



Vol. 13

ISSN 2277-1425
e-ISSN 2277-1433



Funded by ICSSR

Himachal Pradesh University Journal

Humanities and Social Sciences

No. 3

Special Issue

December 2025

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A Peer Reviewed Biannual
Journal of Himachal Pradesh University

HIMACHAL PRADESH UNIVERSITY JOURNAL

(Humanities and Social Sciences)

A Peer Reviewed Biannual

ISSN: 2277-1425; e-ISSN: 2277-1433

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Note: Himachal Pradesh University Journal (HPUJ) is an ICSSR Funded journal since November 2024.

The soft copy of the journal is available at <https://www.hpuj.in/>

Subscription

Annual Rs.1500 Institutional Rs. 1000 Individual Overseas: \$ 70

Claims for undelivered copies may be made no later than four months of publication. The publisher will supply the missing copies when losses have been sustained in transit and if the availability in stock allows.

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Post-US withdrawal geopolitics: understanding the shift from decline to strategic ascendancy in India-Afghanistan relations

M. Yousufzai & H.K. Thakur

ABSTRACT

In view of 2020 Doha Agreement, the US withdrew from Afghanistan facilitating the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The new development marks a significant moment in the South Asian geopolitics. The current paper investigates how the South Asian geopolitics and the Indo-Afghanistan relations in the post-US withdrawal era have evolved. It also examines the strategic implications for regional and global actors, including China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. Against its traditional stand on democracy and state-building in Afghanistan, India has pursued a realist approach and pragmatic engagement strategy with the Taliban to safeguard its national interest, security and connectivity. The study argues that India's well-articulated outreach through the consistent humanitarian aid, diplomatic re-engagement, and backchannel negotiations to intervene the easy slide of Afghanistan into the strategic monopolization orbit of Pakistan and China. This well-conceived approach may transform the regional alignments and complicate the Sino-Pakistani cooperation, and reshape the emerging security architecture of South and Central Asia.

Keywords: South Asia, Geopolitics, India-Afghanistan Relation, Geopolitics

Introduction

The Indo-Afghanistan relations trajectory in the post-U.S. withdrawal phase exhibits a complex interplay of strategic recalibration, pragmatic diplomacy, and continuity of long-standing developmental engagement. After the fall of democratically elected government and the Islamic Republic in August 2021 and the return of the Taliban to power, India initially adopted a careful posture, giving preference to its personnel and people in the country, and reassessing the evolving regional landscape. Conversely, the rapidly changing geopolitical environment, including a vague U.S. strategy, Pakistan's futile efforts at consolidating influence in Kabul, and China's expanding strategic foothold forced India to gradually re-engage with the Taliban-led administration. This diplomatic re-engagement between the two countries unfolded through

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structured dialogue and incremental confidence-building measures (CBMs) took the two countries bilateral cordiality to a new height. High-level meetings between India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, together with the restoration and subsequent upgrading of India's diplomatic presence in Kabul, indicates a pragmatic shift from principled distance to calibrated engagement. Importantly, the Taliban leadership has repeatedly assured India that Afghan territory will not be used for anti-India activities, implicitly addressing New Delhi's long-standing security concerns regarding Pakistan-backed militant groups.

Relations between the people of Afghanistan and India can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization. The Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan have had the closest relations since the pre-historic times (Sharma, 2007, p. 259). The two states are bound by centuries-old historical and cultural ties, reflected in enduring connections across art, culture, architecture, cuisine, and language (Grishin & Rawan, 2020). India has long been regarded as Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and the largest provider of development assistance in the region. India's contribution to the Afghanistan's development includes major civilian infrastructure projects, notably the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam and the Afghan Parliament building. India's development partnership with Afghanistan began in the 1950s, when Afghanistan was India's largest export market for dry fruits until transit trade through Pakistan became problematic. However, there was a serious disruption in this flow during the Afghan civil war from 1992 to 96. During the Taliban rule, a force averse to India, the diplomatic relations were severed and India's embassy was closed in 1996 (Sinha, 2017).

The study follows a qualitative research methodology grounded in geopolitical and foreign policy analysis. It relies primarily on primary and secondary sources, including official statements, parliamentary debates, policy briefs, think-tank reports, and scholarly literature. Key developments, agreements and engagements are investigated through document analysis and comparative policy evaluation. The study also adopts a realist theoretical framework to explain India's policy shift from normative democracy promotion to pragmatic strategic engagement in the post-withdrawal geopolitical environment. From the realist lens, India's post-withdrawal Afghanistan policy shows a visible shift from principled commitments to power-centric calculations guided by its national interest like subduing g Pakistan's anti-India moves, regional security and stability, checking cross-border terrorism, checking increased Chinese presence and balancing the changing geopolitical landscape in favour of India. Following the Doha Agreement and the Taliban's return, India prioritises security, strategic access, and balance-of-power concerns over democracy promotion. Engagement with the Taliban is, therefore, a deliberate Indian policy to prevent Afghanistan's drift into the exclusive influence of Sino-Pakistan duo, preserve connectivity, and safeguard core national interests within an evolving regional power structure.

Diplomatic breakdown and the India–Afghani relations (1992-1996)

The relations between India and Afghanistan experienced a sudden low and almost near-total non-cooperation during the period of Taliban ascendancy (1996–2001), rooted in geopolitical rivalry and ideological divergence. After the fall of Najibullah regime in 1992, Afghanistan slipped into civil war among different mujahideen factions. India initially maintained a reasonable distance from the Rabbani government, considering it as a legitimate authority amid instability. However, with the rise of Pakistan backed Taliban in 1996, there was further decline in their ties as it fundamentally altered the regional equation. India refused to pass recognition to the Taliban regime, and showed sympathy with the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Massoud. The Indian concerns were both strategic and ideological. The Taliban's close association with Pakistan heightened New Delhi's fears of Afghanistan turning into a hub of anti-India forces, particularly in the context of militancy in Kashmir. The period was also marked by terrorist acts like the 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 to Kandahar. The incident deepened the mistrust between the two states, as Taliban's posture during the hijack was found pro-hijackers. Afghanistan also provided safe haven to international terrorist groups including Al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden, reinforcing India's security anxieties.

It was only after the U.S-led intervention in September 2001 that caused the fall of the Taliban and the initiation of formal Indian diplomatic engagement with Kabul. The post-Taliban government led by Hamid Karzai since 2002 witnessed India's rapid re-engagement with Afghanistan and the reopening of its embassy and becoming a major development partner. Thus, the 1996–2001 period represents a phase of strategic estrangement, shaped by proxy competition, terrorism concerns, and divergent regional alignments. Taliban's rule, though recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE only, from 1996 to 2001 has been the worst phase in Afghan history on account of retrogressive policies and was opposed by Northern Alliance. United Nations and OIC never recognized the Talibani government that controlled around 90 p.c. of the territory in 2001 (Thakur, 2021; See also Thakur, 2025).

Afghanistan was also found engaged in anti-Indian activities like supporting terrorism and blocking Indian trade inflows. During a survey, Indian Armed Forces has obtained the knowledge of about 105 training camps, 49 of these were in Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir, 48 in Pakistan and 8 in Afghanistan (Bakshi & Sharma, 2025, p. 32). However, after the fall of Taliban in 2001, a new phase began in Indo-Afghanistan relations. Following the appointment of Hamid Karzai (a post-graduate from the Department of Political Science, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India) as interim president in December 2001, India quickly established diplomatic relations, reopened its embassy and opened four consulates in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Jalalabad (Nagra, Mustafa, & Imran, 2019). Since 2001, India has emerged as

Afghanistan's fifth largest bilateral donor, committing over 2–3 billion US dollars in development assistance. This included major infrastructure projects, educational scholarships, healthcare, and bilateral trade which reached up to 1.5 billion US dollars in the year 2019–2020 (Destradi, 2018).

Between 2002 and 2020, the state of Afghanistan underwent a significant democratic transition under the framework of the Bonn Agreement that led to the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Under new Presidents like Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan embraced a new constitution in 2004. Several elections were also conducted for presidential and parliamentary bodies, media freedoms were increased, and the formal state institutions were strengthened. Despite of the violent resistance by the Taliban, the phase marked an era of multiplication of Afghan relations globally. During this period, India–Afghanistan relations also deepened into a comprehensive strategic partnership. India became one of Afghanistan's major development partners, investing over \$3 billion in infrastructure, health, education, and capacity-building. Landmark projects included the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul and the Salma Dam (Afghan-India Friendship Dam) (Talukdar, 2017). The Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation (BRO) constructed a major road in 2009 in the remote Afghan province of Nimroz, connecting Delaram to Zaranj. This has proved a viable alternative route for the duty-free movement of goods through the Chabahar port in Iran to Afghanistan (Bennett, 2005). India followed a strategy of building up huge infrastructure in Afghanistan to reduce its dependence on Pakistan. In 2011, India and Afghanistan also signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), formalizing cooperation in security, trade, and institutional development. India extends significant help by providing strength to the democratic institutions through trained civil servants and security personnel, and back Kabul's sovereignty in regional forums. India and Afghanistan view each other as important pillars of strength - Afghanistan sees India as a non-offensive development partner, and India views Afghanistan as a stable, democratic state which is important for its regional security and balancing Pakistan's strategic influence.

Amid the wave of freedom willing to entrench in the country, democracy in Afghanistan failed to earn legitimacy and went through testing times against the insurgents and retrogressive forces. While the Karzai government completed successful two terms and engaged in great reconstruction project it couldn't earn legitimacy among the diverse sections due to different reasons. The Ghani government has also performed moderately since 2014. The National Unity Government (NUG) under Ghani failed to deliver what it had promised in uniting all power groups in Afghanistan, reduce conflict and bring stability in military situation and begin a peace process with the Taliban. President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah failed in meeting the objectives. Taliban's gaining control over Kunduz, Farah and Gazni further dwarfed the status of Ghani government to the extent that US itself bypassed the government

to enter into an agreement with Taliban in February 2020. As part of that agreement, the US committed for the full withdrawal of international forces and the Taliban promised to prevent other groups like Al Qaeda from the use of Afghan soil against the US, a major US security concern (Thakur, 2021). In the democratic phase of Afghanistan from 2002 to 2020 India has played a significant role in state-building and political institution making. India's objectives in Afghanistan are threefold: to promote a stable democratic order, counter Pakistani influence, and prevent Islamabad-backed militants from using Afghanistan as a platform for terrorism that could threaten Indian interests. New Delhi sees each goal as interconnected (Constantino, 2020).

U.S. withdrawal and the collapse of democracy in Afghanistan

On 29 February 2020, after more than nineteen years of conflict, the United States and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan (AJIL, 2020). The agreement forced Taliban to prevent the use of Afghan territory which may threaten the United States and its allies, while also obliging them to enter into negotiations with other Afghan parties (Franz, 2021). Consequently, the Afghan government collapsed, and President Ashraf Ghani fled the country. By the end of August, the United States and several other countries had carried out a large-scale airlift operation to evacuate their nationals, as well as Afghans who were at risk (Eichensehr, 2021) The primary objective of the American presence in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon was to eliminate the threat posed by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda to the United States, Afghanistan, and the broader international community. However, after nearly two decades of extensive bloodshed and widespread destruction, Afghanistan ultimately fell back under Taliban control. The withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces left behind a weak, fragile, and deeply uncertain political environment. On the battlefield, Afghan security forces were unable to compensate for the loss of U.S. and NATO military support, a deficiency that directly contributed to the rapid collapse of state authority and the fall of Kabul (Malick & Faye, 2021). The international community's state-building efforts in Afghanistan fundamentally failed to achieve their stated objectives building a stable and democratic society. The United States and its allies have not been able to achieve their goals of building an Afghan society based on Western democratic values.(Shukurov, 2022). The strategic policy of the international community was marked by fundamental miscalculations about the viability of the democratization project. The Afghan state and democratic institution, supported by the United States for nearly twenty years, were never really in a position to reinforce a strong Afghan political community, because the democratic forces in Afghanistan were not organized enough to sustain effectively in such situation (Heinze & Steele, 2025). However, this democratic period faced immediate and sustained challenges. The Taliban quickly regrouped with the initial aim of seeking revenge and restoring their Islamic Emirate, publicly refusing the vision

of electoral democracy and instead selected the post-2001 undemocratic system (Ibrahimi, 2022).

The days of freedom are over in Afghanistan, and now the streets of Kabul are under Taliban rule. There has been a huge impact on the social, cultural and administrative structures and institutions. After twenty years of U.S.-supported governance, millions of residents of Kabul are experiencing an uncertain condition, where government services are still largely unavailable. An economy that depended on American aid for the past two decades has suddenly plunged into freefall, making daily life extremely difficult for citizens. Girls have been prevented from attending secondary schools, and women are not allowed to travel long distances without a male relative. Before the Taliban came to power, men and women would picnic together in parks on weekends and sit in cafés, chatting over coffee. Girls wore knee-length dresses and jeans. Well-groomed men worked in government offices wearing western suits, where women also held some high-level responsibilities. Thousands of women who served as lawyers, judges, soldiers and police officers are no longer at their posts. Most working women have been restricted to jobs in education or health care. Serving fellow men in government offices are told to grow beards, wear traditional Afghan clothes. Music is officially banned, and foreign news broadcasts, TV shows and movies have been removed from public airwaves. Many people became unemployed after jobs with foreign embassies, and NGOs vanished (Goldbaum & Zucchini, 2022).

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 represented a watershed moment that fundamentally reshaped India–Afghanistan relations. Following the Taliban's return to power, India was compelled to close its embassy and consulates in Afghanistan in August 2021 (Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022). The political change has caused significant uncertainty in several aspects of the partnership. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has led to a condition of uncertainty about its relations with other states, especially India, thereby substantially damaging the commerce, planning, investments, exports, and imports through its territory (Devi, 2022).² The change in Afghanistan has not only directly affected the bilateral relations between India and Afghanistan, but also has triggered a new round of regional power games involving India, Pakistan, Russia, Iraq and other countries (Zhang, 2022).

India Afghanistan relations: the future possibilities

The US withdrawal implies several possibilities ranging from failure to sustain democracy to the rise of Islamic forces. Afghanistan may fall to the same old power rivalry of eighties with the Taliban side shift, as Russia this time flanks with Taliban, a force created by US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Russo-Chinese understanding over the BRI and South Asia of which Pakistan appears to be an important partner excludes the Indian role. India has played a

significant role in reconstruction of the war torn state but its presence has not gone well with Pakistan, China and now Russia (Thakur, 2021). The strategic thinkers also note the increased Chinese presence in South Asia in general and Afghanistan in particular creating concerns in India. The \$47 billion megaproject China Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC) as part of China's ambitious Belt and Road (BRI) project, now valued at \$67 billion in 2020, the 99-year lease of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, and the BRI 2017 signed with Nepal are some of the big projects China has grabbed in the sub-continent as it also eyes Afghanistan's Bagram airfield left abandoned by the US (Thakur, 2021).

The future of India-Afghanistan relations has both significant challenges and emerging opportunities as the two sides seek to redefine their engagement amid altered political realities. The Taliban's takeover ushered in a new phase, generating a complex mix of constraints and possibilities. This political transformation has compelled India to reassess its diplomatic approach, particularly in exploring pragmatic avenues for cooperation across various sectors. At the same time, key challenges persist, including India's non-recognition of the Taliban regime, intensifying regional rivalries, and ongoing security threats posed by terrorist groups (Acxir, 2025). Despite these impediments, both sides have shown a willingness to continue cooperation. Taliban leader Sher Mohammed Abbas Stanekzai has stated his government's commitment to continuing political, economic, and trade ties with India, while India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has shown interest in extending relations with Taliban government. For the first time India participated in Intra-Afghan peace talks. India appears to be prepared to proceed with relations under Taliban rule in order to further its international interests (Manzoor, 2022). India's strategic interests in Afghanistan remain compelling drivers for future engagement. India has the potential to take a policy to continue cooperating with Afghanistan due to its interest in controlling Afghanistan's mineral resources and realizing India as a regional power in the South Asian region (Susilowati, Fauzi, Hidayat, & Nabeel, 2022) The broader regional context will play a decisive role in shaping future prospects. The United States' disengagement from Afghanistan has placed India and China in a new competitive setting, as both seek to cultivate influence in Afghanistan. This evolving dynamic requires India's Afghanistan policy to be robust and strategically calibrated aimed at safeguarding its geopolitical interests, counterbalancing China's expanding influence, and simultaneously contributing to the pursuit of a multipolar regional and global order (Yousuf, 2023).

India's re-engagement with Taliban

India's engagement with the Taliban marked a fundamental shift in its Afghanistan policy, moving from complete non-alignment to active diplomatic engagement. According to strategic expert Michael Kugelman, 'New Delhi's engagement with the Taliban represents a significant shift as it moves from an

inconsistent relationship towards initiating some form of communication channel.’ This pragmatic approach was driven by the strategic need to safeguard India’s significant security interests in Afghanistan and its influence in the region from the monopoly of staunch rivals like Pakistan and China (Dar,2021) India’s decision to engage in negotiations with the Taliban must be viewed in the perspective of a rapidly shifting regional landscape. The initiative by India is not a step taken for official recognition, but it is a strategic decision influenced by several factors. These include the increasing tension between the Taliban and Pakistan, a relative decline in Iran’s influence in the region, Russia’s preoccupation with other geopolitical issues, uncertainty regarding the United States’ global strategy, and China’s growing presence in Afghanistan (Indian Express, 2025). All these changes have altered the regional balance, leading India to recalibrate its foreign policy of preserving distance with the Taliban. India seeks to safeguard its security interests, prevent Afghanistan from becoming a haven for anti-India militant groups, and preserve its long-standing political and economic stakes in the country, while carefully avoiding legitimisation of the Taliban regime (Roy, 2025). India’s senior diplomat, Vikram Misri, met with Taliban acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai, marking the greatest degree of contact since Kabul fell. The Taliban leadership stated a desire to expand political and economic relations with India, describing it as a “significant regional and economic power”. The discussions allegedly centered on growing commerce and utilizing Iran’s Chabahar port, which India has been constructing to avoid Pakistan’s Karachi and Gwadar ports. India has historical and civilisational ties with Afghanistan, Foreign Minister S Jaishankar explained to parliament in 2023. India has spent more than \$3 billion on over 500 projects in Afghanistan, including roads, electricity lines, dams, hospitals, and clinics. It has trained Afghan officers, provided hundreds of scholarships to students, and constructed a new parliament building. This represents an enduring geopolitical fact. Regardless of the character of the state in Kabul, monarchical, communist, or Islamist there has been a natural closeness between Delhi and Kabul (Biswas, 2025).

On May 16, 2025, immediately after the conflict between India and Pakistan ended with a ceasefire agreement, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar held a phone call with Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. During the conversation, Jaishankar thanked Afghanistan for the assistance provided and Muttaqi expressed India’s condolences over the Pahalgham terrorist attack. This diplomatic initiative reflects India’s emerging policy of careful and balanced re-engagement with the Taliban, aiming to maintain strategic dialogue channels and protect India’s regional interests. In August 2025, under this re-engagement policy, India requested the UN Security Council’s Sanctions Committee (UNSCSC) for granting permission to Ameer Khan Muttaqi to travel to India since in January 2001, Muttaqi had been included in the UN Security Council’s Consolidated Sanctions List, necessitating a formal exemption for international

travel. Although the initial request was denied, the re-submitted application a month later was approved, making his visit to India possible between October 9 and 16. This order of these incidents highlights India's careful policy shift towards more pragmatic and realistic engagement with Taliban without granting it formal diplomatic recognition (The Hindu, 2025). For the first time since the Taliban came to power, Afghanistan's Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi visited New Delhi on October 9, 2025. During his six-day visit, Muttaqi aimed to strengthen economic ties with India while also advancing the Taliban's broader efforts to gain international diplomatic recognition by increasing engagement with regional powers. He met with India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, and other top officials to address a range of political, economic, and commercial concerns. The tour featured discussions with Indian business executives, as well as cultural events, such as trips to the Taj Mahal and a renowned Islamic madrasa. (Azami & Mollai, 2025). India reaffirmed its commitment to its long-standing development partnership with Afghanistan, including the maintenance and repair of completed projects and the completion of projects already underway. Both sides agreed that Afghanistan's additional development priorities could be advanced through continuous technical consultation. The Afghan delegation clearly acknowledged India's long-term contribution to infrastructure development and capacity-building initiatives and expressed openness to increasing cooperation in areas aligned with Afghanistan's changing development needs (News18, 2025). During the meeting Taliban foreign minister held that Taliban has never promoted any anti-Indian sentiments and emphasized that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will not allow any individual or group to use afghan soil against India. The External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also announced that India's technical mission in Kabul would be upgraded to a full Embassy and observed that close cooperation will not only contribute to Afghanistan's national development but also improve regional stability (Hindustan Times, 2025). After the diplomatic dialogue, Haj Nuruddin Azizi, Afghanistan's Minister of Industry and Commerce, made an official visit to India from November 19 to 25, 2025. This visit represents an important initiative to restore practical communication in economic and trade fields with the Taliban administration.

The two sides announced the launch of air freight corridors on the Kabul–Delhi and Kabul–Amritsar routes, welcomed the reactivation of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on trade, commerce, and investment, and agreed to explore cooperation opportunities in mining and other high-value sectors. It was further agreed that both countries would appoint commercial representatives in each other's embassies and institutionalise the establishment of a Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024). Recently, Afghan Taliban officials assigned diplomat Noor Ahmad Noor to the Afghanistan embassy in New Delhi. Noor has arrived in the Indian capital to begin his responsibilities as Chargé d'Affaires. Amir Khan Muttaqi, in a meeting with S. Jaishankar in October 2025, confirmed their appointment. The acceptance of the

Taliban-appointed chargé d'affaires in New Delhi by the Government of India is considered a significant shift from its previous state-centred approach with Afghanistan. Instead of a strategic partnership, India has of late shifted towards an issue-based practical approach aiming at ensuring access to humanitarian assistance, upholding regional stability, and continuation of diplomatic dialogue (Roy, 2026). India has also shown deep concern over the possibility of turning of Afghanistan in to a hub of militancy and terrorist activities, which could pose a direct threat to India's security and a challenge for sustenance of their bilateral cordiality. From the Taliban's viewpoint, India's proximity is far more important to it than any other state as it could reduce its diplomatic isolation and secure a greater legitimacy to it globally. Furthermore, at the domestic front too, India is important for Afghanistan as its active participation is crucial for accessing development aid, economic support, and humanitarian assistance. The appointment of a Chargé d'Affaires by the Taliban indicates an effort to normalize relations with India and for India, approving the appointment of a lower-level diplomatic position like a Chargé d' Affaires permits it to keep the door of dialogue open without granting formal recognition to the Taliban regime (Bajpayee, 2025).

Conclusions

India's careful and well-conceived engagement with the Taliban reflects a decisive transformation from its policy of principled distance to pragmatic realism. Instead of conferring formal recognition to Kabul, New Delhi has opted for structured, issue-based dialogue premeditated to safeguard its security interests, protect long-standing developmental investments, and prevent Afghanistan from drifting exclusively into the strategic orbit of rivals such as Pakistan and China. Afghanistan has also maintained due distance from China as it didn't handover Bagram airfield to it. The current policy shift emerges from an altering regional balance marked by U.S. withdrawal, rise of Taliban–Pakistan tensions, and shifting alignments involving Iran and Russia. The diplomatic touch between S. Jaishankar and Amir Khan Muttaqi, the facilitation of UN travel exemptions, and the acceptance of a Taliban-appointed Chargé d' Affaires collectively signal the initiation of a noteworthy process that normalises their relations. India has upgraded its technical mission in Kabul but it stops short of diplomatic recognition. By this India has institutionalized communication channels without legitimizing the Taliban government. Instantaneously, the initiation of renewed trade mechanisms, air freight corridors, and cooperation through Iran's Chabahar connectivity framework shows that economic rendezvous remains crucial for the India's Afghanistan calculus. For Kabul, engagement with India reduces its diplomatic isolation and increases the chances for international legitimacy. For India, the new policy ensures continued humanitarian access, plug extremist spillovers towards it, and conserves its historical goodwill in Afghan society. Lastly, India's new Afghanistan policy exhibits a broader strategic doctrine: realism without

endorsement, engagement without recognition, and continuity of influence amid geopolitical uncertainty.

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The foreign policies of developed nations: implications for global stability, development and economic dynamics

Sandip Kumar Singh & Daniel Gidey

ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the foreign policy behaviour of developed states and its impact on global stability and political economy through the theoretical lenses of realism, liberalism, and constructivism. In the post-World War II era, major powers, principally the United States and its Western allies, alongside states like Japan, have shaped a predominantly unipolar order through military alliances, institutional governance frameworks, and economic rule-setting mechanisms. Their foreign policies combine power politics, multilateral engagement, and strategic competition, especially in the evolving rivalry among the United States, China, Russia, and other Western powers. Developed countries significantly influence global development regimes, aid architecture, foreign direct investment, technology transfers, trade rules, and sanctions, thereby shaping markets worldwide, including in developing states. However, their policies are often criticized for neo-colonial tendencies, double standards, and protectionist domestic pressures. Despite these contradictions, emerging multipolarity offers developing countries opportunities to strengthen South-South cooperation and pursue more equitable global development frameworks.

Keywords: Foreign Policy of Developed Nations, Global Stability and Security, International Development Strategies, Global Political Economy Dynamics, and North-South Power Relations

Introduction

The developed world, especially in the Global North, has always maintained a conspicuous role in defining international politics, governance, and security at the global level. Through their foreign policies, which have largely been projected in terms of promoting peace, development, and international cooperation, their own strategic national aspirations in terms of power assertion, dominance, and other economic factors have also been met. From the end of World War II until today, in this multipolar international system, the foreign policies of developed countries not only set international standards but

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determined international development according to their image. This means that foreign policy became an appropriate tool through which the developed country influences international relations. The conduct of states within international relations is basically driven by the quest to maximize power and ensure survival within the international system that is anarchic, and this has been correctly identified by classical realists. The ideas of these theorists highlight how great states emphasize strategic intention, power, and security in international politics (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1948; Waltz, 1979). The liberal institutionalist camp, on the other hand, supports the view that the ever-growing dependence between developed states exists and seriously affects the nature of today's foreign policies because world politics have become less dependent upon force, while intergovernmental institutions are gaining increased importance in the governance of the world (Keohane & Nye, 1987). The period after the Cold War was characterized by the rise of liberal internationalism, whereby industrialized states were able to constitutionalize their values into international institutions such as IMF, World Bank, and WTO, using soft power tools such as (Ikenberry, 2019; J. S. Nye, 2004). Nevertheless, criticisms arose with the focus that such institutions tend to reinforce structural inequalities and curb the policy autonomy of developing countries (Falk, 2004; Slobodian, 2018). The 21st century has brought competitive and forceful elements to foreign strategies used by developed countries.

Notions such as “smart power,” “weaponized interdependence,” and “geoeconomic regimes” can help clarify the ways and means through which economic regulation, technology, finance, and interdependencies are being utilized for geopolitics (Farrell & Newman, 2019; Jones & Hameiri, 2022; Slaughter, 2009). At the same time, great-power rivalry ‘through U.S.–China competition, renewed NATO assertiveness and Indo–Pacific security architectures’ is characterized by a return to balancing behaviour, territorial deterrence, and strategic containment (Mearsheimer, 2019). These changes in development point to the increasingly multi-dimensional nature of foreign policies within the Global North.

Theoretical framework

Any serious theoretical attempt to understanding foreign policies adopted by developed states has to be pluralist in nature, since no single framework accounts for the diverse motivations, policy instruments, and global consequences involved. Emerging research demonstrates that state behaviour is shaped through the interaction of material power, institutional constraints, and socially constructed identities. Correspondingly, this section invokes the respective core insights of Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism as a framing for the analysis before engaging with the appropriateness of a multi-theoretical approach, liaising these perspectives into one. The theoretical eclecticism imbued in such an approach gains its impetus from recent IR debates, raising questions with regard to how best to capture complexity within foreign-policy

behaviour in an era defined by great-power competition, institutional contestation, and normative change (Drieschova et al., 2022; Ikenberry, 2020; Mearsheimer, 2021).

Realism: power, security, and the balance of power

Realism represents one of the earliest and most formative theoretical paradigms on foreign policy, where there is a large emphasis placed on the relevance of power, interest, and survival. Realism was, and still is, one of the leading foundations of international politics and strategies for developed countries, especially for the USA, the major European powers, and now also for East Asian developed states (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1948).

Classical Realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, postulated in his book “Politics Among Nations” in 1948 that states are rational in pursuit of maximum power, therefore regarding foreign policy as an expression of national interest. This accounts for why great powers always strive to maintain their strategic superiority either by military alliances (like NATO), forward deployment, and deterrence. Kenneth Waltz’s structuralism claims that in an international system characterized by anarchy, states are forced into self-help, therefore great powers maintain a balance of power in order to feel secure (Waltz, 1979).

Contemporary realism demonstrates the refinement of these views, as it emphasizes the forces that determine state actions. Mearsheimer asserts that the hegemonic intentions of a liberal United States have led to periods of instability, since the inevitable reversion of great powers to geopolitics has occurred. The offensive realism constructed by Mearheimer has been a contributing factor in increased rivalry between the US and China in contemporary times and the defence posture of Europe with respect to Russia. Realism remains an attractive theory because it offers an explanation pertinent to developments in international security and defence politics in a highly interdependent international system (Mearsheimer, 2019).

Liberalism: institutions, cooperation, and interdependence

On the other hand, the liberal theories give a contrarian outlook and highlight cooperation, institutions, and interdependence as the determinants for foreign policy behaviour and actions. In the contemporary era, the institutionalists consider that the developed countries have created the global governance frameworks of the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the OECD, and the G7 institutions for reasons other than their strategic goals, but for principles like predictability and problem-solving (Freeman et al., 2022; Lake, 2018).

Current literature depicts the phenomenon in which the use of institutionalized frameworks in modern great powers holds significance in guiding their decision-making process in the realm of foreign policies. Various institutions in the

economic and political domains facilitate the route through which cooperation in response to trade regimes, climate change, monetary regulation, and health possibilities in the global setting now exists (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2023). The fact that there was a further reinforcement of liberal international order in the post-Cold War era and in the post-2010 situation is a further testament to the relevance of this phenomenon. Ikenberry illustrates how a group of developed democracy states continue to support encasing norms of liberalism within their international institutions and establishments with the goal of realizing a stabilization of the rules and regulations of the rules-based international order (Ikenberry, 2018a, 2020).

Soft power, on other hand, has remained an important concept under liberal International Relations, with recent scholarship emphasizing the role of cultural power, educational exchange, or public diplomacy in supplementing hard power in influencing international outcomes (J. Nye, 2017). The foreign aid regimes, globalization strategies, and development partnerships pursued by OECD countries indicate this general liberal stance (Saltnes, 2021). Realism emphasizes power politics, while liberal international theory shows that great powers employ institutions and economic networks as strategic tools in order to secure leadership position, spread shared values, and exert influence over global governance (Acharya, 2018).

Constructivism: norms, identity, and values in foreign policy

Constructivism also brings a necessary element missing in strictly material approaches because it focuses on the influence of ideas, identities, and social norms in decision-making of foreign policy. The contemporary constructivist literature argues that the mature states make not only claims about their interests but also claims to a set of norms: support for democracy promotion, human rights, rules-based order, and the environment in the case of the mature states (Kowert & Barkin, 2024). It has been asserted again recently that the role of behaviour affected by identity, meaning, and/or norm is relevant for the area of international relations. Foreign policy from the identity of the European Union's role as a normative power in human rights and peace building has remained the same (Hadfield et al., 2017).

Equally so, the engagement of Canada, Japan, and the Nordic countries falls increasingly under the humanitarian tradition, feminist foreign policy, and climate responsibility (Tuominen & Kronlund, 2023). Constructivists have also emphasized the manner whereby embedded norms condition economic and political decision-making. The notion that institutionalized democracies find a balance whereby they meet social demands within their own societies and simultaneously live up to the standards within the global economic order is refashioned within new studies on the liberal order (DUGURI et al., 2022; Ikenberry & Kupchan, 2020).

These norms shape foreign policy preferences on development cooperation, peacekeeping, refugee protection, and climate diplomacy (Krook, 2025; Krook & True, 2012; Rai, 2004). Theories of constructivism also account for why advanced states have varied reactions to similar changes in the global environment, whether as a consequence of memory (e.g., Germany as a pacifist after World War II), identity (e.g., France's "strategic autonomy"); or adherence to certain values (e.g., U.S. support for democratization).

In this regard, theories of constructivism add value to foreign policy research by highlighting the interplay of ideas, norms, and state identities with material interests (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; González, 2025; Mesquita & Shadmehr, 2023).

Justifying a multi-theoretical framework in analysing developed nations' foreign policy

A single theoretical perspective cannot encapsulate adequately the foreign policy behaviour of developed countries because their strategy acts at multiple levels at once military, institutional, economic, and norm levels. This particular article will therefore use a multi-theory approach. This is because of three reasons (Brooks, 2020; Kobayashi & King, 2022).

Developed countries practice real politics/hard power (realism), institutionalized politics/liberalism, and discourse-based politics/constructivism alongside. For instance, the Indo-Pacific Strategy developed by the US utilizes military partnerships (realism), economic structures like IPEF (liberalism), and concepts of freedom and rules-based order (constructivism) at one and the same time. Neither realism, liberalism, nor constructivism captures such a combination of approaches (Tan, 2013; Townshend & Crabtree, 2022).

Realism informs the study of strategic competition, such as NATO expansion and Chinese American competition, while liberalism explains cooperative institutional arrangements, and constructivism reveals the basis of legitimation in policy through shared values. Taken together, these perspectives help build a complete comprehension of the ways in which advanced states combine power politics, norms, and leadership (Ikenberry, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2019).

The current challenges of weaponized interdependence, geoeconomics, and a new generation of global development partnerships and institutions exceed the domain of any one theory. The current environment demands a theoretical approach that incorporates military competition and security (realism), economic and institutional linkages (liberalism), and ideational structures (constructivism) (Farrell & Newman, 2019; Jones & Hameiri, 2022). As a result, a multiple theory framework is applicable for a more refined interpretation of how developed country foreign policies impact global security, development,

and economic factors (Duncombe & Dunne, 2018; Trubowitz & Burgoon, 2023).

Evolution of foreign policies of developed nations: from postwar order to strategic recalibration

The foreign policies of developed countries have traversed a wide range of phases from the post-WWII era up to the present international geopolitical system. The immediate post-WWII period was dominated by military cooperation and bipolar thinking. Nevertheless, beginning at the end of the Cold War and up until the present, there has been a discernible move towards internationalism and the establishment of global institutions. Notwithstanding, in recent years, there appeared to have been a shift back towards international geopolitics and economic interests among developed nations. The conclusion of World War II marks a significant turning point in the framework of foreign policies adopted by developed nations, such as the United States and Western Europe. The devastation in Europe, along with the emergence of a new rival in the form of the Soviet Union, demanded a joint response in post-war foreign policies.

The USA established itself as a leadership country with the Marshall Plan and the creation of new international bodies, namely the UN, IMF, and World Bank (Hogan, 1987; Ruggie, 2002). The above actions, rather than being a result of security concerns alone, also stemmed from the intention to establish a liberal international order based on open markets and a politically stable international system (Ikenberry, 2011). Within Western Europe, driven by the rebuilding of the economy through the influence of the Americans, there has been the search for regional integration through the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Union (Moravcsik, 2013).

The post-WWII Japan foreign policies were based upon the Yoshida Doctrines, namely the restoration of the economy with the United States's security shield (Dower, 2012).

It is presented that the post-WWII international arrangement represented the fusion of security-minded and normative approaches within the international relations paradigm and defined a "hybrid" approach for the foreign policies in the developed nations for a considerable amount of time post the WWI and WWII (Gaddis, 2006).

The developed nations had designed their various policies in a manner as to keep the aspects related to the competition and the rivalry based upon the ideologically constructed patterns in the Cold War era. NATO was born in 1949 and confirmed America's security commitment in Europe in a tangible manner and transformed the European defence policies (Citaristi, 2022; Kaplan, 1988).

Concurrently, the OECD emerged in 1961 to manage economic policies of developed capitalistic countries (Woods, 2014), cementing economic unity in

the West. “The underlying principles of foreign policy during this era of containment (Kennan, 2014), deterrence, and building alliances were rooted in realism and a strategy to effectively cope with Soviet Union rivalry. Western Europe pursued a balance of integration with alignment, while Japan and subsequently South Korea were to prove pivotal to U.S. Asian policy (Calder, 2009). Scholarship notes that military blocs, economic cooperation frameworks, and ideological missions were institutionalized during this period that shaped the strategic identity of developed states (Leffler and Westad, 2010). This also laid the basis of modern technological competition and nuclear strategy that shaped foreign policy and remains prominent to this day.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 disturbed the international order, leading to the advent of a new age, which many nations feel that they live in today that of ‘unipolarity,’ under the hegemony of the USA (Ikenberry et al., 2011). It is within this new age that foreign policy in the developed nations has started to resemble ‘liberal internationalism in that it emphasizes ideals of democracy, cooperation, and globalization (Moore Jr, 2024).

Western global governance institutions have, since the Cold War era, evolved in such a way that they are able to respond to the shifting needs for security and governance and have expanded the scope of their work. NATO has expanded from the original purpose of collective security to operation beyond borders as a consequence of the shift in the needs for crisis management and security (Szenes, 2023; Webber et al., 2012). The European Union also continues to follow the strategy of expansion and the development of instruments for external action as it targets the establishment of the EU as a normative actor (Biscop, 2018).

Japan and Germany have further extended their involvement in peacekeeping, development assistance, and international security cooperation despite their historical and constitutional constraints (C. Hughes, 2015). The era also witnessed the rise of the humanitarian intervention, an aspect of heightened discourse on the relationship between the sovereignty of a nation and the responsibility to protect, especially in the Kosovo and Libyan cases (Bellamy, 2014). In economic terms, the great powers boosted trade liberalism and financial globalization in international institutions, cementing an open international economic system (Tooze, 2021).

Though this era started with optimism about an international system based on rules, interventions, particularly the Iraq war, contributed to an increasing sense of doubt about liberal interventionism. More contemporary scholarship contends that efforts toward a liberalism-led hegemony led to overreach, causing structural circumstances under which great power rivalry resumed (Mearsheimer, 2019; Walt, 2018).

The international system of the 21st century has witnessed an accentuation of strategic rivalry, largely as a response to Chinese surge power and Russian re-activation, impelled by evolutionary transformations in all major developed countries. In effect, competition between the US and China has become the principal conceptual lens that shapes all foreign relations, from technological competition and geoeconomic politics to military advancements, respectively, as identified in (AL KHALEEL, 2024; Mearsheimer, 2003). The Indo-Pacific has been one of the main frontlines in this competition, where the US, Japan, Australia, and India are developing various degrees of strategic cooperation to balance China's emerging power (C, 2020). There have also been major changes in Japanese security policy, where there has been advance security capacity and an active strategic role, marking an apparent shift away from Cold War-era restraints (C. W. Hughes, 2024).

In Europe, geopolitical disruptions such as Brexit, US strategy ambiguity, and conflict between Russia and Ukraine have pushed the European Union 'to rethink its strategy of autonomy in defence and its policies for energy and technological security' (Biscop, 2021). The United States is also seeking to rebalance its strategy with a renewed focus on a 'supply chain resilience strategy' and 'technological security' through its 'global strategy for greater global competition' (Beckley & Brands, 2022; Norton et al., 2025).

Recent research implies that developed countries are moving into 'an increasingly fragmented international system that is multipolar, interdependent, and relies upon defective global governance' (Acharya, 2025; Farrell & Newman, 2023). The international system today demands developing 'hybrid foreign policies' that practice 'realist strategies of power balancing alongside elements of selective multi-literalism and normative' action.

Foreign policy approaches of key developed nations

United States

The foreign policy of the USA remains grounded in the ideology of leadership by example and power projection, this includes military power projection, among others. Even while the grand strategy debate in the USA oscillates between the politics of restraint in foreign policy, in favour of liberal internationalism, it continues to maintain a global strategic infrastructure in terms of military bases and security guarantees that provide continued interventionist policies in strategic areas (Beckley & Brands, 2022; Ikenberry, 2020).

Its strategic infrastructure is directly associated with the need to maintain freedom of navigation, technological supremacy, as well as readiness for use. Democracy promotion assumes the role of one of the increasingly controversial pulls of foreign policy of the United States. Through aid policies, its strategic commitment to the diplomatic process, the USA continues to promote

democracy in accordance with its values in spite of the strategic challenges of stability postulated above (Ikenberry, 2018b; Nye Jr, 2021). There is evidence that the USA's commitment to democracy promotion becomes both selective and instrumented through the theory of strategic rivalry. Military alliances are the central element of the security architecture led by the US. NATO and bilateral alliances in East Asia are critical security instruments based on deterrence, reassurance, and shared burden. They are being transformed to meet the challenge of the increasing PRC's power and cyber threats, amid growing debates about shared burden, escalation, and geography of US security commitments (Brands, 2022; Zhao, 2022).

European union and major EU States (France, Germany, UK)

The European Union and the main European powers simultaneously engage in a strong focus on soft power, diplomatic, and multilateral policies and, when necessary, adjusted security policies. The European Union's soft powers include the promotion of normative influence via the following: Trade diplomatic efforts, Regulatory powers, Human rights, and a strong affinity for institutionalized multilateralism (Bindi, 2010; Manners, 2002).

The external policies of the European mainland additionally capitalize on diplomatic action and regulatory influence through the "Brussels effect." Major European Union member states entail different strategic focuses, with France often concentrating on strategic autonomy and expeditionary defence force projection in Africa and European defence initiatives, while the German strategy focuses on economic statecraft, rule-of-law-based order, and limited defence actions, constrained by historical circumstances (Berger, 1998; Howorth, 2019).

The United Kingdom post-Brexit has been making efforts to maintain its reach in world affairs through bilateral relations and alignment with U.S. foreign and security policies while developing a separate security identity (Smith, 2004).

Concerning economics: The EU and its member states apply the instruments of trade, development aid, and the mechanism of conditionality for commercial and normative policies, while the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and large ODA disbursements are a case in point here. Security priorities include cooperation on NATO, adaptation to strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific area with a level of partnership and actions proportional to multilateralism and tailored to the regional strategic agenda (On 'strategic autonomy,' see European Parliament analysis).

Japan

Traditionally, Japan's foreign policy has been defined by a pacifistic constitution, its post-war reconstruction strategy, and its reliance upon the United States for security, under the so-called Yoshida Doctrine. However, over the last few years, significant transformation of Japan's security strategy has

taken place. It includes setting up a National Security Council, reinterpretation of the constitution in which issuance of collective self-defence is allowed, increase in military expenditure, as well as a close partnership on security matters with the United States and other countries in the Indo-Pacific, as reported (Hinata-Yamaguchi, 2022; C. W. Hughes, 2022, 2023).

Yet, a stronger security presence is not the sole dimension of Japan's foreign policy. However, the 2014/2015 security laws & regulations constituted a major turning point because they allowed Japan to be actively engaged within the scope of allied action and regionally significant security matters. Such reforms have placed the state at the vanguard of the regional deterrence posture while being subjected to internal limitations and norms established on its past experience (Inoguchi, 2013).

In economic terms, Japan's influence is felt through its official development assistance and infrastructure financing programs, infrastructure investments through the private sector, mostly within the Indo-Pacific region and Africa. Its emphasis on the quality of infrastructure for connectivity and resilience in the supply chains can be attributed to both developmental and strategic intents to provide an alternative to other regional visions (C. W. Hughes et al., 2023; Medcalf, 2020).

Strategic rivalries with China have entered the mainstream of Japan's foreign policies. Japan's challenges meant that maritime security threats and the need for territorial security through technology have led the country to develop its naval power infrastructure and initiatives through bilateral engagements and frameworks that are not only associated with the Quadrilateral (Hatakeyama, 2021; C. W. Hughes, 2022).

Other developed nations (Canada, Australia, South Korea)

Canada

The Canadian foreign policy can be described in terms of middle-power diplomacy, typified by normative leadership, high levels of support for multilateralism, and the strategic sidelining of closer ties with core partners. Canadian foreign policy under current leadership, especially in the face of Indo-Pacific developments, reflects a brand of balanced internationalism, in terms of a mix of traditional norms of support for multilateral institutions, international law, and international humanitarian work, supplemented by an emerging emphasis on carefully limited security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Hanlon, 2023).

This specific emphasis on Canadian foreign policy can be observed within the framework of the current Indo-Pacific Strategy of the Canadian government, as well as new initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region, including new navy presence and new Canadian defence bilateral in the Indo-Pacific region, within the framework of a new shift towards Canadian foreign policy from normative

leadership to a balance approach on international relations, to address a combination of limited security cooperation and traditional multilateral regimes, international law, and humanitarian international engagement (Chapnick & McKercher, 2024; Holland, 2021).

Australia

The foreign policy of Australia embodies a bipolar character wherein “Australia is a middle power and is actively committed to regional engagement,” while it is also “a more forceful and strategic security presence in the Indo-Pacific.” Australia’s stance is characterized by a combination of military modernization programs and developmental assistance in the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia in addition to military and strategic programs with the US. Thus, hard and soft power strategies enable Australia to expand its presence in the Indo-Pacific while ensuring a rules-based regional framework (Chubb & McAllister, 2020).

Australia’s engagement with AUKUS represents a major shift towards more techno-military integration with major allies, which reflects its willingness to assume more strategic risk as a way of responding to rising levels of Chinese pressure. At the same time, AUKUS has sparked debate about levels of escalation, sovereignty, or regional strategic stability, as these pertain to Australia’s major aspirations towards deterrence, advanced technology, and strategic partnerships (Medcalf, 2020; White, 2019).

South Korea: middle power diplomacy

South Korea transformed its role from being largely an alliance-based security actor into an independent medium-level actor in regional and international relations. Though Southern Origins-based alliances remain the fundamental element of its own national security policy, South Korea uses various tools of its foreign policy, which include economic statecraft, development policy, and engagement policy in the Indo-Pacific region. South Korea’s recent engagement in new-generation security structures, such as AUKUS-related structures, also represents its desire and willingness to pursue an active role in South-Eastern Asia’s regional security on the condition it balances its relations both with China and with North Korea’s ambitions (Jeong, 2022; Snyder, 2018).

In general, modern middle power diplomacy for developed countries reflects the “niche leadership” approach and not the “comprehensive power projection.” They practice “norm entrepreneurship,” “peacebuilding,” “technical and development assistance,” and “conditioned security roles” based on their geographical locations, capabilities, and alliance system roles. This approach helps the middle powers in exercising their diplomatic roles and stability functions in the regions without the intention of becoming great powers and dominating the global politics, which reflects their pragmatic approach towards

the “competitive and fragmented international politics.” (Acharya, 2025; Cooper, 2023).

Developed nations and global stability: power, interests, and preventive diplomacy

Developed nations are the linchpin in international peacebuilding through diplomatic initiatives, sanctions regimes, peacekeeping missions, and mediation. The United States, European Union, and Japan often invest diplomatic capital through various international institutions such as the UN Security Council, OSCE, and OECD. The liberal argument is that democratic states stabilize the international system through the fostering of institutions and norms; realist critiques emphasize that major powers’ foreign policies frequently pursue strategic self-interest with less noble humanitarian impulses. Scholarship on preventive diplomacy (e.g., works by Gareth Evans and Michael Lund) reinforces the idea that early intervention by developed states can prevent escalation only when strategic costs are minimal.

Military alliances and global security architecture

The international security architecture around NATO, bilateral alliances in Asia led by the USA, security structures within the EU, and arrangements such as AUKUS are an anchor for stability because they are a means of encouraging deterrence against aggression. NATO began its transformation from its origins as a Cold War defence alliance into today’s role responding to global crises in Afghanistan, Libya, and the Balkans. Some believe that too many Western alliance’s create security dilemmas in relations with Russia and China. Yet, its significance continues to be a primary building block of joint defence strategies for such bodies as NATO, NORAD, and EU’s SD&P: Security & Defence Policy.

Strategic rivalries increasing tensions

Today, the Sino-American rivalry is the hallmark geopolitical struggle of the twenty-first century, covering military modernization, technology decoupling, territorial claims-in the South China Sea, and Taiwan-influence projection in the Indo-Pacific, and Africa. In contrast, the Russia-West clash restarted with vigour after the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 and has escalated in 2022 due to Russia’s full-scale invasion.

Nuclear deterrence, arms control, and security dilemmas

A new era of nuclear competition is unfolding amidst the weakening of arms control regimes (collapse of the INF Treaty, uncertainty over New START) among developed nuclear nations such as the US, Russia, France, and the UK. Meanwhile, the strategic thinking of major-world powers is characterized by mutual deterrence, whereas new threats have been added by modernization initiatives such as hypersonic weapon systems and low-yield nuclear warheads.

Current thinking among scholars (e.g. Joseph Nye and Lawrence Freedman) argues that arms control decline contributes to world instability and the dangers of nuclear miscalculation.

Developed nations and global development: aid, governance, and the politics of sustainability

OECD countries lead in development aid; they influence development agenda-setting using the DAC framework. The total European Union contribution is still the largest; other major countries include the U.S., the UK, Germany, and Japan. There has been a shift in the agenda of development aid; now issues such as governance reform and capacity enhancement are included. But if criticisms are examined seriously, it can be noted that the agenda-setting in major institutions like the IMF and the World Bank is dominated by developed countries.

The G7 group is described as the “steering committee of developed countries,” while the G20 also includes new rising countries but essentially still follows the plans of the West in macroeconomic issues; they also lay down guidelines in the matter of macroeconomic policies but are challenged in the matter of legitimacy by countries of the South. Commitments in the developed countries help immensely in the financial aspects of the SDGs, the climate funds (Green Climate Fund), and the health infrastructure of the globe. Japan and the European Union are very engaged in sustainable diplomatic efforts, whereas the U.S. follows the same in their efforts through USAID and MCC.

Nonetheless, the financing gap of the SDGs still exists, and the involvement of developed countries in sustainability has been surpassed by their efforts in the Political Landscape of Geopolitics and rivalries of the latter over the sustainability efforts of the developed countries. The developed countries demonstrate leadership in the management of digital and cyber issues in the form of the WTO/TRIPS regime.

Their efforts in the health and education sectors have improved the human development outcomes in the developing countries in the past decades. But the developed countries’ rigid IP regime makes it difficult for the growing use of technology more in the pharmaceuticals and renewable energy sectors.

Developed nations and global markets: trade power, investment flows, and economic realignment

It is through trading policies that developed countries wield their influence across the WTO, bi-lateral arrangements, and regional economic groups. Sanctions remain a major tool in international policies pursued by the US and the EU. They Mold the actions of countries like Iran, Russia, and North Korea. Sanctions have been presented as a means to a normatively grounded international order. Nevertheless, they generate an enormous humanitarian crisis for those citizens whose countries face the US and EU-sanctioned policies. FDI

from the developed countries has emerged as the driver of industrialization, infrastructure development, and technology affairs in the Global South (Sabatini & Isard, 2025; Trade & (UNCTAD), 2024; Yildirim & Chatagnier, 2025).

Currently, the leading investors in the developing countries are the U.S., Japan, and the EU. Yet, FDI has assumed a geopolitical undertone as the rivalry with China's Row plans is escalating. The fields that have captured the interest of the investors are the high-tech industries such as green energy, digital technology, and the last-mile delivery. The failure of the contemporary supply chain with the developed nations was disclosed by the COVID-19 crisis, and after that, the new paradigm shift of the 'friend-shoring' and 'near-shoring' approach has emerged (Kassim, 2023).

The developed countries' monetary policies, interest rate hikes by the U.S. Federal Reserve, for example, lead to capital outflows, a decline in the value of currencies, and debt crises in developing countries. The climate policies, carbon border charges, for example, of developed countries may present a new trade barrier to African and Asian countries. The arrangements such as Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, CPTPP, and AUKUS are attempts at economic clustering to mitigate the growth of China.

Challenges to developed nations' global leadership: selectivity, power, and credibility

Also, developed countries receive criticism regarding their use of aid, trade, and security cooperation arrangements in order to extend their influence in other countries. African and Asian scholars claim that developed countries promote conditional approaches and investments that are focused on resources, which are similar to neo-colonial tendencies. The West has been selective in terms of intervention, which has been less pragmatic in humanitarian terms, more driven by strategic considerations and feasibility.

For example, humanitarian arguments presented in relation to military intervention in Kosovo in 1999 are not consonant with inaction during 1994 in Rwanda, when more effective action was possible in disposing of that conflict. Also, some recent works suggest that humanitarian language has often been used in a legitimating and strategic manner in relation to projecting power, and that interventionist decisions are driven by calculations of risk, alliance, and strategic priorities rather than humanitarian considerations such as moral obligation and principle (Bellamy, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2019). Also, efforts by developed countries regarding human rights remain inconsistent, criticizing others but not criticizing their own allies. recession, the rise of the economic nationalism phenomenon in developed economies can be manifested through various means, viz., industrial policies, subsidization strategies, Export Control Policy, and reshoring strategies, in an environment where US-China tech wars are re-writing the rules on the liberal trading architecture, as these are redefined by (KANBİR, 2025; Luo, 2021).

On the other hand, currently, in internal affairs, the roles of internal factors such as polarization in American politics in the United States of America because of political polarization in America's political atmosphere, Brexit in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and European politics in terms of populism in Europe are also on the rise in external politics in terms of differences in multilateral politics in terms of treaties and agreements due to external political fragmentations (Destradi & Vüllers, 2024; Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022).

Opportunities for the global south: strategic agency in a multipolar world

A multipolar world presents a wonderful opportunity to developing nations to bargain with other global powers like the West, China, India, Russia, Turkey, and the Gulf states to build a good economic and security alliance.

Thus, with the increasingly multipolar and fragmented global map, the developing countries are seizing the chance to increase their agency on the global map with the new platforms or formations such as the South-South cooperative formations such as BRICS and IBSA, or the regional agencies like the African Union to increase the formalities and visibilities of issues ranging from the aspects of commerce, climate, development financing, or even debt restructuring. Therefore, it increases the potency of the global South. Further, the aspect of multipolarity provides the chance for the developing or medium-sized countries to act on the global map on their own and cannot remain dependent on any of the major powers with indications of the cases of countries such as India, Indonesia, and Brazil itself. While forming coalitions, the Global South is actively attempting to demonstrate its impact on global governance institutions through its demands for change in the UN Security Council structure, the quota system in the IMF, and agenda-setting in the G20, and through the utilization of ASEAN and Mercosur in shaping new norms on issues such as digital governance, climate, and development (Acharya, 2025; Narlikar, 2020; Stuenkel, 2024).

Conclusion

The foreign policies of developed countries still remain a vital factor for the trends of the stability of the global order, global development, and the global economy. From the post-Second World War order to the contemporary features of multipolarity, developed countries used the structural powers of defence alliances, leadership, their superior economy, and the idea of deficit and excess. The development of foreign policy of developed countries manifests certain continuities of historical developments of materialism, institutionalism, and ideationalism. The traditional realism security, power, as well as competition requirements find their central place within these considerations, as in the refurbished great power competition where the US, China, as well as Russia, find their crucial place. Yet, the ideal of cooperation as central to institutional as

well as developmental forms of liberalism continues to define the trends of different international regimes from trade to finance, as well as from climate to developmental aid.

The more recent speculative focus of constructivism does focus on the ideational aspects of identity, norms, and memory that critically influence foreign policy decisions that diverge in terms of the differences between Western Europe and developed non-Western countries in terms of Japan and other developed countries. The analysis indicates that the developed states contribute largely to the stability of the global system. The roles through which the stability is attained and secured by the developed states are through deterrence, the formation of alliances, the mechanism for conflict resolution, and the efforts for the maintenance of peace. However, these roles are also responsible for the creation of dilemmas of security. These dilemmas are created when the expansion of alliances and the formation of regimes of sanctions affect the stability and interests of competitive states. These economies contribute to the global markets through the roles of trade to the regulation of monetary policies.

The effects of these roles contribute to the vulnerabilities created within the economies of the developing states. The aid and assistance offered by the developed states to the developing economies are crucial. Looking forward, it appears that international politics will be influenced by a mix of increased great power competition, technological diversification, supply chain shifts, and governance structure rebalancing of international governance architecture. Climate change issues, digital governance issues, public health security issues, and issues of energy transition will increasingly be on foreign policy futures. The developed states would have to refocus their positions and strike an equilibrium among power politics and multi-lateral cooperation as international issues increasingly get across national boundaries. The increased assertiveness of developing nations, formation of coalitions around issues, and forces of domestic politics in developed states will also shape international politics.

In the case of developing countries, these new trends and orientations create a situation of potential challenge and opportunity. The influence of policies pursued in the developed world is expected to continue in the future, as they influence the trends and direction taken in the economies, security arrangements, and the system of governance in the Global South region. On the one hand, the transfer of power in a multipolar world guarantees the nations of the Global South their independence of action through the transfer of power in a multipolar world and the chance to take up new opportunities from the trend of multipolarity, in addition to having better partners in the reform of bodies of governance.

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Dharma and the theories of international relations: reflections on global peace and security

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ABSTRACT

The Vedic wisdom revealed to humanity that *dharma*, the eternal cosmic laws, holds and sustains everything in order and harmony. The *dharma*-centric worldview conditioned the spiritual foundation and material view of Indian life. It has provided ideas and ideals, moral and spiritual values, beliefs and practices, and individual and social life patterns. It is the basis of deep insight into the rhythm of cosmic order and nature. India has projected the ideals of cosmic harmony, unity, and universal fraternity and treats the whole world as one family, *Vasudhaiva kutumbkam*. India had advocated this idea in several international forums, including the recent G-20 meeting held in September 2023 under India's chairmanship. The international relations theories help us understand the undercurrents of events, process and phenomenon unfold in international relations. These theories can be broadly classified into approaches that maintain that conflicts and competition among nation-states are inevitable due to the anarchic nature of global order, and those who consider cooperation among nation-states possible. Some theorists believe that inequality and injustice are the root cause of conflicts among nation-states and that emancipation from all these deprivations is the ultimate goal. Further, constructivists believe that international organizations can socialize states and individuals according to norms. They maintain that change occurs through the diffusion of ideas and socialization or internationalization of norms. In short, constructivism explores how ideas and norms influence state actions and international outcomes.

The concept of *dharma* provides an alternate approach to international relations, especially in maintaining international peace and security. In international relations, *dharma* can be considered as a normative framework that goes beyond self-interest and power politics. The *dharma*-centric worldview in international relations emphasizes ethical conduct, non-violence, interconnectedness, righteous governance, humanitarianism, and awareness about the consequences of one's action. Applying these precepts in international relations could contribute to stabilizing and maintaining international peace and security. Applying *dharma* in international relations is a bottom-up approach to maintaining peace and security. (Rangarajan, Relevance of Arthashastra in the 21st Century 2021) It is an individual-centric process to create awareness about

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their responsibility towards the family, society, nation, and humanity. The institutional mechanism formed after the end of the Second World War based on the collective security principle has failed to maintain international peace and security. Concomitantly, the nontraditional threats to the security of nation-states in the form of terrorism, climate change, and economic slowdown can be addressed only through multilateralism. The emergence of a human security approach to ensure international security is a move towards a *dharma*-centric global view. The concept of human security envisages a bottom-up approach to international security. It is based on the assumption that if all individuals living in states are secure, the states would be secure, and if all states are secure, there is international security. The dissemination of ideas such as *dharma* in international relations at the individual level to the nation-state and international levels would significantly impact, especially in the context of substantial issues humanity faces in the arena of human security. This paper examines the applicability and significance of a *dharma*-based global order to maintain international peace and security from a theoretical perspective.

Keywords: *Dharma*, Vausdhaiva kutumbakam, realism, idealism, constructivism. Human Security

***Dharma* as a concept**

The Indian philosopher and former President of India, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, defined the term '*Dharma*' as a code of conduct supported by the general conscience of the people. It is not subjective in the sense that the individual's conscience imposes neither it, nor external in that the law enforces it. *Dharma* does not force men into virtue but trains them for it. It is not a fixed code of mechanical rules, but a living spirit which grows and moves in response to the development of society (Radhakrishnan 2016). Thus, *dharma* is a dynamic concept which assumes different form and implication in response to the changes in the society. However, the essence of *dharma* is that each individual act in a natural way fulfilling his responsibility to himself, family, society, and humanity (Kapoor, Indian Knowledge System 2012). The ancient Indian text *Arthashastra* also envisaged a society rooted in *Dharma* (Kangle 1965).

Dharma is often understood as one's moral and ethical duty or righteousness. It encompasses the principles and values that guide individuals in leading a virtuous and harmonious life. It includes fulfilling one's responsibilities to oneself, family, society, and humanity. In a broader sense, *dharma* is linked to the cosmic order and the harmony that sustains the universe. It suggests a natural order exists, and individuals should align themselves with this order to maintain balance and cosmic harmony. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings. *Dharma* at the individual level means each individual is believed to have unique duties and responsibilities. It provides guidelines for ethical conduct in various spheres of life. *Dharma* includes principles such as truthfulness (*Satya*), non-violence (*Ahimsa*), compassion (*Daya*), and fairness (*Danda*). Adherence to these principles is seen as essential for personal and societal well-being (Kapoor, Encyclopaedia of Hinduism 2012).

Dharma is not a rigid set of rules but is adaptable to different contexts and circumstances. It recognizes that individuals' moral and ethical duties may vary based on their roles and situations (Kapoor, Indian Knowledge System 2012). Thus, flexibility is considered an essential aspect of the concept of *dharma*. It is often seen as the path that leads individuals toward self-realization and liberation (*moksha*). Individuals following one's *dharma* are believed to purify their minds and souls and ultimately progress in their spiritual life. The concept of *dharma* has been explored and adapted in modern contexts, including discussions on ethics, leadership, and societal values. The success of global movement towards democracy depends largely on the acceptance of responsibilities by each individual at the personal, family, societal, nation-state, and international levels.

***Dharma* in international relations**

The concept of *dharma* in international relations implies non-violence, *dharma* in governance, the interconnectedness of the world, and humanitarianism. The central principles in a *dharma*-centric worldview are *ahimsa* or non-violence. This principle emphasizes resolving international and inter-state issues through peaceful means and diplomacy rather than war or aggression. If one applies this principle in international relations, global security issues can be resolved by promoting dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution mechanisms and thereby achieving and sustaining global peace and security. The chapter VI of the UN charter elaborated on the pacific settlement of disputes through negotiation, conciliation, good office, mediation, arbitration, and adjudication (Charter 2022).

The *dharma*-centric worldview highlights the importance of righteous governance. It also suggests that the decision-makers must uphold moral principles, justice, and fairness in their policies and actions. This perspective could influence international relations by promoting ethical behavior and cooperation among nations. The global issues in the arena of security, economy and environment can be addressed effectively through multilateralism. None of these issues can be resolved by any one nation, whatsoever powerful, singlehandedly.

The concept of *dharma* also emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings (Chapple 2008). It could lead to a perspective that values global cooperation and collaboration in international relations. Nation-states would be encouraged to work together to address common challenges such as security dilemmas, climate change, poverty, and pandemics. The concept of *dharma* is eternal, universal, and natural. It can be followed in any society. Therefore in international relations, the concept of *dharma* is of great significance. Any attempt to apply the concept of *dharma* in international relations would lead to the emergence of a new world order to ensure enduring international peace and security.

Theories of international relations

A number of theories in international relations explain the various aspects of maintaining international peace and security. Among these theories, the realist and idealist theories take contradictory stands on essential human nature, national interests, and the nature of international relations. The realist theory in international relations maintains that states are the primary actors in international relations. It also envisages that the state's actions are based on self-interest and the pursuit of power. They viewed the international system as anarchic, and states always prioritize their own security and survival (Morgenthau 2014). Therefore, international relations have become acclimatized by the 'security dilemma' (Glaster 1997). The concept of security dilemma is based on the premise that one nation's security is considered another nation's insecurity, and vice versa.

The security dilemma is a concept in international relations that refers to a situation where one state's efforts to increase its security are perceived as a threat by other states, leading to a cycle of competition and often lead to armament and arms race. Mutual distrust among nation-states is a significant factor. If nation-states do not trust each other's intentions, they may interpret defensive measures as offensive preparations, eventually ending up in a vicious circle. It is challenging for nation-states to come out of this vicious circle (Waltz 2010). The inherent uncertainty in international relations and the absence of a supranational agency at the global level can exacerbate the security dilemma. Nation-states may misinterpret each other's actions or intentions due to a lack of accessibility to authentic information, leading to heightened suspicions, defensive arms buildup and even open conflict. The recent Russia - Ukraine war in Europe well explains how the mutual suspicion leads to war. Russia maintained that Ukraine intention to join the NATO prompted it to attack. However, during the war two more nations Norway and Sweden joined NATO which again, aggravated the fragile security environment in Europe.

In international relations, there is a significant power asymmetry among nation-states; the weaker states may perceive defensive measures of the bigger nation-states as potential threats (Waltz 2010). In order to balance power, weaker states might engage in military alliance that further escalates tension. Nation-states involved in an arms race can contribute to the security dilemma. As one nation-state enhances its military capabilities, others may feel compelled to do the same to maintain a balance of power, even if the original intentions were defensive. Lack of communication and diplomatic channels can amplify the security dilemma. Nation-states may need more adequate means to clarify their intentions, leading to misunderstandings and escalating tension. They often formulate national security policies based on worst-case scenarios. While these policies are intended to enhance security, they can inadvertently create a perception of aggression and trigger security conflicts, and grievances that can cast a shadow on current international relations. The past hostilities can breed

suspicion and make it challenging for nation-states to trust each other's motives, contributing to the insecurity. Conversely, there are theories in international relations which maintain that international peace and security can be achieved through cooperation.

The idealist theory emphasizes the role of international institutions, cooperation, and diplomacy. It believes nation-states can work together to achieve common goals, and international organizations can foster peace and security. The liberalist maintains that multilateralism is an effective means to build a rule-based international order. And liberalism promotes the idea that multilateral institutions are effective in fostering cooperation and peace among nation-states. The liberalist also believes that multilateral institutions like the United Nations Organization plays a major role not only in maintaining international peace and security but also in the sphere of international trade and economic cooperation. Therefore, in addition to nation-states there are many other players in international sphere, such as international organizations, regional organizations, multinational corporations, international nongovernmental organizations.

The constructivist theorists are of the opinion that it is ideas, norms and identities are shaping the international behaviour. They consider that multilateralism is influenced by shared norms and expectations. The emergence of QUAD as a multilateral institution in the Indo-Pacific can be seen as an instance of shared norms and expectations. The constructivists argue that multilateral institutions can shape the state behavior by influencing their beliefs and identities. Again, states are more likely to engage each other in cooperative efforts when they share common values and norms. (Rangarajan, *The Changing Dimensions of Security: India's Security Policy Options 2015*)

The neorealist places more significance to the structure of the international system than on the individual state behaviour. The neo realist argue that the anarchic nature of the international system and the unequal distribution of power influence the relevance and effectiveness of multilateralism. The security dilemma due to anarchic nature of international system adversely affects the performance of multilateral institutions. The neo realist further argues that in a unipolar or bipolar international system where one or two nations are dominant the multilateral institutions have less relevance. However, in a multipolar world where power is evenly distributed the multilateral institutions are relevant (Rangarajan, *The Changing Dimensions of Security: India's Security Policy Options 2015*).

The critical theorists share an alternative perspective on multilateralism. They are of the opinion that multilateral institutions manifest the power dynamics of the developed and developing world. The division between developed and developing nations is well reflected in all multilateral institutions, especially related to economy and environment.

The theoretical perspective on multilateralism provides students of international relations an opportunity to understand and analyse the undercurrents of

multilateralism in international relations. The relevance of a particular theory depends on the context and issues to be analysed (Wendt 1999).

New world order: multi polarity without multilateralism

The emerging world order can be well defined as a multipolar world. However, multi polarity without multilateralism leads to exercise of force and chaos. In a multi polar world multilateralism is sine qua non for the smooth conduct of international relations. The present international power structure demands multilateralism. In the new world order though the significance of multilateralism has been emphasized the functioning of this institutional mechanism including the UN is not very effective in maintain international peace and security (Rangarajan, India's National Security: Challenges and Responses 2025). It appears that multi polarity without multilateralism further augmented the conflicts. In the ongoing Russia –Ukraine war in Europe and the Israel. Hamas conflict in West Asia the role of multilateral institutions such as the UN is very limited.

UN as a multilateral mechanism

Immediately after the end of Second World War the UN had come into existence to maintain international peace and security. The prime concern at that time was to avoid a third global war. Therefore, the responsibility to maintain peace and security has been vested with the Security Council, especially the P-5, the militarily powerful nations at that time. During the cold war period the politics of great power rivalry and competitions have adversely affected the performance of the UN in maintaining international peace and security. However, it appears that more than balance of power it was the operation of balance of terror or the fear of mutually assured destruction (MAD) which prevented an open war between the most powerful nuclear weapon powers. And the disintegration of former Soviet Union resulted in the end of superpower rivalry and competition (Rangarajan, Changing Dimensions of Security:An Indian Perspective 2020).

In the post-cold war period, the UN has failed to perform its mandated role to maintain international peace and security. This appears to be due to two significant developments in the post-cold war era. The end of cold war marked the end of a bipolar international power structure. The disintegration of former Soviet Union led to a unipolar global power structure. In this period the UN was very effective when Iraq annexed Kuwait in 1990. A multilateral force was sent to restore Kuwait's independence and territorial integrity as per the UNSC resolution.

Multilateralism in practice

A peep into the functioning of multilateral institutions established under multilateralism shows that they are functioning effectively if the members have a common perception on issues before them. Though the national interests are same such as territorial integrity, sovereignty, peace, security and prosperity,

nations differ with regard to the means applied to achieve these objectives. There are nations that use coercive means to achieve their national interests and there are nations that apply pacific means to settle disputes (Rangarajan, India's National Security: Challenges and Responses 2025).

The principle of collective security works well if all the nations participate in the mechanism extend their wholehearted support. If the nations are divided on every security related issue the efficacy of collective security machinery will be adversely affected and the role of UN to maintain international peace and security would be limited. The UNSC failed to take action against the aggressor mainly because the exercise of veto by the P-5 (Rangarajan, Changing Dimensions of Security: An Indian Perspective 2020).

One of the major issues confronted by multilateral institutions is the inordinate delay in decision-making. This would adversely affect when the emerging security situations demand swift action. The delay in decision-making is due to the process of reaching consensus among the actors on contentious issues mainly related to peace and security. The rapidly changing global situations demand deft diplomacy and quick action. However, many times the multilateral institutions fail to rise to the occasion.

Another major hurdle before multilateral institutions including the UN is the power imbalances. The equality of member countries in multilateral forums is only in letters and not in practice. When the question of individual nations concerns and aspirations come, they violate the principle of equality. The most powerful nations join together to protect their interests at the expense of less powerful. This often happens in institutions where the concerns of developed and developing nations are involved. In the global financial institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund the global south has only limited role to play (Rangarajan, India's National Security: Challenges and Responses 2025).

The enforcement mechanisms under multilateral agreements are not effective due to the noncompliance of member nations. It is often voluntary in nature and nations seldom pay heed to their commitment under multilateral agreements. This often affects the implementation of the provisions enumerated in multilateral arrangements. Concomitantly though the convergence of some interests brings nations together in a multilateral treaty obligation, they seldom pay heed to obey the recommendations. Nations are often driven by their national interests and achieving consensus in multilateral setting is a formidable challenge. Further in a highly globalized world some nations are still incite nationalistic approach to divert the attention of people. This approach is being followed mostly in nations under nondemocratic form of government. And the use of multilateral forums to gain support for national agenda is also not uncommon.

Further the inefficiency of bureaucracy and delay in the implementation of various programmes in a time bound manner also affect the performance of

multilateral institutions. Therefore, in a multi polar world the inherent weaknesses of multilateralism not only adversely affect the maintenance of international peace and security by coercive means but also the promotion of positive peace through cooperation. A dharma based international relations can be initiated at the multilateral level. Such an initiative would provide platform for creating a new approach to peace based on dharma to maintain international peace and security.

Perceptions of international peace and security

In the present international scenario, no nation-state or international organization whatsoever powerful can address the issues related to global peace and security. Such a situation emerged due to lack of faith and trust among nations regarding their moves and countermoves.

International peace and security can be achieved by incorporating dharma in international affairs reasonably and by avoidance of power politics and rivalry. The issues of security dilemma can be better addressed by mutual trust and cooperation among nation-states. And the mutual trust and cooperation is possible when nation-states accept dharma-based approach to peace. Since it is a bottom-up approach the acceptance of dharma at the individual level would lead to the creation of a peaceful global order. Acceptance of dharma is innate by nature and no external compulsion is required for its enforcement.

Conclusions

Applying *dharma* in international relations is a bottom-up approach to maintaining peace and security. It is an individual-centric process to create awareness about their responsibility towards the family, society, nation, and humanity. The institutional mechanism formed after the end of the Second World War based on the collective security principle has failed to maintain international peace and security. Similarly, the nontraditional threats to the security of nation-states in the form of terrorism, climate change, and economic slowdown can be addressed only through multilateralism. The emergence of a human security approach to ensure international security is a move towards a dharma-centric global view. The concept of human security envisages a bottom-up approach to international security. It is based on the assumption that if individuals are secure, states would be secure, and if all states are secure, there is international security (Barry 2010). The human security approach is a new initiative to address nontraditional security threats and to maintain international peace and security (Rangarajan, *The Changing Dimensions of Security: India's Security Policy Options* 2015).

Most global issues in the realm of economy, environment, and security can be addressed with a dharma-based approach. It is an individual-centric process to create awareness about their responsibility towards the family, society, nation, and humanity. The institutional mechanism formed after the end of the Second

World War based on the collective security principle has failed to maintain international peace and security. Concomitantly, the nontraditional threats to the security of nation-states in the form of terrorism, climate change, and economic slowdown can be addressed only through multilateralism (Rangarajan, India's National Security: Challenges and Response 2024). The emergence of a human security approach to ensure international security is a move towards a *dharma*-centric global view. The concept of human security envisages a bottom-up approach to international security. It is based on the assumption that if all individuals living in states are secure, the states would be secure, and if all states are secure, there is international security. The dissemination of ideas such as *dharma* in international relations at the individual level to the nation-state and international levels would significantly impact, especially in the context of substantial issues humanity faces in the arena of human security.

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Regional politics, identity and development in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh: interpreting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections

Pampa Mukerjee

ABSTRACT

The article reflects on the regional political dynamics of the hill states of North India, focusing on Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Using the 2024 Lok Sabha elections as an empirical reference point, it analyses how local issues, religion, identity, and developmental aspirations shaped electoral processes and outcomes across these states. It argues that beyond their geographical proximity, these regions share a distinct political character rooted in their location along sensitive international borders, which produces specific developmental priorities. It also highlights the social texture of hill societies, where the divide between urban and rural life remains blurred, settlements are small and scattered, and dense community networks continue to play a central role. In such contexts, kinship structures, or *biradari* ties, retain political significance and often influence patterns of political mobilisation and voting behaviour. By situating electoral outcomes within these structural and socio-cultural contexts, the paper offers a regionally grounded understanding of political processes in the Indian hill states.

Keywords: Identity, regional politics, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, electoral behaviour.

Introduction

The Himalayan belt of North India, particularly Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, provides a rich empirical setting for examining the relationship between geography, identity and politics within India's federal framework. Although these states occupy a relatively marginal position in terms of parliamentary representation, they are far from peripheral in political significance. Regional identity, religious affiliation, ethnic concerns and distinct developmental priorities have together shaped a dynamic and competitive electoral arena in the hills.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections offer a valuable vantage point from which to explore these dynamics. Conceptually, the study draws on the literature on regionalism, identity politics and federal democracy. It engages with Subrata Mitra's formulation of Indian democracy as "embedded federalism," where

regional identities and political cultures are not suppressed but incorporated within a wider national framework. India's federal design enables layered accommodation, allowing regional aspirations to find expression without undermining national cohesion. Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, the two hill states illustrate this pattern clearly. Assertions grounded in ethnicity, religion or sub-regional distinctiveness are articulated through institutional channels such as elections, party competition and representative politics.

Against this backdrop, the paper examines how regional aspirations, uneven development and identity-based mobilisations shaped electoral behaviour in the 2019 and 2024 general elections. It seeks to unpack the ways in which these overlapping and interdependent factors influenced political alignments and outcomes in a geographically sensitive and culturally diverse region.

The analysis is based on multiple sources: post-poll survey data from CSDS for 2019 and 2024, official data released by the Election Commission of India, newspaper and media reports, and relevant scholarly literature.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section briefly introduces the two Himalayan States as electoral and political landscapes. The electoral performance in these two States is discussed and analysed with reference to 2019 and 2024 parliamentary elections in section two and the third section attempts to identify common electoral trends and patterns as they unfold in the two hill States, while recognising their diversity and differences.

I

Locating the hill states: geography, culture and identity

The two Himalayan States are set apart not only by their mountainous geography but also by distinctive demographic patterns and socio-political formations. Their terrain has shaped dispersed settlements, strong community bonds, and historically layered identities that differentiate them from the plains. These regional characteristics significantly influence patterns of political mobilization and frame the electoral and developmental narratives that emerge during elections.

Like other mountainous regions, these two Hill states also share sensitive international borders and therefore their geo-strategic location plays a central role in political discourse. Electoral campaigns often draw upon themes of national security and territorial integrity. As Verma (2020) observes, the geopolitical importance of these regions has led to their frequent interpretation through a security-centric lens, where militarization and nationalism become powerful instruments of political mobilization. In such contexts, appeals to patriotism are not incidental but are woven into the broader structure of electoral competition.

At the social level, the hill states are characterized by scattered habitations and dense kinship networks. Political behaviour in these regions differs from that of

large urban centres, where individual preference may dominate voting choices. In the hills, localized identities such as *biradari* and extended kinship ties often shape electoral outcomes. Jayal (2000) notes that in settings where community bonds are strong, kinship affiliations can override ideological commitments, influencing both voting patterns and the selection of candidates. Democratic participation, therefore, operates within a communitarian framework in which community endorsement carries substantial weight.

Ecological fragility adds another layer of complexity to politics in these states. Mountain ecosystems are inherently sensitive, and the pressures of rapid development frequently generate environmental risks. The floods in Himachal Pradesh in 2023 and the land subsidence crisis in Joshimath, Uttarakhand, brought into sharp focus the consequences of unregulated infrastructure expansion and extractive development. While economic growth remains a central electoral promise, environmental sustainability has increasingly entered public debate and party platforms, as Nayak (2023) suggests. This tension between development aspirations and ecological vulnerability creates a distinct policy dilemma, shaping both governance priorities and electoral contestation in the Himalayan region.

II

Electoral performance of the hill states: 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections

The section explores the evolving electoral dynamics in the two hill States of North India with reference to the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections. While collectively contributing merely sixteen Lok Sabha seats, these States often serve as trend setters for sub-national sentiments and identity-driven politics. Electoral contests in these regions are shaped not only by national ideologies and welfare narratives but also by local concerns like ecological vulnerability, demands for regional autonomy, and identity-based mobilization. The Table 1 below reflects a gradual yet notable shift in electoral outcomes in the hill States of North India between the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections

Table 1: Electoral trends reflected in the hills (2019 & 2024)

State	Lok Sabha Seats	2019 Results (BJP / INC / Others)	2024 Results (BJP / INC / Others)	Turnout 2019	Turnout 2024
Uttarakhand	5	5 / 0 / 0	5 / 0 / 0	61.5%	64.2%
Himachal Pradesh	4	4 / 0 / 0	4 / 0 / 0	72.4%	70.3%

Source: Election Commission of India.

Uttarakhand

The twenty five year old Himalayan State has given back-to-back victories to the BJP in the 2014 , 2019 and 2024 . The BJP retained its electoral presence by

winning all the five seats in 2019 and four in 2024 general elections. A marginal decline, i.e. the loss of one seat to the Congress in 2024 suggests that there has been an emerging discontent over local issues like unemployment and disaster management. The government’s handling of the farmers’ protests, anger over the *Agnipath* scheme and the Haldwani violence might also affect the vote share. Nevertheless BJP continued to hold a strong organizational grip and managed to retain a sizable support base. In-fact BJP’s vote share increased from 61 percent (2019) to 64 percent.

Table 1.1: Voter turnout: 2019 and 2024

Constituency	Voter turnout 2019 (in percent)	
	2019	2024
Haridwar	69.18	62.36
Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar	68.97	61.35
Tehri Garhwal	58.87	51.01
Garhwal (Pauri)	55.17	48.79
Almora (SC)	52.31	40.87
State Average	61.88	55.89

Source: Election Commission of India, 2024.

Traditionally treated as part of ‘money order economy’ due to outmigration, Uttarakhand always recorded a low voter turnout in comparison to the national average as far as parliamentary elections are concerned (Mukherjee 2022). The voter turnout in the Lok Sabha in 2019 and 2024 is concerned, there is an approximately 6 percent decline from 2019 to 2024 is concerned. Apart from out migration, one can also infer other factors like voter apathy, election timing coinciding with the wedding season etc.

Caste and party-wise voting pattern

The electoral politics in Uttarakhand are deeply rooted in caste and religious affiliations, reflecting both continuity and shifts in political preferences over time. The CSDS–Lokniti 2024 post-poll survey reflected in Table 1.1 provide critical insights into how major social groups like Hindu upper castes, Dalits, and Muslims voted in the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Table 1.2: Party voted for Uttarakhand Lok Sabha

Religion	Congress		BJP		Other	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Hindu upper caste	22	16	67	80	11	5
Hindu Dalits	63	53	33	44	4	3
Muslims	42	92	46	--	12	8

Source: CSDS-Lokniti 2024, 2019.

It is an accepted fact the region which is also known as ‘Dev Bhumi’, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with its aggressive Hindutva narrative has managed to garner the support of Hindu upper caste vote-i.e. of the Brahmins and the Rajputs in Uttarakhand. One also witnesses similar pattern in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections where 80 percent of the Hindu upper caste voted in favour of BJP. However, the number reveals that in 2024 elections, the BJP support from this group declined to 67%, representing a 13-percentage point drop despite its sustained Hindutva narrative (Table.1.2). One reason for the drop in upper caste vote may be due to out migration due to employment and other factors.

As far as Dalit votes are concerned, while the Congress’s vote share among Dalits increased from 53% in 2019 to 63%. reaffirming its traditional base among marginalized communities, BJP’s support dropped significantly from 44% to 33%. This shift could be interpreted as growing dissatisfaction with issues on social justice, representation, and economic welfare for Scheduled Castes (Thorat & Newman, 2010; Pai, 2002). The consistent but small share of “Others” (around 3–4%) suggests that Dalit voters remain divided but mostly aligned with national parties, resisting the fragmentation seen in other caste groups.

The data from 2019 and 2024 elections thus clearly show that there exists both continuity and ruptures as far as caste and religion electoral alignments in the State. is concerned. While the upper caste remained largely aligned with the BJP, Dalits gradually moved towards the Congress, possibly due to unfulfilled expectations. The Muslim votes which were traditionally with the Congress, also seem to be relatively fragmented.

Table 1.3: Locality and voting pattern

Locality	Party Voted for Uttarakhand Lok Sabha (Data in percentage)					
	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Rural	34	25	58	69	8	7
Urban	30	42	55	49	15	8

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post Poll Survey 2024.

Yet another significant axis to understand electoral behaviour and voting pattern especially in hill States like Uttarakhand is rural-urban divide as geographical differentiation, migration and access to public services influence electoral choice particularly in high-risk ecological zones. The Table 1.3 reveal significant transformations in party support across these demographic categories in the State. While in 2019 election, 42% urban voters supported the Congress, in 2024 election, the data shows that it declined to only 30 % vote indicating a change in

its support base. While the Congress party lacked a strong leadership base, the BJP was able to reach out effectively to urban middle class through welfare schemes and digital governance initiatives. The 2024 elections in fact re-affirmed BJP's consolidation over urban votes which increased from 49% in 2019 to 55% in 2024. The urban electorates identify BJP with development, infrastructure and economic nationalism (Palshikar, 2017).

Table 1.4: Gender wise vote choice

Gender	Party Voted for Uttarakhand Lok Sabha					
	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Men	30	31	56	62	15	4
Women	36	32	58	60	6	2

Source: CSDS- Lokniti, Post-Poll Survey 2024.

In assessing the voter behaviour and preferences, gender as an axis can no longer be overlooked. In fact, women's political agency is becoming more pronounced both in terms of voter turnout and partisan preference. The table 3.4 shows that in comparison to male voters, women voters in Uttarakhand displayed a relatively stable preference for both major parties. In comparison to male voters, whose vote share for the BJP witnessed a decline from 62% in 2019 to 56% in 2024, the female vote share for BJP remained nearly steady (60% in 2019 to 58% in 2024), showing their confidence in the party's national leadership and welfare narratives targeted at women, such as the Ujjwala Yojana and PM Awas Yojana (Jafferlot & Verniers, 2022).

Table 1.5: Gender-wise voter turnout: Lok Sabha elections: 2019 and 2024

Election Year	Male Turnout (%)	Female Turnout (%)	Gender Gap	Overall Turnout (%)
2019	67.09%	67.18%	+0.09% (F>M)	67.4%
2024	65.55%	65.78%	+0.23% (F>M)	65.79%

Source: Election Commission of India.

It is important to note that in the State, women voter turnout has surpassed the male voters for the third consecutive general elections. While in 2014, the gap was 1.54%, it widened significantly to 4.5 % in 2019. In 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the gap narrowed slightly to 2.62 points in comparison to 2019 elections. This trend of higher female voter turnout in fact reflects a growing political awareness and active political participation. It also raises larger questions regarding assertion of women's agency in electoral democracy.

A higher women voter turnout can also be attributed to number of factors like women centric welfare schemes like Ujjwala-Yojana (LPG-connection), PM-Awas Yojana(housing) and financial inclusion programmes that have encouraged women voters to participate actively. Further efforts made to ensure improved and secure accessibility to polling stations too facilitated higher female turnout in the State.

Table 1.6: Voting pattern– economic class

	Party voted for Uttarakhand Lok Sabha					
	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Poor	26	42	60	41	14	18
Lower	38	18	49	80	13	3
Middle	40	30	50	65	11	6
Rich	29	39	71	61	-	0

Source: CSDS -Lokniti post poll Survey 2019, 2024.

In Uttarakhand, in the last two Lok Sabha elections, one witnessed important shift in voting patterns across different economic class. The BJP enjoyed substantial support. across all economic categories in 2019, particularly among the lower-income and upper-income groups with 80% of the lower class and 61% of the rich voting for the party. There are three possible reasons behind this trend- Narendra Modi’s charismatic leadership, infrastructural growth and BJP’s emphases on welfare delivery. In contrast Congress attracted the support of a larger segment of poor voters (42%) and upper-class voters (39%) reflecting partially its elite liberal base.

In 2024 elections, BJP managed to maintain its support base among the upper class (71%), suggesting thereby its continued influence of pro-business narratives, tax reforms, and the “double engine” development model promoted by the central and State BJP governments. However, one witnessed a visible shift in the political economy of voting particularly among the poor category. While the BJP gained from 41% in 2019 to 60% in 2024, Congress saw a steep decline from 42% to 26%. This suggests that welfare schemes such as PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and Ujjwala may have translated into greater appeal among the economically marginalized (CSDS-Lokniti, 2024; Deshpande, 2024).

The most visible and striking development is the drastic decline of votes of the lower income group for BJP from 80% in 2019 to 49% in 2024. On the other hand Congress increased its vote share of the group from 18% to 38%. in 2024. One can safely infer that despite welfare provisioning, structural inequalities and economic vulnerabilities. At the same time the main thrust of the Congress on

minimum income guarantees, job schemes, and rural distress narratives seems to have resonated well with this voter base in 2024 (Jaffrelot, 2023).

Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh with a history of alternating power between the BJP and the Congress (INC), presents a complex electoral scenario in 2024 (See Thakur, 2018; Thakur & Negi, 2025). While the BJP maintained its parliamentary stronghold, the INC demonstrated resilience in State-level contests. BJP achieved a clean sweep in the State winning all four Lok Sabha constituencies: Kangra, Mandi, Hamirpur, and Shimla (SC). Despite these victories, the BJP’s margins decreased compared to the 2019 elections. For instance, the victory margin in Kangra reduced from 477,623 in 2019 to 251,895 in 2024 (ECI 2024). Overall, the BJP’s vote share stood at 56.44%, a decline from the previous election, while the INC’s share increased to 41.67%.

Voter turnout

The State witnessed an overall voter turnout of 70.90% in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and in comparison, to 2019 (72.42%) was marginally low. Mandi recorded the highest turnout at 73.15%, while Kangra had the lowest at 67.89%. The reduced turnout may reflect voter apathy or dissatisfaction, particularly in regions affected by natural calamities and economic challenges (Table 1.7).

Table 1.7: Voter turnout in Himachal Pradesh- 2019 and 2024

Year	Overall Turnout	Mandi	Hamirpur	Shimla (SC)	Kangra
2019	72.42	73.60	72.83	72.68	70.73
2024	70.90	73.15	71.56	71.26	67.89

Source: Election Commission of India 2024.

Table 1.8: Voting pattern- caste/community

	Party Voted for Himachal Pradesh Lok Sabha			
	Congress		BJP	
	2024	2019	2024	2019
Hindu upper caste	30	29	70	68
Hindu OBC	36	17	64	78
Hindu Dalits	64	32	31	65

Source: CSDS -Lokniti post poll Survey 2019, 2024.

As in other States of India, caste significantly defines electoral outcomes in Himachal Pradesh. While not overt in its form and expression like in the States of Punjab, Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, caste identities do inform voting preferences in the State.

The Table 1.8 shows the pattern in voting preferences across three major caste categories: Hindu upper castes, Hindu Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Hindu Dalits. The data indicates that there has been a consistent and dominant preference for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) among Hindu upper castes. Though the vote share of the party in this demographic increased marginally from 68% in 2019 to 70% in 2024 nonetheless it reiterates the consolidation of upper-caste votes behind the BJP, which has historically appealed to this group through a mix of ideological affinity, cultural nationalism, and welfare-based policies.

As regards Hindu OBC votes, one witnessed a significant shift from 2019 to 2024 Lok Sabha Elections. For instance, in 2019, 78 percent voters from this category supported the BJP and only 17 percent voted for the Congress. Interesting by 2024, BJP’s support from this group declined to 64 percent and Congress on the other had an increase of 36 percent. One can infer that as far as BJP is concerned its earlier stronghold over the OBC vote declined due to possible disenchantment regarding economic policies, employment and other OBC-specific concerns. At the same time, it also reflects the attempt made by the Congress to broaden its social base.

One of the most significant developments that took place between 2019 and 2024 election is the reversal of Dalit support in the State. In 2019, 65% of Dalit electorates voted for the BJP, while only 32% amongst them supported the Congress. However, in 2024, these figures altered and reflect just the opposite trend. While Congress got the support of 64% of Dalits, BJP’s share declined to 31%. This shift shows that the Congress could effectively tap into the Dalit votes by addressing their grievances, promising welfare schemes and was thus able to rebuild its traditional support base. There seems to clear of a disaffection with the BJP among Dalits, possibly due to perceptions of marginalization or unmet policy expectations.

Table 1.9 Locality and voting pattern

Locality	Party Voted for Himachal Pradesh Lok Sabha <i>(data in percentage)</i>					
	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Rural	41	25	57	72	2	4
Urban	53	44	47	53		4

Source: CSDS -Lokniti post poll Survey 2019, 2024.

There has been a marked shift in the voting patterns across different geographical constituencies in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Himachal Pradesh. In terms of locality i.e. rural versus urban continues to shape the electoral behavior of the communities influencing how political parties tailor their campaign strategies and welfare outreach.

The table 1.9 illustrates that there has been a significant decline of BJP's vote share in rural Himachal Pradesh from 72 % in 2019 to 57 % in 2024. The Indian National Congress on the other hand witnessed a significant increase of vote share from 25% in 2019 to 41% in 2024. The shift points out that there is a relative dissatisfaction with the BJP related to agrarian distress, unemployment and other rural development issues which is also a national trend as argued in recent studies (Shah, 2018; Yadav, 2019).

In urban localities, the electoral shift was even more pronounced with Congress ahead of BJP in terms of urban vote share, securing 53% in 2024 compared to 44% in 2019. This shift of urban voters towards Congress may be attributed to factors such as inflation, rising cost of living, urban unemployment, and dissatisfaction with economic reforms perceived to favour the economically affluent (Vaishnav, 2020; Jaffrelot, 2021).

The Himachal Pradesh Lok Sabha elections 2024 data therefore reflect a broader erosion of BJP's electoral dominance particularly among urban voters who have historically supported the party. For instance, Chhibber and Verma in their study point out that while the BJP's success nationally has often relied on urban middle-class support (Chhibber & Verma, 2018), this demographic is not immune to economic grievances, especially post-pandemic. It seems that the Congress capitalized on the BJP's vulnerabilities, possibly by localizing its campaign narratives, focusing on issues such as local governance failures, employment, and price rise, and leveraging regional discontent (Kumar, 2023).

Gender -wise voting pattern

The gender-wise distribution of votes in Himachal Pradesh as reflected in Table 3.10 shows political preference among male and female voters. The data illustrates that the Congress improved its vote share from 31% in 2019 to 44% in 2024, whereas the BJP's support dropped from 66% to 56%. In the State, women have gradually emerged as a critical electoral group, and the Congress seems to have reworked its strategy to cater to gendered vulnerabilities such as rising food prices, LPG subsidies, and public healthcare (Chhibber & Verma, 2018). There is no denying the fact that as managers of household, these issues impact women specifically.

Table 1.10: Party voted for Himachal Pradesh Lok Sabha

	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Men	39	24	57	72	4	4
Women	44	31	56	66		3

Source: CSDS-Lokniti 2024, 2019.

In recent years, studies have revealed that women voters are not mere passive participants in the electoral process but are increasingly emerging as autonomous political actors. Their voting decisions are shaped by both national-level policies and localized socio-economic narratives (Deshpande, 2024). In States such as Himachal Pradesh which is characterized by high levels of female literacy and significant labour force participation, gender sensitive political communication has assumed growing significance in shaping electoral outcomes

Table 1.11: Economic class/ party voted for -Himachal Pradesh

	Party voted for Himachal Pradesh Lok Sabha					
	Congress		BJP		Others	
	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019
Poor	72	29	28	69		3
Lower	37	22	60	75	4	3
Middle	36	29	64	67		4
Rich	42	32	53	63	5	5

Source: CSDS-Lokniti 2024, 2019.

The intersection of economic status and electoral preferences provides key insights into voter behaviour, particularly for a State with a high-human-development index like Himachal Pradesh. In fact it is important to analyse how different economic classes, poor, lower, middle, and rich aligned themselves politically over two consecutive Lok Sabha elections of 2024 and 2019.

In the 2024 Parliamentary elections the BJP had majority support from the lower and middle-income groups. However, there has been a visible drop-in support base for the party from among the lower-income voters from 75% in 2019 to 60% in 2024. The Congress party on the other hand showed an upward swing 22% to 37%. Interestingly from among the shift has been marginal for both BJP and Congress. These developments electorally point out the growing disillusionment with the BJP’s economic governance, particularly regarding inflation and youth unemployment (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2022), while also reflecting the Congress’s limited but expanding inroads.

In Himachal Pradesh celebrity driven personalised campaign was a defining feature in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. For instance, presence of high-profile BJP candidates Kangana Ranaut in Mandi, Anurag Thakur in Hamirpur is reflective of this trend. In fact, Anurag Thakur secured his fifth consecutive victory in Hamirpur, while newcomers Kangana Ranaut and Rajeev Bhardwaj won in Mandi and Kangra, respectively. The Congress, by contrast, failed to project charismatic candidates with broad appeal in these regions.

III

Despite its cultural and geographical diversities, the four North Indian Hill State displayed certain converging trends with reference to 2019 and 2024 parliamentary elections. The present section attempts to identify few such trends like the dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party, decline of the Congress party, a distinct and visible nationalisation of electoral narratives.

The BJP's dominance in the hill states

The dominance and consolidation of BJP in these hill States is due to the culmination of number of factors. In States like Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh which are primarily Hindu majority States and represent the idea of 'Dev Bhumi' (Land of the Gods), narratives of nationalism and Hindutva emphasised by BJP had a popular appeal.

Apart from its ideological appeal and rhetoric of nationalism, the BJP had gradually built a strong organizational network at the booth-level as seen in States like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. This robust network system at the grass roots level enabled the party to manage elections closely. Along with booth level management, it also initiated a disciplined cadre mobilisation both in rural and urban areas with the support of RSS and other affiliated organisations.

The 'Modi factor' continued to play a decisive role in Uttarakhand. Narendra Modi's popularity and image as a strong and decisive leader had a strong appeal and acceptance particularly in militarised and border regions. Further in States like Himachal Pradesh, charismatic and celebrity candidates was used to reach out to the aspirational voters. The party was also successful in building and consolidating a strong support base among Brahmins, Rajputs and the urban middle class in States like Uttarakhand and Haridwar. Such consolidation helped BJP secure urban constituencies like Dehradun and Haridwar in Uttarakhand and Shimla and Mandi in Himachal Pradesh.

To mobilise and build support among women, schedule castes and economically weaker sections, it effectively used flagship schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (free LPG connections to poor women), PM Awas Yojana (housing for the poor) and PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (free food grain distribution during COVID -19 and beyond). The schemes were instrumental in enhancing the image of BJP as a pro-poor party particularly in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh (CSDS-Lokniti 2019; Jaffrelot, 2021).

BJP's "double engine" narrative referring to seamless and coordinated development efforts between the Centre and State ruled by BJP had a strong appeal in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. The narrative was instrumental in bolstering BJP's image as a party which delivers development even in remote and high-risk hilly terrains (Palshikar 2022; Sharma 2021).

The BJP also benefitted from a fragile and fractured opposition and subsequent electoral fragmentation. Factional Politics, weak leadership and absence of a strong narrative in the Congress Party, created political space for the BJP to emerge as an effective political force. Moreover, the decline of regional parties also benefitted the Bharatiya Janata Party. For instance, one witnessed decline of Uttarakhand Kranti Dal in the last two parliamentary elections.

In summing up, the culmination of multiple factors like ideology, development narrative, organizational effectiveness, welfare populism and weak and divided opposition contributed in strengthening BJP's electoral presence in the region. One also witnessed continued presence of BJP in Hindi speaking States (H.P., Uttarakhand). However, in contrast sub-regional identities in Kashmir and Ladakh diluted BJP's presence in the region.

The Congress declines

As discussed earlier in the article, in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh the two mainstream political parties- the BJP and the Indian National Congress, historically have been alternating power with each other. However, in the last two parliamentary elections, the Congress party failed to mark its electoral presence in the hill States. Though it managed some sporadic gains in assembly polls, it could not seek even a single parliamentary seat in Himachal Pradesh in 2019 and 2024 general elections. In Uttarakhand, the Congress failed to take advantage of BJP's internal factional politics and leadership crisis. It could not exploit the public discontent and provide a viable alternative. According to recent studies, the decline of the Congress is attributed to its leadership crisis, low cadre strength and weak grassroots network (Palshikar 2022).

Thus, the common pattern that we find in these two States as far as Congress party is concerned is its declining electoral influence. The reason behind such performance is that it failed to provide an alternative or a counter to BJP's dominant narratives around national security, welfare led development and Hindutva centric nationalism (Jaffrelot 2021; Kumar, 2022). In fact, the party did not have a long-term vision for these regions and due to organizational mismanagement, it lost the capacity to compete with BJP in the hill States.

Priority of national issues over local concerns

The electoral behaviour across these two northern hill States was primarily oriented towards national level narratives in both 2019 and 2024 parliamentary elections. This is not to argue that there was absence of local level issues like 2023 floods in Himachal Pradesh, issues of migration and employment in Uttarakhand.

The focus and emphasis of BJP on issues like Modi's leadership, national security, welfare delivery and infrastructure development resonated across the electorate in these States. According to CSDS-Lokniti 2024 data, approximately

69 percent of voters in Uttarakhand Stated that national leadership and central policies of BJP were key voting determinants (Verma & Sardesai,2024). Moreover, development projects in the State were projected as symbols of national rejuvenation like Char Dham Highway, Kedarnath reconstruction etc. (Chibber 2023). At the same time neither of the opposition parties or independent candidates managed to curate State-centric counter narratives. In fact, they failed to develop an alternative governance model based on regional development issues and concerns around social identity resulting in lack of mobilisation of the electorate around local agendas. (Palshikar 2022).

In lieu of a conclusion

The 18th Lok Sabha elections held in the Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, the two hill States of North India is thus significant in understanding how identity, development and regional concerns define electoral preferences The electoral outcomes reflect that regional specificities and national political trends tend to co-exist, thereby validating the thesis of “embedded federalism”, offered by Subrata Mitra(2006) where diverse and regional identities are negotiated and accommodated within the framework of Indian democracy. Irrespective of their peripheral representation in the Lok Sabha, these regions have articulated robust democratic participation shaped by region specific identities, caste configurations, developmental and other local concerns.

Due to the strong presence of traditional Hindu social formations and national political parties, the States of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, exhibit a political culture which is both centripetal and regionally expressive.

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An analysis of investor decision-making in mutual fund investments through SIPs: evaluating return, safety, liquidity, and tax benefits across varied market conditions

Deepika Gautam & Esha Sharma

ABSTRACT

The present study is quantitative research that utilizes primary data obtained from the individuals invested in mutual funds through Systematic Investment Plan (SIPs), and an attempt has been done to identify and analyze the factors influencing and motivating the investor while investing in mutual funds through SIP. A conceptual model is formulated based on past studies and primary research with the help of Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) and AMOS 20. A total response of 199 investors was collected, and a hypothesis linkage between the constructs was constructed. Out of the 27 total statements, we came across the four major factors affecting the investor's decisions. With this help, we formulated a model to show the pattern in which an investor may invest during diverse market conditions. The study has explored the essential process that every individual investor must follow before making any investment decision.

Keywords: Mutual Funds, Portfolio Management, Safety, Return and Tax benefits.

Introduction

A mutual fund is a 'portfolio' of different financial instruments. It is a pool of money from numerous investors who wish to save money. Investing in a mutual fund can be much easier than buying and selling individual stocks and bonds. A mutual fund is an investment security type that enables investors to pool their money into one professionally managed investment. Mutual funds can be invested in stocks, bonds, cash, and other assets. These securities are called holdings combine to form one mutual fund, also called a portfolio. Mutual funds can be considered baskets of investment. Each basket holds dozens or hundreds of security types, such as stock or bonds. Therefore, when an investor buys mutual funds, they are buying a basket of investment securities.

Systematic investment plan deals with investing same amount of money at every month for stipulated time. During systematic investment, the investor has to

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invest the same amount every time irrespective the condition of the market. The market condition like up or down does not affect the investment amount in systematic investment plan. The systematic investment plan helped the investors to invest the money in various stocks without entering directly. The investors gain more units when the market is up, and lesser units when the market is down, this is the basic thing in mutual fund investments. Through this study, an attempt has been made to identify and analyse the behavioral aspects that influence the investment decisions of investors and to analyze the attitude of investors toward Mutual Funds.

Thus, the present study first discusses the investment behavior of individuals towards mutual funds through SIP during diverse market conditions. Further, the study describes the rationale of being the study focused towards the topic, the review of literature regarding the research topic. Subsequently, the present study discusses the methods undertaken in conducting research, the major findings and conclusion, followed by the scope for future research.

Objectives of the study was to explore the demographic factors responsible for influencing determinants of investors' perception and to identify critical factors that influence individual investors' decisions. Also to examine the interrelationships between these influencing factors.

Hypothesis development

Factors like return, safety, liquidity, and tax benefits have substantial effects on investment decisions related to mutual funds during diverse market conditions. Investors invest through SIP as they know that Mutual funds allow them to reinvest their earnings, which can lead to compounding and growing the investment. Investment in mutual funds may lead to diversification and optimum portfolio management as it ensures safety related to return as these are regulated by government bodies like SEBI. Mutual funds allow investors to redeem their investments at any time without significant delays, even during diverse market conditions and even allow partial withdrawals. Lastly, tax benefits, which are one of the most important objectives behind any investment and mutual funds, provide this relaxation as it can be claimed under **Section 80C** of the Income Tax Act, 1961, in India.

Hence, the Hypothesis

H₁- Return, Safety, Liquidity and Tax Benefits are factors influencing Investment decisions in Mutual Fund through SIP during Diverse Market Conditions

Review of literature

In the present research, the author utilized the systematic literature review methodology to scrutinize the previous studies aligned with the present research.

Author has utilized the databases for the study consisted of the Springer nature Database, Sage database, Emerald Group publishing database, Wiley online library and JSTOR.

Investor perception towards mutual fund and systematic investment plan

Various studies on the investor's perception/decision to invest in Mutual funds through a Systematic Investment Plan have been conducted by various authors worldwide. It is estimated that the growth of mutual funds in the present century falls around 14.4% rate as India's mutual fund market is underpenetrated and India's AUM to GDP ratio is only 16%, whereas the global average is around 75% which suggests a lot of scope for growth in this industry. However, according to Asia Week (2001) estimations, the current growth of investment in mutual funds is much higher than that of bank deposits and equity investments in the present century. Abey (2017) contemplated the different elements impacting investment choice in mutual fund plans and found that age and instructive capability don't influence the investment disposition. The paper upheld for mutual fund investments for better enhancement. Retirement pay plans are more liked by investors relying on their assignment or pay level. The expert management framework additionally impacts mutual fund investment choices as investment portfolios by giving applicable monetary data. Saini, Anjum and Saini (2011) in their research study analyzed the mutual fund investments in relation to investor's behavior and Investors' opinion and perceptions has been examined pertaining to diverse issues like type of mutual fund scheme, objective of investing, role of financial advisors/brokers, sources of information and various services provided by the mutual fund managers, etc. Another study conducted by Sharma (2012) attempted to investigate the causes responsible for under identification of mutual fund as a primary investment option. The study inspects the investor's perception pertaining to different features of mutual fund schemes to attract them for investing in particular funds. The paper investigated three factors named fund attributes, sponsor attributes, and monetary benefits, which should be offered to investors to secure their long-term association in the form of building investor loyalty. The study suggested and have given insight to mutual fund companies for moulding their offers according to the requirements and expectations of Indian investors.

Investors' decisions through SIP during diverse market conditions

Chen and Knez (1996) and Ferson and Schadt (1996) studied that information on various economic factors affecting portfolio returns is available publicly. A fund manager can act upon anticipated changes in states of economy and alter the risk of portfolio to her advantage. Although portfolio turnover can lead to outperformance or underperformance of outcomes (Chou, Huang, & Lai, (2016), the only skill needed here will be macro-economic literacy which is not what fund managers get paid for as it can be replicated by investors too. Senthil (2010) conducted a study to identify the most preferred investment option from all the financial options available to investors and it was concluded that mutual

funds were most preferred investment option among the investors compared to other investment options. As in stock market the risk is higher, and that risk is lower down by investing in mutual fund schemes. However, Over the period of time through various researches, it has been found that the Indian investors usually preferred low risk, high return and liquidity to return. The study suggested that a lot of ground is yet to be covered in this direction. Hence, it is important to identify the various factors that influence investors' decision in investments in Mutual Fund through Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) during diverse market conditions. The present study has been taken up specifically with this idea in mind.

Research methodology

Research design

The present research is a quantitative research approach, based on primary data collected from respondents of Shimla city who invest in mutual funds through SIP. Using the Kregcie-Morgan Table Chaokromthonh K; & Sintao, N. (2021) for the calculation of sample size 199 respondents at a 7.5% margin of error was considered. To account for non-responses, 220 questionnaires were distributed and n=199 responses were completed and was considered suitable for the study. Since this is adequate to make the analysis, all the discussions were conducted with n=199 as the effective number of respondents. The convenience sampling was used as it allowed for a quick and accessible way to gather data. A well-structured questionnaire was prepared by taking the references of various articles written by various experts on investment in share capital. The questionnaire consisted of various sections, including a demographic profile of the respondents. The questions were carefully worded to ensure clarity and to avoid bias and allowing respondents to provide accurate and meaningful responses. Various experts in this field ensured the reliability and validity of the whole questionnaire. Convergent validity was supported as the AVE for all the three constructs was greater than 0.50, and the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability were above 0.70.

Sources of data

The questions asked in the survey were based on sources of information to invest in a mutual fund, their objective behind investing, reasons for not investing through systematic investment plans, and socio-economic factors that force the respondents to select these investments. The data was interpreted using the Factor analysis using SPSS software and confirmatory analysis using the AMOs software as it is known to be more efficient while estimating values in different parameters Hair Jr, J.F; et al. (2020). All these methods facilitated a comprehensive collection and data analysis and helps to determine the various factors underlying the findings.

Rationale of the study

The study has significant new work/knowledge as compared to already published work. The study aims to explore how key factors like return, safety, liquidity, and tax benefits influence investor decisions when investing in mutual funds through Systematic Investment Plans (SIP) during diverse market conditions. Understanding these factors provides insight into the decision-making process of investors and helps identify how varying market scenarios impact their investment choices. By focusing on a sample of 199 respondents, the study aims to gather insights into local investment behavior and preferences of individuals. Further the study contributed to help mutual fund companies to identify the areas required for improvement and to make marketing strategies during diverse market conditions. The study highlighted that Mutual fund companies need to create new and innovative products according to the orientation of investors and different market conditions, as market conditions have a significant impact on the investment decision-making process.

Analysis and discussion

Demographic profile of the investors

Integrating demographic information is crucial for analysing and understanding the data accurately. With the help of this methodology, researchers can spot biases or discrepancies in ideas based on age, gender, qualification, occupation, annual income, and investment experience to improve the representation of their results.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the investors

Age	Frequency	Percent
<=30 years	51	25.6
31-40 years	120	60.3
41-50 years	14	7.0
Above 50 years	14	7.0
Total	199	100.0
Gender		
Male	169	84.9
Female	30	15.1
Total	199	100.0
Educational Qualification		
Below Graduation	28	14.1
Graduation	50	25.1
Post Graduation	91	45.7
Above Post Graduation	30	15.1
Total	199	100.0

Family Occupation		
Academicians	32	16.1
Businessperson	64	32.2
Govt. Employees	81	40.7
Others	22	11.0
Total	199	100.0
Annual Income		
Less than 2,50,000	15	7.5
2,50,001-5,00,000	59	29.6
5,00,001-7,50,000	112	56.3
7,50,001 and above	13	6.5
Total	199	100.0
Investment Experience		
Fresher	26	13.1
1-5 Years	39	19.6
6-10 Years	120	60.3
10 Years and above	14	7.0
Total	199	100.0

Source: Author Compiled.

Item analysis for factors influencing investment decisions in mutual fund through SIP

Item analysis is to examine the descriptive data, including measures such as mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis to fully disclose the factors influencing individual decision making in the present study. Descriptive analysis helps to analyse the data meaningfully and helps locate the items revealing unfavourable characteristics. Thus, item analysis, is vital to ensure validity and reliability by deleting or revision of items in the data set. Table-2 shows that liquidity is the most prioritized factor among the respondents with the highest mean score (13.99) as investors place significant importance on having easy access to their funds. Safety has the second highest mean score (13.23), indicating that respondents also consider the security of their investments very important, Return has a lower mean score (11.23) compared to liquidity and safety, but it is still a significant factor and tax benefits have the lowest mean score (10.93) among the four factors, indicating the fact that while tax advantages are a consideration, they are not as significant in influencing investment decisions compared to liquidity, safety, and return. Investors might prioritize immediate and practical aspects of their investments over potential tax savings.

Table 2: Item analysis for factors influencing investment decisions in mutual fund through SIP

	Safety	Liquidity	Return	Tax Benefits
Mean	13.23	13.99	11.23	10.93
Standard Deviation	4.95	4.71	2.65	4.36
Skewness	.010	-.661	-.590	.335
Kurtosis	.252	.281	-.410	.546

Source: Author Compiled.

The objective(s) behind investing in equity mutual funds through SIP

There are various investment avenues, where people can invest their hard-earned money. While making investment there are many considerations that respondents has considered. From the Table 3, it is seen that 199 respondents have given their choices for the various objectives behind investing in mutual funds through SIP. Respondents have given their choices on various objectives from most preferred to least preferred. Table 3 throws light on the ranking of five most preferred investment avenues by the people in study area. Analysis of table reveals that vast majority of respondents have given first preference to invest their savings in equity mutual fund through SIP is to meet the expenses towards higher education of children with mean value 2.87, second objective for the respondents to invest in equity mutual fund through SIP is to meet contingency expenses with mean value 2.72, third objective for the respondents to invest in mutual fund through SIP is to diversity Investment Portfolio with mean value 2.17, fourth objective for the respondents to invest in mutual fund through SIP is to have a comfortable corpus for Retirement and the fifth objective for the respondents to invest in mutual fund through SIP is to reduce tax burden with mean value 1.99. Their preferences were averaged, and based on the mean value ranks have been given to various objectives as follows:

Table 3: Objective(s) behind investing in mutual funds through SIP

Investment Avenues	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Ranks
To have a comfortable corpus for Retirement	2.11	.913	43.27	.172	-1.061	IV
To diversity Investment Portfolio	2.17	.921	41.05	.209	-.767	III
To meet the expenses towards Higher Education of Children	2.87	.960	31.29	-.432	-.752	I
To meet Contingency Expenses	2.72	1.275	48.57	-.421	-1.711	II
To reduce Tax Burden	1.99	.899	46.35	.168	-1.044	V

Source: Author Compiled.

Exploratory factor analysis

The attitude of investors towards the investment options is changing with the financial liberalization and dynamic business environment as every investor expect that he would get a reasonable return on his investment with minimum risk. It is observed that investors are more devoted and fonder of finicky type of investment choice and preferences. So, it is imperative to study the factors in light of socio-economic factors that force them for selecting these investment options. The KMO measures of sampling adequacy, which is equal to 0.886, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity, which comes with a significance level of 5%, are statistically significant with a value of 9061.489, which shows that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that it looks to be factorable.

Table 4 exhibits the results of the rotated component matrix. The table reports the loading of different statements on identified four factors. Statements from S1-S8 have been loaded on factor 1, i.e., Liquidity Factors. Statements from S9-S15 have been loaded in factor 2 (Safety Related Factors), the variables which are loaded in factor 3 (Return) are from S16- S20 and factor 4 includes the statements from S22-S27 (Tax Saving Factors). From the above table, it is seen that total four factors have been extracted.

Factor 1 identifies as Liquidity comprises of eight statements: Offer easy redemption options with factor loading .829, Allow investors for hassle-free withdrawals without significant penalties having factor loading .844, Partially redeem is possible having factor loading .691, Systematic withdrawals provide the liquidity having factor loading .793, Strong liquidity management practices having factor loading .604, Automatic rebalancing and liquidity-focused investment strategies having factor loading .841, availability of mutual funds with no lock-in period or short lock-in periods with factor loading .161 and Flexibility in Funds Management with factor loading .307,

Factor 2 identifies as Safety comprises of seven statements: Mutual funds are managed by professional fund managers with factor loading .722, Mutual funds are regulated by financial authorities having factor loading .681, Mutual funds focus on low volatility investments having factor loading .649, Allows investors to maintain secure investment profile having factor loading .636, Spreads investments across multiple securities having factor loading .556, Robust risk management practices having factor loading .702, Principal amount in Mutual fund remains always safe with factor loading .819. Factor 3 identifies as Return comprises of six items: Investors may get fixed return on mutual funds having factor loading .944, Equity mutual funds may give more than 100% return having factor loading .942, Different ways to get the return having factor loading .943, Better returns than traditional saving options having factor loading .820, Risk and Returns are closely correlated having factor loading .702, Higher Tax benefit can be availed as compared to other financial instruments having

factor loading .614. factor 4 identifies as Tax benefits comprised of statements including: Tax rebate can be availed as per requirement having factor loading .801, Certain SIP comes under EEE (Exempt, Exempt and Exempt) category having factor loading .799, Investing in mutual funds is eligible under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act having factor loading .743, Exempted from wealth tax having factor loading .382, Investing through SIPs in balanced mutual fund schemes is completely tax-free having factor loading .763, Mutual funds invested in government bonds are referred to as tax-exempt funds having factor loading .831 and Investor may get a maximum tax deduction of Rs 1.5 lakh per year having factor loading .584.

Table 4: Rotated component matrix

S1	Offer easy redemption options	.829			
S2	Allow investors for hassle-free withdrawals without significant penalties	.844			
S3	Partially redemption is possible	.691			
S4	Systematic withdrawals provide liquidity	.793			
S5	Strong liquidity management practices	.604			
S6	Automatic rebalancing and liquidity-focused investment strategies	.841			
S7	Availability of mutual funds with no lock-in period or short lock-in periods	.161			
S8	Flexibility in Funds Management	.307			
S9	Professional fund managers manage mutual funds		.722		
S10	Financial authorities regulate mutual funds		.681		
S11	Mutual funds focus on low volatility investments		.649		
S12	Allows investors to maintain secure investment profile		.636		
S13	Spreads investments across multiple securities		.556		
S14	Robust risk management practices		.702		
S15	Principal amount in Mutual fund remains always safe.		.819		
S16	Investors may get fixed return on mutual funds			.944	
S17	Equity mutual funds may give more than 100% return			.942	
S18	Different ways to get the return			.943	
S19	Better returns than traditional saving options			.820	
S20	Risk and Returns are closely correlated			.702	
S21	Tax rebate can be availed as per requirement				.801
S22	Certain SIP comes under EEE (Exempt, Exempt and Exempt) category				.799
S23	Investing in mutual funds is eligible under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act				.743
S24	Exempted from wealth tax				.382
S25	Investing through SIPs in balanced mutual fund schemes is completely tax-free.				.763
S26	Mutual funds invested in government bonds are referred to as tax-exempt funds				.831
S27	Investor may get a maximum tax deduction of Rs 1.5 lakh per year				.584

Source: Extraction Method (Principal Component Matrix).

Reliability and validity of the model

Table 5: Reliability and validity statistics- factors influencing investment decision in mutual fund

	CR	AVE	MaxR (H)	Sf	Liq	Re	TB
Sf	0.803	0.576	0.830	0.865			
Liq	0.612	0.507	0.780	0.139	0.534		
Re	0.890	0.612	0.899	0.788	0.489	0.674	
TB	0.930	0.714	0.958	0.785	0.213	0.888	0.544

Source: Author Compiled.
Sf-Safety, Liq-Liquidity, Re-Return and TB-Tax Benefit

Table 5 depicts the statistical data for convergent and discriminate validity. The validity of the interview schedule was assessed with the help of different measures, including composite reliability (Cr), which needed to be 0.70. Secondly, the average variance explained (AVE) was considered, which should be greater than 0.50. Maximum reliability (MaxR(H)) was also assessed, and It is seen that the Maxr(h) value is higher than the car value for each latent variable integrated into the model for divergent reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table-6: Measurement model-factors influencing investment in mutual funds

Model Fit Summary				
CMIN				
Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF
Default model	76	112.995	677.357	2.185
Criteria				<2.00
RMR, GFI				
Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default Model	0.23	0.776		
Criteria	<0.100	>0.60		

Source: Author Compilation.

Table 6 indicates the statistical data for model fit. The observed result of the Chi-square test, is Goodness of Fit (0.776), exceeds the proposed criteria. The boundary estimation result for the Resting metabolic rate (RMR0 is 0.23). In the present study, we asked individuals what are the fitness consequences? Using

evidence, we demonstrate that diverse factors, such as return, safety, liquidity and tax benefits contribute to variation in individual RMR as it is linked with fitness, showing correlations with traits, suggesting that the fitness consequences of a given RMR may be context-dependent and its measures of fit are reasonably suitable.

Table 7: Structural relationship- factors influencing investment in mutual funds

		Unstd Estimate	Std Estimate	P value
Safety	← Investment Decisions	0.382	0.057	0.000
Liquidity		0.289	0.045	
Return		0.166	0.078	
Tax Benefits		0.310	0.131	

Source: Author Compiled.

Table 7 analyses the factors influencing investment in mutual funds: Safety, Liquidity, and return and tax benefits through SIP. Standardized and unstandardized estimates along with the p-value have been used, and these identified factors have shown a significant impact on investing in mutual funds. It can be seen in the analysis that there is a positive correlation between all the identified factors in relation to investment decisions. As the mean score of safety increases, investment is likely to be increased by 38% and this relationship is statistically significant because p-value of the variable is 0.000 and this indicates that safety is the major reason of investors to invest in mutual funds. The regression analysis, as shown in Table 6, suggests that the coefficient B for Liquidity is 0.289 with a p-value of 0.000, underlying the fact that investors prefer to invest in mutual funds through SIP as it allows easy conversion of their investments into cash with no major losses. From the analysis, it can be interpreted that return also positively impacts investment decisions by 17%. The value of B is 0.166; its beta is 0.078 with a probability value of 0.000. the probability value is very low, indicating a significant relationship. The data reveals the fact that SIP is an attractive option for individuals seeking consistent returns, with lower risk and higher potential for long-term wealth creation in mutual funds and investors also believe that through SIP, the risk is spread out over time as it reduces the impact of short-term market volatility, potentially leading to better returns in the long run. Investors should consider various aspects like investment objectives and strategies, fund performance, quality of management, fees and expenses, and the types of assets the fund invests in.

Further, the results, as depicted in Table-6, show that one unit of mean scores in Tax benefits will increase the scope of investment decisions by 31%, which implies that the number of investors preferred mutual funds increases by 31%. The statistical data shows the significant influence of investing in mutual funds

during diverse market conditions. Consequently, insights based on the effects of cognitive biases on an individual's decisions are important because they help investors to make rational decisions. Investors should also consider the fact that diversification is important to avoid concentrating risk in a few instruments as investors may use the same fund to spread the money across different assets and markets.

Conclusion and implication

The present study is an in-depth analysis of Investors' Decisions in Investments in Mutual Funds through a SIP during Diverse Market Conditions. The analysis is done with the help of various statistical tools. The collected data have been interpreted and the following conclusions have been drawn: Most of the respondent investors' objective in investing in mutual funds through SIP was to meet the expenses towards Higher Education of Children. So, it is necessary to develop the mutual fund schemes that suits such investors' needs. From the analysis, it is also found that, Investors are comfortable with mutual fund investments due to safe approach. So, the AMCs should frame strategy to ensure safety of the investors. The study identified the critical factors which affect the mutual fund investment through SIP during diverse market conditions. This research is important because it reveals that liquidity was one of the critical factors in mutual fund investment through SIP, as investors prioritize a balance between security and flexibility in their financial choices. Mutual funds offer diversification, which reduces risk, and professional management, which instills confidence, especially for those with limited investment expertise. The preference for mutual funds suggests a cautious yet strategic approach to investing, where safety and convenience are as important as potential returns. Mutual fund companies should provide proper information and knowledge to their valuable customers regarding the various safety features they offer nowadays. A Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) is one of the innovative products launched by Assets Management companies. Mutual fund companies should develop more conservative options and launch educational campaigns to inform investors about the inherent safety features of mutual funds.

The research strategy used in this study is quantitative. In future research, mixed methodology might be applied, considering the psychological factors, as more results could be explored by considering quantitative and qualitative methods. Further, sample size may be expanded on to gain more insightful viewpoint related to investment decisions.

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Social spaces and Chicago School of Sociology – contributions of three prominent Chicago sociologists

Rajbir Saha

ABSTRACT

In view of evolving new geographic techniques, that has been able to maintain a future standing interest in managing the prospect of lifestyles in an urban setting, such continuity in experimental research has sprinted beforehand of propositions about the character of space in locality substantial ceiling. Simultaneously, in sociological thought, sociologists employ similar generalizations of space unfolded in discourse of Chicago School, during the beginning of 1918 and primeval 1930s. Idea of social space, holding its immense importance within the works of namely three spearheading sociologists, Simmel, Park, and Goffman, seeks to analyse the classical scholarly works of space based on social form integral to general manifestation of the Chicago School of Sociology. Both for Simmel and Chicago School, the notion of social based spectrum of spaces lies inside the arrangements done socially among entertainers, performing artists, affiliations of social nature and structure, from the point of interaction forms. This unique culture put emphasis on the affiliation of material space and social space, securing the dual focused preface of social space - endogeneity and transience, moreover concentrate on the bonds between spaces and mortal interests.

Keywords: Social spaces, forms, structures, human ecology, Chicago School.

Introduction

Throughout the history of sociology, a field that have been developing for over a century since its inception in the 19th century, the understanding of space by sociologists have progressively transformed. From sociological perspective, the concept of ‘space’ has slowly broadened from the original material and spatial interpretations to the more conceptual notion of ‘social space.’ Representations of space and representational space are evident especially in Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of social space Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), ‘actor-network’ of Latour (2005) and in concept of ‘spatial practice’ of Lefebvre’s (1991; 1974) where space is considered to surpass its geographic and physical demerits. These concepts encompass a range of social significances, such as authority, creation, development, and social interactions. Alongside these impactful French theories, a separate theoretical framework of social concept of space developed by Georg Simmel, a Sociologist of German origin and the

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famous Chicago Sociologist emphasizing “social structures” and “human environment” (Simmel, 1971; 2009, Park and Burgess, 1921; 1969). Nonetheless, sociologist Simmel and the institution of Chicago School, both express similar nature of sociological methodology, which falls short of theoretical propositions. As similar to Bourdieu’s results, the sociologists pioneered to make use of broad issues of theoretical proponents in order to dimensions of social existence. Hence, until the period of 21st century, neither Simmel, Park & Goffman nor Andrew Abbott, a modern sociologist, within their theoretical discourses regarding social spaces were analyzed thoroughly. According to Simmel and Chicago School, through power dynamics or class conflicts, social space can’t be determined, rather, can be found on dynamics of social interaction, that lies in spatial and temporal contexts, highlighting an interconnection of both spaces – physical and social endorsed by two characteristics, namely-endogeneity and transience. Both clearly differ from the Marxist class and Bourdieu’s field theory.

The author in this paper speaks about the contributions provided by three popular sociologists within this field, namely – Georg Simmel, Robert Ezra Park & Erving Goffman, and examines the concept of social spaces, as per their writings to provide significance of space and time dynamics, in comprehending varied rigid and short social forms. The reason behind to analyze and determine the three sociologists’ theories is because they exhibit similar sociological lineage during different periods, are distinct and share society’s core metaphysical and epistemological assumptions regarding society. In addition, the theoretical assumption is especially apparent in space analysis. Before beginning with spatial theories, separately there is a need to define social spaces. Different terms are used in the domain of social theory specifically in Bourdieu’s “field” or Chicago’s “ecology.” In an ideal thought, three basic elements are included in social spaces such as actors, spatial locations, and relations among the two terms (Abbott, 2005; Liu and Emirbayer, 2016). These threesome components highlight the differences among social space and the other trilogy namely, “social structure,” “social system,” and “social network.” First, term concentrates on the organizational framework of social existence, rather than the independence of the individuals within the framework. Second, term stresses the roles and functions of individuals within a functional framework, as opposed to their spatial positions, and third, social network underscores the relationships among individuals, instead the links between networks and spatial positions. In such comparison, primary focus of social concept of space is exactly is to determine, how individuals and spatial positions are interconnected, and such forms, and transformations tend to shape how the social nature of structure will be and past dynamics of whole space.

Georg Simmel-study of social types

Simmel maintains that, sociology can be defined simply the studying of social types, where this term has three specific, interrelated meanings – geometry of shape, transcendent and vitalistic term (Silver and Brocic, 2019). Among the three, the spatial interpretation is most apparent in Simmel’s concept, yet another two interpretations have also profoundly influenced the social perspective and methodology of the Chicago School. According to him, the term sociology ought to be viewed as the mathematical shapes and sizes of social science, with its primary mission is to examine of different bases of society based on “an abstraction from tangible reality” (Simmel, 1950). Simmel proposes that further study in this context, conveyed by these forms ought to be associated with politics and history, other social science fields. Modern sociologist of American origin, Emily Erikson offers a striking metaphor regarding this idea: Simmel’s sociological thought interprets the structure of a container, rather than the liquid resides in the container, and most crucially, “the structure of container is not shaped by the liquid it holds” (Erikson, 2013). This particular perspective is notably different from other prominent sociological thinkers, such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. It does not prioritise conflict dynamics, social unity, nor does it advocate a specific trajectory for societal development. Rather, this perspective concentrates on articulating the diverse fundamental types of existence on social basis and the transformation mechanisms. Simmel maintained that, in a defined space social nature of conversations takes place among individuals. He contends that “if several individuals exist within specific spatial limits in isolation from one another, then each one merely occupies their own immediate area with their essence and their actions, and between this area and the adjacent area lies unoccupied space, pointed practically - nothing” (Simmel, 2009). Importance of space in sociological context can be understood through the interaction processes, as defined by Kant – “the possibility of being together” (Simmel, 2009). The diverse relationships and exchanges among individuals enable them to unite. Thus, two terms social space and interaction are mutually reliant, As long as social interaction processes persist, the question of boundary between performers inevitably emerges. Simmel asserts that “it is not the territories, not the assets, not the urban area and the country side that define one other boundary, but the inhabitants or proprietors engaged in mutual action” (Simmel, 2009). In other words, boundaries in the sociological perspective will only begin to develop when social interactions among individuals or groups commence. Thus, “the boundary is not merely a spatial phenomenon with sociological implications, but a sociological truth that is created in a spatial manner” (Simmel, 2009). As per Simmel’s sociological analysis of the idea of “boundary” are in parallel lines, the late 20th-century idea of “boundary-work” in the scientific meaning of sociology suggested by Gieryn (1983) and Abbott’s (1988) concept of “jurisdiction” in the area of the sociological understanding of professions. Such viewpoints highlight the spatial impact of boundaries. Marked

by a difference from other interpretation in modern sociology, being proposed by Lamont and Wimmer, respectively in the year of 1992, 2000 and 2013, view those boundaries as an identity marker distinguishing among races or classes. Discussing of Abbott's (1995) "boundary objects" which more directly derives from Simmel's understanding on social forms. Maintaining that boundary lines are not meant to divide entities, rather they influence the essence of peoples, collectives, institutions and social nature of units. Though, boundaries are integrated into a specific configuration, entities focused on social nature tend to arise. Simmel offers a apt analogy for illustrating an importance of boundary within social space, function as a frame in an art work. He asserts that "the frame signifies that within it lies a realm governed by its own standards, a realm that is not influenced by the factors and dynamics of the external world; while it represents the autonomy of the art work, it simultaneously, by its very essence, emphasizes the existence and impression of the surroundings" (Simmel, 2009). In a comparable manner, boundary, on one side, distinguish a social area from the external environment, offer a guarantee that space which has social feature are "internally cohesive," while on the other side, act as "the interactive unity, the operational connection of every component to one another gains its spatial representation in the enclosing boundary" (Simmel, 2009). The picture frame analogy represents effectively Simmel's premise regarding social space endogeneity, indicate to a considerable degree are self-sufficient throughout external environment. While boundaries are present marks of outer world are visible in respect to social spaces. Such social framework is given a shape through the conversation by internal performers. This analysis will reveal that this premise of endogeneity will be found in the dialogues of Park and Goffman, even in other Chicago sociologists involved in analysis of social spaces.

Alongside the boundary, social distance represents another fundamental idea in Georg Simmel's theory. Modern west sociological thought frequently interprets such distance through the lens of social structure analysis, especially drawing on explorations of "double" (dyad) and "triple" (triad) (Simmel, 1950). Certain social thinkers like Black, tried an attempt to quantify experimental social distance. Nevertheless, in Simmel's texts, social distance is deeply intertwined with human feelings and psychological states, making it a subjective concept that is inherently connected to individuals. This inclination is especially prominent in his influential piece, Simmel's 1971 "The Metropolis and Mental Life". The core premise regarding human character is distinctly more cynical than Durkheim's discussion on unity having social nature. Although. Simmel stresses social engagement, but not make a sense that all individuals with active participation in relation to other. The indifferent demeanour often seen in urban environments reflects human's inclination to keep social separation and evade interaction with others.

The relation between social proximity and human feelings depend on both spatial and temporal factors. As Simmel states, when there is decline in physical

distance among individuals, the result leads to “the greatest exuberance” or “the most intolerable pressure” (Simmel, 2009). Spatial separation frequently operates alongside temporal separation to affect individuals’ feelings. For example, a short time apart for lovers can evoke intense emotions similar to the proverb, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”. Nevertheless, if the distance persists over a long period of time, their feelings may slowly decline or even result in apathy (Simmel, 2009). Another example stated by Simmel is that form of friendships between companions and nearby residents or neighbours: “Having one’s neighbours as companions is beneficial, but it can be risky to have one’s companions as neighbours. There are likely only a handful of friendships that does not include little form of separation in their intimacy; though geographical detachment substitutes for the often awkward and annoying regulations that are necessary to preserve that emotional distance with constant interaction” (Simmel, 2009). Among them, prominent are family members, can’t maintain the distance, so called physical spatial ones, thus ethics and morality tends to prevent the behaviour that disrupts customs, for instance incest. Moreover, the essential importance associated with social structures mentioned previously indicates that these structures possess a life cycle. In fact, “It arises inventively from the context of interaction, provides guidance and vigour, but may also become depleted to the extent of prompting a quest for revitalization” (Silver and Brocic, 2019). Hence, any change of variation noticed in physical space that to associated with social changes such as destructions and urbanization, this modified form of such space also continues to evolve and change, could exist or not.

Both Simmel’s and Bordieu’s perspective on space differs from each other. Considering fields to be of virtual spaces that remain unaffected by problems created due to physical space, and represent a relation the positions of stakeholders and geographic situations. Roles within a situation only gain significance when are held through a specific person or association (Liu & Emirbayer, 2016). In comparison, to Simmel’s notion of social space having relation to material space and time, which reveal individual presence are not required at every place - called to be vacant space. He argues that vacant space and social groups having related to one another act like a border line and link. In Simmel’s words, “The empty area that exists between two tribes, functions as a neutral space for trade or other forms of conversations. This basic structure, characterized by its entirely negative essence, facilitates a distinct form of relationship between opposing forces, embodying it within that context. Consequently, the mere existence of unoccupied space reveals itself as a medium and expression of social conversation” (Simmel, 2009). The other part is for social engagement vacant space acts to be a necessary one. The movement of individuals within such space is based upon assumption that territorial location are not filled up. If every location within a space is entirely filled, movement becomes unattainable. This understanding of vacant space underscores a critical distinction between social space theory maintained by

Simmel and Bourdieu. Further, Bourdieu's theory put emphasis on constant systemic space, where interaction and mobility of social nature are not essential as a pre-requisite. Conversely, the term social based conversation and mobility are put forwarded initially by Simmel's, but later used in exploration in Chicago school.

Relationship between natural and human created space-by Robert E. Park

Most ancient academic lineage within the annals of American sociology, are theories of sociological thought based on Chicago School. Profoundly, put in shape by Georg Simmel, mainly for two reasons - Firstly, relate with Albion Small, founder of Chicago School along with Robert E. Park. After completing their studies at that time period, both Small and Park came in contact with Simmel, therefore returned to the United States with his sociological concepts. Secondly, Chicago, a prominent city of United States for non-native settlers. The city mostly attracts varied ethnic peoples from other parts of the globe, mostly from Europe, leading to a high dynamic and diverse population. This variety leads to large spectrum of social based conversation, establishing a lively and vivid social atmosphere. In order to utilize, Simmel's sociological thought on social categories and interpersonal conversations, for Thomas and Park, it offered to them an empirical first-hand foundation. In a relative comparison to long-standing and fairly stable societies of Europe, the reconfiguration of ethnic dynamics and the process of nation building in 20th century America were deeply connected. The geographic divisions and social categories that arose from the conversations of various ethnic groups differed from the urban environment, as illustrated by Simmel using Berlin as an example. This difference is notably evident in academic studies performed by Park and scholars of Chicago School on concept of cities (Park et al. 1967; 1925).

Impact of Chicago School on social space theory are visible, because of a well-known approach of research called to be "human ecology," which forms the foundation to create a lines of concepts and analytical instruments for comprehending interaction processes within social space. Though, Park coined the term "human ecology", he along with other colleagues- Burgess and McKenzie and students at the University of Chicago, as a whole developed this biologically inspired sociological framework. In an early paper of a book, "*The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment*", McKenzie defined human ecology as "a study of the spatial and temporal relationships of human beings as influenced by the selective, distributive, and accommodating forces of the environment" (McKenzie, 1967; 1925). In another paper titled "Human Ecology," Park underscores that "society, from the ecological perspective, and in so far as it is a territorial unit, is merely the area within which biotic competition has diminished and the struggle for survival have taken on higher and more refined forms" (Park, 1936).

Introducing, the four fundamental forms of social interaction by Park and Burgess in their book *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Park & Burgess, 1969; 1921) are – contention, conflict, accommodation and integration, where competition holds the prominent place among all the four. Stated by Park, generally competition exists in human community, in order to bring and to maintain the communal equality, without the advocacy of obtrusive factors, or to continue in general course of life, where the equality is not balanced (Park, 1936), maintained that the forms of accommodation, conflict, integration, hegemony, succession or any other types of instruction are already included in competition among humans and non-humans. But, during times, these interactions may be evident more as to control the scuffle for power and prestige (Park, 1936). The proposition from where the origin of human power seems to emanate, are linked to biotic competition, a disparity with the theories of power, significantly highlight domination and subordination, as maintained by Weber and Bordieu. Seems to be present in the discussion of contemporary theory of Chicago school by those sociologists, (Abbott, 1988) express that the theory of professions systems dominates conflicts among the professions practiced, is more a competing and equilibrating model rather than simply of a power one. However, this above-mentioned model exist on the assumption that no profession is indulge in delivering services not up to expectations, stand it against outsiders of competing forces, may be seems to be powerful (Abbott, 1988).

Though, Chicago school highlight competition, which is not treated equal to Spencer's concept or trade contention of an economy. Both Park and Burgess believe that interactions are formed on the basis of social contacts and having "interactions without social contact" forms the core of competition (Park and Burgess, 1969; 1921). In a logical sense, competition in population is interwoven with other process of social interaction viz. conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. Thus, a new concept was introduced by Park & Burgess – competitive cooperation to explain the social order involved in it, where an individual have freedom to acquire one's own profit and also compelled to do so, engages all other individual to achieve the means of profit (Park and Burgess, 1969; 1921). Moreover, this social order depends upon competition cut across the individuals' interests, the cultural process constrained in it, with the customs, laws and tradition rather going with the economy of pure market competition. Indeed, both competition and conflict, complement each other as interactions, where the individual positions is determined by the former and the place is fixed in society by the later one. According to (Park and Burgess, 1969, 1921) the features of community and society are – *location, position and presence of ecological factor*, and the *status, subordinate and control*, respectively.

Another concept by Park and Burgess is of- isolation, portrayed in the book *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, penned by both. Termed as opposite of

social interaction and contact, to be completely free from social groups, an individual can think of unimaginably. Exclusion from communication is a feature of isolation in sociology, as spatial separation is indeed formed by geographical one. Infused with the elements of isolation and of social contact, is often found in historical cycle of life processes in any group, when being analyzed. Having a group membership, increase contact among the participants encircled in a group rather contact being declined-a key factor well preserved in an individual and remains to be united (Park and Burgess, 1969; 1921). Furthermore, contact gets reduced in the result delivered by the segregation process of Isolation, which is not changeless. Precisely, segregation observed in social process and thus create an unoccupied empty space- according to Simmel observations. Throughout, historical period because of the consequence of isolation led the formation of nation and ethnic groups – the geographical location is being separated from each group due to isolation, making a prerequisite to evolve different race and culture. Though modern sociologists of American origin interpret Park's human ecology concept, those studying related issues tend to maintain a linear progression of racist nature, where ethnic groups of different origin move from isolation to three other social forms viz. conflict, competition and accommodation, where the white population culminates and gets assimilated (Morris, 2015). This seems to be a significant misconduct on part of Park and Burgess concept, are not in straight forward relation with an evolving purpose, alternatively the diverse interaction process among actors that are in same social spaces, closely related to actor's position as being described.

In analysis of urban association variations by McKenzie, focused on the concept of invasion and succession, influenced by ecological changes externally, of social spaces – marks an additive feature to earlier internal processes within a space. Though, McKenzie in the human community the formation, segregation and association, mark the result of invasion series and of course may be a territory remain to be occupied or unoccupied degrees (McKenzie, 1967; 1925). More importantly, this discussion of invasion reflects the social reality that in early 20th century large movements of immigrants were reported to Chicago and other American cities. Moreover, an important point has been observed that, the process of accommodation is behind the differentiation and integration, pushed or backed by invasion within a social space. As per McKenzie, invasions and accommodations tend to provide a continued effect to well defined areas of developed community, bolstered by its cultural features in a selective way (McKenzie, 1967; 1925). In addition, an organization of ecological importance or any similar formation surrounded by any community attracts like a magnet to suitable human elements and irrelevant units thus constitute the biological or cultural section of population residents belong to urban centre (McKenzie, 1967; 1925). Further, the concentric circle model of E. W. Burgess urban association distribution depend on the Chicago model does not view a map that is steady,

but a social structure portray the urban forms, evolves from the processes of social interaction (Park et al 1967; 1925).

Emanating from the theory of biological ties, in the early 20th century, the ecological aspects of the Chicago's thinkers tend to follow Simmel's propositions of social space with crucial changes. Because social space theory of Simmel's human ecology provides a set of abstract conceptual understanding of those terms of isolation competition, conflict, domination, succession, describes the social interaction and its process expanding the analytical unit between community and city groups. Moreover, in comparison with the concept of Blumer (1969) symbolic interactionism, precisely noted to be the 2nd School of Chicago, whereas the social theorists maintained by Goffman, the interactions of micro perspective, utilization of 1st Chicago School ancestors of Ecological Theory is not of limited scene, rather covers a broad covering. Viewing from social interaction lens, interactions persist among individual or organizations or country's boundary are not distinguished in terms of pure social types, whereas the Park's concept of contention cooperation exists both at small and macro level of individuals organizations and batch of nations. Therefore, difference between the levels viz small and macro analysis are not as much importance from Chicago School, rather the pattern maintained between social units or agency – of interactions, and its varies during eras – to be of considered much importance.

Self-territories – By Erving Goffman

Erving Goffman, although represent symbolic interactionism concept, often found similar to group of sociologists such as Blumer, Mead and Strauss, but social theory and symbolic interactionism proposed by Blumer tends to be different. During an interview in 1980, Goffman, himself called to be a proponent of traditional structural functionalist, and also as an urban ethnographer, labelled a pioneer of symbolic interactionism (Verhoeven, 1993). Goffman was a student of Everett Hughes, an influential figure of his life and most of other sociologists during his generations, among them prominent were Becker and Friedson of Chicago University, during period of 1940s, all considered to social ethnographers' practitioner (Verhoeven, 1993). Though, Blumer, not having interest in ethnography, pioneered the term symbolic interactionism. Goffman points out key limitation of theorists of Blumer's to be very precise one, lack of substance and against the system, without a space for structure, organization or trends, rather to be a critically ancient approach (Verhoeven, 1993). In contrary, he himself consider his own sociological epistemology to be out of date, conventional and ingenious (Verhoeven, 1993). Although, he bothers both for social order and processes, yet traced out the differences he pointed about symbolic interactionism on social spaces discussion.

Goffman in his book, *Asylums*, introduced the term “total institution” – a famous concept, referred to “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman, 1961). He argue that the basic spatial structure exists, in which people would sleep, work, play in different arrangements, fellow beings and in different authorities, having a no rational plan (Goffman, 1961). In addition, also argue that, his concept would create and experience a type of stress, between inner world and outer world, thus persist as a strategy in managing men. All those upon entering the institution, undergo a system of humiliation, where own sense and own boundary were conquered and defiled in material and interpersonal routes of varied nature.

Simultaneously, every member of an institution partakes in “secondary adjustments,” engaging in activities that does not overtly contest the authority of the colleagues but enable them to seek illicit gratifications, like inmates using and trading contraband within the prison facility. The procedure of secondary adaptations entails a phenomenon termed as “fraternization,” whereby individuals who were initially socially aloof begin to provide mutual assistance, thereby developing shared “counter-norms” that resist the total organization’s endeavour to shape them into a “unified, egalitarian community of destiny” (Goffman, 1961). As such, Goffman compares a total institution to “a type of stagnant body of water where small islands of dynamic, captivating activity emerge”. Engaging in similar activity can assist the individual in coping with the psychological stress commonly triggered by attacks on one’s character (Goffman, 1961).

Comparable to Simmel’s aforementioned frame analogy, Goffman’s notion of a total institution is emblematic of a profoundly internalized social environment. Upon entering these institutions, individuals become secluded from the external world. Indeed, the fundamental premise is similarly evident in the human ecology studies conducted by the original proponents of Chicago School sociologists, including Park. This group perceived the Chicago city as a restricted social space, directing their analysis solely towards the dynamics between individuals and society within this context, largely neglecting the influence of external environmental elements on these interactions. The sole potential exception could pertain to the seminal publication authored by Thomas and Znaniecki, titled “*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*” (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1995; 1918), the discussion encompasses the lifestyles of Polish peasants in their European place of origin. Nevertheless, his depiction of total institutions in own publication, *Asylums*, extends beyond mere delineation by entirely separating the designated area from its surroundings. Within this context, though identities are established by individuals in the external environment are systematically abolished through a process of embarrassment,

thereby culminating in the organization attainment of ‘total control’ over individuals.

But as Goffman’s “Dead Sea” metaphor suggests, that there exists a world beneath in all organizations; “the underworld of organizations is to social institutions as the world is to cities” (Goffman, 1961). Each member of the organization’s world is divided into three distinct areas: the inaccessible area, the visualized area, and the freely available area. Areas inaccessible to most people become free areas for minorities, and each member of the organization gradually creates his or her own “food” in these “tribal lands.” Concept of “area” is based on the Chicago School of Human Ecology’s focused on space. Though, a geographic group and a region in the overall system are more social and physical than the conditions of the urban group described by Park and Burgess. More important, is the concept of “residence” to be subjective, and each member’s area are different. The same material area may be a free area for one person and a protected area for the other, and may be the identity of different members at different times. Goffman’s pioneering research has been an influential one, but his distinct concept of territory and contribution to the advancement of socio-spatial theory has received little attention. This part focused on a crucial concept in his work, aims to highlight the unique contribution to social space theory. Further, Goffman developed solely another theory of territory in other essay entitled “*The Territories of the Self*” (Goffman, 1971). The writings begin with the introductory note -

“At the centre of social organization is the concept of claims, and around this centre, properly, the student must consider the vicissitudes of maintaining them... one type of claim becomes crucial: it is a claim exerted in regard to “territory.” This concept from ethology seems apt because the claim is not so much to a discrete and particular matter but rather to a field of things -to a preserve-and because the boundaries of the field are ordinarily patrolled and defended by the claimant” (Goffman, 1971).

A human habitat is a non-flexible place like a home or a garden, or be occasional, a park or café settings that belongs to a person for a time period. The territories or habitat might be an “egocentric” reservation that moves with the applicant depends on the location (Goffman, 1971), like a wallet, backpack, or cell phone one carry with self. But no matter what the type of territory is, more as a “commodity” that required be “managing and protecting.” Similar to McKenzie’s discussion of invasion and displacement in urban spaces, Goffman argued that the process of intrusion into one’s territory and interaction is central to the creation of social boundaries. According to Goffman, there are two distinct “evils” of territorial offence, first is intrusion and the second is obtusion. The former is when a person trespasses into an area having no right to enter or is prohibited from damaging the protected area or otherwise contaminate, while the latter is when someone extends their territorial claim over a larger area and causes others to think that they are trespassing on their

territory, though not forms the case (Goffman, 1971). Hence, Goffman's discussion of territory follows the perspective of ecological aspects of Chicago School; the changes in organizational structure of a society are visible through the defined and competitive aspects of space. But what makes him distinct, is his re-visualised various social roles based on the identity of the performer. In his article "The Territories of the Self," he maintained eight types of the self, namely place of self, or personal space, stall, space being used or used space, turn, wrapper or sheath, ownership territory and to conserve information and conversations.

More seemingly, the unit of analysis changes from the groups and communities evoked through the primary generation of the Chicago School to each and every one, the interactions regarding territories end up more than honestly as social approaches consists of competition and conflicts, additionally contain subjective elements including human psychology and observations. Referring to this aspects, Goffman's concept of private territories certainly addresses a considerable limitation in Park and Burgess's concept of human ecology, have a tendency to view spatial interactions as passive evolutionary procedures, limiting to cognition and preciseness. Though, in Goffman's works, one could trace out not only the spatial interaction, of human ecology in a conventional way but also the American tradition of social psychology in a pragmatic way, are visible in the academic works of William James, Charles S Peirce and G H Mead, paving the way for a strong foundation of much revered Chicago School of Sociology.

Conclusion

Now, the questions forms, is social space could be a structure or an expression, or based on social entity or a reciprocation? Different schools of sociological knowledge have different answers, but for Simmel and other scholars of Chicago School, social space exist in interactions of social thought, those who believe and the structure emanate from such interactions. Neither, Simmel nor Park or Goffman possesses a predetermined rigid belief of social entity or structure, in comparison to field theory. Rather, focus on the processes, constructing the structure. Such processes of competition, conflict, invasion and accommodation, provide an implication of space in social context is more flexible than being a steady one. Prime focus of Bordieu was on steady society of French in middle to late 20th century, whereas presence of social hierarchy within different class, groups and profession were clearly defined and reintroducing of status and habits in forms of social aspects were evident. Hence, field theory evolved from social context. Having experience of conducting field work in Algeria, most of Bordieu's empirical field works are related to French society. In comparison, Simmel, Park, Burgess and McKenzie carry out their academic works in well charismatic, varied and promptly changing social environments, their way of imagination and discussions were

highly influenced. Furthermore, Goffman was an exception. Though he belongs to a typical middle class American society, of mid to late 20th century, his concepts of total institution and self-territories, display no fluidity than interactions advocated by scholars of 1st generations of Chicago School. Yet, in the show of changing variations, Goffman presumption of his own interaction order, places first to structure, if compared to field theory of Bordieu. A very picture of customary ‘chicken-&-egg’ revolves round the centre.

In addition, to concept of Chicago School social space theory, priority have been accorded to association between physical and social space, keeping aside the Bordieu’s field theory separate the physical space from social, which becomes a sociological fascination. Academic discussion provided by Simmel, Park, Burgess and Goffman to constitute social space depend on actual rigid physical space. Thus, a mere understanding and analysing the social space concept by Chicago School, are not eloquence of networks, fields or surroundings, rather like an energetic and spontaneous structure of social history. Apart from Simmel’s and Chicago School academic works, there exist two prominent features – simultaneity and transience, kept up a solid suspicion with respect to the outside boundaries of space. Looking at metaphors of Simmel’s, Goffman’s and Abbott’s propositions of image frame, total institutions and professions systems respectively, are halt form outer environment; whereas, endogeneity or simultaneity, presumption is valuable for centring inquire about consideration on the inner forms of associate activity into these spaces, while it limits the examination of the connections between different social aspects of spaces and the other space portability of on-screen characters. However, field theory possesses more elasticity. Although social space theory of Chicago School is sensitive than field theory, and varied processes of intercourse are not stable as power struggles of Bordieu’s, rather real histories are formed, turns the shape of social entity in space.

Now, turning finally to highlight, whether people’s emotions exist in social space or not! To begin, with Simmel’s approach on link between social distance and emotions, where sociologists of such discourse have not ever keep out emotions from spatial theory. In addition, Goffman even carry countless experiences of indignity, misery and lust, rather to serve like a Weber notion of iron cage. However, the relations between any person not lies around power and capital only, but centred round the notions of excitement and disappointment – are natural emotions, arise from social interactions. In fast changing modern picturesque driven by technology of internet, AI & ML and digital environment, traditional face-to-face interactions have overcome by digital spaces on boarding to screens and gadgets. Nonetheless, the reverberance of emotions, dispute and nexus among an individual, keeps a prominent aspect of perception of social spaces interactions.

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Live-in-relationship and constitutional morality: an analytical study of Indian judicial approach and recent development

Sanjay Sindhu & Surya Dev Singh Bhandari

ABSTRACT

There have been significant transformations in family law across the world in 21st century, particularly with the growing acceptance of live-in relationships as a form of unmarried cohabitation. The phenomenon reflects changing social attitudes and continues to generate complex legal and cultural debates. Live-in arrangements generally involve two individuals choosing to cohabit on the basis of mutual compatibility and personal independence, often prioritised by educated and economically independent individuals who try to find alternatives to traditional marriage. Although cohabitation is not illegal in India, the absence of a comprehensive statutory framework means that legal recognition largely depends on judicial interpretation, including the Supreme Court's affirmation of such relationships under Article 21 of the Constitution. Recent developments, such as the enforcement of the Uniform Civil Code in Uttarakhand requiring registration of live-in relationships, have intensified debates over privacy, autonomy, and legal protection. This paper examines these evolving judicial and legislative responses and evaluates their implications for India's broader socio-legal framework.

Keywords: Live-in Relationship, Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code, Art. 21, cohabitation.

Live-in-relationship: a conceptual analysis

The Collins dictionary defines live-in relationships as 'relationship between partners who live together in the same house and have sexual relationship, while not being married' (Collins Dictionary, n.d., para. 1). However, the popular term used for live-in relationships, i.e. arrangement wherein, the couple are not legally married, is cohabitation (Scott, 2014, p. 90). In essence, live-in relationship is a relationship between partners who live together in the same house and have sexual relationship, while not being married. The meaning of live-in-relationship cohabitation is an arrangement whereby two people decide to live together on a long term or permanent basis in an emotionally and/or

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sexually intimate relationship (Jawale, 2012, p. 231). This term is most frequently applied to couples who are not married. A live-in relationship is a contractual union and youth opt for this workable union since nobody is willing to take up additional responsibilities. This enables them to find out their compatibility and understanding with a live-in-partner before proceeding to enter into a marriage. In simple words, the basic idea of cohabitation or conducting a live-in-relationship is that the interested couple wanted to test their compatibility for each other before going for some commitment; something about the financial concerns etc. In fact the concept of live-in-relationship is not defined in any national legislation. To define live-in-relationship in legal sense is, “an arrangement of living under which the couple which is unmarried lives together to conduct a long-going relationship similarly as in marriage (Lex-Warrier Legal Solution, 2014). This concept of live-in-relationship in multidimensional one, which having many issue, rights and obligation of the parties affected through this relationship including husband, wife, children etc. Thus, the basic idea of cohabitation or conducting a live-in relationship in that the interested couple wanted to test their compatibility for each other before going for some commitments. It also seems that sometimes other reason may be because of financial concern. Actually, majority of cases which are coming into lime light are from metropolitan cities (Jawale, 2012, p. 231). Frankly speaking, the transformation in the life style towards western system has definitely brought the need for such concept in India as well. Even the Uniform Civil Code of Uttarakhand, 2024, Act No. 3 of 2024, Section 3 (b) “live-in relationship” means a relationship between a man and a woman (hereinafter referred to as “partners”), who cohabit in a shared household through a relationship in the nature of marriage, provided that such relationship is not prohibited under Part - 3 of this Code.

Live-in-relationship: a global view

Globally speaking, cohabitation is a common pattern among people in the Western countries. There are obviously number of reasons for living together. These may include wanting to test compatibility or to establish financial securely before marriage. It may also be because they are unable to legally marry, because for example same sex, some interracial or interreligious marriages are not permitted. Other reasons include living with someone before marriage to avoid marriage in an effort to avoid divorce, a way for polygamist or polygamists to avoid breaking of law, way to avoid the higher income taxes paid by some two income married couples, considering cohabitation as private and personal matter and not to control it by political, religion or patriarchal institution. Live-in-relationship in various countries are either recognized as it exits or it's finding recognition via implied provisions of different statues that protects various rights. In Scotland, the live-in-relations were conferred legal sanctity in the year 2006 by Family Law Act. Section 25 (2) and Section 28 of the Act are of special reference. As per Section 25 (2) of the Family Law Act of

Scotland, a court of law can consider a person as a cohabitant of another by checking on three factories; the length of the period during which they live together, the nature of relationship during that period and the nature and extent of any financial arrangements, in case of breakdown of such relationship. Moreover, Section 28 of the same Act provides a cohabitant the right to apply in court for financial support. The United States has institutionalized cohabitation by giving cohabiters essentially the same right and obligation as married couples.

Worthwhile to mention here that the situation is similar to Sweden and Denmark in these countries' partners living together are not recognized as legal partners. In France, cohabitation is defined as a *de facto* stable and continuous relationship between two persons of different sexes or of the same sex living together as couple. The contract binds two adults of different sexes or of the same sex, in order to organize their common life and allow them to enjoy the rights according to married couples in the areas of income tax, housing and social welfare. The contract can be revoked unilaterally or bilaterally after giving the partner, three months' notice in writing. In England, the Civil Partnership Act 2004 covers the live-in-relationship. Though, a man and women living together in a stable sexual relationship are often referred to as 'common law spouses. If a cohabiting couple separates, the courts have no power to override the strict legal ownership of each other's property or breakdown of relationship. In England, the law of the country seeks to protect the right of child born under such relationship. Both parents have onus of bringing up their children irrespective of the fact the whether they are married or cohabiting. If a cohabitating couple separates, the courts have no power to override the strict legal ownership of property and divide it as they may do on divorce.

So far as Canada is concerned, Live-in relationship is legally recognized. In many cases common law couples have the same rights as married couples under the federal law of the country. A common law relationship gets legal sanctity if the couple has been living in a conjugal relationship for at least twelve continuous months, or the couples are parents or a child by birth or adoption, or one of the couples has custody and control of the child and the child wholly dependent on that person for support. The laws of Ireland and Australia also recognize live-in-relationship. Australian Law recognizes the '*de facto* relationship' between couples, while in Ireland the impetus is towards greater recognition to live-in-relationship as there has been demand for right to maintenance by separated Live-in couples. In China, the couple can sign a contract to indulge in live-in-relationship. The rights of the child are secured as the child born outside the wedlock has the same benefits as enjoyed by the children born under a marriage.

Live-in-relationship: the Indian perspective

Whatever are the reasons for the growth of the concept of live-in-relationship, there are several sources and far reaching socio-legal issues which emerge from the Live-in relationship, which need the attention of the legislature. Frankly speaking, the concept of living together without marriage has gained momentum in India as well. Presently, no specific law has been enacted by the legislature. In the nineteenth century, court enforced some agreements where the consideration was past cohabitation (India's Law Journal, n.d.). Section 23 (The Indian Contract Act, 1872, S 23) of the Indian Contract Act, 1872 states that of courts, regard consideration of an agreement immoral it is unlawful and consequently the agreement is void. Where a man and women live and cohabit together, although not lawfully married to each other, and the man in consideration of the past cohabitation agrees to transfer property to the women or to make provision for her maintenance, the question often arises as to the enforceability of such an agreement. In *Dhiraj Kaur v. Bikramjit*, (AIR 1938 Pat 502, 1938) the Allahabad High Court allowed the women to recover arrears promised to her for past cohabitation.

In fact, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is the only legislation that bestows all benefits on women living in such kind of arrangement by reason of being covered within the term 'Domestic Relationship'. The Act provides protection to the wife or Live-in partner against physical or mental abuse at the hands of husband or Live-in partner or his relatives. The Act under Section 2(f) defines domestic relationship as a; "relationship between two persons who live or have, at any point of time, live together in a shared household, when they are related by consanguinity, marriage or through a relationship in the nature of marriage, adoption or are family members living together as a joint family' (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, S 2 (f)).

Thus, the Act seems to be the lone legislation which refers to the live-in-relationship, imbibed within the definition of domestic relationship provided under the Act, which has been invoked by the courts to provide relieve to the women victims in live-in relationships. As a matter of fact, live-in relationship neither falls under the category of valid marriage nor void or voidable marriage. Under Hindu Law the rule of legitimacy is dependent upon the marriage. The social status of children is determined by the act of their parents. If they have entered into valid marriage, the children are legitimate; but if, the parents committed a folly and entered recklessly into an invalid marriage or a child is conceived even without entering into a relationship of marriage the resultant innocent children are labelled as illegitimate (Tenneti, 2014, p. 18). Another crucial issue that creeps up is regarding the right of maintenance.

The earlier Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 under Section 125 and the present *Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita*, 2023, under Section 144 (Section 125 of

Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, S 125 & Bharatuya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, S 144) contains the provision for the right of maintenance by a wife under the circumstances mentioned under this Section. These sections represent the power of the court to make an order for maintenance in favour of wife only and they do not extend in favor of any other woman who is not legal wife. It is pertinent to mention her that the National Commission for Women recommended to the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2008 that definition of wife as described in Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (now BNSS, 2023), should include women involved in a live-in-relationship. The move has come Malimath Committee observed that if the man and women are living together as husband and wife for a reasonable long period, the man shall be deemed to have married the women. The committee also recommended the amendment of the definition of wife under Section 125 of the Cr.P.C. (now Section 144 of BNSS, 2023), so that a woman in relationship can get the status of wife as well.

However, it is relevant to mention here that the customary law and the Evidence Act, inclines in favour of Live-in relationship where a long time living together as husband and wife in the society would be a reasonable presumption in favour of their marriage unless it is rebutted by convincing evidence. Thus, Section 114 of Indian Evidence Act 1872 (The Indian Evidence Act, 1872, S 114) (now under BSA, 2023) reveals that where independent evidence of solemnization of marriage is not available valid marriage will be presumed by continuous cohabitation. Even the Supreme Court observed that the continuous prolonged cohabitation raises a presumption in favour of marriage, and against concubinage.

Live-in relations: judicial response

In its earlier judgment, in *A Dinhomey v. W L Balhamy*, (AIR 1927 PC 185, 1927), the Privy Council laid down the principle that “where a man and a woman are proved to have lived together as a man and wife, the law will presume, unless the contrary be clearly proved, that they were living together in consequences of a valid marriage and not in a state of concubinage”. In another case *Mohabhat Ali v. Md. Ibrahim Khan* (AIR 1929 PC 135, 1929) the proposition of law laid down was that the law presumes in favour of marriage and against concubinage when a man and woman have cohabited continuously for number of years. The court in *Golak Chand v. Parvin Kumari* (AIR 1952 SC 231, 1952) observed that continuous cohabitation of partners as husband and wife and their treatment as such for a number of years may raise the presumption of marriage, but the presumption which may be drawn from long cohabitation is rebuttable and if there are circumstances which weaken and destroy that presumption, the court cannot ignore them. In *D.Nagaratnamba v. Kunuku Ramayya*, (AIR 1968 SC 253, 1968) Bachawat, J of the Supreme Court of India recognized past cohabitation as a good consideration. These cases were

concerning enforceability of agreements where the consideration was past cohabitation without marriage and upholding lawfulness of consideration in such cases amounted to legal recognition of live-in relationship by the judiciary. Thus, initially, the Privy Council, on two occasions, had considered the scope of the presumption that could be drawn as to the relationship of marriage between two persons living together.

In the historic ruling of *Badri Prasaad v. Dy. Director of consolidation*, (AIR 1978 SC 1557, 1978) the apex court categorically held that where the partners lived together for long spell as husband and wife there would be presumption in favour of wedlock. The presumption was rebuttable, but a heavy burden lies on the person who seeks to deprive the relationship of legal origin to prove that no marriage took place. Though no law at present deals directly with live-in relationship it does not mean that such relations are not regulated. Live-in relationship is not an absolute right to give rise to certain rights and liabilities. In some regards the cases of prolonged live-in relationship are considered as a relationship equal to that of marriage. Couples having such relationship cannot escape from the liabilities arising from the prolonged live-in-relationship as the living of them with each other for a long period give rise to an implied implication of contract of marriage between them. Although relationship of marriage is created by the act of the parties expressly and impliedly, live-in relationship is covered by the latter which can also be said as a constructive marriage. In the instant case of *Badri Prasad v. Deputy Director of Consolidation*, 1978 (AIR 1978 SC 1557, 1978) the court wittingly observed; ‘of man and women live as husband and wife in society, are compelled to prove, half a century later, by eye witness evidence that they were validly married, few will succeed’ (*Badri Prasad v. Deputy Director of Consolidation*, 1978). In *Thakur Gokal Chand v. Parvin Kumari* (AIR 1952 SC 231, 1952), the Supreme Court held that continuous prolonged cohabitation raises a presumption in favour of marriage, and against concubinage. The earliest case in which the Supreme Court of India recognized the live-in relationship as a valid marriage was that of *Badri Prasad v. Deputy Director of Consolidation* (AIR 1978 SC1557, 1978), in which the Court gave legal validity to the fifty year live-in relationship of a couple.

The Hon’ble Supreme Court in Civil Appeal No. 6466 of 2004 decided on 13th August, 2010 held that a live-in relationship that has existed for a long time will be considered a marriage, the Supreme Court has said; if a man and a woman have been living under the same roof for a number of years, there will be a presumption under Section 114 of the Evidence Act that they have lived as husband and wife and the children born to them would not be illegitimate, a bench of justices P. Sathasivan and B.S. Chauhan have said. “The law presumes in favour of marriage and against concubine,” judges said. However, the presumption can be disproved by “unimpeachable evidence”. The Madras High Court in the curious case of *Aysha v. Ozir Hassan*, (Criminal Revision Case No.

674 of 2007) relating to the presumption of marriage, the Single Judge Bench of C.S. Karnan, J. held that if a bachelor who has completed 21 years of age and a spinster who completed 18 years of age indulges into a sexual act then they would be considered as legally wedded couple and marriage formalities like *sapt padi*, exchange of garland and even registration of marriages are only for the satisfaction of the society. The Court opined that if a woman indulges into coitus with a man, irrespective of the fact that she eventually become pregnant, then they would also be termed as ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ and afterwards if they separate owing to mutual difference, then they cannot marry another spouse without getting a divorce decree from the court of competent jurisdiction.

In the case of *S.P.S. Balasubramanyam v. Suruttayan* (1992 Supp (2) SCC 304, 1992) the Supreme Court held that if a man and woman are living under the same roof and cohabiting for a number of years, there will be a presumption under Section 114 of the Indian Evidence Act that they live as husband and wife and the children born to them will not be illegitimate. This decision suggested that the law treats long live-in relationships as good as marriages. The courts could subsequently interpret live-in relations to mean “living together as husband and wife “to exclude those who enter into a live-in relationship “by choice” without intending to be married, as that is still a matter of doubt and debate (Westminster Law Review, n.d.). Further in the case of *Payal Katara v. Superintendent, Nari Niketan Kandri Vihar Agra and Others* (AIR 2001 All 254, 2001) the Allahabad High Court ruled out that “a lady of about 21 years of age being a major, has right to go anywhere and that anyone –man and woman even without getting married can live together if they wish”. In *Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh & Anr* (AIR 2006 SC 2522, 2006) the Apex Court held that live-in relationship was permissible only between unmarried major persons of heterogeneous sex. The Supreme Court in the case of *D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal* (*Faushik*, 2011) has held that, a relationship in the nature of marriage under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 must also fulfil some basic criteria. Merely spending weekends together or a one night stand would not make it a domestic relationship. It also held that if a man has a “keep”, whom, he maintains financially and uses mainly for sexual purpose and/or as a servant it would not, in their opinion, be a relationship in the nature of marriage. In the case of *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* (Criminal Appeal No. 2009/2013), the Supreme Court correctly holds that the term “relationship in the nature of marriage” in the Domestic Violence Act covers live-in relationships. This judgment is also extremely interesting, however, because of its possible impact on the legal status of homosexual relationships. In this case, the court was faced with a complaint of domestic violence, and had to determine whether a woman in a live-in relationship could claim under the Act. In order to do so, she would have to show that her relationship was covered under, one of the enumerated grounds under the definition of Section 2(f) –

which the Court read as exhaustive. The only possible ground was “relationship *in the nature of marriage.*”

Frankly speaking there is an increasing trend of couples entering into live-in relationships, not as a precursor but rather a substitute of a formal marriage. Such long-term commitments often include procreation of children. In legal parlance such child is known as illegitimate child and debars from to be a part of the family and right to inherit the assets of the family. At one time an illegitimate child was *filius nullius* save for certain purposes of the relationship with his parents, and could in general not inherit property but could acquire it by gift or will. With the passage of time statutes have materially altered the old legal position and have gone a considerable change towards assimilating the position of the illegitimate to the legitimate. Now an illegitimate child may acquire property by gift or will, succeed intestacy and recover damages for the natural parent’s death (Basu, 2002, p. 431). In fact, cohabiting couples have little guidance as to their legal rights in such areas as property ownership, responsibility for debts, custody, and access to health care and other benefits, and survivorship. Family law experts advise cohabiting couples to address these and other issues in a written cohabitation agreement, similar to a Premarital Agreement. The contract should outline how the couple will divide expenses and own property, whether they will maintain joint or separate bank accounts, and how their assets will be distributed if one partner dies or leaves the relationship property acquired during cohabitation, such as real estate, home furnishings, antiques, artwork, china wear, gold, silver, tools, and sports equipment may be contested if a partners separates or if one of them dies. To avoid this, the agreement should clearly outline who is entitled to what (Paliwal, 2008, p. 273-274).

Apart from this the Hon’ble Supreme Court has also given landmark judgments make its stand clear on the issue. For instance, in *D. Velusamy* it was held that a woman in live-in relationship is not entitled to maintenance unless she fulfils certain parameters, the Supreme Court had observed that merely spending weekends together or a one-night stand would not make it a domestic relationship. In order to get maintenance, the essential four conditions are: Firstly, the couple must hold themselves out to society as being akin to spouses.; secondly, they must be of legal age to marry; thirdly they must be otherwise qualified to enter into a legal marriage; fourthly, they must be voluntarily cohabited and held themselves out to the world as being akin to spouses for a significant period of time.

In *Krishna Chandra Jerai v. State of Jharkhand and Another*, (Cr.RJ. No. 197(1) of 2005) it was admitted, by the petitioner in the proceeding before the magistrate that both the parties, i.e., the applicant and petitioner lived together as husband and wife for quite long time and it is also admitted that out of their relationship three children were born but the learned magistrate rejected the prayer for granting of maintenance under Section 125 Cr.P.C. on the ground that

she failed to prove that she was legally wedded wife. In 2008, it was recommended by the National Commission for Women to the Ministry of Women and Child Development to include Live-in female partners for the right of maintenance under Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code, 1973. The National Commission for Women recommended that women in live-in relationship should be entitled to maintenance if the man deserts her (Shaikh, 2012, p. 53). The view was also supported by the judgment in *Abhijit Bhikaseth Auti v. State of Maharashtra and Others* (Criminal Writ Petition No. 2218 of 2007). In the instant case the Apex Court also observed that it is not necessary for woman to strictly establish the marriage to claim maintenance under Section 125 Cr.PC. A woman living in live-in relationship may also claim maintenance under Section 125 Cr.P.C. However, later supreme court has given different opinion with respect to maintenance right of a woman who is not a legally wedded wife (Tenneti, 2014, p. 20). Thus, in *Savitaben Somabhai Bhatiya v. State of Gujarat* (AIR 2005 SC 2141, 2005), Supreme Court held that ‘but as per the position in law stands presently there is no escape from the conclusion that the expression ‘wife’ as per Section 125 Cr.PC. refers to only the legally married wife.’

The Maharashtra Government in 2008 also supported the concept of Live-in relationships by accepting the proposal made by Malimath Committee and Law Commission of India which suggested that if a woman has been in a live-in relationship for considerably long time, she ought to enjoy the legal status as given to wife. Maharashtra government proposed to amend Section 125, Criminal Procedure Code and expand the definition of the word ‘wife’ to include a woman living with a man like his wife for a reasonably long period (Shaikh, 2012, p. 54). However, recently it was observed that it is divorced wife who is treated as a wife in context of Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code and if a person has not even been married i.e. the case of Live-in partners, they cannot be divorced, and hence cannot claim maintenance under Section 125 of Criminal Procedure Code (HelpLine Law, n.d.). The partner of a Live-in relationship was first time accorded protection by the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which considers females who are not formally married, but are living with a male person in a relationship, which is in the nature of marriage, also akin to wife, though not equivalent to wife. Thus, the definition of domestic relationship includes not only the relationship of marriage but also a relationship ‘in the nature of marriage (HelpLine Law, n.d.). In *Varsha Kapoor v. UOI & Ors* (WP (Crl.) No. 638 of 2010), the Delhi High Court has held that female living in a relationship in the nature of marriage has right to file complaint not only against husband or male partner, but also against his relatives (HelpLine Law, n.d.). The Delhi High Court awarded Rs. 3000/- per month as maintenance to a maid who was in a Live-in relationship with her widower employer. However, the Supreme Court in *Vidhyadhari v. Sukhrana Bai* ((2008) 2 SCC 238) created a hope for persons living together as husband and wife by

providing that those who have been in a live-in relationship for a reasonably long period of time can receive property in inheritance from a live-in partner. In this case property of a Hindu male, upon his death (intestate), was given to a woman with whom he enjoyed a live-in relationship, even though he had a legally wedded wife alive (*Revanasiddappa v. Mallikarjun*, (2011) 11 SCC 1).

Another important concern in the relationship of Live-in's is the children born. In *Radhika v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (AIR 1972 MP124, 1972) it was held that in the case of a live-in relationship, not only does the law presume in favour of a valid marriage, but also it deems the child born out of such a relationship to be legitimate and have rights in their parent's property. The Supreme Court in *Tulsa v. Durghatiya* ((2008) 4 SCC 520, 2008) held that children born out of such a relationship will no more be considered illegitimate. The same approach was adopted by the Supreme Court in a recently delivered judgment in the case of *Veluswamy v. D. Patchiammal* (SLP (Crl.) Nos. 2273-2274/2010). Again, in *Vidhyadhari v. Sukhrana Bai* ((2008) 2 SCC 238, 2008), the Supreme Court held that even if a person had contracted into second marriage during the subsistence of his first marriage, children from the second marriage would still be legitimate though the second marriage would be void. In *Rameshwari Devi v. State of Bihar & Ors* (AIR 2000 SC 735, 2000). This Court dealt with a case wherein after the death of a Government employee, children born illegitimately by the woman, who had been living with the said employee, claimed the share in pension/gratuity and other death-cum-retiral benefits along with children born out of a legal wedlock. This Court held that under Section 16 of the Act, children of void marriage are legitimate. As the employee, a Hindu, died intestate, the children of the deceased employee born out of void marriage were entitled to share in the family pension, death-cum-retiral benefits and gratuity. Giving an important clarification on live-in relationships, the Supreme Court has said that if a man and woman "lived like husband and wife" for a long period and had children; the judiciary would presume that the two were married. A bench of Justices B S Chauhan and J Chelameswar issued the clarification on a petition filed by advocate Uday Gupta, who had questioned certain sweeping observations made by the Madras high court while dealing with the issue of live-in relationships. Importantly, the Supreme Court opined that children born out of prolonged live-in relationships could not be termed illegitimate (*The Times of India*, 2014). However, the right to maintenance of children born from a live-in relationship was upheld in 2007, in *Dimple Gupta v. Rajiv Gupta* ((2007) 10 SCC 30, 2007). In this case Supreme Court held that the child born out of live-in relationship could claim maintenance from his biological father. Moreover, there are certain other statutes which contain direct or indirect reference to or concerned with the concept of relationships in the nature of marriage and hence, provide certain remedies to the victims of such relationships. For instance, the customary law and the evidence act inclines in favour of live-in relationship wherein, a long time living together as husband and wife in the society would be

a reasonable presumption in favour of their marriage unless it is rebutted by convincing evidence.

Ironically, from the above observations it seems that the Indian judiciary is neither expressly encouraging nor prohibiting such kind of live-in relationships in India. The judiciary is only rendering justice in accordance with law in a particular case. In fact the main concern of the judiciary is to prevent the miscarriage of justice. The first case in which the Supreme Court of India first recognized the live-in relationship as a valid marriage was that of *Badri Prasad v. Dy. Director of Consolidation*, (AIR 1978 SC 1557, 1978) in which the Court gave legal validity to the a 50 year live-in relationship of a couple. In *Payal Katara v. Superintendent Nari Niketan Kandri Vihar Agra and others* (Singh & Rutabhashini, 2014, p. 28-29), the High Court of Allahabad ruled out that a lady of about 21 years of age being a major, has right to go anywhere and that anyone, man and woman even without getting married can live together if they wish. In this case it was held that live-in relationship is not illegal. In *Lata Singh v. state of UP and anr* (AIR 2006 SC 2522, 2006), the apex court held that live-in relationship permissible only in unmarried major persons of heterogeneous sex. In *Patel and others case* (2006(8) SCC 726, 2006) the apex court observed that live-in relationship between two adult without formal marriage cannot be construed as an offence. It further held that there is no law which postulates that live-in relationships are illegal. The concept of live-in relationship was again recognized in the case of *Tulsa v. Durghatiya* (2008(4) SCC 520, 2008). In *Radhika v. state of Madhya Pradesh*, (AIR 1972 MP 124, 1972) the apex court had observed that a man and woman are involved in live-in relationship for a long period, they will be treated as a married couple and their child would be called legitimate. In *Chellamma v. Tillamma*, the SC gave the status of wife to the partner of live-in relationship. *Katju J. and Mishra J.* stated that, in their opinion, a man and woman, even without getting married, can live together if they wish to. This may be regarded as immoral by society, but is not illegal. There is a difference between law and morality. In *Madan Mohan Singh and others v. Rajni Kant and anr* (Manu/SC/0596/2010) the court held that the live-in relationship if continued for long time, it cannot be termed in as “walk-in and walk-out” relationship and there is a presumption of marriage between the parties.

In *D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal* ((2010) 10 SC 469, 2010) the Hon’ble Supreme Court while distinguishing between live-in relationship and relationship in the nature of marriage under the protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 held that “not all live-in relationships will amount to a relationship in the nature of marriage to get benefit of the protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.” After making this statement which equates “relation in the nature of marriage” with “live-in” relations prevalent in the west, the judges state that in their opinion a “relationship in the nature of marriage” is akin to a common law marriage. According to the judgment,

common law marriage requires that although not being formally married, (a) The couple must hold themselves out to society as being akin to spouses, (b) They must be of legal age to marry, (c) They must have voluntarily cohabited and held themselves out to the world as being akin to spouses for a significant period of time.

Live in relationships and Uttarakhand UCC: a recent development

The preamble of the Uniform Civil Code of Uttarakhand 2024 (Act No. 3 of 2024) states that it aims to, *inter alia*, govern and regulate the laws relating to live-in relationships and matters related thereto. As per Sec. 1(3) the Code it extends to the entire state of Uttarakhand including the residents of Uttarakhand who live outside the state. However, as per Sec. 2 of the provisions of the code do not apply on the members of Schedule Tribe as recognized by Art. 366 read with Art. 342 of the Constitution along with groups protected under Part 21 of the Constitution. Sec. 3(b), defines, live in relationship as “relationship between a man and a woman, who cohabit in a shared household through a relationship in the nature of marriage”, Sec 3 (b) mandates that the partners of such a relationship should not be prohibited to enter live-in relationship by Part 3 of the Code. The Code notes that shared household connotes ‘living under one roof, even though the accommodation may be rented, jointed owned house or by any one partner’s etc. Furthermore, Sec. 3(d) defines statement of relationship as ‘a jointly signed statement to the effect that a man and a woman are in a live-in relationship or intend to enter into such a relationship.’ As per the Code the man and woman involved in live in relationships are referred as partners.

Part 3 of the Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code titled ‘Live-in Relationship’ extend from Sec. 378 to Sec. 389. These sections holistically deal with the legislative aspects of rights and duties of partners living in a live-in relationship. Thus, Sec. 378 read with Sec. 381 mandates that the partners of a live in relationship, who either reside in Uttarakhand or are residents of Uttarakhand who live outside the state, shall submit statement of live in relationship to the Registrar whereupon, the Registrar shall conduct a summary inquiry to ensure that the partners of the live in relationship do not violate the restriction imposed under Sect. 380. Sec 380, *inter alia*, prohibits live in relationship between partners within prohibited relationships, involving at least one minor, or cases wherein, consent is gained by prohibited means for instance coercion and undue influence, or wherein, one partner is already married or has already entered into another live in relationship etc. The Registrar upon completing a summary inquiry may either grant certificate of registration within 30 days of receiving the statement of live-in relationship or the Registrar may refuse to register the statement however in case of refusal he is mandated to provide reasons in writing for such refusal. Additionally, under Section. 387 upon failure of the partners to submit statement of live in relationship with 30 days of entering such relationship shall upon conviction face up to three months of imprisonment or fine up to ten thousand rupees or both. *Prima facie* the code of Uttarakhand

which includes mandatory registration backed by punitive sanctions seems appropriate to deal with legal ramifications of live in relationship.

As per the Code under Sec. 385 Registrar is duty bound to forward all statements of relationship that he receives under Sec. 381 to the head of the local police station. Further, the Registrar also has the onus to forward information to the head of local police station if the partners of the live-in relationship are prohibited to enter such a relationship by Sec. 380 or the statement provided to the Registrar under Sec. 381 is either incorrect or suspicious. Furthermore, in case one of the partners is below the age of 21 the Registrar is duty bound to inform their parent or guardian.

Further, the Register is also empowered by the code under Sec. 386 to either *suo moto*, or on receipt of complaint or information, issue notice to the partners to submit statement in thirty days. Upon failure to do so the any partner may either be imprisoned up to six months or fined twenty-five thousand rupees or both. Furthermore, Sec. 388 notes that upon desertion of a woman in case of live-in relationship she may claim maintenance. The rights and duties related to maintenance as per Sec.388 would be *mutandis mutandis* to Chapter 5 Part 1 of the Code Live-in relationship grant great flexibility as Sec. 384 of the code notes that the relationship can be terminated at the instance of both or either one of the partners through a signed statement of termination, which is defined under Sec 3(e) of the Act. The statement of termination also has to be submitted to the Registrar.

The general spirit of common law with regards to children is highlighted by the 1777 observation of Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield in the case of *Goodright v. Moss* (1777) 2 Cowp 591, 1777) wherein, his lordship noted that “It is a rule founded in decency, morality and policy that the law will not bastardize a child born in wedlock.” In the same spirit the Uttarakhand Civil Code as reflects the same policy as Section 379 grants legitimacy to any children born out of live-in relationships. Further, children of the partners of live-in relationship have equal inheritance right as if there were born out of a regular marriage.

Despite the holistic and progressive legislation, the critics of the Code contend that the compulsory requirement vis-à-vis informing the Registrar about live-in relationship violates right to privacy recognized by nine judge bench of the Supreme Court under Art. 21 in the case of *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) & Anr. v. Union of India & Ors* (2017) 10 SCC 1, 2017) and thereby, the state engages in unwanted surveillance.

It is worthwhile to mention here that though, in practice, till May of 2025, only 28 registrations of live-in relationship have been made since the enforcement of the Code which indicates low awareness or resistance. Despite the lead by Uttarakhand other Indian states in absence of clear legislation essentially follow

the judicial precedent of the Supreme Court for case-by-case protections, without mandating any requirement for registration.

Live-in relationships: sociological and psychological perspectives

Sociologically live-in relationships are viewed as the by-products of the rise of individualism and they highlight the voluntary denudation of institutional marriages, rise of personal autonomy and the weakening of traditional norms. Despite the fact that marriage is a vital social institution yet it is in decline (Oxford Dictionary, 2014, p. 441). However, with respect to live-in relationship the functionalist sociologist emphasize the reduction in stress through mutual satisfaction and support. While the feminist challenges the old functionalist view of marriage as a harmonious institution (Giddens, 2013, p. 421) and the feminist view live-in relationship as an attack on patriarchy. Nevertheless, statistically marriages vis-à-vis cohabitation is both socially acceptable and ensures greater stability. Further, sociologist like Patricia Morgan, highlight that cohabitation, instead of prelude to proper marriage, indicates phenomena like increase in sexual partner and partner change (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 553). Additionally, due to the recent recognition of live in relationship the social institutionalisation is weak, norms and legitimate expectations remain uncertain. Psychologically, Jordan Peterson has contended that, live in relationship unlike marriages displays lower level of commitment and thereby, reduce trust leading to higher breakup rates vis-à-vis marriages (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 553). Nonetheless, cohabitation is developing as a longterm alternative to marriage even though, traditionally even in Europe cohabitation was viewed as scandalous (Giddens, 2013, p. 441) and socially disapproved.

Conclusion and sum up

To summarize, while considering conventional texts of conjugal and nuptial institutions, it becomes apposite to analyse the legal position of live-in-relationship. The observation reveals that one might easily '*Live-in*' but not that easily '*walk out*' of such a relationship. The twenty first century is witnessing that the institution of marriage is gradually weakening in contemporary Indian society, particularly in urban areas. This evident position is the impact of international development. The observation further shows that the cohabitation in various countries more particularly France and Scotland are the most liberal so far as the non-martial cohabitation is concerned. Canada has also started recognizing the cohabitations on equal terms with marriage levelling no distribution between the two in recent enactment. Whereas France, Scotland and in United Kingdom very limited rights are guaranteed to such live-in-partners. Worthwhile to mention here that the rights of the separated partner and children born out of such unions, issue of legitimacy and maintenance of the children take effective solution. In Australia and in Russia conservative approach towards relations which are not satisfying the statutory requirements are still not recognized. Although live-in relationship is quite prevalent in western countries,

but reality in India is different. Here marriage is still an institution, which preferred over any form of union. In fact, India has been widely recognized as a country with strong moral values and rich traditional integrity. While considering this, specific law on live-in relationship is required to demonstrate or to find out the amicable solution to harmonize the basic structure of tradition and culture that characterizes Indian society. Legally speaking, there is need to pass special law for live-in-relationships and legal status of parties after specific period of its existence, providing the partners as well as child born out of such relationship with all legal rights of maintenance, succession, inheritance as available to a married couple and their legitimate offspring. The Supreme Court of India took the initiative and declared that live-in-relationship though considered immoral but it is not illegal. The court in few cases granted the status of married couple to live-in couple, in some cases held that live-in relationship doesn't cast any obligation on the couple, as the whole idea of live-in relationship is to evade such bondage, evincing a penchant towards an obligation less, free society. As a whole it can be *concluded* that by many questions with respect to live in relationship still remains unanswered. Thus, the fallacies in law and the kind of judicial gerrymandering looks like an innovative step towards new horizons of live-in relationship whose success would largely depend upon its genuine use which will further depend upon the role played by partners to a relationship and the judiciary.

In sum, as observed, the 2024 Uniform Civil Code of Uttarakhand attempts to legislative regulate the seemingly novel social phenomena of live-in relationship within the constitutional paradigm of Article 21. Though, in contrast to other model it focuses upon mandatory registration. Just, as the American jurist Roscoe Pound saw the aim of law to reconcile conflicting interest the 2024, Uniform Civil Code in the same spirit seems to achieve a healthy reconciliation between the rise of individualism, personal autonomy while ensuring that the state has proper legislative mechanism to address the potential legal and social concerns.

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Digital governance and democratic accountability in India: challenges and prospects

Emanuel Nahar & Kamalvir Singh

ABSTRACT

The study examines the evolving relationship between digital governance and democratic accountability in India. Over the past decade, India has transitioned from limited administrative computerization to an integrated digital state architecture characterized by digital identity systems, direct benefit transfers, data-driven administration, and platform-based service delivery. While these initiatives have enhanced administrative efficiency, transparency, and procedural responsiveness, their implications for democratic accountability remain complex and contested. The study situates digital governance within broader theories of vertical, horizontal, and social accountability, and evaluates its impact across transparency, citizen participation, service delivery, and electoral processes. It argues that digital systems have strengthened formal access to information and streamlined welfare delivery, yet they have simultaneously generated structural challenges including data centralization, surveillance risks, algorithmic opacity, digital exclusion, and weakened intermediary institutions. The study observed that digital governance in India represents neither an unequivocal democratic deepening nor a purely technocratic shift, but rather a dynamic interaction between technological innovation, institutional design, and democratic norms requiring sustained regulatory and institutional reform.

Keywords: Digital Governance' Democratic Accountability, Digital India; Algorithmic Governance; Direct Benefit Transfer; E-Governance.

Introduction

The blistering development of digital technologies in the last 30 years has significantly transformed the patterns and organization of governance in the global arena. The governments are turning to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to provide government services, handle information, automate government processes, and communicate with citizens. This change in the system of traditional bureaucratic administration to the digitally mediated one has brought a radical change. This new phenomenon has the ability to improve transparency, efficiency, participation, and accountability. The emergence of digital governance is not only a technological shift as such,

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but the rearrangement of state-citizen dynamics in the twenty first century (Estevez & Janowski, 2013).

Digital governance has been adopted in India in a grand and large scale. As the Indian state has established the massive programs to develop digital infrastructure, encourage connectivity, and provide services through the Internet. It has attempted to implement technology in virtually all the areas of its civic governance. The introduction of programmes which focus on systems of digital identity, online portals of public services, direct benefits transfer, online payment platforms, has changed the way citizens interact with the state to a considerable extent. The digital drive towards an empowered society has been packaged as a path towards inclusive development, better services provision and more responsive governance. Meanwhile, the rapid increase in the internet penetration and smartphones-use has transformed the public sphere; providing new arenas of political communication and civic participation. However, it is not only efficiency or technological modernization in digital governance; the issue has a deeper implication on democratic accountability (Maurya, 2024).

Democratic accountability entails the accountability of the public officials to the citizens, oversight and control of the abuse of power by the institution, and openness and involvement in governance processes. The application of digital tools can enhance vertical accountability through the enhancement of access to information and providing feedback with citizens. They can also support horizontal accountability using data-based control and institutional surveillance. Nevertheless, the identical technologies can give rise to new forms of power asymmetry, centralization, and establish grey systems of algorithmic decisions that can hardly be questioned. The research question guiding this study is; whether digital governance has enhanced democratic accountability in India or it has simultaneously generated new structural challenges that complicate existing accountability mechanisms. Over the past decade, the expansion of digital platforms, data-driven administration, and technology-enabled service delivery has significantly increased the state's administrative capacity and created new channels for interaction between citizens and public authorities. These developments have been widely presented as tools for transparency, efficiency, and participatory governance. However, their implications for democratic accountability remain uneven and contested. While digital initiatives have, in some contexts, strengthened monitoring, reduced discretion, and improved access to information, they have also introduced concerns related to data centralization, surveillance, exclusion, algorithmic opacity, and weakened intermediary institutions. This study seeks to uncover the extent to which digital governance reforms in India have substantively deepened democratic accountability, as opposed to merely enhancing administrative efficiency, and to critically examine the structural tensions and institutional gaps that shape this evolving relationship between technology and democracy.

The preliminary study observed that the digital governance in India has brought both benefits (transparency and efficiency in the services) in meaningful ways but has also raised issues of exclusion, concentration of data, institutional control, and balances of power between citizens and the state. Democratic effects of the digital transformation cannot be measured entirely based on technological success but instead, they have to be measured through the prism of institutional design, inclusivity, and mechanisms of abuse (Kirty, 2025).

Conceptual and theoretical framework

There is a need to conceptualize the links between digital governance and democratic accountability. Although the terms; e-governance, e-democracy, and digital governance are used synonymously it is important to note that these terms denote different albeit intersecting aspects of how the state interacts with technology. The traditional definition of e-governance is the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance the efficiency of administration, streamlining the delivery of public services and improving the operation of the government in various internal ways. It is more management and procedural in nature and is focused on cost cutting, speed and convenience. E-democracy on the other hand revolves around political participation and citizen involvement. It involves electronic consultations, electronic voting systems, civic networks and social media exchanges that seek to widen the democratic participation beyond the regular elective process. Digital governance is a wider and more comprehensive concept. It is both the administrative digitization and participatory, as well as the structural change of the governance processes by the way of data systems, algorithmic decision-making, infrastructures of digital identity, and platform-based interface between the state and citizens. This extended interpretation brings to focus two interrelated aspects of digital governance, which are the administrative and the participatory. The administrative aspect is focused on efficiency, service delivery transparency and bureaucratic modernization. It tries to justify state operations by means of digital databases, automated processes and real-time surveillance. The participatory aspect, in turn, envisions the further democratization of the process, providing feedback of citizens, allowing an online form of consultation, and establishing new arenas of debate and interaction. In reality though, these two dimensions need not necessarily coincide. The transfer of administrative efficiency to democratic empowerment is not always automatic, and participatory tools can only be symbolic without being integrated at the institutional level when it comes to decision-making.

The analysis of digital governance should thus be placed in the general theoretical framework of democratic accountability. The accountability of the public authorities in the theory of democracy implies the requirement of the public authorities to justify and explain their actions and to face repercussions in case their actions are not in accordance with the stipulated norms or expectations. There are three types of accountabilities which are mostly known.

Vertical accountability exists between the citizens and the state, which is mainly done through election, public opinion and political representation (Lührmann et al., 2020). Digital platforms have a potential to make this form more robust by creating more access to information, redressing grievances, and broadening civic participation avenues. Horizontal accountability is situated within the state apparatus, which means the checks and balances between the institutions, the legislature, executive, judiciary, and independent oversight institutions. The digital data systems can improve monitoring capabilities, but the information can be concentrated in the hands of the executive agencies, which will complicate the balance in the institutions. Social responsibility is as a result of civil society institutions, institutions of media, and the citizen groups that question the state action and mobilize the discourse of people. The social accountability is more and more manifested in the digital age through the use of online networks, investigative journalism, and digital activism.

These systems of accountability are based on rival models of democracy. Liberal representative democracy gives importance to regular elections, constitutional protection as well as institutional balance and safeguard. In this respect, digital governance is evaluated in terms of the increased transparency, safeguarded rights, and procedural fairness. Participatory democracy, in its turn, states that the democracy has to go beyond the electoral representation to the active participation of the citizens in the processes of policy making. The digital tools are usually exalted in this context as the tools of civic voice and direct participation. Deliberative democracy goes further to advance this view by emphasising the need to debate based on reason, inclusiveness and public justification in decision making. The digital platforms have the potential to establish the arenas of deliberation, but can also increase polarization and misinformation and thus deteriorate the quality of democratic discourse.

The shift of governance by technology also collides with arguments between New Public Management (NPM) and Digital-era Governance. Having become prominent in the late twentieth century, NPM focused on efficiency, managerialism, and market-oriented reforms in the state administration. This approach was usually associated with early e-governance projects that focused on service optimization and cost-effectiveness. Digital-era governance, however, acknowledges that digital technologies not only reorganize service provision, but also power relations, data flows and institutional coordination (Dunleavy et al., 2006). It is shifting to managerial efficiencies to the integration of platforms, data-driven policymaking, and networked forms of governance. Such a change has important consequences to accountability because it might lead to greater administrative capacity and less transparency as the information and technological expertise become concentrated in executive agencies. Altogether, the conceptualization of the current research considers digital governance to be a transformational process that goes beyond technology modernization to reconstruct democratic frameworks. Placing the digital initiatives in the

framework of the existing theories of democracy and accountability, the analysis not only compares it with the increased efficiency of governance, but also measures the extent to which it becomes more accountable, participative, and balanced in its institutions. The conflict between administrative rationalization and democratic deepening is one of the key issues to consider to understand the actual effect of digital governance in India.

Evolution of digital governance in India

The history of digital governance in India shows a slow but steady change to a unified digital state system through computerization of the administrative system. This trend can be generally defined in three stages, the initial phase of administrative digitization, the phase of consolidation as a time of country-wide initiatives, and the phase of the creation of the institutional model based on the centralized digital platforms and the data management (Insights on India, 2025). The initial period of digital governance in India was mostly linked to the need to enhance efficiency of the administration with computerization and the use of information technology. The first attempts were to digitalize government records, automate departmental processes and implement electronic service delivery of certain processes like taxation, land records and transport services. These efforts were coordinated through the introduction of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in an attempt to organize the efforts of ministries and states. This plan was meant to ensure that the citizens could access the services of the government by having common services delivery outlets and also enhance transparency and efficiency of government processes. In this phase, the predominant logic of digital governance was very managerial and was focused on process re-engineering, reduction of costs, and administrative rationalization. Even though these reforms helped in making services accessible, the democratic implications were indirect, since the main interest was not on the citizen participation and accountability mechanisms.

The latter stage started with a bigger and a bolder digital transformation vision. Since 2015, the Digital India project marked the beginning of the transition to a countrywide digital environment as opposed to the poorly coordinated e-governance efforts (Observer Research Foundation, 2025). This project expressed a greater goal: to make India a digitally empowered community and knowledge economy. It was based on three major pillars. First, the digital infrastructure was viewed as a social good, such as universal digital identity systems, broadband connectivity, and mobile access. This infrastructure was to be used to make sure that all citizens had access to government services electronically. Second, services on demand and governance were to help centralize the common services via online portals, digital payment and real time monitoring web. Direct benefit transfer, e-procurement, and electronic grievance redressal mechanisms were aimed at minimizing leakages and increasing administrative transparency. Third, the focus of digital empowerment was on citizen centred strategies, such as digital literacy programs and access to

information via internet. This phase in theory made the digital governance more than the bureaucratic modernization to the wider social change.

The emerging institutional structure that has come up with these initiatives is that of growing centralization and assimilation of digital platforms. A host of centralized digital systems are now both the central elements of governance and the connection between identity, welfare provision, taxation, and financial inclusion in interconnected databases. Design and implementation of digital infrastructure have a large coordination role by the ministries and central agencies; state governments adopt and operationalize these systems in their respective jurisdictions. This participatory, but subordinated, federal structure has enabled the rapid expansion of digital programs but has also institutionalized technical and managerial power among the executive institutions.

Meanwhile, the scope of data governance has grown significantly. The creation of digital identity systems, databases of beneficiaries and electronic transaction platforms has resulted in huge repositories of citizen data. This has increased the ability of the state with regard to monitoring service delivery, targeting welfare schemes, and the evaluation of policy outcomes. They have also brought new issues to light on data protection, privacy protection, and institutional control, however. The legal and regulatory systems that apply to the digital information remain dynamic, and it represents the conflict between innovation and responsibility (Sasi, 2026). Altogether, the changes in digital governance in India indicate the transition between the partial digitization of the administration to the full-fledged digital state regime. What started as a modernization initiative fuelled by efficiency has evolved into an intricate institutional presence that alters the access and methods of attaining services by citizens, the policies put into practice and the exercise of power by the state. This change gives the empirical basis of evaluating whether digital governance has enhanced the state of democracy accountability or has raised new structural issues in the Indian democratic system.

Digital governance and democratic accountability: areas of impact

The spread of digital government in India has impacted the various aspects of democratic accountability very much. The most explicit effects of it are seen in four main domains which are transparency and information access, citizen engagement and feedback, service delivery and administrative responsiveness and electoral and political accountability. Although digital systems have brought about new tools of control and interaction, they do not have simple and even democratic impacts. Enhancement of transparency is one of the most common mentioned advantages of digital governance. Online government portal has resulted in improved access of policy documents, budgetary allocations, scheme guidelines, and administrative procedures by citizens. Online platforms enable people to access applications, authentication of rights, and official notifications

without the mediator. The digitalization of the Right to Information (RTI) procedure has also gone ahead to simplify an application of the right to access information so that one can file requests online, track the information and respond. Open data platforms have enhanced public access to datasets on the development indicators, government spending and service delivery outcomes. The visibility of administrative performance has also increased in the form of public dashboards that provide real-time statistics on welfare schemes, vaccination drives, and infrastructure projects and other government initiatives (DoPT, n.d.).

These changes indicate that there is a major change in the process of opaque bureaucracy to more approachable and traceable methods of governance. But, substantive enhancement of transparency should be analyzed with care. The accessibility of the information does not necessarily imply that it is understandable and applicable. Complicated data sets, technical forms, and language obstacles might restrict the meaningful access of significant population segments. Additionally, the concept of transparency can only make sense when there are checks and balances of decision-making. Therefore, although digital governance has also led to the increase of the formal access to information, it can be effective in enhancing the democratic accountability provided that the citizens are capable of interpreting, challenging, and reshaping the policy decisions on the basis of this information (Fox, 2007).

Another important area of impact is citizen participation. Digital grievance redressal systems enable people to make complaints, monitor the replies as well as request administrative redress without visiting governmental offices physically. Participatory platforms are also introduced to get the feedback of the people on the draft policies, legislative proposals and developmental initiatives. The social media has stood as one of the glaring avenues of direct communication between the political leaders, government agencies and the citizens. Such digital interfaces provide the impression of an interactive and responsive state.

However, the democratic value of this participation must be thought through. In as much as grievance portals make procedures more accessible, response levels and quality differ greatly. Participation can be consultative on the one hand instead of deliberative on the other hand and have minimal say in the final policy decisions. The communication styles of social media have tended to focus on visibility and political rhetoric as opposed to an orderly discussion of the policy. Also, the digital engagement is more likely to represent the opinions of comparatively connected and literate groups of people, which can isolate the untrustworthy populations that lack access to the internet. The most important question, then, is whether digital participation mechanisms can facilitate substantive engagement and influence of policymakers or they can only fulfil symbolic roles that justify the decisions that are already made.

Digital governance has been strongly impacted in service delivery and administrative responsiveness as a third area. Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) have changed the way welfare is distributed by transferring subsidies and benefits to the bank accounts of beneficiaries by-passing Middlemen leakages. Digital identity systems have enabled verification of beneficiaries, better targeting as well as consolidation of multiple welfare schemes to become a single database. Public service portals available on the internet enable individuals to use technology to apply and obtain certificates, licenses, and permits thus minimizing time wastage and corruption (GoI, n.d.).

These reforms are major advances in terms of efficiency. Automated systems can decrease the time of processing, decrease the discretionary authority at the low-level administration, and generate auditory tracks of transaction pathways. Efficiency is not the only aspect of democratic responsiveness. In the event of system failures in digital systems, or failure or inability to authenticate potential beneficiaries, or inaccessible grievance mechanisms, instead of making systems more accountable, they may undermine them. The focus on the efficiency of technologies can occasionally prevail over the necessity to control them with the help of human factors and to be able to make an exception in unique situations. Therefore, the assessment of digital service provision should strike an equilibrium between achievements in the rationalization of the administration and the fear of accessibility, equity, and redressal.

The fourth area of influence is electoral and political accountability. Election management is becoming more and more digitally based such as voter registration databases, dissemination of electoral roll online, and information campaigning. The systems are able to boost accuracy, transparency and civic confidence in elections. Concurrently, the social media has revolutionized political communication. Digital channels are being used by political parties and leaders to mobilize supporters, spread out campaign messages, and also communicate directly with voters. The Internet-based political mobilization has reduced the costs of participation, and citizens can voice their views, run a campaign, and influence the discourse.

Nevertheless, digitalization of political communication brings new weaknesses as well. The quick spread of false information, targeted political advertisement, and content optimization offered by algorithms may distort the deliberating process of the population. There are no clear regulatory systems that regulate digital campaigning making the accountability mechanisms harder. On one hand, the digital tools can bring more people into the political sphere and enhance political engagement, but they can also increase polarization and diminish the quality of democratic debate. Combined, the four areas depict that digital governance has redefined the environment of democratic accountability in India. It has also increased transparency in its formal form, participation has been offered new digital platforms, service delivery has been streamlined and

the system of electoral processes has been incorporated in the technology. However, all these transformations are empowering and constraining at the same time. The effect of the digital governance on the democratic accountability is thus not a unilaterally positive or a completely negative one. Rather, it demonstrates a complicated interaction between technological innovation, institutional design, and democratic norms- an interaction that requires constant revision and rewinding (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023).

Key challenges to democratic accountability

Although digital governance has brought notable innovations in transparency, delivering services and participation, it has brought about structural challenges that make democratic accountability difficult. These difficulties are not simply technical constraints but some underlying conflict between technological modernization and democratic practices. The risks of exclusion, the concentration of power, the loss of privacy, the algorithmic inscrutability, and the disorder of information must thus be addressed as the risks of the digital governance in India.

The continued existence of the digital divide and the consequent exclusion patterns is one of the most critical issues. Despite the significant rise in the internet penetration and smartphones use, there is still uneven access in rural and urban areas. The countryside has poor connectivity, low bandwidth, and low digital infrastructure. This gap influences the citizens in terms of their access to online governmental services, sending complaints, or engaging in online consultations (TRAI, 2023). Besides geographical differences, there are still strong gender divisions in access to digital divide. Females, especially in rural and marginalized areas tend to be less digitally literate and less in control of technologies. These inequalities are further enhanced by socio-economic barriers. Lowly-educated citizens, those with low incomes, or having precarious jobs may find it difficult to learn how to use complicated digital interfaces or authenticate their identities in digital systems. Another barrier would be language accessibility since most online services are typically run in English or a small number of languages, which lack inclusivity in a diverse multilingual society.

These stratification inequalities indicate that despite being designed to be universal, digital governance can actually support the structural inequalities. People who already have access to resources, literacy, and connectivity are enjoying an unfair advantage over digital systems, and marginalized groups may face exclusion. The potential of being included can be replaced by new forms of marginalization when access to welfare benefits, grievance, or information on the web can be conditioned on digital competence. Democratic accountability states that all people must have equal ability to challenge and to participate in the state; when the access to digital technology is unequal, it challenges this principle.

The second problem is associated with the concentration of power that is made easy by digital infrastructures. Digital governance is usually based on centralised databases, built-in platforms and single systems of digital identities. Although centralization can foster coordination and eliminate duplication, it also offers data and administrative power to the executive institutions. The storage of large masses of data allows the state to track, classify and control the citizens on a scale never before seen before. This concentration can reinforce the power of the executives especially where oversight systems are ineffective or inefficient. It is also further increased by platform governance, which reinforces the centralizing tendency. When various services are merged such as welfare distribution, taxation and so on into single digital sites, the power of the platforms becomes a major source of institutional power. As the roles of decision-making become automated and centralized, the middle-level intermediary institutions, e.g. the local bureaucracies or the communal level organization, might be reduced. This shrinking of the space in between can lead to loss of horizontal accountability by reducing the possibility of institutional contention and debate. Dispersal of power in democracy serves as a check against abuse; it is possible that digital consolidation will accidentally widen these checks (Zuboff, 2019).

Very much associated with centralization is the growth of state data capacity and the related issues of privacy and surveillance. The digital systems of governance produce a lot of personal data, such as biometric data, financial data, demographic information, and service utilization patterns. Although this type of data may be used to enhance targeting and policy analysis, it is also useful in advancing the surveillance of the state. The lack of sound data protection mechanisms and autonomous enforcement agencies makes the problem of abuse more likely. These concerns are enhanced by weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of transparency in data-sharing practices and lack of avenues where citizens can grant their consent. In this case, the conflict between productivity and civil rights is especially sharp. Automated verification systems and built-in databases could minimize fraud and simplify the process of delivering welfare, but they also create the possibility of intrusion monitoring and profiling. Democratic accountability means that citizens are in charge of their own personal data and that they have good solutions to misuse of data. The lack of control over data governance as it outpaces its regulation leads to the accountability gap, undermining the social trust in digital institutions.

The other highly important issue is that of algorithmic governance and systemic openness. With the continued development of digital platforms into automated systems to make decisions, algorithms are starting to shape the eligibility decision-making, the risk assessment system, and the way resources are allocated. Such systems tend to be complicated and not easily comprehensible to the citizens or even the policymakers. The transparency deficit exists because of the inaccessibility of algorithmic design and implementation. The citizen who

does not receive benefits or services as a result of an automated decision cannot easily appeal the decision especially when the decision-making logic is not available or proprietary.

The institutional oversight is made more difficult as well by algorithmic obscurity. Conventional accountability systems presuppose the existence of recognizable decision-makers who are able to justify and explain what they do. Decisions that are mediated through technological systems lead to diffusion of responsibility between programmers, administrators, and political authorities. This spread ensures that it is more difficult to point the finger or seek redress. In this case, the democratic control demands the emergence of new regulatory tools that can audit and examine digital systems.

Lastly, the digitalization of the public space has increased the pressure on issues connected to misinformation and the distortion of democracy. The social media sites have emerged as the key platforms of political communication, mobilization, and debate. On the one hand, they increase the possibilities of civic participation; on the other hand, they make it easy to misinform and mislead. Orchestrated movements, content-manipulated and targeted messages can corrupt the mood of the masses and turn informed democratic decision-making into a farce. The amplification of content based on algorithms tends to promote polarizing or sensational content, which leads to echo chambers and political fragmentation.

There is a lack of regulatory frameworks that regulate digital political communication that are still in development and are controversial. There has always been a dilemma between the freedom of expression and the need to reduce misinformation which is detrimental. Lax or lax regulation can enable manipulation to thrive, whilst excessive restrictions can also be counterproductive by stifling the justifiable opposition. Democratic responsibility is becoming even more exposed in this precarious space; the citizens might find it difficult to learn the difference between the information that gets to them and the ones that are being fabricated (UNESCO, 2023).

Institutional and legal framework

A strong democratic accountability is heavily reliant on the strength of the institutional and legal framework in which digital governance is exercised. With the growing role of digital technologies in mediating between public administration, service delivery, and political communication, regulatory frameworks need to be changed to respond to the emergent problems of privacy, transparency, surveillance, and institutional regulation. This system comprises of statutory provisions, judicial interventions, parliamentary scrutiny, and sector-based regulatory bodies in India. Nevertheless, the sufficiency and consistency of such mechanisms is the matter of critical discussion.

The Information Technology Act, 2000, and its various amendments are the legal tool upon which digital activity in India is established. The Act, which was initially established to streamline electronic commerce and offer legal protection to electronic transactions, has seen its boundaries increase as well to cover cybersecurity and data breach clauses and intermediary liability. The amendments and other related rules have also brought with them the responsibilities of digital intermediaries such as due diligence provisions and content control mechanisms. Although these provisions are designed to establish an orderly digital ecosystem, there is still a concern about the question of balance between the regulatory power and civil liberties. The wide authority given to the executive in content takedown and information blocking issues has presented concerns of transparency and procedural protection (Government of India, 2000).

India has also formulated a more organized regime on data protection following increasing anxieties regarding privacy and data abuse. The development of a unified data protection law is an indication of the realization that there is the necessity to control the gathering, storing, and employing of personal information. These types of legislation attempt to create a set of rules regarding consent, purpose restriction, data minimization, and accountability of data fiduciaries. It is also a vision of institutional control and redressal of grievances. Nonetheless, the actual efficacy of the data protection system hinges on the autonomy, capability and enforcement power of the regulatory bodies. When the oversight bodies are kept closely tied to the executive body, or are not endowed with sufficient resources, they may be limited in their capacity to exercise any meaningful checks.

The courts have been very instrumental in defining the outline of digital responsibility. Courts through their landmark decisions have granted privacy its constitutional standing and have expressed the necessity of a balance to be struck between technological progress and basic rights. Judicial review offers a crucial point of contest concerning executive practices concerning surveillance, content regulation, and digital identity. The judiciary also ensures horizontal accountability among the state structure by interpreting constitution guarantees based on new technologies. However, the judicial intervention is usually reactive but not proactive as they deal with disputes when damage has been done. Rebates may also restrict timely remedies due to delays in adjudication and technical nature of digital governance cases.

Another important aspect of parliamentary accountability is the parliamentary oversight. Deliberation and accountability are attained through the parliamentary discussions and standing committees, and legislative oversight of digital policies. Preferably, this monitoring can guarantee that any digital initiatives will be discussed publicly and subject to institutional scrutiny prior to being rolled out. Nevertheless, the technical aspect of the digital systems may decrease the

positive involvement of the legislative branch, particularly in cases of a lack of special knowledge. Furthermore, speedy legislative procedures could limit thorough discussion of tricky digital legislation. Good monitoring should not be confined to formal legislative power, but also to long-term capacity building and openness in the executive decision making (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2021).

Besides laws and parliamentary procedures, various regulatory authorities and administrative bodies also control certain issues of digital governance. These are the telecommunications regulation bodies, cybersecurity coordination, and data protection enforcement bodies. Their mission is generally to watch over adherence, provide an instruction, and so respond to complaints. Such bodies are important to accountability because of their independence and operational autonomy. Regulatory agencies can act as good bridges between the state and citizens wherever they operate in a transparent manner and are independent institutions. On the other hand, their oversight ability could be compromised by overlapping jurisdictions, ambiguity of mandates or executive control over them.

An analysis of the general accountability strength presents a mixed image. Paperwise, India has a stratified system that includes law, judicial control, legislative oversight, and regulatory oversight. Such a multiplicity of mechanisms implies that the institutional level acknowledges the necessity of checks and balances of the digital sphere. The efficiency of these protections however depends on implementation, institutional independence, and transparency. The concentration of regulatory powers in the executive, lack of technical capabilities in regulatory bodies, and transforming technological dynamics make discrepancies between legal stipulations and the application of the law.

To sum up, even though India has developed a primary legal and institutional framework to regulate digital transformation, accountability protection is not consistent. There are oversight mechanisms, which are effective in different sectors and situations. To ensure that democracy holds a stronger accountability in the digital age, more than mere legislative perfecting is necessary: better institutional independence, more transparency in the digital policymaking process, and constant adjustment to the new technological obstacles.

Prospects for strengthening democratic accountability

Digital governance in India will rely not only on the level of technological progress of the country but also on the ability of institutions to balance innovation against democratic values. To enhance democratic accountability, it is necessary to make considered policy decisions to manage the current structural vulnerabilities and use the transformative possibilities of digital systems. A progressive framework should work on inclusion, institutional regulation, data security, participatory design and decentralization.

One of the initial measures that could be taken to enhance accountability is to bridge the digital divide. Expansion of infrastructure is crucial especially in the rural and remote regions where gaps of connectivity still exist. Access to a high-quality broadband connection in combination with affordable digital devices has to be a public good and not a market-driven privilege. Nevertheless, facilities are not enough. Digital literacy programmes should empower the citizens with skills needed to access online services, grasp the digital rights and use the online governance platforms effectively (Venkatesh et al., 2014). It is not limited to technical training of literacy, as it should also incorporate the understanding of privacy, cybersecurity, and critical analysis of information. Inclusive design is also very crucial. Online interfaces have to be able to accommodate linguistic diversity, accessibility to people with physical disabilities, and usability by people with poor formal education. Digital governance can take steps towards its democratic vision of universal participation by focusing more on making sure that access and usability are fair.

There should also be an increase in institutional oversight mechanisms to make the digital systems accountable. Autonomous regulatory authorities having well-articulated mandate and operational independence are essential in regulating data governance, cybersecurity and regulation of the digital platforms. These institutions ought to have investigative, enforcing, and transparency requirements. The fact that they are not dependent on the executive is crucial to retaining trust in them. Moreover, the parliamentary control should keep up with the digital transformation dynamics. Dedicated parliamentary committees dedicated to digital governance and new technologies may have a long-term effect of scrutinizing the initiatives of the executive, evaluating the regulatory frameworks, and consulting with technical professionals. The consistent involvement in legislation would contribute to horizontal accountability and make sure that digital policies are the subject of a democratic debate.

Another pillar of accountability is strong data protection and privacy. Best enforcement mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that the statutory protections can be translated into real rights. The data protection authorities should be sufficiently equipped with resources and technical skills as well as sanctioning authority to respond to breaches. Easy grievance redressal avenues ought to be availed so that citizens can question how personal information is abused or how surveillance is conducted illegally. It is also necessary to have transparency in the algorithm systems. The citizens must be given the right to explanation and review where automated decision-making impacts on welfare eligibility, access to credit, or access to public services. The presence of periodic audits of algorithmic systems by independent bodies can help to decrease the level of opacity and to provide fairness. The concept of transparency embedded in the digital design is an accountability culture as opposed to regulative behavior.

The further opportunities of democratic deepening are in increasing meaningful participatory digital platforms. Instead of only allowing people to participate in redressing grievances or having a token consultation, the digital resources can ensure that civic deliberation can take place. Policy consultation, budget and legislative feedback online platforms can also be constructed in such a way that it involves rational argument and broad representation. Citizen input that is incorporated in the decision-making processes that are final improves substantive accountability. Digital democracy is one such move that can enable communities on the local level to engage in the planning and delivery of resources and supervision of civic activities. Digital platforms would enhance vertical as well as social accountability by integrating participatory channels into formal governance systems.

Lastly, to create a balance between efficiency and democratic responsiveness, decentralization of digital governance is necessary. Although the centralized platform offers integration and scale, the over-concentration of the authority can undermine institutional pluralism. Digitally equipped local governments can be more responsive and contextual because of their regional specifics. Interoperable but state sovereign federal digital architecture would balance technological integration with constitutional principles of decentralization. Ensuring that innovation at the state level is encouraged in a common standards framework can encourage experimentation and maintain accountability.

Overall, the future of making democracy accountable in the digital age of India relies on institutional design factors that seek to achieve inclusion, transparency and accountability. Technology is neither democratic nor authoritarian and its effects are determined by regulatory models, power distribution, and engagement by the citizens. India can solve the problem of digital inequalities, strengthen oversight institutions, protect privacy, facilitate deliberative involvement, and decentralize power to guarantee that digital governance is transformed as an instrument of democratic deepening, but not centralization. The viability of the digital transformation in the long term will be based on the ability to be accountable to the citizens to which it aims to be of service.

Conclusion

One of the biggest changes in the twenty-first century are the spread of digital governance in India as the relations between the state and its citizens have dramatically altered. This paper has explored how digital governance has emerged over time since the initial stages of digitization of administration to the elaboration of cohesive digital platforms and broad data infrastructures. It has discussed the impact digital initiatives have had on transparency, citizen engagement, service provision and political accountability as well as pinpointing structural issues that come along with technological inclusion in democratic systems.

This analysis shows that digital governance has without a doubt increased the administrative capacity. Public service delivery has been expedited and made more efficient through online portals, direct benefit transfers, system of digital identity, and real-time dashboards. Digitised records and open data programmes have helped to make information available to more people. New forms of grievance redressal and civil interaction have expanded formal channels by which the citizens can interact with the state. Digital technologies have also transformed electoral management and political communication, allowing it to coordinate logistics and reach the public better. On these fronts, digital governance has enhanced some of the procedural elements of accountability, especially in regard to transparency and responsiveness of the administration.

The democratic consequences of this change are however not evenly distributed and disputed. Continuous digital inequalities, which are geographically, sexually, socio-economically, and linguistically based, restrict the same access to digital systems. The concentration of information and administrative power bring up the issue of institutional balance and control. The increase in the surveillance potential and the changing data management systems indicate the strain between efficiency and civil rights. The fact that algorithmic obscures responsibility and lessens transparency in making decisions makes the process challenging. In the meantime, digital worth of political communication poses weaknesses in the area of misinformation and regulatory ambiguity. These issues depict that modernization of technology does not necessarily create a democratic deepening.

Going back to the main research question, which is whether or not digital governance has made democracy more accountable in India or introduced new structural issues, the answer is in the qualified evaluation. Digital governance has improved performance by the administration and has also come with mechanisms that can enable accountability. But it has also created new risks which need to be handled carefully on an institutional level. Responsibility has grown in shape but is staid in practice, influenced by disparities, rules and changing power relations.

Finally, the future of the democratic accountability in India lies not with technology, but with the institutions, regulatory protection, and political adherence to the principles of democracy. Electronic systems should be incorporated under open legal structures, be open to scrutiny and should be available to every citizen. Improving the protection of data regimes, increasing oversight of parliament, decentralizing digital power, and investing in digital access are all crucial steps to harmonizing technological innovation with constitutional values. When properly regulated, digital transformation can be used to help create a more participatory and transparent democracy. Unchecked, it will have the risk of centralizing power and increasing inequalities. The future of digital governance in India shall thus be dictated not by the capacity of

technology, but by the democratic decisions influencing the way it is being implemented in India.

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Deendayal Upadhyay's Vision and the National Education Policy 2020

Yog Raj

ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) marks a significant milestone in the transformation of India's education system. The Policy which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29th July 2020 outlines the vision of India's new education system. It bears a strong influence of Deendayal Upadhyay's philosophy. Replacing the earlier National Policy on Education 1986, it aims to address the changing needs of the 21st century by making education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and skill-oriented. The policy seeks to improve access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability at all levels of education—from early childhood to higher education. By introducing structural reforms such as the 5+3+3+4 curricular framework, promoting multilingualism through the three-language formula, strengthening teacher education, and establishing innovative bodies like PARAKH and the Academic Bank of Credits, NEP-2020 envisions a learner-centered and globally competitive education system. This research paper examines the evolution, objectives, key reforms, advantages, and challenges associated with NEP-2020 and underscores the impact of Deendayal's ideas on NEP.

Keywords: National Education Policy- 1986, NEP- 2020, Union Cabinet, Education System, Multidisciplinary, Structural reforms, Three-language formula, PARAKH, and Academic Bank of Credits.

Introduction

In India, education is placed in the Concurrent List of the Constitution, enabling both the Central and State governments to legislate on the subject. Education is essential for achieving the full potential of individuals and for building a just, equitable, and progressive society that supports national development. In a rapidly evolving global knowledge landscape, reforms in the education system have become increasingly necessary. In this context, the National Education Policy 2020 was approved by the Government of India on 29 July 2020. Subsequently, the Ministry of Human Resource Development was renamed as the Ministry of Education. This policy replaces the 34-year-old National Policy on Education 1986. After its announcement, the government clarified that no language would be imposed on learners and that there would be no compulsory shift in the medium of instruction from English to any regional language. The vision of the National Education Policy 2020 is to develop an Indian-centric

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education system that contributes to transforming the nation into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all. The policy seeks to introduce significant reforms across all levels of education, from pre-primary to higher education, thereby reshaping the overall structure and functioning of the Indian education system. The philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya, especially Integral Humanism, has subtle yet visible echoes in the NEP 2020. The emphasis on holistic development (body, mind, intellect, soul) aligns with NEP's multidisciplinary approach. The focus on Indian knowledge systems and cultural rootedness reflects his emphasis on civilizational identity. NEP also speaks of the promotion of value-based education which shows Upadhyay's ethical and moral framework. The focus of NEP on encouragement of self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) resonates with vocational and skill-based learning. Similarly, the advocacy of decentralization is reflected in flexible curricula and institutional autonomy (Khimta, 2017). Together, NEP integrates tradition with modernity, echoing Upadhyaya's vision. The first part deals with NEP and its evolution in India followed by Deendayal Upadhyaya's ideas reflected in NEP.

Part 1

Historical evolution of NEP-2020

The development of the National Education Policy 2020 reflects India's continuous efforts to reform and strengthen its education system in response to changing social, economic, and global demands. After independence, the Government of India introduced the National Policy on Education 1968, which was based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission and emphasized national integration and equal educational opportunities. Later, the National Policy on Education 1986 was formulated to address issues of access, equity, and quality, and it was further modified in 1992. Earlier education policies primarily focused on expanding access to education. The process of formulating a new education policy began in 2015. In May 2016, the Committee for the Evolution of the New Education Policy submitted its report, which served as the basis for the then Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to prepare preliminary inputs for the Draft National Education Policy, 2016. Subsequently, in June 2017, a committee chaired by former ISRO Chief Dr. K. Kasturirangan was constituted to draft a comprehensive New Education Policy. The committee presented its draft in May 2019. This was followed by an extensive consultation process undertaken by the Ministry, involving various stakeholders across the country. After detailed review and revisions, the policy was finally approved on 29 July 2020. Over the decades, significant changes occurred in India's economy, technology, and demographic profile, creating new challenges and expectations from the education system. The need for a comprehensive and modern reform became increasingly evident in the 21st century, particularly in the context of globalization, digital advancement, and skill-based employment.

Thus, NEP-2020 emerged as a transformative policy aimed at restructuring both school and higher education to make it more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned with global standards while preserving India's cultural values.

Aims and objectives of NEP-2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the Government of India, presents a comprehensive vision for transforming the country's education system. It proposes transformative reforms at every stage—from early childhood care to higher education—with the goal of universalizing education from pre-school to secondary level and achieving a 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2030. The policy envisions India emerging as a global knowledge superpower through a dynamic and inclusive education system. The key objectives of NEP 2020 include:

Universal access and inclusion: The policy aims to provide equitable and inclusive education for all, regardless of socio-economic background, gender, or physical disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring access to quality education for marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

Holistic development: NEP 2020 focuses on the holistic development of students by promoting not only academic excellence but also their physical, social, emotional, and ethical growth. It encourages the integration of co-curricular and extracurricular activities into the curriculum.

Quality education: The policy aims to improve the overall quality of education at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education. This includes revising and updating curriculum and pedagogy, promoting experiential learning, and ensuring the use of technology in teaching and learning. It encourages a shift from rote learning to a more experiential and application-based approach.

Flexible learning: The National Education Policy 2020 advocates a flexible academic framework that allows learners to pursue interdisciplinary subject combinations aligned with their interests and career goals. It institutionalizes multiple entry and exits provisions in higher education, supported by credit transfer systems and the Academic Bank of Credits, thereby promoting academic mobility and lifelong learning pathways.

Vocational education and skill development: The policy integrates vocational education into the mainstream curriculum from the foundational stages, with the objective of equipping students with practical competencies and industry-relevant skills that enhance employability and self-reliance.

Teacher education and professional development: The policy prioritizes the enhancement of teaching quality through systematic reforms in teacher education, continuous professional development, and the creation of supportive institutional environments. It seeks to attract and retain competent individuals in the teaching profession while upholding high professional standards.

Multilingual education and academic flexibility: The National Education Policy 2020 underscores the promotion of multilingualism as a foundational principle of learning. It further advances academic flexibility by enabling students to choose subjects across disciplines and by introducing multiple entry and exit provisions in higher education. These measures are reinforced through credit transfer mechanisms and the Academic Bank of Credits to facilitate seamless academic progression.

Higher education reforms: The policy seeks to restructure higher education institutions into multidisciplinary entities that foster research, innovation, and a global outlook. It envisages a flexible academic framework and proposes the establishment of the National Research Foundation to strengthen and financially support research activities across disciplines.

Global Integration: The policy aspires to enhance the global competitiveness of Indian education by encouraging internationalization, including permitting reputed foreign universities to establish campuses in India and promoting academic collaboration at the global level.

Financial commitment: The policy reiterates the commitment to increase public expenditure on education to achieve the target of 6 percent of GDP, thereby ensuring adequate financial resources for its effective implementation. Collectively, above these objectives reflect a comprehensive and transformative vision aimed at aligning India's education system with emerging national and global demands.

Structural reforms in school education: the 5+3+3+4 model

Under the National Education Policy 2020, the traditional 10+2 education structure has been replaced with a new four-stage curricular framework. The earlier system has been restructured into a 5+3+3+4 design, covering the age groups 3–6 years (Foundational Stage), 6–8 years (Preparatory Stage), 8–11 years (Middle Stage), 11–14 years (Secondary Stage – Part I), and 14–18 years (Secondary Stage – Part II). Unlike the previous 10+2 model, which formally began at age six and excluded children aged 3–6 from the school framework, the new structure integrates early childhood care and education into the formal system. Furthermore, the implementation of this policy framework has been made mandatory for both government and private educational institutions.

Four-stage curricular structure under the NEP-2020

The 5+3+3+4 curricular structure introduced under the National Education Policy 2020 is organized into four distinct stages. The four stages of the Policy are outlined and discussed as follows:

1. Foundational stage (Ages 3–8 Years): Under the National Education Policy 2020, the Foundational Stage covers children aged 3 to 8 years and spans a period of five years. It is structured in a (two parts) 3+2 format, comprising three years of pre-school education followed by two years of primary schooling

(Classes I and II). The first three years are to be completed in *Anganwadi* centres or *Balvatika*, while the subsequent two years are undertaken in formal school settings (class 1st & second). Recognized as the most critical phase of a child's educational journey, this stage aims to establish a strong base for holistic learning and development. An activity-based and play-oriented curriculum is proposed for the entire five-year period, with a strong emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

2. Preparatory stage (Ages 8–11 Years): Under the **preparatory stage** of the National Education Policy 2020, a three-year period is designated for children aged 9 to 11 years, corresponding to Classes III to V. This stage emphasizes the consolidation of foundational literacy and numeracy, with particular focus on strengthening students' numerical competencies. Simultaneously, learners are provided instruction in their regional language to promote linguistic development. The curriculum includes subjects such as science, mathematics, and arts, delivered through experiential and activity-based pedagogical approaches, thereby encouraging conceptual understanding, creativity, and active participation in the learning process.

3. Middle stage (Ages 11–14 Years): The **middle stage** of the National Education Policy 2020 spans three years and includes students aged 12 to 14 years, corresponding to Classes VI to VIII. During this phase, education becomes more subject-oriented, with a strong emphasis on skill development. Vocational education is introduced from Class VI onward, enabling students to acquire practical skills alongside academic learning. Basic coding is incorporated into the curriculum beginning in Class VI, and project-based learning is also initiated at this level to foster analytical and problem-solving abilities. Students are required to participate in short-term internship programs of around ten days, conducted in collaboration with local vocational experts such as carpenters, gardeners, and potters, thereby promoting experiential learning. Examinations at this stage are conducted by the concerned authority in accordance with prescribed guidelines.

4. Secondary stage (Ages 14–18 Years): The **secondary stage**, the final component of the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure under the National Education Policy 2020, spans four years and caters to students aged 15 to 18 years, covering Classes IX to XII in two phases—Classes IX–X and XI–XII. This stage eliminates the rigid separation among arts, commerce, and science streams, allowing students to select subjects based on their interests rather than predetermined streams. For example: students will study fashion designing along with science and mathematics. While certain core subjects remain compulsory for all, a range of elective options such as art, music, and vocational courses are available to promote holistic and multidisciplinary learning. Board examinations for Classes X and XII will continue. In this phase, the examination system will be made flexible. The New policy has been made in such a way that every student will leave the school with a special skill.

Higher education reforms under NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces significant reforms in the structure of higher education, emphasizing flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, and student mobility. It proposes a multidisciplinary undergraduate programme with multiple entry and exits options, allowing learners to progress at their own pace. The undergraduate programme will be of either three or four years' duration. Students exiting after the first year will be awarded a certificate; after the second year, an advanced diploma; after the third year, a Bachelor's degree; and upon completion of the fourth year, a Bachelor's degree with research. In addition, postgraduate programmes will be structured as either one-year or two-year courses, depending on the nature and duration of the undergraduate qualification.

Three- language formula under NEP-2020

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the promotion of multilingualism and the preservation of native languages as integral components of holistic education. In this regard, the policy proposes the implementation of the three-language formula, ensuring that no language is imposed on any learner. Under this framework, the first language is to be the mother tongue or the regional language. In Hindi-speaking states, the second language would be English or another modern Indian language, while in non-Hindi-speaking states it would be English or Hindi. The third language may be English or another modern Indian language. Broadly, the formula ensures that students learn three languages based on regional context and individual choice, with the stipulation that at least two of the three languages must be native to India. Following objections from certain political groups and political parties, explicit references to Hindi and English in earlier drafts of the policy were subsequently removed. Additionally, Sanskrit is included as one of the language options under the three-language formula and is to be offered at all levels of school and higher education. Other classical languages—such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit—are also to be made available. Furthermore, foreign languages including Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian are proposed to be offered at the secondary stage.

Teacher education and professional development

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions comprehensive reforms in teacher education and professional development to enhance the quality of teaching across all levels. It proposes the strengthening of Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs), with improved assessment standards and the incorporation of TET scores into recruitment processes. A new National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) will be developed by the National Council for Teacher Education in consultation with the National Council of Educational Research and Training to ensure uniformity and academic rigor in teacher

preparation. By 2030, teacher education will be integrated into multidisciplinary universities, and the minimum qualification for teaching will be a four-year integrated B.Ed. degree, while the M.Ed. programme will be redesigned as a one-year research-focused course. Faculty composition in Departments of Education will be diversified, encouraging advanced research qualifications across disciplines.

In addition to above, the policy emphasizes continuous professional development, mandating at least 50 hours of annual training through local, regional, national, and international workshops, as well as online modules. Teachers will be relieved from excessive administrative and non-academic duties to enable greater focus on pedagogy and student learning. A structured mentoring ecosystem will be developed through the establishment of a National Mission for Mentoring, drawing upon the expertise of senior and retired educators to provide academic guidance, research support, and professional enrichment to university and college faculty. Collectively, these measures aim to professionalize teaching, strengthen institutional support, and elevate the overall standards of education.

Assessment reforms: PARAKH and ABC

As proposed in the policy, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis for Holistic Development) will function as a National Assessment Centre to standardize and oversee the evaluation practices of school boards across the country. Additionally, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) will operate as a virtual credit repository, where students will earn credits throughout their learning journey. These credits will facilitate flexible entry and exit from institutions and will remain valid for up to seven years.

Major reforms in NEP 2020

Under the National Education Policy 2020, several significant reforms and structural changes have been introduced, some of which are highlighted below:

Multidisciplinary higher education and GER expansion: By 2030, all higher education institutions will evolve into multidisciplinary establishments, with at least one large multidisciplinary institution in or near every district. Each institution is expected to have a minimum enrolment of 3,000 students. The policy also aims to raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education, including vocational education, from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035.

Holistic and integrated curriculum: The policy promotes the integration of arts, sciences, and vocational disciplines, eliminating rigid boundaries between streams. Departments such as Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Indology, Arts, Dance, Theatre, Education, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Sciences, Sports, Translation, and Interpretation will be established across institutions to ensure broad-based learning.

Discontinuation of M. Phil programme: The M. Phil degree will be discontinued as part of the restructuring of postgraduate and research pathways.

Promotion of Sanskrit and multilingualism: Sanskrit will be mainstreamed with strengthened institutional support, and the three-language formula will also extend into higher education to encourage multilingual proficiency.

Emphasis on vocational education and skill development: Students will acquire at least one vocational skill during their schooling, and coding will be introduced from Class VI. Internship opportunities with local trades and crafts will begin from Grade VI to promote experiential learning.

Reform in premier institutions: Institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology will adopt a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach, incorporating arts and humanities alongside technical education.

Academic bank of credit and flexible degree structure: An Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) will digitally store students earned credits, enabled multiple entry and exit options in higher education. A four-year undergraduate programme may lead to a degree “with Research” upon successful completion of a substantial research project. Students will also have the flexibility to choose major and minor subjects.

Common entrance examination: Admissions to higher education institutions will be streamlined through a common entrance examination conducted by the National Testing Agency. The test will be optional rather than mandatory.

Strengthening digital education: A National Education Technology Forum will be established to enhance digital learning, and e-courses will be offered in eight regional languages to expand access and inclusivity.

Internationalization of higher education: Institutions will establish International Students' Offices to attract and support foreign learners. India will be promoted as a global study destination, and top 100 foreign universities will be permitted to set up campuses in the country under a special regulatory framework.

Advantages of the NEP- 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces several progressive measures aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of education in India. Board examinations for Classes 10 and 12 are designed to become less stressful by focusing on the assessment of core competencies rather than rote memorization, and students will have the opportunity to appear for the examinations twice. An independent regulatory authority will oversee both public and private schools to ensure uniform standards. Moreover, the policy removes rigid distinctions among academic streams, extracurricular activities, and vocational education, promoting a holistic approach to learning. Some key advantages of the policy include:

- Emphasis on practical understanding and experiential learning instead of rote memorization.
- Promotion of a scientific temper and critical thinking skills from an early age.
- Facilitation of the establishment of high-quality higher educational institutions aligned with global standards.
- Enabling reputed foreign universities to establish campuses in India, thereby providing students with international exposure without studying abroad.
- Strengthening and promoting value-based education within the academic framework.

Challenges in the implementation of NEP- 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a far-reaching reform of India's education system. Although it outlines an ambitious vision for transformation, its effective implementation faces several significant challenges. The major concerns include:

Resource allocation: The policy calls for substantial financial investment in infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum redesign, technology integration, and research. Ensuring sufficient financial resources remains a significant challenge, especially in view of the fiscal limitations faced by both the central and state governments.

Teacher recruitment and training: NEP 2020 underscores the importance of qualified and professionally trained teachers. Recruiting competent educators and ensuring continuous professional development—especially in remote and underserved regions—poses a serious challenge.

Curriculum transformation: The policy proposes comprehensive curriculum reforms aimed at promoting skills, critical thinking, and creativity. Integrating these changes into the existing system requires careful planning, capacity building, and sustained effort, making the transition both complex and time-intensive.

Language concerns: The policy advocates the use of the mother tongue or home language as the medium of instruction up to Class V to strengthen foundational learning. While pedagogically beneficial, implementing this in a linguistically diverse country like India poses practical challenges. Developing quality teaching materials and ensuring adequate teacher proficiency across numerous regional languages remains a significant hurdle.

Expansion of universities: With nearly 1,000 universities currently operating nationwide, the policy's goal of doubling the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education by 2035 demands rapid expansion. Achieving this target would require establishing approximately one new university every week for the next

15 years—an undertaking that presents considerable logistical, financial, and administrative challenges.

School education reforms: The National Education Policy 2020 aims to bring around two crore out-of-school children back into the education system. Meeting this objective over a 15-year period would necessitate setting up nearly 50 schools each week, alongside substantial investment in infrastructure, staffing, and resources—making implementation both ambitious and demanding.

Digital divide: Although the policy promotes the integration of technology in education, a wide gap persists between urban and rural regions and among socio-economic groups. Bridging this divide by ensuring equitable access to digital devices, reliable internet connectivity, and digital literacy is essential to fully leverage technology in education.

Centre-state coordination: Since education is a concurrent subject in India, both the central and state governments share responsibility. Effective coordination and policy alignment across states are crucial for uniform and consistent implementation.

Stakeholder engagement: The success of NEP 2020 depends on meaningful collaboration among key stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, teachers, students, parents, and civil society. Building consensus, resolving differences, and fostering partnerships are vital to achieving its objectives. Addressing these challenges will require sustained effort, strong political commitment, and collective action. Realizing the transformative vision of NEP 2020 and ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for Bharat is a long-term endeavour that may take years to fully reshape the Indian education system.

Part II

The educational vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya, particularly his philosophy of Integral Humanism, finds a nuanced reflection in the National Education Policy 2020. While NEP 2020 is not explicitly derived from his writings, its intellectual orientation resonates with several core principles he articulated regarding human development, cultural rootedness, and societal harmony. Upadhyaya's concept of Integral Humanism emphasizes the balanced development of the individual—integrating physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. This finds a parallel in NEP 2020's shift away from rote learning toward a holistic, multidisciplinary education system. The policy encourages flexibility in subject choices, critical thinking, and creativity, aiming to nurture well-rounded individuals rather than mere economic agents.

A key aspect of Upadhyaya's thought is the importance of cultural continuity and indigenous knowledge systems. NEP 2020 reflects this through its strong emphasis on promoting Indian languages, traditional knowledge, and local

contexts in education. By advocating for mother tongue instruction in early education and integrating classical knowledge traditions, the policy aligns with his vision of education rooted in India's civilizational ethos. Furthermore, Upadhyaya's stress on self-reliance and decentralized development resonates with NEP's focus on vocational training, skill development, and institutional autonomy. The policy's encouragement of innovation, entrepreneurship, and local engagement mirrors his belief in empowering individuals and communities to achieve sustainable development.

In essence, NEP 2020 embodies a synthesis of modern educational goals with traditional philosophical insights. Although shaped by multiple influences, its alignment with Upadhyaya's ideas underscores a broader ideological continuity—one that seeks to harmonize global competitiveness with national identity and holistic human development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, drawing upon Indian knowledge traditions, ideas of Deendayal Upadhyaya and other prominent philosophers the NEP 2020 presents a new educational vision for modern India by introducing comprehensive and progressive reforms in the country's education system. The policy aims to align India's education framework with global standards while preserving the nation's cultural values and diversity. Through significant structural changes, a strong focus on foundational learning, promotion of multidisciplinary higher education, improvement in teacher education, and the introduction of innovative assessment systems, NEP-2020 seeks to create an inclusive, flexible, and learner-centered education system. However, the successful realization of this vision largely depends on its effective implementation. This requires the active involvement of all stakeholders, adequate financial support, well-trained teachers, proper infrastructure, and strong coordination between the central and state governments. Despite certain challenges, if implemented effectively, NEP-2020 has the potential to transform India's education system and contribute significantly to the country's social, intellectual, and economic development in the years ahead.

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Assessing the contributions of the two revolutionary compatriots of Bihar- Baikuntha and Yogendra Shukla

Shreya Singh

ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the vibrant landscape of revolutionary nationalism in Bihar, tracing its transformation from a cradle of non-violence into a formidable bastion of militant resistance against British colonial rule. While the 1857 Mutiny provided the initial impetus, the study focuses on the “second phase” of the movement, which emerged from the widespread disillusionment following the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922. At the heart of this analysis are the life trajectories of Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla and his uncle, Yogendra Shukla, two pivotal figures whose transition from Gandhian ashrams to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) epitomizes the radicalization of Bihar’s youth. Through a meticulous review of archival records, official reports, and revolutionary literature, the paper explores the strategic operations of the Golden League Society and the intellectual influence of socialist ideologies. It provides a detailed account of the Shukla duo’s involvement in political dacoities, jailbreaks, and the high-profile assassination of the state witness Phanindranath Ghosh—an act that immortalized Baikuntha Shukla as a martyr. By juxtaposing Baikuntha’s supreme sacrifice in 1934 with Yogendra’s long-standing career as a socialist leader in post-independent India, the research underscores the multifarious nature of patriotism and the enduring legacy of Bihar’s revolutionary spirit in the struggle for Indian independence.

Keywords: Militant Nationalism, Bihar Revolutionaries, Indian Independence Movement, Agitation, Colonial Rule.

Introduction

“Fumes of revolution awaken,
the consciousness in deepest slumber,
For death becomes the reason to live,
and adolescence only a number”.

The canvas of revolutionary movement in Bihar is dyed with varied colors of intrepidity, courage, enthusiasm and highest degree of patriotism. The land of Bihar which once cradled the Buddhist and Jain Philosophy of peace and non-

violence, roared ferociously against the uncouth and anarchical rule of Colonial Empire. The young and the passionate populace of Bihar not just displayed veracity and endearment for freedom but also happily sacrificed their young lives for the motherland. The first war of Independence or 1857 mutiny acted as a guiding light for the young men and women who were not satisfied with the non-violent ways of offering resistance. Exemplary contributions made by Kunwar Singh, Pir Ali Khan, Babu Amar Singh, Ugrasan, Jiten, Daood Miyan, Ganauri Khalifa and many other martyrs of 1857 mutiny motivated the spirit of revulsion amongst the People of Bihar. Formation of Golden League Society in 1906 in Deogarh acted as a stepping stone as it gradually became a hub of anti-British activities carried by the Indian Revolutionaries. The society used to operate from Sil's lodge in Deogarh. It was rented by Barindra Kumar Ghosh from its original owner Devendranath Sil. It was often used by the society to manufacture empty bomb cockles. Literature too played an important role in developing an understanding of revolution, revulsion and resistance among the literate Bihari masses (Desai 2014). It is evident from an official report discussing the revolutionary activities in Ramgarh session of the Congress in Bihar that the revolutionary literature such as- communist party's cyclostyled pamphlets such as- Communist, The Proletarian Path, Join the communist party of India and a hindi edition of the History of the Communist party of the Soviet Union Bolsheviks were distributed during the session. Along with these, copies of Jamshedpur speech of Jayprakash Narain printed in Hindi and other languages were also found. The report further elaborated that the congress session has invariably been used by extremist elements to distribute objectionable literature and execute their anti-war revolutionary propaganda. Another report was issued by Governor-in-council of Bengal in in early 1920's regarding the clandestine publication houses running in Bengal and Bihar. The report refers to those papers the tendency of which was to recruit the youth of Bengal to hate the British and as a result of that hatred, they were motivated to commit violent offences against the English officials residing in India. The principal papers referred to were: Narayan, Sankha, Dhumketu, Jugantar, Atma Shakti, Prabartak, Nava Sangha, Bijali, Bangavani, Sarathi, Pravasi, Prabhati, Tarun, Mukti kam and Sonar Bharat. It has been estimated that third/fourth of the space in the Sarathi and Mukti Kam and one/fourth of the space in the Atma Shakti and Tarun was taken up by articles having a direct or indirect tendency to incite violent hostility against Government and the British.

Inauguration of Hajipur Ashram in 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi further motivated the progress of revolutionary ideology in Bihar as the place a meeting point for many revolutionaries such as- Baikuntha Shukla, Akshayvat Rai, Deepnarayan Singh, Basawan Singh, Suniti Singh, Yogendra Shukla and many others. It is this place which felicitated the rise of Baikuntha Shukla and Yogendra Shukla as revolutionary nationalists.

This research paper has scrutinized the multifarious programmes conducted and executed by the revolutionary groups of Bengal and Bihar with special reference to the activities propitiated by Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla and Yogendra Shukla. Several archival records have been consulted while compiling the manuscript along with some well-researched Journal articles and books published by Bihar Archives as commemorative volumes. Baikuntha and Yogendra Shukla arrive at the center stage of second phase of revolutionary activities which was fomented by the calling off of Non-Cooperation Movement by Mohandas Karamchanda Gandhi. They became the members of Hindustan Republican Association in 1920 and it was their association with this establishment that shaped them to become two great revolutionary protagonists of Bihar. They revolutionary who were filled with the rare attributes of fearlessness, unwavering dedication and truthfulness towards their motherland.

Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla and Yogendra Shukla

“Their real freedom is not within the boundaries of security,
But in the high roads of adventures,
Full of the risk of new experiences.”

– *‘Nationalism’ by Rabindranath Tagore (Tagore 2021)*

Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla is usually remembered as the one who killed Phanindranath Ghosh, the traitor who became a witness to the British Government in Lahore conspiracy case. However, there is more to his character than the revered crown of martyrdom he received and which can still be a source of inspiration. He was a product of the second phase of revolutionary movement in India which was the result of postponement of non-cooperation movement after Chauri-Chaura incident of 1922. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who wanted to appeal to high court against the death sentence issued for Baikuntha Shukla quoted that, India needs young men like Baikuntha. And it is quite evident that a few thousands like Baikuntha can push out the British government from Indian soil (Mishra 2013). Similarly, Yogendra Shukla was counted among the most intrepid of the revolutionaries who had such strong physical and mental strength that he was feared by the British also. The adulthood of Yogendra Shukla embarked on his life at a time when India was watering the ideals of rebel, resist and reject. It was in the year 1915 when Yogendra Shukla was only an adolescent lad of seventeen years brimming with ebullience, heard the most ardent and stimulating speech of Swami Satyadev Parivrajak. Swamiji spoke in his speech about his abhorrence for slavery and affection towards freedom. He mentioned one incident that happened to him in America “when an American lady proposed him for marriage, to which he responded that he has tied the marital knots with his motherland.” His words were scintillating with the notions of mental, social and political emancipation of Indians. He condemned the Karma theory related to previous birth which was given by pundits and expressed his distaste for the idea of fatalism. He attacked the colonial rule and

also the internal class and caste struggle India was dealing with. This infuriated the young minds of Indian revolutionaries. He asked his listeners to repeat Lord Krishna's message that Man is responsible for his actions. He believed that human race which adorns an independent identity shrug off the dominance of any alien power thriving on its blood. In his famous speech on Bhartiya Swadhinta Sandesh, which was attended by Yogendra Shukla in person, raised the call for Revolution and stated that Resistance to tyranny is an obedience to God.

A peep into Baikuntha Shukla's early life is more surprising than inspiring. He belonged to Muzaffarpur district of Bihar. In a village named Jallalpur, he lived along with his father Ram Bihari Shukla, who was an ordinary poor peasant. Although Baikuntha Shukla wasn't highly educated and his education was limited to the degree provided by village middle school, however he was well-acquainted with the importance of education. He started his career as a teaching professional and used to give free-education to village kids during his leisure hours. Thus, in a way, he was a practitioner of Benthamite theory of Utilitarianism and maintained this attitude of being useful to someone throughout his life. Shaheed Shukla was married at a young age. But the fancy illusions and lofty comforts of a settled married life failed to gratify his bellowing spirits. He was destined to follow the thorny path of revolution, political dacoities and violent resentment against the colonial subjugation.

Almost similar circumstances pervaded over the life of Yogendra Shukla. Born into a humble family of Muzaffarpur on 18th October, 1896, he worked harder to conceive both primary and secondary Education just like Baikuntha Shukla did. However, his motives never coincided with his class mates who studied to secure high paying jobs. He started groping for the meaning of his life after accomplishing his school education. Soon, speeches delivered by various revolutionary leaders and members of Anushan Samiti began to disturb the peace of his mind and he felt drawn towards the ideology of intolerance towards the British rule marshalled by Militant Nationalists. He joined Acharya Kripalini in Banaras in 1917 (NAI 1927). He was so inspired by Kripalini's views on social reform and Nationalism that he became his ardent follower. He actively participated along with Acharyaji in Non-Cooperation Movement started by M.K Gandhi. He even took part in the agitation movement started by J B Kripalini along with nineteen other students of Banaras Hindu University to boycott the coming of Prince of Wales to India. He got involved in revolutionary activities and propagation of Khadi in Banaras and Faizabad. As a result of this he was arrested in Faizabad in 1923 and was sent to Banaras jail where he continued to perturb the British authorities by his ferocious attitude and actions, to quote one- when once he forcibly entered into a water tank of the jail.

The lethargic attitude of congress disgruntled the educated Youth of India. Influence of western literature, revolutionary ideas of Marx, Gorky and others

were poking them to rise from their slumber. Baikuntha Shukla was one such youth who like Yogendra Shukla was young and unable to walk hand-in-hand with the non-violent policies of INA. With the aggravation of political turmoil in the country and hatching of various revolutionary parties, it became impossible for Baikuntha Shukla to keep calm. He sold off his lands and moved to Gandhi Ashram, in Hajipur, along with his wife to participate in Gandhi's civil disobedience movement. Initially, ideas of peaceful resentment, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience appeared persuasive to him. But soon he began to realize that his aptitude has higher degree of appreciation for revolutionaries.

After the dismissal of Non-cooperation movement Yogendra Shukla too went to Sabarmati Ashrama and worked with Gandhiji, but like Baikuntha Shukla he too failed to satiate his spirits with the principles of non-violent freedom struggle. His mind became restless and he left Sabarmati Ashram, only to live his life for a couple of years as a vagabond. Around, 1927 he met Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Rajendra Lahiri and Sachindra Bakshi and made Hajipur his working place as a revolutionary. He later became the most prominent member of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (Das Gupta 1956). From the personal account of a revolutionary named Raj Mahendra Prasad, it can be inferred that it was Yogendra Shukla who taught shooting to Bhagat Singh in the forests of Bettiah. He started to get indulge in various raids and dacoities to accumulate enough funds, arms and ammunitions. V.D. Savarkar, in one of the issues of *Abhinav Bharat* has explained the right motive behind these raids and dacoities, followed by the murder of British officials and Zamindars. He has stated that, "Intention of Revolutionaries wasn't to kill anyone but to make a loud noise, so that the deaf can hear". Revolutionaries believed that a violent struggle propagated, in order to restore legitimate rights through which the maximum good is possible to the maximum people, is a virtuous act. Thus, Yogendra Shukla committed many political dacoities with the object of purchasing arms and ammunition in order to fulfill the needs of the party. So, regular confrontations with revolutionary leaders like- Bhagat Singh, Kedarmani Shukla, Chandra Shekhar Azad and especially Yogendra Shukla convinced Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla to join Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. He was deeply influenced by Yogendra Shukla's ideologies of revolution and freedom. He was mesmerized by the ferocious acts of bravery committed by him in all his raids to collect resources for the party. Yogendra Shukla committed his first dacoity on November Nine, 1928 at Bazidpur in Dalsingsarai, looted twenty-five thousand and shot dead one of the inmates of the house (NAI 1940). Again, he carried out the looting raid in Garaul in which his name was convicted as the main accused after the confession of one of the revolutionaries involved in the dacoity named, Anant Kurmi. One of the most important political dacoities committed by Yogendra Shukla and his party was the Maulania dacoity conducted in the house of Bauk Mahto of village Maulania under Bettiah Police station on June 7, 1929, in which ornaments amounting to Rs.1200 were stolen

and one man was killed. The convicts of Maulania dacoity were revealed to the British again by two revolutionaries called Raghuni and Man Mohan Baneerji, who surrendered before the colonial Government. However, such events failed to daunt the spirit of revolution burning in the hearts of revolutionaries like Yogendra Shukla and so the party led by Shukla conducted two more raids at Jhajhra and Dheluaha. They looted Rs.7000 at Jhajhra and cash and ornaments of worth Rs.10000 at Dheluaha. Amidst this, an arrest warrant was released against him on 3rd July, 1929 because of his involvement in Maulaniya robbery in Champaran district. He, somehow succeeded in preventing himself from getting caught and was simultaneously ebullient in conducting his duties as a revolutionary. He was also the main player in the jail break plan drafted by Chandrashekhar Azad to rescue Bhagat Singh and others from Lahore jail.

These episodes boldly depicted the selfless service Yogendra Shukla was doing for the freedom of his motherland and it inspired not only Baikuntha Shukla to fight but the youth all across the country. During one of the many incidents associated with civil disobedience movement, Baikuntha Shukla too got arrested but was subsequently released after Gandhi-Irwin pact on March 5th, 1931. This was a turning point in the life of Baikuntha Shukla as there after he became a member of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and All India Republican Association. At Hajipur Gandhi Ashram, a centre of Hindustani Seva dal was opened under his guidance. An official document highlighting the prominent position of Hindustani Seva dal states that, two articles were enclosed and appeared in the issue of ADVANCE, dated 25th and 27th October, 1931 respectively (NAI 1940). The appeal was issued by Dr. N.S Hardiker, organizing secretary of the Hindustani Seva dal to all provincial congress committees and all Seva Dals and was for the recruitment of six thousand well-trained, well-disciplined and efficient soldiers to fight the battles of India in the manner in which congress working committee wanted. The appeal further suggested that inauguration of instructor's training camp was to be done and the sole aim of these training camps would be to train six thousand Indian Sainiks. Two hundred fifty was the number of Sainiks allotted to Bihar. Baikuntha Shukla thus became busy in training these young men in his camp at Hajipur. Anyone interested to join his camp was subjected to a rigorous test of dedication and determination. He used to nail down their hands to measure the degree of affection and loyalty towards the country running in their young blood. Those who failed weren't taken as members of the revolutionary group. The next level of test was more difficult than the previous one, because Shaheed Shukla used to ask the participants to succeed in one more task for final selection. The task which used to deter most of the youngster from joining the revolutionary group was getting shot at the hands. Such trials and tribulations were conducted to provide the participants with a glimpse of the inhumane treatment they could receive once caught. Such hues of determination and intrepidity ornamented the stature of Shaheed Shukla.

Meanwhile, Yogendra Shukla was arrested on Eleventh June, 1930 for carrying out violent conducts of loot and murders and was sentenced to twenty-two years of imprisonment. When he was in Chapra jail, his trial was fixed to take place on 25th July, 1930 in his cell itself (Dasgupta 2011). Great resentment was expressed by the political prisoners sharing the cell with Shukla and they all demanded that the trial should take place in the open. This lucidly reflects the popularity Yogendra Shukla had among the fellow revolutionaries. Another episode which justifies his revered stature among the militant nationalists is the trial of Maulania Dacoity Case. It was opened on April 18, 1931 inside the premises of Motihari jail and the Indian Republican Society of Darbhanga circulated a leaflet to rich men for contribution towards a fund in order to meet the expenses of the trial. Also, Letters were smuggled out of jail directing the revolutionaries to supply revolvers, ammunitions, rope, swords, chloroform and money to facilitate the jail break attempt of revolutionaries at Motihari jail. The plan failed and Yogendra Shukla was transferred to Bhagalpur Central jail (Sampath 2021). Later, in December 1932, Shukla was sent to Cellular jail at Andaman, where he persuaded five other revolutionaries to pursue hunger strike to express their resentment against the inhuman conduct reflected by jail officials. The strike continued for forty-six days and became a national news. In 1937, he was released after Shri Krishna Singh and his first Congress ministry took up the cause of political prisoners and staunchly demanded their release. On account of the untiring efforts laid down by Shri Krishna Singh, Yogendra Shukla was released in March, 1938.

Although in jail, Yogendra Shukla was in constant touch of revolutionary activities carried out across India and inside the premises of Hazaribagh jail he planned something which made Baikuntha Shukla immortal for generations to come and the entire establishment of Revolutionary Group became indebted to him for his sacrifice. And the event that made Baikuntha, a mortal, immortal was the killing of Phanindranath Ghosh. Ghosh, after his statement ascertaining the convicts of Lahore conspiracy case as murderers, was declared a traitor among the community of revolutionary nationalists. Initially, Chandrasekhar Azad chose Bhagwan Das and Sadashiv Pulkar to punish Ghosh with death (Waraich 2015). An attempt was made by Bhagwan Das and Pulkar to kill Phanindranath Ghosh in the premises of the court itself, however they failed in their attempt. It was during these heated hours of aggression and indignation; Baikuntha Shukla planned his visit to Hazaribagh jail. His motive was to discuss the status quo with Yogendra Shukla, who was in imprisonment there. Yogendra Shukla encouraged Baikuntha Shukla to kill Phanindranath Ghosh or each and every revolutionary will be killed because of him. The hour demanded prompt action else the idea for which hundreds and thousands of revolutionary freedom fighters embraced death will die too. Baikuntha Shukla along with Chandrama Singh of Shahabad district, Rambinod Singh, Ramdeni Singh, Suraj Narayan Singh and many other revolutionary freedom fighters started making more boisterous efforts to perturb the British administration. Revolutionaries

circulated the slogan,” either to bear the taint or wash it off” (Srivastava 1988). Several rounds of meetings were conducted to discuss and decide the punishment to be given to Phanindranath Ghosh. Each and every member was enthusiastic to volunteer himself or herself for the holy task of cleansing the revolutionary community of a traitor. At last, decision was taken through a lottery and Baikuntha Shukla’s name came in.

On ninth November, 1932 Phanindranath Ghosh was attacked by Baikuntha Shukla, who absconded after hurting him with a sharp weapon. On seventeenth November, 1932 Ghosh succumbed to his injuries and died. British Government took offensive actions against the murderers of Phanindranath Ghosh as it wanted to dilute the vehement efforts of revolutionaries and intimidate their determination with the face of stringent legal actions. Several search parties were created, many innocent revolutionaries were imprisoned and torturously questioned, all possible suspects were taken into custody and all evidences were conspicuously examined to reach the conclusion that the convict was Baikuntha Shukla. After one-and-a-half-year long tribulation, Baikuntha Shukla was martyred on fourteenth May, 1934 and his last words were ‘*Bande Mataram*’ (Sarkar 2012). He was so fearless even after getting acquainted with the news of him being given death punishment that when another revolutionary Kishori Prasanna Singh came to meet him in jail, Baikuntha Shukla asked him to conceive the feeling of happiness and release himself from the grief of personal loss as his friend is going to die for the sake of his country and he has delivered his duty sincerely. Two lines of a poem which he sang before Singh was, “the plant of freedom mustn’t dry up, so! We are nourishing it with our blood.”

Yogendra Shukla, after his release from the prison in 1938, again entered into the arena of Politics following his release and continued to support the revolutionaries’ activities carried out by militant nationalists. He was a key player in Civil Disobedience Movement started by M.K Gandhi and the Hazaribagh jail break episode of his life, in which he absconded along with Jayprakash Narayan in 1942 and walked a distance to Gaya with Jayprakash Narayan on his shoulders is an immortal chapter of the glorious history of Indian Militant National Movement. He embarked on a new role as a Socialist Politician in Post-Independent India when he joined Praja Socialist Party as a member in 1950’s. Antecedently, he was elected a member of All India Congress Committee in 1938 but he later joined the Congress Socialist Party. In 1940, he undertook the membership of All India Kisan Sabha in place of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (Singh 2011). He was not only a great revolutionary but the attributes of a great political leader was also imbibed in his character. Being a Socialist, he never led an extravagant life and his salary as a party member was used for the multifarious activities carried out by the party. His peaceful demise took place on 19th November, 1960 leaving him alive in the hearts of every Indian.

Conclusion:

Lives of Shaheed Baikuntha Shukla and Yogendra Shukla the two Bihari compatriots from the same family left their indelible reminiscences on the easel of history of Indian Independence. These two moderately educated men were moulded in the furnace of struggle and their demeanour were guided by the inner voice of their conscience. Both of them forbade themselves to follow the footsteps of easy patriotism and chose the harder one which led straight to the noose.

The fledgling years of Baikuntha and Yogendra Shukla were the period they worked under the umbrage of Gandhiji's non-violent Philosophy. However, the calling off of Non-Cooperation movement became the reason of their despondency. The turning point in their lives came when they became the members of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and began to envisage an Independent India derived from the sacrificial blood of revolutionaries. Baikuntha and Yogendra Shukla shared familial bond and Yogendra Shukla was Baikuntha Shukla's uncle. They worked in tandem to achieve the single goal of freedom.

However, Baikuntha Shukla didn't live enough to breathe in the air of Independent India and received martyrdom. Yogendra Shukla enjoyed a long career as a Socialist politician of post-Independent India. A comprehensive study of his political career could suggest the ideological tussles and innumerable political, economic and social issues that engulfed the post-Independent India, such as- communalism, student's agitation, Indian Kisans and their resentment to name a few.

“Two roads diverged in a wood and,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

The aforementioned lines penned down by Robert Frost explicitly unfolds the sentiments which may have guided these two youngsters of tender age to have relinquished all their materialistic desires and purse the thistly path which however was difficult but garlanded them with immortality.

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Political ecology of land and forest rights in Himachal Pradesh: between conservation and community rights

Devender Sharma & Baldev Singh Negi

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex interplay of land and forest rights in Himachal Pradesh, challenging the binary of ‘encroachment’ versus legitimate occupancy. Tracing the state’s land governance from colonial settlements to post-Independence reforms, it highlights how policies like the Nautor Land Rules (1968) and Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act (1972) empowered marginalized communities, only to be undermined by the Forest Conservation Act (1980). The latter reclassified customary land as forests, criminalizing long settled cultivators. The Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) aimed to rectify historical injustices but faces poor implementation, with only 16.7 percent of claims granted as of 2025. Drawing on historical, legal and ecological perspectives, the paper critiques the states’ rigid enforcement which disregards customary rights and prior allocations. It argues for a nuanced approach that recognises subsistence driven settlement, integrates the FRA effectively and halts evictions pending judicial review. By reframing ‘encroachers’ as heirs of historical land use, the paper advocates for a right-based, inclusive governance model that balances ecological integrity with social justice.

Keywords: Forest Rights Act, land reforms, Himachal Pradesh, encroachment, forest governance

I

Introduction and theoretical framework

In the past decade, India’s forest landscape has encountered a critical juncture. Although the Forest Survey of India (2011) asserts that forest cover remains stable at around 21% of the country’s total area, ground realities show otherwise. Key wildlife species like tigers are vanishing from these forests (Tiger Task Force 2005), and significant forest tracts are being diverted for infrastructure and other development projects (Das 2012), resulting in the displacement of indigenous forest communities (Sahu 2008). While the government touts the success of participatory forest management initiatives (Singh et al. 2011), local populations are increasingly asserting their legal rights to manage forests, often facing strong resistance from the forest bureaucracy (Joint Committee 2010).

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Consequently, the conversation around forests has evolved from how to protect or restore them to broader and more complex issues like identifying key stakeholders, determining who should lead decision-making, understand the rights of external parties, and clarify the procedures for converting forest areas to other uses. These concerns now encompass rights, duties, governance mechanisms, and the need for transparency and accountability. Such debates have intensified both in the context of preserving forests for biodiversity and converting them for alternative purposes. These complexities mark a significant departure from the relatively simpler forestry discussions of the 1980s and 1990s.

Policy shift and community response

India's forest policy discourse prior to the 1990s can largely be categorized into two overarching phases. The first phase began under colonial rule and continued through the first two post-independence decades. Colonial forest policy—though not uniform across time and space—was predominantly geared toward maximizing revenue and serving industrial needs (Guha 1989; Guha and Gadgil 1989). Additionally, it played a role in state formation (Sivaramakrishnan 1999) and echoed the colonial mission of “civilizing nature” (Philip 2004). The institutional framework it developed was technocratic, emphasizing exclusive state control over forests and the regulation of commercially important forest products. These policies sparked resistance in various regions, some violent, such as in Uttarakhand (Guha 1989) and Jharkhand, and others non-violent, like in the North Canara region (Nandkarni et al. 1989). Communities challenged state authority through petitions, legal battles, and public advocacy, emphasizing forests' importance for local livelihoods and asserting traditional rights. These struggles occasionally resulted in localized policy concessions such as the creation of Van Panchayats in Kumaon (Agarwal 1999), recognition of *khuntkattidar* rights in Jharkhand (Upadhya 2005), and *sopinabetta* entitlements in North Canara (Saberwal and Lele 2001).

The second phase of forest debate took shape in the 1970s with the emergence of the Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalayas, which reignited national-level discussions on environmental and forest issues. While ground-level protests spread beyond Garhwal to regions like Jharkhand (Anonymous 1979; Das 1991), the central concern echoing earlier tensions remained the contest between state authority and community rights in forest governance (Guha 2012). However, the state's response diverged significantly from earlier concessions. Instead of granting rights to Garhwali communities, the government imposed blanket bans on tree cutting above certain altitudes, thereby exacerbating hardships for locals. In Jharkhand, community protests against state control over commons and forest management practices that prioritized teak over locally valued *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) were met with violent suppression (Corbridge and Jewitt 1997). The state's response took the form of technical fixes—namely,

Social Forestry programs in the 1980s. These aimed to boost tree planting on non-forest lands (usually pasturelands controlled by the revenue department) to counter a perceived fuelwood shortage, without addressing the deeper questions of rights and governance.

Debates on forest conversion

A related but evolving issue in both colonial and post-1970 contexts has been the conversion of forest land to alternative uses. Agriculture-versus-forestry debate, with a clear policy bias in favor of expanding cultivation to increase the land revenue. Despite internal frictions between the forest and revenue departments, the preference for labelling forested areas as “wastelands” reflected the colonial state’s agricultural agenda. After independence, the tension intensified. To sidestep politically challenging land reform, many state governments began allocating common lands—including forests—to the landless. This practice gained further momentum under national programs like “Grow More Food,”¹ introduced to address food shortages and an expanding population.

In 1970s, environmental concerns were rising more prominently. One narrative emphasized the ecological functions of forests at the macro level, including the idea that deforestation in the Himalayas was causing floods in the Ganga plains (Myers 1986). The Chipko movement was increasingly interpreted not as a struggle for livelihood rights, but as a grassroots effort to protect nature (Agarwal et al. 1982). This reframing influenced the government’s actions, leading to the imposition of a moratorium on tree felling in hilly regions above 1000 meters in elevation and on steep slopes in what is now Uttarakhand. Another major policy shift was the reclassification of forestry from a state subject to a concurrent one, giving the central government more authority. The most far-reaching response was the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) in 1980. This legislation mandated central approval for converting forest land to non-forest uses. Initially, the FCA served to curtail widespread and populist allocation of forest lands, which had reached alarming levels in the 1970s about 150,000 hectares annually (Damodaran and Engel 2003, p.6). The Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Act in the Godavarman case expanded its scope, a development welcomed by conservationists (Dutta and Yadav 2005).

Rise of wildlife and biodiversity conservation

A third significant aspect has come to the forefront in forest policy since the 1970s one that was nearly absent during the colonial era: the explicit inclusion of wildlife and biodiversity conservation objectives. With global declines in wildlife throughout the 20th century, India too experienced mounting concerns regarding species loss. This led to the rise of conservation efforts in the early 1970s, often initiated in a top-down fashion and led by former sport hunters who had reinvented themselves as conservationists (Rangarajan 1996).

Forest policy of 1952 and commercial forestry

India's first national forest policy² after independence, formulated in 1952, continued the colonial-era marginalization of local community claims. It asserted that proximity of a village to a forest should not interfere with the country's right to exploit forest resources for national benefit. Despite its rhetoric about ecological benefits, in practice the policy entrenched commercial forestry for urban and industrial markets as the central objective for the next three decades. This commercial orientation led to large-scale transformation of diverse forest ecosystems into monoculture plantations, severely disrupting local livelihoods and accelerating biodiversity loss under the guise of scientific forest management. In 1970s, protests emerged across the country like in Uttarakhand with the Chipko movement and in other regions such as Bastar and Jharkhand, against the industrial-scale logging and conversion of natural forests into monocultures. Unfortunately, legislative reforms introduced in the 1970s and 1980s failed to adequately respond to these grassroots concerns.

Legal shifts, evictions, and the forest rights struggle

The enactment of the Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980, following the 1976 constitutional amendment that moved forests to the Concurrent List (Down to Earth, 2023), Centralised the control over forest land use, marked a turning point in forest governance. The Supreme Court's Godavarman judgment 1996³ further intensified state control by applying the FCA to all land fitting the dictionary definition of forest. Tensions escalated with the MoEF's 2002⁴ eviction order, which led to mass displacements over 152,000 hectares. Despite a clarifying circular later that year, evictions continued, triggering national protests. This momentum gave rise to the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD),⁵ which demanded recognition of long-standing customary rights. Their advocacy culminated in the landmark Forest Rights Act, 2006, a corrective to decades of exclusion and centralised control.

Forest rights act (FRA) 2006

The FRA 2006 marks a turning point in Indian environmental and social legislation when parliament acknowledged the historical injustice caused by the creation and consolidation of state-controlled forests, which excluded and dispossessed indigenous and traditional forest-dwelling communities. Crucially, the Act recognizes that the rights it confers come with responsibilities such as the sustainable use of forest resources, the protection of biodiversity, and the maintenance of ecological balance. This framing strengthens forest conservation by reimagining it as a shared duty between the state and local communities. At the same time, it challenges the prevailing model of exclusionary, centralized forest governance, opening the door for democratic, community-based forest management. A total of 51.23 lakh claims were filed under the Forest Rights

Act, 2006, of which only 25.11 lakh titles amounting to approximately 49 per cent have been distributed (MoTA, 2025).

II

Land and forest rights in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh presents a complex and layered picture when it comes to land use, forest governance, and agrarian rights. Out of the state's total geographical area of approximately 55.67 lakh hectares, around 37.03 lakh hectares or 66.5% is officially designated as forest land, according to the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (2013). However, this administrative classification diverges significantly from the ecological reality. The Forest Survey of India (2021)⁶ notes that only 15.43 lakh hectares, or 27.7% of the total area, is actually under tree cover. Among these forested areas, 20.5% are categorized as very dense forests, 46% as moderately dense, and 33.5% as open forests. This reveals that nearly 58.3% of the land legally classified as forests lacks any substantial tree cover. Much of this includes high-altitude zones, rocky terrains, and snow-bound regions where natural tree growth is limited. The disjuncture between legal definitions and ecological realities is not unique to Himachal Pradesh but mirrors national patterns where forest categorization is more administrative than ecological. This disconnect has serious implications for governance, land rights, and conservation, especially when large tracts of so-called forest land are unavailable for community use or ecological restoration.

Simultaneously, the pattern of agricultural land use adds another layer of complexity. As per the Agriculture Census 2015-16, Himachal Pradesh has 9.96 lakh agricultural holdings spread over 9.44 lakh hectares, which accounts for roughly 17 per cent of the state's total area. However, only 5.56 lakh hectares, about 10%, is considered actually cultivable. With such limited arable land, forest and commons have historically played an important role in supplementing subsistence farming and livelihoods. Yet, the long-standing issue of forest land occupation for agriculture and habitation remains unresolved, despite the enactment of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. This legislation legally recognizes pre-2005 occupations of forest land for livelihood purposes under Section 3(1), and lays out a clear process for identifying eligible claimants. While the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in the state, especially in non-tribal areas has been marred by procedural delays, administrative neglect, and legal ambiguity. As of June 1, 2025, under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), Himachal Pradesh received a total of 6,000 claims, of which 683 (approximately 11%) were for Community Forest Rights (CFR) and 4,883 (around 81%) were for Individual Forest Rights (IFR). However, only 1,000 titles have been distributed so far, 146 for CFR and 662 for IFR, indicating a low overall distribution rate of about 16.7% (MoTA 2025).

It is important to revisit the state's land reform history to understand the landscape of contestation and control. The state's evolution from a semi-feudal princely configuration into a modern administrative unit profoundly influenced its approach to land redistribution. The state Himachal Pradesh came into existence on April 15, 1948, after the merger of 30 princely states and attained full statehood in 1971. Its agrarian structure was shaped by exploitative land tenure systems. Local rulers, under the influence of colonial land revenue regimes, acted as superior landlords (*malik-i-ala*),⁷ while peasants were relegated to the status of inferior holders (*malik-i-adna*),⁸ bound by practices like *beggar*-unpaid forced labor. Systems like *Bhaichara* and *Pattadari* governed land in collective and ancestral frameworks, while regions such as Shimla had the *Bethu* system, in which peasants toiled both for their subsistence and the rulers' profit. Kangra, in particular, exhibited classic *Zamindari* patterns, with over 700 large estates recorded before reforms. These exploitative systems fueled the need for post-independence legislative action to secure land rights and dismantle hierarchical ownership structures.

The first wave of land reforms in Himachal Pradesh drew from broader national strategies. Early laws such as the *Punjab Tenancy Act, 1887*,⁹ and the *Punjab Tenants Security of Tenure Act, 1950*,¹⁰ were applied through legal adaptation. However, it was the *Himachal Pradesh Abolition of Big Landed Estates and Land Reforms Act, 1953*,¹¹ that marked a real turning point. Influenced by the *1949 Kumarappa Committee recommendations*,¹² this legislation aimed to abolish intermediaries, enforce land ceilings, and secure tenancy rights—particularly for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who make up over a quarter of the state's population. This was followed by other key laws, including the *PEPSU Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act, 1955*,¹³ and the *Punjab Security of Land Tenure Act, 1953*.¹⁴ Later reforms consolidated these efforts with the *Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972*,¹⁵ which formally abolished intermediary ownership and conferred proprietary rights on approximately 3.8 lakh tenants. *The Himachal Pradesh Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1972*,¹⁶ and the *Himachal Pradesh Village Common Lands Utilization Act, 1974*,¹⁷ further aimed to restrict land accumulation and enhance access to resources for the rural poor.

An important redistributive instrument during this period was the Himachal Pradesh *Nautor Land Rules, 1968*. These rules sought to formalize the allocation of government wastelands—excluding reserved forests and urban zones—to landless and economically weaker households. Applicants could receive up to twenty bighas, while a 1975 amendment empowered *Tehsildars* to quickly sanction up to five bighas. While initially a powerful tool for social equity, the *nautor* land policy soon collided with forest conservation laws, particularly after the *Forest Conservation Act (FCA) of 1980*. This Act centralized forest governance and retroactively curtailed community access to land that had previously been distributed through state policy. Many of these lands were not

classified as forests at the time of allocation, yet subsequent enforcement efforts have treated such occupants as illegal encroachers. These ambiguities have become a major source of legal conflict and grassroots resistance, especially where livelihoods depend on lands now subject to eviction orders.

Another dimension of conflict emerged from the *Himachal Pradesh Village Common Lands Vesting and Utilization Act, 1974*. While the act intended to redistribute *Shamlat* or common village lands for the benefit of the landless, it also effectively removed community control over commons, placing them under state jurisdiction. Many of these lands were later reclassified as forests, despite their historical usage for grazing, agriculture, and forest produce collection. This reclassification has not only undermined local autonomy but also created friction with newer rights-based laws such as the *Forest Rights Act, 2006*. The FRA recognizes a range of individual and community rights over reserved forests, protected forests, grazing lands (*charagahs*), and even national parks. The FRA's promise has been undercut by poor implementation and legal contradictions.

The contemporary debate on land encroachments must therefore be situated in this broader historical and legal context. Many of the so-called encroachments today are better understood as legacies of legally sanctioned land settlement schemes or customary land use, made vulnerable by shifting definitions and conservation mandates. Pre-1980 *nautor* grants, for instance, were legal at the time, and reflect the state's own policies for addressing landlessness and marginalization. However, these same lands are now being targeted in eviction drives following High Court orders and forest department enforcement. Such actions disregard the legal nuances and social realities shaping these settlements, threatening the existential livelihoods of small farmers and orchardists, whose state-sanctioned practices are now deemed illegal without due process or compensations.

The issue of land and forest rights in Himachal Pradesh cannot be reduced to simplistic binaries of legality and encroachment. It reflects a long continuum of historical injustice, legislative reform, administrative contradiction, and ecological misclassification and to truly address these challenges, a more nuanced and participatory approach is needed one that honors both legal entitlements and the lived realities of those who have been depended on these lands for generations.

III

Early land settlements and the shift in land rights

Land reform has played a central role in India's rural development strategy since the early years of its planned economy, and Himachal Pradesh-created through the integration of 30 princely states and attaining full statehood in 1971-aligned itself early with this national agenda. In line with the First Five-Year Plan, the

state introduced a series of land reform measures aimed at dismantling entrenched feudal structures and ensuring agrarian equity. The foundation for this transformation, however, was laid much earlier during British rule. Between 1882–88 and 1916–17, the colonial administration conducted the first formal land settlements, classifying land into two broad categories: cultivated or common lands, and non-cultivated lands. Cultivated lands-known as *Dehat* in British-administered regions and *Shamlat* in princely states-were communally used by villages and supported grazing, house construction, and the collection of fuel wood and fodder. These uses were based on customary rights that required no formal documentation, and were widely accepted as legitimate entitlements. In contrast, non-cultivated areas were categorized as Reserved Forests and brought under state control for timber extraction or conservation under the emerging colonial forest regime.

After independence, Himachal Pradesh built on these traditions by implementing the concept of “*Nautor*” -allocating common village or grazing lands to landless families, often in tracts ranging from 5 to 20 *bighas*. These allocations were largely drawn from village commons and targeted the most marginalized communities, including Dalits and tribals. However, with rising population pressure and shrinking land availability, more grazing lands were repurposed into *Nautor* lands without being replaced by alternative commons or forest lands. This pattern, observed in many parts of India, raises ethical and ecological concerns as forest lands are diverted for livelihood or development needs without corresponding rehabilitation or planning. A major shift occurred with the 1974 land settlement, which fundamentally changed the state’s approach to land rights. Where earlier land use had been accepted on the basis of oral testimony from community leaders like *Lambardars* or *Pradhans*, the new settlement required formal, written documentation for all land claims-effectively invalidating centuries of customary usage. This shift mirrored a nationwide move from decentralized, community-rooted land governance to more centralized, bureaucratic regimes, epitomized by the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.

The 1974 settlement process was not just a legal transformation, but also marked by administrative violations. Instead of consulting legitimate Panchayat heads, handpicked individuals were designated to sign off on land classifications, often bypassing the broader community. This contradicted principles of natural justice and due process, particularly because once land rights had been acknowledged by the District Collector, they could not be revoked without proper legal procedures. Furthermore, earlier policies such as the “Grow More Land” campaign of the 1950s had explicitly encouraged people to cultivate village wastelands, and a 1952 government circular had even allowed the use of such land without prior permission. Retroactively labeling these lands as encroachments, decades later, is both legally questionable and historically inconsistent.

The role of Patwaris in this context is significant. These local revenue officers have been conducting *Girdawari* (land inspections) every six months for decades, recording the crops and trees planted on various parcels of land. If orchards or crops have been cultivated on a piece of land for 40–50 years under the state's continuous observation, this inaction amounts to tacit approval. The communities involved have invested labor, money, and hope into these lands, turning them into productive farms and orchards. Sudden eviction notices, often framed in the language of forest conservation, overlook this longstanding relationship between people and land.

Recent eviction drives targeting these long-settled populations pose a serious challenge to constitutional principles. They violate Article 14 (equality before law) and Article 21 (right to life and livelihood), especially when carried out without meaningful consultation or legal redress. The state must act immediately to halt such actions and seek a judicial review, particularly in the Supreme Court, to reconcile past policies that encouraged land use with present enforcement mechanisms that criminalize it. The broader tension between forest conservation laws and the lived agrarian reality is starkly visible in Himachal Pradesh. Just as the Forest Rights Act (2006) was passed to remedy historical injustices faced by forest-dependent communities across India, Himachal must similarly revisit its land governance history. The state's own legislative instruments, the Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, the Nautor Land Rules, and the Ceiling on Land Holdings Act were all designed to empower rural communities and promote equity. However, their objectives are increasingly at odds with top-down conservation regimes that ignore the ground realities of land use. The nullification of customary rights, especially those unrecorded but historically recognized, undermines both the spirit of constitutional justice and the logic of prior governance.

This contradiction is not merely theoretical, in tribal regions like Kinnaur, for instance, the nautor rules of 1968 and 1975 were adapted to meet local needs, and tribal communities actively engaged with the process. Land was formally applied for and allocated through proper bureaucratic channels, making these entitlements not just traditional but also legally sanctioned. These reforms strengthened community land rights and helped fulfill the constitutional promise of equality. Simultaneously, a less formal but equally significant redistribution occurred after the abolition of princely states. Fearing land ceiling laws, many ex-Rana and Rajput elites informally transferred land to tenant families, servants, and relatives. These transfers, though rarely documented, created de facto landholding arrangements, socially accepted within villages and often lasting decades.

Upper Shimla, which emerged as the apple belt of India in the 1980s, offers another example of this disconnect. With political encouragement and growing demand for horticulture, large tracts of forest and wastelands were cleared to establish apple orchards. Much of this cultivation began just as the FCA came

into effect, making it technically illegal but it was politically protected and widely practiced. Over time, these orchards became permanent, productive landholdings, yet they still lack legal recognition under forest laws, rendering orchardists vulnerable to eviction or harassment.

In Kangra, the legacy of bonded labor also intersects with informal land tenure. The 'pau' system tied landless laborers to landlords in exploitative arrangements. With the advent of land reforms, many former 'pau' laborers started building homes and cultivating land that had once been part of their servitude. These communities gradually transitioned into informal tenure holders, with the tacit acceptance of local authorities. However, recent legal enforcement actions have begun targeting these long-settled populations as encroachers, ignoring the historical, social, and economic context of their occupancy.

Rather than viewing land occupancy through a rigid legalistic lens, policies must incorporate historical practices, customary use, and social equity. The FRA offers a valuable framework in this regard, recognizing that rights rooted in tradition and livelihood are not less valid because they were never formally recorded. Himachal Pradesh, with its unique blend of historical settlements, community land systems, and post-independence reforms, is in a strong position to lead the way in rights-based, inclusive land governance.

IV

Post-1980: land conflicts in Himachal Pradesh

The FCA 1980, nullified decades old customary use, informal settlements, and even state-sanctioned distribution of land through earlier programs like Nautor in some cases. The consequences of this centralization became evident in regions like Kinnaur, where more than 90 individuals, many from Scheduled Tribe communities, were served eviction notices in 2015 under the Public Premises Eviction Act. These individuals challenged the notices in court, invoking the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, a legislation specifically meant to address historical injustices faced by forest dwellers. As per the online portal of forest department i.e., Monitoring of Forest Encroachment Eviction System (MoFES) there are 12,271 cases of encroachment have been detected across the state, out of which 5,712 cases (about 35%) have been decided, and 4,520 cases (around 29%) have resulted in eviction. The total area of encroachments detected is 4,28,279 hectares, of which 4,00,836 hectares (nearly 94%) have been evicted. However, only 8.6 hectares of the evicted land have been used for plantation or closure, indicating that post-eviction land restoration is extremely poor (Forest Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2025). This led to cutting of the green and fruit bearing apple plants in district Shimla regions. This eviction drive took place against the backdrop of encroachment identification initiated under the pretext of regularisation during the BJP regime in 2000, when

approximately 167,339 farmers across Himachal Pradesh applied for the regularisation of about 24,502 hectares of encroached land—an initiative reportedly encouraged by the then state government to garner electoral support ahead of the assembly elections (DoEST, 2009).

Rethinking ‘encroachment’

The issue of so-called “encroachments” in Himachal Pradesh is deeply rooted in the complex history of land reforms, administrative lapses, informal land transfers, and survival strategies adopted by marginalized communities. Rather than viewing these as instances of unlawful occupation, a more historically accurate lens reveals them as the outcome of fluctuating policies and unaddressed claims. From *Nautor* allotments to informal transfers post-princely state abolition, from bonded labourers becoming cultivators in Kangra to apple orchardists in Shimla transforming forest slopes into productive farms, the land-use landscape has evolved through lived necessity and tacit state support. However, post-1980 forest enforcement, especially the rigid application of the FCA without accommodating pre-existing rights or implementing the FRA effectively, has criminalized these long-settled communities. This legal dissonance is not just a matter of poor policy but a breach of constitutional guarantees, particularly when communities were earlier encouraged or permitted to cultivate and reside on such lands. Moving forward, state government must recalibrate its legal and policy approaches, recognizing the difference between exploitative encroachments and legitimate, survival-driven settlements.

Halting eviction on the ground of humanity and ecology

A significant judicial intervention came through the Himachal Pradesh High Court’s judgment on 27 December 2018, authored by Justice Surya Kant, which addressed the plight of long-settled cultivators facing mass evictions. The case involved 29 consolidated writ petitions filed by farmers and landless families residing on forest and wasteland parcels for decades. Drawing from past legal precedents, including Justice Kamlesh Sharma’s 2002 ruling in *Poonam Gupta vs. State of HP*, the court emphasized that minor encroachments by the poor, especially those involving shelter or subsistence cultivation, should be regularized rather than removed. The judgment also referred to the 2017 notification issued by the Himachal Pradesh government that called for resolving eviction issues based on humanitarian considerations and prior court directives. Justice Surya Kant noted that the blanket application of the 1952 Forest Department orders, which had classified all wastelands as government property, should have been re-examined by the state, particularly when other states like Punjab had successfully delinked significant tracts of land from forest control to address agrarian and residential needs. The judgment took into account the lived vulnerabilities of these communities, especially in light of frequent cloudbursts and flash floods that destroy not only homes but also cultivable land. The court emphasized that the FCA, although designed to

protect the environment, should not become a tool of social injustice. Notably, it recognized the ecological contribution of apple orchards, particularly the Nand variety, which play a role in carbon absorption. The destruction of such productive land, it argued, was both environmentally counterproductive and ethically indefensible. The judgment ultimately called for a more empathetic and balanced approach that considers both ecological integrity and the dignity of the people who have sustained these landscapes.

Conclusion

The story of land reform in Himachal Pradesh began with promise and initial laws such as the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act of 1972 and the Nautor Land Rules of 1968 were designed to redistribute land to the landless, recognize customary tenures, and shield vulnerable populations from arbitrary eviction. These efforts, inspired by both constitutional principles and post-colonial agrarian justice, aimed to empower *dalits*, tribals, and poor rural families across the state. However, this progressive trajectory was disrupted by the implementation of the Forest Conservation Act in 1980. Though ecologically significant, the FCA overrode previous rights and settlements, reclassifying lands under forest control and rendering thousands of legitimate cultivators as “encroachers.” Compounding this setback has been the incomplete and poorly executed implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in Himachal Pradesh. This dissonance between the original intent of land reforms and current implementation practices underscores the need for a structural course correction. Recognizing and legalizing customary land use, implementing the FRA in both letter and spirit, and halting evictions until due processes are fully exhausted must become immediate priorities. Most importantly, a distinction must be drawn between predatory encroachers and poor, subsistence-level cultivators who have sustained these lands for generations.

Notes

1. The Grow More Food Campaign in Indian history is primarily an initiative aimed at boosting agricultural production, though it encountered challenges linked to tenant activism. Additionally, the campaign is critiqued by Sitapati, who sarcastically points out its inefficacy. This critique emphasizes the larger issues of food distribution rather than merely focusing on increasing production, highlighting the complexities of addressing food security in the context of agricultural initiatives.
2. The National Forest Policy of 1952 marked India’s first comprehensive post-independence strategy for forest management, taking a strongly utilitarian and top-down approach aligned with the nation’s economic goals. It introduced a functional classification of forests into protection forests, national forests, village forests, and tree-lands—without replacing the legal classifications outlined in the Indian Forest Act of 1927. The policy set an ambitious target to increase forest cover to one-third of India’s land area (about 33 %), with differentiated goals of 60 % cover in hilly regions and 20 % in plains. Central to its implementation was the institution of working plans, which were to serve as the principal instruments for scientific, state-level and local forest management endeavors.

3. The *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulkpad vs Union of India* case, initiated in 1996 as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), is a landmark in India's environmental jurisprudence. Filed by retired forest officer T.N. Godavarman, the case addressed the unchecked degradation of forests due to activities like mining and construction without proper clearances. The Supreme Court ruled that diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes is permissible only under strict conditions and with necessary environmental approvals. Over the years, the case has led to numerous directives aimed at forest conservation, including the formation of monitoring committees. It remains ongoing, continuing to influence forest and environmental governance in India.
4. The MoEF order of 3 May 2002 created a wrong impression that evictions had been ordered by the Supreme Court, and massive eviction drives instantly began. Following nationwide protests of tribal communities, the MoEF issued a follow-up order on 30 October 2002 reaffirming the government's commitment to the implementation of the 1990 Guidelines. But due to the misunderstanding that the Supreme Court had expressly ordered the eviction of encroachers, eviction drives have continued.
5. While in the post-independence period multiple acts have been passed for forest, biodiversity, and wildlife conservation in India, none addressed the rights of people from the scheduled tribes (STs) who have been protecting, conserving, and living in the forest for generations. Then, in 2001, the Forest Ministry misinterpreted a Supreme Court ruling and used it to evict 300,000 people from their land over a six-month period. This led to peaceful mass movement by tribal activists, with millions of people marching from the hinterlands to the capital. A Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) brought multiple groups together to demand for a policy to ensure the rights of forest dwellers on forest lands as this eviction threatened about three million tribal families. This collective action led to the passing of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in 2006.
6. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) published the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021, which is the 17th biennial assessment of India's forests. The report indicates an increase in both forest and tree cover compared to the 2019 assessment.
7. *Malik-i-Ala* translates to "King of Kings" or "the great king" in Arabic, and is often used as a title or honorific, particularly in historical and religious contexts. It can refer to a specific ruler, but also can be a general term for a high-ranking individual.
8. *Malik-i-Adna* refers to the inferior owner in a system where land ownership is divided between superior and inferior owners. In essence, the "adna malik" is the one who directly cultivates or possesses the land, while the "ala malik" is the superior owner. This concept is relevant in the context of land tenure systems where rights are split between different parties.
9. Punjab tenancy act is a land reforms law which deals with relationship of landlord and tenant. Before that law tenant was being exploited as there was no security of possession to the land for tenants. In 1868, first time right of occupancy was granted to the tenants. Now, the Punjab Tenancy Act, 1887 provides for the same right of occupancy, with modification, to the tenant.
10. The Punjab Tenants (Security of Tenure) Act, 1950, was enacted to provide security of tenure to tenants and regulate land tenures in Punjab. It aimed to protect tenants from arbitrary eviction and fix maximum rent. The Act was later repealed by the

- Punjab Security of Land Tenures Act, 1953, which consolidated and expanded upon the provisions for land tenure reform.
11. The Himachal Pradesh Abolition of Big Landed Estates and Land Reforms Act, 1953, aimed to abolish large landholdings and reform land tenancy laws in Himachal Pradesh. The Act, also known as the Himachal Pradesh Abolition Act, was enacted with the objective of transferring land ownership to the actual tillers and implementing agrarian reforms.
 12. The 1949 Kumarappa Committee, officially the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, was established to analyze India's agrarian structure and recommend reforms. The committee, chaired by J.C. Kumarappa, proposed measures like abolishing intermediaries (like zamindars), reforming tenancy laws, and imposing ceilings on landholdings. These recommendations aimed to eliminate exploitation of cultivators and ensure land ownership for tillers.
 13. *Pepsu Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1955*, required that the petitioner should plant an orchard within the prescribed time. If he does so, he is entitled to the exemption even if he has failed in his attempt provided that he has not altogether abandoned it. The existence of the orchard, later on or at the time when the Commission was going into the matter, would be of no relevancy. This does not mean that in order to get exemption the petitioner may plant an orchard and later do away with it and start cultivating the land, but it also does not mean that if the petitioner does plant an orchard and for no fault of his the plants do not survive and he persists in his effort to plant an orchard he would lose his right merely because at the relevant time either the trees which are standing on the land are not old enough to come to the conclusion that the orchard was planted within the prescribed period or that in his repeated attempts to raise an orchard the trees are of a very young age at the time when the Commission inspects the orchard.
 14. *The Punjab Security of Land Tenure Act, 1953*, is a piece of legislation in Punjab that aims to regulate land ownership and tenancy in the state. It defines key terms like landowner, small landowner, permissible area, and tenant, and establishes rules for land reservation, permissible area selection, and tenant rights. The act also addresses issues such as rent, ejection, and land transfers to ensure fair land management practices.
 15. Himachal Pradesh, established on 15 April 1948, by merging 30 princely states, holds Special Category State status due to its hilly terrain, low population density and financial challenges. Renowned for its scenic beauty, the state has become a sought-after destination for land purchases. However, this demand led to exploitation, with outsiders persuading local farmers to sell land at undervalued prices, leaving many landless. To protect local interests, *the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972*, particularly Section 118, prohibits non-agriculturists from acquiring agricultural land in the state. While effective in safeguarding local farmers, the provision has faced criticism for being overly restrictive, allegedly hindering fundamental rights, business opportunities and development. Its inclusion in the Ninth Schedule further shields it from judicial scrutiny, fuelling debate.
 16. *The Himachal Pradesh Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1972*, limits the maximum amount of land an individual or family can own in the state. It was enacted to protect local residents and regulate land ownership after Himachal Pradesh's formation. The

Act has been amended several times, including to grant equal property rights to daughters and to exempt certain entities from the ceiling.

17. The Himachal Pradesh Village Common Lands Vesting and Utilization Act, 1974, aims to vest village common lands in the State Government and regulate their utilization for the benefit of the community. It extinguishes individual rights over these lands while providing a framework for their management and potential allotment for specific purposes.

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Study of environment and pollution of Bagheri and Pandiyana villages of Solan in Himachal Pradesh

Raj Pal & Anjali Verma

ABSTRACT

An upsurge in the pollution level in areas of cement factories in Himachal Pradesh is a matter of concern. The present study takes into consideration the impact of Bagheri cement plant in Solan district with focus on: 1. health of people living near the plant, 2. on human settlements, 3. on the vegetation. For the purpose of this study, stratified samples of population were collected from two nearby villages. Accurate particulate matter measurements were obtained from the HPSPCB. Also, official websites of government and cement plant was taken into consideration. Information regarding health status and diseases was collected through house-to-house interviews and medical receipts of various hospitals and dispensaries. During the field survey, photographs were taken of dust-covered houses, trees and bushes. The present research derived following conclusions: 1. Exposure to cement dust increased human health risks, 2. Human settlements were affected due to the dust and pollution and it resulted in migration of local population, 3. Thick layer of cement dust on plants resulted into stunted growth of vegetation in the area.

Keywords: Air Pollution, Bagheri, Cement plant, Environment, Health, Settlement, Himachal Pradesh

Introduction

Cement is an important material for infrastructure needs and is manufactured in small and large factories. During cement production, various emissions effect the atmosphere, such as CO₂, NO₂, SO₂, particulate matter (Le et al., 2025, p.1; Salazar-Rojas et al., 2025, p.1), which result into larger impact on the environment (Belaid, 2022, 1), vegetation, human health and the property in some way or the other (Farmer, 1993, p. 65; Abdul-Wahab,2006, p. 339;Isikli et al., 2006, p. 1547; Gao, et al., 2016, p. 553;Souza Zorezenao et al., 2024, p. 2). Recent studies and research have also identified cement industry as one of the polluting industries, and it is the root source of many dangerous human diseases. In different studies done on various cement plants at Pan-India level found in their study that cement dust is potentially harmful to the environment and it directly affects vegetation and human population. (Shukla et al. 2008,p. 34 and

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2013, p. 337; Ramesh et al. 2014, p. 155; Bildirici 2020, p. 2256; and Mishra et al. 2021, p.109)); Richard and few others showed in their research that long term exposure to cement dust affects the functioning of lungs and liver in humans (2016, p. 6). Common diseases occurred by cement are asthma, BP, lung cancer, itching, TB, ischemic heart disease, eye irritation etc. (Attri & Kalia, 2017, p. 15). Additionally, fine particulate matter poses health risks to adults and children (Mallongi et al., 2023, p. 52). Air pollution, particularly fine particulate matter, is a severe environmental and public health threat (Sudhakar and Reddy, 2023, p. 8; Mudgal and Chelsami, 2024, p. 44; Chamchalam et al., 2025, p. 5331). These studies conducted on various cement plants underline the fact that cement industries are affecting human health and vegetation. Given the substantial production capacity of Himachal Pradesh cement factories, particularly the large-scale plant in Bagheri, understanding the environmental and health implications of particulate matter emissions is crucial. Present study strengthens the claims made in previous studies.

Methodology

The main objective of the present research remained: a) to notice and register the effects of cement plant on the health of the people, b) to check the influence on human settlements in and around two km radius of the cement plant, c) to check the impact on nearby vegetation. For the purpose of this study, stratified population samples were collected from two nearby villages falling within a two km vicinity of the cement plant during 2021-2023. The sample consisted of a total of one hundred fourteen respondents. The sample included both the gender. Also official websites of government and cement plant was taken into consideration. For few quarries, RTI was also sought from company and various government agencies. Under the field survey an attempt was made to collect information about the environment and residents' condition of mainly two villages namely Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri). For the better understanding of the issue, several previously done studies in various parts of the country were also taken into consideration. As a research gap it was found that no concrete study of this newest cement plant in Himachal Pradesh was conducted considering its impact on vegetation and population, hence it remained a case of observation for the present study.

Study area

The present study was undertaken in the vicinity of Bagheri Cement Works (Bagheri & Pandiyana (Tikri), Nalagarh, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India). It is one of the biggest cement plants of Himachal Pradesh. Jaypee Himachal Cement Limited (Grinding & Blending Unit, Bagheri) was established in 2010 by Jaiprakash Associates Limited (JAL) and Jaypee Cement Corporation Limited (JCCL) at Pandiyana (Tikri) village. Jaypee Himachal Cement Limited (JHCL) has been merged with UltraTech Cement Limited (UCL) vide order dated 17.08.2017 (HPDI, RTI-498, 1). Now it is a unit of UCL and today running

successfully with its present nomenclature Bagheri Cement Works, UltraTech Cement Limited. It is situated about 10 kilometers (kms) from the nearest railway station Kiratpur Sahib (Punjab).

Details of villages studied

Two villages around cement plant have been selected for analysis in the study, namely Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri). These are located at different distances from the plant. The distance of Bigheri village is one kilometer (km) and of Pandiyana (Tikri) village is 0.050 kms from the cement plant. The nearest village to cement plant is Pandiyana (Tikri). The total area of the Bagheri village is 199 and Pandiyana (Tikri) is 368 hectares. The total population of Bagheri village is 1074 and a Pandiyana (Tikri) village is 1094 on the basis of the 2011 census (422). The total sample size for the study is 114 respondents (two of each family), and out of this sample 71 were male and 41 were female respondents. Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri) villages are located on the same road leading to the cement plant.

Amount of Particulate Matter in Ambient Air and its Effect on Human Health

The pollutants suspended in the atmosphere in the form of solid or liquid phase are Particulate air pollutants, i.e., suspended particulate matter (SPM). Particulate Matter (PM) is classified as PM10, PM2.5, PM1 and dust (Desai et al., 2023, p. 87). Gaseous pollutants are sulphure dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂).The number of polluted particles in the air is measured by the National Air Quality Index (NAQI). The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has assigned itself the responsibility of daily monitoring of air quality in various cities. NAQI measures how airborne particulate matter affects human health (CPCB Report 2019, 83). A brief overview of particulate matter concentrations in ambient air and their impact on health is given below (Table 1).

Table 1: Particulate matter in ambient air and its effects

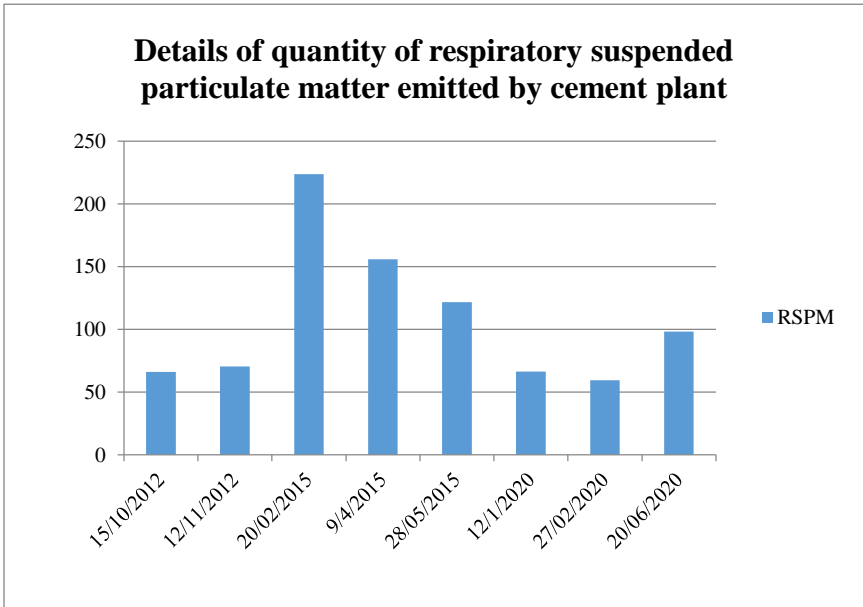
Air Quality Index	Particulate Matter (PM2.5) ug/m ³	Particulate Patter (PM10) ug/m ³	Health Impact
Good (0-50)	0-30	0-50	Minimal
Satisfactory (51-100)	31-60	51-100	Minor breathing discomfort to sensitive people
Moderately polluted (101-200)	61-90	101-250	Breathing discomfort to asthma patient, elderly & children
Poor (201-300)	91-120	251-350	Breathing discomfort to all
Very poor (301-400)	121-250	351-430	Respiratory illness on prolonged exposure
Extremely Bad (401-500)	250+	430+	Serious impact on people with heart & lung disease

Source: CPCB, National Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Statistics and Trends 2019, Central Pollution Control Board, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India.

Results and discussion

Details of the spatial distribution of particulate matter levels around the residential areas of the cement plant

Fig.1: Details of the quantity of respiratory suspended particulate matter emitted by cement plant



Source: Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board data from 2012-2020 sought through RTI

Bagheri Cement Works currently produces 2.0 million tons of cement annually. Various fine particles are emitted during cement production (Abril et al., 2014, p. 154)..These particles easily become airborne and can be carried long distances by wind, causing widespread environmental pollution (Salazar-Rojas et al., 2025, p. 1). Its impact on the human population and vegetation can be measured in years gone by, approximately ten to fifteen years after cement plant establishment. A summarized data regarding the quantity of particulate matter emitted into the atmosphere of the surrounding areas by cement plant on different dates of different months of year has been collected from Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board Regional Office Baddi through website, officials and RTIs, the details of which are given in the above Fig. 1.

Looking at the data shown in Fig. 1 above, the amount of air pollutants (such as fine particles PM_{2.5} ug/m³, PM₁₀ ug/m³) emitted by cement plant in areas was 66.08 (PM)ug/m³ on 15-10-2012 (HPSPCB, RTI/2024-2122. p. 1), 70.48 (PM)

ug/m³ on 12-11-2012 (HPSPCB, RTI/2024-2122.p. 2), 223.70 (PM) ug/m³ on 20-02-2015 (HPSPCB, RTI/2023-4858. p.2), 80.81 (PM) ug/m³, 156.02(PM) ug/m³ on 09-04-2015 (HPSPCB, RTI/2023-4858. p. 18), 121.80(PM10) ug/m³ on 28-05-2015 (HPSPCB, RTI/2023-4858.p23), 66.36(PM) ug/m³ on 12-01-2020 (HPSPCB, RTI/2024.p.62), 59.56 (PM) ug/m³ on 27-02-2020, 98.27 (PM) ug/m³ on 20-06-2020. The concentration of PM was recorded highest in year 2015 i.e., 223.7ug/m³ and lowest in the year 2012 i.e., 66.08ug/m³. With reference to table 1, this ratio is higher than the prescribed standards. Higher proportion of particulate matter have demonstrated a consistent and strong association with health-related morbidity, mortality, and reduced life expectancy (Abdul-Wahab, 2006, p. 339; Attri & Kalia, 2017, p.12; Sudhakar & Reddy, 2023, p.8; Salazar-Rojas et al., 2025, p. 1). These studies clearly indicated that the amount of particulate matter affect the surrounding environment and human health.

Environmental impact due to cement plant among the respondents

Under the field survey, an attempt was made to enquire from the local residents what changes took place in the environment after establishment of a cement plant in the selected area and how the surrounding environment was affected. A question posed to interviewers has been tabulated in table 2 along with related data that has been collected.

Table 2: Environmental impact due to cement plant among the respondents

Questions asked from the respondents	Total respondents	Yes	No	Don't know	Good	Bad	Good-Bad Both	Healthy	Unhealthy
what do you think about this plant	114	-	-	15	-	45	54	-	-
Impact of dust & smoke emitted by cement plant	114	78	-	35	-	-	-	-	-
Depletion of cultivable	114	59	-	45	-	-	-	-	-
Crops are being adversely affected	114	61	-	53	-	-	-	-	-
Vegetation are being affected	114	65	-	49	-	-	-	-	-
Problems increased due to increase in traffic	114	89	-	25	-	-	-	-	-
Dirtiness increased around this plant	114	83	-	31	-	-	-	-	-
Impacted human health	114	43	-	71	-	-	-	-	-
Your health condition	114	-	-	-	-	-	-	84	20
Does any member of your family have any disease	114	51	63	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Field survey (2021-2023)

Present data has been collected from one hundred fourteen local respondents from the two selected villages Bagheri and surrounding areas of Pandiyana (Tikri) during 2021-2023. During the field survey, several photographs were taken from various locations around the cement plant in which we found that cement plant has affected the surroundings environment, is shown in fig. 2a, b, c, d below. Various studies have reported serious hindrance to vegetation growth due to the impact of cement dust. Cement dust directly affects crops and plants due to the accumulation of dust on them and hinders their growth (Farmer, 1993, p. 65; Shukla, 2008, p. 34, and 2013, 337; Ramesh et al., 2014, p. 155). A clear reduction in vegetation growth was observed around Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri) villages, with cement dust covering crops and trees (fig. 2a, b). According to local residents, at the time of harvesting, it causes burning sensation in the eyes and itching on the hands.

Fig. 2: Views showing the surroundings environment of the cement plant (continued)



Fig.2a: Cement dust accumulated on the crops



Fig.2b: Growth of Banyan tree



Fig.2c: Deposition of dust on trees and grasses



Fig.2d: Dust deposited on temple

Increasing filth and traffic are causing problems in the villages of Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri), which are located on the same road leading to the cement plant. They experience heavy traffic of both small and heavy vehicles daily. The dust and smoke emanating from the cement plant and from vehicular traffic

keeps accumulating on the Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri) village houses (fig. 2c). The Shiva temple (fig. 2d) is located in Tikri Pandiyana village, near the cement plant. The white marble on top of the temple appears discolored because cement dust has accumulated on the white marble. Apart from the cement plant, there are no other industrial units in the area that could be considered sources of pollution. It is also not highly urbanized. The areas and vegetation around the cement plant and highway are greatly affected by their polluting emissions. Chaturvedi has conducted similar survey on Chunar Mirzapur industrial area that includes cement plant as well. Its impact on two adjoining areas, Banaras Hindu University and Chunar Mirzapur carries the similar observation (Chaturvedi et al., 2013, p. 389) as present study on Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri).

In addition to this, even human health is at risk. Referring to Fig. 1, the concentration of particulate matter was recorded highest in the year 2015 i.e., 237.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. If the amount of particulate matter in the atmosphere exceeds the prescribed standards, it will affect human health, as mentioned in the Table 1. Local residents made it clear that patients suffering from asthma, lung cancer and respiratory diseases etc. have difficulty in breathing due to cement dust and smoke. Previous studies done on ACC Barmana cement plants have shown that patients suffering from BP, itching and eye diseases are also affected by the smoke and dust, since the cement industry is associated with high dust emissions causing ischemic heart disease, respiratory diseases and other diseases (Attri & Kalia, 2017, p. 15). Present study supplants the previous observation, though done on different cement plant. On the other hand, local residents spent almost their entire life in their community, and hence they are exposed to polluted particles on a daily basis, so local residents are susceptible to such diseases. Various studies prove that living in a polluted environment is harmful to health (Abdul-Wahab, 2006, 339; Beig et al., 2010, p. 2; Richard et al., 2016, p. 6; Zorezenao et al., 2024, p. 2), hence present study further corroborate the research done on other cement plants by researchers.

Residents of Bagheri and Pandiyana (Tikri) also regretted that no effective steps were taken by the cement plant towards environmental protection. Contrary to it, the documents and official records received from plant office show that new technologies are being used in the cement plant to prevent environmental pollution. Although efforts have been made by the plant to reduce its harmful effects on the environment, the amount of particulate matter pollution in the air has still been found to be higher than prescribed standard (shown in Fig. 1), and in 2012, Himachal Pradesh High Court (HPHC)/Green Court, while disposing of a public interest litigation (No. 15 of 2009, No. 586 of 2010), imposed a fine of Rs 100 crore on the Jaypee cement plant for gross violation of environmental laws and other irregularities (HP High Court, 2012), confirming that their efforts to curb environmental pollution are ineffective. Also, no new plantation was observed in these areas to reduce pollution through better tree-cover. It could

also have reduced cement dust entry into natural soil. The environment and communities in the areas surrounding the cement plant are also not immune to the effects of particulate matter.

Conclusion

The objective of the study was to assess the impact of the existing cement plant on the environment and nearby community. The study concludes that the exposure to cement dust increased human health risks. Secondly, human settlements were affected due to the dust and pollution. Thirdly, thick layer of dust on plants had resulted into stunted growth of vegetation. Several newspaper reports forced government and management to look for an extensive plantation to reduce the effect of dust up to certain level. Though in-principle agreed, still on ground, neither plantation was done, nor was substantive fine imposed for non-performance of the order. Besides few local migration, rest of the people do not want to leave the place and are forced to live in highly polluted areas. For development, we need better policies based upon symbiotic relations where collective efforts of government and state could lead to better living environment for population and vegetation.

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Revisiting the Indian conception of nation: a study through Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of integral humanism

Sharda Verma & Prem Lata

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of the nation in Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism, which offers a distinctly Indian perspective on nationalism. Grounded in the concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat*, Upadhyaya's framework seeks to integrate individuals who share common cultural roots while emphasizing the unity of human consciousness. *Chiti* represents the intrinsic collective consciousness of a nation that binds people through a shared cultural essence, whereas *Virat* denotes the external manifestation of that consciousness through social institutions, cultural expressions, and collective achievements. By analysing these concepts, the paper highlights Upadhyaya's cultural and spiritual understanding of nationalism and contributes to a broader understanding of cultural unity within a diverse society.

Keywords: Culture, Nation, Chiti, Virat, Cultural Spirituality and Nationalism, Hindu nationalism.

Introduction

Nationalism has played a crucial role in shaping the idea of the nation, making it necessary to first clarify the meaning of the term. The word *nation* originates from the Latin term *nasci*, meaning "to be born," and its interpretation varies across cultural, political, and psychological dimensions. Culturally, a nation consists of people connected through shared language, religion, traditions, and historical experiences, though internal diversity may exist. Ethnic and cultural communities often form the foundation of national identity. Politically, a nation refers to a group that perceives itself as a unified political community and often aspires to sovereign statehood. Psychologically, nation formation reflects the human need for security, identity, and belonging, leading individuals to associate with others who share similar cultural backgrounds (Heywood, 2013, pp.108–110).

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Scholars have generally explained nations through two broad perspectives. One views the nation primarily as a cultural community shaped by shared traditions, values, and historical memory. The other interprets it as a political construct formed through institutions, governance, and power relations. Anthony D. Smith defines a nation as a “named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and memories, a public culture, a unified economy, and common legal rights and duties for its members” (Smith, 1991, p.14), emphasizing its cultural basis. Alternatively, some scholars view the nation as a community united by shared characteristics and the aspiration to govern a territory regarded as their homeland (Barrington, 1997). In this view, national identity is partly constructed through political processes that cultivate a collective awareness among people in a particular territory (Antonisch, 2015).

Because of this political interpretation, the concept of a nation is often confused with that of the state, and the terms are frequently used interchangeably. Deendayal Upadhyaya, however, distinguishes clearly between them. According to him, the state is the institutional and visible expression of the nation, whereas the nation itself is a timeless cultural entity characterized by a shared history, purpose, and collective consciousness. States may emerge or disappear due to territorial changes, but nations endure because they are rooted in the shared consciousness of a cultural community. Thus, the state exists primarily to serve the nation and facilitate the realization of its goals (Shastri, 2008, p.51).

Upadhyaya advocates a form of cultural nationalism that views the nation as an organic and enduring entity. In his view, nations are not artificially created but evolve gradually through historical and cultural processes. Just as individuals possess a unique nature, each nation develops a distinct cultural character shaped by its traditions and environment. Upadhyaya regarded the Indian nation as fundamentally spiritual in character (Upadhyaya, 1971). He conceptualized *Chiti* as the inner essence or soul of the nation, rooted in *Dharma*, which signifies moral duty and righteous conduct. This national consciousness manifests in the collective sentiment and devotion toward the motherland shared by the people. When organized collectively, this consciousness finds expression in *Virat*, the dynamic and institutional manifestation of national life.

This paper is organized into three sections. The first examines major theories concerning the origin of nations. The second explores Deendayal Upadhyaya's conception of the nation as an alternative to Western theories, focusing particularly on the concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat*. The third section analyses the practical implications of his cultural conception of nationhood (Khimta, 2018).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology combining philosophical analysis with a critical review of existing literature. It draws on the works of scholars such as Barrington, Smith, and Antonisch to construct a theoretical

framework that integrates cultural and political perspectives on nationhood. Within this framework, the study examines Deendayal Upadhyaya's concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat* to interpret national identity from an Indian philosophical perspective. It also compares these ideas with major theories of nationalism, focusing on the distinction between nation and state, cultural unity, and collective consciousness, while assessing their relevance in contemporary Indian political discourse.

Objectives

1. To examine Indian alternative frameworks to Western conceptions of the nation.
2. To analyse Deendayal Upadhyaya's philosophical interpretation of the Indian nation through the concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat*, and assess their practical implications.

The origins of nations and nationalism: associated theories

Nations and nationalism are historically significant concepts that have profoundly shaped societies and cultures across the world. In examining the origins of these ideas, Anthony D. Smith identifies three major approaches: primordialism, modernism, and ethno-symbolism. A long-standing debate exists over whether nations should be understood primarily as cultural communities or as political communities. Proponents of the cultural perspective argue that shared culture forms the foundation of national identity, whereas advocates of the political perspective view nations as products of political consciousness and organization. Primordialism maintains that nations are a natural and enduring feature of human existence, suggesting that people possess an inherent attachment to their nation and that nations have existed since ancient times. However, critics argue that this approach struggles to explain why such attachments arise and how collective identity among members of a nation is formed (Antonsich, 2015).

The primordial approach views the nation primarily as a cultural community. Anthony D. Smith elaborates this idea in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), where he introduces the concept of "ethnies" to describe the historical continuity between pre-modern ethnic communities and modern nations. According to Smith, nations are historically rooted in shared cultural heritage, language, myths, and traditions that often predate the emergence of modern states and political independence (Heywood, 2013). He considers ethnicity to be a precursor to nationalism and challenges the claim that nations and nationalism are purely modern phenomena.

In contrast, modernist scholars such as Ernest Gellner argue that nations and nationalism are products of modernity, particularly of industrialization. Gellner contends that the transition from traditional agrarian societies to modern industrial societies produced profound social changes. Industrialization

increased social mobility and competition, creating a need for a new form of cultural cohesion. Consequently, a standardized and homogeneous culture was imposed upon previously localized agrarian communities. This standardized national culture facilitated social cohesion and created conditions favourable for the emergence and spread of nationalism in industrial societies (Gellner, 1983, pp. 34–35).

Modernist perspectives also emphasize the role of the modern centralized and bureaucratic state, particularly its communication and transportation networks, in the formation of nations (Antonsich, 2015). Within this framework, Benedict Anderson conceptualizes the nation as a political community. According to Anderson, a nation consists of people bound primarily by shared citizenship, even though they may differ in cultural or ethnic backgrounds. In his influential work, Anderson describes nations as “imagined communities,” arguing that members of a nation perceive themselves as part of a shared collective despite never knowing most of their fellow members. In modern societies, this shared imagination is largely constructed through education, mass media, and processes of political socialization (Anderson, 1983, pp. 1–8).

A third perspective, ethno-symbolism, attempts to reconcile elements of both primordialism and modernism. While it acknowledges nationalism as a modern ideological movement, it argues that nations themselves have deeper historical roots. Smith suggests that modern nations are built upon earlier ethnic communities whose myths, memories, symbols, and traditions have been transmitted over long historical periods. Nationalist elites often rediscover and reinterpret these pre-existing cultural elements in order to construct modern national identities (Smith, 1991, p. 358).

However, many scholars argue that these theories of nation and nationalism largely originate from European historical experiences and are often generalized through the framework of European knowledge systems. As a result, they are only partially applicable to the nationalist experiences of Asian and African societies. In Asia, nationalism is widely recognized as anti-colonial nationalism, which emerged from collective resistance to colonial domination, particularly under British rule.

Critiquing the universalization of European theories of nationalism, Partha Chatterjee challenges Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community in his essay *“Whose Imagined Community?”*. Chatterjee acknowledges Anderson's argument that nations are not determined solely by sociological conditions but are historically imagined and constructed through processes such as print capitalism in Europe and elsewhere (Chatterjee, 1997, p. 5). However, he questions whether societies outside Europe truly have the freedom to imagine their nations independently if the models of nationalism they adopt are already derived from European historical experiences.

To explain the distinctive nature of nationalism in the colonial world, Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalism first establishes its own sphere of sovereignty within colonial society before confronting imperial power politically. He distinguishes between two domains within colonial society: the material and the spiritual. The material domain includes areas such as the economy, statecraft, science, and technology, where Western powers had already established dominance. In contrast, the spiritual domain represents the inner sphere of culture, traditions, and collective identity, which nationalist movements sought to protect from colonial influence. This spiritual domain, according to Chatterjee, became a defining feature of Asian and African nationalism, serving as a means of preserving cultural autonomy and identity (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 21).

From this perspective, the Indian nation can be understood as rooted in a deep cultural and spiritual consciousness that cannot be controlled by external forces. Similarly, Deendayal Upadhyaya argued that *Chiti*—the collective cultural consciousness of a people—forms the true foundation of a nation, while *Virat* represents its broader social.

***Chiti* and *Virat* as the base of the Indian nation: Upadhyaya's Interpretation**

Deendayal Upadhyaya conceptualized the nation as a living and evolving entity. According to him, a nation develops gradually when a community of people inhabiting a particular territory cultivates a shared sense of identity and belonging. In this sense, the nation represents an enduring and permanent reality, whereas the state is merely an institutional arrangement created to protect and represent the nation. Even in the absence of political authority, the nation continues to exist. As reflected in the traditional idea that “when there was neither kingdom nor king, there was neither punishment nor punisher,” the nation nevertheless persisted as a collective entity. It functions as a self-regulating body that preserves its essential spirit, or *Chiti*, even during periods of foreign domination. The spirit of the nation survives through the cultural traditions of its people, which evolve over time and are transmitted across generations. This continuity highlights the intrinsic relationship between a nation and its cultural identity, emphasizing the role of heritage in maintaining national unity and resilience (Sharma, 2019, pp. 13–15).

Upadhyaya further traces the roots of national identity to the ancient philosophical traditions of India found in the *Darshanik Shastras*. Within this intellectual framework, the concept of *Jati* emerges as a representation of the nation. According to this interpretation, *Jati* is formed through the synthesis of two fundamental elements—*Chiti* and *Virat*—which together shape the collective identity and unity of a nation (Sharma, 2017).

In the framework of *Daishik* political thought, *Jati* is understood as an organic and natural manifestation of society that cannot be artificially created or destroyed by human intervention. At the core of this concept lie the principles of

Chiti and *Virat*. *Chiti*, rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, represents a collective psychological and spiritual disposition that transcends generations. It is not based on biological lineage or familial ties but arises from a shared cultural and spiritual inheritance. In this sense, *Chiti* embodies the fundamental essence of a community and resides within individuals as the highest ideal of collective fulfilment and happiness (Sharma, 2019, pp. 40–46). All other forms of happiness are considered secondary in comparison to this higher collective ideal, motivating individuals to subordinate personal interests for the well-being of the community.

At the same time, *Chiti* is not a static force; it evolves and manifests differently across individuals and generations. It finds its strongest expression within the larger community and is preserved by those who maintain the cultural and spiritual traditions of the society. Essentially, it represents the collective consciousness of the social body. When this consciousness becomes awakened and unified, the community transforms into *Virat*, which represents the organized and active expression of national strength. *Virat* acts as a protective force that safeguards the community from threats and challenges to its integrity. Together, *Chiti* and *Virat* illustrate the dynamic relationship between cultural consciousness and collective action, enabling the nation to achieve resilience and cohesion (Mishra, 2013, p. 293).

According to Upadhyaya, by following the guiding force of *Chiti*, a nation seeks to awaken its *Virat*, which he describes as the *prana* (life force) of the nation. *Virat* represents the collective capacity, strength, and vitality through which national unity and social balance can be maintained. For Upadhyaya, the revival of India's national vitality requires the awakening of its *Virat*, which would enable the nation to reconnect with and rejuvenate its civilizational heritage (Krejick, 2019, p. 382).

Drawing upon the philosophical conceptions of collective consciousness found in Indian *Darshanik Shastras*, Upadhyaya establishes *Chiti* as the foundation of national consciousness. He defines *Chiti* as the psycho-spiritual consciousness that emerges when individuals live in harmony with shared cultural values. It is this collective consciousness that determines and sustains the character and identity of a nation (Kumar, 2023, p. 3502). Every nation, according to Upadhyaya, possesses an inherent quality or *Chiti* that defines its unique national character. This essence is expressed through a nation's *Dharma*, culture, literature, and historical traditions, reflecting the unity of its civilizational experience. In this sense, *Chiti* represents the soul of the nation, enabling all parts of the social body to function harmoniously and strengthening the nation as an integrated whole.

By recognizing and nurturing this shared *Chiti* through commonly inherited cultural values, Upadhyaya believed that both national welfare and the broader

well-being of humanity could be achieved. The national life of India, in this framework, is ultimately guided and shaped by *Dharma*, which defines the moral and cultural foundation of the nation (Sharma, 2019, p. 118).

Upadhyaya's conception of the nation emphasizes cultural unity rather than uniformity. He argued that a shared consciousness could sustain a culturally diverse society without undermining its plurality. His objective was to strengthen national unity by articulating an ideal principle that could bridge cultural divisions and prevent the decline of national cohesion. The concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat*, therefore, form the core of his distinctly Indian interpretation of nationalism, which places emphasis on collective consciousness and spiritual-cultural identity.

This idea resonates with Partha Chatterjee's interpretation of Asian nationalism, which he describes as rooted in cultural spirituality. Chatterjee argues that the cultural essence of a nation exists in an inner spiritual domain that cannot be dominated by external political forces. While Chatterjee characterizes spirituality as the intrinsic feature of Indian society, Upadhyaya conceptualizes *Chiti* as the inner cultural consciousness of the nation. Both perspectives emphasize the primacy of cultural and spiritual foundations over purely political structures in shaping the development of nationalism.

Upadhyaya's concept of a cultural nation: from theory to practice

Deendayal Upadhyaya argued that nationalism cannot be reduced merely to resistance against foreign rule. For him, nationalism represents a deeper emotional and cultural attachment to the motherland. Although a nation may consist of elements such as shared race, religion, territory, traditions, collective experiences, communication networks, and political institutions, these factors alone do not fully capture the essence of nationalism. According to Upadhyaya, the true foundation of nationalism lies in a profound love and devotion to the motherland that binds individuals into a collective national community (Tharoor, 2019, p. 16).

In the political practice of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the idea of a cultural nation was articulated as a civilizational concept. The Jana Sangh maintained that India was not merely a geographical entity but a cultural nation whose identity derived from its ancient civilizational traditions. The party emphasized the continuity of Indian culture and sought to unite the country as a cultural whole. In contrast to Jawaharlal Nehru's emphasis on secular political institutions, the Jana Sangh placed greater importance on cultural institutions as the basis of national unity. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) played a significant role in shaping this ideological perspective by providing organizational support, ideological training, and disciplined cadres that helped propagate cultural nationalism at the grassroots level (Baxter, 1971, pp. 34-43).

Upadhyaya's philosophy of cultural nationalism has also influenced contemporary political organizations such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the RSS. These organizations have embraced his vision of the nation as a cultural and civilizational entity and have worked to promote cultural consciousness in modern India. The RSS seeks to realize this vision through its network of *shakhas*, disciplined volunteerism, and various social service initiatives aimed at promoting social harmony and national integration. In doing so, it presents itself as a grassroots civil society organization dedicated to cultural revival and the strengthening of national unity (Sharda, 2018).

From the RSS to the Jana Sangh, a broader ideological current often described as the "India Right" has consistently promoted the idea of India as a nation rooted in a shared cultural heritage, in line with Upadhyaya's conception of cultural nationalism (Khimta, 2018). This ideological continuity later provided the intellectual foundation for the Bharatiya Janata Party, which inherited both the political legacy of the Jana Sangh and the cultural-nationalist worldview associated with the RSS.

When the Bharatiya Janata Party was formed in 1980, it formally adopted the philosophical ideas of Deendayal Upadhyaya, particularly the doctrine of Integral Humanism. In its manifesto, the BJP described Integral Humanism as the guiding principle of its social philosophy under the section titled "Our Social Philosophy: Rooted in Integral Humanism." According to the party, its social agenda draws inspiration from Upadhyaya's holistic philosophy, which seeks to establish a just society by harmonizing diverse sections of the population and ensuring the development of even the most marginalized members of society (Bharatiya Janata Party, 1998, p. 203).

Within the context of electoral politics, the idea of a cultural nation is often associated with the concept of Hindu nationalism. This interpretation draws partly from V. D. Savarkar's formulation of *Hindutva* in his work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*. Savarkar defined a Hindu as a person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha—from the Indus to the seas—as both his *Pitribhumi* (fatherland) and *Punyabhumi* (holy land) (Savarkar, 1969, p. 113; Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 12). Upadhyaya broadly accepted this cultural definition of the nation but emphasized that the concept of *Hindu Rashtra* is frequently misunderstood. According to him, it does not imply the exclusion of other religious communities. Rather, individuals belonging to different faiths can remain part of the national cultural mainstream while preserving their own forms of worship and religious practices, thereby becoming integral participants in the collective life of the nation (Tharoor, 2019, p. 23).

Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party has successfully established itself as a dominant force in India's mainstream political landscape while drawing ideological inspiration from the idea of a cultural nation. Hindu nationalism has

played a significant role in shaping contemporary political discourse, particularly under the leadership of the BJP. By combining cultural nationalism with a developmental agenda often described as “new developmentalism,” the party has attempted to fill the ideological vacuum left by the declining influence of the Congress Party’s model of secular nationalism. Consequently, political competition in India increasingly reflects a broader ideological contest between secular nationalism and cultural or Hindu nationalism (Vaishnav, 2019, pp. 13–18).

In this political trajectory, the notion of a cultural nation remains a central ideological component. Although Upadhyaya’s philosophical concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat* may not always be explicitly referenced in contemporary political discourse, their underlying principles continue to influence debates on cultural nationalism, Hindu nationalism, and the idea of *Hindu Rashtra*. The ideological framework of the Bharatiya Janata Party illustrates how these philosophical ideas have evolved from theoretical formulations into practical political narratives.

Conclusion

The concepts of *Chiti* and *Virat* articulated by Deendayal Upadhyaya provide a distinctive intellectual framework that challenges the dominance of Western theories of nationalism. Much like the need to question ideological monopolies within Indian politics, Upadhyaya’s thought offers an alternative to the Western-centric understanding of nationhood by drawing upon indigenous philosophical traditions. While European knowledge systems often interpret Asian nationalism primarily as a reaction against colonial rule, Upadhyaya situates the origins of Indian nationhood within the deeper philosophical and cultural traditions of Indian civilization. His interpretation therefore serves as a counterpoint to Eurocentric narratives of nation formation.

At the core of Upadhyaya’s philosophy is the idea that the essence of a nation lies in its shared cultural identity, shaped by its historical experiences, ethical values, and spiritual traditions. This identity is not merely a political construct but a lived experience that creates an emotional and moral bond between individuals and their motherland. Upadhyaya’s vision of nationalism thus extends beyond territorial sovereignty or political unity to encompass a deeper cultural and spiritual cohesion that binds society together through shared values, traditions, and collective purpose.

In this framework, *Chiti* represents the inner essence of the nation—the moral, spiritual, and cultural consciousness that defines its unique identity. It embodies the accumulated heritage of a civilization and distinguishes one nation from another. Upadhyaya argued that a nation can sustain its vitality only by nurturing this inner essence; when a society neglects or distorts its cultural identity, it risks losing its sense of purpose and unity.

Virat, on the other hand, represents the outward manifestation of this inner consciousness. It reflects the collective strength, unity, and organized efforts of the people when the national spirit is awakened. Together, *Chiti* and *Virat* illustrate the relationship between the inner cultural soul of the nation and its external social and political expression.

Upadhyaya's thought therefore integrates the cultural, spiritual, and political dimensions of nationalism into a unified framework. Rather than emphasizing political uniformity alone, his approach highlights the importance of cultural unity and civilizational continuity. In doing so, it challenges purely materialistic or Western models of nationhood and advocates a holistic vision of national development that harmonizes both material progress and spiritual values under the guidance of the nation's *Chiti*.

Within contemporary politics, this conception of a cultural nation has influenced ideological discourse, particularly through the promotion of cultural heritage and civilizational identity. Policies that emphasize the preservation of Indian traditions and cultural values reflect this broader attempt to strengthen national identity through a framework rooted in India's philosophical and cultural heritage.

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Reviving Bharatiya knowledge traditions: Deendayal Upadhyay's vision and the National Education Policy 2020

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines how the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reflects the Bharatiya knowledge traditions envisioned by Deendayal Upadhyaya. Drawing from the principles of Integral Humanism, the study highlights Upadhyaya's emphasis on dharma, cultural rootedness, holistic development, and value-based education. It analyses how NEP 2020 integrates Indian languages, traditional knowledge systems, yoga, Ayurveda, classical arts, and ethical learning into the modern educational framework. The paper finds that NEP 2020 functions not only as an educational reform but also as a civilizational initiative that reconnects India with its cultural foundations while preparing learners for the demands of a globalized world. The study also underscores how NEP 2020 aims to balance indigenous wisdom with scientific inquiry, promoting a model of education that is both culturally grounded and future-oriented. Overall, the policy's approach reflects Upadhyaya's belief that national progress must be rooted in India's civilizational values.

Keywords: Bhartiya Knowledge Tradition, Deendayal Upadhyaya, NEP, Integral humanism, Antyodaya.

Introduction

If national unity is the objective, it is essential to understand the philosophical foundations of Bhartiya nationality and Bhartiya culture, as articulated by Deendayal Upadhyaya in *Rashtra Chintan* (Upadhyaya n.d.). Upadhyaya argued that Bhartiya culture has been historically shaped by Hindu philosophical traditions, which provide a civilizational framework rather than a narrowly religious identity. In this context, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) reflect India's traditional cultural philosophy and social systems, closely aligning with Upadhyaya's conception of Bhartiya culture. The use of the term Bhartiya, rather than Indian, is adopted in this study because the objective of IKS is to focus India's indigenous cultural traditions, philosophical foundations, and

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civilisational heritage. The word Bharat carries deeper cultural and emotional connotations, reflecting a historically rooted identity that resonates with the nation's heritage, values, and traditional knowledge systems. Therefore, the usage of Bhartiya signifies a culturally grounded and civilizational conscious perspective rather than merely a modern political or geographical identity. The NEP 2020 represents the first national-level education policy to promote this Bhartiya philosophical perspective on a large scale by formally integrating traditional knowledge, values, and cultural practices into the mainstream education system. Bharatiya knowledge traditions have long viewed education as a process that focuses on the overall development of the body, mind, intellect, and soul. Rooted in the philosophies of the Vedas, Upanishads, and classical Indian thought, this tradition emphasises ethical values, moral discipline, self-realisation, and harmony between the individual and society. Modern Indian thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Swami Vivekananda, and Deendayal Upadhyaya strongly advocated for an educational model grounded in India's civilisational ethos, where character building, spiritual growth, and cultural rootedness form the foundation of learning (Thakur, 2010). Deendayal Upadhyay expressed this vision through his philosophy of Integral Humanism, which stresses ethical living, cultural continuity, and balanced human development (Upadhyaya, 1965). He argued that India's education system must draw strength from its heritage while adapting to contemporary needs.

However, the present Indian education system still influenced by Thomas Macaulay's colonial model of 1835, continues to favour Western frameworks, English-centric teaching, and examination-oriented learning. After independence, rather than reconstructing this colonial structure, successive governments placed primary emphasis on modern, Western oriented science and technology driven learning to support industrial and economic growth. While this contributed to national development, it also created a significant imbalance, as ethical education, cultural knowledge, value formation, and the holistic visions of Gandhi's *Nai Talim*, Tagore's creative learning, Vivekananda's character-building ideal, and Radhakrishnan's spiritual-humanistic approach were not meaningfully integrated into mainstream policy. The system gradually became career-driven, exam-heavy, and disconnected from India's civilisational knowledge traditions.

In this context, Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism provides a corrective framework by balancing material progress with cultural, ethical, and social responsibility. It can be observed after 2014, this perspective increasingly shaped national policies, including those related to culture, health, and especially education, as reflected in government initiatives. The NEP 2020 marks a major shift by explicitly emphasising IKS. The policy promotes Indian languages, classical arts, yoga, Ayurveda, local traditions, environmental wisdom, value-based learning, and India's scientific heritage while also

strengthening scientific temperament, research, digital literacy, and global competitiveness (Ministry of Education, 2020). In this way, NEP 2020 seeks to align traditional wisdom with modern pedagogical requirements.

By synthesising ancient Indian educational philosophies with contemporary global academic standards, NEP 2020 functions not only as an educational reform but also as a civilisational renewal project. It aims to create learners who are deeply rooted in India's cultural identity while possessing the competencies required in the twenty-first century. This dual commitment heritage with modernity forms the core of this research paper's analysis.

Deendayal Upadhyay's vision of Bharatiya knowledge systems

Deendayal Upadhyaya strongly criticised the colonial education system for distancing Indians from their culture, languages, and civilisational memory, arguing instead for an educational model rooted in mother-tongue learning, Bharatiya knowledge systems, ethical values, and character formation (Upadhyaya, 1965). Deeply influenced by ancient Indian philosophical and religious texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharmashastras, and classical commentaries, he believed that education must nurture the integrated development of body, mind, intellect, and spirit, thereby cultivating virtue (*dharma*), self-discipline, and social responsibility. Scholars note that, for Upadhyaya, true education can emerge only from India's civilisational ethos rather than borrowed Western frameworks (Chanu & Sharma, 2024). Viewing education as a collective social responsibility, he maintained that individuals are born with basic instincts and become responsible and ethical members of society only through proper education and cultural refinement (Upadhyaya, 1965). Because education ultimately strengthens society, he argued that charging high fees contradicts the common good; if children are denied education due to poverty, the entire society suffers. Using the analogy of nurturing a seed into a fruitful tree, he asserted that educated individuals become assets to the larger community (Upadhyaya, 1965). He pointed out that ancient India's *gurukula* system and even many pre-1947 princely states provided free education, food, and lodging, supported by the community through practices such as *bhiksha*, reflecting a civilisational understanding that society must bear the burden of education (Upadhyaya, 1965). Extending this logic, he argued that essential services like healthcare should also be freely accessible and lamented the commercialization of sacred spaces, such as paid entry to the Tirupati temple, as signs of declining cultural values. Ultimately, Upadhyaya envisioned an education system aligned with Integral Humanism and Antyodaya, one that ensures basic necessities, fosters cultural rootedness, and promotes collective welfare as the foundation of national development (See Khimta, 2017; 2018).

NEP 2020 as a reflection of Upadhyaya's educational philosophy

Deendayal Upadhyaya viewed education as a collective social responsibility and an essential instrument for the integrated, overall development of the individual and society (Upadhyaya, 2017). In the post-Independence period, he consistently argued that education should not remain limited to skill formation or economic productivity, but must nurture cultural consciousness, ethical values, and social harmony in accordance with Indian philosophical traditions. However, due to prevailing ideological orientations and the dominance of colonial and Western frameworks in policy-making, Upadhyaya's vision of an education system rooted in Bharatiya knowledge, culture, and civilisational values did not occupy a central place in government policy for several decades. After 2014, with the Bharatiya Janata Party forming a strong government at the Centre, there was renewed ideological and institutional space to revisit indigenous educational ideas. The government initiated comprehensive reforms by constituting expert committees and commissions to redesign the education system in line with India's cultural ethos and contemporary needs. This process culminated in the adoption of the NEP 2020, which seeks to integrate Indian knowledge systems, ethical learning, holistic development, and social responsibility into mainstream education. In this context, NEP 2020 can be understood as reflecting Deendayal Upadhyaya's educational philosophy, particularly his emphasis on culturally rooted, value-oriented, and socially responsive education. NEP 2020 demonstrates a strong alignment with Bharatiya knowledge traditions in the following ways:

Promotion of Indian languages

Deendayal Upadhyaya strongly supports education in the mother tongue and regional languages, viewing language as a vital carrier of culture, values, and collective memory (Upadhyaya, 2017). He argues that learning through indigenous languages enhances comprehension, creativity, and cultural self-confidence, whereas excessive dependence on foreign languages leads to the alienation of learners from their social and cultural environment. This perspective is clearly reflected in the NEP 2020, which advocates teaching in the mother tongue or regional language at least up to Grade 5, reinforcing a strong connection between education and cultural heritage (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy further promotes India's linguistic diversity through the three-language formula, enabling students to engage with multiple languages while remaining rooted in their own linguistic traditions. Additionally, the establishment of the National Institute of Translation and Interpretation aims to preserve and promote regional and endangered languages, thereby contributing to a more inclusive, culturally grounded, and nationally conscious educational framework (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Integration of Indian knowledge systems

NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on the integration of IKS by encouraging the teaching of Indian philosophy, classical literature, and ancient sciences as part of the curriculum. It promotes yoga and meditation as essential components of physical, mental, and ethical development and supports the inclusion of Ayurveda and other traditional medical knowledge in higher education. The policy also highlights the study of Sanskrit and other classical and ancient languages, such as Tamil, Pali, Prakrit, and Persian, to deepen students' understanding of India's intellectual and civilisational traditions. (Ministry of Education, 2020). By encouraging the learning of these classical languages, NEP 2020 seeks to preserve India's rich linguistic heritage and enable direct engagement with original texts and knowledge traditions, thereby strengthening cultural continuity and ethical awareness. These policy orientations closely resonate with Deendayal Upadhyaya's ideas articulated in *Rashtra Chintan*, where he emphasized that education must be rooted in Bharatiya philosophical thought, cultural traditions, and ethical values to sustain national consciousness and social harmony (Upadhyaya, 2017). Upadhyaya argued that neglect of India's indigenous knowledge traditions weakens cultural continuity and moral foundations, while their integration strengthens intellectual depth and civilisational self-confidence. Thus, NEP 2020's focus on Indian knowledge systems reflects Upadhyaya's vision of education as a means of preserving cultural heritage while guiding holistic human development (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Arts, culture, and crafts

NEP 2020 emphasises the importance of arts, culture, and traditional crafts within the education system by promoting art-integrated learning, wherein academic subjects are taught through creative forms such as painting, music, theatre, and dance, enabling students to engage with knowledge in more expressive and meaningful ways (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy also encourages vocational education and skill training in traditional crafts such as weaving, pottery, handicrafts, and indigenous forms of labour, thereby recognising the dignity and economic value of indigenous skills (Ministry of Education, 2020). Furthermore, NEP 2020 supports active engagement with local artisans, folk traditions, and community knowledge, helping students develop cultural sensitivity and appreciation of cultural practices at the grassroots level (Ministry of Education, 2020).

These initiatives closely reflect Deendayal Upadhyaya's vision; he argued that education must remain organically connected to India's cultural life, productive traditions, and social realities (Upadhyaya, 2017). Upadhyaya emphasised that art, craft, and labour are integral to national culture and should not be treated as inferior to intellectual pursuits. He criticised the colonial separation of mental

and manual work and advocated an education system that integrates cultural creativity, dignity of labour, and social responsibility, thereby strengthening cultural pride and self-reliant livelihoods (Upadhyaya, 2017).

Value-based and ethical education

The NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on value-based and ethical education, highlighting core Indian values such as truth (*satya*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), compassion (*karuna*), and righteous conduct (*dharma*), alongside constitutional values and responsible citizenship (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy encourages student participation in community service, social engagement, and civic responsibility, enabling learners to develop sensitivity toward society and a commitment to collective well-being. By integrating ethical values into the learning process, NEP 2020 aims to nurture a morally aware, socially responsible, and ethically grounded generation.

These objectives closely resonate with Deendayal Upadhyaya's ideas articulated in *Rashtra Chintan* and *Integral Humanism*. In *Rashtra Chintan*, Upadhyaya argued that education must cultivate moral character, social responsibility, and ethical discipline, as intellectual development without values leads to social imbalance and moral decline (Upadhyaya, n.d.). Similarly, in *Integral Humanism*, he emphasized that true education should promote the integrated development of body, mind, intellect, and soul, with ethics and *dharma* forming the foundation of social harmony and national life (Upadhyaya, 1965). Thus, NEP 2020's focus on ethical learning and social responsibility reflects Upadhyaya's Integral Humanist vision of education as a moral and civilisational force rather than a purely utilitarian activity.

Promotion of yoga, ayurveda, and overall development

The NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of overall development and well-being into education, advocating the inclusion of Yoga, meditation, and traditional knowledge systems such as Ayurveda in school and higher education curricula. The policy highlights that education should foster physical, mental, and emotional development alongside academic learning, enabling students to adopt healthy lifestyles and preventive healthcare practices. It also encourages linking Indian traditional knowledge systems with modern scientific approaches to promote research, innovation, and cultural rootedness (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The Government of India has actively promoted yoga, Ayurveda, and holistic wellness in ways that resonate with Deendayal Upadhyaya's vision of complete and balanced human development. Important steps include the declaration of International Yoga Day by the United Nations in 2014, (Times of India, 2014) the growth of AYUSH institutions and scientific research in Ayurveda, and the integration of yoga practices in schools, workplaces, and public routines. Public initiatives such as the "Y-Break" program further encourage individuals to adopt

short wellness exercises during work hours, promoting physical, mental, and ethical well-being. (The Hindu, 2021).

These initiatives reflect Upadhyaya's emphasis in *Rashtra Chintan* and *Integral Humanism* that education and societal development must focus on the holistic growth of body, mind, intellect, and spirit, rather than merely material or economic advancement (Upadhyaya, 1965). Upadhyaya advocated that traditional knowledge systems, including yoga and Ayurveda, are essential for cultivating self-discipline, inner balance, and social harmony, which are foundational to a healthy and ethically grounded society. By integrating these practices into public life, India not only enhances its global cultural presence but also demonstrates the practical application of its civilisational wisdom.

Critiques and challenges

Although the NEP 2020 has been widely appreciated for promoting Indian languages, traditional knowledge, and holistic learning, several critiques highlight important challenges that must be addressed for effective implementation. Some scholars and civil society groups express concern about the possible "saffronisation" of education, especially after recent textbook revisions that reduce or alter discussions on Mughal history, caste issues, and minority perspectives (Times of India, 2024). Another challenge relates to the limited availability of trained teachers who can properly teach Indian Knowledge Systems, Sanskrit, yoga, or Ayurveda-based content (Economic Times Government, n.d.). Rural urban disparities in infrastructure also create unequal learning environments, making it difficult for many schools to adopt multilingual education, art-integrated learning, or technology-supported teaching. In the health-related components of NEP and AYUSH-linked initiatives, researchers point to scientific and regulatory gaps in Ayurveda, where evidence quality and standardisation still require improvement (Hazra et al., 2025). Concerns are also raised about inclusivity, especially whether minority groups and non-dominant cultural traditions will receive equal representation in curriculum design. These issues suggest that while NEP 2020 has strong potential, its success depends on careful, balanced, and inclusive implementation that respects diversity and strengthens the overall quality of education.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a major step toward reviving Bharatiya knowledge traditions in modern India. Its emphasis on Indian languages, classical knowledge, yoga, Ayurveda, arts, and value-based education reflects the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya and his philosophy of Integral Humanism. The policy brings together India's civilisational wisdom with the requirements of the 21st century, creating an education system that is rooted yet progressive, traditional yet future ready. While challenges remain, the direction

is clear, India is reclaiming its educational identity and building a culturally confident generation.

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M.N. Roy's new humanism and its relevance in contemporary political thought

Bhawna Sharma & Dev Raj

ABSTRACT

The idea of New Humanism developed by M. N. Roy is reconsidered in order to understand its significance for present-day political thought. He developed New Humanism as a response to the limitations of both orthodox Marxism and narrow nationalism, arguing that political thought must place the individual at the centre of social and political life. Emphasising reason, scientific temper, ethical responsibility, and individual freedom, Roy envisioned a democratic order grounded in the moral and intellectual autonomy of human beings rather than ideological dogma or party dominance. This study analyses the philosophical foundations of New Humanism and highlights Roy's critique of authoritarian politics and centralised power. It further explores the contemporary significance of his ideas in addressing present challenges such as the crisis of democracy, rising populism, and the weakening of individual freedom. The paper argues that M.N. Roy's humanist framework continues to offer valuable insights for rethinking democracy and ethical politics today.

Keywords: M. N. Roy; New Humanism; Radical Humanism; Human Freedom; Rationalism; Democratic Decentralisation; Ethical Politics.

1. Introduction

Humanism has played a significant role in the progress of philosophical and political thought. At its core, it emphasises the dignity, freedom, rational capacity, and moral responsibility of human beings. Humanism places the individual at the centre of intellectual and social life and maintains that people are capable of shaping their own future through reason and ethical conduct. The origins of humanist ideas can be traced to classical Greek philosophy, and these ideas were later revived during the Renaissance, when scholars stressed the importance of human potential, rational inquiry, and secular learning (Monfasani, 1998). With the passage of time, humanism developed into different forms, including liberal humanism, secular humanism, and existential humanism. Each of these forms emerged in response to the political, scientific, and cultural changes of different historical periods. In the twentieth century,

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however, the devastating effects of the world wars, ideological conflicts, and the rise of authoritarian regimes challenged many of the earlier assumptions of humanism and created the need for new philosophical approaches capable of addressing the crises of modern society.

Within this broader intellectual context, the Indian political thinker Manabendra Nath Roy developed a distinctive philosophical framework known as New Humanism. Roy's intellectual development was characterised by a series of ideological transitions rather than a linear progression. Initially, he was a revolutionary nationalist dedicated to the struggle against British colonial rule in India. His political activities later extended to the international sphere, where he became closely associated with the communist movement. Roy's participation in the Communist International was significant, as he contributed to debates on colonial emancipation and the theoretical interpretation of Marxism (Haithcox, 2011, p. 17).

As his political reflections deepened, M.N. Roy began to express increasing dissatisfaction with orthodox Marxism, especially its deterministic view of historical development and the authoritarian practices that had come to define Soviet communism. These concerns gradually prompted him to reassess the ideological roots of both nationalism and communism. Finding both traditions insufficient for achieving true human freedom, M.N. Roy turned to develop an alternative philosophical perspective that aimed to reconcile the ideals of individual liberty with the broader goals of social progress (Mondal, n.d.).

This intellectual search by M.N. Roy led to the articulation of the philosophy of Radical Humanism, which he later famously known as New Humanism. M.N. Roy's Humanism placed a strong emphasis on human freedom, reason, and moral responsibility, which highlights a break with prevailing political ideologies. In developing this perspective, Roy rejected both rigid metaphysical beliefs and the deterministic interpretation of history associated with economic reductionism. He argued that human beings should not be viewed merely as passive outcomes of historical or economic conditions, but as conscious agents capable of shaping social and political life. For Roy, the central purpose of politics was not simply the management of power or economic interests but the cultivation of intellectual and moral growth among individuals (Ahmed, 2022, p.119). In this sense, New Humanism highlights scientific reasoning, moral autonomy, and democratic participation as essential foundations for a free and humane social order

M.N. Roy's critique of prevailing political ideologies acquired particular relevance in the twentieth century, a period marked by the rise of authoritarian regimes and intense ideological confrontations. He was sharply critical of both totalitarian communism and militant forms of nationalism, maintaining that these systems ultimately subordinated individual freedom to collective or ideological objectives. In contrast, he advocated a decentralised and

participatory form of democracy in which citizens would play an active role in political decision-making. His conception of ethical politics and responsible citizenship reflected a broader conviction that genuine social progress must be guided by human reason and moral responsibility rather than unquestioning loyalty to rigid ideological doctrines.

M. N. Roy's intellectual orientation was shaped by a strong commitment to materialism, rationalism, and secularism. With this philosophical grounding, he remained unconvinced by Mahatma Gandhi's effort to integrate religion with politics. M.N. Roy believed that modern politics should be based on reason, scientific temper, and critical inquiry rather than faith or spiritual authority. In his view, the frequent use of religious language and symbolism in Gandhian politics risked diverting political discourse away from rational debate. Roy was particularly critical of Gandhi's prayer meetings, which he saw as an inappropriate blending of religion and political mobilisation. For Roy, such practices did not contribute to the development of a rational democratic culture. Reflecting this scepticism, he once remarked that Gandhi's prayer meetings were nothing more than a "great farce" (Bhambhri, 1960). This comment illustrates Roy's broader concern that politics in a modern society should be guided by human reason and ethical responsibility rather than religious sentiment.

Despite the originality and intellectual depth of M.N. Roy's philosophical contributions, his ideas have received comparatively limited attention within mainstream political theory (Manjapra, 2010, p. xv). In discussions of Indian political thought, scholarly attention has more often centred on figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar, whose ideas have had a more visible influence on political movements and institutional developments (Philosophy Institute, 2024). Nevertheless, Roy's New Humanism offers a distinctive perspective that brings together liberal democratic principles and scientific rationalism while also engaging with the ethical foundations of political life. His work represents a serious attempt to formulate a universal humanist philosophy capable of responding to the challenges of the modern world.

The contemporary global situation makes it important to revisit M. N. Roy's idea of New Humanism. The twenty-first century has seen growing concerns about the weakening of democratic institutions, the rise of authoritarian populism, and increasing ideological polarisation in many parts of the world (Fitzzi, 2019, p.1). In several countries, democratic processes are being challenged by political movements that undermine reasoned public debate and encourage divisive narratives. At the same time, rapid technological change and shifting economic structures have raised new questions about the place of human agency, the meaning of individual freedom, and the ethical responsibilities of political authority (Stiefenhofer, 2025, p.3). In this context, M.N. Roy's emphasis on rational thought, ethical responsibility, and active

democratic participation offers a useful perspective for reflecting on the foundations of democratic life.

Against this background, the present study attempts to re-examine M. N. Roy's concept of New Humanism and to assess its relevance in the present time. The study raises a few central questions: What are the main principles of M.N. Roy's New Humanism? How does M.N. Roy's understanding of humanism differ from classical humanist traditions and from Marxist thought? In what ways can M.N. Roy's ideas contribute to ongoing discussions in political theory and democratic practice? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to highlight the continuing importance of M.N. Roy's philosophical ideas.

The paper argues that M.N. Roy's New Humanism offers a rational and ethical framework for thinking about some of the major political challenges of the present era, particularly those related to democracy, freedom, and human agency. By stressing the importance of individual autonomy, scientific reasoning, and ethical political life, M.N. Roy's philosophy provides a meaningful basis for imagining a social order that is both democratic and respectful of human dignity.

2. Intellectual and historical context

2.1 Early life and revolutionary phase

The intellectual growth of Manabendra Nath Roy can be better understood when placed within the historical and political conditions of the time in which he began his political life. Born in 1887 in Bengal as Narendar Nath Battachary, he came of age during a period when opposition to British colonial rule was gradually gathering strength across India. C. P. Bhambri (1960), in his study, referred to M. N. Roy as both a practical revolutionary and an important philosopher, noting that he combined active participation in revolutionary politics with serious philosophical reflection (p. 252). The early twentieth century witnessed the rise of revolutionary nationalist groups prepared to challenge colonial authority through organised, sometimes militant resistance. Influenced by this political atmosphere, M.N. Roy became involved in anti-colonial revolutionary activities while still quite young. He was associated with underground nationalist groups in Bengal that sought to undermine British authority through secret organisations and revolutionary action (Roy, 1970, p. 12).

M.N. Roy's early political involvement was shaped by the broader intellectual climate of Indian nationalism, which combined a strong commitment to independence with a willingness to explore radical methods of political struggle. At the same time, his experiences gradually revealed the limits of purely nationalist approaches in confronting a global imperial system. In search of wider revolutionary connections and a clearer ideological direction, M.N. Roy travelled outside India and established contact with international revolutionary

circles. These encounters widened his intellectual outlook and brought him into contact with socialist and Marxist ideas that were increasingly influencing political debates worldwide. As a result, M.N. Roy's political thinking gradually moved beyond a narrowly nationalist framework and adopted a more international outlook, in which the struggle against colonial rule was seen as part of a broader global movement against imperialism and capitalism (Manjapra, 2010).

2.2 Marxist phase

M.N. Roy's engagement with Marxism marked a crucial stage in his intellectual and political development. During the early 1920s, he became closely associated with the international communist movement and played an active role in the Communist International. This involvement placed him at the centre of important discussions on revolutionary strategy, colonial liberation, and the expansion of socialist movements beyond Europe (Manjapra, 2010, p.37). Over time, M.N. Roy came to be recognised as one of the most prominent Asian figures within the international communist movement and contributed significantly to debates on the position of colonial societies within Marxist theory.

One of M.N. Roy's important contributions during this period was his criticism of the Eurocentric assumptions that shaped many orthodox Marxist interpretations of colonial societies (North, 1963, p. 1). He argued that the social and economic conditions of colonial countries differed substantially from those of industrial Europe and therefore required different revolutionary strategies (Haithcox, 1971, p.17). Instead of simply applying European models of proletarian revolution, M.N. Roy emphasised the need to understand the particular historical and social realities of colonised societies (Verma, 1961, p. 280). In this context, he pointed to anti-colonial nationalism as a potential ally in the broader struggle against imperial domination (Srishti, 2025). Through his writings and political interventions, M.N. Roy sought to expand the scope of Marxist theory by bringing the experiences of colonised societies into its analytical framework. This phase of his career established him as an influential Marxist thinker and an active participant in international revolutionary politics.

2.3 Break with Marxism

Despite his early commitment to Marxism, M.N. Roy gradually began to question several of its theoretical assumptions and political practices. His doubts arose from both philosophical reflection and his experiences within the international communist movement (Balcom, 2023, p.365). In particular, he grew increasingly critical of the deterministic understanding of history often associated with orthodox Marxism. The emphasis on economic structures as the primary force shaping social and political developments, he felt, left insufficient

space for the roles of human creativity, moral reflection, and conscious political action in historical change (Verma, 1961, p. 282).

At the same time, M.N. Roy became increasingly troubled by the authoritarian direction taken by communist regimes, especially in the Soviet Union. The growing concentration of political authority and the intolerance of dissent within communist organisations raised serious concerns for him. These developments led M.N. Roy to reconsider the relationship between revolutionary politics and individual freedom. He came to believe that the pursuit of social equality should not undermine personal liberty or democratic participation. His growing dissatisfaction with Soviet communism eventually led him to distance himself from the international communist movement. This moment marked an important turning point in his intellectual life, prompting him to seek a philosophical framework that could reconcile social progress with the protection of human freedom and ethical responsibility (Balcom, 2023, p.359).

2.4 Emergence of radical humanism

M.N. Roy's dissatisfaction with both nationalism and orthodox Marxism gradually led him to formulate a new philosophical perspective, which he called Radical Humanism and later came to be widely known as New Humanism. M.N. Roy (1947) argues that political philosophy must move from thinking in terms of nations and classes to thinking in terms of the human individual (p.5). These ideas began to take clearer shape during the 1940s, when M.N. Roy started to present his reflections on human freedom, rational thought, and democratic organisation in a more systematic manner. At the centre of Radical Humanism was the conviction that human beings possess the capacity to guide their own social and political life through reason and ethical judgement. He rejected religious dogma and rigid ideological doctrines, arguing instead for a scientific and rational approach to the organisation of society.

During this period, M.N. Roy also attempted to translate these philosophical ideas into a practical political programme. In 1940, he established the Radical Democratic Party, which sought to promote democratic decentralisation, reasoned political discourse, and active citizen participation in public affairs (PolSci Institute, 2025). Although the party did not achieve major electoral success, it provided an important platform for M.N. Roy to communicate and develop his ideas. Through his writings and political engagement, he continued to elaborate the principles of New Humanism, emphasising individual autonomy, ethical political conduct, and scientific reasoning as essential elements of a democratic and humane society. M.N. Roy's intellectual journey from revolutionary nationalism to Marxism and ultimately to Radical Humanism reflects a persistent effort to address the tension between social justice and individual freedom. This evolution provides essential background for understanding the emergence of M.N. Roy's New Humanism and its significance in modern political thought.

In the final week of December 1946, the Radical Democratic Party of India convened its conference in Bombay, where a resolution was adopted to prepare a manifesto articulating the fundamental principles of New Humanism. These principles had been gradually formulated and refined by the party since its establishment six years earlier. The conference approved a set of theses that summarised these core ideas. In accordance with this resolution, a draft manifesto elaborating these theses was later submitted to the Central Political Council of the party, which met from 23 to 25 May 1947 to deliberate on the document. The draft expanded upon the theses adopted at the conference and also incorporated earlier statements issued by the party concerning the international political situation. The Central Political Council approved the document in principle (Roy, 1947, p. 7). However, the author of the draft recommended that the formal endorsement by the party and its publication as an official manifesto be postponed for a period

3. Philosophical foundations of new humanism

The philosophy of New Humanism developed by Manabendra Nath Roy seeks to place human beings, their rational capacities, and their moral responsibilities at the centre of social and political life. His philosophical outlook emerged partly from his dissatisfaction with both traditional religious doctrines and rigid ideological systems such as orthodox Marxism (Roy, 2023). In his view, a philosophy appropriate for the modern democratic age must rest on scientific understanding, moral independence, and the active role of individuals in shaping social life. New Humanism therefore brings together epistemological, ethical, and political ideas into a broader vision that stresses rational inquiry, individual freedom, and social responsibility.

3.1 Epistemological foundations

The epistemological basis of New Humanism rests on scientific rationalism and empirical knowledge. M.N. Roy maintained that human understanding of the world must arise from reason, observation, and critical examination rather than from superstition, unquestioned faith, or metaphysical speculation. For him, scientific rationalism offered the most dependable means of acquiring knowledge about both nature and society. M.N. Roy, emphasising scientific inquiry, hoped to cultivate habits of intellectual independence and scepticism, encouraging individuals to critically examine accepted beliefs and social institutions.

He argued that knowledge does not originate from divine revelation or eternal truths but from human experience and investigation (Roy, 2023). Empirical knowledge, obtained through observation and experimentation, plays a decisive role in shaping our understanding of reality. The development of modern science, he believed, had demonstrated that the universe operates according to natural laws that can be studied and understood through systematic inquiry (Roy,

1952). In the same way, social and political theories should also be open to rational scrutiny and empirical evaluation rather than being treated as unquestionable doctrines.

An important feature of M.N. Roy's epistemology is his rejection of metaphysical speculation and dogmatic thinking (Ray, 1995). He believed that metaphysical systems often rely on assumptions that cannot be tested or verified, and for that reason, they tend to discourage critical reflection. Such systems, in his view, frequently function as instruments of intellectual control. M.N. Roy therefore argued that philosophy should move away from metaphysical abstractions and instead adopt a scientific outlook grounded in evidence, reason, and open debate. By opposing both religious dogma and ideological rigidity, M.N. Roy sought to promote a form of philosophical inquiry that encourages intellectual freedom and supports the continued expansion of human knowledge.

3.2 Ethical foundations

The ethical dimension of New Humanism is closely connected with M.N. Roy's belief in the moral autonomy of the individual. M.N. Roy argued that human beings possess the capacity to determine their own moral values through reflection, reasoning, and shared social experience (Chauhan, 2025, pp. 281-290). Unlike traditional ethical systems that derive moral authority from religious teachings or sacred texts, M.N. Roy maintained that morality should emerge from human reason and from the practical conditions of social life. In this sense, ethics is not imposed by external authority but grows out of the rational and cooperative character of human society.

For M.N. Roy, the autonomy of the individual forms the basis of ethical life. Individuals are not simply passive members of society; they are moral agents capable of making responsible choices. Ethical behaviour develops through an awareness of the consequences of one's actions and through a commitment to the well-being of others. M.N. Roy believed that a society composed of free and rational individuals would naturally develop moral norms that encourage cooperation, justice, and mutual respect (M.N. Roy's Intellectual Journey: From Marxist Revolutionary to Radical Humanist, 2025).

M.N. Roy's ethical outlook also emphasises the close connection between individual freedom and social responsibility. He rejected the belief that morality depends upon obedience to religious authority or adherence to rigid ideological systems. Instead, ethical conduct should be guided by reason, sympathy, and concern for human welfare. Within such a framework, morality is not a fixed code but a living and evolving system shaped by human experience. By grounding ethics in human reason, M.N. Roy sought to develop a moral philosophy that is consistent with both scientific knowledge and democratic values.

3.3 Political philosophy

Freedom lies at the heart of M.N. Roy's political philosophy. He regarded individual freedom as the highest political value and as a necessary condition for the development of human personality. In his view, the fundamental purpose of political institutions should be to create conditions in which individuals can develop their intellectual and moral capacities without unnecessary restrictions. Freedom, therefore, is not simply the absence of external constraints but also the ability of individuals to take part in shaping the social and political environment in which they live.

One of the most distinctive aspects of M.N. Roy's political thought is his emphasis on democratic decentralisation. M.N. Roy believed that genuine democracy cannot flourish within highly centralised systems of power where authority is concentrated in a small group of leaders or bureaucratic institutions. Instead, he argued for a decentralised governance structure in which power is distributed among local communities and citizens participate directly in decision-making processes. Such a system, he believed, would encourage civic responsibility, strengthen democratic accountability, and reduce the risk of authoritarian rule. M.N. Roy's political reflections also include a strong critique of totalitarianism (Jani, 2017). The rise of authoritarian regimes during the twentieth century deeply influenced his thinking. He observed that ideological movements often justify the suppression of individual liberty in the name of collective goals. Both fascist and communist regimes, in his view, demonstrated how centralised power and rigid ideological conformity could erode democratic values and personal freedom. New Humanism therefore rejects all forms of totalitarian politics and stresses the need to safeguard individual rights, intellectual freedom, and pluralism within political life.

3.4 Human agency

A recurring theme in M.N. Roy's philosophy is the importance of human agency. M.N. Roy firmly believed that human beings actively shape history rather than simply being shaped by it (Roy, 2004). This position marked a clear departure from deterministic interpretations of historical development, particularly those associated with orthodox Marxism. While M.N. Roy acknowledged that economic and social conditions influence human behaviour, he argued that such conditions do not fully determine the direction of historical change.

M.N. Roy rejected economic determinism, the idea that historical development is primarily driven by economic structures and class relations (Roy, 1922). Instead, he emphasised the role of human creativity, intellectual initiative, and ethical decision-making in shaping historical outcomes. Individuals and communities possess the capacity to question existing institutions, develop new

ideas, and construct social arrangements that reflect their aspirations for freedom and justice.

By highlighting the importance of human agency, M.N. Roy sought to reaffirm the role of individual responsibility and conscious action in political life. Social progress, in his view, depends on the ability of individuals to think critically, act responsibly, and cooperate with others in pursuit of common goals. In this sense, New Humanism presents a vision of society in which human beings actively participate in shaping their own historical destiny and work collectively toward creating a democratic and humane social order.

4. Core Principles of new humanism

The philosophy of New Humanism, developed by Manabendra Nath Roy, is not merely a theoretical critique of existing political ideologies but also a constructive framework that outlines the fundamental principles for building a rational, democratic, and ethical society (Sibi, 2020, p. 640). M.N. Roy believed that social and political systems should be designed to enhance human beings' freedom, dignity, and intellectual development (Datta, 2020, p.108). In contrast to ideological systems that prioritise the state, class, or nation over the individual, New Humanism places the individual at the centre of political life while emphasising cooperation and ethical responsibility. The core principles of M.N. Roy's New Humanism include individual freedom, rationalism, ethical politics, decentralised democracy, and a cosmopolitan vision of human solidarity.

4.1 Individual freedom

Individual freedom is the cornerstone of M.N. Roy's New Humanism. M.N. Roy asserted that the primary objective of any political system should be to establish conditions that enable individuals to fully develop their intellectual, moral, and creative capacities. M.N. Roy argued that systems which subordinate the individual to collective abstractions ultimately undermine freedom. As he observed, "A political system and an economic experiment, which subordinates the man of flesh and blood to an abstract collective ego, cannot possibly be the suitable means for the attainment of the goal of freedom" (Roy, 1947, pp. 36-37). In M.N. Roy's conception, freedom extends beyond political rights such as freedom of speech or association. It includes the broader capacity for individuals to think independently, participate actively in social life, and pursue personal goals without coercion. M.N. Roy emphasised that human progress depends on individuals' freedom to question established beliefs, challenge authority, and explore new ideas. Without intellectual and political freedom, societies risk stagnation and authoritarianism. At the same time, M.N. Roy did not interpret freedom as absolute individualism. He argued that true freedom is compatible with social cooperation and responsibility. Individuals achieve genuine freedom when they participate in a social order that encourages rational dialogue, mutual respect, and collective problem-solving.

4.2 Rationalism

Rationalism represents another fundamental principle of New Humanism. M.N. Roy maintained that human reason is the most reliable means for understanding the world and organising society. Historically, irrational beliefs, superstition, and dogmatic ideologies have frequently justified oppression and restricted human freedom. (Bardon, 2019) In contrast, rational inquiry promotes critical thinking, scientific investigation, and open debate, all of which are essential for advancing knowledge and fostering social progress. M.N. Roy strongly advocated cultivating a scientific temper in society. According to him, political decisions and social policies should be based on evidence, logical reasoning, and empirical analysis rather than emotional appeals or ideological rigidity. (Rathaur, 2024, pp. 12-20) Rationalism also promotes intellectual tolerance, as it recognises that knowledge evolves through continuous questioning and dialogue. In this sense, rationalism serves as the intellectual foundation of New Humanism by encouraging individuals to approach social and political issues with an open, critical mind.

4.3 Ethical politics

A distinctive aspect of M.N. Roy's philosophy is the insistence that politics must be guided by ethical principles. M.N. Roy observed that modern political systems frequently prioritise power, strategic advantage, and ideological conformity over moral responsibility. He argued that such practices undermine democratic values and erode public trust in political institutions.

New Humanism, therefore, calls for the integration of ethics into political life. M.N. Roy believed that political leaders and citizens alike should act in accordance with the principles of honesty, justice, and respect for human dignity. Ethical politics requires that decisions be evaluated not only for their effectiveness but also for their moral consequences. (Chauhan, 2025, pp. 281-282) In this framework, political power is not an end in itself but a means to promote human welfare and social cooperation. (Roy, 2004, p.220)

M.N. Roy's concept of ethical politics further emphasises the importance of civic responsibility. Citizens in a democratic society are expected to participate actively in public life and to hold political institutions accountable to moral standards. (Chauhan, 2025, pp. 281-290) Through rational dialogue and ethical engagement, individuals collectively shape political systems that embody shared human values (Chauhan, 2025, pp. 281-290). M.N. Roy's commitment to individual freedom and active citizenship led him to advocate a system of decentralised democracy. He argued that highly centralised political structures often concentrate power in the hands of a small group of leaders or bureaucratic institutions, thereby limiting ordinary citizens' participation in decision-making (Bhambri, 1960, p. 254). Such concentration of power increases the risk of authoritarianism and reduces the responsiveness of political institutions to

society's needs. To address these concerns, M.N. Roy proposed a decentralised democratic system in which political authority is distributed across multiple levels of governance. Local communities, civic organisations, and citizen assemblies play a central role in political decision-making. This participatory model encourages individuals to assume responsibility for public affairs and cultivates a culture of active citizenship. Decentralised democracy also enhances transparency and accountability in governance. When political power is dispersed, and citizens have direct access to decision-making processes, it becomes more difficult for political elites to monopolise authority. M.N. Roy believed that such a democratic structure would strengthen the foundations of freedom and ensure that political institutions remain responsive to the people's aspirations.

4.5 Cosmopolitan humanism

The final core principle of New Humanism is its cosmopolitan outlook. M.N. Roy rejected narrow forms of nationalism that elevate the interests of a single nation above those of humanity as a whole. M.N. Roy (1947) mentions in his book that "Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation nor of Class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as freedom of the individual. Therefore, it can also be called New Humanism, new because it is humanism enriched, reinforced and elaborated by scientific knowledge and social experience gained during the centuries of modern" (pp.36-37) While recognising the significance of cultural identity and national self-determination, he cautioned that excessive nationalism often leads to conflict, intolerance, and the suppression of individual freedom. (Roy, 1947, p.38)

Instead, M.N. Roy advocated for a universal humanism grounded in the belief that all human beings share common aspirations for freedom, dignity, and happiness. This cosmopolitan perspective emphasises global cooperation, mutual understanding, and respect for cultural diversity. M.N. Roy maintained that challenges such as war, economic inequality, and environmental degradation cannot be addressed solely within the framework of national politics. These issues require a broader vision that acknowledges the interconnectedness of human societies. Cosmopolitan humanism thus encourages the development of international institutions and cooperative frameworks that promote peace, justice, and human rights across national boundaries. By emphasising the unity of humanity, M.N. Roy's philosophy aims to transcend divisions created by ideology, nationality, and religion, and to foster a global community grounded in reason and ethical responsibility. (Manjapra, 2010, p.104)

Together, these core principles form the foundation of M.N. Roy's New Humanism. They reflect his belief that a truly humane society must be built upon the values of freedom, rationality, ethical responsibility, democratic participation, and global solidarity. Through this philosophy, the limitations of

both traditional ideologies and authoritarian political systems could be overcome.

5. Critical evaluation of new humanism

The philosophy of New Humanism, developed by Manabendra Nath Roy, represents an important contribution to modern political thought. By integrating scientific rationalism, ethical responsibility, and democratic participation, M.N. Roy attempted to formulate a comprehensive framework capable of addressing the moral and political crises of the twentieth century. However, like any philosophical doctrine, New Humanism has been subject to critical evaluation by scholars and political theorists. While many appreciate its emphasis on individual freedom and rational inquiry, others point out certain theoretical and practical limitations. A balanced assessment of M.N. Roy's philosophy, therefore, requires an examination of both its strengths and its weaknesses.

5.1 Strengths of new humanism

One of the most significant strengths of New Humanism lies in its strong defence of individual freedom. M.N. Roy placed the individual at the centre of social and political life and argued that the primary goal of any political system should be to enable individuals to realise their intellectual and moral potential. This emphasis on personal autonomy distinguishes New Humanism from many ideological systems that subordinate individual rights to collective interests such as the state, class, or nation. In this sense, M.N. Roy's philosophy provides a powerful argument for safeguarding civil liberties and democratic freedoms.

M.N. Roy's philosophy is further distinguished by its commitment to rationalism and scientific thinking. He maintained that the advancement of human knowledge through science and rational inquiry constitutes the most reliable foundation for social progress. By rejecting superstition, dogmatism, and metaphysical speculation, New Humanism fosters a culture of critical thinking and open debate. This emphasis on scientific temper is especially pertinent in contemporary societies, where misinformation, ideological polarisation, and irrational political narratives frequently shape public discourse.

The ethical dimension of New Humanism also represents a major contribution to political philosophy. M.N. Roy argued that politics should not merely be concerned with the pursuit of power but should be guided by moral principles aimed at promoting human welfare. His insistence on ethical politics challenges the conventional separation between morality and political practice. By emphasising moral responsibility and human dignity, M.N. Roy sought to create a political culture in which public decisions are evaluated not only for their effectiveness but also for their ethical consequences.

Additionally, M.N. Roy's advocacy for decentralised democracy presents a valuable alternative to highly centralised political systems. He argued that

democratic participation should extend beyond periodic elections to encompass active citizen engagement in community decision-making. This participatory model promotes civic responsibility and reinforces the relationship between citizens and political institutions. Given contemporary challenges such as political alienation and declining public trust, M.N. Roy's emphasis on participatory democracy is especially relevant.

5.2 Limitations of new humanism

Despite its strengths, New Humanism has been criticised for several limitations. A frequent critique is that M.N. Roy's philosophy is overly idealistic, as it presumes that individuals will consistently act in accordance with reason and moral responsibility. (Contemporary Political Thought in India, 2021) Critics contend that this assumption underestimates the persistence of irrational behaviour, conflicting interests, and power struggles within political life. Consequently, some scholars question the feasibility of implementing M.N. Roy's humanist ideals in complex and conflict-ridden societies. (Roy, 1947, p.26)

A further limitation involves the institutional framework of M.N. Roy's proposed political system. Although he advocated decentralised democracy and participatory governance, he did not offer a comprehensive blueprint for practical implementation. Critics argue that, without detailed institutional mechanisms, transitioning from current political structures to M.N. Roy's envisioned democratic order may be challenging. This lack of a concrete political strategy has at times limited the practical impact of his ideas. (Fuchs, 2019)

M.N. Roy's dismissal of traditional religious frameworks and ideological political movements has also been criticized by some scholars. (Patoyari, 2024) Although his focus on rationalism and secular ethics is generally valued, critics assert that excluding religious and cultural traditions from moral discourse may neglect their influence on social values and community identity. (Chauhan, 2025, pp. 281-290) In numerous societies, religious and cultural beliefs remain integral to public life, and M.N. Roy's strictly rational approach may not adequately address these realities. (Jayapalan, 2000).

5.3 Scholarly critiques

Scholarly critiques of New Humanism have emerged from different ideological perspectives. Marxist scholars, for instance, have argued that M.N. Roy's rejection of economic determinism weakens the analytical strength of Marxist social theory. They contend that economic structures and class relations remain central factors in shaping political power and social inequality. From this perspective, M.N. Roy's emphasis on ethical transformation and individual autonomy may overlook the structural economic conditions that influence social change. Conversely, some liberal scholars value M.N. Roy's commitment to

individual freedom but question whether his philosophy adequately addresses the complexities of modern democratic governance. (Sibi, 2020, pp. 640-642) Although M.N. Roy's vision of participatory democracy is theoretically attractive, its implementation in large, diverse societies may present substantial administrative and political challenges. Despite these criticisms, M.N. Roy's New Humanism remains a subject of scholarly interest due to its ambitious synthesis of rationalism, ethics, and democratic values within a coherent philosophical framework. Rather than rejecting existing ideologies outright, M.N. Roy aimed to transcend their limitations by prioritising human freedom and moral responsibility in political life. His philosophy promotes critical reflection on the ethical foundations of politics and encourages scholars to reconsider the role of human agency in advancing social progress.

Thus, the critical evaluation of New Humanism underscores both its enduring strengths and unresolved challenges. Although certain elements of M.N. Roy's philosophy may seem idealistic or incomplete, its focus on rationality, freedom, and ethical responsibility continues to provide valuable insights for contemporary political thought.

6. Contemporary significance of new humanism

The philosophy of New Humanism, formulated by Manabendra Nath Roy, was developed in response to the ideological conflicts and authoritarian political systems of the twentieth century. However, many of the concerns that M.N. Roy addressed in his writings remain relevant in the twenty-first century. The contemporary world is experiencing significant political and social transformations marked by the crisis of democratic institutions, the rise of populist leadership, and increasing ideological polarisation. (Fitzi et al., 2019) In this context, M.N. Roy's emphasis on rational inquiry, individual freedom, and ethical politics provides valuable insights for addressing the challenges faced by modern democratic societies. Reassessing M.N. Roy's New Humanism allows scholars to explore how his ideas can contribute to contemporary debates about democracy, human rights, and global cooperation.

6.1 Crisis of democracy

One of the most pressing political issues of the present era is the crisis of democracy. In many parts of the world, democratic institutions are facing growing pressure from authoritarian tendencies and populist movements that undermine constitutional norms and rational political discourse. (Ekiert, 2023) Political leaders often appeal to emotional nationalism and identity-based politics rather than encouraging informed public debate. This trend weakens democratic institutions and diminishes citizens' role as active participants in political decision-making. (Identity-based narratives fuelling rise in autocracy, 2025)

M.N. Roy's philosophy responds to this crisis by emphasising the importance of rational and responsible citizenship. He argued that democracy should extend beyond electoral competition to include active individual engagement in public life. By fostering critical thinking, civic participation, and ethical leadership, New Humanism supports a form of democracy that resists authoritarian tendencies. M.N. Roy's support for decentralised democratic structures further strengthens local participation and accountability, reducing the concentration of political power that can lead to authoritarian governance.

6.2 Human rights and individual freedom

Another significant aspect of New Humanism's contemporary relevance is its strong defence of human rights and individual freedom. Modern democratic societies acknowledge the necessity of protecting civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, association, and belief. However, these freedoms are increasingly threatened by political repression, surveillance technologies, and restrictions on dissent worldwide. (Greitens, 2020)

M.N. Roy's philosophy centres on individual freedom in political life and holds that social progress depends on individuals' capacity for independent thought and action. His focus on dignity and autonomy aligns with contemporary human rights discourse. By asserting that political institutions should protect and enhance individual freedom, New Humanism offers a philosophical foundation for current efforts to defend democratic rights and civil liberties.

6.3 Scientific temper and rational public discourse

The contemporary world is characterised by rapid technological change, expanding digital communication, and an unprecedented flow of information. While these developments have created new opportunities for knowledge sharing, they have also contributed to the spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and ideological propaganda. (Enders et al., 2021) The erosion of rational public discourse poses a significant challenge to democratic governance, as informed decision-making depends on reliable knowledge and critical reasoning. (Brennan, 2026)

M.N. Roy emphasised the importance of scientific temper and rational inquiry as guiding principles for social and political life. His insistence that public policies be grounded in evidence, empirical knowledge, and logical reasoning is especially relevant in an era dominated by misinformation and emotional political narratives. By promoting critical thinking and scientific literacy, New Humanism encourages citizens to evaluate information rigorously and participate more responsibly in democratic processes.

6.4 Global

Globalisation has increased the interconnectedness of societies worldwide, generating both opportunities and challenges. Issues such as climate change,

economic inequality, migration, and international conflict demand cooperative solutions that transcend national boundaries. However, the rise of narrow nationalism and protectionist policies frequently impedes global cooperation. (Goodhart, 2005)

M.N. Roy's vision of cosmopolitan humanism provides a valuable perspective for addressing global challenges. He maintained that humanity shares common aspirations for freedom, dignity, and well-being, and that political thought should extend beyond narrow national interests. By emphasising human unity and the necessity of international cooperation, New Humanism advances a global ethical framework that supports peaceful coexistence and collaborative problem-solving.

6.5 Relevance in Indian political thought

Within Indian political thought, M.N. Roy's philosophy holds a distinctive position alongside influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar. While Gandhi emphasised moral and spiritual values in politics and Ambedkar focused on social justice and constitutional democracy, M.N. Roy offered a unique perspective rooted in scientific rationalism and secular ethics. (Roy, 2004)

M.N. Roy's focus on rational citizenship, decentralised democracy, and ethical politics complements other traditions within Indian political thought and enhances the intellectual diversity of democratic discourse in India (Parasher, 2024). His ideas promote critical reflection on the relationship between freedom, reason, and social responsibility in a rapidly changing society. Revisiting M.N. Roy's New Humanism thus offers an opportunity to reconsider the ethical and philosophical foundations of democratic governance in contemporary India.

In summary, the contemporary significance of New Humanism is its capacity to address many pressing challenges in modern political life. By advocating rational inquiry, individual freedom, ethical politics, and global cooperation, M.N. Roy's philosophy provides a compelling framework for reimagining the future of democracy and human development in the twenty-first century.

7. Conclusion

The philosophy of New Humanism developed by Manabendra Nath Roy represents a significant and distinctive contribution to modern political thought. M.N. Roy's intellectual journey from revolutionary nationalism to Marxism and ultimately to Radical Humanism reflects a continuous effort to find a philosophical framework that could reconcile social progress with individual freedom and ethical responsibility. Dissatisfied with both the dogmatism of traditional religious systems and the deterministic tendencies of orthodox Marxism, M.N. Roy sought to construct a human-centred philosophy grounded in scientific rationalism, moral autonomy, and democratic participation. Through

New Humanism, he attempted to redefine the role of the individual in history and to establish a political philosophy that emphasises freedom, reason, and ethical conduct as the foundations of a humane social order.

A central theme of M.N. Roy's philosophy is the primacy of individual freedom. M.N. Roy argued that the ultimate aim of social and political institutions should be the creation of conditions in which individuals can fully develop their intellectual and moral capacities. Unlike ideological systems that subordinate the individual to the state, class, or nation, New Humanism places human beings at the centre of political life. This emphasis on personal autonomy highlights M.N. Roy's belief that genuine democracy must be built upon the active participation of rational and responsible citizens. By advocating decentralized democratic structures and participatory governance, M.N. Roy sought to prevent the concentration of political power and to encourage citizens to engage directly in the processes that shape their social and political environment.

Another important contribution of M.N. Roy's philosophy lies in its emphasis on rationalism and scientific inquiry. M.N. Roy maintained that human progress depends on the ability of individuals to think critically and evaluate social institutions through reason and empirical knowledge. By rejecting metaphysical speculation and ideological dogma, New Humanism encourages a culture of intellectual freedom and open debate. M.N. Roy believed that scientific rationalism provides the most reliable foundation for understanding social problems and developing effective solutions. In this sense, his philosophy promotes a spirit of inquiry that is essential for the advancement of democratic societies.

M.N. Roy also placed great importance on the ethical dimension of political life. He argued that politics should not merely be concerned with the pursuit of power but should be guided by moral principles aimed at promoting human welfare. In his view, ethical responsibility must be an integral part of political decision-making. The emphasis on ethical politics distinguishes New Humanism from many modern political ideologies that often separate political strategy from moral considerations. M.N. Roy believed that a democratic society can function effectively only when citizens and leaders alike are guided by principles of justice, honesty, and respect for human dignity.

Despite its many strengths, M.N. Roy's philosophy has also faced certain criticisms and limitations. Some scholars argue that his vision of a rational and ethically guided society may appear idealistic, particularly in a world where political conflicts, economic inequalities, and ideological divisions continue to shape social realities. Others suggest that M.N. Roy's proposals for decentralised democracy lack the detailed institutional mechanisms necessary for practical implementation. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the intellectual significance of his attempt to create a comprehensive philosophy centred on human freedom and rationality. Instead, they invite further scholarly

engagement with his ideas and encourage contemporary thinkers to refine and adapt his humanist framework.

In the contemporary world, characterised by the rise of authoritarian populism, the erosion of democratic norms, and increasing ideological polarisation, M.N. Roy's New Humanism acquires renewed relevance. His emphasis on rational inquiry, individual autonomy, and ethical responsibility provides valuable insights for addressing many of the challenges faced by modern societies. The spread of misinformation, the decline of rational public discourse, and the growing concentration of political power highlight the importance of the principles that M.N. Roy sought to promote. By encouraging critical thinking, civic participation, and ethical leadership, New Humanism offers a philosophical framework capable of strengthening democratic culture and protecting individual freedom.

Furthermore, M.N. Roy's cosmopolitan vision of humanity emphasises the need for cooperation and solidarity beyond national boundaries. In an era marked by global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and international conflict, his call for a universal humanist perspective remains particularly relevant. M.N. Roy believed that the advancement of humanity depends on the recognition of shared human values and the willingness of individuals and societies to work together in pursuit of common goals.

In conclusion, the reassessment of M.N. Roy's New Humanism reveals that his philosophy continues to offer important insights for contemporary political thought. By integrating rationalism, ethical responsibility, and democratic participation into a coherent framework, M.N. Roy provided a powerful critique of authoritarian ideologies and a constructive vision for a humane and democratic society. Although developed in the context of twentieth-century political struggles, the principles of New Humanism remain highly relevant to addressing the crises of democracy, freedom, and human agency in the modern world. M.N. Roy's philosophical legacy, therefore, remains an important intellectual resource for scholars and policymakers seeking to build a more rational, ethical, and democratic global society.

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BOOK REVIEW

Defence forces vision 2047: a roadmap for a future-ready Indian military - A Policy Review, HQ IDS, New Delhi, 2026

Ashok Kumar

The nature of warfare is undergoing a profound transformation in the twenty-first century, driven by rapid advancements in technology, the rise of hybrid threats, and the increasing importance of non-kinetic domains such as cyber and space. In this context, India's Defence Forces Vision 2047 emerges as a significant strategic document aimed at preparing the armed forces for future challenges. Released as part of the broader national vision marking 100 years of independence, the roadmap seeks to build a modern, integrated, and technologically advanced military force. Unlike earlier planning frameworks, Vision 2047 adopts a holistic approach by linking defence preparedness with economic growth, technological innovation, and national power. This integration reflects a shift from traditional military planning to a more comprehensive national security strategy.

Strategic Context and Rationale

The Vision 2047 roadmap is rooted in the recognition that the global security environment is becoming increasingly complex and unpredictable. The changing nature of warfare, characterised by artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber warfare, and space-based capabilities, necessitates a shift from conventional force structures to technologically enabled multi-domain operations. Additionally, India faces a challenging geopolitical environment marked by a two-front threat scenario involving China and Pakistan, as well as emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Non-traditional threats such as terrorism, cyber attacks, and information warfare further complicate the security landscape. The roadmap, therefore, aims to develop a force capable of deterrence, rapid response, and sustained operations across the full spectrum of conflict.

Key Pillars of Vision 2047

At the core of Vision 2047 are several interrelated pillars that collectively define the trajectory of India's military transformation. The first pillar is technological advancement, which emphasises the adoption of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, hypersonic weapons, and directed energy systems. These technologies are expected to provide a decisive edge in future conflicts. The second pillar is jointness and integration, which seeks to overcome the traditional siloed functioning of the three services by promoting integrated theatre commands, joint logistics, and unified planning structures.

This shift is essential for enhancing operational efficiency and effectiveness. Another critical pillar is the concept of multi-domain operations, which involves the integration of capabilities across land, sea, air, cyber, and space domains. This approach reflects the evolving nature of warfare, where success depends on the ability to operate seamlessly across multiple domains simultaneously. The fourth pillar is self-reliance, aligned with the broader policy of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which aims to reduce dependence on foreign defence imports by strengthening indigenous manufacturing and research capabilities. Finally, the roadmap emphasises organisational reforms, including restructuring command systems, enhancing interoperability, and creating specialised agencies for emerging domains such as cyber and drone warfare.

Implementation strategy

The Vision 2047 roadmap adopts a phased implementation strategy to ensure a gradual and sustainable transformation of the armed forces. In the short term, the focus is on enhancing operational readiness, initiating structural reforms, and expediting procurement processes. The medium-term phase involves the operationalisation of integrated theatre commands, induction of advanced technologies, and expansion of domestic defence production capabilities. In the long term, the goal is to achieve full-spectrum multi-domain capability, technological self-reliance, and global competitiveness. This phased approach reflects a pragmatic understanding of the complexities involved in large-scale military transformation and seeks to balance ambition with feasibility.

Integration with existing defence frameworks

An important aspect of Vision 2047 is its attempt to integrate and streamline existing defence planning mechanisms. India's defence planning has traditionally been guided by frameworks such as the Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan and the Defence Acquisition Procedure. However, these frameworks have often operated in isolation, leading to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts. Vision 2047 seeks to address this issue by providing a unified strategic direction that aligns various planning processes under a common framework. This integration is expected to enhance coherence in policy formulation and improve the efficiency of resource utilisation.

Critical evaluation: strengths

The Vision 2047 roadmap exhibits several notable strengths that make it a significant step forward in India's defence planning. One of its key strengths is its comprehensive and forward-looking nature, as it addresses not only military capabilities but also technological, industrial, and organisational dimensions of national security. The emphasis on jointness and integration is particularly important, as it addresses a long-standing weakness in India's military structure. By promoting integrated theatre commands and joint operations, the roadmap has the potential to significantly enhance operational effectiveness. Another major strength is the focus on self-reliance, which aligns defence policy with broader economic objectives. By promoting indigenous defence production and innovation, the roadmap can contribute to economic growth, technological development, and job creation. Additionally, the alignment of defence planning with the national vision of becoming a developed country by 2047 underscores the strategic importance of military transformation in achieving broader national goals.

Critical evaluation: challenges and limitations

Despite its strengths, the Vision 2047 roadmap faces several challenges that could hinder its successful implementation. One of the most significant challenges is the persistent issue of implementation deficits in India's defence sector. Bureaucratic delays, inter-service rivalries, and policy discontinuities have historically impeded the execution of defence reforms. Overcoming these challenges will require strong political will and institutional reforms. Budgetary constraints also pose a major challenge, as modernisation and technological advancement require substantial financial resources. Given competing developmental priorities, ensuring adequate and sustained funding for defence transformation may prove difficult. Furthermore, India continues to face technological gaps in critical areas such as advanced propulsion systems, sensors, and high-end platforms, which necessitate continued reliance on imports. Addressing these gaps will require sustained investment in research and development. Another limitation is the slow and complex procurement process, which is often incompatible with the rapid pace of technological change. Streamlining procurement procedures and enhancing decision-making efficiency will be crucial for the success of the roadmap.

Emerging dimensions and future trends

The Vision 2047 roadmap reflects an increasing recognition of emerging dimensions of warfare, including cyber, space, and cognitive domains. The proposed establishment of specialised agencies for drone warfare, cyber operations, and space security highlights the growing importance of non-traditional capabilities. These developments indicate a shift towards a more comprehensive understanding of warfare, where information dominance and technological superiority play a decisive role. The emphasis on industry-

military collaboration is another important trend, as it recognises the role of private sector innovation and academic research in driving technological advancement. This ecosystem approach is essential for building a robust and self-reliant defence industrial base.

Comparative perspective

In a global context, India's Vision 2047 aligns with similar initiatives undertaken by major powers such as the United States and China, which are investing heavily in multi-domain and technology-driven warfare capabilities. However, India's approach is shaped by its unique strategic environment, resource constraints, and developmental priorities. While the roadmap demonstrates a clear understanding of global trends, its success will depend on its ability to adapt these trends to India's specific context.

Policy implications

The Vision 2047 roadmap has significant policy implications for India's defence and national security framework. It underscores the need for institutional reforms aimed at enhancing decision-making efficiency and promoting civil-military integration. Strengthening the defence industrial base through increased investment in research and development, as well as incentivising private sector participation, will be critical for achieving self-reliance. Additionally, fostering a strategic culture that emphasises long-term planning, jointness, and innovation will be essential for sustaining the momentum of military transformation.

In conclusion, Defence Forces Vision 2047 represents a bold and comprehensive attempt to prepare the Indian military for the challenges of the future. By emphasising technological advancement, jointness, multi-domain operations, and self-reliance, the roadmap provides a clear direction for military transformation. However, the transition from vision to reality will require overcoming significant challenges related to implementation, funding, and technological capability. With sustained political commitment, institutional reforms, and effective execution, Vision 2047 has the potential to transform India into a technologically advanced and globally competitive military power, thereby reinforcing its position in the evolving international order.

India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy. Picador (India), 2017 by Ramachandra Guha

Abha Chauhan Khimta

Ramachandra Guha's *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (2007) stands as one of the most insightful, spirited, analytically rich and elegantly crafted accounts of India's political and social trajectory after independence. Guha filled a significant scholarly gap by producing a deeply researched narrative of post-1947 India, when much of Indian historiography remained focused on the colonial period and the nationalist movement. The work is a magisterial account of the pains, struggles, humiliations and glories of the world's largest democracy. His contribution is to demonstrate how India's democracy survived despite formidable structural, geopolitical and socio-economic challenges in contemporary Indian historiography.

Guha wrote the book in the first decade of the twenty first century, when India's economy grew and when it was on the verge of becoming a superpower in the world and his central argument challenges the pessimistic predictions of early political theorists who doubted the viability of democracy in a poor, deeply divided, and recently decolonized society. Instead, he argues that India represents an example of democracy whose endurance must be explained through institutional resilience, political accommodation, federal flexibility, and a vibrant civil society. In doing so, Guha situates India within broader comparative democratic studies and implicitly contests modernization theories that linked democratic success to economic prosperity and social homogeneity.

Methodologically, the book is impressive for its extensive use of archival sources, private papers, memoirs, newspapers, and oral histories. Guha makes effective use of previously underutilized material, including personal correspondence of political leaders, reports of civil servants, and regional newspapers. This allows him to move beyond elite political narratives and incorporate regional dynamics, social movements, and intellectual debates. His interdisciplinary approach, combining political history, social history, and elements of political sociology, gives the work a multidimensional character that distinguishes it from conventional political chronicles.

Structurally, the book is organized both chronologically and thematically, beginning with the trauma of Partition and the enormous challenges of state

consolidation. Guha effectively demonstrates that India survived despite the massive challenges it faced. He appreciates the qualities of our first generation of political Leaders-Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar and their ilk. He applauded the courage with which they confronted these challenges and the sagacity with which they overcame them (Guha, P: xv). The discussion of the linguistic reorganization of states is particularly noteworthy, as Guha presents it as a successful example of democratic accommodation rather than a threat to national unity. He claimed that the creation of linguistic states has acted as a largely constructive channel for provincial pride (Guha, p.196). His analysis shows how India's federal structure evolved through negotiation rather than coercion, thereby strengthening the democratic framework. As Gandhi also claimed that under democracy individual liberty of opinion and action would be guarded and stressed on the fact that a democrat must be utterly selfless and must think not in terms of self or party but only of democracy. He expected a healthy and honest difference of opinion in democracy (Khimta, p. 88).

One of the strongest sections of the book is Guha's treatment of political crises. such as the Emergency (1975–77). For instance, he interprets emergency period (1975-77) not merely as an authoritarian aberration but as a stress test that ultimately reaffirmed democratic commitment through popular resistance and electoral correction. His analysis in this book, highlights the role of the judiciary, opposition parties, journalists, and civil society actors in resisting authoritarian tendencies. This section is particularly valuable because it situates the Emergency within global debates about democratic backsliding and institutional fragility. Guha also provides an account of the rise of regional parties and the decline of Congress dominance. He interprets it as a deepening of democratic participation rather than viewing this fragmentation as political decline. His discussion of caste politics and the Mandal movement is insightful in demonstrating how democratic processes once again proved successful and prediction about balkanization of India into many parts did not come to pass (Guha, p. 627). Similarity in the idea of Gandhi can be traced when he claimed that leaders must behave in a way that fosters social cohesiveness and spiritual development rather than encouraging social rifts for selfish motives (Khimta & Kumar, p. 56).

Another important contribution of the book lies in its treatment of social conflicts, including insurgencies in the Northeast, the Punjab crisis, and the Kashmir conflict. Guha presents these conflicts as products of historical grievances, identity politics, and governance failures. His balanced treatment reflects a historian's commitment to complexity rather than ideological simplification. However, some critics have argued that Guha's analysis sometimes privileges state-centric explanations over subaltern interpretations. Despite its many strengths, the book is not without limitations. One criticism concerns the relative imbalance between political explanation of events and economic analysis. Though Guha discusses the economic reforms of 1991 and

their political implications, yet the economic transformation of India arguably receives less analytical depth. The work would have strengthened by the detailed economic analysis while giving the significance of liberalization in reshaping India's social structure and global position.

Additionally, some scholars have noted that while Guha attempts to incorporate social history, the narrative still tends to revolve around prominent political figures and institutional developments. Greater engagement with issues such as gender history, labour movements, and grassroots activism might have further enriched the work. Nevertheless, given already the vast scope of the book, such omissions appear more as limitations of scale rather than conceptual weaknesses. Stylistically, Guha achieves a rare balance between scholarly rigor and narrative readability. It can be argued that his ability to combine anecdotal detail with structural analysis makes the book valuable not only for historians but also for scholars of political science, international relations, and development studies. This accessibility has contributed to the book's wide readership beyond academia, including policymakers and civil services aspirants.

In historiographical terms, *India After Gandhi* can be seen as part of a broader shift toward writing contemporary history with the same seriousness traditionally reserved for earlier periods. By documenting India's democratic evolution, Guha contributes to the intellectual project of understanding postcolonial state formation and democratic endurance in the Global South. His work complements studies of democratic resilience and provides a valuable empirical case for comparative political theory.

In conclusion, *India After Gandhi* remains a landmark work in modern Indian historiography. Its breadth of research, analytical clarity, and balanced interpretation make it an indispensable reference for understanding India's post-independence journey. Guha succeeds in demonstrating that India's democratic survival was neither accidental nor inevitable, but rather the result of continuous negotiation between institutions, leaders, and citizens. For scholars seeking to understand the complexities of India's political development, this work remains essential reading.

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(Humanities and Social Sciences)

ISSN: 2277-1425; e-ISSN: 2277-1433

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Harish K. Thakur

Chief Editor HPUJ

hpuniversityjournal@gmail.com

94180-08900

Published by:
Himachal Pradesh Univesity, Shimla-5

Printed by:
DGT Graphics, Calm Café Building, Summer Hill, Shimla-171 005
Mobile: 98050 22905