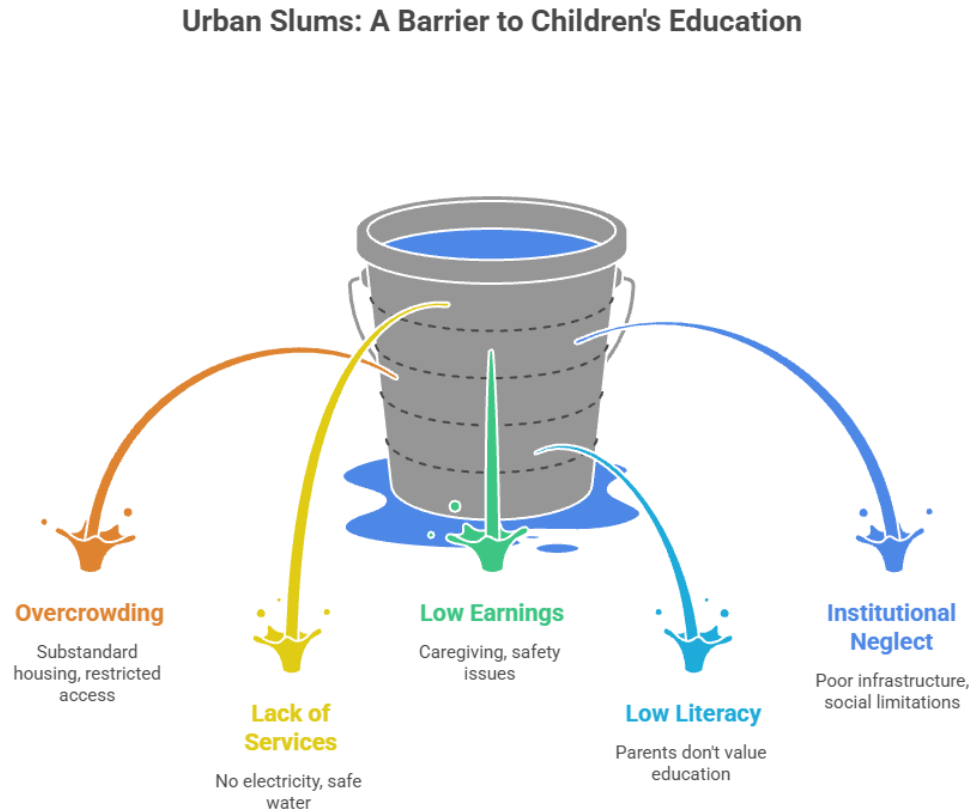
As UNICEF (2018) report shows that the poor urban children in one sixth of the countries surveyed, are the most disadvantaged children living in urban cities who are less likely to complete their primary education than the similar poor children in the rural areas. Also, in one out of every four countries children from poorest urban households are at a greater risk of dying before the age of five compared to the poorest children in the rural areas. These findings indicate that even though urban areas have better and more schools and medical facilities but the poorest urban children do not benefit from them. The children need to be central in urban planning but in a lot of cities they are overlooked. Millions of children living in urban slums and informal settlements lack the access to basic social services and also face the risk of overcrowding, poor living conditions which lead to major

health issues. It is need of the hour to implement urban development plans to safeguard their well-being.

The slums in Delhi present a picture of overpopulation, substandard housing and restricted access to public services. Even though the Right to Education Act mandates free and compulsory education for 6-14 years children but due to the poor infrastructure, economic and social limitations and institutional neglect in their neighborhood the children do not attain education. Asha India reports that the literacy rate in Delhi slums areas is 56% while around 46% students drop out between the grades 1 & 10th. The urban slums show the most contrasting picture of the disadvantaged communities living in the deprived areas with the accelerated city growth on the other side. Also, as per the Section 3 of the Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act, 1956, slums are identified as overpopulated, substandard housing, with inadequate sanitation and limited access to essential civic services, making them unsuitable for healthy living. In Delhi NCT, the population living in such slums is over 17% (Census 2011). The figure is understated due to the exclusion of illegal and unregistered settlements. The education in such colonies is degraded due to the structural, societal and financial impediments (Mishra, 2025).

Also, due to the bad conditions in the slums a lot of children drop out from the schools for reasons like low household earnings, caregiving responsibilities and personal safety issues. Also, the houses in slums lack basic services which enable academic progression like electricity for learning, safe drinking water, safe and secure housing. The parents too have low literacy levels so they have very less understanding of the importance and value of formal education which leads to children's low levels of attendance and early drop out among the children (Mishra, 2025). Despite growing attention to urban poverty and education, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how specific structural shortcomings and environmental barriers within urban slums directly influence children's educational outcomes, particularly in rapidly expanding cities like Delhi.

Existing studies often address poverty and education in broad terms but fail to provide localized, context-specific analyses that connect overcrowding, inadequate social services, health risks, and living conditions to academic performance and school retention. Moreover, limited research proposes tailored, practical interventions that respond to the unique realities of slum settlements as shown in figure 1. Therefore, a focused examination of these responsible elements in Delhi's slums is essential to design equitable strategies that ensure every child, regardless of socio-economic background or place of residence, has access to quality education. The study aims: i) to examine the structural shortcomings, environmental barriers in the slums of Delhi and ii) to suggest tailored measures which ensure every child has a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education irrespective of their economic and social standing and place of resident.

Figure 1. Factors affecting children's education

2. Review of literature

The review of literature has been divided into three themes namely collective socialization, infrastructure and governance, and violence and drop out of children that mainly affect the educational outcomes of students in their neighborhood.

2.1 Collective socialization

The research on the collective socialization in the neighborhoods highlights that the students' educational outcomes are formed not only by the family and school alone but also by the neighborhood in which they reside. Nieuwenhuis and Hooimeijer (2016) argue that the neighborhood socialization is one of the primary mechanisms which influences the educational outcome of the students. It is influenced by the neighborhood social order, communities collective resolve to solve common problems and the ability of the community to promote educational values. The study argues that the students' educational outcomes is affected by the neighborhood socialization and not solely by the family's individual socio-economic standing. Rivera and Doom's (2023) findings also suggest that with the

help of collective efficacy the negative impacts of living in a high-risk neighborhood can be reduced. When the people in a community trust each other and are wanting to take action for the collective good then the students can have positive development and growth even while living in a disadvantaged neighborhood. While Nieuwenhuis and Hooimeijer (2016) shows collective socialization in a neighborhood as an important mechanism for student's educational achievement, Rivera and Doom (2023) shows its protective function in reducing the impact of the adversities which the students face while living in such vulnerable neighborhoods by practicing collective efficacy.

Together these studies show that the neighborhood influence is not just limited to the infrastructure alone but collective socialization also influences the educational outcomes in a neighborhood. It is done by sharing the collective responsibility to guide children, promoting the collective norms and contributing in developing a positive nurturing environment. Both the studies provide evidences of the western world and provides limited understanding of how the collective socialization works in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of India in which caste, class, poverty, relocation all have an influence in shaping the community interactions and relations.

2.2 Infrastructure and governance

The existing research shows that the educational disparities exist apart from children's individual and family situations and is influenced by the neighborhood resources, infrastructure and the work done by the local governing bodies. These studies vary in the different processes identified by them in the neighborhoods. Goldfeld et al. (2015) argues that community infrastructure, state provided services, and the governance mechanisms affect the quality of educational experiences of children as it is influenced by the accessibility and the quality of these essential community resources. Similarly, Chatterjee and Burns (2021) demonstrate by the empirical findings how in the economically marginalized neighborhood in Bangalore, due to their weak civic infrastructure and limited public services it negatively affects the children's educational achievement as they are restricted from an enabling learning setting. While both the studies focus on the neighborhood resources and essential services, Goldfeld et al. (2015) views the neighborhood as an integrated environment in which the physical urban infrastructure, social climate, essential services and governance structures combinedly affect the growth and development of the students while Chatterjee and Burns (2021) using the empirical findings from an urban neighborhood in India shows how these structural inequalities results in the lower educational attainment of students.

Soja (2010) broadens this perspective by explaining how these unequal physical infrastructure, uneven state investment and availability of services are the different forms of the spatial injustice which is due to the deliberate government

policies and planning choices. While Goldfeld et al. (2015) and Chatterjee and Burns (2021) explain the repercussions of the neighborhood inequalities on the educational achievements and overall development of the students. Soja (2010) discusses why in the first place such neighborhood inequalities exist in some neighborhoods. These studies paid less attention on how do the students in these neighborhoods experience these inequalities in their everyday life and how does it affect their educational outcomes. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the students' lived experiences of community infrastructure, local policy implementation in the Delhi's marginalized urban neighborhoods.

2.3 Violence and drop out of students

The exiting literature emphasizes that the neighborhood violence does affect the student's educational achievement but the factors of the neighborhood violence differ. The various scholars differ in explaining the factors responsible for this violence. Vadivel et al. (2023) reflects on the cumulative effects of the low-socio economic disadvantages where the economic hardships, high crime neighborhoods, scarce learning resources collectively hinder students' educational achievements. In contrast Burdick-Will (2018) focuses specifically on the neighborhood violence showing how the continuous exposure to violence in a student's neighborhood alters their behavior in school classrooms. It changes their behavior, safety concerns and lowers their trust on the teachers which has a spillover effect on the other students as well. Thus, negatively impacting the conditions necessary for effective learning. Together these studies emphasize that the neighborhood violence should not be seen as an isolated issue but situated within the broader neighborhood setting. In which the economic hardships, unsafe neighborhood conditions and the structural disadvantages all interact together to weaken the educational achievements of the students.

The existing research provides insufficient attention on how does the crime in the neighborhood, deviant peer groups, criminal recruitment of students and weak community control work together to influence the students' educational outcomes. The present study addresses this gap by analyzing how do these various neighborhoods processes contribute to the declining school engagement in the Delhi's urban marginalized neighborhoods.

2.4 Theoretical framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) helps to understand how does environment of an individual has an effect on them. The five layers of the environment mentioned are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The microsystem contains the interaction of children with their immediate near ones i.e. their parents, siblings, neighbors, teachers. According to the theory, whatever the child experiences in his/her microsystem, it directly helps in building the child's mindset and personality. The encounter which the children

have in their microsystem directly affects their growth, development, habits and temperament. The second layer mesosystem holds the interactions amongst the various stakeholders in the microsystem i.e. an interaction between the teachers and parents and how that interaction has a positive or a negative effect on the growth and development of the children. The ecological system theory posits that the interaction among the closest stakeholders of the children should have a harmonious relationship for a healthy learning atmosphere for the young school going children. As it will help them to become ready for any challenge and situation in their life.

The third component of the theory is the exosystem which includes the social structures and institutions in which the child does not participate directly, but the influence of it affects the development of the child in many ways. The examples of it can be the government policies in the area and law and order of the area in which the child grows. The fourth being, the macrosystem which includes the broader cultural and societal landscape of a child's development. It means the norms, values, attitudes and community mindset. All of this either affects them positively or negatively. The children are affected by the encounters they have in their immediate surroundings, neighborhood and community (Lubis et al., 2024). A child can only become a useful resource if their surroundings allow them to become productive and that is only possible if they have a safe and healthy environment to grow in. A good development of mindset and lifestyle comes from healthy educational and social surroundings around the children (Lubis et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research site

A survey conducted in India's capital, Delhi, showed that approximately 2,50,000 children residing in the slum areas are not attending school. The findings also showed that the major challenges faced by the slum dwellers are unemployment, health issues, and lack of access to basic municipal services and infrastructure (Delhi-NCTD, 2015). Education is universally considered a fundamental right and a very important factor for one's social and economic growth and progress. Yet, ensuring access to quality education to the underprivileged children living in urban slums is still a major challenge, especially in fast-growing cities such as Delhi. It is clearly visible the sharp disparity between the educational opportunities accessible to the children from wealthy backgrounds and those from the marginalized neighborhoods that highlight the prolonged inequality which remains even after several policy regulations.

Delhi being India's one of the most crowded and economically varied cities, provides a glaring example of the gaps in the access to education. The slum settlements show overcrowding, poor infrastructure and socio-economic

hardships. All of which collectively impacts the children's learning outcomes and achievement living in these slums. The various issues like substandard school facilities, constrained access to academic resources, and lack of basic student support services promote the cycle of educational disparities (Mohan et al., 2023). The research was conducted in three slums and unauthorized colonies of Delhi namely Shahbad Dairy, Khajoori Khas and Sardar colony. The areas selected for the study was based on purposive sampling which aims to examine how the neighborhood characteristics shape the educational outcomes among children living in Delhi's marginalized neighborhoods. The areas Khajoori Khas, Shahbad Dairy and Sardar Colony provide rich qualitative evidence as these areas are characterized with deep rooted poverty, spatial exclusion, poor infrastructure and challenging environmental conditions which make these sites suitable for examining the research objectives (NewsClick, 2023; The Times of India, 2019, 2025). A lot of government initiatives and NGO actions are active in the capital like the RTE act and various government mobilizers working on the ground level to put the out of school children from these slums in schools. But the success of these programs and initiatives is very low and is not providing access and opportunities for quality education for all. Also, they are not able to remove various kinds of institutional hindrances for the children living in the slums. The study tries to explore the current issues related to educational access and outcomes in the urban slums of Delhi. It tries to deepen the insights in the educational disparities in the urban slum communities and provide meaningful suggestions and solutions to improve the access for quality education for all the children irrespective of their socio-economic status and area of residents.

3.2 Sampling Approach

The study was conducted in Delhi, the capital city of India. The study uses a qualitative research approach. The methods chosen were purposive sampling and snowball sampling since not all children and parents were willing to be part of the study. The tools used for the data collection were in-depth interviews and focus group discussions of a total 80 participants. It included 55 children, 16 parents and 9 NGO members who work closely with the socially disadvantaged children in these neighborhoods. The children interviewed were from the age group of 13-18 years and were from classes 8th-12th in the government schools of Delhi.

Table 1. Demographic details of the participants

Participant type	Khajoori Khas	Shahbad Dairy	Sardar Colony	Total
Children	18	20	17	55
Parents	5	6	5	16
NGO Members	4	2	3	9
Total Participants	27	28	25	80

Table 1 summarizes the demographic details of the participants. 18 children, 5 parents and 4 NGO members were interviewed from Khajoori Khas. Then 20 children, 6 parents and 2 members from NGO were interviewed from Shahbad Dairy, and 17 children, 5 parents and 3 NGO members from Sardar colony were interviewed, thus making the total participants 80.

3.3 Instrument of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview schedule designed to elicit in-depth narratives of students, parents and NGO workers experiences related to as shown in **Table 2**. In the slum areas, children's lives are shaped by both the community and the challenges they face. There is a lack of collective socialization through no community interactions, lack of social bonding and negative peer influence within families and neighbours. Also, many children are exploited by entering the deviant paths and some are forced to drop out of school due to poverty and lack of support. Girls often face gender discrimination and the risk of harassment, while local infrastructure and services such as sanitation, healthcare, and schools remain inadequate. Social institutions, including the police and schools, are inconsistently effective, and violence and neglect further impact children's well-being. Accordingly, the questions were asked as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Overview of interview questions

No.	Research Question	Focus / Aspect
1	Do the people in these slums have collective socialization?	Community interactions, social bonding, peer influence
2	Are the children in these colonies and slums exploited? How?	Child labor, informal work, abuse, neglect
3	Do the children in these slums drop out of schools? Why?	School attendance, economic pressures, discrimination
4	Are gender discrimination and sexual assault experienced by girls in these areas?	Gender bias, harassment, safety of girls
5	How are the services and infrastructure provided by the local governments in these areas?	Sanitation, water, healthcare, roads, schools
6	Is there any kind of violence practiced in these areas?	Physical, domestic, street, or community violence
7	Do the schools discriminate and exploit children from these areas?	Teacher bias, neglect, unequal treatment
8	Do the children have role models in these areas?	Guidance, mentorship, community influence
9	How is the working of the social institutions like police, law and order in the area?	Law enforcement efficiency, community trust, legal protection
10	How are the cultural and societal landscape of the area,	Traditions, beliefs, social norms,

including norms, values, community mindset and attitudes?

community mindset

Thematic Analysis

Three-step thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to organize and interpret complex data. In the first step, we assign codes to pieces of data, identifying recurring ideas, behaviors, or patterns, such as “school dropout” or “peer influence.” In the second step, these codes are grouped into sub-themes that capture broader patterns, like “Lack of social cohesion” or “Violence affecting children.” Finally, in the third step, the sub-themes are synthesized into broad overarching themes that reflect the core findings of the study, such as “Lack of Collective Socialization,” “Dropout and Exploitation of Children,” and “Gender Discrimination and Infrastructure Gaps.” This structured approach helped to draw meaningful insights while maintaining clarity and depth in analyzing qualitative data as shown in table 3.

Table 3. Three step thematic analysis

Broad Theme	Sub-themes / Codes	Examples / Statement Form
1. Lack of Collective Socialization	Lack of social cohesion	“People in the slums fight amongst themselves on festivals and other times, and don’t talk amongst each other.”
	Peer influence on children	“Children learn behaviours from their peers, adopting informal work practices and deviant behaviours.”
	Lack of role-model presence	“Children don’t have positive role-models to look upon.”
	Social institutions	“The local police and law enforcement are perceived as distant, which affects community trust and collective safety.”
2. Dropout and Exploitation of Children	School dropout	“Many children drop out due to family poverty, need to work, or inability to afford school supplies and lack of teaching in schools.”
	Child labor / exploitation	“Children are engaged in rag-picking, being couriers of drugs, prostitution, domestic work, and street vending instead of schooling.”
	School discrimination	“Schools don’t give admission to these children easily and don’t listen to their problems as well.”
	Violence affecting children	“The various criminal gangs and negative influences in these areas influence the children to join them and earn money.”
3. Gender Discrimination & Infrastructure Gaps	Gender discrimination	“Girls are often restricted from working or attending school equally, and expected to handle household chores.”
	Sexual assault / harassment	“Incidents of harassment and abuse against girls are not taken seriously.”

Infrastructure gaps	“Local roads, sanitation, and clean water are inadequate, impacting children’s health and school attendance.”
Access to services	“Healthcare and social welfare services are limited or hard to access, especially for women and girls.”
Cultural norms	“Community mindset reinforces traditional gender roles and restricts opportunities for girls.”

Source: Authors compilation

3.4 Researcher’s Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher (first author) identifies as a middle-class woman who was familiar with the field in terms of navigating the city, accessing the different research sites and gaining access to the respondents. The researcher’s educational background as a research scholar was welcomed by an NGO named Shubhakshika Educational Society and a social jurist who work for the socio-economically marginalized students studying in the Delhi government schools which enabled the access to the respondents. The participants were assured that their identities will remain anonymous and their participation is completely voluntary and they can leave whenever they wish to. This helped in reducing any perceived pressure to participate and give socially desirable answers which helped to increase the credibility of the research. The researcher’s positionality as a woman helped the girls to open up and share about their day-to-day experiences of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the neighborhood. As mentioned by some of the respondents that they found it easier to open up about their experiences with a woman than with a man because of their encounter of sexual violence from men in their neighborhood. The researcher conscious of her gender identity tried to position herself along axes of her identity that best suited the demands of navigating the field. In line with Creswell’s (2007) recommendations, the researcher understands that qualitative research is influenced by the researcher interactions, assumptions and interpretations. Therefore, throughout the study the researcher tried to be aware of her own assumptions, and made efforts that the findings reflect the experiences of the participants and not the personal beliefs of the researcher. The analysis involved reading of the interview transcripts several times, constant comparison of the responses of the different participants to identify the common themes and differing ideas and regular critical discussions of the interpretations of the findings with the co-author to ensure the rigor, trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

4. Findings

The findings of the study have been divided into four themes namely collective socialization, drop out and exploitation, gender discrimination and infrastructure gaps.

4.1 Collective Socialization

It was told by the children and the NGO people working in the area that *“The collective socialization in the area is very weak. The people in the neighborhood do not talk to each other at all. The only communication that happens is if the people are from the same village otherwise no communication happens. The people in the neighborhood do not talk to each other as they all come from different places, and they doubt the intentions of the others thinking how the other person will be so it is better not talk to them.”* Also, it was told that the neighborhood collectiveness is very weak, as they do not try to solve any issues in the neighborhood together nor celebrate any kind of festivals in harmony. There are always fights during the festivals. Thus, even though they are living in one colony but there is a feeling of isolation between them.

The children and parents also told that there is no safety and peace in the colony. In some of the neighborhoods there are conflicts between various religions i.e. Hindus and Muslims. It was told that they taunt each other, try to instigate each other so that the other comes for a fight. All of this the children told, makes the neighborhood environment very toxic. Another issue shared was there are inter-castes conflicts too in the area. A child narrated an incident, *“A scheduled caste man was crossing the area and the higher caste men started commenting on his clothes as they were dirty and torn as he was coming from work. So, then a fight broke and both started beating each other.”* It was told that such fights disturb the whole neighborhoods unity and create an environment of hatred and resentment. Also, it was told that there are fights between the people living in these neighborhoods based on their eating habits like vegetarian and non- vegetarian food.

The findings resonate with the bonding and bridging social capital theory which suggests that the bonding social capital creates close relationships within the homogenous groups like the people from the same village, caste, while the bridging social capital unites different heterogeneous groups together in the same locality leading to the development of the interpersonal trust, teamwork and sharing of knowledge. The bridging capital is weak in these marginalized urban neighborhoods of Delhi resulting in neighborhoods becoming socially divided which leads to not taking collective responsibility for the children's education and narrowing their access to broader educational opportunities and guidance (Putnam, 2000; Tahlyan et al., 2022).

The other issues narrated by the NGO workers was that the concept of ‘collective socialization’ is missing in these neighborhoods. Since the parents are daily wage earners, so they are more concentrated on earning their daily wage for their survival. They do not get the time to socialize with their neighbors or solve the problems in the neighborhood. It was told by the NGO workers working in the area that most of the fathers in these colonies drink and are alcoholics and beat their wives at night. So, due to the daily wage labor and then being alcoholic at night, they do not stand up for the crucial causes in the neighborhood.

Also, it was told by the NGO workers “*The parents collectively do not have the mental courage to question the school authorities, as they have very low self-esteem and feel that they are very inferior in front of the school authorities. Also, they do not stand up against the wrong doings of the schools and government authorities as they are not aware about their rights. So, when the school authorities refuse to give admission to their children as they do not have the Aadhar card, or cut their names from schools wrongly if they are absent for some days, or simply say we will not give admission as seats are full. All of these issues are not questioned by the parents as they are not aware about their rights and do not have the courage to question the school authorities which spoils the future of their children.*” Also, the workers told that the people in these neighborhoods do not have the concept of neighborhood socialization and unity. They are not aware that if they all come together and fight for their causes collectively, they will be in a better position to bargain with the authorities. But due to their inter-religion, inter-caste, region fights and issues they are divided. As a result, it becomes easier for the authorities to exploit them.

Analyzing the findings using the collective efficacy theory shows that only poverty and physical infrastructure in a neighborhood does not influence children’s development but also the level of confidence of community members on one another, demonstrating common beliefs and being ready to contribute collectively for the wellbeing of the neighborhood has an impact (Sampson et al., 1997; Rivera & Doom, 2023). This weak collective efficacy has major negative educational repercussions on the students. Since the community members in these neighborhoods do not trust each other, they are not able to collectively monitor the children’s behavior, improve their school attendance, oppose to the unjust school practices and fail to promote a positive environment for their learning. Therefore, in these neighborhoods the educational issues remain stagnant at the individual household levels rather than being treated as a collective responsibility of its community members.

Also, it was told by the NGO workers who work closely in these neighborhoods that many male household members are alcoholics. There are also a lot of addicts who roam around at night and robberies happen as well. There are some shops selling cheap alcohol from which the people in these neighborhoods buy. So, when the children have such negative role models in front of them, they get

influenced from them too. The children also drink alcohol, try to do robbery in these neighborhoods. So, when the elders of these colonies have deviant norms and values then the children in these neighborhoods also learn from them and from their drop out peers. They also start engaging in all these kinds of addiction thinking it is normal and acceptable leading to their poor educational outcomes.

The negative role models in the neighborhood have negative repercussions on the students' educational achievements. According to the social learning theory, children develop their behaviors by watching and replicating the actions of the influential individuals in their neighborhood and social environment (Bandura, 1977; Hurd et al., 2009). In such neighborhoods where the practices like drinking alcohol, robbery and other kinds of deviant behaviors are performed, then these activities become normalized and the children also internalize them. Instead of having positive role models around them these children acquire behaviors that shift their focus from schooling. The greater participation towards substance use, illegal activities and in deviant peer groups lowers their participation in schools, diminishes their academic motivation, obstructs their learning and promotes alienation from the schools leading to their early permanent school exit. The findings also resonate with the collective socialization theory which suggests that when the adults in a neighborhood are not able to inculcate educational values in the children and rather display harmful behaviors then the community's ability to promote and regulate the academic development of students is weakened and is ineffective (Coleman, 1988; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016).

4.2 Drop out and Exploitation of Children

It was told by the parents and children that a lot of children drop out from their schools in these neighborhoods. One of the reasons told by a child was, *"As I do not understand what the teacher teaches, so I'm not able to develop my interest. So, then I decided not to go as I'm not able to understand anything."* Another reason told by the parents and children were, *"As there are a lot of criminal gangs that operate in these areas, so they influence these children and lure them with money. So, the children of age group 17-18 years who drop out join these gangs, and then commit murders, robberies, and other illegal activities. They are not caught by the police too, as the gang pays the police thus ruining the future of these children permanently."* It was told by the NGO members that small children are exploited for money too. As they are made to act as couriers of drugs for these gangs. The reason for using small children was explained, *"As no one will think that small children will be carrying drugs and they will not be caught. So, they are used as couriers of drugs from one place to another. Their parents also do not object as it adds to the family income so they are fine with it. These children drop out from schools, destroy their future and do these kind illegal activities to earn money."*

The social disorganization theory posits that when the neighborhoods have continuous criminal activities, weak social control mechanisms and poor regulatory mechanisms then it encourages the criminal groups to hire children and normalize these deviant behaviors (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Kubrin & Wo, 2016). They offer the children financial incentives for murders, robberies and for other unlawful activities which reduces their perception of the importance of schooling and education as they are able to earn money. The differential opportunity theory further explains that when there are less legitimate pathways which offer educational and financial mobility and more illegitimate ones that are easily available then the children view the illegitimate routes as more attainable and feasible pathways for improving their livelihood and economic security (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Shjarback, 2018).

Another reason for the drop out in these areas was explained by the NGO workers was the parents of these children go in the morning and come home at night. And no one is there to pay attention on them whether they go to school or not. So, these children due to the peer influence in the area start missing school. They start consuming drugs and alcohol which is readily available in these colonies at a very cheap price. Also, due to the peer influence these children start doing robberies as they see their friends doing it and earning money from it. Some of them do robbery in their own houses too. It was also told by students that some girls from their schools to fulfil their needs of luxury as they see it on social media have turned to prostitution and the parents are not aware of it. The teachers also told that there is a line of guest houses near the school where these girls go. Thus, due to the lack of parent's attention, these children drop out from schools.

The routine activity theory suggests that due to the weak informal supervision and the prevalence of the deviant peer groups, criminal groups and the absence of an effective guardianship as parents are absent throughout the day. It leads to children's increased encounter with drinking, drugs and employing in commercial sexual abuse. It results in students becoming detached from their schools and ultimately exiting the formal schooling system (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Also, as no one keeps an eye on these children so they are exploited by the nearby shopkeepers in the area too. An NGO member narrated an incident, *"There is a car bumper repairing shop nearby. The owner gives 20 rupees to the children and asks them to rub the bumper with cream for 20 minutes. The bumper gets its shine and the children are happy with the 20 rupees earned. If the owner would have kept an employer for this job, he would have to pay a minimum of 400-500 per month but by exploiting the children's labor, they save money. Also, the children miss their school and earn money by such ways. They also sell plastic bottles which they find on roads and the senior students in schools steal the steel out from the desks and benches and sell them too."* Another reason told by the students why they drop out from schools was as their family elders are unwell so they have to earn compulsorily. It was told that they work in factories and constructions sites

to support their families. An NGO member also shared that there are government officials who are roaming in these slums to get the out of school children admitted in the government schools of Delhi. He narrated an incident where *“The officials from a slum took the children for admission to a nearby government school. When the principal refused to give admission saying these children do not have an Aadhar card or the required documents the officials said alright and brought back the children to slums saying they cannot get admission as they do not have the required documents. The RTE Act compulsory instructs that even if the children do not have the documents the schools cannot deny to give admission. The officials either do not know about the rules or just do not want to fight for these children to get them admitted in schools and do their job with honesty.”*

Analyzing the findings using the street level bureaucracy theory it explains how the frontline public officials shape the access to education of children by their daily decisions and choices (Lipsky, 1980; Oliveira & Peixoto, 2021). The findings show how the government officials lack of will or unawareness about the laws leads to the socio-economic marginalized children not getting admission in the schools, leading to the failure to enforce their educational rights.

Structural violence theory posits that such incidents cannot be observed in isolation but are part of the larger societal and organizational inequalities which systematically and deliberately put the marginalized students at a structural disadvantage (Galtung, 1969; Farmer et al., 2006). The findings suggests that the neighborhood shopkeepers exploiting the children for their cheap labor, the household dependence on the child's earning and the government institutions not able to protect the educational rights of these students. All of this collectively reproduces the educational exclusion for these marginalized students. By not letting them have access to their basic needs so that they are not able to realize their full potential academically.

4.3 Gender Discrimination

The girls said that they face a lot of discrimination in their neighborhood and at their homes. One girl told *“When my sister asked my mother that she wants to do a job after class 12th, the mother immediately said no. She said the neighborhood people will question us that where does she go all day, who all does she meet outside, what time does she come back. She said humein nahi sunni ulti seedhe baatein. Aise samaj mein izzat khatam ho jaati hai.”* (We do not want to hear these nonsense talks. It diminishes our respect in the society). Also, when the mother discussed about the job with the neighborhood ladies and relatives, they said, *“Abh apni beti ki kamayi ka khaoge? Yeh bahar jake ladko se baatein karengi aur ghumengi mat bhejo inhe.”* (Now will you eat from your daughters' earnings? They will go outside to talk and roam around with boys better to not send them.)

The girls also told that they are not allowed to go outside their houses or for playing. They told that *“Our mothers say that your safety is in your hands. If you go outside and something happens, no one will say anything to the boy but your respect and honor will be gone forever. Now the environment is not right for you to go outside.”* Also, the councilors in the schools told that, *“Some of these girls are sexually assaulted by their own family members. The assaulters are sometimes their uncle, grandfather or house tenant. These girls become very quiet in the school, they do not answer during the teacher student interaction. Also, they do not mix up with other girls, and they do not perform well academically too. Such incidences are very detrimental for the growth and development of the girls as they do not speak about it also and remain quite.”*

Also, it was told by the girls that they are not safe in their neighborhood too. *“If we go outside, boys pass bad comments, ask for our numbers, try to hold our hand, whistle at us and also abuse us.”* Another girl told that, *“When I shared one of the harassment incidents with my mother, I was told that if next time something like this happens, she will get my name cut from the school. Any small thing happens with my sisters or me she gives the same warning that she will get our name cut from school. My mother does not trust us at all, she only listens to our relatives and the neighborhood ladies who say ill about us and then scolds us. I feel like eating something wrong or committing suicide as it feels very suffocating here. One of my friends has committed suicide due to these reasons.”*

Another girl told, that she used to play cricket and her parents were fine with it. Then one day the neighborhood ladies came and told her, *“Go play inside your house or help your mother in household chores but do not play with the boys. My mother after that day did not allow me to play as she said we do not want to hear things about you in the neighborhood. I loved playing cricket but now I feel helpless and cry sometimes.”*

It was told by the girls that the discrimination at their houses also includes, their brothers are sent to the private schools and they are sent to government schools. Also, the brothers are given milk and nutritious food, and the girls are not given. So, the capability of safety and good food is missing for the girls. If such kind of discrimination, sexual assault and distress girls face every day at their homes and neighborhood, then how can we expect them to become academically successful and grow in their lives.

The findings show that the girls' educational opportunities are being structurally restricted through the patriarchal gender norms. Also, by limiting their capabilities and by conducting gender related abuse on them. Analyzing the findings using the patriarchal feminist perspective shows that the gender disparities are rooted in the social structures that give more freedom, power and facilities to the boys while controlling the girls' movements, their actions and their freedom to use the public spaces which disables their growth (Walby, 1990; Dahal, 2023). In these

neighborhoods the girls are not allowed to work, play and go outside to safeguard the family's honor. They are also experiencing sexual harassment in the community spaces and are being negatively impacted by the unequal access to the nutritious food. It was in contrast to the boys in their neighborhood who received greater autonomy and opportunities. Importantly, these constraints were not only put by the male members of their neighborhood but also by the women in the community. Thus, showing how the gender norms are reproduced through the everyday social engagement and collective expectations of the society.

Further the capability approach suggests that even though the girls have access to schools but they are deprived of the capabilities of bodily integrity, bodily health, freedom of movement, play and wellbeing (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011). They constantly encounter restrictions on their movement, face harassment, have fear of abuse, and face nutritional deprivation which takes away their opportunities to fully participate in their educational institutions and fulfil their educational aspirations.

4.4 Infrastructure Gaps

It was told by the students that, *"There are open sewers in our neighborhood and some substances keep coming out of it. It has foul smell which attracts mosquitoes due to which the children get sick with dengue and malaria"*. Another child narrated, *"The building in which I live is almost about to fall but still no one gets it repaired. Two three lintels had fallen too, but luckily no one was in those rooms at that time"*. The children also told that in their neighborhood the roads are unpaved, due to which the cars slip and accidents happen. This leads to people fighting amongst themselves creating havoc and chaos. It was also told that water in the morning does not come on time and the children get late for their school.

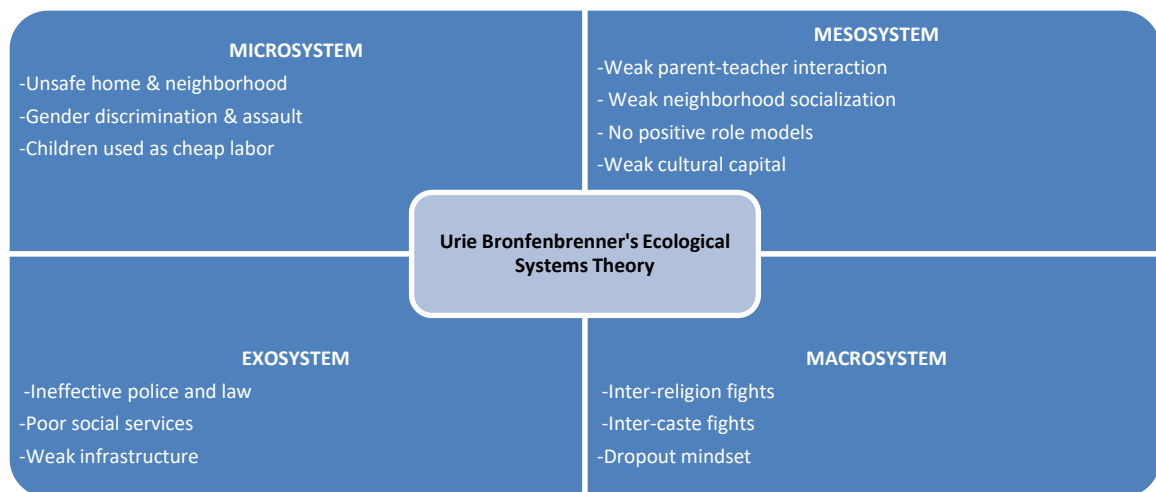
The boys told that, *"In our neighborhood the government had installed 4-5 open gym equipment's in the nearby barren land. But not even a month had passed, someone stole all the equipment's, leaving the neighborhood without any recreational activity again. The local government did not install anything after that in our area."* The children also told, *"There are no parks in these areas and when we try to play on the streets the elders who are drinking hooka there scold and tell us to go inside. Thus, we do not play and sit at our homes."* It was also told by them that during the rains there is a lot of water clogging due to which the children either miss their tuitions or if they go their jeans gets completely wet making them feel embarrassed.

Analyzing the findings using the capability approach it suggests that the quality education does not only mean to have access to schools but it also means having the real opportunities and freedom to experience the benefits of education (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). The neighborhood conditions in which the children live reduce the opportunities for them to get benefitted from their schools, i.e. the open

sewers lead to children falling sick leading to their absenteeism in schools and their lower academic achievement. Also, the dilapidated buildings in which they live give them chronic stress and anxiety that it may fall anytime making their concentration in studies very difficult. In addition, the late water supply delays their reaching school on time leading to the loss of their learning in schools. So, due to their neighborhood conditions the students are not able to maximize the benefits of their schooling.

Thus, due to the neighborhood conditions the capabilities like their health both mental and physical wellbeing, safety and everyday functioning is affected which hinders their academic achievements. Analyzing the findings using the spatial justice theory it suggests that the poor infrastructure conditions is because of the uneven urban infrastructure investment and spatial planning. This results in the educational disparities by providing very limited opportunities for the children living in these marginalized urban neighborhoods (Soja, 2010; Dadashpoor & Dehghan, 2025). Therefore, the students face educational disparities not only because their families are economically disadvantaged but also because the government decides to invest on the local infrastructure unequally in different neighborhoods within a city. Contemporary research studies also shows that safe recreational parks and local child play areas help in children's intellectual development, mental wellness and academic engagement while their shortages lead to the learning disadvantages among the children (Sprague et al., 2022).

Figure. 2 Components of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Source: Authors Compilation

Figure 2 shows the various components of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of how a child's development is affected by the different layers in their environment.

5. Discussion

The findings can be analyzed using the ecological systems theory which explains that the children's growth and educational achievements are shaped by the continuous interplay between the individuals and their interconnected environments which influence their everyday experiences. Rather than considering educational achievements as a result of personal competence or family conditions alone, the ecological perspective explains that children's academic development is shaped by the wider social, physical, organizational and regulatory environment around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The neighborhood is a crucial element of children's microsystem which is also influenced by the broader governance and structural processes. The neighborhood issues such as the weak collective socialization, crime and violence, gender inequalities, deficient infrastructure and limited governance support affect the children's educational development. It makes a negative impact on their physical and mental wellbeing, security, access to academic opportunities, social interactions, and the everyday schooling participation. These neighborhood factors together decide the students school participation, classroom involvement, educational achievement and whether the students will continue or drop out from their schools.

The findings on the theme of collective socialization shows that the neighborhood relationships were based on village social relations, same caste, alcohol addiction and poor collective responsibility for the children's education. Rather than being a connected community who are able to collectively encourage children these neighborhoods showed limited trust and no solidarity. The findings support the collective efficacy theory which suggests that the neighborhoods which have less cooperation and weak community based social control are not able to create conducive environment which can help in the development and growth of the children (Sampson et al., 1997; Rivera & Doom, 2023). The study also shows that the criminal activities and exploitation in the area significantly lead to school detachment of students. The deviant groups like the criminal gangs, drug selling groups, exploitative shopkeepers create alternative routes that are in direct competition with education. In line with the social disorganization theory when the neighborhoods display regular criminal activities and have weak community social norms and regulations then it becomes easier for the criminal gangs and exploitative employers to influence and lure the children in committing these criminal activities and making them drop out of the schools.

The findings also resonate with the routine activity theory which explains that parents extended working hours as daily wage labors leads to their limited ability to supervise their children. This leads to children getting closer with the deviant peer groups and other unscrupulous adults (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The findings also show an important government dimension which is less thoroughly examined in the neighborhood level studies. The government officials who were given the

responsibility for the admission of these students in schools failed to question the schools when they did not give admission to these vulnerable children. Additionally, the weak implementation of the child labor laws in these neighborhoods lead to the student's economic exploitation and their gradual drop out from schools. These findings indicate that the exclusion from education is maintained not just by the neighborhood conditions but also by the shortcomings in the policy implementation.

Gender discrimination was identified as another major determinant in shaping the educational inequalities in these neighborhoods. The girl's movement was restricted to protect the family's honor. The girls encountered sexual misconduct in the neighborhoods, were sexually harassed by their own family members and were provided less nutritious food as compared to their brothers. These findings resonate with the patriarchal feminist theory which suggests that the unequal power relations between the genders led to strategically governing the girls' freedom of movement, their personal agency and their access to various opportunities (Walby, 1990; Dahal et al., 2023). The findings also resonate with the capability approach by showing that the constraints on the bodily integrity, freedom of movement, play and nutrition limit the girls from developing the meaningful capabilities which are needed to realize the benefits of education and schooling fully (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

The infrastructure component came out as an important neighborhood factor that shapes the educational outcomes of the students. The open sewers, dilapidated buildings, irregular water supply, absence of the recreational infrastructure and flooded streets significantly shapes the children's well-being, school presence, spatial freedom, and access to academic support and learning resources. These findings resonate with the capability approach which suggests that the children's education is not only dependent on the access to schooling but also on the environmental factors which enable the students to engage meaningfully in the learning process (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Walker, 2012). The findings also resonate with the concept of spatial justice which contends that the disproportionate government investments on the physical resources in some neighborhoods lead to educational disparities. It hampers the marginalized students' pathways of development, their overall well-being and access to the various learning opportunities (Soja, 2010).

Collectively the findings demonstrate that the educational disparities in the marginalized urban neighborhoods of Delhi cannot be understood as an isolated educational issue or attributed only to the student's individual abilities. Instead, it is a result of the dynamic interplay between the neighborhood social relations, gendered inequalities, infrastructure disparities, governance failures and conditions facilitated for committing crimes. All of these neighborhood mechanisms together restrict the children's educational development, participation and growth. By examining education through a neighborhood lens the study

contributes to the growing literature which shows that children's academic performance and development are rooted in their broader social structures, spatial conditions and the governance regulations (Goldfeld et al., 2015; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016).

5.1 Limitation

The study focuses on limited urban slums in Delhi, so the findings might not be fully transferable to other cities or slums where the socio-cultural structures and infrastructure conditions differ. Also, since the study has been conducted and the experiences of the respondents have been noted at one point in time, so it does not capture the educational outcomes of the students in the long term.

5.2 Policy implications

Some of the solutions to improve the neighborhood conditions are by having child center services in these neighborhoods, which can protect the children from getting exploited by such gangs, neighborhood shop owners and criminals in their areas. Also, the girls can be protected from entering prostitution for money. They can be given counselling about the ill-effects of this for their whole life. The parents and neighborhood people too should be given counselling by experts to urge them to stop their habit of addiction, as it directly influences their children. They should also be explained how important it is to let their girls get good education and do job and not discriminate them. As this will protect them from a lot of different kinds of exploitation if they are self- dependent and earn money. The parents should be explained to give children a peaceful environment at their homes, without any domestic violence. So that the child can develop their capability of bodily integrity as well, which means to have a safe house where they feel safe and happy, which will help them directly to perform better academically (Nussbaum, 2011). Also, the parents should be counselled for not letting their children dropping out as it continues their vicious cycle of poverty and miserability.

The second being, the infrastructure of these neighborhoods should be improved effectively. The roads should be paved, no garbage dumps should be accumulated, water logging problems during rains should be solved. Also, the sewers should be closed that lead to health hazards in children, and the poor buildings in which these children live should be repaired so that they don't crumble and fall leading to loss of lives. Also, the parks or recreational activities should be developed by the municipal or local government to improve the social, mental and physical health of the children that will lead to the better academic outcomes of the students (Chatterjee & Burns, 2021). Only when the infrastructure and basic services of the area is improved then the spatial injustice in these areas will be lowered or diminished (Soja, 2010). Also, the police, law and order of these neighborhoods should be improved effectively. All these criminal gangs, illegal

selling and buying of drugs and liquor should permanently be shut down. So that the children don't get the easy accessibility of such addictive substances and negative influences and their future is saved. Also, for the protection of girls in these areas, 24*7 patrolling of police is very important. A police outpost should be nearby these areas, so that the safety of girls and children is ensured. Also, the fights done in these neighborhoods will be controlled if there is presence of police in the neighborhood. Rather than stopping the girls from stepping out in the neighborhood, it's important to make the areas safe for them to become successful.

The third being, the community should be taught that if they have strong neighborhood socialization, and if they are united, then they are in a better bargaining position with the government institutions and schools. They should be made to understand that fighting amongst themselves on the basis of castes, religion and food habits is their loss and their children's loss. Rather, they should try to unite and solve the social problems and issues of the locality together and appreciate the strength of unity in diversity. Also, the people in the community should give advice and help other children too, if their children have succeeded, rather than hiding and not sharing their success stories. As it will help other children to have positive role models in their neighborhood, which will influence, motivate them and help them to understand the knowledge to be successful in the outside world thus have a stronger cultural capital.

6. Conclusion

The study shows that neighborhood serves as a central factor in determining the educational development of the students. The weak social cohesion, crime and abuse in the community, gender-based discrimination and infrastructure gaps are all interrelated processes which together constraint the children's learning opportunities, reduce their school participation and thus finally force them to leave schools permanently. Due to all these factors the children are not able to develop their abilities to become successful in their lives and achieve academic and personal success. They are not able to acquire the tacit knowledge, skills and values through their cultural and social capital which could help them become successful in the society. Thus, when the parents, schools, neighborhood, law and order and local government work together and give support to each other rather than exploiting and fighting with each other, only then the students' future educational outcomes can be improved, as it takes a village to raise a child. The only way to protect the educational prospects of the socio-economically marginalized future generations is by providing them with a neighborhood where they can grow mentally, physically, emotionally and socially into capable individuals and can lead a life which they value.

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Article: Indigenous Economies in Transition: Entrepreneurial Challenges in a Diverse Socio-politico Communitarian Naga Society

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Indigenous Economies in Transition: Entrepreneurial Challenges in a Diverse Socio-politico Communitarian Naga Society

--Inatoli Ghushepu & A. Wati Walling

Abstract

This paper investigates the socio-political and cultural factors impacting entrepreneurship in Nagaland, highlighting that entrepreneurial advancement is intricately linked to the region's distinctive history and institutions. Its objective is to explicate the reasons behind the stagnation of entrepreneurial development in Nagaland and to identify the challenges encountered by Naga entrepreneurs within society. The discussion draws upon insights derived from both qualitative and quantitative data gathered across six districts. The results indicate that enduring community values, social responsibilities, and cultural traditions continue to influence entrepreneurial conduct, resulting in issues such as workplace ethics. Christian ethics provide moral guidance for business conduct; however, institutional practices such as church fundraising and tribal affiliations may constrain enterprise expansion. Additional barriers include insurgency, nepotism, inadequate policies, limited financial resources, and dependency syndrome. The study underscores how Nagaland's intricate institutional landscape persistently impedes the growth of entrepreneurial ethos.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Indigenous, Communitarian, Socio-political, Nagaland*

Introduction

The Indigenous economic foundation of the Nagaⁱ community was predominantly based on cultivation. In addition to crop production, they augment their subsistence activities through hunting, fishing, foraging, and engaging in the traditional barter and exchange system on a local scale, infrequently involving non-Nagas (Nienu, 2015, p. 220). The largest area of transformation among Naga society was the cultural aspect of the Nagas, through direct contact with the British administration and Christian missionaries in the hills since the 1870s. The establishment of British administration in the Naga hills in the late 19th century first started the process of urban growth. These early urban centres provided a motley of pull factors, particularly those of market-centre activities. Furthermore, such centres provided a focus for congregating to expedite and satisfy their economic pursuits and needs, replacing direct village-to-village and tribe-to-tribe market activity (I. L. Aier, 2006, p. 55). The simple barter-exchange system was

replaced by a money economy where the circulation of money became the only means of conducting economic transactions, and people began to engage in trade and commerce. Many permanent shops and markets were established, and indigenous finished goods became available in these shops and markets, which improved the economic condition of the people. It may be noted that urban growth in the Naga social experience was not a result of surplus generation from within or industrialisation, but as a case of colonial administrative presence (I. L. Aier, 2006, p. 79). In the post-colonial era, hard currency has completely revolutionised their economic transactions, overriding the traditional exchange system (Nienu, 2015, p. 244).

The Naga agrarian society was supplanted by a capitalist society, resulting in the emergence of new social classes, and Naga society is divided into many social classes on the basis of profession, occupation, and wealth (Nshoga, 2022, p. 291). Wealth used to serve the community, and social status and prestige gained through feasts of merit were common practices in traditional Naga society (Chasie, 2005, p. 259; Wouters, 2015, p. 12). In the recent past, the socio-cultural aspect of giving practised by the wealthy through various ways such as feasts of merit, feeding the community and generously gifting the poor during traditional festivals, as well as other times, contributed to the traditions of charitable giving of the Nagas. With British colonial rule over the Nagas and the advent of American Baptists in Nagaland (Angelova, 2017, pp. 23-24), the religious and cultural practice of headhunting was prohibited, and ceremonies, customs, and feasts associated with headhunting were gradually neglected. With the advent of Christianity among the Nagas, instead of performing feasts of merit like earlier times, big feasts at Christmas were given by an individual to gain social status and prestige in the society (Wouters, 2015, p. 14; Archer, 1947 as cited in Angelova, 2017, p. 32). The distribution of wealth to the community by means of feasts is supplanted by the concentration of individuals' wealth.

Entrepreneurship in the broad sense refers to the undertaking of any self-employed venture involving risk-taking, uncertainty and profit motive (Williams & Gurtoo, 2017, p. 2). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) broadly defines entrepreneurship as any attempt at new business or new venture creation (Karadeniz & Ozdemir, 2017, p. 43). 'Entrepreneurship means the taking over and organisation of some part of the economy, in which people's needs are satisfied through exchange, for the sake of making a profit and at one's own economic risk' (Swedberg, 2000, p. 26).

To understand entrepreneurship, one needs to move away from considering the entrepreneur in isolation and look at the entrepreneurial process. Jack and Anderson (2002) considered entrepreneurship not merely an economic process but one that draws on the social context that shapes entrepreneurial outcomes. Granovetter (1985; 2017) asserted that embeddedness represents the convergence of economic and non-economic aspects of society, encompassing social networks

and their consequences, as well as cultural, political, religious, and broader institutional influences. Furthermore, the social embeddedness of the economy pertains to the integration of economic and non-economic activities, whereby non-economic actions impact costs and the methods utilised in economic endeavours. Socio-cultural environments, encompassing beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, behaviours, and lifestyles, are moulded by cultural, religious, educational, and social influences. These elements impact an individual's attitudes, dispositions, behaviours, decisions, and activities, ultimately shaping their personality. They are acquired, shared among members of a society, and transmitted across generations (Akhter & Sumi, 2014, p. 4). Weber emphasised the substantial impact of society on the development of entrepreneurs. He observed that the socio-cultural environments individuals reside in provide a foundational set of values that influence personal convictions and cognitive processes, thereby affecting their entrepreneurial choices—either promoting or inhibiting them. Weber underscored that cultural beliefs and values are inherently significant, as they shape social institutions such as the economy. He considered these values a crucial source of impetus for social action (Dillon, 2010, pp. 126-127). Granovetter (2017) posited that the economic actions of actors are embedded within tangible and ongoing social systems, and these relational networks serve a central mediating function between individual actions and social institutions and cultures. Bourdieu (1994) asserted that Habitus encapsulates the manner in which group culture and personal history influence both the body and the mind; consequently, it shapes an individual's current social behaviours.

The objective of this article is to explicate the reasons behind the stagnation of entrepreneurial development in Nagaland. Furthermore, it aims to identify the challenges faced by Naga entrepreneurs within Naga society. This article discusses the inferences drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data. For the sample size, based on the total population in the proposed field areas and using Slovin's formula, the total sample size was 400. Primary data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Data were collected from six districts of Nagaland, namely, Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung, Phek, Tuensang, and Zunheboto. Multistage random sampling as well as the snowball sampling method was used in selecting respondents. While multistage random sampling was used both for questionnaires and interviews, the snowball sampling method was used for interviews. The sample frame included entrepreneurs, religious leaders, bureaucrats, policy makers, banks, NGOs, and members of some militant organisations. Secondary data were collected from various sources, such as newspapers, books, and journals.

Singh (1973) argued that modernisation in India led to the adoption of new values and norms, such as individualism, secularism, and rationality, but it has not completely replaced traditional values like collectivism, religiosity, and emotionalism. This process of selective adaptation, incorporating modern values into their traditional cultural framework, was seen in Naga society too. These

socio-cultural factors that impede or benefit entrepreneurial development in Nagaland are discussed below.

Community Solidarity and Workplace Absenteeism

Nagaland, often referred to as the land of festivals, hosts more than two festivals annually. These festivities predominantly emphasise agricultural traditions and include activities such as dancing, singing, drinking, feasting, and merrymaking as their primary attractions (Nshoga, 2022, pp. 155-157). Seventeen tribes of Nagaland observe their respective festivals, which are centred around the agricultural cycle. Many of these celebrations are associated with spring, sowing seeds, the first crop, harvest, physical and spiritual sanctification, the end of the year, and other occasions. All these festivals are celebrated in a communal spirit. In the past, festivities and sedentary lifestyles during the cold winter months balanced out to rejuvenate and prepare for the energy-taxing physical activities in the field during spring and summer monsoon months (Nienu, 2015, p. 132). During the head-hunting days in the traditional Naga society, communitarian ethos was practised within the village and, in most cases, another village was considered an enemy. However, British rule made the Nagas conscious of each other and made them realise that their interest and outlook should go beyond the limits of the village (I. L. Aier, 2006, p. 45). Naga village was built upon loyalty, integrity, honesty, and unrestrained cooperation, and these were the pillars of solidarity, essential characteristics expected of every member of society.

This festive spirit seems to continue prevailing in contemporary Naga society, as evidenced by the relaxed lifestyle adopted by a significant segment of the population. This is exemplified by the responses of entrepreneurs, detailed in Table 1, where 32 percent operated their shops for less than eight hours daily for commercial activities. It is noteworthy that this occurs despite only 80 percent of the respondents relying solely on their enterprises as their primary source of income; furthermore, 92 percent of respondents regarded their enterprises as successful ventures.

Table 1. Responses of the total number of hours spent in a day for the enterprise

No. of hours	Responses (at 100%)
7 hours & below	32
8 to 10 hours	49
11 & 12 hours	19

Source: *Field Survey*

This atmosphere of festivity fostered a complacent attitude among individuals, which over time resulted in a lack of discipline and inconsistency in their daily activities and ultimately affected their entrepreneurial endeavours as well.

The culture of absenteeism continues to be a significant issue for the Naga community, with 64 percent of entrepreneurs recognising it as a primary concern related to work ethic. Odyuo (personal communication, November 16, 2019), who owns a clothing boutique in Dimapurⁱⁱ shared that,

One challenge with employing Nagas is their frequent absenteeism. I have Nagas and non-Nagas in my workforce. While both are dedicated, Nagas often request leave nearly every other day for funerals, weddings, family, or community events. I wish to support Nagas but prefer hiring non-Nagas because their absences disrupt operations.

Another manifestation of absenteeism is the ‘shutter down’ phenomenon—businesses closing during operating hours due to community activities. In light of community sentiment, enterprises were sometimes expected to cease operations during business hours following the death of a community member in the locality, regardless of whether the deceased was personally known. At times, this entailed halting business for half a day; on other occasions, for an entire day. Originally, closures primarily occurred in response to the deaths of prominent community leaders and were enforced at the local level, with the general public typically adhering to these directives. Recently, however, this practice has become more widespread, and the underlying reasons for it have expanded. In some instances, it may be due to ‘shutter down’ initiatives imposed by certain organisations within

the community, involving matters unrelated to the enterprise and entrepreneurs. Some individuals voluntarily suspend their business operations, while others do so out of a sense of duty or in compliance with explicit directives as an act of solidarity. This enforced form of solidarity appears to be impacting the efficient operation of enterprises.

Thus, Absenteeism seemed to be one of the major issues as people are weighed down by too many social obligations, as Naga social structure takes precedence and overrides individual interests conducive to and in favour of the group's solidarity (Nienu, 2015, p. 129). If a befitting punishment restored the broken social system, shame and guilt acted as a strong mechanism of control for individuals to comply, as argued by Elsterⁱⁱⁱ. By placing community solidarity as a paramount interest, an individual is burdened with social duties that one is obligated to participate in and contribute to for one's community.

Zhimomi (personal communication, November 16, 2019), who runs a beauty parlour in Dimapur, states that 'Naga employees lack professionalism and need improvement.' She adds that 'our people should improve their conduct with customers, take responsibility, and stay sincere even without their employer present.' Others support this view, noting that despite a desire to hire Nagas, many opt for non-Nagas because Nagas often cross boundaries, become 'too friendly,' and lack basic professional ethics. About 60 percent of entrepreneurs found engaging with Naga customers challenging, especially regarding credit sales. Their personal ties made denying credit difficult, affecting financial plans since credit recovery is slow.

Donations for community projects by village associations and unions pose another issue. As R. Angami (personal communication, October 19, 2019), a bakery owner in Kohima, explained, 'the sale of lottery tickets, costing around two to three thousand rupees, impacts my business, and it takes significant time to recover the losses in subsequent months.' The different forms of donations by various organisations are further discussed in the following points.

Naga culture emphasises reciprocity and mutual aid, with survival based on self-reliance. Members support and strengthen each other, exemplifying the 'snuggle for survival'^{iv} (Nienu, 2015, p. 110). Bourdieu (1994) characterises habitus as the internalisation of history, which becomes nearly invisible yet actively embodies the past. It constructs a framework through practices within initial constraints, thereby influencing its development. Shared circumstances give rise to a collective habitus that naturally aligns practices without deliberate calculation, norms, direct interaction, or explicit coordination. Consequently, the festival culture of the Nagas and their sense of community have become ingrained aspects of their behaviour, observable in daily life. The persistent festive ambience, community solidarity, and the entrepreneurs' dependence on communal support, together with expectations from both Naga employees and customers, have

fostered a fusion of professional and personal spaces. This amalgamation has impacted entrepreneurial activities within the region.

Religious Values and Normative Giving

The core Naga belief system its cosmology and worldview is linked to cultural, social, economic, philosophical, oral, and psychological aspects. Naga tribal religion greatly influences individual conduct and village behaviour. Christianity introduced an organised religion that fostered greater cohesion among Naga tribes (I. L. Aier, 2006, p. 46; Neinu, 2015, p. 136). Many Naga entrepreneurs believed that Christian ethics and values in church motivated self-improvement and contributed to their entrepreneurial efforts. Swuro (personal communication, December 07, 2019), a leather goods manufacturer in Phek^v shared that the church teachings, such as ‘to uphold honesty in everyday life; have patience in dealing with others; have perseverance in all our undertakings,’ serve to guide him in his daily pursuits, particularly when engaging with diverse individuals in his entrepreneurial endeavours. A. Chakhesang (personal communication, November 15, 2019), a departmental store owner in Dimapur, shared the teachings of the church, such as ‘helping and giving back when business prospers, providing employment to others, and being independent,’ serve as fundamental values guiding him toward becoming an individual who contributes to society through his enterprise. S. Ao (personal communication, January 27, 2021), a sports goods shop owner in Mokokchung^{vi} shared that the church's teachings provide her with support in her entrepreneurial efforts. She stated that lessons such as ‘learning more about humility and the dignity of labour, striving for reward through honesty, dignity, and hard work’ serve as motivations in her business endeavours. L. Sangtam (personal communication, February 02, 2021), a wholesaler in Tuensang^{vii} shared that the church teachings that influenced him included ‘work is worship, and be faithful in giving.’ Visier (personal communication, February 06, 2021), a retailer in Kohima, said, ‘Encouraging to prioritise Jesus in all business efforts and starting each day with a brief prayer were teachings from the church that supported my entrepreneurial journey. Figure 1 shows the responses of the entrepreneurs regarding the Christian values they practise, in order of preference, which they shared contributed to the success of their entrepreneurial venture.

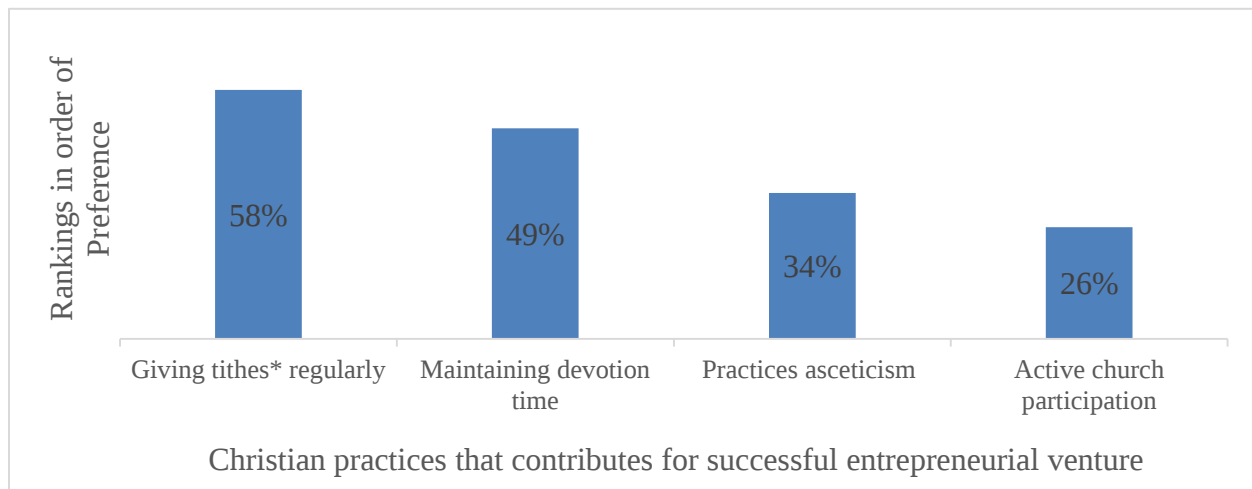


Figure 1. Christian Practices that Foster Entrepreneurial Success

*Note: Tithes—The Lexicon of Evangelical Christianity defines tithe as giving one-tenth of one's income offered to God and to support church operations.

Source: Field Survey

Christians consider the Bible^{viii} as a moral guide and Bible verses such as ‘to live a life that is pleasing to God’ (Colossians 1:10^{ix}; 2nd Corinthians 5:9^x), ‘to put God first’ (Proverbs 3:6^{xi}; Matthew 6:33^{xii}), and ‘to pray first’ (Colossians 4:2^{xiii}; Philippians 4:6^{xiv}), are some of the teachings of the Bible that encourages its believers to practice these ethics in their every walk of life. As illustrated in Figure 1 and echoed by the entrepreneurs mentioned earlier, this aligns with Weber’s (1930, 1946) seminal research, which explored the link between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism in 16th- and 17th-century Europe. Weber argued that there is an ‘elective affinity’ between certain cultural or religious beliefs and the personality traits they promote, which then influence a nation’s character and social institutions. His analysis of the Protestant ethic demonstrated that values are a core driver of social action. Regardless of their specific content, these values motivate not only actions but also rational decisions.

There are instances of issues faced by entrepreneurs with regard to the activities of the church. One such instance, as shared by T. Sumi (personal communication, October 19, 2019), a restaurant owner in Kohima, is that ‘participating in the church as a deaconess used to disturb my business as there are so many activities in the church and as a deaconess, I am expected to participate in almost all these activities. But now, I can concentrate on my business as I’m relieved from church work.’ Furthermore, as shared by respondents, 15 per cent of the entrepreneurs

said that actively participating in the church hampers the growth of their entrepreneurial activities. Another concern shared by respondents was total shop closure on Sundays. O. Lotha (personal communication, February 20, 2021), who runs a hardware and electrical goods shop in Dimapur, shared that, ‘Dimapur being a business hub, total closure of shops on Sundays badly affects businesses and it should be discontinued.’

In contemporary Naga society, churches solicit funds through member donations to support various initiatives, including the construction of church edifices, staff housing, and Sunday school facilities. They also raise funds to commemorate events such as church jubilees and to facilitate outreach endeavours at local, national, and international tiers as part of their evangelisation efforts. Historically, all Naga tribes held a belief in an afterlife wherein the Creator-spirit dwells within the ‘Land of the Dead’, regarded as a higher and virtuous existence devoid of social vices. Admission to this realm was attained through merit-based feasts and rituals conducted throughout an individual's lifetime. Achieving this state relied on consistent effort and honesty, thereby ensuring a righteous life both on Earth and in the afterlife (Neinu, 2015, p. 145). Wouters (2018, 2022) observes that the abolition of Naga feasts of merit by American Baptist missionaries resulted in a cultural transition from a morally driven, redistributive economy to one centred on accumulation. Feasting continues but is now primarily associated with specific occasions such as marriage and Christmas; social feasts have transitioned into religious events, notably Christmas, which serve the entire community. Over time, Christmas celebrations have developed into year-round acts of donation. According to 85 percent of respondents, fundraising activities within the church impeded the growth of their businesses. While 24 percent reported donating up to one hundred thousand rupees in cash in 2019, aside from ten tithes paid to the church, 73 percent chose not to disclose their donation amounts. Only five percent confirmed they did not donate anything that year. Regarding support for these fundraising efforts, 15 percent expressed support, 11 percent opposed, and a significant 74 percent preferred not to disclose their opinions. This reluctance to reveal or discuss their views indicates a hesitation to speak openly about the church and its activities, potentially due to concerns about controversy.

Table 2. Different forms of donations/ fund-raising methods contributed to the church

Contributions made through different methods	Yes Responses (in %)
1. Monetary & in-kind donations	75
2. Setting up & overseeing stalls on sales day	63
3. Donating a month's salary	36
4. Travelling to sell goods from place to place	21
5. Others (one-day wage, mission envelopes, & voluntary works)	8

Source: *Field Survey*

Table 2 displays responses regarding contributions to various donation and fundraising methods initiated by different churches. Although it was separately reported that only 15 percent of respondents supported the churches' fundraising efforts, Table 2 indicates otherwise, with 75 percent participating by donating. Additionally, 67 percent of respondents reported making contributions to more than one type of donation or fundraising event organised by the church. Marroquin (2017) emphasised the influence of religion on economic activities. In Haiti, expenditures on rituals and spiritual practices surpass other household expenses, with tombs—particularly those for peasants—being more expensive than their modest dwellings. He observed that religious institutions exert a considerable impact on economic choices. The data indicate that, although many individuals may not endorse the church's fundraising initiatives, the majority participate positively when such activities are conducted. In 2019, 95 percent of respondents reported engaging favourably in these efforts, regardless of their stance on financial contributions. As Bourdieu (1990, cited in Spigel, 2016, p. 106) explains, many of the field's rules and traditions, known as *doxa*, are so profoundly ingrained in daily life that they become invisible. They are not only unquestioned by those who uphold them but also seem so natural and self-evident

that they remain uncontested. This observation appears to be applicable to Naga entrepreneurs in relation to church fundraising and donations.

Taxation Practices of Naga Political Groups

Another significant factor which affected trade and commerce in Nagaland was the presence and activity of insurgents. The history of the Naga Separatist Movement dates back to late 1929 when the Naga Club submitted a memorandum before the Simon Commission demanding exclusion of Nagas from the proposed constitutional reform in British administration in India (L. S. Aier, 2009, p. 420). Since the 1950s, the broader Naga community has endured considerable suffering, including loss of life, economic devastation, and a persistent absence of daily order, caught between the Indian Army and militants (I. L. Aier, 2006, p. 90). These occurrences signaled threats to their socio-cultural identity, economic stability through taxation and resource depletion, and the erosion of their traditional laws, customs, and traditions. Consequently, a strong call for respecting Naga sovereignty emerged, forming the foundation of their political movements. In contemporary Naga society, as Lotha (2016) observes, ongoing divisions within the Underground factions persist, and members are growing weary of the constant forced taxation, intimidation, extortion, and faction-related violence. A convenience store owner in Kohima, A. Chakhesang (personal communication, October 21, 2019), mentioned, 'they are always asking for money for various reasons. Sometimes for fuel, sometimes for a cup of tea, and so on. A cup of tea costs me ten rupees, but for them, it costs 500 rupees!' K. Awomi (personal communication, June 17, 2023), who owns several enterprises including a well-known branded clothing showroom in Dimapur, shared that,

I pay taxes to more than ten factions, ranging from twenty thousand to one hundred thousand rupees, depending on their size and negotiability. I also make payments during the Christmas and New Year seasons, as well as peak sales times. Some individuals even take goods without paying. Now, my sales team suspects that two or more men entering the showroom could be militants.

Another respondent who owns a bakery in Dimapur expressed her frustration, stating, 'I personally cannot understand the aims and objectives of the Naga Political Groups (NPGs). In fact, they are like parasites in our society, driven by a hunger for power and money. I wish I could sit with all the faction leaders and share my frustrations!' The owner of a motor vehicle accessories enterprise in Dimapur, Ngullie (personal communication, November 13, 2019) observed that local entrepreneurs with limited capital encounter difficulties in fulfilling militants' demands or paying taxes, thereby impeding their growth and potentially resulting in the closure of their businesses. Conversely, local entrepreneurs with financial capacity but lacking connections with influential militants tend to prefer investing outside Nagaland, as dealing with militants is considered a significant challenge. An entrepreneur operating a provision store articulated their

frustration, stating, ‘Our militants could be viewed as a private security team for outsiders who have monopolised our market. They are not concentrated on economic growth; rather, they pursue solely financial gain and power to benefit their own families.’ Shohe (personal communication, January 20, 2021), who runs a bakery along with her other two sisters in Zunheboto^{xv} shared that,

Due to elevated taxation, I am compelled to increase the prices of baked goods and pickles, which has led to a decline in sales and financial losses. Operating the bakery independently does not generate sufficient income for my sisters and me, and closure is not an option as we lack alternative employment opportunities. Despite these difficulties, we remain dedicated to sustaining the business after substantial investments.

Table 3 presents the responses of issues faced by entrepreneurs due to the activities of the militant organisations. Since 54 percent of respondents identified pricing as a major concern, excessive taxation on essential goods and numerous road and highway taxes significantly raise the cost of living in Nagaland. NSCN-IM^{xvi} announced in local dailies that the ‘one year tax holiday’ for Naga entrepreneurs would be extended to two years. However, 65 percent of respondents reported that this was not practically enforced, as they still pay taxes and donations to militant groups regardless of when their enterprises were established.

Table 3. Responses of the issues faced by entrepreneurs due to militant organisations

Issues faced due to the following activities of militant organization	Yes Responses (in %)
Multiple taxes imposition on entrepreneurs	81
Transport tax on goods coming to the State	79
Sunday restrictions on conducting business	79
Transport tax on goods within the State	75
Market syndicate & monopoly by some militants	58

Source: Field Survey

Several NPGs, although maintaining a truce with the Indian government, continue to impose illegal taxes, thereby creating a hostile environment for trade (Chetry, 2024; Mampilly & Thakur, 2025, p. 470). indefinite shutdown of business establishments began in Nagaland on Saturday to protest against extortion by underground groups after a call given by the Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce & Industries (CNCCI) (*Shutdown of Businesses*, 2024). Although 74 percent of respondents indicated their lack of support for taxes and donations imposed by militant groups, 72 percent reported regularly paying their annual

taxes. Some respondents noted that failure to comply could result in threats such as ‘displaying weapons’ or ‘mental harassment through extortion letters and calls.’ Granovetter’s (1985) embeddedness theory elucidates how cultural and social networks influence actors, with their choices constrained by institutions and networks due to potential sanctions or exclusion. The data demonstrate that entrepreneurs generally oppose the activities of militant groups because they damage their businesses; however, many felt compelled to participate due to potential sanctions or repercussions from resisting these demands and militant actions.

Tribal Exclusivism and External Economic Dominance

Another challenge entrepreneurs in the State faced was the display of individualistic behaviour by their peers. A total of 66 per cent of respondents identified this as a major obstacle to collaboration with other entrepreneurs in the state. The transition from Naga agrarian society to a capitalist one led to the rise of a new social class, dividing Naga society into multiple classes based on profession, occupation, and wealth (Nshoga, 2022, p.152). A respondent indicated that the Nagas demonstrate a crab mentality^{xvii}. He further stated that establishing business relationships with other Naga entrepreneurs and engaging in collaborations pose a considerable challenge due to society's highly judgmental and unsupportive mindset.

Elwin (1961) contends that the transition to Christianity, with its emphasis on personal salvation, introduced a novel form of individualism that supplanted the traditional community-centred values. As Chasie (2005) lamentably notes, ‘at the moment everyone talks of Naga but thinks and acts according to their individual tribes,’ illustrating this transformation. Swu (personal communication, February 19, 2021) indicated that tribalism impedes individuals from renting shops in specific regions recognised for their commercial activity. She shared that,

I was searching for a commercial room for rent to open a provision store in the Nagarjan^{xviii} area as it is considered a hotspot for commercial activities. I asked to rent a room in an under-construction building to start a shop. The owner, upon learning I was Sumi, said all rooms were booked. Some months later, a friend's cousin opened a provisional store there. I found out from my friend that they booked the room a couple of weeks before opening. The owner told my friend's cousin that many Sumi people inquired about rent but preferred not to rent to Sumi tenants, leaving the space vacant. My friend is from the Lotha community.

Wouters (2018) observed that, historically, local identities were fragmented and centred around clans, khels, villages, and occasionally village clusters, rather than around the concept of tribe. The colonial administration and ethnological classification formally recognised the Naga tribes for the first time. Furthermore, the establishment of tribal battalions within the Naga movement, factionalism

driven by leadership, and the emergence of formal apex organisations encompassing entire tribes have all contributed to this development. Wouters (2022) posits that contemporary tribalism within Naga society is a relatively recent development, originating from specific historical events. This form of tribalism has supplanted the previously robust community solidarity among the Naga tribes and seems to also impact their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Most Nagas were first-generation entrepreneurs, unlike the non-Naga business community in the state, which generally has roots in long-standing mercantile traditions, some dating back centuries. Trust and cooperation within their networks are key to the growth and success of their enterprises, aligning with Granovetter (1985), who argues that business decisions are influenced by previous interactions with trusted individuals. While non-Naga businesses benefit from extensive social networks and trust, other factors that are common across the state also enable them to operate on a larger scale than Naga entrepreneurs. Historically, non-Naga businessmen control a significant share of large-scale hardware, general merchandise, and grain or produce warehouses. They also dominate wholesale, supply, and distribution channels in commercial hubs like Dimapur to this day. Civil society bodies like Against Corruption and Unabated Taxation (ACAUT)^{xix} and the Naga Council Dimapur (NCD) have consistently highlighted that non-local business networks operate with a degree of impunity by collaborating with or securing protection from certain NPGs, in return for regular payments and 'taxation' shares (Dutta, 2024; SATP, 2014). Although NPGs are frequently subject to criticism, a cadre of influential overground individuals and organisations actively facilitate and benefit from dealings with NPGs, as well as with some prominent non-Naga traders, thereby establishing a syndicate system common within the state (Asumi, 2025). These relationships are primarily transactional rather than ideological, with actors acquiring protection, influence, and underground leverage in exchange for financial support or commercial cooperation, which are subsequently employed to suppress competition or intimidate dissent when deemed necessary. Furthermore, Jamir (personal communication, January 20, 2021) emphasised concerns regarding Benami or proxy operations, wherein non-Naga traders utilise Naga names within the state to conduct business with the intention of evading taxes and accessing benefits designated for Naga entrepreneurs. Although non-Nagas predominantly control the market due to their extensive experience, the sector is additionally regulated by non-Naga inhabitants and external entities operating through NPGs and other overground channels. This arrangement allows them to operate as syndicates, monopolising the marketplace and posing significant barriers for most Naga entrepreneurs to participate in large-scale sectors such as wholesaling, supplying, and distribution. Consequently, many Naga entrepreneurs are primarily engaged in retail businesses.

Capital Deficit and Structural Constraints on Naga Entrepreneurs

In addition to tribalism, another challenge in securing shops for rent in hotspot commercial areas was a shortage of capital in the form of large advances payable to property owners. Over 70 percent of respondents reported that businesses relied on self-saved funds, making it challenging to compete with non-local entrepreneurs, particularly in securing shop rentals. These non-locals were willing to pay high advances, making it difficult to find affordable and good rental spots. More than half of the respondents indicated that they operate their business from an unfavourable location, experiencing a sense of helplessness and persisting despite the associated disadvantages. Furthermore, entrepreneurs encountered considerable difficulties in accessing credit systems, citing the lack of financial support as a significant barrier. This deficiency hinders business expansion, as many respondents stated, 'securing loans from financial institutions is exceedingly difficult.' One respondent noted that 'the procedures for applying to and receiving schemes from funding institutions are excessively rigid,' thereby complicating the loan acquisition process. Longchar, a florist from Kohima, shared her experience, remarking, 'the last time I attempted to secure a loan from banks such as the State Bank of India (SBI), my request was refused, citing the requirement of a government-issued job ID card.' Additionally, numerous entrepreneurs believe that the practice of requiring government employees as guarantors should be discontinued. Jamir, a businessman from Dimapur specialising in musical instruments, sound systems, and electronics, indicated that the primary obstacle faced by local entrepreneurs is a shortage of capital. He recommended that the government develop schemes targeting experienced entrepreneurs with more than five years of operational history, supported by relevant financial documentation, to facilitate loans offered at subsidised interest rates.

A discussion with the SBI branch manager (T. Jamir, personal communication, November 14, 2019) and a SIDBI representative (A. Gangte, personal communication, November 13, 2019) revealed that financial institutions were reluctant to sanction business loans in Nagaland owing to a documented history of low repayment rates.

Table 4. The frequency of savings by entrepreneurs

Savings	Yes (Responses at 100%)
Monthly	40
Annually/ Biannually	44
No saving	16

Source: Field Survey

Table 5. Modes of Saving

Mode of savings	Yes Responses (at 100%)
Saving done in the Bank	58
Saving done at home	24
Re-investment of funds	2
No saving	16

Source: Field Survey

Naga entrepreneurs, as depicted in Tables 4 and 5, predominantly exhibit limited engagement with financial institutions, which could enhance their credibility with banking entities. Regardless of the frequency of their annual savings, a significant portion of entrepreneurs appear to lack financial literacy. Specifically, 24 percent retain cash without utilising banking services or reinvesting, while 16 percent do not engage in saving activities at all. Furthermore, only two percent reinvest their earnings into their enterprises, a practice generally regarded as detrimental within the business community.

In addition to the reasons previously mentioned for entrepreneurs' capital shortages, respondents highlighted that authentic entrepreneurs often receive limited benefits despite numerous schemes and policies. They pointed out that the main problem hindering fund distribution to genuine entrepreneurs is the lack of transparency in the selection process for financial subsidies and schemes, which is often compromised by nepotism and corruption within the state government. As lamented by R. Angami, an entrepreneur from Kohima,

Many genuine entrepreneurs think that without a wealthy background or political ties, it's best to steer clear of seeking funds or schemes, since no deserving candidate has ever received the Prime Minister's Employment Guarantee Program (PMEGP) or won the National Entrepreneurship Awards (NEA). I believe your odds are more like chasing a rainbow to find a pot of gold than actually getting government support.

Kikon (2015) asserts that most large-scale projects rarely provide benefits to impoverished and marginalised populations. Table 6 illustrates entrepreneurs' awareness of various government schemes, whereas Table 7 indicates the schemes they have actively employed. Policy measures are frequently

implemented without a comprehensive understanding of the diverse motivations and roles of entrepreneurs in promoting economic and social development (Calza & Goedhuys, 2017, p. 529). Bartlett (2017) identified corruption as a significant impediment to business growth in Croatia. Bates (as cited in Block & Evans, 2005, p. 509) observed that development projects may adversely affect individuals lacking close connections to the state. Franičević and Bartlett (as cited in Bartlett, 2017, p. 107) noted that entrepreneurship policies often prove ineffective due to their susceptibility to rent-seeking behaviour by privileged entrepreneurs who exert pressure on institutions such as banks and local governments.

Table 6. Responses on awareness of government schemes available to entrepreneurs

Schemes available for Entrepreneurs	Unaware (in %)
North-East Venture Fund (NEVF)	80
Stand-Up India	75
National Entrepreneurship Awards (NEA)	72
Start-Up India	70
Prime Minister's Employment Guarantee Programme (PMEGP)	56

Source: Field Survey

Table 7. Schemes availed by Entrepreneur Respondents

Schemes Availed	Yes (in %)
PMEGP	9
Start-Up India	3
Stand-Up India	2
Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)	2
Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)	1
NEVF	1

Source: Field Survey

An inspector from the Department of Industries and Commerce in Dimapur explained that awareness campaigns are conducted using funds provided by higher authorities, typically on an annual basis. However, he emphasised that participation remains low and public trust in government and its policies is declining due to pervasive corruption. As evidenced by the experiences of many entrepreneurs and previously discussed, numerous government policies and

incentives designed to support genuine entrepreneurs are frequently compromised by corrupt practices such as favouritism and nepotism by those in authority. This observation aligns with Bourdieu's theory that social capital can be converted into economic capital through social networks, alliances, and connections that enhance overall capital (Dillon, 2010, p. 408). Furthermore, the limited efficacy of policies may stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of entrepreneurship, particularly in numerous developing nations where, especially within the informal sectors, it functions more as a means of survival rather than a profit-driven endeavour. The study additionally revealed that 88 percent of respondents engaged in entrepreneurial activities driven by economic necessity.

Developmental Counterinsurgency and Dependency Syndrome

India's Counter-Insurgency (COIN) strategy encompasses force-oriented security operations, diplomatic negotiations, and socio-economic development initiatives (Ladwig III, 2009; Lalwani, 2011; Mehta, 2026). Consequently, socio-economic and developmental aid from the central government plays a critical role in these efforts, with substantial financial packages allocated annually to the region. However, these grants and assistance aimed at economic and social progress have frequently been misappropriated, poorly managed, and executed without sufficient oversight. This has led to the normalisation of earning unearned profits, thereby establishing a new livelihood pattern in Nagaland. Such a culture of exploiting public interests through unscrupulous means has fostered a parasitic dependency among the Nagas. Kikon (2005) asserts that electoral alliances and political ideologies are significantly influenced by the persistent necessity for states to rely upon economic packages from the central government. This cycle of dependency tends to reduce even well-meaning Naga regional parties to roles of administrators executing an agenda originating from the national level—which rarely reflects the genuine politics and local concerns of Naga communities. This dependency syndrome appears to be prevalent among entrepreneurs as well. The Inspector of the Department of Industries and Commerce in Dimapur observed, 'there are numerous schemes and policies readily accessible for entrepreneurs, and I am willing to assist anyone sincerely interested in learning about or utilising them.' He further remarked, 'however, individuals often adopt a complacent attitude even in visiting the office for inquiries; instead, they tend to blame the government for not making these schemes available at their doorstep.' Several respondents expressed concerns, including the need for guidance in selecting a business sector, understanding the importance of savings, and obtaining a checklist of required documents for loans. These issues highlight the widespread dependency syndrome among many entrepreneurs within the state. This reliance of the state government on the central government, combined with Naga entrepreneurs' dependence on banks and the state for support in their business endeavours, results in Nagaland functioning as a sponsored society.

Conclusion

This paper unpacked and analysed the varied socio-political and cultural dimensions of Naga society and their influence on the development of entrepreneurship within the State. According to Berger and Luckmann (1991), the reciprocal typification of actions is developed through shared history rather than instantaneity. Institutions are continually shaped by their historical contexts. Transformations such as colonialism, Christianity, state enclosure, border imposition, guerrilla warfare, violence, extractive capitalism, urbanisation, developmentalism, and shifting cultural values—processes that typically unfold over centuries elsewhere—have been condensed into merely a few generations within this region. The rapid and extensive social transformations experienced by the Nagas have led anthropologist David N. Gellner to describe this phenomenon as a ‘compressed modernity’ (Wouters, 2022, p. 41). The Nagas have internalised a communitarian ethos and ancient Naga festivals as intrinsic aspects of their identity. This persistent community solidarity and a ‘snuggle for survival’ have influenced workplace ethic issues among entrepreneurs, such as absenteeism and blurred distinctions between professional and personal boundaries, thereby affecting business operations. While colonialism and Christianity instigated shifts in Naga society and contributed to tribalism, external economic influences from non-Naga traders operating in conjunction with state entities also impacted entrepreneurial activities. Although Christian ethics motivated many entrepreneurs in their business endeavours, certain church activities, such as fundraising, had negative repercussions. Furthermore, insurgency, coupled with nepotism, ineffective government policies, and limited support from financial institutions, contributed to stagnation and hindered the growth of entrepreneurship in Nagaland. Baumol (as cited in Choi & Storr, 2018, p. 107) posits that when institutions prioritise profit-seeking, entrepreneurs tend to engage in productive activities such as innovation and cost reduction. Conversely, if institutions favour rent-seeking, entrepreneurs may partake in unproductive, parasitic behaviours. Dependence on the central government’s Counter-Insurgency strategies, including economic grants and aid, has fostered a dependency syndrome observed within both the state government and numerous entrepreneurs, revealing parasitic tendencies within the populace. Consequently, the indigenous economies within the multifaceted socio-political and cultural milieu of a Naga society face significant barriers to entrepreneurial development.

Declarations

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ⁱ Nagas belong to the cognate constellation race, classified as one of the Mongoloid stock and trans-migrator races in Northeast India, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language (Nshoga, 2022).

ⁱⁱ Dimapur is the largest city considered the commercial hub, located in the southwestern part of Nagaland.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jon Elster argued that norms bind mainly through their effects on emotions- they are sustained by the feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, guilt and shame that a person suffers at the prospect of violating them (Granovetter, 2017).

^{iv} Nowak calls the 'snuggle for survival' a powerful adaptive mechanism. According to him, 'snuggle' is designed to help one another, citing various examples from animal life, such as female lions that within a pride will suckle one another's young (Nienu, 2015).

^v A district in the south-eastern part of Nagaland.

^{vi} A district in the northern part of Nagaland.

^{vii} A district in the eastern part of Nagaland.

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- viii The Bible is the sacred scripture of Christians comprising the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- ix Colossians 1:10. 'So that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.'
- x 2nd Corinthians 5:9. 'So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.'
- xi Proverbs 3:6. 'In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.'
- xii Matthew 6:33. 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'
- xiii Colossians 4:2. 'Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.'
- xiv Philippians 4:6. 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'
- xv A district in the central part of Nagaland.
- xvi NSCN-IM, formed on 31 January 1980, is the largest Naga nationalist and separatist group operating mainly in Northeast India.
- xvii Crab mentality— in psychology, it is a way to illustrate the selfish, harmful, and jealous mindset of some members in a group, who will try to undermine and halt the progress of the other better-performing members in the group.
- xviii Nagarjan; a locality in Dimapur city.
- xix ACAUT is a People's movement started in Nagaland in the year 2013, mandated by the Naga people to tackle the issue of unabated multiple taxations, asserting 'One Government One Tax', and fight the evils of corruption (*What is the Stand*, 2014).

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Article: Rationalising Religion and Reconstructing Society: An Exposition of Ambedkarian Buddhism as a Scientific Religion

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Rationalising Religion and Reconstructing Society: An Exposition of Ambedkarian Buddhism as a Scientific Religion

--Gurram Srinivas and Parvathi K. Iyer

Abstract

Ambedkarian (Navayana) Buddhism represents a blend of social philosophy, scientific thinking, and a practical approach to religion. This revitalized form of Buddhism is central to Ambedkar's political vision and beliefs. Ambedkar argued that social and political ideas cannot effectively address the issues that religion creates in society. He opined that religion exercises a stronger influence on morality than other belief systems and ideologies. In this context, he also believed that religion should serve a social purpose, be aligned with scientific principles and advocate for justice and fairness to maintain its relevance in society. As a result, he redefined the principles of Buddhism to combat the inequality, injustice, and discrimination often linked to religion while ensuring it remained grounded in science and reason. This paper explores Ambedkar's views on religion, its impact on social structures, the importance of scientific understanding in religion, and its potential for liberation. It also examines Ambedkar's social theories and political efforts across three areas: the issue of graded inequality in Indian society, the effectiveness of solutions proposed by scientific socialism and Buddhism and the reconstruction of society through Buddhism as a method of science and reason. Ambedkar's focus on a scientific and rational perspective in religion, alongside his articulation of Buddhism's scientific aspects, reflects his aim to modernize while also reviving the egalitarian values of Indian culture to tackle societal inequalities.

Keywords: science, rationality, religion, Buddhism, Hinduism, caste system.

Introduction

The influence of Buddhism on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is prominently reflected in his significant contributions to Indian society, including the formulation of enduring measures aimed at empowering marginalized and downtrodden communities through the establishment of economic and political rights enshrined in India's constitution. He championed the revival of cultural and social agency through a reinvigorated interpretation of Buddhism, while also emphasizing the importance of science and rationality in the pursuit of a just society. He was a staunch advocate for a modern India grounded in scientific reasoning and a reformed religious framework. Ambedkar's social and political philosophy encompasses two dimensions: a rigorous and objective analysis of India's social, cultural, and political institutions, alongside a reconstruction of Buddhism as a scientific religion, often referred to as Ambedkar Buddhism or Navayana Buddhism.

Rationality and scientific integrity in religion were paramount considerations for Ambedkar as he examined the complexities of India's history, culture, and civilization. In contrast to many scholars of Indian religions, including Buddhism, Ambedkar's alternative interpretation diverged from traditional classifications such as Hinayana and Mahayana. This allowed him to construct a rationalistic framework of Buddhism that has played a crucial role in Indian civilization, yet remains insufficiently acknowledged. Through this innovative approach to reinterpreting Buddhism, he was able to reconstruct not only the original scientific essence of Buddhism but also the historical narratives of culture, polity, and social structures in India across different epochs.

While many leaders of the national movement regarded Hinduism as the singular foundation of Indian civilization, primarily through Indological and traditionalist lenses, Ambedkar articulated a compelling critique of Hindu civilization and religion, which he argued perpetuated inequality within Indian society. He positioned Buddhism as a viable alternative source of Indian civilization. Distinct from other social and political reformers and philosophers of his era, he drew from his insights into Buddhism's historical role in promoting egalitarian values, proposed it as a solution for rationalizing religion and fostering scientific education and economic opportunities for the downtrodden, thereby addressing historical inequalities.

He recognized the imperative for a comprehensive reform of society, encompassing its social, economic, political and cultural institutions, along with their philosophical foundations. During India's struggle for independence, he consistently warned fellow leaders about the improbability of effectively addressing inequalities through social reform alone, advocating instead for constitutional and legal measures. His perspectives diverged significantly from those of other social and political thinkers of his era, who regarded India as unique and unparalleled in the world. In contrast to Ambedkar, many contemporaneous social thinkers and national leaders were uncritical, if not entirely supportive, of the inequalities perpetuated by the caste system and Hindu religion within Indian society. His peers appeared indifferent to the social maladies afflicting Indian society and lacked empathy towards the necessity of transforming the moral and ethical foundations of society to rectify these issues. This indifference was largely attributable to their social positioning and the priorities they had established for themselves, their communities, and, by extension, the nation.

Unlike his contemporaries, Ambedkar critically examined Indian civilization, the caste system, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even socialism through the lens of scientific principles. These themes were significant outliers in his political perspective, which influenced the future of all marginalized classes whose 'cause'

he championed. He engaged critically with each issue, subjecting them to scientific scrutiny before formulating his worldview. Ambedkar assessed existing institutions, social values, and cultural practices of Indian society against the standards of scientific and rational scrutiny that modern societies were expected to uphold. A critical evaluation of India's past illuminated for him the potential of historically marginalized ideologies and worldviews, particularly the religion of Gautama Buddha, in constructing a better society. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that Ambedkar's scientific analysis of India's history, civilization, social structure, and institutions, as shaped over millennia, also underpins his vision for India's future, extensively documented in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches (hereafter referred to as BAWS).

Ambedkar undertook this endeavour independently, analyzing the sociocultural, political, and economic inequalities entrenched in caste, religion, and gender structures. To this end, he invested significantly in empowering the marginalized and downtrodden by advocating for equal economic and political rights within India's constitution and promoting such empowerment through the cultural and social agency of scientific Buddhism and modern education. Numerous instances in his writings and speeches illustrate his extensive invocation of definitions, elaborations, and examples from global literature on sociology, philosophy, economics, and political theory concerning religion, science, and rationality in relation to equality and justice. Many Western scholars he referenced were of considerable repute, unambiguously illustrious, and recognized authorities in social philosophy and/or religious studies. Similarly, numerous scholars interested in Indian society, who have scrutinized Ambedkar's writings, have affirmed that he is a singular figure among Indian social reformers and political leaders, having rigorously researched all issues he addressed.

Ambedkar's scientific approach to religion is evident in his examination of various aspects of Indian society, and none of his arguments have ever been successfully refuted for lack of scientific rigor. His analytical, philosophical, and political articulations reflect this scientific approach to religion, as affirmed by multiple testimonials, analyses, and appraisals over time. It is crucial to revisit his ideas within their original context and intent to comprehend their significance at the time and to evaluate their relevance in contemporary society.

In the following sections, we will try to examine his views on some of the important issues and themes he dealt with at length. We have endeavored to accomplish this by going through each theme according to the significance Ambedkar attached to them. He extensively emphasized on rationality and the scientific basis for values in social institutions, specifically religion. The following sections of the paper briefly explicate his views on religion, science, and rationality in Indian society under broad themes of inequality and religion in India, and an analysis of scientific socialism and Buddhism and Buddhism as a scientific religion, with a focus on his historical inquiry into religion and its

impact on various social, economic, and political institutions and the uniqueness of Buddhism as a religion that embodied science and rationality.

Society and Religion: The Problem of Graded Inequality in India

Ambedkar resolutely believed that the caste system is the root cause of social, economic and political inequality in Indian society.¹ In his writings and public speeches, he emphasized that a strong connection existed between religion and social inequality. According to him, the religion-induced inequalities functioning through history, culture, and traditions got instituted in caste, ethnic and gender structures in Indian society.² He arrived at such an understanding through a comprehensive analysis of Indian civilization, and the contribution of various constituent philosophies and religions in the evolution of Indian society, specifically Hinduism and Buddhism. His analysis consistently led him to believe that, unlike Buddhism, the Hindu religion had a major role in creating and maintaining social inequality in Indian society. Further, a comparison of both the philosophy and history of Hinduism and Buddhism informed him about the potential of Buddhism in offering pragmatic solutions to inequality in Indian society.

Ambedkar dwelt at length on religion and science (lack thereof) in ancient India. During British colonial rule, the Western world came to believe that India never had scientific advancements throughout its history. Instead, India was considered having had excelled in Eastern mysticism.³ Such an assessment was countered by some Indian scholars to claim that ancient Indians have pursued and excelled in all branches of modern science. Applying a universal standard of measuring scientific progress, Ambedkar also firmly believed that the claims regarding the scientific advances made in India during ancient times are lacking in evidence. In 'Triumph of Hinduism,' Ambedkar (BAWS, vol.3, p. 323) raises specific and relevant questions regarding the claims by some Hindu scholars⁴ over the scientific achievements of the ancient Indians. In his analysis, even if the great achievements of ancient Indians were true, they hold no value as further pursuance stopped when Hinduism faced a challenge from Buddhism. He observed that the ancient Indian philosophers, more specifically the Brahmins, had given priority to their group interests over science and scientific approach, abandoning the project of science⁵. The Brahmins were inventing justifications for their privilege and superiority in society by authoring Smritis when the growth of

¹ Rajasekhariah and Hemalata (1991, p. 374) note that "(H)is philosophy was guided by a kind of social dynamism. It was one of solving the problems of the social and political ills of mankind."

² Valerian Rodrigues (2011, p. 58) contextualised Ambedkar's approach as 'interrogating the cultural sphere'.

³ According to Heinrich mer (1952, p. 340) "the earliest Aryan priestly wisdom ... (could be) ... described as a kind of intuitive and speculative natural science".

⁴ He specifically mentioned Binoy Kumar Sarkar's 'Positive Background of Indian Sociology' (1937) and Brajendrananth Seal's 'The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus' (1915).

⁵ He claims, "Instead of writing books on Science, the Brahmins undertook to write Smritis" (BAWS, Vol. 3, p. 323).

Buddhism challenged their self-proclaimed superiority. He questioned why they had not made any progress in the positive sciences they claimed to have discovered, and the non-progress in those sciences was deplorable if their claims were true. According to him, the Brahmins, being the only educated class, had prioritised their claim to supremacy and class interests while abandoning the primary pursuits of an intellectual class to further scientific knowledge (BAWS, vol.3, p. 323).

Ambedkar noted that the morals of Hindus are based on Smritis and other religious texts as prescribed for them by the Hindu religion. Ambedkar opined that *Manusmriti*, the law book of Manu for Hindus prescribed both ‘Varnashrama dharmas’ as well as ‘Sadharana dharmas’ mainly as a code of duties and functions as ‘Law, Ethics and Religion,’ altogether (BAWS, vol.3, p. 334). He drew his argument about the relationship between law and religion as from the explanation by Henry Sumner Maine (in *Ancient Law*, 1861) who claimed that in ancient times religion was influencing all aspects of human life through different social institutions. Further, he drew on L.P. Jacks’ (1920-21) analysis that illustrated how religion, ethics, and morals are interrelated. He reasoned that the differentiation between religion and ethics is a modern-era phenomenon. Religion and ethics are bound together and morality and ethics are ‘essentially practical.’ He elaborates, “[...] The problem of [e]thics is not merely getting the [g]ood understood but *realised*, not merely getting the [r]ight placed on a scientific basis but *done*. Morality is a mere matter of defining what is good and what is right” (BAWS, vol.3, p. 333).

Ambedkar contended that ‘Hindu civilization’ had produced greater inequalities than other civilizations through its prioritization of religion over science, Arts and crafts. While citing Prof. Har Dayal (1912, p. 45), he summarized that Indian civilization focused its energies on religion and ethics instead of evolving ‘technical equipment’ to cope with the vagaries of nature and illnesses of mind and body. Religion and ethics, he noted, are most important as they installed ‘thought and action’ and shaped the outlook towards one’s own life and attitude towards fellow humans. He further observed, “[t]hey prescribe principles which govern conduct, mould character and implant in man that mysterious thing called conscience which acts as his sentinel and prevents him from going wrong” (BAWS, vol. 5, p. 137-138).

Ambedkar put forward his thesis about the origin of untouchability as per the scientific method and principles that historians are expected to observe. K.N. Kadam (1997) noted that Ambedkar followed four principles in his historical analyses of the caste system viz., all literature to be examined and tested accepted rules of evidence, to examine all evidence, separating the true from false and use of imagination and intuition to bridge gaps (p. 11-12). Anirudh Deshpande (2016) made a similar observation regarding Ambedkar’s “[...] Profound engagement with the universal and scientific values of the Enlightenment, with a mix of

dialectics, logic and reason at their centre.”⁶ In the true spirit of scientific inquiry, if one encounters gaps in evidence that are necessary to explain the historical phenomenon, he asserted it is better to go with a working hypothesis where direct evidence is lacking.⁷ He argued that in such cases it is imperative to use one’s imagination and intuition to link facts that are not yet known. About his conclusions, he stated that he is not claiming ‘finality’ for his thesis and the readers can draw their conclusion. He implored the readers (and critics) to grant him “[...] A fair and unbiased appraisal” (BAWS, vol. 7, p. 245).

Reflecting on how Ambedkar employed the method of historiography in his assessment of the caste system as early as 1948 much before the discipline of history in India could adapt to this method, Anirudh Deshpande (2016) noted that Ambedkar “Conceived history as a synthesis of art, science, and storytelling underscored by the historian’s fertile and creative imagination.” Ambedkar was exceptional in analysing science and religion, even in comparison with many scholars of theology, science, and social theory. The same is evident in his critical engagement with varied explanations of the origin and contemporary empirical reality of the caste system.⁸ Ambedkar vehemently refuted all claims regarding the caste system having had a scientific basis of any sort⁹. In ‘Castes in India’ (BAWS, vol. 1), Ambedkar countered the assumptions that either Manu or the Brahmins as a class were the creators of the caste system. In his reasoning, with all the assumed power and influence neither a single group (here Brahmins as a caste/class) nor an individual (Manu) can create the most complex caste system. Further, he negated the orthodox Hindus’ belief in the assumed scientific basis of the caste system; that the Shastras created it, and therefore it cannot be bad. He stated,

I have urged so much on the adverse side of this attitude, not because the religious sanctity is grounded on [a] scientific basis, nor to help those reformers who are preaching against it. Preaching did not make the caste system [nor] will it unmake it. My aim is to show the falsity of the attitude that has exalted religious sanction to the position of a scientific explanation. (BAWS, vol. 1, p. 16-17) .

⁶ Anirudh Deshpande (2016) considered Ambedkar “[...] An “anti-myth” historian par excellence much before history moved in the direction of becoming a critical discipline in select Indian universities post 1947.” See <https://www.forwardpress.in/2016/04/dr-ambedkar-the-unsentimental-historian/>

⁷ Anirudh Deshpande (2016) credited Ambedkar as ‘unsentimental historian’ for this argument and further opined, “Ambedkar is usually not recognized as a historian despite the deep historicity of his overall work on the Indian caste system.”

⁸ Ambedkar observed that caste system “[...] Is something special in the Hindu social organization and marks off the Hindus from other peoples” (BAWS, vol. 3, p. 141).

⁹ Meera Nanda furthers this view, she argued, “In Ambedkar one can find a genuine beginning of the philosophical discourse of modernity in India. In Ambedkar one can find an uncompromising critique of the hierarchical worldview of upper caste Hinduism, without any romance about its tolerance, pluralism and its ‘scientificity’, etc. (romance that even liberals like Nehru were not free from)” (Nanda, 2002: 355).

In 'Annihilation of Caste' (BAWS, vol.1, p. 49-50) Ambedkar explained the social basis of the origin of caste. He asserted that the caste system is not a demarcation of races, but a division of people belonging to the same race. After scrutinizing the claims of 'heredity and eugenics in defence of the caste system' he argued that castes and sub-castes are not eugenic in origin and the caste system is not aimed at preserving the purity of castes. Referring to restrictions on intermarriage and interdining between castes and sub-castes, he contended, interdining cannot infect blood and contribute to either the preservation or degradation of race. These restrictions are not 'to maintain the purity of race or blood.' Further, he noted that 'caste has no scientific origin' and ascribing a eugenic basis to caste is 'grossly unscientific'. He noted, "Even today eugenics cannot become a practical possibility unless we have definite knowledge regarding the laws of heredity" (BAWS, vol.1, p. 49). He declared that the caste system is not based on modern eugenic principles, but on the arrogance and selfishness of a section of Hindus with social authority (BAWS, vol.1, p. 50). Further, he rejected the four-fold varna system¹⁰, the division of labour in the caste system, and the utility value of caste occupations. In his elaborate critique of Manu and his code of conduct, he rejected the tenability of caste hierarchy¹¹. Choosing to focus on the constructive side, as an alternative to caste inequality, he wished for an ideal society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity¹². Ambedkar maintained that the equality principle must be applied to ensure the fair treatment of all individuals. The factors that make people unequal are both within and beyond individuals' efforts and capabilities, hence, at the societal level, equality should be the governing principle. He derided caste inequality and questioned the objection to equality due to the religious sanctity of the caste system. While analyzing the crucial role religion plays not only in shaping society, but deciding the fates of individuals, Ambedkar argued,

... [I]t is an error to look upon religion as a matter which is individual, private and personal... religion becomes a source of positive mischief if not [a] danger when it remains individual, private and personal. Equally mistaken is the view that religion is the flowering of [a] special religious instinct inherent in the nature of the individual. The correct view is that religion like language is social for the reason that either is essential for social life and the individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of the society. (BAWS, Vol. 5, p. 409).

Further, he reaffirmed that the essence of religion is anything but the "preservation of life" (BAWS, Vol. 5, p. 408). Tracing the origin of religion in savage societies and analysing its evolution in modern societies, he rejected the

¹⁰ He laid out his argument in detail in this regard, see BAWS, vol.1: 59-60.

¹¹ Rajasekhariah and Hemalata (1991: 361) summed up this as, "Dr. Ambedkar denounces and rejects the Chaturvarna system of social organisation of the Hindus by Manu as totally irrational, un-scientific and inhuman."

¹² He declared that his objective is "Hindu society must be reorganized on a religious basis which would recognise the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" (BAWS, vol.1: 86).

basis of religion in such notions as magic, tabu, totem as well as God.¹³ He saw religion's primary goal as enabling and empowering individuals rather than assigning inescapable fates based on their birth in a specific family or social group.¹⁴ Notwithstanding his emphasis on the importance of religion for society, either in the context of the reformation of the Hindu religion, where he explained the necessity of religion (BAWS, Vol. 1, p. 76), or about the creed of the Buddha, where he pointed out the functions of religion (BAWS, Vol. 3, p. 442), he also cautioned about the limitations it encountered in ensuring justice between different communities, classes and nationalities (BAWS, Vol. 5, p. 398).

It has been well established in many treatises produced thus far on Ambedkar that he undertook a systematic study of various social, economic, and political institutions (such as caste, religion, economy, and polity) and ideologies (varnashrama dharma, karma, etc.) and philosophies (concerning both religion and worldview) that had created greater inequalities in society, and found them problematic for the future of post-independent India, the flourishing of parliamentary democracy, and the empowerment of the "depressed classes". Such a thorough study of a society and its culture was rarely seen, even in Western countries that had a long history of the development of science and rationality. Ambedkar had extensively written and spoken about the caste system trying to understand its philosophical basis, the sociocultural context of its emergence, the modes and methods of its spread and its impact on various castes. It is evident now that during the colonial period, modern investigations into the caste system took many forms such as census, ethnologic and ethnographic accounts, and Indological explanations that provided diverse yet uncritical discourses (descriptions devoid of explanations according to Ambedkar) about the rationale and utility of India's unique stratification system¹⁵. Ambedkar rejected various caste 'origin' theories put forth by ethnologists and proposes his theory of caste, a process of 'imitation and excommunication' that began with Brahmins closing their class rank to others and Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras imitating the Brahmins in closing their class boundaries to others (BAWS, vol. 1:22). Unlike many of his contemporaries who either uncritically reproduced the prevailing, dominant discourses on the divine, utility, or functional value of the caste system

¹³ In consonance with many social science theories of religion that traced the history of evolution of religion in primitive societies to the modern times, Ambedkar argued, "That today God has taken the place of magic, does not alter the fact that God's place in religion is only as a means for the conservation of life and that the end of religion is the conservation and consecration of social life" (BAWS, Vol. 5, pp. 408-409).

¹⁴ Ambedkar emphatically declared that "religion exists not for the saving of souls but for the preservation of society and the welfare of the individual" (BAWS, Vol. 5, p. 420-421). Elsewhere, he declared, "I have strong religious sentiment according to my own conception of religion, but I have no faith in Hinduism and I hate hypocrisy. I have therefore, decided to renounce Hinduism, but I do not intend to do so immediately as I want to carry my community with me." (BAWS, Vol. 17(1), p. 238)

¹⁵ Weber observed, "All Hindus accept two basic principles: the *samsara* belief in the transmigration of souls and the related *karman* doctrine of compensation. These alone are the truly "dogmatic" doctrines of all Hinduism, and in their very interrelatedness they represent the unique Hindu theodicy of the existing social, that is to say, caste system" (Weber, 1958:118).

or merely reported its functions and dysfunctions without much elaboration, Ambedkar's analysis of the caste system raises pertinent questions about its natural evolution in India and its inherent inevitability of producing an exclusivist and exploitative system of social stratification.

Ideology and Religion: Equality through Socialism or Buddhism?

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar conducted a comparative analysis of the philosophies of scientific socialism and Buddhism, paralleling his evaluations of various religions and their moral and scientific foundations. He posited that, beyond socialism, Buddhism possesses a unique potential to ensure equality alongside liberty and fraternity. During Ambedkar's time, diverse interpretations of socialism existed in various rudimentary forms, permeating both intellectual discourse and the political actions of organizations for over two centuries in the Western world. Ambedkar critically assessed socialism in relation to its necessity and appropriateness for Indian society, with a particular focus on its capacity to provide enduring solutions to the pervasive social and economic inequalities. He juxtaposed socialism with Buddhism to ascertain which ideology offers a value system that guarantees liberty and equality while fostering fraternity within society.

In his work 'Buddha or Karl Marx,' Ambedkar acknowledged that while the concept of socialism predates Karl Marx, the distinctiveness of Marx's socialism is characterized as 'modern socialism or Communism.' He noted that Marx perceived his version of socialism as historically inevitable and inescapable, underpinned by a scientific foundation, in contrast to earlier proponents of similar ideas (BAWS, vol. 3, p. 443). Ambedkar emphasized that, unlike his predecessors, Marx successfully articulated a scientific rationale for socialism. To substantiate this new form of socialism, Friedrich Engels (1970/1880) critiqued utopian socialism, tracing the evolution of historical materialism to illustrate that scientific socialism is an inevitable and logical culmination of rational thought developed over centuries.

Ambedkar interpreted Marx's stance as one of opposition to both capitalism and utopian socialism. Marx asserted that his socialism was scientific rather than utopian, and all his doctrines were designed to validate this assertion. Ambedkar noted:

"By scientific socialism, what Karl Marx meant was that his brand of socialism was inevitable and inescapable, and that society was moving towards it, with nothing capable of halting its progression. It is to substantiate this claim that Marx primarily dedicated his efforts." (BAWS, vol. 3, p. 443).

Furthermore, Ambedkar summarized the foundational principles of Marxian socialism in ten succinct points and compared them to Buddhism to identify both

similarities and differences. His primary conclusion from this comparison is that both ideologies share the common objective of establishing a just social order, differing primarily in their methods of attainment: Marxism advocates for the violent overthrow of ruling classes, whereas Buddhism emphasizes self-realization. In his evaluation of Marx's contributions to socialist doctrine, Ambedkar credited him with proposing a pragmatic version of socialism. However, he ultimately deemed Buddhism as a more suitable model for achieving a just society, given its emphasis on the triad of values: equality, liberty, and fraternity, in contrast to Marxian socialism (communism), which can only guarantee equality (BAWS, vol. 3, p. 462). Ambedkar asserted that all three values were essential, as true equality and liberty could only be assured when fraternity is fostered.

Ambedkar further analyzed the applicability of Karl Marx's theory of modern socialism or communism in the context of India, identifying two critical prerequisites: firstly, the necessity for a unified or cohesive proletariat (BAWS, vol. 1, pp. 46-47), and secondly, the need for adaptation to a new form of 'State Socialism' devoid of dictatorship, functioning effectively within the framework of parliamentary democracy (BAWS, vol. 1, pp. 411-412). Given his reservations regarding the feasibility of socialism overcoming these challenges, coupled with the readily available alternative of Buddhism, Ambedkar advocated for the global dissemination of Buddhism as a superior solution to the economic, social, and political needs of the world. He emphasized that Southeast Asian nations, already steeped in Buddhism, should resist the temptation to abandon their spiritual heritage in favor of Marxism or socialism. Instead, they should assume a leadership role in promoting Buddhism worldwide.

Science and Religion: Rationalising Religion and Reconstructing Society

Rationality and religion are often perceived as being in opposition to one another. Religions assert their legitimacy through reason, rationality, and scientific principles, claiming to represent the ultimate truth. Notably, all religions, particularly Christianity and Buddhism, have sought to establish scientific legitimacy. However, such claims are not without contestation. In contrast to other religious traditions and philosophies that emerged throughout ancient, medieval, or modern periods in India, Buddhism is entitled to a more significant claim to India's civilizational, societal, and cultural heritage, despite its prominence being relatively brief.

Buddhism, which was reinterpreted and revitalized by Ambedkar, was also tasked with the additional responsibility of community-level emancipation rather than individual liberation. Ambedkar engaged with all major world religions, evaluating them against the 'yardstick of modern science' before selecting Buddhism as an alternative to Hinduism (Blackburn, 1993, p. 5). Unlike other religions that emphasize the centrality of God and the soul, Ambedkar interpreted

Buddha as having articulated that "the cleaning of mind is, therefore, the essence of religion" (BAWS, vol. 11, p. 105).

In comparison to Christianity and Islam, which are based on divine revelation, Buddhism is characterized as a religion of discovery (BAWS, vol. 11, p. 75). Ambedkar elucidated that Buddha's teachings represented a discovery resulting from inquiry and investigation into the conditions of human life on earth, as well as an understanding of human instincts and the historical and traditional influences that shape them (BAWS, vol. 11, p. 217-218).

Ambedkar posited that Buddhism transcended mere religious categorization; it embodied a liberation ideology. He articulated that Buddha's path, or dhamma, encompassed two fundamental postulates: 1) the relationships among human beings during their earthly existence, and 2) the alleviation of suffering as the primary purpose of dhamma (BAWS, Vol. 11, p. 121). Ambedkar highlighted Buddha's significance as the founder of a religion that espoused "Ahimsa" and modern social values such as freedom (social, intellectual, economic, and political) and equality (between genders), as well as the notion of "salvation for humanity in life on earth" rather than in an afterlife (BAWS, vol. 17 (2): 105).

His decision to renounce Hinduism stemmed from his conviction that it degraded the lives of the oppressed classes by sanctifying the caste system. He sought to understand the origins of untouchability within Hinduism, as opposed to other religions, and to find a faith that would liberate the vast masses of Dalits from their marginalized status. His engagement with Buddhism, particularly in the context of his quest for a religion that embodies equality, liberty, and fraternity, led him to recognize the emancipatory potential of Buddhism, which he believed was rooted in its scientific foundation.

Ambedkar's approach to religion is encapsulated in his remarks during a parliamentary debate on the states' reorganization bill of 1956, where he stated, "[d]o not pray for my soul. I have no soul. I am a Buddhist. Nobody need[s] take the trouble of praying for my soul. I do not believe in God. I have no soul. I have spared you that trouble" (BAWS, vol. 15, p. 966).

In 1950, while discussing 'Buddha and the Future of His Religion,' Ambedkar expressed his views on the contemporary status of Buddhism, noting that "people have developed an inquiring mind in respect of religion," indicating that individuals are no longer passively inheriting their parents' faith without critical reflection (BAWS, vol. 17(2), p. 108). He viewed Buddhism as a key to empowerment for Dalits and believed in its potential for global emancipation. Despite concerns regarding the 'utility value of religions,' he advocated for the inclusion of all who are inclined towards religion into the fold of Buddhism, given its egalitarian principles. He recognized an opportunity for Buddhism and emphasized the importance of its dissemination by contemporary Buddhists.

Ambedkar believed it was the responsibility of Buddhist nations to promote Buddhism. Despite a lack of support from Buddhist organizations, both within and outside India, he independently introduced Buddhism to 'the depressed classes'. Prior to the significant mass conversion he led, Ambedkar purified Buddhism of the corruptions it had previously endured, offering only a scientific interpretation to his followers. One notable instance of Ambedkar's vision for Buddhism as a scientific religion is reflected in the memorandum of association of the Buddhist Society of India, which he registered in 1955, stating its objective to "establish schools and colleges for religious and scientific subjects" (BAWS, vol. 17 (2), p. 478). He founded the People's Education Society in 1945, which expanded significantly over the years, operating hostels, schools, and colleges.

For Buddhism to remain relevant in the modern world and to facilitate its global spread, Ambedkar identified the need for a Buddhist bible, reorganization of the Bhikkhu Sangha, and the establishment of a World Buddhist Mission (BAWS, Vol. 17(2), p. 105). Through his reinterpretation of Buddhism and successful mass conversion efforts, Ambedkar stands as the only modern practitioner who has revitalized its original essence. Recent analyses and evaluations focusing on reason, religion, and science regard Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism as a manifestation of his scientific approach (Zelliot, 2008; Nanda, 2001; Fuchs, 2004; and Rodrigues, 1993).

Ambedkarian Buddhism: The Plausibility of a Scientific Religion

Religion is often used interchangeably with terms such as "value system" and "way of life," as it embodies the civilization, culture, and morality of a society. It is also perceived as a "philosophy" and an "ideology" that underpins the norms and values individuals adhere to in their daily lives. As advancements in science and technology occur, religious doctrines and practices face challenges, prompting reforms and ongoing pressure to adapt to these developments. (Waggett, P.N. (1904).

Ambedkar posited that, in contrast to the doctrines of other religions, Buddhism, as articulated by Gautam Buddha, is a religion devoid of concepts such as God, soul, rebirth, and salvation, making it more amenable to rationality. He regarded it as the most ideal religion capable of empowering individuals and fostering societal cohesion, particularly due to its emphasis on morality. To eliminate contemporary distortions and ensure its alignment with rigorous scientific scrutiny, he reinterpreted its tenets and reconstructed a scientific foundation that resonated with the scientific temper and democratic ethos, rendering it relevant for modern times. In this regard, Ambedkar reconstructed Buddhism to highlight its egalitarian, scientific, and rationalistic principles. He believed that Buddhism was the only social religion that championed the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which are essential for the justice that modern India requires.

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, along with the form of the religion he advocated, known as Navayana Buddhism, elicited varied reactions across the fields of social sciences and humanities. The discourse often centered on either the overall relevance of religion in contemporary society or the perceived shortcomings of Navayana Buddhism in comparison to traditional forms. However, several critical issues remain unexplored, such as Ambedkar's conceptualization of religion, its social or societal purpose and function, and the alleged relationship between religion, science, and rationality. This section aims to delve into Ambedkar's Buddhism, examining its meaning, context, and outcomes in detail. Among the numerous studies that have elucidated Ambedkar's Buddhism, only a few stand out for their academic rigor, including works by Zelliott (2008), Nanda (2001), Fuchs (2004), and Rodrigues (1993). Additionally, Ambedkar asserted that Buddhism serves as a superior tool for every society compared to other religions and socio-political philosophies that claim or have the potential for social equality and justice. He advocated for all Buddhist nations to promote the spread of Buddhism globally. Ambedkar contended that the primary function of religion is emancipation rather than the provision of salvation, emphasizing that religion serves a this-worldly purpose rather than an otherworldly one. Among various religions, rational and moral principles, and philosophies, he identified only Buddhism, as propounded by Gautama Buddha, as capable of withstanding scientific scrutiny and remaining relevant today as a pathway toward liberty, equality, and fraternity. He firmly believed that Buddhism's emancipatory potential primarily arises from its scientific foundation. Regarding the distinctions between Hinduism and Buddhism, Max Weber (1958) noted that, of all the doctrinal systems originating in India, only the materialists (Sankhya) and Buddhists are particularly heterodox to Hinduism, as they practiced the rejection of the Vedas and Hindu rituals. Furthermore, he observed that Buddhists, akin to the materialists, denied the existence of the soul, stating that Hindu philosophy and what can be classified as "religion" beyond mere ritualism relies on the belief in the soul (Weber, 1958, p. 118).

Sangharakshita is recognized for his insider's perspective on Ambedkarian Buddhism or Navayana Buddhism, having played a significant role in its propagation following Ambedkar's death. In his work (Ambedkar and Buddhism, 1986), Sangharakshita (1986), he elaborated on Ambedkar's unique approach to the relationship between science and religion. He articulated that:

In asserting that religion must align with science, Ambedkar does not imply that the truth of religion can be scientifically demonstrated, nor does he suggest that there is nothing in religion that is not subject to scientific investigation. (In Buddhism, the Dharma is described as atakkavachara or 'beyond reason,' and for Ambedkar, science and reason are synonymous.) What he conveys is that any belief that contradicts scientific principles, in the sense that it can be disproven on scientific grounds, cannot be accepted as religion, even if it is traditionally regarded as such (Sangharakshita, 1986, p. 112).

Conclusion

Nearly three-quarters of a century ago the historic launch of Navayana Buddhism or Ambedkarian Buddhism emphasised on scientific approach and rationality in social, economic, and political institutions in India. At the ideation level, it exemplified the pursuit of a balance between scientific rationality and humanistic religiosity akin to similar pursuits involving both Christianity and science in the West. Cognizant of past and current philosophic and political doctrines, Ambedkar abridged moral and ethical principles with science and rationality by reinvigorating a religion that imbibed all these elements. He subjected religion to scientific scrutiny more than any other observer, researcher, or scholar. His reasoning, rationality, and scientific approach to religion were positively appraised by many scholars.

Ambedkar reconstructed a rational and scientific version of Buddhism, which is devoid of beliefs and practices related to rebirth, salvation, and rituals that had crept into various streams of Buddhism after Buddha's lifetime. Ambedkar's Buddhism is rational and scientific, and in his view, it was the only religion that had the potential to empower human beings at the collective level to overcome societal problems. His announcement of leaving Hinduism in the year 1935 and subsequent references to Buddhism in his writings and speeches showed his inclination towards Buddhism over many years before his official conversion in the year 1956. Thus, Ambedkarian Buddhism signifies both rejection of social inequality and the embracing of social justice, rationality and critical thinking. It is a religion closely linked to social justice and political activism. It was an attempt at creating a more equitable society while also providing a spiritual path to personal transformation and enlightenment. Finally, in the Ambedkarian exposition of Buddhism, Navayana Buddhism emerged as a religion comprising scientificity and rationality that promoted the same without inherent contradictions. Further, it was meant to be an essential and effective tool for the social and political emancipation of the "depressed classes" as well as for the entire modern democratic India.¹⁶

Ambedkar's scientific approach to religion is well demonstrated in all the important analyses he undertook, particularly those concerning Indian society, culture, and social institutions, as well as his vision for modern India. In addition to his involvement in various cultural, social, and political organizations, he established organizations and institutions that trained future generations to continue the process of social, cultural, and political transformation that he had initiated, ranging from The Depressed Classes Association in 1930 to The Buddhist Society of India in 1955. Some of the institutions and organizations he founded continued to strive for his vision, while others failed to grow after his

¹⁶ M.T. Joseph (2013: 51) observed that Ambedkar's Buddhist Dhamma as a social religion did not get wider societal acceptability given Buddhism's 'insignificant presence in modern India'.

passing.¹⁷ Ambedkar used a historical perspective in all readings and assessments of Indian society, particularly in his analysis of Hinduism and Buddhism. He applied a systematic, rational, and scientific approach to all the issues he examined, not only those of Indian society but every institution, value, and practice in the world that claimed a moral, ethical, and scientific basis for its existence. While searching for an alternative religion for India's depressed classes (read Dalits), whom he perceived as being subject to discrimination in Hinduism, he chose Buddhism as an alternative, as he felt that it empowered the individual by imbuing rationality and individual agency, and he advocated it a 'social' as well as a 'scientific' religion.

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¹⁷ Timothy Fitzgerald (1997:233) referred to how a Buddhist organization Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana (TBMSG) is synthesizing the "materialistic and political praxis" of Ambedkar Buddhism with traditional Buddhism in Maharashtra.

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LONELINESS AND LIFE-SATISFACTION AMONG THE RURAL ELDERLY

--R. Maruthakutti and Myclin Mary

ABSTRACT

Loneliness among the elderly has gained focus as a serious social problem and research attention. The greater the loneliness experienced by the elderly the lesser is the life satisfaction. With a view to know the extent of loneliness as well as life satisfaction experienced by the rural elderly, an empirical study was conducted among 280 elderly persons from a village of Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. Life satisfaction is at its lowest among those elderly living alone in this village. And such loneliness is found to be more prevalent among the female elderly than their male counterparts. Household composition and gender have been found to play a role in the outcome of loneliness. Loss of spouse is threshold point in experiencing loneliness or otherwise irrespective of the gender status of respondent. Thus, gender difference is found to affect significantly the varied distribution of the elderly in terms of their marital status and living arrangements and in turn the quantum of their life satisfaction.

Keywords: *Loneliness, Life-satisfaction, Marital Status, Migration of Youth, Gender*

INTRODUCTION

Elderly population is the fastest growing age group in the world. When the demographic balance shifts, this cohort becomes overrepresented. This increase has its own growing demands on the social and health services, and in turn, on governments to finance these services (Eliopoulos, 2010). The growing number of old age homes being established these days is indirect evidence of the demands of expanding elderly.

Changing household composition and altered power structure entail shifting priorities in family budget. Consequently, modified and extended households are essentially anchored in the younger generation. It is an immense challenge for older persons to live in a youth-oriented society warranting modifications in their established lifestyle and in interpersonal relationships and dyadic equations. And the usual, adverse changes that accompany aging in the form of physiological and mental deteriorations (the weakening immune system, memory-loss and decreased cognitive ability) make it tougher for them to cope with this changing ecosystem. Secondly, social and economic depletions follow the course of biological aging, determining the environment of the elderly individual. The elderly are more intensely hit by social isolation, unfavourable financial status and

the loss or death of the significant others like parents, siblings, co-workers and neighbours who have been a source of support in regular life (Harrigan & Farmer, 2000).

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Though studies and research on aging started in the middle of the last century, the publications that have appeared on loneliness till the end of the last millennium have been scanty. There is a spurt in aging studies and publications thereafter. Yet comparative studies on the predicament of the urban and rural elderly have been scarce.

Casey and Yamada (2002) observe the following with regard to the status of the elderly and their loneliness: "Older persons living alone are more likely to get dementia and may need outside assistance in the case of illness or disability and are at greater risk of social isolation in both developing and developed nations". But the question as to how or why the elderly are often left alone is partially answered by Cumming and Henry (1961) as they reflect perfectly the predicament of the elderly who require both social involvement and activity for their well-being, but are denied by the society's mindset against old age. Ageism has been imposed upon by the misconceptions (psychological, biological and social).

As a society enamoured of and prejudiced with the glamour of youth, we all too often hold a blanket view of the elderly as non-productive human beings (Riley et al., 1972). We characterize them, perhaps unintentionally, as potential victims of mental and physical deterioration and, therefore, tend to discount them as obsolete and expendable. Society is replete with myths biological, psychological and social about old age and the elderly.

Loneliness is an enduring condition of emotional state that becomes hazardous when a person feels estranged from others; or misunderstood and rejected by others; and/or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activity, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy (Rook 1984). Given the growing understanding about the impact of loneliness and social isolation on the elderly individuals, the policy-makers (both national and regional) have turned their attention to the loneliness of the elderly.

According to 2001 census, 33.01 percent of the elderly India live without their spouses. Widowers among elder men form 14.9 per cent, while 50.3 per cent of the elderly women are widows. In India, most of the elderly women are widows and are the most vulnerable group among women. The percentage of widows is disproportionately higher than that of widowers due to the cultural practice of men marrying younger women (Jayashree, 2020). The 75th round report of the National Sample Survey of 2020 reflects the changing social dynamics the

gradual decline of the joint family system over the decades and the resultant increase in the elderly living in isolation.

Singh A and Nishi Mishra (2009) conducted a study about the loneliness, depression and sociability in old age. Aging process is a serious stage in the life and it continues throughout the life cycle. It represents the ending period of everyone's lifespan in the world. This research examines the relationships among loneliness, depression and sociability in elderly persons, and to identify the gender differences among elderly persons. The findings of the study indicate that the level of depression increases when the loneliness also increases among both men and women. While both men and women tend to experience depression associated with loneliness there is a significant difference at respective levels. This might be attributed to the difference in the nature of work. All men had been working in formal sector while women respondents were housewives and were spending their lives at home and finding pleasure by engaging in daily chores in caring all household members.

Tattwamasi Paltasingh and Renu Tyagi (2015) emphasize that greater awareness is required among the elderly women, their families and the public at large about good health which is determined by social and emotional well-being of the person. Women need to be sensitized about their rights. The voice of the older women needs to be incorporated in policy formulation, planning and implementation. Happy ageing depends on a person's ability to maintain meaning in life, despite physical decline, ageism, etc. In order to empower older women and change their stereotyped perceptions, governments, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs, including the mass media, should initiate collaborative efforts. Older women need not be viewed as victims of the existing patriarchal structures accepting this assumption. Their positive economic and social contributions to their families and to the society throughout their lives should be acknowledged. Elderly women are tremendous source of resources through many productive activities.

A study by Sara J, Czaja, Jerald H. Moxley and Wendy A. Rogers (2021) concluded that social isolation and loneliness are serious public health issues given the connection between the negative physical, mental and cognitive health outcomes and increased risk of mortality. The findings are based on the analysis of the size of the social network and the social support or lack of it as they relate to indices of health and wellbeing of older adults. Loneliness results in declining health status. The findings suggest that isolation and loneliness are related but distinct constructs. Social isolation was predicted by social network size. Social network size and social isolation were also related to social support which in turn was related to loneliness.

Heidinger T. and Lukas Richter (2020) studied about the loneliness of elderly during Covid-19 period, comparing the status and quality of loneliness before and

during the pandemic. And the researchers conclude that loneliness has increased among elderly respondents who were living with at least one person, and not living alone. Whether this is true of those who have negative ties in their network is not stated clearly.

Berg Wager M and John E. Morley's (2020) findings reveal that about five percent of the elderly are always feeling lonely and have physical and mental health problems. The long term effects of loneliness and social isolation can be more devastating including increased blood pressure, depression, overweight, smoking, alcohol, drug use, decreased physical activities and sleeping time. Few elderly affected heart problem, stroke and some other health issues. The remaining 95 percent do not feel being alone in view of making new friends and continued meeting with them. Circle of friends is an important factor in reducing loneliness. Finally, the researchers suggest that there is a need to train medical students and residents and other professionals in recognizing loneliness, and health professionals need to become more aware of the importance of loneliness in an older person.

Loneliness has been found to be a growing phenomenon, particularly during the Corona days. It has profound bearing on the health of an aged person. Although loneliness is not a problem exclusive for the elderly, it has been an undeniable fact that aging and loneliness invariably go together (Donaldson & Watson 1996). That loneliness can affect both the mental and physical health of an elderly and that it does lead to a variety of problems for the aged like the manifestation of symptoms of depression (Tiikkainen, & Heikkinen 2005), and the increasing consumption of alcohol (Acquire, 2002) besides other physical illnesses (Theeke, 2009).

"Life satisfaction" or contentment is considered to be one of the components that reflect the conditions of a good life. Contentment and the prospect of aging well are important for all of us. Contentment is a combination of both the individual's external life circumstances and his or her inner understanding or perception of those circumstances. The premises of contentment in the light of the specific conditions of later-life have been explored by various theoretical approaches. Firstly, it is sometimes considered a component of a broad construct, such as "successful aging". And successful aging is, researches indicate, achieved through constant attention not only to measures external and contextual but also to subjective, individual perceptions of significant areas like personal health and social connectedness. Moreover, the link between perceived personal control and the general sense of contentment represents a field of great interest within gerontology. Social network is an important part of later life. The issue of contentment in old age is closely related to successful aging. Both concepts emerged in the literature of gerontology almost half a century ago, and successful aging is dependent on the elderly individual's ability to counterbalance the

negative consequences of aging (e.g. illness, depression, disability, social withdrawal etc.).

Turlapati S (2011) studied the level of satisfaction among the elderly in urban settings covering respondents in the age group of 66 to 70 years. Majority of the respondents were Hindus and most of the respondents, 44 percent had worked in government organisations. The researcher found out four factors determines life satisfaction of elderly. All the four predictor variables had statistically significant relationships with life satisfaction. Physical and psychological healths were negatively related to life satisfaction. Loneliness was inversely related to life satisfaction, that is lonely elders had lower levels of life satisfaction. Extent of social support was positively related to life satisfaction, that is the elders those who had higher levels of social supports had higher levels of life satisfaction. Spiritual wellbeing was also positively related to life satisfaction that is higher level of spiritual wellbeing had higher level of life satisfaction. Finally, the elderly had perceived higher level of life satisfaction.

Borg C, Hallberg I R and BlomQuist K (2006) studied the life satisfaction among elderly and its relation to living condition, health, self-care capacity, feeling lonely, physical activities and financial resources. The researchers found out that the low level of satisfaction was seen among women as well as those living in special accommodations. Life satisfaction was lower among women in higher age because the elder women have lower education and poorer financial resources. Among the associated factors, their reduced self-care capacity stood out multidimensional depending on social, physical activity, mental and economic sources. The daily activities such as preparing meals, going shopping, walking outside, and handling money were done by women not men. Care of these people to preserve or improve their life satisfaction was considered. This study broadly supports activity theory rather than disengagement theory.

Kumari T. L., Hemalatha and Bhagyalakshmi (2019) analysed the quality of life and life satisfaction of the elderly in Tirupathi. In this study the researchers found out the positive correlation between the quality of life and life satisfaction among elderly. Even though there was positive relation some of the variation observed by the researchers in the study is most of the respondents (60 percent) have good quality of life. In the aging process the quality-of-life decreases, loses autonomy and social participation. In nuclear family the level of life satisfaction was higher than in joint family. Men have the higher life satisfaction than women. The health status, occupation, and financial support are also the important reason for the quality of life and life satisfaction in their old age period.

According to Anis Ahmad (2016), most of the studies highlight that the terms “life satisfaction”, “morale” and “happiness” are often used interchangeably referring to the psychological wellbeing of the individual. Old age is the fading period of the life cycle. The researcher concludes some observations such as

disengagement, harassment in getting pensions or monetary schemes, old age health problems, lack of proper care and cooperation from the family members. The government as well as non-government agencies are also important factors which affect the life satisfaction of aged people in getting their monthly pensions or other schemes provided by the central or state government for the welfare of aged. The informal social support from the family members, whether they live in nuclear or joint families, is always needed for the aged people for their successful ageing. In joint family many demerits are seen but there is one important merit is found that social support to the aged whenever they were sick, weak and disabled. Though it gives emotional support to the old people. In nuclear families in old age, there may not be a person who is capable of providing support in mobility or mobilising resources.

People may live physically isolated without having any negative feelings. Obvious examples are sages and voluntarily withdrawn elders, who prefer living in isolation either in their own homes or in paid ones. In any case, isolation is the result of the lack of known persons around. Loneliness is the feeling experienced by a person that he or she is left alone and neglected.

One may feel lonely even while one is living among others. An elderly man living with his son's family may be lonely because others in the family do not talk to him. The increasing trend of nucleation of the family may lead to growing isolation of the elderly persons and may also make them feel lonely. Loneliness and social isolation have direct effect on older people's health and life span. The elderly who are living alone need more resources to maintain their health and they need long-term care.

Loneliness and social isolation in older people, particularly in rural areas, are serious issues that require attention. Such rural elderly are at greater disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts, where services and institutions are available. Lack of awareness about social welfare services is also a characteristic of rural communities. The rural elderly are mostly illiterate and are not aware of the social welfare services offered by the government or the non-government organizations. An elderly person sitting alone, in the backyard or under a tree and vaguely staring into the street is a common sight in villages. The present paper attempts to shed light on the rural elderly who experience loneliness and the associated factors, and also on their sense or otherwise of having lived a satisfactory life.

AREA AND METHODS

This present study, conducted in a village called Maruthamputhur in the Alangulam Taluk of Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, aimed at assessing a variety of factors determining the living conditions of the elderly: their living arrangement pattern; their socio-economic status on their loneliness; and their

state of mind with regard to contentment in life. An attempt has been made in the process of this study to assess if gender is an important variable in their predicament.

Loneliness in the present study refers to the feeling of not being in tune with the people around, lacking companionship, not being part of a group and feeling left out. For measuring loneliness, Version 3 of the Loneliness Scale propounded by Russell (1996) of University of California, Los Angeles (the UCLA Scale) has been used.

“Life Satisfaction” operationally refers to the overall satisfaction experienced by the elderly people in their life is the sense of satisfaction that they have lived out a meaningful, active, and gratifying life with interesting experiences and achievements and that they are currently well positioned. For measuring this sense of contentedness, the Life Satisfaction Index for the Third Age (short form LSITA) as provided by Barrett & Murk (2006) is used.

Agriculture, by land-owners and by farm-labourers, and beedi-rolling are the primary occupations for the people of Maruthamputhur (Alangulam Taluk of Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu). Many families keep cattle, and sell milk in retail within the village as well as extensive to market (Aavin – Tamil Nadu Cooperative Milk Producers Federation Limited) has been a major source of income for the village. Most families live in their own houses. Migration is one of the key factors, where family as whole engaged in petty businesses in other states. They also involved in seasonal agriculture and visiting annually to the village during village festivals having strong faith in little traditions.

The total population of Maruthamputhur is 5,501. The elderly women significantly outnumber the elderly men. Of the 431 elderly persons, 192 are men and 239 are women. The names appearing in the case studies have been changed in order to maintain anonymity.

For the purpose of this study, cases were drawn from the voter list. It was decided to cover two thirds from the sample frame. The researcher interviewed 280 elderly respondents using a semi-structured interview-schedule. The data collection was carried out during the two-month period of November and December of 2018.

RESULTS

The age of the elderly sample ranges from the minimum of 60 years and the maximum of 98 years. The mean age is around 70 years. While the male respondents constitute 48.6%, the female respondents constitute 51.4%. More than half of the respondents are married and most among the rest are widowed. When the marital status of the respondents is analysed in relation to gender, we get a staggering result. It is found that 80.9% of the male respondents are married whereas only 29.9% of the female respondents are currently married. Conversely,

only 19.1% of the male respondents are widowers whereas 70.1% of the female respondents are widows. Thus, it is clear that among these elderly respondents, the widows outnumber the widowers. This is largely attributable to the customary age difference between the spouses at the time of marriage. Traditionally, the groom is older and the bride is younger. As a result, when they become old, normally the husband dies first, and the remaining stay married till their death, whereas the wife loses her husband and becomes spouseless in her last days.

Except for a negligible few (who are Christians), almost all of the respondents are Hindus. The vast majority of the respondents (82.9%) belong to the backward class; 7.1% belong to the most backward class; and 10% belong to the scheduled caste. The classification of communities is based upon Tamil Nadu Government Gazette notification annexure. The younger generation in the study village constituting about 50% of the people, migrated to Mumbai (formerly Bombay) seeking job opportunities. And having settled permanently in Mumbai, they visit the village during the annual leave and/or for a grand celebration of the village temple festivals.

In the village, 80% of the elderly are occupied with beedi-rolling to earn for their own expenses. There are two main companies Kajah Beedi and Seyadu Beedi that employ the elderly. These two companies have fixed the age limit for the pensioners as 50 years and above. The pension amount also varies between the companies and the work experience of the workers. While the Kajah Beedi Company gives Rs.800-1000 to the pensioners, the Seyadu Beedi Company gives Rs.500-745 to the pensioners. And some of the pensioners still engage themselves in rolling beedis for other local companies for an extra income. They earn Rs.50/- per day which meets their daily expenses. Annual worship of clan deities and village festivals are common. The beedi companies extend a loan for their expenses related to these festivities. And the loan is repaid in instalments by the elderly from their pension amount. Thus, the elderly people fend for themselves and fulfil their needs themselves. Majority of them have their own house and some of them are living in rent-free houses owned by their relatives who have emigrated. Only a few are living in rented houses. However, many of them in the village have their own land in small holdings and livestock too.

There are 10 wards and 7 Anganwadi Centres in the study village. The village has one Government Primary School; a Higher Secondary School; a Government Hospital; and a Primary health centre. The village is composed of 75% Hindus and 25% Christians. The village has several temples, with each caste claiming exclusively one for its own. The highest education that the village has seen is a Bachelor of Engineering. The main occupation of the village is beedi-rolling, agriculture (the region produces paddy and banana), rearing livestock and selling milk. Though 80% of the people are into beedi-rolling, selling-milk and milk-related business provides another major source of income for the people. Two

major companies (Arockiya and Aavin) collect the milk from their village at eight o'clock in the morning and evening every day.

More than half of the elderly respondents are illiterate and one-third of them have had primary education. While more than one-third of the respondents have no notable vocation, most of these elderly respondents are still engaged in some work or the other; nearly one-third of the respondents are engaged in beedi-rolling. And some of them are working as coolies. About 17 percent of the respondents have no personal income. Nearly half of the respondents earn only up to Rs.2000/-or less per month, and the maximum income for this elderly sample is Rs.10000/- and the mean is around Rs.1600/-.

More than one-fourth of the respondents are living alone. Nearly 50 per cent of the respondents are living with spouse and about 25 per cent with their married son. Very few are living with their married daughter. Living alone is found to be more prevalent among the female elderly than their male counterparts (77% as against 23%). On the other hand, living with spouse is found to be more prevalent among the male elderly than the female elderly (73% as against 27%). Majority of the elderly have separate space at home or live close by. These men spend most of the time in a common meeting place predominantly temple followed by bus shelter and tea shop. It is noteworthy that the sons, after their marriage, are sent away to live separately in a new house and the elderly parent lives either alone or with the spouse. It is common here to settle the son and daughter-in-law in a separate house as there is lack of adequate space in their parental home.

The widowed respondents experience greater loneliness than the married ones. In cases where the family-size is bigger, the respondents experience less loneliness. Those who have more than four members in the family have the least loneliness score. The highest loneliness score is found, as expected, among the respondents who are living alone. The lowest mean score is found for those living with spouse. Thus, the study reveals that loneliness is suffered less if the respondents' spouses are alive and are living with them. The respondents who have lost the spouse, or who are left to live alone due to other reasons, suffer greater loneliness. After the death of their spouse, the elderly widowers feel lonelier than the elderly widows. The widowers often feel that none can fill the space left vacant by their wives' demise. They had grown so dependent and had relied on the wives for every household chore that they feel helpless and lost when left alone. And they feel ashamed about asking for help from others: for the washing of their clothes; for food; and for administering medicines for their ailments.

There is gender difference in emotional wellbeing too. Compared with women, the elderly men grow more dependent on their household members after their spouses' death. And most of the elderly feel that they have sacrificed their whole life for their children, but their children do not realize their pain and problems

during their old age. The parents who had given up their own wishes for the sake of their children are determined now to live and suffer without bothering their children conveying pains and problems. However, some elderly respondents expressed their feeling that their children, after becoming adults, should willingly take over the responsibilities of their parents, and reduce their burden. The elderly observe that they were brought up by their parents to earn without losing their self-respect in society; whereas now the present generation is too selfish and most of them shy away from family responsibilities.

MARITAL STATUS: LOSS OF SPOUSE

Death of the spouse is a serious challenge for the female elderly irrespective of the fact that they have or do not have children and grandchildren. The children donot respect their mother, cunningly get all the money, property from their parents and neglect them in their old age. The elderly are very sentimental and, as a result, they turn generous and sympathetic while their son or daughter complained about their poverty and helplessness. They are sentimentally so moved by their troubles that they selflessly give away all their savings to their children, only to be thrown into disregard later. And those who have male children find their predicament worse: when the son goes out for work leaving the parents to be cared by his wife, the daughter-in-law is reported to be ignoring them. In some cases, the daughter-in-law does not even provide food in time.

The marital status of the respondents has a significant bearing on their level of 'life satisfaction'.The elderly living with their husbands have greater sense of peace and contentment than the widowed respondents. And the family-size of the respondents has a significant influence on their life satisfaction with a curvilinear association. Life satisfaction is greater for the respondents having up to 4 members in the family followed by a lesser score value for those who more than 4. Those who are living alone have the least life satisfaction score. Those who are living with spouse have the highest mean score in life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is the least for those living alone compared to all the other categories. When life satisfaction is correlated with loneliness, it is found that the two variables are negatively correlated and this correlation is significant. Where the loneliness is high, life satisfaction remains proportionately low.

Gender by itself does not have a direct bearing on loneliness or life satisfaction. Rather it acts through other variables viz. marital status and living arrangement. It is found that most of the male elderly are fortunate to live with the spouse and continue to remain married during a major part of their old age, due to differential mortality and spousal age difference which reduces loneliness and enhances life satisfaction. Elderly men feel lonely after the death of the spouse and they donot want to depend on their children.

ACCESS TO INTIMATE TIES

The personal choices of the elderly are restricted they are not often allowed to watch certain Television programmes or channels. And their special needs are always negated even if conveyed. On the whole, most of the children are found to be ignoring the basic, everyday needs of their elderly parents. In some cases, they have a “cruel mind-set” and aim at grabbing all the money and material things necessary for their own security. As a result, the elderly parents are left empty-handed, to live separately without much resources. Many of these elderly women have already legally transferred their properties in favour of their children. And now they have to work and earn for their own basic needs. They have a long day of work, waking up early morning, finishing cooking, washing and then going for the government project of 100 days of work (MGNREGA) in a year in nearby villages. On their return, they have all the other remaining tasks to be completed. They cannot help but feel badly about their life and wishing early end to their life. Some scholars have characterized loneliness as a silent killer.

LOSS OF STATUS OR RECOGNITION

Loss of status or recognition is an important phenomenon in case of a male elderly's life satisfaction. Unfortunately, most of them feel that they are ignored and uncared for after the death of their wives. And most of them agree that they are respected a little if they get pension or have any earnings. A few male elderly are able to take care of the grand children—dropping them at school and picking them back in the evening and do some errands, like shopping. And they complain that the daughters-in-law do not treat them well, while they treat their own parents well and fulfil all their needs using her husband's income. Some elderly men confide that in the absence of daughter-in-law, the sons take care of them well. This finding is inconsonance with the other findings—e.g. the absence of negative ties as a strong predictor of a sense of wellbeing (Rook, 1984).

MIGRATION

In Maruthamputhur village, out migration is an important factor that determines household composition. Most of them have migrated to Mumbai for their livelihood. Some people went to Mumbai seasonally doing garment business and vessel business during a specific time of the year and returning to their village after that. They have their own house to stay on their return. Some of the villagers stay permanently in Mumbai and visit their village occasionally, perhaps during temple festivals and other life cycle events in the village. Most of them in the village are well off. They stay alone or stay with their daughter-in-law as the son lives away. The elderly feel lonely mainly because their children and grandchildren stay away from them and outside the village. Some have their sons in Mumbai to earn their livelihood. The elderly have no one to take care of them or support them except for themselves. They trust that their children would come

to take care of them if ever they fall sick. But after their marriage, the sons do not send any money for their mothers' needs. Neighbours are supporting them in fulfilling their regular needs by fetching food and medicine. Occasionally, the sons send money to meet the expenses. Otherwise, the elderly are left with their own Beedi pensions to rely on.

Living alone is a common thing in this village mainly due to the migration of children. Predominantly, it is male migration though some females also migrated to Mumbai for employment. The process is chain-migration. If their neighbours and relatives are in Mumbai they helped the other villagers to go to Mumbai and they joined together to work. Some of the family members have set up separate business.

In Maruthamputhur village many of them migrated to Bombay and Chennai or other major destinations seeking livelihood or employment. Invariably, all the family members come to their village once in a year for the village festivals, particularly for the worship of clan deities (*kuladheivam*). At that time, they stay with their elder parents. So, the elderly parents repent having allowed their children to study higher education which resulted in their out migration. Conversely, other elder parents felt they done a great mistake in not letting their children pursue higher education since their children do agricultural work or any other working nearby villages though their children stayed with them. The principle of Relative Deprivation operates. They face many problems due to their loneliness. If they have spouse with them, they spend their time with their spouse but that is also very boring for them, 'how long I see only my spouse'. If they lived with their children, they were very happy and satisfied by spending time and taking care of their grandchildren. If the elderly lost their spouse, then they suffered a lot as they are unable to manage their loneliness. Thus, migration is a source of serious problems to the elderly.

CASE STUDIES

Esakkiammal is an 84-year-old widow who lost her spouse when she was 43 years. She has three sons, and all of them are working in Mumbai. She has her own house and her second son sends four thousand rupees per month while the third one sends a thousand rupees once in two or three months. She receives the money through the post office. The first son comes to the village whenever he gets leave and procures all the things she needs. She wears only white and does not ever wear anything colourful. She has two friends aged 78 years and 80 years. All the three of them are widows and are very thick friends. The 80-year-old friend is very sick and she cannot work. The 78-year-old lives with her children in the village. And her house is in the same street as that of Esakkiammal. All three of them have their own houses and Esakkiammal provides food every day to her ailing friend through the 78 year old woman. Sometimes she has seen the children coming to give food to the sick elderly woman. Three or four times a week other

neighbours, working in the field, give them some vegetables and enable them manage their daily food. Morning and evening, Esakkiammal gives food to her friend who is sick while her other friend serves her, now and then, with coffee or tea. The three pathetic or pitiful women are bonded in every sense and support themselves sharing whatever little they have or can get. For these three elderly women, there is little support from their children. They have developed a unique inclusive pattern of sharing their respective resources which are different.

Chandran is a 74-year-old man with two sons and a daughter. He worked hard and earned for their future while he was in Mumbai. He explains various forms of living arrangement prevailing in their area. In their generation all the men work as long as they can, and they have such self-respect that they expect no support from their children. Only one thing they expect in return and that is love and care from their children and grand-children. But, Chandran observes that this younger generation is 'very bad'; they expect their parents to meet all their needs lifelong; but they will conveniently ignore the parents on important occasions. For example, they do not interact with us, ask our ideas and consent in connection with family ceremonies—in his case, they did not consult him regarding the life-cycle ceremony of his grand-daughter. In this old age also, he bought gold studs and anklets for his grand-daughter and yet his son never thought of buying him a single dress ever as a token of affection. It has been conventional to gift parents with new clothes during family ceremonies. The present-day youngsters are not willing to work hard; they are not even inclined to try to get any job. Just they study some random subject and work without any struggle. They want to get all the things in their life easily. But expect their parents to earn more money and property for them. The old man does not like to waste his time unnecessarily, and hence goes for any work and earns a daily income. He spends one hour with his friends under the tree in public space and shares his daily life events.

Mrs. Sivakami, a 62-year-old widow with a son as her potential support, works in 100 days' farming work project and earns Rs.250/- per day. She says that she didn't know her husband's age when he died. Her son is studied 12th standard and doing masonry work. She used to tell that her son was earning enough money but he did not support her financially. He is married and has two girl children. Till today her son is not supporting her. She told that her son 'doesn't satisfy even her basic needs'. Immediately after the marriage of her son she decided to live separately. She told "I save my earning like a sparrow, *kuruvisekura madiri*" (colloquial utterance in Tamil, highlighting small-savings). She has saved Rs.80,000/- and invested in post office. Instead of being a dependent, she used to spend money for her son and his family. Already she bought a seven-sovereign gold chain, and gave away three sovereigns to help her son in constructing his house. She gifted new dress and silver anklets to his elder daughter, though he never ever asked her what she would have. And he never bought her a sari ever. She is living in the next street, not far away. Furthermore, she admits that if she stayed with him, he would exploit her and would even grab

all her savings. He would deprive her of her savings forcing her to become a dependent. She has learnt from such sufferings of other elderly widows that she has grown wise and cautious. Living alone now, she experiences many problems like going to the hospital alone without anyone to support or accompany. After the demise of her husband, she thought that god had given her a son as a source of support. No use of entertaining such faith. She reminds herself of the Tamil saying which amounts to this: *The mother's heart is crazy with love and the offspring's is a heart of stone*. She heaves a heavy sigh, that she would breathe her last living alone and helpless.

DISCUSSION

On the other hand, most of the female elderly are widowed, and have lost the opportunity to live with an intimate sharing/caring relationship till death. Women elderly who are involved in beedi-rolling as a group with their friends in a certain place share their feelings with those friends and as a result are relatively feeling less lonely. Right from the morning they are involved in beedi-rolling to earn their livelihood even now. It is a stress-buster for the elderly when they are with their peer groups.

Elaborating upon the positive contribution of women and how such contributions go often unacknowledged, Paltasingh and Tyagi (2015) write that their contributions are for the whole family and they play an indispensable role as caregivers and provide main support in managing family responsibilities. They are not merely the recipients of family income or property but contribute to well-being of the family throughout their lives. This findings is in consonance with Elisabeth Schroder Butterfill (2003).

Age difference at the time of marriage the brides being several years younger than the grooms finds most women elderly, widowed and single with advancing age. Gender, thus, becomes a crucial variable that has an effect on marital status/widowhood in later life for women and the quality of life in terms of loneliness and life satisfaction. Health-care statistics reveal that the health services do not reach more than 16 per cent of the elderly widows in India (Rajan & Sreerupa, 2008). Widows are reported to be disproportionately vulnerable to disability, illness and poor health care utilization.

The elderly widows and widowers face certain problems after the marriage of their sons or daughters. The parents feel as if they are depending on their children even for their basic needs. After the marriage of the son, if the daughter-in-law is not taking care of the elderly, then their son is also unwilling to take care of his vulnerable parent. It is evident that the wife has significant influence over her husband. It is then they feel abandoned and lonely as never before they felt in

their life. If their married daughter happens to live near the elderly parent's house, she takes care of them by providing them food and helping them in their daily activities. Though the female children take responsibilities of their parents, the elderly parents feel embarrassed and do not accept it with ease. Receiving care from their daughters would slight them and would make them laughing stock. Most of the elderly work hard till their last breath of life. They earn at least Rs.50 per day and they cook their own food with provisions got through the family card (Public Distribution System). On receiving the old age pension, they buy the things they need regularly and buy medicines for them. Even though they are living with their children after the death of the spouse they feel lonely and empty in their life. Life appears meaningless.

The elderly widows and widowers encounter problems commonly after their son or daughter's marriage. After the death of their spouse and after getting their son or daughter married, they feel as if they have suddenly become dependent on their children even for meeting their basic needs. After marriage of the son, if the daughter-in-law is good-natured and amicable, she takes care of the elderly, otherwise they suffer physically and mentally. Most of the elderly state that their sons, after their marriage, refused to take care of them.

The elderly tend to suffer physically and psychologically during this stage. If they are physically not well they stay inside their house itself. If their children live nearby, then they are taken to the hospital; their clothes are washed and they are given healthy food. In most (90%) of the families, the daughters-in-law do not take care of them. So, they are emotionally affected very much and feel despondent and heart-broken. They think that they have become a burden and their life has no meaning. When one's spouse had gone, it is better not to live any longer. Living without one's spouse is like being in hell. They simply await their death day by day.

In Maruthuputhur, 80% of the people have their own house and some of them are living rent-free in their relatives' houses. So, they don't feel homeless. Only a few are living in rented houses. Most of them have their own land and livestock and movable properties like gold in the form of jewelry providing a sense of security. Some of the elderly had trusted their children and given away their possessions to them. But later they regret doing so. For, their children do not take care of them and they become indifferent once the elderly parents had transferred their property. They feel that if they had not given away their property and jewels, they would have been respected and taken care of by their children. They repent losing their property status. Though there is a provision to retrieve the property according to 'The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior citizens Act, 2007', seldom the elderly resort this step. Thus, some of them have been cautious enough to hold on to their possessions till their last breath and not to give away their property easily (though oblivious of the fact that this may have other

consequences). After losing all, if filial responsibility is ignored, the elderly are bound to suffer all consequences stated above.

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Socio Economic Status in Maruthamputhur (N=280)

S.No	Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Age	60-70 years	170	60.7
		71 -80 years	85	30.3
		Above 80 years	25	8.9
2	Sex	Male	136	48.5
		Female	144	51.4
3	Marital Status	Married	152	54.2
		Widow	114	40.7
		Widower	14	5
4	Education	Illiterate	44	15.7
		Primary level	161	57.5
		Middle School	69	24.6
		High School and above	6	2.14
5	Caste	Nadar	176	62.9
		Konar	49	17.5
		Chettiar	5	1.8
		Thevar	2	0.7
		Asari	13	4.6
		Vannar	4	1.4
		Navithar	5	1.8
		Pallar	28	10.0
6	Occupation	No Occupation	99	35.3
		Agriculture	22	7.9
		Coolie	48	17.1
		Beedi Rolling	91	32.5
		Petty Shop/Business	12	4.2
		Cattle Rearing	6	2.1
		Retired	2	0.7
7	Monthly Income	No Income	47	16.8
		Up to Rs. 1000	65	23.2
		Rs. 1001 to Rs.2000	63	22.5
		Rs. 2001 to Rs. 3000	53	18.9
		Above Rs.3000	52	18.6
8	Family type	Nuclear	262	93.5
		Joint	18	6.4

Table 2: Association between Socio Economic variables and Loneliness

Sl.No	Socio Economic Variables	F Value	Significant Level
1	Age	0.561	0.691
2	Gender	0.591	0.443
3	Marital Status	7.934	0.005*
4	Literacy	3.504	0.062
5	Occupation	0.237	0.627
6	Monthly Income	0.484	0.747
7	Family Size	5.017	0.007*
8	Living Arrangement	3.275	0.022*

Table 3: Association between Socio Economic variables and Life Satisfaction

Sl.No	Socio Economic Variables	F Value	Significant Level
1	Age	0.715	0.583
2	Gender	0.803	0.371
3	Marital Status	5.826	0.016*
4	Literacy	1.031	0.311
5	Occupation	0.029	0.864
6	Monthly Income	1.088	0.363
7	Family Size	3.722	0.025*
8	Living Arrangement	2.601	0.052*

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Article: Mapping the Movements: Identity Negotiation and Mobility among Muslim Classical Dancers

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Mapping the Movements: Identity Negotiation and Mobility Among Muslim Classical Dancers

--Al Ameen J

Abstract

Muslim classical dancers occupy a precarious position within contemporary cultural landscapes. They face systematic marginalization across multiple spheres of belonging simultaneously. This ethnographic study examines how Muslim practitioners of Indian classical dance forms navigate dual rejection: rejection from dominant Hindu classical dance establishments, and rejection from conservative elements within their own religious communities. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's framework of "hated bodies" and affective economies, the research explores how these performers develop sophisticated strategies of embodied resistance when their bodies are marked as inappropriate within spaces that claim inclusivity.

The study focuses on transnational mobility as a key form of resistance. Through ethnographic fieldwork across Kerala and digital engagement with diaspora communities, the research reveals how geographical movement allows practitioners to construct spaces where artistic practice and religious identity coexist more harmoniously. The findings show how performers work to transform affective economies by redirecting flows of hatred toward professional recognition. While mobility introduces its own challenges, many Muslim classical dancers experience greater empowerment in destination contexts than in their places of origin. The research contributes to scholarly discussions on religious minorities in the arts, transnational artistic migration, and the politics of cultural inclusion. These movements create new possibilities for economic survival and cultural belonging, reframing classical dance as a universal practice rather than the exclusive domain of particular religious or caste communities.

Keywords: Classical Dance, Muslims, Transnational Mobility, Hated Bodies, Affective Economies, Resistance

Introduction

The intersection of religious identity and artistic practice in contemporary India creates profound negotiations for performers who embody cultural contradictions within nationalist frameworks. This paper examines how Muslim classical dancers deploy mobility as a strategy of resistance. Their bodies become contested sites of cultural authenticity and religious orthodoxy. The study investigates how Muslim practitioners navigate dual rejection from dominant Hindu classical dance establishments and conservative community elements through strategic transnational movement, creating alternative circuits of cultural practice and professional recognition.

Muslim classical dancers occupy a liminal position at the intersection of multiple exclusion systems. Their bodies are marked as inappropriate for classical dance practice. Their religious authenticity is simultaneously questioned for engaging in forms deemed incompatible with Islamic spiritual values. This double bind creates conditions requiring creative resistance and survival strategies, with transnational mobility emerging as a particularly significant response.

The term "Indian classical dance" refers to performative traditions officially recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi and Ministry of Culture: Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Odissi, Manipuri, and Sattriya. This study adopts the state recognition terminology while remaining critically aware of embedded power dynamics. These dance forms evolved through complex cultural processes over time, with documented textual foundations that remain contested in scholarly discourse.

This research contributes to growing scholarly attention on how performers from marginalized communities negotiate participation in cultural forms associated with dominant religious and caste identities. Mezzadra (2011) positioned the "right to escape" as resistance, framing migration as a rejection of constrained conditions rather than economic opportunism. This concept resonates with Muslim performers caught between conflicting expectations, where geographical movement becomes essential for artistic survival. Florida (2005) examined how creative workers migrate to pursue artistic passions, creating novel cultural nodes outside traditional power structures. Toynbee and Dueck (2011) analyzed how migrant musicians create transnational networks that challenge nationality-based cultural restrictions. O'Shea (2007) documented Indian classical dancers migrating to continue traditions beyond the constraints of national identity. Kiwn and Meinhof (2011) argue that musicians migrate specifically to continue artistic practice when experiencing local restrictions, highlighting mobility as a survival strategy.

The study's significance extends beyond these specific experiences to broader questions about cultural belonging, artistic practice, and resistance within postcolonial contexts characterized by religious nationalism and cultural orthodoxy. By examining how these performers utilize transnational mobility to create alternative artistic spaces, this research illuminates how marginalized practitioners negotiate participation in cultural forms that have become contested sites of authenticity and belonging.

Theoretical Framework: Affective Economies, Hated Bodies, and Transnational Mobilities

Sara Ahmed's (2014) theory of collective affective economies provides the analytical foundation for this study. Her concept of "hated bodies" explains how Muslim classical dancers become systematically marked as inappropriate subjects

within cultural spaces that practice exclusion while claiming inclusivity. Ahmed argues that hate circulates between figures through repetition and reinforcement, creating "sticky" associations between identity markers and negative emotions. Bodies become marked not through individual actions but through association with broader categories constructed as threatening.

The concept of affective economies reveals that emotions operate through social and cultural systems. Hate flows through social structures in ways that often appear reasonable or justified. The hated body becomes internalized not only for the one who hates but also for the one who is hated. This creates additional complexity for those marked as inappropriate, who must navigate both external exclusion and the psychological weight of being positioned as objects of collective hatred.

Ahmed's analysis of the "stranger" is particularly relevant for understanding the figure of the Muslim classical dancer. These figures become sites upon which anxieties about cultural contamination, religious transgression, and national belonging are projected. The mechanism of repetition explains how hate works through accumulated cultural narratives that precede individual encounters. In classical dance contexts, the Muslim body carries the accumulated weight of narratives about religious incompatibility before any individual dancer begins to perform. Emotions are also performative acts that produce the very objects they claim to describe. Discourse about "appropriateness" positions Muslim classical dancers as questionable subjects whose presence requires justification.

Transnational mobility represents a form of resistance against this systematic marking. Muslim classical dancers challenge spatial and social constraints through strategic movement, creating alternative circuits where artistic practice and religious identity can coexist. This mobility functions as everyday negotiation, potentially transforming affective economies by redirecting hatred toward recognition and professional validation. It demonstrates that hatred is contingent rather than inevitable.

The three empirical sections that follow each operationalize a distinct dimension of this framework. The section on marginality traces how affective economies produce and sustain exclusion across family, institutional, and community contexts. The section on transnational mobility examines how strategic movement redirects these affective flows. The section on transforming affective economies documents how recognition and professional validation emerge through the alternative circuits that mobility makes possible.

Methodology

This paper draws on a larger ethnographic study of Muslim classical dancers in Kerala conducted between 2019 and 2024. The theme addressed here,

transnational mobility and identity negotiations, emerged from that broader inquiry.

The study employed a multi-sited ethnographic approach. Fieldwork spanned multiple districts across Kerala, from Thiruvananthapuram in the south to Kasaragod in the north. This geographic scope was necessary to capture how classical dance intersects with Islamic cultural norms across Kerala's diverse social landscapes, and to include experiences from both established urban cultural centres and regional peripheries.

Sixty in-depth interviews were conducted across five participant categories. The primary group consisted of twenty Muslim classical dancers. A second group comprised ten Muslim community members in positions of religious authority, including mosque administrators and religious teachers, whose perspectives provided institutional context for the pressures performers face. Fifteen non-Muslim classical dancers participated for comparative perspective. Fifteen performing artists from other disciplines, including theatre and music, contributed a broader view of minority navigation within Kerala's performance ecology. Ten academicians and cultural officials, including policy advisors and dance scholars, completed the participant pool.

The twenty Muslim classical dancer participants are the analytical focus of this study. Their ages ranged from eighteen to fifty-six years at the time of interview. Fourteen identified as women and six as men. Fourteen were active professional performers or full-time dance teachers at the time of data collection; the remaining six were semi-professional, balancing dance with other employment. Their primary forms were Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi and Kathak. Participants represented diverse Muslim sub-communities within Kerala ten from the broader Sunni Muslim community, seven from the Mappila tradition, two from the Rawther community, and one from the Koya community. Socio-economically, eight came from higher-income households, eleven from middle-income backgrounds, and one from a lower-income family.

Recruitment followed purposive sampling. A performer born to a Muslim family and practicing a classical dance form at an intermediate or advanced level. Snowball referrals through community and institutional networks extended the sample. Interviews lasted between sixty minutes and two hours. Several participants engaged in multiple sessions, particularly those whose experiences involved sensitive negotiations with family members or religious authorities. Interviews were conducted primarily in Malayalam and in person. Online and telephone interviews were used during the COVID-19 pandemic period, and some participants found digital formats more comfortable for discussing sensitive topics, as the physical distance offered privacy not always available face-to-face.

Interviews were complemented by participant observation at seven state-supported dance institutions and ten private institutions, as well as at festivals, competitions, and backstage spaces. The researcher participated directly in classical dance training at one state institution, gaining embodied insight into hierarchies and modes of exclusion. Digital ethnography, including analysis of YouTube performances, Instagram posts, WhatsApp discussions, and online teaching platforms, was used to trace transnational mobility patterns and diaspora networks.

Ethical protocols included ongoing informed consent and full participant confidentiality. No naming system, real or pseudonymous, is used in this paper, to protect participants in tightly knit artistic and religious communities where identification carries really professional and social risk. The term Muslim classical dancers refer to performers born into Muslim families who practise classical dance, regardless of their current level of religious observance. The study is concerned with how Muslim identity as an embodied social marker shapes artistic experience, not with evaluating participants' theological commitments.

The Double Bind of Marginality: Navigating Exclusion from Multiple Fronts

Muslim classical dancers in Kerala face simultaneous marginalization from two directions. The dominant Hindu classical dance establishment questions their authenticity and right to practise forms ideologically associated with Hindu religious traditions. Conservative elements within Muslim communities view classical dance as fundamentally incompatible with Islamic spiritual values. This creates what Sara Ahmed might describe as bodies systematically marked by hatred within spaces that publicly claim inclusivity and secular neutrality.

The intensity of this double bind forces Muslim classical dancers into constant negotiation of their artistic practice, religious identity, and cultural belonging. Communities on both sides frequently view these elements as mutually exclusive. The result is not abstract ideological conflict but concrete, daily pressure that accumulates over years of practice.

Family narratives bring this dynamic into sharp focus. They reveal how economic class, geographical positioning, and social status can override religious orthodoxy in determining family attitudes toward cultural practice. A vivid illustration came from a participant during fieldwork, who recounted a WhatsApp group incident from 2016 that remained etched in her memory. She described a family group created by an uncle to connect paternal relatives, a group of over a hundred members used mainly to share greetings, death announcements, Ramadan updates, and occasional political posts. The group had become quieter over time as individual sub-groups multiplied, but it remained a significant site where family values and collective judgments were publicly performed.

In 2016, one of the participant's paternal aunts uploaded around fifty photographs to this group. They showed her granddaughter, a girl in the sixth or seventh standard, preparing for Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi competitions, along with photographs from her actual performance. The participant recalled her surprise: she had not known that anyone from her paternal family was practicing classical dance. What struck her more was the response from group members. Rather than the silence or censure other family members had faced for similar pursuits, comments poured in with appreciation and love emojis. Shortly after, the aunt posted a video clip of the girl's Kuchipudi performance and received equal warmth. The participant described watching this unfold with a mixture of astonishment and recognition. The girl and her family were settled in the Middle East, and the aunt had been visiting them in Abu Dhabi when the performances took place.

The participant brought this incident to her mother, who had a long memory of these same relatives being critical of the participant and her brother for dancing. The mother's response was direct. She observed that "apart from the changes that happened over the period, there is some kind of class consciousness attached to it, as they are affluent and settled abroad; they are getting such concessions." She also recalled that the young performer's own mother had been a creative child, passionate about cultural activities, but the family had restricted her to studies. The mother suspected that she was making her children do what she herself had been prevented from doing.

The mother then noted something more structural: the girl and her family were comfortable with dance training in the Middle East because they did not have to face immediate family reactions. "As they only come for vacations, the family rarely discusses such things," she said. "If somebody had practiced here, it would have been different." This observation is precise. Geographical distance does not change religious belief but it dissolves the mechanisms of surveillance and sanction that make belief into pressure. The incident also illuminates how class mobility transforms the circulation of judgment into acceptance. It is not that religious values shifted; it is that economic status and physical distance created conditions under which concessions became possible.

This contingency of acceptance has concrete institutional parallels. During fieldwork, many classical dancers described challenges in securing performance spaces. Most classical dance performance based events are conducted at temple festivals rather than state-sponsored events, which limits opportunities to religious contexts that can be uncomfortable or inaccessible for Muslim performers. State appointments are few. Teaching positions in private schools offer minimal wages. Many performers spend years building student networks while competing with numerous graduates from the same institutions. One interviewee captured the situation with clarity: there are simply too many trained practitioners and too few

viable opportunities. The market is oversaturated and Muslim performers enter it without the informal caste and community networks that ease access for others.

The most telling evidence of cumulative pressure is not open conflict but quiet departure. During field inquiries, multiple instances emerged of Muslim performers who had simply left local classical dance circles without explanation. When the researcher asked about a performer from a Muslim family who had previously been active in performances, the interviewee said immediately that "the only information available is that she continues dancing and has no contacts. She is neither in Kerala nor part of the classical dancer's network." A possible reason for the disappearance, the interviewee reflected, was to avoid religious complexities. "She had many challenges when performing in Kerala during her early days." This deliberate disconnection is a survival strategy. It is chosen when the demands of constant identity negotiation become too complex to sustain.

The three dimensions discussed above, the class-contingent dynamics of family acceptance, the material and institutional barriers of the broader cultural field, and the recurring pattern of quiet withdrawal, together constitute a cumulative logic of exclusion. It is this compound pressure that makes transnational mobility not merely a preference but a structural necessity for many Muslim classical dancers.

Transnational Mobility as Strategic Resistance

Facing this double bind, Muslim classical dancers have increasingly turned to transnational mobility as a form of strategic resistance. This mobility operates at multiple levels: physical relocation, short-term professional visits, post-retirement migration, and digital engagement. Each of these levels creates different kinds of alternative space for artistic practice and professional recognition. It is important to acknowledge from the outset, however, that mobility is a partial and uneven form of resistance. It enables individual survival and professional development, but it does not dismantle the structural inequalities that necessitate migration in the first place.

The economic motivations for migration are real and cannot be separated from the cultural pressures that produce them. A Bharatanatyam dancer from Trivandrum, born into a Muslim family, articulated the calculation with precision during fieldwork:

Many classical dancers had gone to foreign countries to generate better income. The opportunities include stages and better socio economic life as the income generation from dance classes is minimal in Kerala due to the excess of dance practitioners whose primary source of income is dance. So, the competition is tough to survive. Many students pass out from various institutes yearly, and most don't have a regular income. However, even though the stage opportunities are few in foreign countries, they still get better incomes if they have many students.

Income generation is the prime motive for them to leave Kerala. Still, they also get recognition irrespective of their social position, years of experience, and celebrity status. There are more than expected performers in Kerala. There is greater competition in the market regarding the quality of their work, fees, and creativity. However, in foreign countries, the demand is higher, and the competition is lower. Many cultural groups in foreign countries conduct big cultural festivals and contests for children, so they look for quality trainers and choreographers who engage many classical dancers in training.

Her analysis makes visible two separate but related logics. One is economic: the diaspora market offers better returns for the same labour. The other is social: recognition abroad comes "irrespective of social position," which, in the Kerala context, means irrespective of caste background or religious identity. For Muslim classical dancers who lack access to the dominant informal networks that circulate performance opportunities, international migration is not simply a financial calculation. It is a departure from a system that limits professional development based on who a performer is rather than what they can do.

The Middle East is the most significant destination for this movement, facilitated by migration networks built through decades of Kerala labour migration to Gulf countries. Two classical dancers from rural Kollam, interviewed together, were actively planning to relocate through marriage networks. Their partners were already working in the Middle East, and they intended to join them. They were candid about their reasoning. One advantage was being with their families. The other was opportunity: "going to these countries gives them more opportunities; at least they can teach some children in their apartments rather than revolving around this competitive market in Kerala." They described the local situation with some exasperation: private dance schools exist within two to three kilometers of each other in their village, most run by graduates of reputed institutions. "Looking at the future, staying here and finding income from dance training is challenging."

The Middle Eastern context offers a particular configuration of advantages for Muslim classical dancers. Predominantly Muslim populations mean that religious identity is not a source of othering in the same way it is in Kerala's classical dance spaces. Simultaneously, large expatriate Indian communities create sustained demand for classical dance education. Parents want their children to maintain connections to homeland traditions. This combination produces a cultural environment where Muslim practitioners can teach and perform without having to justify their religious identity to gatekeepers.

Post-retirement migration adds another dimension to these patterns. Several former state servants, school teachers, and dance institution employees moved to foreign countries through established networks after retirement to offer dance classes. This reveals that transnational mobility is not confined to younger practitioners navigating the early stages of a career. It is a strategy deployed

across life stages, with classical dance offering a form of post-retirement engagement that is more economically viable abroad than in Kerala's saturated market.

Short-term international visits constitute a related but distinct form of mobility. Many performers make visits abroad to perform at stage shows, evaluate competitions, or work as choreographers for community events. These visits create professional recognition and income that are not available within Kerala's constrained performance landscape. They also build the transnational networks that sometimes precede longer-term relocation.

Digital platforms have expanded the scope of transnational mobility considerably, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced a global shift toward virtual programming that "rejuvenated conventional ideas of space and content format, creating virtual stages where traditional hierarchies could be challenged and reimagined." Online teaching platforms, YouTube performances, and Instagram presence allow performers to reach global audiences and build student networks without leaving their location. These digital forms of mobility create hybrid professional lives that combine local residence with transnational engagement.

Digital spaces nonetheless present their own difficulties. Online presence requires navigating both technological barriers and persistent cultural prejudices that follow performers into virtual contexts. The phenomenon of "digital marginality" is real: a dancer who faces questions about her religious identity in a Kerala institution may encounter similar questions from diaspora community members who engage with her online content. The digital realm does not automatically produce the cultural freedom that physical distance can create.

The strategic nature of all these movements reflects sophisticated calculations about opportunity and constraint. As Mezzadra (2011) theorized, the "right to escape" constitutes a form of resistance where migration represents a rejection of constrained conditions rather than mere opportunism. For Muslim performers caught between conflicting exclusions, geographical movement is essential for artistic survival. Yet one academic expert working on classical dance pedagogy offered a pointed critique of survival-focused migration during a telephone interview: "classical dancers going abroad for livelihood and survival do not contribute much to the global attention of these forms, nor do they invite international collaborations." She continued: "placing classical dance forms across nations should not be just a networking pattern that revolves around teaching and training them across countries. It should involve deeper pedagogical and theoretical work that could transform the forms. It is high time to develop an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach to classical dance for international audiences." This critique does not invalidate individual migration as a survival

strategy. It does, however, name the gap between individual mobility and the collective structural transformation that would make migration unnecessary.

Transforming Affective Economies: From Hatred to Recognition

Transnational mobility represents more than individual survival. It constitutes a practical challenge to what Ahmed terms "affective economies," the systems through which emotions like hate, recognition, and belonging circulate and become attached to particular bodies and practices. Through migration, digital engagement, and the creation of alternative performance circuits, Muslim classical dancers redirect affective flows, transforming spaces of exclusion into counter-economies of appreciation and professional validation.

The WhatsApp group incident recounted in the previous section is instructive here too. The overwhelmingly positive response to the diaspora child's performances, contrasting with the censure other family members had faced for identical pursuits, demonstrates that hatred is not a fixed property of Muslim bodies engaged in classical dance. It is shaped by material circumstances, cultural contexts, and social positioning that can be altered. The class mobility and geographical distance of the child's family created the conditions under which appreciation became possible. This is not a small finding. It reveals the mechanism through which affective economies operate and, more importantly, the mechanism through which they can be transformed.

Students trained in classical dance from Muslim families living abroad consistently described the experience as less burdened by social judgment than training in Kerala. Some young women from Muslim families in Middle Eastern countries shared in interviews that they did not disclose their classical dance training in school or community spaces. They wore purdah and participated fully in religious activities at school and in the community, maintaining visible markers of religious belonging while privately continuing their artistic practice. They did not describe this as oppressive concealment. They described it as a workable arrangement that allowed them to continue dancing. When they performed in diaspora association programs, they received little criticism. Several attributed this to the diversity of the population and what they called "extended individualism," a greater tolerance for individual cultural choices within multicultural settings. Occasionally, relatives or community members from the Middle East who learned about a participant's training would pass this information back to extended family in Kerala. Few serious repercussions followed, because participants visited Kerala only for vacations. The effectiveness of community sanction is diminished by temporary presence.

Transnational performance circuits have created alternative systems of validation outside local cultural hierarchies. Competitions and festivals organized by diaspora associations in the Middle East offer Muslim classical dancers access to

competitive structures that evaluate them on technical competence and artistic creativity rather than on religious identity, family background, or community positioning. These structures are familiar because they mirror Kerala's own competitive culture, but they operate according to different social logics. Children of parents in well-paid professional positions receive training from Kerala-based teachers who make short visits. Some students travel back to Kerala to compete in school or university art festivals, maintaining links to the homeland competitive circuit while building alternative networks of recognition abroad.

Individual trajectories document both the possibilities and the limits of this transformation. The mother of a Muslim classical dancer from South Kerala offered a measured account of her daughter's path during fieldwork:

She could not shift to a foreign country after marriage as her husband got a job in Kerala, and they settled in their hometown. She initiated a private dance training institution, which is running successfully. Even though she aspired to mobility through shifting, she still got it here by successfully running a training institution. Even though we worked hard to get this institution recognized, the outcome is still good, and she is living a decent life following her passion. However, for many, this may not be the case; it might be a possible reason why classical dancers shift to different parts of the world.

When the researcher interviewed the daughter separately, a more complicated picture emerged. She recalled that her family had urged her not to pursue dance as an academic degree. Her mother had suggested she study it by correspondence: "with the impression that if my partner didn't allow me to continue with dance or if we shifted to a different part of the world, I could work through my professional degree and continue with dance, just as my passion." The gap between the mother's current account of struggle and success and the daughter's memory of earlier discouragement reveals something important. Family pride in a daughter's successful institution is real. So is the pragmatic contingency planning that shaped the path she took to get there? Both are true simultaneously.

Institutional efforts to expand access to classical dance point toward more structural forms of transformation. One academic expert working on classical dance pedagogy for international audiences articulated a vision of making the form "accessible globally and to dance beyond borders." She envisioned interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches designed for international and transnational audiences, approaches that would engage performers from the margins and help redefine their structural position. This represents a different register of transformation from individual mobility: it is collective, pedagogical, and explicitly aimed at dismantling the power relations embedded in classical dance's content, practice, and institutional transmission.

The broader significance of these individual and collective efforts extends across the art forms themselves. Through migration, digital connectivity, and the creation of alternative performance and teaching circuits, Muslim classical dancers create new possibilities for understanding classical dance as a universal artistic practice. Their mobility and resistance constitute an embodied critique of the caste-Hindu frameworks that have historically controlled access to these forms. They simultaneously negotiate the religious conservatism within their own communities that views such artistic practice with suspicion.

The cumulative evidence from fieldwork is striking. The fundamental premise that classical dancers born into Muslim families are inherently sites of hate and cultural transgression is being dismantled, unevenly but perceptibly, through these complex everyday efforts. Performers connect across the globe, find new opportunities, and use those opportunities as resistance against the power structures that mark their bodies as inappropriate in both mainstream classical dance discourse and within their own communities.

The challenges that accompany transnational mobility must be acknowledged plainly. Economic precarity is common. Many Muslim classical dancers who migrate take up employment in unrelated fields and use classical dance as a supplementary income through private teaching. Credential recognition does not transfer: years of training and professional standing in Kerala may count for little in destination contexts where different aesthetic preferences and institutional frameworks govern recognition. Practitioners often rebuild their professional reputations from the beginning.

Cultural isolation is a recurring difficulty. Physical distance from Kerala may reduce community surveillance, but it also severs connections to the cultural ecosystem that nurtured artistic development. Many practitioners report missing Kerala's collaborative networks, the rhythm of temple festivals, and the community knowledge of classical dance traditions that informs local practice. The linguistic dimension compounds this. Teaching classical dance abroad requires pedagogical adaptation for students who lack familiarity with the regional languages, literary traditions, and cultural references that give these forms their depth.

For Muslim women, migration carries gendered complexities that deserve specific attention. Marriage-based migration facilitates physical movement but can introduce new forms of family surveillance and cultural restriction. The gender dimensions of artistic migration intersect with religious interpretations of appropriate behavior for women, creating specific constraints on independent travel, professional networking, and public performance. Migration does not dissolve patriarchal authority; it sometimes relocates it. These challenges collectively confirm the paper's central argument. Structural change within

classical dance institutions and within religious communities remains necessary. The burden of negotiation should not rest entirely on individual performers.

Conclusion: Redefining Cultural Belonging through Strategic Resistance

The experiences of Muslim classical dancers navigating transnational mobility reveal the relationship between artistic practice, religious identity, and cultural belonging in a period of religious nationalism and cultural orthodoxy. Their resistance through geographical movement, digital engagement, and alternative circuit creation shows how marginalized practitioners challenge exclusionary systems while maintaining artistic practice.

This paper has advanced three interconnected arguments. First, transnational movement constitutes a practical challenge to both Hindu coded classical dance frameworks and religious orthodoxies within Muslim communities. Second, the transformation of affective economies through strategic mobility shows that hatred and marginalization are contingent and can be redirected through sustained resistance. Third, the study contributes empirical and conceptual resources to scholarly discussions on religious minorities in the arts, transnational migration, and the global circulation of traditional art forms. The experiences of Muslim classical dancers in Kerala have remained largely undocumented in these discussions.

The research also identifies significant limitations. Economic pressures, cultural isolation, technological barriers, and the reproduction of marginalization in new contexts all qualify the transformative potential of individual mobility. Broader structural transformation requires collective action and institutional change. As participant voices confirm, the circulation of hate can also be addressed through developing a pedagogy for transnational audiences, one that treats classical dance as a universal practice and works to dismantle the power relations embedded in its content, transmission, and performance.

The pedagogical innovations discussed here point toward possibilities for more comprehensive inclusion. Digital platforms and virtual performance spaces offer further possibilities for creating artistic communities that do not depend on the religious and caste hierarchies of Kerala's institutional landscape. The experiences of Muslim classical dancers demonstrate that cultural belonging is not determined by religious identity or geographical location alone. It can be created and sustained through artistic excellence, strategic resistance, and persistent negotiation of identity across multiple cultural contexts. These dancers demonstrate that the boundaries of cultural belonging can be expanded through everyday negotiations that refuse to accept marginalization as permanent. Their efforts reveal possibilities for more inclusive understandings of both artistic practice and religious identity. Classical dance, reimagined and reclaimed, can

transcend nationalist frameworks and religious orthodoxies. It can serve as a site for demonstrating the universal human capacity for artistic expression.

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Article: State, Capitalism and Violence: A Critique of Police-inflicted Violence in Odisha

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State, Capitalism and Violence: A Critique of Police-inflicted Violence in Odisha

--Akankhya Panigrahi

Abstract

This paper wishes to contribute to the sociological understanding of state and state violence with an analysis of police-inflicted violence in contemporary India. It attempts to question the relationship between state and violence as 'given' and explores how they are shaped in the context of neoliberalism in India. It focuses on two major issues concerning police violence in the state of Odisha: violent suppression of social movements which resist large-scale corporate industries and state violence against Maoism. Using secondary sources, this piece reflects on case examples resonating these issues to understand the relationship between state, capitalism and violence. The cases reflect how the context of neoliberalism provides space for legitimising extreme and arbitrary state violence. They reveal that the state engages in perpetuating capitalist exploitation and social marginalisation through police violence, thereby embedding policing in structural violence.

Keywords: *State, Violence, Police, Capitalism, Resistance Movements*

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Introduction

The relationship between state and violence is often thought to be obvious or 'given', including Weber's definition of the modern state as essentially characterised by monopoly over legitimate violence (Weber, Roth & Wittich, 1978, p. 56). However, we need to complicate the idea of legitimacy further by asking how and to what extent violence is legitimised in different contexts. Borrowing from marxist sociology, it can be said that the state is coercive in all kinds of societies but such coercion has peculiar motives and consequences depending on the nature of the state and the dominant mode of production (Desai, 1975, p. 19-39). While violence in socialist totalitarian states has received scholarly attention, it is also important to study the increasingly visible state violence in democratic societies with a capitalist set up. In an attempt to address this central question, the essay reflects on state violence in contemporary Indian society.

Two fundamental questions need some reflection. First, how do we characterise the state in contemporary Indian society and second, what is the significance of

violence used by this state. A modern state in India is considered to be formally organised under colonial rule. Among other things, the colonialists took over management of the economy, facilitated commercialisation and industrialisation, created a legal bureaucratic apparatus and transferred property majorly to the state. The post-colonial state continued to support rapid industrial development though the democratic regimes attempted *additionally* to bring about policies of socialism and redistribution of land (Kohli, 2012). Desai (1975) argues that whether governmental regimes are democratic, authoritarian or totalitarian, the modern state fundamentally aims to maintain the dominant mode of production, which can either be capitalist or socialist, not both.

Though the Indian state chose ‘capitalist path of development’ (Desai 1986, p. vii-xxiv), it is considered to be semi-feudal and semi-colonial in complex ways. Transitions to capitalist relations did not eliminate feudal ties but created complex class polarizations based on feudal ranking, as well as caste (Pati, 2011). Vanaik (1990) argues that the Indian state represents the interest of the dominant classes, which is constituted by both agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie (p. 18-26). The formal bureaucratic state structure remained similar to colonial times and was less influenced by democratic ideals. The educated elite took control of the same bureaucratic structure whose practices they critiqued during the colonial regime. Socialist policies and reform initiatives could be diverted to fulfil private interests by gaining control over state administration (Kaviraj, 2000; Harrison, 1960).

In the late eighties and nineties, the paradigm of ‘Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation’ (LPG) was implemented leading to opening up of economic sectors to foreign capital, increased opportunities and fearlessness of the domestic capitalist class, change in composition of the capitalist class as many new players entered and the increasing influence of industrial bourgeoisie over political decision-making (Chatterjee, 2008, p. 56). The position of the Indian bourgeoisie improved both within India and internationally, post liberalisation (Vanaik, 1990, p. 8). Though the role of the state is supposed to reduce in a liberalised economy, the Indian state rather asserted its presence and facilitated running of the economy by property owning and business classes (Kohli, 2012, p. 42). The state actively engaged in providing clearances and resources to industrial bourgeois classes which they would not have acquired through the operation of market forces alone (Levien, 2015).

How does the state, in practice, facilitate capitalist expansion and exploitation? In certain contexts, it is prominently through the use of state violence. To address this, the essay will focus on violence by police and state armed forces in contemporary Indian society. It particularly analyses case examples from Odisha by using secondary sources (news reports, documentaries, ethnographies, government websites etc.). In the past two decades, the state has recorded an increase in police violence and human rights violations (Table 1 & 2), which requires sociological analysis. Theories from multiple disciplines have critiqued

the use of police violence. It has been majorly attributed to frustration among police officials, resulting from hierarchical organisation of police institutions, pressure of work, political influence, media influence, nature of work and training etc. (for example, Baxi, 1982). Although these are important factors, these alone cannot explain the complex realities of police violence. There is a need to analyse police violence by locating it in a wider context, particularly neo-liberalism and state-capitalist relations as discussed above.

Table 1. Number of Human Rights Violations cases, Intimations about Custodial deaths/rapes and Encounter deaths in India registered with National Human Rights Commission (1995-2022).

Year (1st April to 31st March each year)	Number of Human Rights Violation Cases Registered	Number of Intimations about Custodial Death/Rapes	Number of Intimations about Encounter deaths
1995-1996	9751	444	-
1996-1997	19623	891	-
1997-1998	35779	1012	62/71 ^b
1998-1999	39427	1297	76/65
1999-2000	49541	1093	85/115
2000-2001	70510	1045	110/109
2001-2002	67776	1307	58/113
2002-2003	67354	1342	83
2003-2004	71427	1463	100
2004-2005	72775	1504	122
2005-2006	72548	1739	157
2006-2007	80325	1607	301
2007-2008	98332	1999	177
2008-2009	89109	1660	132
2009-2010	80260	1601	111
2010-2011	82779	1574	199
2011-2012	93446	1433	179
2012-2013	105659	1705	181
2013-2014	96135	1719	148
2014-2015	112062	1722	192
2015-2016	115616	1823	206
2016-2017	89846	1763	180
2017-2018	77589	1785	164
2018-2019	87406	1936	158
2019-2020	74737	1700	127
2020-2021 ^a	61865	1814	78
2021-2022	111082	2542	152
2022 (1 st)	79610	1771	91

April- 31 st Nov 2022)			
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Note: Adapted from Annual and Monthly Reports published by National Human Rights Commission 1995-2022 (NHRC 2022). Human rights violation cases reported commonly include custodial deaths, encounter deaths, labour violations, violence against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women and children, violations against health and environment, prison violations, inaction by state/government officials and violations by police (includes false implications, extortion, torture, illegal arrest/detention etc.) and paramilitary forces. Most violations are registered against the police (NHRC 2020, 1-2, 26-27).

^a Data unavailable for the month of November 2020.

^b Intimations received by state government/Intimations received by media and other sources.

Table 2: Number of Human Rights Violations cases, Intimations about Custodial deaths/rapes and Encounter deaths in Odisha registered with National Human Rights Commission (1995-2022)

Year (1 st April to 31 st March each year)	Human Rights Violation Cases Registered	Intimations about Custodial Death/Rape	Number of Intimations about Encounter deaths
1995-1996	487	10	-
1996-1997	695	13	-
1997-1998	702	23	0
1998-1999	464	68	1
1999-2000	595	46	1
2000-2001	907	57	0
2001-2002	805	56	0
2002-2003	837	42	0
2003-2004	1127	53	0
2004-2005	814	43	0
2005-2006	708	44	4
2006-2007	833	55	1
2007-2008	1147	56	1
2008-2009	750	50	0
2009-2010	1075	48	1
2010-2011	1852	55	10
2011-2012	3337	37	5
2012-2013	5781	52	8
2013-2014	5368	52	12
2014-2015	5790	55	6
2015-2016	16215	51	8
2016-2017	8682	51	9
2017-2018	4909	58	7

2018-2019	4902	65	14
2019-2020	4081	65	3

Note: Adapted from Annual/Monthly Reports published by National Human Rights Commission 1995-2022 (NHRC 2022).

Objective and Focus of the Study

The article aims to analyse the relationship between state, state violence and capitalist exploitation in contemporary democratic society, with a focus on Odisha. Following a brief history of social exploitation in Odisha, the essay moves on to look at two issues relating to state violence. The first issue looks into movements of resistance against capitalist establishments and the use of police violence to suppress them. It helps us reflect on how police violence has been used as a tactic to set up industries post liberalisation by suppressing demands of land rights and livelihood. The second issue focused here is state violence against Maoism. Assumptions and narratives relating to Maoism have provided the state with an extra legitimacy for violence. People live critical lives in regions where both Maoist violence and state violence is rampant (Sundar, 2006, 2012). Police violence is being used not only to target Maoists but to arbitrarily suppress any voice against capitalist exploitation. Analysis of anti-Maoist police violence in Odisha where it is simultaneously considered a “last resort” as well as a “success”, is necessary (“Four Maoists Gunned”, 2020). It is argued that the increasing use of police forces indicates not only an unconstitutional tendency of the state (Chakravarti, 2012, p. 38) but also a stubborn support for private capitalism at the cost of social marginalisation.

Historical Processes of Land alienation and Exploitation in Odisha

In order to contextualise police violence in Odisha, a brief history of social exploitation is pertinent. Several regions of Odisha are known to be rich in agricultural land, forest as well as mineral resources. Paradoxically, a significant section of the population lags behind in terms of basic necessities like health, education and food security. This is a fundamental contradiction that social scientists try to address. Throughout the years, marginalised sections, mostly belonging to Adivasi and Dalit communities, have experienced exploitation of land and resources. This section looks at how the changing political economy and nature of the state have created space for such exploitation, in which feudalisation, colonisation, state occupation of land and liberalisation become significant processes.

Processes of feudalisation, the emergence of private property, increasing settlement of non-tribal Hindu castes in the plains reinforced by colonialists (colonialists considered non-tribals as more industrious), violence etc. resulted in landlessness and displacement of tribals to the hills (Pati, 2011). There was also a significant shift in the political structure with the emergence of the colonial state. Historians like Hermann Kulke, drawing from Burton Stein's concept of segmentary states reflect that prior to colonisation, the state in India was constituted by "little kingdoms". Each of these kingdoms were sovereign as well as worked in cohesion with others. Kings depended earlier on the legitimacy provided by tribal populations (Schneepel, 2001). After the colonial state was established, the kings were empowered by the British officials to collect revenue from agricultural cultivation. This resulted in more and more transfer of tenured land to non-tribals dominant castes who practiced settled cultivation and could generate more revenue (Pati, 2011).

Landlessness, displacement and indebtedness was accompanied by socio-cultural alienation and shifts in tribal identities. While the affluent sections incorporated themselves in the Brahmanical-Hindu fold, poorer sections became agricultural labourers and 'outcastes' (Pati, 2013). Practices like shifting cultivation, changing food habits and identities etc. were coerced survival strategies adopted by tribal communities due to external factors, and not inherent part of their identities, as the colonialists constructed and the state continues to portray (Pati, 2011). Tribal groups were not passive victims of these changes but resisted in several ways which ranged from negotiations to attacks on non-tribals settling in their lands (Pati, 2011; Debaranjan, 2013). These uprisings were suppressed by administrative as well as military power (Kumar & Choudhary, 2005, p. 22).

By the late twentieth century, the process of land distribution and sale became regulated by state officials. With the establishment of the Indian constitution, the demarcations of scheduled areas and identification of 'scheduled tribes' was formalised. Laws were passed to restrict the selling of lands in scheduled areas to non-tribalsⁱ. Most of them had loopholes and have been misused. For example, the Orissa Estate Abolition Act, 1960 and the Orissa Government Land Settlement Act, 1962 disallowed the intermediaries to lease or sell land without permission of the collector (later, revenue officer) who was supposed to prioritise Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes. The sketchy part of these acts combined with the Land Encroachment Act, 1972 was that people had to first "encroach" on the land illegally after which it was decided by the state official if the land could be granted. This led to corruption and further indebtedness of the landless communities (Kumar & Choudhary, 2005, p. 27-28). Such laws which criminalise the very forms of life and labour give more space for state repression (Eckert, 2014).

The major loss of tribal land was due to the dis-incentivisation of shifting cultivation and allocation of those lands to the state and non-tribals (Pati, 2013, p.

50). The state further utilised both cultivable and non-cultivable lands for development projects resulting in large-scale displacements. Since the 1990s, the paradigm of 'Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation' (LPG) has dominated the idea of development (Levien, 2015, p.153). Practices of private capitalist accumulation, actively supported by the state, have severely affected the resources and livelihoods of the marginalised populations. In order to resist such exploitation, several movements have emerged in Odisha (for a review, see Padhi & Sadhangi, p. 2020). These movements are being suppressed by brutal police violence as reflected in the following sections.

From Compensation to Killings: State Violence to Protect Industry

Within the LPG paradigm, the government of India relaxed Industrial and Mining laws to allow Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) into the mining sector in 1991. Following this, the Odisha government granted a license to the Odisha Mining Corporation for leasing of land to private companies for bauxite-mining (Reddy, 2006, p. 12-17). There have been continuous efforts to expand mining as it is a major source of state revenue (Reddy, 2006, p. 86-89; Pradhan, 2020). The Samatha judgement of 1997 against the buying of tribal lands by non-tribals was supposed to act as a deterrent for occupation of tribal lands by private companies. However, state governments initiated public-private partnerships to bypass such restrictions (Padel, 2009).

In 1992, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the government of Odisha and UAIL (Utkal Alumina International Limited), now owned by Aditya-Birla group, to set up an aluminum plant at Doraguda in Kashipur block located in Rayagda district in Odisha. The Company extracts bauxite from Baphlimali hills and exports the refined product. Since its inception, the project has been resisted by the residents of different villages in Kashipur affected by the project (Padhi & Sadangi, 2020, p. 191-213). The movement against the industry became prominent during the mid-1990s, particularly with the formation of Prakrutika Sampad Surakhya Parishad in 1996 (Reddy, 2006). A series of violent actions by the police has tried to suppress this movement in the past couple of decades.

The Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 requires the consent of the population (conducted through *Pallisabhas*ⁱⁱ in Odisha) for the acquisition of tribal lands for developmental activities. However, consent has been falsified, manipulated and forced by official authorities in several contexts (Bandyopadhyay, 2004, p. 409; Sundar, 2006, p. 3189). Several methods were used to coerce people for their consent to establish the industry in Kashipur as well. Government and police officers, apart from company officials, were engaged in strategies of "purchasing" consent by promising compensation and through manipulation (Padhi & Sadangi, 2020, p. 203). Methods used by the state turned more and more violent as the villagers refused consent and resisted through various means.

The police firing in Maikanch on Sixteenth December 2000, which took three lives and injured many, became a hallmark of state repression in Kashipurⁱⁱⁱ. Ethnographic accounts have recorded details of the firing (see Padhi & Sadangi, 2020, p. 200). The Mishra commission set up for investigating the Maikanch firing published its report in 2003, where it condemned the police only for firing excessive rounds and manipulating FIRs. Neither police nor the district administration was convicted. Compensation promised to the families of the deceased was not provided in time (Debaranjan, 2008). Additionally, the commission also commented that the industry would not cause any pollution. In some newspaper accounts, the report was lauded as a success for the company against “environmentalists” and “locals fearing displacement” who come in the way of economic growth (“Mishra Panel Report”, 2003). Such narratives of economic growth presumed through capitalist development, provide additional immunity to the state to inflict violence, even in democratic regimes.

Violence was experienced in Kashipur in a heightened manner especially in areas where the industry was planned. New police outposts were established in December, 2004 coercively despite resistance (Sarangi et al., 2005). Platoons of police forces were permanently deployed for months. They conducted flag marches, raided villages, interrupted meetings, visited weekly markets, resorted to beatings, molestations, threats and arrests (Reddy, 2006, p. 57-58). In 2012, Odisha Industrial Security Force was established to protect state and private industrial undertakings (Odisha Police, n.d.).

The particular anti-mining movement is said to have weakened after such repressive measures. Some accounts suggest that the social environment and social relations in Kashipur changed after the emergence of the corporate notion of land and state repression (Pathy, 2003, p. 2836; Reddy, 2006, p. 48-53). Some locals believe that there was an increase in consumption of liquor, vehicles and concrete houses, conflict and distrust. People got scattered and divided. Some accepted compensation against their land either due to “*tanka lobha*” (greed of money) or as a strategy for survival (Padhi & Sadangi, 2020; Debaranjan, 2021, 16:00).

Contrary to the promises made by the UAIL company and the government, the industry did not create adequate employment. Marginalised sections are now being forced to demand work in the factory with precarious working conditions and live in adverse environments (Mohanty, 2017). They either engage in low-paid industrial labour or migrate to urban cities seeking informal jobs. For over a decade now, several villages have been demanding jobs, alternative livelihoods, proper rehabilitation and reduction in pollution (Dash, 2020). It is not a coincidence, nor merely situational that the gap between the rich and poor sections has increased in the last decade (Anand, 2021). The neo-liberal economic policies have resulted in rapid economic growth while simultaneously increasing poverty and inequality (Kohli, 2012, p. 10).

Liberalised economy has been imagined to have a “trickledown effect” and reduce poverty through job creation, increase in standard of living etc. However, this has not been actualized, which is why governments resort to welfare measures and compensation. In the years of LPG, the spending on welfare programs increased for which various explanations are provided (Gupta, 2012, p. 279-294; Chakraborty, 2021, p. 7). These measures not only involve corruption but also sugar-coat the failure in providing employment. Miliband reflects that in democratic capitalist societies there is demand for reducing social inequalities. When the state fails to effectively ‘reform’ the social order mainly through welfare measures, it resorts to repression and police power. But repression is not practiced alternatively, rather complementary with welfare (Miliband, 1969, p. 271).

Police violence continued even after the UAIL industry was established. On 25th August 2014, some villagers had gone to the mining site in Baphlimali hills seeking jobs. A huge number of armed police with authorisation from the magistrate, reached Baphlimali and started beating villagers in Paika Kupakhal, which is the entry point of the hill. Popular media has not covered this incident. One local journalist who tried to write about the incident was harassed (Dash, 2020). A few villagers narrate the incident in a documentary:

Around 25-30 vehicles came along with a bus. The police got down from the vehicles and surrounded us from all sides. We said ‘it is already 1 pm, let us take our food and then we will go. Why are you beating us?’ but they struck us from behind and started pushing us. Both local police and paramilitary forces came; The Kashipur Inspector-in-charge (IIC) shouted “magya ta, sala (derogatory slang) did your father own this land? Why have you come here!”. They threatened us “Go to Naveen Patnaik. Go to Collector” The police gheraoed us. They had guns and batons. Female police pushed women, male police pushed men, someone's leg got broken, someone's knee got broken. In that condition they chased us to the village. (Debaranjan, 2014, 1:00)

On 1st November 2019, fourteen Dalit men were arrested from a protest site in Dwimundi village in Kashipur. It was reported in a few news channels which show protesters being chased by the police (OTV, 2019). The protestors were subjected to casteist remarks, beatings and arrests for “doing politics” as the state officers claim (Dash, 2020, p. 28). People’s politics here entails their fight for basic survival. They are being arrested and killed for doing politics not for committing crime (Chandavarkar, 1998; Eckert, 2014). Policing in some contexts obsess with crime and its violation, rather than protection of rights. ‘Crime’ itself is constructed and improvised pertaining to specific interests (Marx, 1993). The obsession with crime helps in fabricating and maintaining a social order which enables capitalist expansion (Neocleous, 2000).

On 3rd January 2020, forty-two Dalit women and seven minors were arrested from a protest site in Paika Kupakhal village where people were protesting to demand jobs and other facilities like nursery promised by the company (Mishra, 2020). Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code had been imposed after such incidents and the presence of paramilitary troops increased (Dash, 2020, p. 26). False cases were filed against People in Kashipur who were beaten up on the pretext of violating Covid 19 regulations imposed by the government (Dash, 2020). Only a few of these incidents get public attention, after which the measures taken are compensatory, if any. Compensation or reformatory practices act as a disguise to ensure smooth functioning of capitalism and state legitimacy (Gupta 2012). It becomes a compromise for marginalised communities who nonetheless have to demand it. Police violence has been used to suppress demands of reform as well as justice.

Despite brutal police violence, several resistance movements continue in various parts of Odisha and other states through which people are opposing exploitation of land, livelihood and labour (“Orissa, AP People”, 2015). For example, protests against steel companies such as POSCO and Jindal Steel Works (JSW) in Dhinkia village, Jagatsinghpur district came to light when police lathi-charged hundreds of protesters on 14th January, 2022 (“Puni Dhinkia Palitila”, 2022). Unhinged by the voices of oppressed groups, governments continue to support more and more profit-seeking establishments at the expense of people’s rights of land and livelihood.

Oppression of Adivasis and Dalits in Odisha has specifically contributed to capitalist expansion. Lerche and Shah argue that this occurs through three processes. One, ‘inherited inequalities of power’ allow the dominant social groups and the state to control capitalist processes. Two, Adivasis and Dalits form a significant part of casual migrant labourers who are employed in informal low-paid precarious jobs. Three, capitalist expansion occurs through ‘conjugated oppression’ which combines class oppression with ethnic and social discrimination (Lerche & Shah, 2021, p.13-14). People are being exploited based on their social position of class, caste, gender, ethnicity etc. Repressing their voices has become a regularised way by which the state is making ‘matters easier for capital’ (Padhi & Adve, 2006, p.186). Increasing use of police violence is an aid to this form of oppression. The incidents of police violence in Kashipur show that violence is used by the state not merely because it has the capacity, authority and monopoly to do so, but as a conscious practice to facilitate expansion of capitalist undertakings.

The ‘Saviour’ State and Arbitrary Killings: Issue of State Violence against Maoism

The previous section dealt with state violence engaged in suppressing resistance movements. Another issue of significance and contestation in Odisha is that of

state violence against Maoism. This practice is almost always legitimised legally and socially, fueled by paranoia created around Maoism. The accounts analysed in this section provide a starting point to see how police violence is practiced arbitrarily, how people who are not engaged in Maoist movement also become victims of state violence. This arbitrary violence has particular implications in the context of neoliberalism and state-capitalist relations. By increasing police against Maoism, the state is also engaging in creating an environment where any voice against capitalist exploitation can be suppressed.

The problems of rural economy, land rights, exploitation by privileged classes and state repression were the foundation for Naxalite movement to emerge during the 1960s in many parts of India^{iv}. Maoist organisations have engaged with social issues like land distribution, farmers issues, caste atrocities, women empowerment etc. at a concrete level. However, they have often restricted beneficial government initiatives and have caused destruction of lives and property of local communities (Sundar, 2006). Violence by the state, in the name of ‘tackling’ Maoism has been equally devastating, if not more. Moreover, only state violence is considered legitimate even though it mostly goes against the laws. To reiterate Das (2013), what counts as violence becomes important. That is, while violence by Maoists have been highlighted negatively by the state, violence by the state is either hidden or applauded.

Several operations have been carried out to eliminate Maoist groups by the central and state governments. A devastating operation carried out in Bastar region in Chhattisgarh was the ‘Salwa Judum’, officially started in 2005. It was disguised as a spontaneous people’s movement for peace against Maoism supported by the state government and the police, but turned Bastar into a war zone. It engaged in forcing villagers to join the Salwa Judum camps and give information about Maoists. Anyone could be killed if suspected to be a Maoist. The Maoists retaliated. Initially, they targeted active members of Salwa Judum but then engaged in large-scale counter violence. The deployment of police and paramilitary forces increased significantly. Arbitrary violence (killings, rapes, burning thousands of houses) became routine practice (Sundar, 2006, 2012; Guha et al., 2006). This ‘repetitive cycle of violence’, as Sundar (2006) put it, has no benefit but blatant ignorance of actual development of the so-called backward regions. A similar idea is reflected by a person living in a ‘cut-off area’^v in Odisha, in a documentary:

The government says - ‘we are providing everything- what does it (government) not do? You are all Naxalites’ - why would we be Naxalites? Is it written in our foreheads? They say that we are doing violent activities. Do we have any weapons? We do not have any arms or weapons that we can become Naxalites. Just because we are living inside ghati (hills), we became Naxalites!. People are suffering so much. But the doctors say that there are a lot of Naxalites in that area, so they cannot come. (Debaranjan, 2013, 8:29)

An incident in Kandhamal district in Odisha further reflects how violence against Maoism has been arbitrarily used. On 8th July 2016, six people were killed and several injured by bullets near Gumudumaha village (“Bloodbath in Kandhamal”, 2016). People who died were Adivasis including three women and an infant. “They did not even spare my child. I was holding my child close to me while they killed him by firing bullets” said the mother of the infant who died in the encounter (“Gumudumaha re Ganahatya” 2016). As reported in journalistic accounts, they were returning from Baliguda town after running errands and collecting payment under MNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) when their autorickshaw got stuck in the muddy road that connects Gumudumaha village to concrete roads. Some came out of the auto to push it out. Suddenly, a number of bullets hit them (Choudhury, 2016). This incident was the result of an anti-Maoist operation (or ‘ambush’) that had been planned by forces from Special Operations Group (SOG), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and District Voluntary force (DVF) as a response to information about Maoists. (“Bloodbath in Kandhamal”, 2016).

This incident gathered the attention of the media and political parties, with some newspapers reporting it as an inhuman act by the police (“Pancha Jananku Maridele”, 2016). Due to public outrage and protests, an enquiry commission (Justice Janab Mohammad Ajmal Commission) was set up by the state government and compensation provided to the victims and their families (OTV, 2017). The commission submitted its report to the state government in March 2018 which has not yet been made public (Choudhury, 2016). Stark contrasts exist in the narratives of the SOG police and the victims. While the victims claim that bullets were fired only from the direction where police were positioned, the SOG claims that the civilians were unfortunately caught in a crossfire between Maoists and the police resulting in ‘collateral damage’ (Panigrahy & Tripathy, 2017). Many deaths due to police firing or custodial violence become hidden under categories used to define the “targets” of violence, be it ‘left-wing extremists’ ‘dacoits’ ‘rioters’ etc. (National Crime Records Bureau, 2021, p. 1037). Cases where there is public outrage leads to an enquiry, at most.

This case reflects that police violence against Maoism has been practiced arbitrarily against people who may not be engaged in the Maoist movement. The victims in the Gumudumaha encounter were not Maoists or ‘outlaws’. They are important political actors, with whom the state has a reciprocal relationship. Perhaps as a result, it has become difficult, if not impossible, for the government and the police to legitimise their deaths. Unlike Agamben’s beliefs, they need not be stripped of their political identity and be reduced to ‘bare lives’ to be killed (Gupta, 2012). And the sheer number of such deaths which the police call ‘collateral damage’ is of grave concern.

How do such extreme and arbitrary state violence get legitimised? There exists a paranoia about certain populations being violent. The portrayal of *Maobadis* (Maoists) as violent allows the state and the dominant elites to manifest this paranoia while simultaneously making it legitimate. Labelling, targeting ‘history-sheeters’, ‘bad characters’, ‘trouble makers’ ‘Maoists’ and ‘urban naxals’ has been a common practice in policing (Eckert, 2014, Khanikar, 2018). In various contexts, entire communities are being arbitrarily targeted by constructing discourses of ‘suspect communities’ as the ‘other’ to lawful citizens (Khanikar, 2018). There is also a pride in state violence reflected in the “successful” stories of Maoist encounters (“Four Maoists Gunned”, 2020). The use of the word ‘encounter’ itself provides certain legitimacy to the state and immunity to the police.

The state often tends to “civilise” groups that it assumes to be violent or inhumane, whether we consider the British action against Meriah practice among Konds (Padel, 2009) or the control of migrant labourers in urban areas through policing (Chandavarkar, 1998). This notion provides a basis for the state to “save” people from violent groups by using violence itself. Our consent towards the legitimacy of the modern state is manufactured in a way that we become reluctant to admit brutal violence by the state, or legitimise it to an extent where we unsee it (Padel, 2009, p. 293). The institutional classification of certain territories as ‘Naxal-affected areas’ or ‘disturbed areas’ in India have unreasonably allowed increased violent state intervention (Desai, 1986). The state is thereby portrayed as the saviour of ignorant, illiterate, passive victims of violence (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022). A newspaper report accounting the details of a firing by paramilitary forces reveals how the state perceives its violence.

To organise *Taleem Sibir* (Training camp) from Sunday, 10 Maoists had camped since the past 2 days under Basadara division Commander K. Rabi’s leadership. On receiving information regarding this, under Muniguda SPO R. Prakash’s direction, one SOG (Special Operations Group) team began an operation by Saturday 5 pm. They reached the hill at night and waited for the right time to climb it. On Sunday early morning 5 am, some Maoists were bathing in a stream while others were resting. During this time, while the Jawans (SOG) climbed the hill, unprepared Maoists were not able to retaliate. Some tried to flee but tumbled as they were hit by bullets (Translated from “Encounter: 9 Maobadi”, 2011)

Such accounts describe anti-Maoist violence as it is perceived by the state- as ‘operations or ‘war’. The people who were shot were alleged to be Maoists and thereby their death legitimised by the state. This account is based in Kashipur where CPI (M) local cadres became prominent to fight for basic rights and against MOUs between government and private companies. Some youths who had seen industry-related oppression since their birth joined the cadres to fight against the company (Debaranjan, 2013, 53:50) In the said incident, paramilitary forces opened fire on a group of cadres resting in the Basangmali hills where nine people

were killed (Padhi & Sadangi, 2020). A number of encounters have taken place especially after 2010 near the plant and mining areas targeting ‘Maoists’ in which mostly local youths have been killed (Debaranjan, 2013, 1:00:50). It is a political question for people whether to support armed rebellion or not (Sundar, 2012) but the state portrays them as having ‘romantic illusions of the Maoists’ (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022).

Balogopal (1986, 1992) argues that treating naxalism as merely a law-and-order problem is to unsee the adverse socio-economic conditions of a significant population and results in criminalising politics itself. Though governments officially recognize the need for development of regions where Naxalite movement is predominant, maximum thought, energy and allocation is put into increasing security forces and their tools for violence. Apart from central police and armed forces, the government of Odisha has recruited several specialised forces for countering Naxalism since the mid-2000s. For example, the Special Operations Groups (SOG) was established in 2004 with the main task of “neutralizing the terrorist, extremists and insurgents operating in Orissa” (Government of Odisha Home Department, 2004, p. 5). The District Voluntary Force (DVF) was organised in 2009 also for anti-extremist operations, the strength of which has been increasing. In August 2008, the state government announced that the strategy of Salwa Judum would be applied in five districts of Odisha (Padel, 2009). Like in Bastar, the Odisha Police contractually recruits Special Police Officers (SPOs) from tribal youth particularly to help in combating “the Naxal problem effectively” (Government of Odisha Home Department, 2012).

While such a large-scale operation like Salwa Judum has not been carried out in Odisha, similar attitudes and tendencies can be seen in the past two decades. A competitive environment has been built where the police compete at combating Maoists (Mohanty, 2021, para. 7). In the past decade, combating operations in Odisha have been reported with pride, where the DVF has gathered particular attention. The DVF is constituted mostly by retired SOG jawans and “the rest are local boys picked on the basis of their skills by the district SP” (Mohanty, 2013). A concerning fact that the DVF does not have to go through long procedures like a SOG team, is rather noted proudly as giving the DVF “a cutting edge” in carrying out more and more operations easily (Mohanty, 2013).

In 2011, the Supreme Court declared forces like Salwa Judum and Special Police Officers in Chhattisgarh as unconstitutional as their deployment led to large-scale violation of human rights. It banned Salwa Judum and other non-state forces such as Koya Commandos as illegal organisations (Venkatesan, 2011). It also ordered the recall of firearms used by SPOs^{vi}. Yet, special forces in Odisha have been increasing. The permanent deployment of special forces who engage only in combating operations has led to more active interventions in the past decade. The state as well as the media no longer find it necessary to justify why combating

operations have been carried out. It is enough to say that the operation was against Naxalites in order to legitimise violence ‘in the process’.

Many regions in Odisha where Maoist violence and anti-Maoist state violence are prominent also constitute spaces for large capitalist set ups. The following documented narrative reflects on how state violence against Maoism acts as a disguise to suppress democratic movements against capitalist exploitation. In Kalinga Nagar, Jajpur district in Odisha, thirteen Adivasis were killed in police firing in 2006 who were fighting against the construction of Tata Steel Plant. A woman who lost her son in the firing was arrested by the police alleging that she sought help from Maoists to avenge her son’s death. She reflects in a documentary

I am fighting for our rights through this struggle. Whoever is fighting for their rights is now being called *Maobadi*, no? They will call us Maobadi only. If they do not call us *Maobadi* the Andolan (movement) will not stop, and the company will not be able to construct the plant. They asked me ‘are you linked with the *Maobadi*? I said ‘yes, I am a Maobadi’. After taking my land, after killing my son, if they call me Maobadi, then I am Maobadi. Did Maoists kill my son? Or who killed? You wore this very uniform when you killed my son and you are calling me Maobadi now. The government and the company have jointly killed my son. How did we become Maoists! I said ‘you should do one of these two things- either you send me to jail or you kill me (Debaranjan, 2021, 16:58).

In another account, an man living in a ‘cut-off area’^{vii} reflects:

The government says - ‘we are providing everything- what does it (government) not do? You are all Naxalites’ - why would we be Naxalites? Is it written in our foreheads? They say that we are doing violent activities. Do we have any weapons? We do not have any arms or weapons that we can become Naxalites. Just because we are living inside ghati (hills), we became Naxalites!. People are suffering so much. But the doctors say that there are a lot of Naxalites in that area, so they cannot come. (Debaranjan, 2013, 8:29)

Such lament and anger reflect that democratic movements against exploitation of tribals are being conflated with Maoism in the practice of police violence. It thereby becomes convenient for the state to carry out industrialisation at the cost of exploitation of land and resources. Using Agamben’s perspective, Gupta (2012) argues that violence to facilitate neoliberal development in this context allows for deaths of the tribals- “as *homo sacer*, those who can be killed without sacrifice, inside and outside the law” (p. 290). The police institution becomes a filter through which legal procedures are used, misused and escaped to kill people. In the context analysed, police violence cannot be considered just as a means to an end (Arendt, 1970). Rather, it has been used systemically to facilitate capitalist expansion and (re)produce social inequality. Police violence therefore becomes fundamentally oppressive.

Policing, Crony Capitalism and Structural Violence

We saw theoretically as well as through case examples how state violence in some contexts has been used to benefit privileged classes even in democratic setups. Recent theories in sociology and social anthropology have looked at how this happens through the concept of structural violence. Structural violence differs from personal violence as it does not involve a direct subject-object relation (Galtung 1969, p. 171). It can be described as a “crime without a criminal” (Gupta, 2012, p. 21). People’s potential is determined by the level of resources and insight available in a given context. If such means are destroyed directly, it constitutes personal violence. If such means are monopolised by a group or class constraining people’s ability to achieve their potential, it constitutes indirect or structural violence (Galtung, 1969). It is systemically inflicted by all members belonging to a particular social order, closely associated with oppression (Farmer, 2004, p. 307).

The state becomes an important perpetrator of structural violence in contemporary Indian Society. Gupta (2012) argues that the suffering and deaths are not inevitable results of conditions of the poor but a consequence of state practices. The bureaucratic structure of the state operates with a ‘modality of uncaring’ which does not allow programs for the poor to be successful, even if state officials genuinely work for them (p. 23). Routine practices of the state (like Practices of corruption, record keeping, labelling, surveillance) are responsible for deciding matters of the poor (Gupta, 2012; Khanikar, 2018). In the process, arbitrary decisions and power determine who will be at the risk of suffering (Farmer, 2003. 7). Alarming number of deaths are being normalised in contemporary society. Gupta (2012) writes

With what should be considered exceptional, a tragedy and a disgrace, but is not: the invisible forms of violence that result in the deaths of millions of the poor, especially women, girls, lower caste people, and indigenous people. What makes such violence invisible? How does one think about not only deliberate acts of violence such as police brutality, but also political, administrative, and judicial action or inaction that prevents poor people from making a living, obtaining medical aid, and securing such necessities of life as food, clothing, shelter, and sanitation? (p. 5)

The control over bodies and lives of people through police violence is complex. No doubt police violence involves deliberate acts of repression and personal violence. However, it cannot be isolated from the larger discourse of structural violence. Bureaucratic practices like corruption, labelling, falsifying records and evidence, other ‘extra-legal’ methods etc. are prevalent in the police system as in any other state institution (Chandavarkar, 1998; Eckert, 2014 and Khanikar, 2018). When increasing power is given to the police than other state mechanisms, the same discourse is implemented through arbitrary arrests and detentions, false

cases, surveillance, killings, torture etc. Further, the case examples reveal how the police violence is closely connected to social exploitation. Violence by the police involves not only restriction of movement to the extent of torture and killing, but also control over lives creating conditions of precarity. It is thereby embedded in structural violence.

Conclusion

Beginning with a review of how the state and political economy in India has been conceptualised, this essay put forward the question of how violence has been practiced in the contemporary context. By focusing on two core issues of police violence in Odisha, it tried to argue that state violence has been used to facilitate private capitalist exploitation and perpetuate social marginalisation. The first issue looked at how state violence aids private capitalist exploitation of land and livelihood by repressing voices that resist such exploitation. Though violence can be conceptualised as distinct from exploitation (Tilly, 2003), it is necessary to see their close interconnection.

The second core issue focused here was police violence against Maoism in Odisha. The past two decades have seen an increase in police forces and action directed towards eliminating Maoism by governments at the state and central levels. By focusing on examples from Odisha, it can be seen how 'combing operations' and police encounters have been used arbitrarily not only targeting Maoists but also civilian population. Some accounts also reflect how Maoism has been used as a disguise to target democratic movements against capitalist exploitation. Narratives against Maoism provide the state with additional immunity to inflict violence. While portraying itself as the saviour, the state violently suppresses any voice against systemic oppression.

By arguing that violence by police and other armed forces of the state are embedded in structural violence, the paper reiterates something that is core to any sociological analysis- that the larger context cannot be ignored while looking at an individual social phenomenon. The extraordinary use of force by the state needs to be analysed, therefore, within the social conditions that facilitate, sustain and excuse it. No doubt, the state actors should be held accountable for the violence they inflict, which is core to a democratic set up. Furthermore, a change in the unequal hierarchical structural conditions can be attained by ensuring rights rather than provision, justice rather than compensation and agency rather than victimhood.

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ⁱ Laws like the Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property (by Scheduled Tribes) Regulation, 1956 (the OSATIP Regulation) and Orissa Land Reform Act (OLR), 1960 (amended in 2002) have provisions disallowing the sale of lands to non-tribals (Kumar & Choudhury, 2005; Pathy, 2003).

ⁱⁱ Pallisabha is a local tier of governance at the ward level constituted by community members. Though their consent is significant, they have less power than the Gram sabhas at the village level ("Land and Governance", 2021, p. 26). For a visual account of pallisabha, see (Debaranjan, 2021, 23:30)

ⁱⁱⁱ An activist leader in Kashipur, Bhagaban Majhi, has portrayed the incident through a song (Wordsoundpowerindia, 2015)

^{iv} "Naxalism, Maoism and Left-wing Extremism- All the terms have different connotations and historical origins but are usually conflated in several state discourses. 'Left-wing extremism' is more often used in national official reports and websites, referring mainly to the activities of CPI (Maoist) groups (Mohanty, 2006). A history of communist and the Naxalite movement in India, the division into different fragments and formation of communist parties is important to understand (see Vanaik, 1990, Mohanty, 1977).

^v Several regions have been submerged by dams constructed since independence. People do not have proper health facilities or schools in these areas. Their homes become inaccessible every year when water levels rise. Deaths due to starvation or minor diseases are common. For the outside world, they become "cut-off areas" (Debaranjan, 2013, 6:00).

^{vi} Writ Petition (Civil) No. 250 of 2007. Nandini Sundar and ors. Versus State of Chattisgarh. Retrieved from <https://main.sci.gov.in/jonew/judis/38160.pdf>

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**Book Review: City, Marginality and Education: Tribal Margins
in Kolkata**

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Book Review: *City, Marginality and Education: Tribal Margins in Kolkata*, by Ruchira Das (2025), New Delhi: Springer, 155 pp., ISBN 978-981-95-0891-4

--Charles Varghese

Ruchira Das's work *City, Marginality and Education: Tribal Margins in Kolkata* is a study that traverses multiple disciplinary boundaries, including sociology, tribal studies, urban marginality, and education. The book primarily focuses on the political economy of the migrant tribal group, the Santhals, who have settled in the Santragachi area of Kolkata, and examines the enduring question of marginalisation. The work assumes significance as it engages with several important questions concerning the social milieu of marginal spaces, particularly how neoliberal global economic processes are transforming so-called 'primordial' social formations such as communities. The resultant dilemmas, struggles, and the role of education within this transformative process are carefully and effectively captured through rich and illuminating empirical evidence.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first, introductory chapter discusses the questions of development, migration, and marginalisation, along with relevant empirical and theoretical literature that engages with the issue of urban marginality. It also outlines its methodological moorings in what can be understood as critical ethnography. The second chapter, *Social Context of Tribal Margins in the City: The Conceptual Framework*, discusses different theoretical insights that help in understanding the context of migration from native lands to the city, the class character of tribal migrants, and the nature of the tribal self as formed within the urban context. Chapter three, *Santhal Lifeworld in an Urban Fringe Settlement*, presents empirical accounts of the spatial location, social and political formations, and the question of tribal identity in the new urban space. Chapter four, *Negotiating the Journey into the City*, discusses the role of networks and their crucial importance in helping migrants cope with the city space, which is not only unfamiliar but also daunting for them. Chapter five, *The Urban Predicament and Intergenerational Dilemmas*, examines class formation among the migrants, their confrontation with the Bengali bhadralok, the struggle for socio-cultural acceptance, aspirations for social mobility, and the gender question embedded within these processes. Chapter six, *The Paradox of Education: Dilemmas of Aspirations and Choices*, discusses intergenerational aspirations and concerns regarding education, along with the question of identity. Chapter seven, *Language-Script Disputes and Formal Learning*, is dedicated to discussing the internal discourse within the Santhal community in Santragachi regarding the use of the Santhali language and its script, Ol Chiki, in education. Chapter eight, *Summary and Concluding Thoughts*, brings together the key insights on

the discourse of aspirations for mobility and the dilemmas of identity that run throughout the text.

The work is the product of an in-depth qualitative account of around 40 families and is able to generate intriguing questions regarding aspirations, education, and marginality. The book engages with Louis Wirth's idea of the ghetto, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital, Giorgio Agamben's notion of the juridico-political structure of camps, and the idea of the public sphere as articulated by Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser, along with Erving Goffman's concept of stigma. Apart from these, John Ogbu's arguments deeply influence the debates in the book, and it also employs the interesting classification of the non-elite middle class by Steve Darné in explaining the social formations among the migrant Santhals. The book successfully and coherently brings together these theoretical discourses to illuminate its central argument concerning the aspirations of marginal communities and the dilemmas of identity within a neoliberal political and economic context. The thick descriptions drawn from fieldwork and presented in the text aptly reflect this discourse. Although the present study illuminates the nuances involved in the transformation of 'primordial native' identity into 'class identity' in the Weberian sense of class, one can also draw insights for thinking about the structural class processes through which communities are dispossessed and relocated across spatial contexts as part of the primitive accumulation of capital in the neoliberal era, irrespective of their aspirations and apparent mobility.

This book makes a significant contribution to the discourse on marginality. With its empirical insights and theoretical reflections, it deepens our understanding of how marginality is constructed in everyday life. It provides rich empirical evidence on how marginal spaces are produced, the nature of aspirations and the role of education, the dilemmas and support mechanisms of people at the margins, and the question of identity within the broader discourse of marginality. The analyses are particularly insightful in addressing certain fundamental questions of 'identity', especially as it is experienced in everyday life, which is dynamic rather than static. The processes of negotiation, their inherent dilemmas, and the ways in which hegemonic systems respond to and shape such negotiations are effectively unravelled in the discussions presented in the book. The author's use of Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of contemporary spaces offers an interesting explanation for the apparent contradictions observed in the relationship between aspirations for mobility and their resulting dilemmas. One can extend this discussion to raise important questions about marginality: why do the deeper structures of the state (beyond the immediate apparatus of government) compel such migrations and produce sustained experiences of marginalisation? How do the apparent promises of social mobility mask the structural design of exploitation without resolving it? It is particularly interesting to note the author's discussion on the removal of English as a compulsory subject by the government, which is analysed using the concept of biopolitics derived from Michel Foucault. At the same time, one may also reflect on the structures that render English effectively compulsory for children—not merely as a language,

but as a prerequisite medium of learning—and the resulting disadvantages this creates, especially for first-generation learners. In this way, the book offers deeper insights and empirical evidence that provoke multiple interpretations and stimulate further debate.

For anyone interested in the question of marginality, this book is undoubtedly a relevant source, as it brings together many of the important themes and discourses associated with the subject. It represents a significant contribution to scholarship on marginality, particularly by foregrounding education and the question of marginal identity within an urban context, in line with the works of Manabi Majumdar, Ajeet Kumar Pankaj, and Jahnavi Sen, among others.

The book, with its compelling combination of theoretical engagement and empirical richness, constitutes an important contribution to sociology, urban studies, tribal studies, and educational studies. It offers deeper insights into theoretical and conceptual understandings while also prompting a critical rethinking of existing policy frameworks.

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Book Review: Family Studies

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Book Review

Family Studies. Edited by Anuja Agrawal. Oxford University Press, 2024, PP 384, ISBN 9780198930693.

--Shraddha K. Awasthi

Family Studies by Anuja Agrawal emerges as a significant new contribution to the largely sociological scholarship on Indian families, including the classic work by Patricia Uberoi titled *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (1993), and more recent ones such as *The Contemporary Indian Family: Transitions and Diversity* edited by Devi Prasad et.al (2020), and Sunita Manda's *Kinship, Family and Marriage* (Manda, 2024). The book brings together diverse perspectives drawn from various disciplines of sociology, anthropology, law and political science and not just confining itself to the domain of sociology. Anuja Agrawal, who has written widely on themes like gender, female sexuality, family, kinship, marriage among others, notes in the introduction section of the book, that family is a complex institution with no fixed definitions of either its meaning or its content. While there are many notions around the 'demise' of family as an institution, its forms and values need to be explored deeply. She argues in the book how 'normative' and 'non-normative' families have their own functional importance in providing care, nurturance and affection, on one hand, while also being as sources of violence and inequity on the other. Agarwal very well brings out the centrality of family to social reproduction, economic and political entitlements as reasons why there exist so much control and constraints in family life and family formation. The selected essays are categorized in four parts, each engaging with a unique aspect of family studies that have received comparatively limited attention in India. These include Critical Reorientations, Beyond the 'normative' family, Trust, Betrayal and Shifting Relations and New Practices: Familial and Methodological. The first part deals with understanding families in India and questioning popular notions around changing family system and structures in India. In the first chapter, Penny Vera-Sanso challenges the narratives of 'degenerating' joint family system due to 'changing family values' and losing cultural and traditional values. She argues that such narratives are a part of wider political agenda of shifting public attention from issues of working conditions, housing, healthcare more critical factors determining 'living arrangements' (p.52). She presents a critique of fixed definitions and criteria for defining families, particularly in government censuses, that often fail to take into account parents who stay with more than one family on different occasions take responsibilities in all these households. Her analysis provides a strong conceptual entry point into the volume on family studies by challenging existing ideas and narratives. Kumkum Sangari,

in chapter 2, explores the relationship between the state, market and families. She uses the terms ‘families’ and ‘the family’, in order to represent both the diversity of families and structural similarities despite those differences. Sangari claims that market has absorbed many roles of services hitherto performed by families, calling it ‘contractualization’ of family. The trend of changing family systems influenced or impacted by neoliberal state and market is thus, an interesting and important interlinkage that Sangari brings out in the essay. The second part of the book focuses on the alternative definitions of family and goes beyond the ‘normative’ understanding, by diving into legal, political and economic factors in studying family and changing trends in marriages. In Chapter-3, Sylvia Vatuk traces the legal history of the law of ‘restitution of conjugal rights’ (RCR), a suit that is filed by a spouse to get their marital partner back to their marital home (Baxi, 2009), its utilization and emerging trends in the interpretation of the law by the judiciary. Vatuk raises a crucial question regarding the utility of saving a marriage (one of the major purposes of RCR) if the relationship has already lost its significance and the duties of marriage have already been ‘ceased’ to be observed by either of the married parties. She also criticizes the Indian Feminist Movement for excluding concerns around either removal or modification of RCR. Chapter 4 brings out another alternative definition of family by focusing on the history and current ongoing ideological arguments of Men’s Rights Movement (MRM) and the kind of kinship and families that are formed and envisioned by the members and advocates of MRM. Srimati Basu in this chapter brings out a perspective of a family from single, widowed men or men who do not wish to get married hence, paving a way for more research around the kind of families men build ‘without wives’. Ghosh and Sanyal, in Chapter-5 provide a descriptive analysis of laws in India that are often discriminatory in favor of heterosexual married couples, and a reflection on why marital status should not be a ‘constitutionally or statutorily protected’ ground for discrimination. Through their analysis they showcase how laws around housing, health, parenthood and child rearing, marriage, maintenance, among others result in ‘privileging’ marriages and marriagelike-relationships but end up being discriminatory towards other ‘non-normative familial relationships’ including queer couples, or even people who choose to stay unmarried. While studies have focused on ‘honour’ killings, and the role of Khaps (Caste panchayats in Haryana, which are not legally recognized, but enjoy wider social recognition and are responsible for upholding caste and community norms (Chowdhry, 1997)) in punishing intercaste marriages (for instance Chowdhry, 1997; Mody, 2008; Ahlawat, 2015 among others), Rama Srinivasan in Chapter 6 focuses on the crises in family/kinship. She contends that such opposition to love marriages are a ‘symptom of rather than the cause of crises in family/kinship’ (p.188). Srinivasan forms a link between family

relations and agrarian crisis in North India and through her work, suggests how the changing economic conditions have impacted familial relations and are responsible for making 'mutations' in kinships. Part three focuses on emotions like trust and betrayal, in relationships including friendships in families. The three chapters in this part revolve around the above themes but in different geographical settings, with nuances added to each of them. Chapter 7 for instance, focuses on friendships that are formed in kin relations, particularly between a newlywed woman and her affinal family members. Soibam Haripriya in next chapter, vividly explains the background of violence in Manipur, the implications of the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, which gives special powers to Armed Forces stationed there to use force against a person acting in contravention of law (p.234)). She suggests that amidst the prevalence of state violence, familial care, even though difficult and challenging, is still evident in different ways. Her observations are in contrast with Parul Bhandari's analysis in previous chapter, where she notes 'mutual trust' and emotional support were the foundations on which friendships were maintained. Haripriya on the other hand observed that 'trust and suspicion co-constitute' friendships and kin relationships in areas marked by violence and death, thereby questioning the normative definitions of heterosexual families. The last chapter of this part is set in Australia, where Supriya Singh focuses on the Indian migrant households, including parent-migrants, as well as Indians who have aged there. Her study showcases how preference for traditional joint families is changed for Indian migrants who aged in Australia who now prefer living 'near' their sons' families but at the same time, having a different house for themselves. Part four of the book deals with newer family practices in India as well as newer methodologies adopted for such kinds of studies. Chapter 10 is an interesting study by Shriram Venkatraman on upper-middle-class women, employed in full-time jobs, who are employing new digital technologies, particularly WhatsApp, for parenting and bringing up their children. The chapter explores how mothers use WhatsApp and other such platforms to The study shows the challenges that mothers face while balancing out between various roles as mothers, providing love and care, and regulating media consumption patterns of their children as well as striking a balance between digital work and digital play for children. The rest of the chapters in this part (chapters 11 and 12) draw on the concepts of 'doing' and 'displaying' families given by Janet Finch (2007), and emphasise on how photographs, including digital images, are utilized to represent the family as an integrated group, often the members seeking social inclusion and validation. Nidhin Donald focuses on images from the website of Syrian Christian families in Kerala and analyses them using his own artworks (which are fictional drawings informed by visual patterns found on these websites). His analysis helps in extrapolating how the families represent

their practices and how they wish to be seen to other such collectives in their attempt to form networks and connections. In chapter 12, Suryanandini Narain examines the photographs and videos recording Indian weddings and the role of these images in formulating civil, class, and cultural identities in north Indian urban society. Janaki Abraham (2010) shows through her study on wedding videos in Kerala that audience is often unable to see the couple and the rituals being performed due to presence of many cameramen and videographers; they later see the rituals with the eyes of the cameramen through wedding videos. Narain's observations reflect similar findings. She makes an additional theoretical contribution by showing the images of cohesiveness created by families. Families trust the photographer to not just witness but interpret these acts of integration along with display and aspiration. The work goes beyond the anthropological practice of observer documenting images to working with images as produced by community and archived by them. While Agrawal takes the conversations around 'non-normative' families similar to the work titled *The Contemporary Indian Family: Transitions and Diversity* (Prasad, Juvva and Nayar, 2020), I believe studies on 'non-normative' family structures should also focus on other kinds of families that have not found a place in this volume. While the book includes a crucial chapter on the kind of family single or widowed men have built for themselves, others, for instance single women's own ways of perceiving family or LGBTQ+ households should also be taken into account. I hope these kinds of families find their place in the next edition of the book paving way for more detailed and deeper dialogues around them. Ultimately, *Family Studies* marks an important scholarly intervention by enriching the existing literature on Indian families. This book will particularly interest undergraduate and post graduate students as well as scholars who wish to get a hold of the dynamic Indian family system. Agrawal, through the book encourages more feminist research on family in a manner that engages with disciplines such as Community Development, Social Work, Psychoanalytic approaches among others.

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