वार्षिक अकादमिक जर्नल २०२४-२५
Yearly Academic Journal 2024-25

कालिंदी कॉलेज

दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

पूर्वी पटेल नगर

नई दिल्ली - 110008

राष्ट्रीय मूल्यांकन एवं प्रत्यायन परिषद् द्वारा A+श्रेणी प्राप्त

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Editorial Board of Yearly Academic Journal, 2024-25

प्राचार्या का संदेश

कालिंदी कॉलेज की वार्षिक अकादमिक जर्नल के 24वें अंक को अकादमिक समुदाय के समक्ष प्रस्तुत करते हुए मुझे बहुत गर्व और प्रसन्नता हो रही है। हमारी त्रिभाषिक और बहुविषयक जर्नल, जिसमें डबल-ब्लाइंड-पीयर-रिव्यू किए गए लेख शामिल हैं, विद्वानों को अध्ययन के विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में मूल शोध प्रकाशित करने के लिए एक मंच प्रदान करती है। अपनी पत्रिका के माध्यम से, हम कॉलेजों और विश्वविद्यालयों के विद्वानों और संकाय सदस्यों के बीच सार्थक शोध और समीक्षात्मक अध्ययन की संस्कृति को प्रोत्साहित करने का प्रयास करते हैं। मुझे उम्मीद है कि पाठकों को यहाँ प्रकाशित लेख बौद्धिक रूप से प्रेरक, आधुनिकतम, और विचारोत्तेजक लगेंगे। मैं संपादकीय टीम द्वारा किए गए सराहनीय काम के लिए हार्दिक प्रशंसा व्यक्त करती हूँ और जर्नल के भविष्य के अंकों के लिए उन्हें शुभकामनाएँ देती हूँ।

Principal's Message

It fills me with immense pride and great delight to present the 24th issue of The Yearly Academic Journal of Kalindi College to the academic community. Our trilingual and multidisciplinary journal, which features double-blind-peer-reviewed articles, continues to provide a platform to scholars for publishing original research in various fields of study. With our journal, we endeavor to foster and promote a climate of meaningful research and critical enquiry amongst scholars and faculty members across colleges and universities. I hope the readers will find the articles published here to be intellectually stimulating, refreshingly insightful, and engagingly thought-provoking. I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the commendable job done by the Editorial Team and wish them the best of luck for the future issues of the journal.

Editorial

"In the tapestry of knowledge, every thread of inquiry weaves a brighter future."

With immense pride and collective effort, we present Volume 24 of The Yearly Academic Journal, a trilingual (English, Hindi, and Sanskrit) publication by Kalindi College, University of Delhi. Building on the legacy of fostering multidisciplinary scholarship, this edition continues our commitment to rigorous academic discourse, underscored by a double-blind peer-review process. The current volume brings together diverse voices—researchers, faculty, and thinkers from across India, reflecting the dynamic interplay of tradition and innovation in academia.

This year's articles traverse a rich intellectual landscape. This volume features Hindi-language articles, enriching our multilingual ethos and broadening accessibility. These contributions reaffirm our dedication to linguistic diversity and regional scholarship.   In the Social Sciences, "Economic Reforms in India: A Tale of Resistance and Caution" interrogates the tensions between policy shifts and public dissent, while the paper on "Politics and Political Parties in Modern Egypt" dissects the complexities of post-revolution governance. The Humanities section delves into cultural resilience, with "Native American Cultural Survival in Louise Erdrich's Novel Tracks" exploring land, language, and identity, and the research on "Mallinatha: Redefining Gender in Jainism" presents challenging historical narratives through the lens of spiritual inclusivity.

In this year's publication Gender Studies emerges as a pivotal theme, bridging tradition and modernity. The paper "Reclaiming Shakti: How Hindu Philosophy Empowers Women" reimagines feminist discourse through Shaktism, while "From Patriarchy to Equality: The Feminist Ideology of B.R. Ambedkar" celebrates Ambedkar's enduring vision for social justice. The article "Fearless Freedom Fighter" pays homage to the Jhansi Regiment's role in India's struggle for independence, underscoring the intersection of gender and nationalism.

Technology's transformative power is examined in "New Media Technology and Refurbished Portrayal of Gender on Digital Platforms in India" and "Optimizing Recruitment through Artificial Intelligence", the latter introducing the innovative AARIF model to revolutionize HR practices. Meanwhile, the paper on "Shifting Cultures from Taboo to Awareness" confronts societal stigmas around menstrual health, advocating for progressive change.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Prof Meena Charanda, the Principal of Kalindi College for her unwavering institutional support in the publication of this year's Academic Journal. Special thanks to our peer reviewers, whose expertise ensured the journal's academic rigor. We also extend our gratitude to the Editorial Team Members for their constant support at every stage of this Journal's publication journey. To our readers: May this volume ignite curiosity, challenge perspectives, and inspire dialogue. Each article is a testament to the relentless pursuit of knowledge a pursuit that transcends boundaries and unites us in shared intellectual growth.

Happy Reading!

Editor

Dr Shalini Shikha

Co-Editor

Ms Tanu Sharma

संपादकीय

"जहाँ शोध में संवेदना हो और संवेदना में सत्य वही से निकलती है ज्ञान की वह नदी जो समय की सीमाओ के परे बहती है" वार्षिक अकादमिक जर्नल उसी ज्ञानधारा का प्रवाह है ।

इस वर्ष अकादमिक जर्नल 2024-25 के लिए हिन्दी में तीन शोध आलेख है जो भाषा - शैली, सिनेमा और नवाचार तथा दलित स्त्री आत्मलेखन और मौलिक अधिकार से संबंधित है | बच्चन की भाषा - शैली (आत्मकथाओं के विशेष सन्दर्भ में)पर केंद्रित यह लेख बताता है की बच्चन जी ने आत्मकथा लेखन में जिस प्रकार की शैली को अपनाया है वह यथासंभव यथार्थ और कल्पना का आश्रय लेती है। हिन्दी आत्मकथा साहित्य में बच्चन जी की आत्मकथा को सर्वश्रेष्ठ स्थान मिला जिस का आधार उनकी वर्णन शैली, भाषा - शैली एवं शिल्प है।

दूसरा शोध आलेख 'हिन्दी सिनेमा में नवाचार :विविध पक्ष' पर केंद्रित है। 'सिनेमा वही जो समाज की धड़कनों को सुन सके और नवाचार वही जो इन धड़कनों को नई पहचान दे सके' को चरितार्थ करता यह लेख बताता है की सिनेमा केवल मनोरंजन का माध्यम नहीं बल्कि यह सामाजिक संवाद और परिवर्तन का एक प्रभावशाली यंत्र बन चुका है। डिजिटल युग में तकनीकी, नवप्रयोगों, कथानक की विविधता और विमर्शों की समकालीनता को जिस गहराई से विश्लेषित किया गया है वह शोध - पत्रिका के गाम्भीर्य को और अधिक सशक्त करता है।

तीसरा आलेख 'हिन्दी साहित्य का दलित स्त्री आत्मलेखन और मौलिक अधिकार ' में दलित जीवन संघर्ष को जिस तरह से वर्णित किया गया है उससे यह समझना और भी आसान हो जाता है की दलित स्त्री आत्मकथाओं में भारतीय संविधान द्वारा दिए गए मौलिक अधिकारों का काफी हद तक हनन होता दिखाई देता है। मौलिक अधिकार छीने जाते है समाज के उन ठेकेदारों द्वारा जो स्वयं को उच्च जाति कहता हैं। इन आत्मकथाओं में जिस मौलिक अधिकार का हनन होता दिखाई देता हैं वह है समानता का अधिकार जो आर्टिकल 14 से 18 तक वर्णित है।

अकादमिक पत्रिका के इस अंक की यात्रा की सृजन यात्रा में सर्वप्रथम मैं कालिंदी महाविद्यालय की **आदरणीय प्राचार्य प्रोफेसर मीना चराँदा** को हृदय से नमन एवं कोटिश धन्यवाद अर्पित करती हूँ। उनका स्नेहिल सहयोग मेरे लिए संबल रहा जिससे विश्वास के साथ मैं इस कार्य सम्पादन हेतु आगे बढ़ सकी। इसी क्रम में आगे **तकनीकी टीम** के प्रति विशेष धन्यवाद ज्ञापित करती हूँ जिनकी सूक्ष्म दृष्टि ने पत्रिका को तकनीकी दृष्टि से उत्कृष्ट स्वरूप प्रदान किया। साथ ही साथ मैं उन सभी **लेखकों, समीक्षकों और सहयोगियों** को भी हृदय से धन्यवाद देती हूँ जिन्होंने अपने विचारों की सुगंध से इस पत्रिका को वैचारिक पुष्प गुच्छ में परिवर्तित कर दिया। आप सभी का सहयोग इस अकादमिक पत्रिका के लिए एक आत्मीय सहभागिता रही हैं। मैं आशा करती हूँ की यह साझा प्रयास ज्ञान की इस दीपशिखा को और अधिक उजासपूर्ण बनाएगा।

डॉ. तरुणा (संपादक)

डॉ. विभा ठाकुर (सह- संपादक)

हिन्दी अनुभाग

अनुक्रमणिका/Index

हिन्दी सिनेमा में नवाचार : विविध पक्ष

रक्षा गीता

सहायक आचार्य, हिंदी विभाग

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आलेख

सार - अपने आरंभिक समय से ही सिनेमा विशेषकर हिंदी सिनेमा फ़ॉर्मूलाबद्ध रहा है यानी फ़िल्मों में जब कोई एक स्टोरी, हीरो-हीरोइन,चरित्र नायक-नायिका हिट हो जाया करते, निर्माता निर्देशक बार-बार उन्हें दोहराते रहते। ये स्टीरियोटाइप छवियाँ दर्शकों को भी लुभाती थी, वे मानने को तैयार नहीं कि नायक ढिशुम-ढिशुम न करे या जिस कलाकार ने एक बार बहन की भूमिका निभा ली, दर्शक उसे नायिका यानी हीरोइन के रूप में कभी स्वीकार नहीं करेंगे,फिल्म का सुखांत,विवाह की शहनाई के साथ अंत यही मुख्य था। निर्माता जोखिम नहीं उठाना चाहते थे क्योंकि फ़िल्मों के फ्लॉप होने का ठप्पा यानी करियर खत्म ! लेकिन समय के साथ-साथ नए निर्देशकों ने जोखिम उठाना शुरू किया दर्शकों के मनोरंजन की भूख भी नए स्वाद की माँग करने लगी। आज लगभग एक शतक से अधिक समय पूरे कर चुका हिन्दी सिनेमा आज तकनीक और दर्शक केन्द्रित बन रहा है, सिनेमा के विकल्पों ने, तौर तरीकों ने बड़े-बड़े बैनरों को विवश किया कि वे अब दर्शकों को मूर्ख न समझे, जैसे कि कहा जाता था कि फ़िल्म देखने के लिए दिमाग घर पर रख कर जाओ! इस शोध आलेख में सिनेमा में हो रहे नवाचारों के विविध पक्षों को दिखाया गया है।

बीज शब्द- हिन्दी सिनेमा, तकनीकी बदलाव कहानी (कंटेंट), प्रेम और विवाह, राजनीति , खंडित नायकत्व, हाशिये का समाज,स्त्री अस्मिता ।

सिनेमा मनोरंजन का तकनीकी माध्यम है। एक समय था कि फ़ॉर्मूला फ़िल्में फैशन की तरह लोकप्रिय हुआ करती थी। धार्मिक, ऐतिहासिक, पारिवारिक, सामाजिक फ़िल्में, स्टीरियोटाइप चरित्र और कलाकार होने के बावजूद 'फर्स्ट डे फर्स्ट शो' के लिए फैन्स लंबी कतारों में लगकर ब्लैक में टिकट लिया करते थे। हाल ही में नेटफ्लिक्स पर प्रदर्शित सलीम जावेद के संघर्षों और सफलता की कहानी कहती डॉक्यूमेंट्री 'एंग्री यंग मेन' (netflix पर उपलब्ध)में एक फ़िल्म दर्शक कह रहा है कि ***'शोले की ब्लैक टिकट बेचकर कई लोगों ने घर बना लिए थे'[1]*** यानि लोकप्रियता का ये आलम था कि लोग दो तीन गुना दामों पर टिकट खरीदा करते थे। शुद्ध मनोरंजन से भरपूर इन व्यवसायिक फ़िल्मों में लगभग एक जैसी कहानी, कलाकार, माँ के हाथ की खीर, बहन की शादी अन्यथा बलात्कार फिर बदला , नायिका की ख़ूबसूरती और नज़ाकत मिलेगी । जो स्त्री-चरित्र समाज के विपरीत आचरण करे वो खलनायिका, समाज भेदभाव छुआछूत से परे विभाजन कहीं दिखाई भी देगा तो धार्मिक या जातिगत न होकर वर्ग के आधार यानी अमीर-गरीब हुआ करता था। ख़ूबसूरत गाँव, भोलेभाले चरित्र मन मोह लिया करते थे। प्रेम, प्रेमगीत परदे पर आकर्षक लगते और विवाह के साथ सुखद अंत। समानांतर सिनेमा के आग़ाज़ के साथ सफेद पर्दे के रंगीन रुपहले सपने यथार्थ की स्याह जमीन पर उतरने लगे थे। समाज, राजनीति, आर्थिक-तंत्र, तकनीक आदि के विकास के साथ-साथ सिनेमा और दर्शकों का आस्वाद भी तीव्र गति से बदला। ओटीटी प्लेटफोर्म और सोशल मीडिया ने भी दर्शको की रुचि को बदलने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई। बड़े परदे से आज सिनेमा

मुट्ठी (मोबाइल) में कैद हो चुका है, कोई फार्मूला,बड़ा बैनर या स्टार अब सफलता की गारंटी नहीं बन सकता। नित नये कंटेंट और तकनीक की खोज में बड़े-बड़े बैनर, कलाकार बुरी तरह फ्लॉप किये जाने लगे हैं जबकि नई प्रतिभाएँ कम बजट में हर विषय पर फ़िल्म बनाने लगी, पसंद भी की जाने लगी हैं। 83, जयेश भाई जोरदार, सम्राट, पृथ्वीराज, बच्चन पांडे, धाकड़, सूर्यवंशम आदि को दर्शकों ने नकार दिया । कोरोना पहले ही बहुत उथल-पुथल कर चुका था, ओटीटी केंद्र में आया तो दर्शक दक्षिण भारतीय व क्षेत्रीय सिनेमा से परिचित हुए, जहाँ उन्हें बेहतर कंटेंट मिला। इस समय 95 से ज्यादा ओटीपी प्लेटफार्म है। तिसपर बॉयकाट बॉलीवुड ने भी परम्परागत सिनेमा की कमर ही तोड़ दी। तथाकथित राष्ट्रवादी फ़िल्में बनाने का दबाव भी निर्माताओं पर रहा लेकिन सफलता हाथ न आई। सबके दिलों पर राज करने वाले 'खान-तिकड़ी' का बहिष्कार मासूम 'लाल सिंह चढ़ढा' को झेलना पड़ा, जो इस बात का भी संकेत है कि दर्शक कुछ नया देखना चाहता है। दर्शक अपने समय, रुचि और सुविधा को भी प्राथमिकता देते हैं, सिनेमाई मनोरंजन हमेशा महँगा शौक रहा है इसलिए जब एक महीने के सब्सक्रबशन पर मनचाहे समय पर विविध भाषाओं और देशों का सिनेमा देखने को मिलेगा तो सिनेमा प्रेमी 2-3 घंटे के लिए 5-7 घंटे और अतिरिक्त रुपया ख़राब करना नहीं चाहते।

तकनीकी बदलाव

मलयालम फिल्म *'सिनेमा बंदी'* (नेटफ्लिक्स पर उपलब्ध) ने दिखाया कि सिनेमा किसी की बपौती नहीं अब हर कोई सिनेमा बना सकता है। तकनीक ने मोबाइल से फ़िल्म बनाना संभव कर दिया है । मोबाइल के एक विज्ञापन में निर्देशक अनुराग कश्यप कहते हैं *"स्क्रीन सही तो सीन सही"* निर्माता निर्देशक विशाल भारद्वाज मोबाइल से शोर्ट फ़िल्म *"फ़ुर्सत"* बनाकर यूट्यूब पर रिलीज़ भी किया हैं, एक फ़िल्म 'अनवांटेड' जिसे फ़िल्मी पोलिटिक्स के चलते रिलीज़ न होने दिया गया, वह भी यूट्यूब पर रिलीज़ हुई[3] पाकिस्तानी फिल्म 'जिन्दगी तमाशा' को पाकिस्तान में बैन कर दिया गया तो उसके निर्माता निर्देशक ने सरमद सुल्तान खूसत इसे यूट्यूब पर रिलीज़ किया [4] यानी फ़िल्म निर्माण,रिलीज़ और देखने के तरीके बदल रहे है। ओटीटी से पूर्व तक रेडियो, टीवी चैनल्स आदि से सिनेमाघरों पर कभी संकट नहीं आया पर आज मनोरंजन मुट्ठी में कैद हो चुका है, मनोरंजन दर्शक की सुविधा और रूचि के अनुसार उपलब्ध है। सिनेमाघर ओटीटी से प्रतिस्पर्धा करने में लगभग नाकाम हो चुके है एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार[5] PVR Inox 50 स्क्रीन बंद करने जा रही है महाराष्ट्र में 80% सिंगल स्क्रीन थिएटर पहले ही बंद हो चुके हैं,कोविड काल के बाद 2.4 करोड़ लोगों ने थिएटर जाना बंद कर दिया है, आज सिनेमाघरों की संख्या 24000 से घटकर 5000 तक रह गई है हालाँकि *पठान व ग़दर* की लोकप्रियता और कमाई ने सिनेमाघरों में उम्मीद जगाई है। जबकि 2019 तक *सुपर 30, वार, उरी, कबीर सिंह, हाउसफुल-4, मिशन मंगल ,दबंग -3,स्ट्डेंट्स ऑफ द इयर* ने बिसनेस अच्छा किया था क्योंकि दर्शको के पास अधिक विकल्प नहीं थे लेकिन आज हैं। ओटीटी की वेबसीरीज़ और फ़िल्मों में नई प्रतिभाओं को खुले दिल से स्वीकार किया जा रहा है दर्शकों ने इन्हें हाथोंहाथ लिया, स्टार संस्कृति को धक्का लगा है जो जरूरी भी था। आज सिनेमा निर्माण में मेकअप आर्टिस्ट,स्क्रिप्ट राइटर,और परदे के पीछे के कई काम AI करने लगी है। हाल ही में हॉलीवुड ने AI के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन भी किया[6]।

कहानी (कंटेंट)

वैसे तो 2000 से पूर्व ही हिन्दी सिनेमा में कहानी के केंद्र में 'आम लोग' आने लगे थे लेकिन आज ओटीटी प्लेटफार्म ने परम्परागत बॉलीवुड को ओवरटेक कर लिया है उसने *"जरा हट के"* नहीं बल्कि अनोखे नए कंटेंट जनता को घर बैठे उपलब्ध करवाए। 2020 में कोरोना के कारण दिग्गज अभिनेता अमिताभ बच्चन की **'गुलाबो सिताबो'**[7] नेटफ्लिक्स पर रिलीज़ हुई फिर 'बॉयकाट बॉलीवुड' के ट्रेंड के चलते अलिया भट्ट की 'डार्लिंग्स' जो सिनेमाघर के लिए बनी थी, नेटफ्लिक्स पर रिलीज़ किया गया क्योंकि फरवरी में रिलीज़ 'गंगुबाई काठियावाड़ी'

Peer Reviewed

एक सशक्त फिल्म होकर भी ज्यादा न चली। वेबसीरिज़ *'लीला'[8]* जो धार्मिक कट्टरतावाद की भयानक तस्वीर प्रस्तुत करती है, राष्ट्रवाद की अवधारणा के प्रतिकूल होने के कारण सिनेमाघर पर आ ही नहीं सकती थी इसलिए ओटीटी पर आती है। सार्थक या कला सिनेमा के भीतर भरपूर मनोरंजन, कम पैसा, अधिक सुविधा, मनपसंद विकल्प व मनोरंजन की गारंटी हो तो दर्शक सिनेमाघर क्यों जाएगा? ओटीटी (2008) से पूर्व ही नयी-नयी प्रतिभाएं अपने दम पर कम बजट में बेहतरीन फ़िल्में बनाना आरम्भ कर चुकी थी, हालाँकि बड़े बैनर और कलाकारों का आकर्षण बरकरार था ग़दर, कोई मिल गया, थ्री इडियट्स, युवा, बंटी और बबली, धूम, लगे रहो मुन्ना भाई,कभी अलविदा न कहना, फ़ना, विवाह, डॉन, जोधा अकबर, गजनी आदि से लेकर बजरंगी भाईजान तक अगर माने तो फ़िल्में *500 करोड़ क्लब* तक पहुँच रहीं थी लेकिन साथ ही पिंजर, कॉर्पोरेट, फैशन, जोगर्स पार्क, ब्लैक, माय ब्रदर निखिल, देव-डी, गुलाल, धोबी घाट,कैरी, हरी भरी, हासिल, ओय लक्की लक्की ओये, मैं मेरी पत्नी और वो द ब्लू अम्ब्रेला,बिल्लू, पीपली लाइव और 2022 में 'वध' जैसे छोटे बजट की फ़िल्में पसंद की जाती रही और मुनाफा भी कमा रही थी। कंटेंट की विविधता ने करण जौहर जैसे निर्माता को भी 'माय नाम इस खान' जैसे गंभीर विषय पर फ़िल्म बनाने के लिए प्रेरित किया क्योंकि उनका ही कथन है- *आज आप दर्शकों को बेवकूफ़ नहीं बना सकतें ।* आज *लापता लेडीज़ और धक् धक्* जैसी स्त्री शक्तिकरण की फिल्में या दलित चेतना की *कटहल, दहाड़* जैसी वेब सीरीज़ विमर्शों का नया फलक तैयार कर रहीं है जो किसी भी साहित्यिक कृति से ज्यादा प्रभावोत्पादक हैं। यूट्यूब की लघु फ़िल्में ऑस्कर नोमिनेटिड हो रहीं है, *चंपारण मटन[9],यस सर[10]* जैसी फिल्मों ने कई राष्ट्रीय अंतर्राष्ट्रीय पुरस्कार जीत रही है।

प्रेम और विवाह

'दिलवाले दुल्हनिया ले जाएंगे' का प्रेमी विवाह करके ही नायिका को अपने साथ ले जाना चाहता है *'विवाह'* फिल्म को नेशनल अवार्ड मिलता है, दिल तो पागल है, *कुछ कुछ होता है, हम दिल दे चुके सनम, कहो ना प्यार है, मोहब्बतें,* इन सभी फिल्मों में प्रेम और विवाह परंपरागत अंदाज में हैं ,जिसमे वैवाहिक संस्कार अपने ताम-झाम के साथ चित्रित होते हैं । *हम आपके हैं कौन*? पारिवारिक संरचना के आधुनिक मापदंड प्रस्तुत करती है यह फिल्म गांव की पृष्ठभूमि पर बनी *'नदिया के पार'* फिल्म का रीमेक है । आज विवाह संस्था बिखरने के कगार पर है उस पर पुनर्विचार हो रहें हैं । 2012 में आई *'कॉकटेल'* फ़िल्म ने लिविंग रिलेशनशिप को संजीदगी से प्रस्तुत किया है तो साथ ही विवाह के साइड इफेक्ट भी बता रही है। *'की और का'* जैसी फिल्में आपको दिखाती हैं कि स्त्री बाहर मोर्चा संभाल रही है तो पुरुष घर संभाल रहा है,पति-पत्नी की स्टीरियोटाइप छवि तोड़ने की कोशिश है ।*'मिनी'* जो सरोगेसी के गंभीर और संवेदनशील मुद्दे पर बनी है जिसमें नायिका फ़िल्मों में काम करने की खातिर सरोगेट मदर बनती है लेकिन माँ बनने के बाद आगे नहीं बढ़ पाती, ये फ़िल्में पितृसत्ता पर सीधे आघात करती हैं । *'लव आजकल'* के प्रेमीयुगल विवाह की परवाह नहीं करते, दिल टूटने पर वे रोने-धोने वाले नहीं है, दिल पर पत्थर रखकर ब्रेकअप करते है फिर नए सिरे से माइंड मेकअप कर लेते है, उनके लिए अपना भविष्य (तमाशा,जब तक है जान,मेरी प्यारी बिंदु) ज्यादा महत्वपूर्ण है। *'बधाई हो'* में दो व्यस्क बेटो की माँ जब गर्भवती होती है तो उसे तिरस्कार झेलना पड़ता है हालाँकि बाद में उन्हें अपनाना टैबू तोड़ना ही है जो सकारात्मक है, शादी टूट जाने पर *क्वीन* की नायिका अकेले हनीमून पर निकल जाती है। हाल ही में श्रद्धा नामक लड़की ने एकल विवाह किया और सुर्खियों में रही जिसे बाज़ार और फ़िल्मों प्रभाव ही कहा जायेगा । *विकी डोनर* सरोगेसी और एडॉप्शन जैसे अत्याधुनिक विषय को हमारे सामने रखती है। *पीकू* बाप-बेटी के अनोखे रिश्ते की कहानी है, पिता रूढ़िवादी समाज से लड़ता है, भय से बेटी की शादी नहीं करना चाहता, घंटो टॉयलेट में बैठ कर मोशन नहीं हो पाना इस बात का भी प्रतीक है कि तमाम सड़ी-गली रूढ़ियों को हम भीतर दबाये बैठे है, चाह कर भी उनसे निज़ात नहीं पा रहे, वास्तव में हिन्दी सिनेमा आज तमाम तरह की रूढ़ियों को तोड़ रहा है और अपने समय की माँग के अनुकूल

दर्शकों की नब्ज़ को पकड़ पा रहा है। **दम लगा के हईशा**, *बरेली की बर्फी, मुल्क, आर्टिकल 15, बनारस* ये फिल्में छोटे शहरों के बड़े सपनों की कहानी कहती हैं। नेटफ्लिक्स की वेब सीरिजों ने इस बदलाव को अत्यंत विस्तार और यथार्थवादी नज़रिए से दिखाया *'सेक्रेड गेम्स' घुल, क्राइम, लीला* आदि में महिलाओं के प्रति हिंसा, राजनीति, हिंसा, धर्म, सांप्रदायिकता आदि बदलते परिदृश्य को बहुत ही बारीकी से दिखाती है।

राजनीति

70-80 के दशक में एक अनरोमांटिक, क्रोधी, एंग्री यंग मेन का प्रवेश होता है जो सामाजिक, राजनीतिक व्यवस्था से अकेले जूझता है लेकिन इस आक्रामक विद्रोही की तरफ़ से ध्यान भटकाने के लिए ही संभवत: राजनेताओं ने पाकिस्तान को शत्रु रूप में प्रचारित प्रसारित करना आरम्भ किया, हर छोटी-बड़ी घटना का जिम्मेदार पाकिस्तान को माना जाने लगा, जीवन के महत्वपूर्ण मुद्दे चालाकी से दरकिनार कर दिए गये। रोमांस पुन: केंद्र में आया। देश भक्ति की फ़िल्में पाकिस्तान को ललकार रही थी *ग़दर, मिशन कश्मीर, रोजा,सरफ़रोश, बॉर्डर, लक्ष्य, गदर, उरी,सर्जिकल स्ट्राइक,परमाणु, मिशन मंगल,* आदि फ़िल्में आम जनता को उतेजित करती हैं। आतंकवादी चरित्र मुस्लिम के रूप में गढ़े जाने लगे। पहले का राष्ट्रवाद अंग्रेजों के विरुद्ध था, अब किसके विरुद्ध करेंगे? क्रिकेट में भी देशभक्ति/राष्ट्रवाद आ गया *लगान* फ़िल्म इसी क्रिकेट को भुनाती है, यहाँ राष्ट्रवाद औपनिवेशिक ताकतों के विरुद्ध किसानों का विद्रोह है जो 90 के बाद आये उदारीकरण के विरोध में था, जिसकी विकृति आज चरम पर है। पूँजीवाद के कारण किसानों और आदिवासियों की क्या दुर्दशा हो रही है हम सब वाकिफ हैं लेकिन चारों ओर सांप्रदायिकता की आग ने मूल समस्याओं को राख कर दिया है। पब्लिक फंड से बनी 'मंथन 'जैसी फिल्म का निर्माण आज संभव है?

खंडित नायकत्व

पहले दर्शक सीधे-सादे हुआ करते थे नायक के पौरुषत्व से कुछ पल जुड़ कर कटु यथार्थ भूल जाते थे लेकिन आज का दर्शक नायकों का महिमामंडन नहीं पचा पाते, कैसे कोई अकेला 10 गोली लगने के बाद भी 10 गुंडों को पीट लेता है, वो हिरोइन को छेड़ता था नायिका भी खुश होती थी जबकि अन्य कोई हो तो वो खलनायक बन जाता है। बासु चटर्जी ने मध्यवर्गीय व्यक्ति को नायकत्व प्रदान किया ,हालाँकि 'डर' और 'बाजीगर' से ग्रे शेड वाले खंडित नायक का स्वरुप तैयार हो रहा था, आदर्श छवि

लुप्त हो रही थी जो कंटेंट के बदलाव का ही परिणाम था। 2001 में *'लगान'* का किसान *'पीपली लाइव'* 2010 तक आते-आते ज़मीन से बेदखल हो मज़दूर के रूप में परिवर्तित हो गया तो भी पसंद किया गया उसके साथ दर्शक की हमदर्दी थी इसी तरह *कहानी,कॉर्पोरेट, फैशन, माय ब्रदर निखिल,ट्रैफिक सिग्नल, लंच बॉक्स,रंग दे बसंत,आमिर,उड़दा पंजाब, गुलाल, इश्किया,डेढ़ इश्किया, मैं और मिसेज़ खन्ना,*जैसी फ़िल्में फिल्मों में नायक की जगह 'चरित्र' ने ले ली है जो पूरी फिल्म को अपने कंधे पर उठाकर चलता है। आज एक फ़िल्म से सभी को खुश करना आसान नहीं क्योंकि मनोरंजन के विकल्प बहुत हैं, ये फ़िल्में भले ही ज्यादा ना कमाई करें लेकिन इनका बजट भी कम होता है जैसे नसीरुद्दीन शाह की वेडनेसडे, शाहिद आदि। जबकि बड़े बैनर की फिल्मों का आधा बजट तो नायक-नायिकाओं को पहले ही दे दिया जाता है और फिल्म फ्लॉप होने पर नायक को फर्क नहीं पड़ता

जुगजुग जियो, शमशेरा, लाल सिंह चढ्ढा, शाबाश मिट्ठू, रॉकेट्री, हीरोपंती' को दर्शक नहीं मिलते जबकि दर्शक *'धोनी अनटोल्ड स्टोरी'* जो पहले देखी सुनी न हो उसे देखने में दिलचस्पी रखतें हैं इस तरह की फ़िल्मों में आउटसाइडर सुशांत सिंह की लोकप्रियता बॉलीवुड से बर्दाश्त नहीं हुई परिणाम आपके सामने है लेकिन सुशांत सिंह की आत्महत्या भी नेपोटिज्म और बॉयकाट बॉलीवुड के प्रमुख कारणों में है। आज का चरित्र नायक समाज के किसी भी वर्ग का हो सकता है वह कमज़ोर अनाकर्षक बॉडी वाला हो सकता है राजपाल यादव,राजकुमार राव, इरफ़ान खान,पंकज त्रिपाठी, विजय वर्मा जैसे कलाकारों के लाखों फैन है ये नए कंटेंट के साथ न्याय करतें है निर्माता निर्देशक भी जोखिम उठातें हैं।

हाशिये का समाज

कला सिनेमा या न्यू वेव सिनेमा ने हाशिये के समाज को केंद्र में लाने का प्रयास किया था लेकिन ये सिलसिला ज्यादा नहीं चल पाया ये फ़िल्में समारोहों की शोभा बढ़ाती रही पर दर्शक नहीं जुटा पाई पर *लगान* फिल्म का कचरा से व्यावसायिक सिनेमा में हाशिए के लोगों की दक्षता को समझने का कोशिश की गई है। कचरा का बॉल स्पिन करना उसकी दक्षता अस्पृश्य जातियों के विशेषताओं को पहचान दिलाने की ओर संकेत करता है । 'स्वदेस' में भी हाशिये के लोगों की समस्याएं देखने को मिलती है। व्यावसायिक फिल्म *माय नेम इस खान* में भी है हाशिये पर जा रहे हैं मुस्लिम समुदाय के मर्म को बताया गया है, 2005 में समलैंगिकता पर *माय ब्रदर निखिल* पसंद की जाती है इसी वर्ष *शबनम मौसी* पारलैंगिक (किन्नर) विधायक की सच्ची कहानी प्रस्तुत करती है, *दोस्ताना* समलैंगिकता को बहुत बचकानी ढंग से दिखाती है जबकि 2015 में *अलीगढ़* फिल्म में इस विषय को बहुत ही संवेदनशीलता से प्रस्तुत करती है, मराठी फ़िल्म *सैराट का रीमके धड़क* हाशिये के समाज को फिल्मी अंदाज में घटिया प्रेम कहानी की तरह प्रस्तुत करती है, 2019 में *सर* एक काम वाली महिला की मार्मिक प्रेम कहानी कहती है, *ट्रैफिक सिग्नल* फिल्म सिग्नल पर गलत काम करने वाले लोगों की जिंदगी का यथार्थ ब्यौरा प्रस्तुत करती है जिनके पास अन्य विकल्प है ही नहीं। *'पा'* फिल्म एक बीमार बच्चे की कहानी है, *मार्गरीटा विद ए स्टॉ* अनोखे अंदाज़ में एक बीमार लड़की की शारीरिक इच्छाओं को बोल्ड अंदाज़ में चित्रित करती है, *आर्टिकल 15* में हाशिये के समाज की समस्याओं को सवर्ण की नजर से दिखाती है जबकि *बिल्लू* जो संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका में यहां अपने मूल शीर्षक से बिल्लू बार्बर के नाम से प्रदर्शित हुई थी *पीपली लाइव* का किसान एक आम दलित किसान की कहानी कहता है,जय भीम, जयंती,कर्णन डब्बड दक्षिण भारतीय फ़िल्में हैं *झुण्ड* । ओटीटी प्लेटफार्म आज समाज के हर तबके और वर्ग को फिल्मों का विषय बना रहा है जिसमें चरित्रों के उपनाम अवश्य होतें हैं अथवा संवाद जो सामाजिक भेदभाव को मुखरता से दिखाते हैं, हाल ही में आई 'चंपारण मटन' में एक संवाद है *"ज़रूरी है ओ कम बाप किये वो हम भी करें।"*

स्त्री अस्मिता

2000 में बेटी न.वन' से पहले भी स्त्री अस्मिता पर फ़िल्में बनती रही थी **शेरनी, खून भरी माँग, ये आग कब बुझेगी,**पर इनकी स्त्रियाँ यथार्थ से कोसों दूर हैं लेकिन 2001 में *'लज्जा'* फिल्म सीधे तौर पर पितृसत्ता पर प्रहार करती है । भ्रूण हत्या,दहेज़ समस्या प्रेम में धोखा खाई सीता के रोल में माधुरी दीक्षित के संवाद जो राम से प्रश्न कर रही है आज तो उसके प्रदर्शन का सवाल ही नहीं उठता फिल्म में सभी नायिकयों के नाम सीता के ही पर्यायवाची है जो इस पुरुषप्रधान समाज से बचती भाग रही है कही चुनौती देती है कहीं रूढ़ियों के खिलाफ़ आवाज़ उठाती है।

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चाँदनी बार,दमन,ज़ुबैदा, सत्ता, ख्वाहिश,मातृभूमि, चमेली, डर्टी, पिक्चर्स, स्त्री,गुलाबी गैंग, हाईवे, क्वीन, जलसा,गंगूबाई काठियावाड़ी, लिपस्टिक अंडर माय बुरका ,मर्दानी बदरीनाथ की दुलहनियां छोरी थलाइवी आदि इस सन्दर्भ में थप्पड़ और पिंक दोनों फिल्में स्त्री की देह की स्वतंत्रता को तार्किक ढंग से चित्रित करती है थप्पड़ की नायिका कहती है- *'नहीं, एक थप्पड़ भी मैं बर्दाश्त नहीं करूंगी'*[11] और वह तलाक की मांग करती है उसके माता-पिता तक उसका साथ नहीं देना चाहते कि तलाकशुदा लड़की कलंक वे ढोने को तैयार नहीं इसी तरह पिंक में भी कहा है कि रजामंदी ना हो तो पति भी उसके साथ सो नहीं सकता इन फिल्मों ने को स्वतंत्रता से सोचने समझने का एक स्पेस दिया है जहां पर तथाकथित सभ्यवर्ग के भीतर की कमजोरी को बुराइयों को शारीरिक शोषण हो उसमें दिखाया गया है। ये स्त्रियाँ पूरी सामाजिक व्यवस्था से टकराते हुए एक नया नायकत्व रच रहीं हैं।

भाषायी बदलाव

उदारीकरण के बाद सिनेमा ने NRI दर्शकों को लक्ष्य बनाया तब शीर्षक तक भी अंग्रेजी में रखे जाने लगे फैशन, माय ब्रदर निखिल, 3 इडियट, टैगों चार्ली मेट्रो,आई हेट लव स्टोरी, ट्रेफिक सिग्नल, तनु वेड्स मनु, नो वन किल्ड जेसिका। जबकि ओटीटी पर यथार्थवाद के नाम पर गालियों का प्रचलन बढ़ रहा है । ओटीटी में सेंसर की कोई भूमिका नहीं इसलिए लगभग हर प्रसंग संवाद में गालियां है जामतारा, मिर्ज़ापुर सेक्रेड गेम, शी, ताज महल, दिल्ली क्राइम, मिर्जापुर,,कब्ज़ा, लस्ट, स्टोरीज, जामतारा, आश्रम, आदि में संवाद में गालियाँ अधिक है, हिन्दी भाषा भी भ्रष्ट हो रही है हालाँकि अन्य भाषाओं की फ़िल्मों के सबटाइटल ने सिनेमा को सहज भी बना दिया है अलग-अलग भाषाओँ की फिल्मों के माध्यम से हम वहाँ के रहन सहन संस्कृति से भी परिचित होते हैं जैसे *चंपारण मटन बज्जिका की फिल्म* है *जैक्सन हाल्ट* मैथिली की लेकिन वे समझ आती है, क्षेत्रीय भाषाओं का विस्तार हो रहा है।

निष्कर्ष - कुल मिलाकर पिछले 20-22 वर्षों में बॉलीवुड परम्परागत चोले को धीरे-धीरे उतार नए रंग में ढल रहा है विशेषकर कहानी के स्तर नए-नए प्रयोग कर रहा है ताकि नई प्रतिभाओं के साथ मिलकर चल सके पहले दर्शक के पास विकल्प नहीं थे तो आज बॉलीवुड के पास दर्शक कम हो रहे हैं । आज वह मुख्य धारा का सिनेमा कहने का दंभ नहीं भर सकता, सिनेमा नया कंटेंट आम जीवन से जुड़े चरित्र-नायक और स्त्री के नये रूपों को हमारे सामने रख रहा है। नई प्रतिभाओं पर किसी तरह के फ़ॉर्मूलों के दबाब नहीं, वे अपनी भाषा, संस्कृति और समाज की विविधताओं, कमजोरियों, ताकतों और चुनौतियों को दिलचस्प अंदाज में चित्रित कर रहें है। दर्शकों को भी नित नए आस्वाद मिल रहें है इसे केवल हिन्दी नहीं अपितु भारतीय सिनेमा का नवाचार कहना उचित होगा जिसका आनंद हर भारतीय दर्शक उठा रहा है।

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बच्चन की भाषा - शैली (आत्मकथाओं के विशेष संदर्भ में)

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प्रस्तावना

भाषा में शैली बहुत कुछ वैसी ही है, जैसे जल में लहर, जिसको जल से अलग नहीं किया जा सकता। "भाषा प्रयोग में शैली-तत्व उसी प्रकार रहता है, जिस प्रकार जल में लहर ।भाषा -प्रयोग संदर्भाश्रित होता है । अतः संदर्भ बदलते ही शैली भी बदल जाती है, जिस में अर्थ अप्रभावित नहीं रह पाता। इस प्रकार, शैली का संबंध संप्रेषण-प्रक्रिया से स्वयमेव जुड़ जाता है और शैली कथन की भंगिमा मात्र नहीं, स्वयं कथन की अंगभूत हो जाती है। अपनी आत्मकथा में बच्चन ने भाषा प्रयोग की उदार दृष्टि अपनाई है। तदनुसार, वे जिसे 'आदर्श हिंदी' कहते हैं, उसमें हिंदी के अतिरिक्त संस्कृत, अँग्रेज़ी, अरबी-फारसी अर्थात् उर्दू, तथा देशज शब्दों का खुलकर प्रयोग किया गया है। भाषा मानव के लिए वह अमूल्य वरदान है, जिससे संस्कृति और सभ्यता का विकास हुआ है। भाषा सामाजिक व्यवस्था इस अर्थ में है कि प्रत्येक समाज के सदस्यों के बीच संप्रेषण भाषा से ही होता है जिस में वाचिक और आंगिक दोनों का समावेश होता है। एक ही भाषा का व्यवहार करने वाले सदस्य अपने-अपने ढंग से भाषा को भी रूपायित करते हैं। लिखित रूप में भाषा का प्रयोग काल और स्थान की सीमाओं का भी अतिक्रमण कर लेता है, फलस्वरूप एक पीढ़ी से दूसरी पीढ़ी तक विचारों, भावों, अनुभवों, आदर्शों का भी हस्तांतरण संभव हो जाता है। सार यह है कि मानव सभ्यता के विकास में भाषा की अहम भूमिका रही है।

"भाषा मनुष्यकृत व्यवस्था है, जिसका तात्पर्य यह है कि मनुष्य की प्रगति-उन्नति के साथ-साथ भाषा में भी क्रमिक परिवर्तन अवश्यंभावी है। इस दृष्टि से, भाषा रूढ़ि भी है और परंपरा भी है। "1 भाषा स्थिर होती है और पंरपरा गतिशील ज्ञान-विज्ञान-प्रौद्योगिकी के विकास के साथ जब भाषा कदम गतिशील ज्ञान-विज्ञान-प्रौद्योगिकी के विकास के साथ जब भाषा कदम मिलाकर चलती है, तब उसमें नए-नए शब्द, नए-नए मुहावरे नई-नई अभिव्यक्तियाँ स्वयमेव निर्मित होती हैं अथवा अन्य भाषाओं के संपर्क में आने पर उनसे आदान करती है। इसीलिए बच्चन कहते हैं किसे संपृक्त होने का अर्थ मेरे लिए " समाज से संपृक्त रहना।"2 भाषा का व्यवहार या प्रयोग किसी खास संदर्भ में होता है। संदर्भ श्रोता, विषय, भाषा, माध्यम, प्रयोजन, स्थान, काल, और यशैली संदर्भ बदलते ही भाषा का स्वरूप बदल जाता है। इसीलिए किसी भी भाषाई समाज सभी व्यक्तियों का व्यवहार एक-सा नहीं होता। यह भी कहा जाता है कि मनुष्य भाषा में अपनी अभिव्यक्ति करता है, परंतु सच तो यह है भाषा मनुष्य को अभिव्यक्त करती है। घनानंद ने ठीक ही कहा है - **मोहि तो मेरे कवित बनावत**" तात्पर्य यह है कि भाषा प्रयोग से ही जन्म होता है। 'शैली' शब्द की व्युत्पत्ति 'शीत्' धातु से हुई है, जिसका अर्थ यह है कि भाषा प्रयोग से व्यक्ति का कुल-शील सब कुछ होता है। यह शील स्वभाव का वाचक है, जिसमें व्यक्ति की कृति, प्रवृत्ति, रुचि, अध्ययन, अनुभव, परिवेश की महती भूमिका होती है। बाबू गुलाबराय के अनुसार -"किसी काम के किसी विशेष प्रकार से करने की पद्धति को शैली कहते हैं और प्रत्येक व्यक्ति के काम करने का विशिष्ट ढंग उसके स्वभाव के अनुसार ही होता है। शैली का अंग्रेज़ी पर्यायवाची शब्द 'स्टाइल' है। 'स्टाइल' शब्द लैटिन के 'स्टाइलस' से बना है, जिसका अर्थ 'कलम' है। यूरोप में पुराने ज़माने में लोहे की कलम से मोम की पट्टियों पर अक्षर

अंकित किये जाते थे। लिखने वालों के अक्षरों में, रूपों में अंतर होता था। इसी अक्षर को ध्वनित करने के लिये 'स्टाइल' शब्द रूढ़ हो गया और विशिष्ट ढंग अर्थात् शैली के लिये प्रयुक्त होने लगा शैली का संस्कृत पर्यायवाची शब्द 'रीति' माना गया है।"3 भोलानाथ तिवारी ने सम्पूर्ण काव्य-सौन्दर्य को शैली कहा है, जो वस्तुतः आभिव्यक्तिगत विशेषताओं का समुच्चय है तथा जिसके आधार पर एक लेखक दूसरे लेखक से भिन्न प्रतीत होता है। चन्द्रमान रावत भी इसी मत के पक्षधर हैं। वे लिखते हैं, "शैली काव्य में प्रयुक्त भाषा की एक सौंदर्यतात्विक विशेषता है। यह भाषा के सौन्दर्य-मूलक प्रकार्य का एक अंग है। यह तत्व भाषा के आधार पर विश्लेष्य है।"4 भाषा में शैली बहुत कुछ वैसी ही है, जैसे जल में लहर, जिसको जल से अलग नहीं किया जा सकता। "भाषा प्रयोग में शैली-तत्व उसी प्रकार रहता है, जिस प्रकार जल में लहर ।भाषा -प्रयोग संदर्भाश्रित होता है । अतः संदर्भ बदलते ही शैली भी बदल जाती है, जिस में अर्थ अप्रभावित नहीं रह पाता। इस प्रकार, शैली का संबंध संप्रेषण-प्रक्रिया से स्वयमेव जुड़ जाता है और शैली कथन की भंगिमा मात्र नहीं, स्वयं कथन की अंगभूत हो जाती है।"5

शैली के लिए भाषा प्रयोग का संदर्भ बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है, क्योंकि संदर्भ बदलते ही शैली भी बदल जाती है। पाण्डेय शशिभूषण शीतांशु के अनुसार, "शैली के अर्थ पर विचार करते हुए उसे कभी कथ्य से संयुक्त कर देखा गया है, तो कभी कथ्य से विलग उसे अभिव्यक्ति मात्र का वैशिष्ट्य माना गया है। एक ओर तो यह कहा जाता है कि कथ्य नामक ऐसी कोई चीज़ नहीं है, जो शब्दों से बिलकुल अलग अस्तित्ववान है, तो दूसरी ओर शैली शब्द का अस्तित्व तथ्य पर बल देता है कि सिर्फ शब्दों के विषय में भी विवेचन किया जा सकता है, जो सीधे कथ्य को संकेतित नहीं करते। पहली मान्यता यह निर्दिष्ट करती है कि शैली का संबंध बाह्य अथवा यांत्रिक है कि वह कवि की यादृच्छिकता के आधार पर एक प्रकार का अभिवर्धित तत्व है, तो दूसरी मान्यता कथ्य के साथ इसके निकटस्थ और परिचित संबंध का ज्ञापन करती है, इसे सावयविक संबंध के रूप में उपस्थित करती है। "6 रिफ़ातेयर का मत है कि "शैली वह माध्यम है, जिसके द्वारा रचनाकार यह सुनिश्चित करता है कि उसका संदेश उस विशेष रूप से कूटबद्ध हो, जिससे पाठक न केवल संप्रेषित सूचना को समझ सके, बल्कि लेखकीय अभिवृत्ति की समझ में भी हिस्सा बटाएँ।"7

दूसरे शब्दों में, शैली भाषा प्रयोगगत वह विशेषता है, जो व्यक्ति के संदर्भ से निर्मित होती है। बच्चन ने शैली-संबंधी थोरो की धारणा उद्धृत करते हुए लिखा है : "थोरो से किसी ने पूछा-शैली क्या है? उसने कहा, बंदूक का घोड़ा दबाना। पर घोड़ा दबाना प्रभावकारी, सार्थक हो सकता है, जब बंदूक भरी हो और निशाने पर सधी।"8 शैली तथा शैलीविज्ञान के संबंध में यह ज्ञातव्य है कि भारतीय काव्य शास्त्र की परम्परा में पहले से ही 'रीति' शब्द विद्यमान है। आचार्य विद्यानिवास मिश्र -"इसी को आधार मानते हुए 'रीति' विज्ञान नाम को अधिक उपयुक्त मानते हैं"9 परन्तु नगेन्द्र ने शैली विज्ञान अथवा शैली शास्त्र नाम का औचित्य निरूपित किया है।" 10 "साहित्य मूलतः भाषा की कला है, अतः भाषा के वैशिष्ट्य की पृष्ठभूमि में ही साहित्य की किसी भी विद्या की पड़ताल सही-सही की जा सकती है। काव्य-भाषा पर विचार करने के फलस्वरूप ही शैली विज्ञान का जन्म हुआ।"11 अपनी आत्मकथा में बच्चन ने भाषा प्रयोग की उदार दृष्टि अपनाई है। तदनुसार, वे जिसे 'आदर्श हिंदी' कहते हैं, उसमें हिंदी के अतिरिक्त संस्कृत, अँग्रेज़ी, अरबी फ़ारसी अर्थात् उर्दू, तथा देशज शब्दों का खुलकर प्रयोग किया गया है। उन्हीं के शब्दों में, "भाषा की शब्दराशि (वॉकेवलरी)के संबंध में मैंने वह उदार नीति रखी कि वह संस्कृत, फारसी, अरबी, प्रांतीय भाषाओं, लोक-बोलियों-यहाँ तक कि अँग्रेज़ी से भी शब्द लेने में संकोच न करेगी, बशर्ते कि वे शब्द वांछित अर्थ व्यक्त करने में समर्थ हों, उच्चारण-सुलभ हों और हिंदी की समय-स्वीकृत ध्वनि-धारा के साथ सहज गति से प्रवहमान हो सकें। "12

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यह सर्वविदित है कि कवि या लेखक भाषा का विशिष्ट प्रयोग ही करते हैं तथा यह विशिष्टता ही उनकी रचना का अभिज्ञान बनती है। "शब्द तो सबके होते हैं, परंतु उनका प्रयोग संदर्भाश्रित होकर नई अर्थच्छटाएँ, व्यंजनाएँ प्रस्तुत करता है। बच्चन की आत्मकथा में प्रयुक्त भाषा में उनकी शैली कहीं द्विरुक्ति को अपनाती है, तो कहीं मुहावरों कहावतों को अपनाती है। "13 सहजग्राह्य बनाने के लिए अन्य भाषा की उक्तियों का भी केवल आश्रय नहीं लेते, अपितु उन्हें साथ-साथ प्रयुक्त भी करते हैं, यथा- संस्कृत-हिंदी, अँग्रेज़ी-हिंदी, फ़ारसी-हिंदी, हिंदी-संस्कृत, हिंदी-अँग्रेज़ी। इसके अलावा आवश्यकतानुसार शब्द-विशेष की व्युत्पत्ति भी दी गई है। इस प्रकार, आत्मकथा की भाषा में जिन-जिन भाषाओं अथवा स्रोतों से शब्द प्रयुक्त हुए हैं, उन्हें निम्नानुसार उदाहृत किया जा सकता है।

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द्विरुक्तियाँ

बच्चन जी के आत्म कथाओं में इन शब्दों का बाहुल्य भी बहुतायत मात्रा में द्रष्टव्य है। कुछ उदाहरणों के माध्यम से इसकी स्पष्टता बोधगम्य होगी ।

उदाहरण

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चाय -वाय ...... आदि आदि उदाहरण कृतियों में दिखलाई पड़ते हैं।

अनुवाद - सहित मूल वाक्य / पद / शब्द

बच्चन जी ने अपनी आत्मकथा के चारों खंडों में संदर्भानुसार संस्कृत तथा अँग्रेज़ी तथा देशज, आगत भाषा के वाक्य, पद तथा शब्द के साथ - साथ उनके हिंदी - अनुवाद भी प्रस्तुत किया है । जिसका एकमात्र उद्देश्य संप्रेषण में सरलता लाना है।

उदाहरणार्थ -

वाक्य - अनुवाद

" सुकविता यद्यस्ति राज्येन किम् "14

(सुकविता पर यदि मेरा अधिकार है, तो राज्य मेरे लिए क्या है, कुछ नहीं, कौड़ी बराबर नहीं ।)

"In every little experience of ours is folded the whole of history" 15_ Swami Rama Tirtha
(हमारे छोटे - से -छोटे अनुभव में मानवता का इतिहास छिपा रहता है - स्वामी रामतीर्थ)

"बौरही बात ; केहू धन्नौरी दिहें आपन राज छोड़त है?"16
(भोलेपन की बात; कोई धरना देने से अपना राज छोड़ता है?)

" खुदरा फ़ज़हीत दीगरा नसीहत (फ़ारसी) "17
(दूसरों को उपदेश देना बहुत सरल होता है)

पद -अनुवाद
Honorarium - पारिश्रमिक
First Favourite - सर्वप्रिय
Though Proper channel - उचित माध्यम
One thing at a time - एक वक़्त पर एक ही काम

शब्द - अनुवाद
एनर्जी - शक्ति
स्काई -लार्क - हवालवा
ड्राइएड ऑफ़ द ट्रीज़ - वृक्ष परी
कॉम्प्लेक्स - कुंठा
ड्यू - प्राप्य
ऑउट ऑफ टर्न - बारी के बिना

कहावतें एवं मुहावरे
" गए रहे हरि भजन को ओटन लगे कपास ।" 18
"मूस मोटाई लोढ़ा होई। " 19
"जो सुख छज्जू के चौबारे, वनह न बलख न बुखारे ।" 20
"जाट मरा तब जानिए तब तेरही हो जाए ।" 21

" भरी सराय देख के आयु पथिक फिरि जाए ।" 22
" पानी पीजे छान गुरु कीजे जान ।" 23
"It is death to be a poet.
" To be the wife of a poet"24. (आइरिस कहावत)
अर्थ - (कवि को प्यार करना मरण है, उसकी पत्नी बनना भी)

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"When at Rome,do as Romansdo "25

"A Milton is required to understand a Milton."26

उपसंहार

बच्चन जी ने आत्मकथा में जिस प्रकार की भाषा - शैली को अपनाया वह यथासंभव यथार्थ और कल्पना का आश्रय लेती है। आचार्य हजारी प्रसाद द्विवेदी जी ने कहा - " साहित्य के उपासक अपने पैर के नीचे की मिट्टी की उपेक्षा नहीं कर सकते । हम सारे बाह्य जगत को असुंदर छोड़कर सौंदर्य की सृष्टि नहीं कर सकते । सुंदरता सामंजस्य का नाम है। " 27द्विवेदी जी की इस धारण के अनुसार - " वही सौंदर्य का सच्चा साधक रचनाकार माना जाएगा, जो अपने आस -पास के सामाजिक यथार्थ को आँख खोलकर देखे, उसकी असलियत को पहचाने और 'सचेत परिवर्तनेच्छा'(ये शब्द द्विवेदी जी के हैं) से संचालित होकर अपनी रचना में सौंदर्य की सृष्टि और अभिव्यक्ति करे । "28 हिंदी आत्मकथा -साहित्य में बच्चन जी की आत्मकथा को सर्वश्रेष्ठ स्थान मिला जिस का आधार उनकी वर्णन शैली, भाषा -शैली एवं शिल्प है। इनकी आत्मकथाओं का महत्त्व साहित्यिक एवं भाषा -शैली की दृष्टि से अप्रतिम है।

संदर्भ - ग्रंथ सूची

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हिंदी साहित्य का दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा लेखन और मौलिक अधिकार

साधना

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हिंदुस्तान ने ब्रिटिश शासन से एक लंबे समय के संघर्ष के बाद 14-15 अगस्त की मध्य रात्रि को स्वतंत्रता हासिल की। यह घोषणा आज़ाद हिंदुस्तान के पहले प्रधानमंत्री जवाहर लाल नेहरू द्वारा की गई। इसके पश्चात देश को सुचारू रूप से चलाने के उद्देश्य से संविधान सभा का गठन किया गया। जिसके तहत् 22 समितियों का निर्माण किया गया, जिनमें सबसे प्रमुख समिति प्रारूप समिति थी। "संविधान का प्रारूप तैयार करने के अपने ऐतिहासिक कार्य को पूरा करने में लगभग तीन वर्ष (दो वर्ष, ग्यारह माह और सत्रह दिन) का समय लगा । इस अवधि के दौरान, इसने कुल 165 दिनों की अवधि में 11 सत्र आयोजित किए। इनमें से 114 दिन संविधान के प्रारूप पर विचार करने में व्यतीत हुए। हालांकि 26 नवंबर 1949 को ही कुछ प्रावधानों को लागू कर दिया गया था, लेकिन अधिकतर प्रावधान 26 जनवरी 1950 को अंगीकृत किया गया। इसी दिन को संविधान दिवस के रूप में बनाया जाता है।[1]

"लेकिन प्रारूप समिति के अध्यक्ष से अलग देश के बहुसंख्यक दलितों, शोषितों के प्रतिनिधि के रूप में डॉ. अंबेडकर के ज़्यादातर प्रगतिशील प्रस्तावों को अस्वीकार कर दिया गया था। अनुसूचित जातियों, जनजातियों तथा अस्पृश्यों के लिए डॉ. अंबेडकर अपनी माँग की अपेक्षा बहुत ही कम प्राप्त कर सके थे।"[2]

भारत के संविधान की संरचना

भारत का संविधान विश्व में सबसे लंबा और लिखित संविधान है, जिसमें मूलतः 22 भाग, 395 अनुच्छेद तथा 8 अनुसूचियां थी जो की वर्तमान में संशोधित होते-होते अब 25 भाग, 448 अनुच्छेद तथा 12 अनुसूचियां हो गई है। संविधान के केंद्र में देश के आम नागरिक है यह संविधान की प्रस्तावना से भली-भांति ज्ञात हो जाता है। क्योंकि प्रस्तावना की शुरुआत ही 'हम भारत के लोग' से होती है इसलिए प्रस्तावना को संविधान की आत्मा भी कहा गया है। भारतीय संविधान के अन्य मुख्य घटक मौलिक अधिकार तथा राज्य के नीति निर्देशक सिद्धांत है। मूलतः 7 मौलिक अधिकार थे जो वर्तमान में 6 ही रह गए है। संविधान राज्य को निर्देश भी देता है ताकि वह नागरिकों को संविधान में उल्लेखित अधिकारों को प्रदान करने में अपनी निष्पक्ष भूमिका और कर्तव्य का निर्वहन कर सके।

मौलिक अधिकार

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[1] https://sansad.in/ls/hi/about/constituent-assembly

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भारत का संविधान अपने नागरिकों को यह छह मौलिक अधिकार प्रदान करता है-

1. समानता का अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 14 से 18 तक)

2. स्वतंत्रता का अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 19 से 22 तक)

3. शोषण के विरुद्ध अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 23 से 24 तक)

4. धर्म की स्वतंत्रता का अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 25 से 28 तक)

5. संस्कृति और शिक्षा संबंधी अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 29 से 30 तक)

6. संवैधानिक उपचारों का अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 32)

संविधान में मूलतः संपत्ति का अधिकार (अनुच्छेद 31) भी शामिल था। जिसे 44वें संविधान अधिनियम, 1978 द्वारा मौलिक अधिकारों की सूची से हटा दिया गया था तथा संविधान के भाग 12 के अनुच्छेद 300 (A) के तहत कानूनी अधिकार बना दिया गया है।

हिंदी में दलित साहित्य

1980 के दशक में हिंदी दलित साहित्य में मराठी दलित आन्दोलन और साहित्य से प्रभावित होकर आता है। मराठी के आन्दोलन धर्मी दलित युवा लेखकों ने दलित पैंथर का निर्माण किया। दलित पैंथर का घोषणा पत्र 1973 में आया। इसी घोषणा पत्र से दलित साहित्य के बारे में एक मुकम्मल दृष्टि बन सकी। इसी का असर हिंदी के दलित लेखकों पर भी पड़ा।

दलित शब्द से क्या अर्थ है? शब्दकोशीय अर्थ में दलित- जिसका दलन और दमन हुआ है, दबाया गया है, उत्पीडित, शोषित, सताया हुआ, उपेक्षित घृणित, रौंदा हुआ, मसला, कुचला हुआ, वंचित आदि से है। मोहनदास नैमिशराय - दलित के अन्तर्गत सामाजिक, धार्मिक, आर्थिक, राजनीतिक, शोषण का अन्तर्भाव होता है, तो सर्वहारा केवल आर्थिक शोषण तक सीमित है।[3] "डॉ. आंबेडकर का मानना था कि जाति-व्यवस्था पर आधारित समाज, जिसका मूल चरित्र ही भेदभाव है, में कमज़ोर वर्गों के उत्थान की ज़िम्मेदारी चंद उच्च जाति के लोगों के ऊपर नहीं छोड़ी जा सकती। उनका 'जाति का उन्मूलन' मुक्ति के संदर्भ में भारतीय समाज व्यवस्था के लिए अत्यंत ही महत्त्वपूर्ण प्रलेख है।"[4] विमल थोरात कहती हैं "हिंदी दलित साहित्य जातिगत भेदभाव के कारण सदियों तक, समाज के हाशिए पर रखे गए दलित समुदाय के शोषण, अपमान, अवहेलना, घृणा और तिरस्कार से उभरे आक्रोश की रचनात्मक अभिव्यक्ति है। वास्तव में यह शोषण, उत्पीड़न और वेदना को झेलते आ रहे मूक वर्ग का समाज व्यवस्था से विद्रोह है। धर्म और कर्म की आड़ में छीनी गई हैसियत की वापसी की मांग और ललकार है जिसने अपने दुःख को कभी व्यक्त नहीं किया आज वह शब्दों के माध्यम से अपने जीवन की त्रासदी और सत्ताधारी वर्ग की साजिशों को पूरी दुनिया के सामने खोल रहा है।"[5]

दलित साहित्यकार तथा आलोचक बजरंग बिहारी तिवारी के अनुसार "दलित विमर्श उस समाज-व्यवस्था की देन है जिसमें जाति और वर्ण के आधार पर मनुष्य-मनुष्य में अंतर किया जाता है और समाज के एक बड़े तबके को

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[3] मोहनदास नैमिशराय, हिंदी दलित साहित्य, साहित्य अकादेमी, रवीन्द्र भवन, 35, फीरोज़शाह मार्ग, नई दिल्ली 110001

[4] वही, पृ.20

[5] विमल थोरात, दलित साहित्य का स्त्रीवादी स्वर, अनामिका पब्लिशर्स एंड डिस्ट्रीब्यूटर्स लि., 4697/3,21ए,अंसारी रोड,दरियागंज,नई दिल्ली-110002, पृ.24

अछूत मान लिया जाता है। इस समाज-व्यवस्था ने 'उच्च वर्ण' को सभी संभव सुविधाएं व अधिकार प्रदान किए तथा निम्न वर्ण व वर्णेतर समुदाय को अधिकारहीन रखकर सेवा तक सीमित कर दिया।"[6]

हिंदी साहित्य में दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा लेखन

ज्योतिबाराव फुले और डॉ. आंबेडकर द्वारा शुरु किये गये कार्य जिनमें शामिल है- दलितों को अपने अधिकारों के प्रति जागृत करना, जाति के आधार पर कार्य को न करना आदि जैसे विचारों को दलित साहित्यकारों ने अपने लेखन से आगे तो बढ़ाया किंतु लेखन करने वाले पुरुष ही थे, जो दलित होने के बाद भी पितृसत्तात्मक विचारों से प्रभावित ही रहे और अपने लेखन में दलित स्त्री की समस्या को ठीक से शामिल नहीं कर सके। इसी कारण दलित स्त्रियों को ही अपनी आवाज बन कलम उठाकर हिंदी साहित्य में अपना लेखन शुरू करना पड़ा। दलित स्त्री अब से अपनी आवाज स्वयं बन अपने हजारों वर्षों के दमन के इतिहास को, स्त्री होने के नाते साथ ही एक दलित स्त्री होने के कारण झेल रही दुख को और जाति, लिंग तथा गरीबी के कारण तिहरे शोषण का दस्तावेजीकरण करने का काम शुरू किया। दलित स्त्री अब साहित्य की हर विधा में अपनी भूमिका निभाने लगी, जिसमें से सबसे महत्वपूर्ण क्षेत्र आत्मकथा का है। डॉ. आंबेडकर ने साहित्य शक्ति के बारे में कहा" हमारे देश में उपेक्षित दलितों का बहुत बड़ा संसार है इसे भूलना नहीं चाहिए उनकी वेदना इनकी यथा को संवेदनशीलता से समझने की कोशिश करो और अपने साहित्य के द्वारा इनके जीवन को उन्नत बनाने का प्रयास करो।[7]"

1999वह समय था जब आत्मकथा की परंपरा और विकास में दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा की शुरुआत होती है। विमल थोरात कहती हैं की दलित आत्मकथन दलित समाज के विभिन्न आयामों को अपने में समेट कर उसके हर एक पहलू पर एक समाजशास्त्री की दृष्टि से विचार करके सामाजिक अंतर संबंधों की पड़ताल करता हुआ नजर आता है। इसीलिए वह केवल व्यक्तिगत अनुभवों की अभिव्यक्ति नहीं है ,बल्कि दलित समाज के अनुभवों की अभिव्यक्ति है। दलित समाज के सामाजिक सांस्कृतिक आर्थिक और राजनीतिक सरोकारों को यह आत्मकथन उजागर करते है।

हिंदी साहित्य में दलित स्त्री लेखिकाएं जिन्होंने अपनी आत्मकथा लिखी उनमे प्रमुख हैं- कौसल्या बैसंत्री, सुशीला टाकभौरे, रजनी तिलक, कावेरी, सुमित्रा मेहरोल, अनीता भारती हैं। यह सभी दलित स्त्री लेखिकाएं अपने-अपने क्षेत्र में साहित्यिक योगदान दे रही हैं। पहली दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा कौसल्या बैसंत्री की है, जिसका शीर्षक' दोहरा अभिशाप' और यह वर्ष 1999 में प्रकाशित हुई। रचनाकार6 8 वर्ष की आयु में अपनी आत्मकथा लिखती हैं। इस आत्मकथा का आरंभ छोटी-छोटी घरेलू प्रसंग और पारिवारिक परिचय से होता है।

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[6] बजरंग बिहारी तिवारी· दलित साहित्य एक अंतर्यात्रा· नवारुण·सी-303· जनसत्ता अपार्टमेंट्स·सेक्टर9·वसुंधरा·गाज़ियाबाद-201012
[7] रजनी तिलक ·समकालीन भारतीय दलित महिला लेखन· स्वराज प्रकाशन ·अंसारी रोड दरयागंज नई दिल्ली ·पृ33 ·

"मैं अस्पृश्य हूँ, इसका मुझे बहुत दुःख होता था और मैं हीनता महसूस करती थी। कोई मुझे मेरी जाति न पूछ बैठे, इसका मुझे सदैव डर रहता था।"[8]

"एक दिन उसने खुद्दी की खिचड़ी बनाकर खाई। दूसरे दिन के लिए कुछ नहीं था। खाना न मिलने से उसकी छातियों में दूध नहीं आया और उसकी बच्ची की दूध के अभाव से मृत्यु हो गई।"[9]

"निरसा जाने के पहले ही हमारी जाति वहाँ पहुँच गई थी।"[10]

"हम दलित समाज के हैं, यह वह जान गया था। बहुत छूतछात मानने वाला था । छोटी जाति वाला साहब है इसलिए न वह हमारे घर का काम करेगा न हमारा छुआ खाना खाएगा, पर डटा रहेगा हमारे घर।"[11]

"न्यायपालिका भी लगता है स्त्री के लिए ज्यादा फिक्र नहीं करती"[12] अपनी आत्मकथा में इस वाक्य द्वारा रचनाकार न्यायपालिका पर भी प्रत्यक्ष रूप से सवाल उठाती नजर आती है।

दूसरी दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा वर्ष 2011 में सुशीला टाकभौरे की' शिकंजे का दर्द' शीर्षक से 2011 में प्रकाशित हुई। जिस प्रकार जंगल में शिकारी द्वारा कसे गए शिकंजे में ,जब कोई जानवर फंस जाता है तो मुक्ति के लिए उसके भीतर से दर्दनाक चीख बाहर आती है। वह जितना अपने को मुक्त करने को छठपटाता है ,दर्द उतना ही बढ़ता है। वह मजबूर होकर ,लाचार ,विवश होकर दर्द ,पीड़ा ,दुख को लगातार सहता पड़ा रहता है मरने के लिए। "दलित होने के साथ स्त्री होने की पीड़ा भी मैंने भोगी है। एक स्त्री की आत्मकथा मनुवाद द्वारा निर्मित पुरुषसत्ता प्रधान समाज में स्त्री शोषण को उजागर करती है।"[13]

"कक्षा में ब्राह्मण, बनियों के बच्चों को सबके आगे बैठाया जाता था। पिछड़ी जाति के बच्चों को पीछे बैठाया जाता। अछूत बच्चे सबसे पीछे अलग बैठते थे। कक्षा में यह श्रेणी वर्गीकरण जैसा था, इससे हमें अपने वर्ण और जाति का आभास हमेशा रहता था।"[14]

"स्कूल के घड़े का पानी चपरासी दूर से पिलाता था।"[15]

"स्वतंत्र भारत के संविधान के अनुसार अछूत-पिछड़े वर्ग और स्त्रियों के कल्याण के लिए अनेक कल्याणकारी योजनाएँ और कानून बनाये गये थे, मगर हम लोगों को इनकी जानकारी ही नहीं थी।"[16]

वर्ष 2017 में रजनी तिलक की आत्मकथा' अपनी जमीं अपना आसमां' शीर्षक से प्रकाशित होती है। रही। अपनी आत्मकथा में उन्होंने बचपन की शुरुआत से ही हुए संघर्ष ,आस-पड़ोस द्वारा किया जाने वाला जातिगत भेदभाव का ,पारिवारिक समस्याएं ,निजी जीवन-प्रेम प्रसंग ,स्वयं का सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता का जीवन का भी

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[8] कौसल्या बैसंत्री, दोहरा अभिशाप, परमेशवरी प्रकाशन, प्रीत विहार,दिल्ली-110092, पृ. 41

[9] वही, पृ. 101-102

[10] वही, पृ. 102

[11] वही, पृ. 102

[12] वही, पृ. 106

[13] सुशीला टाकभौरे, शिकंजे का दर्द, वाणी प्रकाशन,4695,21-ए,दरियागंज,नयी दिल्ली 110002, पृ. 8

[14] वही पृ. 18

[15] वही पृ. 45

[16] वही पृ. 90

वर्णन किया है। "एक दलित लड़की पैदा होते ही मां-बाप के श्रम की भागीदार हो जाती है।"[17] "या छोरी भंगन की थ्यारे घर काहे कू आवे है। इसे भगया करे न?"[18]

अगली आत्मकथा वर्ष 2018 में अनीता भारती की 'छूटे पन्नों की उड़ान' शीर्षक से प्रकाशित हुई है। आत्मकथा में उनके बचपन से लेकर अत्याचार और अपमान का घूंट पीकर ऊंचाइयों की ओर बढ़ने का वर्णन मिलता है। अभाव में रहते हुए भी दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय से ऍम .ए ,.बी .एड. की पढ़ाई करना ,छात्र राजनीति में सक्रिय रहते हुए अंतरजातीय विवाह करना ,लेखन कार्य करते रहना इस आत्मकथा की विशेषता है।

वर्ष 2021 में सुमित्रा महरोल की आत्मकथा 'टूटे पंखों से परवाज़ तक' शीर्षक से आती है। जो दलित, स्त्री और शारीरिक रूप से विकलांग किसी रचनाकार की पहली आत्मकथा रही।" हाशिए पर रहने की पीड़ा और त्रास को मैंने एक से अधिक स्तरों पर झेला है एक से अधिक कारण थे मुझे उपेक्षित करने को मेरे आत्मविश्वास को रौंद ,दीन-हीन स्थितियों में रहकर ,विवश भाव में दूसरों पर जीवन बसर करने को ......मुझे यह जिंदगी स्वीकार न थी।[19]" यह आत्मकथा समाज के समक्ष कई गंभीर सवालों को खड़ा करती है। इस आत्मकथा में पितृसत्ता ,जातिवाद और विकलांगता से उपजी जीवन स्थितियां है तो उपेक्षा ,अपमान व तिरस्कार भी है। जिसके चलते जीवन के सामान्य कष्ट भी और बढ़ जाते है। इस कृति में शहरी परिवेश में आजादी के बाद के भारत में एक दलित विकलांग स्त्री का जीवन संघर्ष को बहुत ही गंभीरता के साथ उकेरा गया है।

भाषा

हिंदी साहित्य की दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा लेखन की भाषा में साधारणपन तो है ही साथ भी सदियों से झेलते आ रहे भेदभाव-छुआछूत के प्रति रोष भी भाषा भी कायम रहता है। भाषा में कुछ जगह अंग्रेजी के भी शब्द प्रयोग किये गये है तो उर्दू भाषा के भी है। हालांकि कुछ जगह वाक्य निर्माण में अशुद्धियाँ भी है जिन्हें सुधारा जा सकता था।

निष्कर्ष

उपयुक्त आत्मकथाओं में रचनाकारों द्वारा अपने दलित जीवन संघर्ष को जिस तरह से वर्णित किया गया है उससे समझना और भी आसान हो जाता है कि दलित स्त्री आत्मकथाओं में भारतीय संविधान द्वारा दिए गए मौलिक अधिकारों का काफी हद तक हनन होता दिखाई देता है। मौलिक अधिकार छीने जाते हैं उस समाज के ठेकेदारों द्वारा जो स्वयं को उच्च जाति कहता है। इन आत्मकथाओं में सबसे अधिक जिस मौलिक अधिकार का हनन होता दिखाई दिया वह है- समानता का अधिकार जो अनुच्छेद 14 से 18 तक वर्णित है। जिसके तहत् देश के सभी नागरिकों को विधि के समक्ष समानता(14), धर्म, वंश, जाति, लिंग, जन्म स्थान के आधार पर कोई विभेद नहीं (15), तथा अस्पृश्यता का उन्मूलन (17) का अधिकार सम्मिलित है।

अनुच्छेद 17 जो अस्पृश्यता से उन्मूलन की गारंटी देता है, लेकिन हिंदी साहित्य की दलित स्त्री आत्मकथाकारों ने अपनी आत्मकथा में अस्पृश्यता-छुआछूत तथा भेदभावपूर्ण घटनाओं का वर्णन किया है। और चिंता की बात यह

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[17] रजनी तिलक 'अपनी जमीं अपना आसमां' ईशा ज्ञानदीप,ए.डी. 77,शालीमार बाग,नई दिल्ली-110088, पृ. 11

[18] वही पृ. 24

[19] सुमित्रा महरोल 'टूटे पंखों से परवाज़ तक' द मार्जिनलाइज्ड पब्लिकेशन, डी-22,रामलीला पार्क के पास,पांडव नगर,दिल्ली-110092, पृ. 100

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है भी है कि सार्वजनिक स्थलों जैसे विद्यालय, सरकारी विद्यालय, सरकारी कार्यालय तथा सरकारी विश्वविद्यालय में भी दलित स्त्रियों को दलित स्त्री होने के कारण घृणित नजरों से देखा जाता है तथा छुआछूतपूर्ण व्यवहार किया जाता है। प्रत्येक आत्मकथा में जातिगत भेदभाव के प्रसंग देखने को मिलते हैं जिनमें से कुछ प्रसंग मैंने उदाहरण स्वरूप प्रस्तुत भी किए है। सुमित्रा महरोल जिनकी आत्मकथा पहली विकलांग दलित स्त्री की संघर्षकथा है, उनकी कथा में उन्होंने अपने कांटेपूर्ण, संघर्षपूर्ण जीवन को समाज के समक्ष रखकर यह दिखाने की कोशिश की है कि दलित होना दयनीय होता है, दलित स्त्री होना और भी दयनीय होता है, तो सोचिए विकलांग दलित स्त्री होना शोषण के स्तर को कितना गुना अधिक कर देता है। यह शोषण के स्तर को 3 गुणा बढ़ा देता है।

मौलिक अधिकार चाहे वह स्वतंत्रता का अधिकार हो, शोषण के विरुद्ध अधिकार हो, धार्मिक स्वतंत्रता का अधिकार हो या सांस्कृतिक और शैक्षिक अधिकार या संवैधानिक उपचारों का अधिकार हो, प्रायः सभी दलित स्त्री आत्मकथाओं में सभी मौलिक अधिकारों का हनन दिखाई प्रतीत होता है। फिर भी निष्कर्ष में कहा जा सकता है कि इन आत्मकथाओं में भारतीय संविधान के निर्माता कहे जाने वाले डॉ. आंबेडकर के प्रति जागरूकता भली-भांति दिखाई देती है। जिसके चलते इन सभी रचनाकारों के जीवन में आगे चलकर काफी सकारात्मक परिवर्तन भी दिखाई देते है, फिर चाहे वह शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में हो या कार्य के क्षेत्र में। डॉ. आंबेडकर के विचारों को अपने जीवन में लागू करते हुए शिक्षा ग्रहण कर समाज की कुरीतियों, भेदभाव, पितृसत्तात्मक सोच जैसी बेड़ियों को तोड़ते हुए भी इन दलित स्त्री रचनाकारों को देखा जा सकता है।

 हिंदी साहित्य के दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा लेखन में संवैधानिक मूल्यों के परिप्रेक्ष्य को समझना उतना ही महत्वपूर्ण है जितना अन्य किसी विधा को। आत्मकथा में दलित रचनाकार अपने आरंभिक जीवन से शुरू हुए भेदभावपूर्ण जीवन को दर्शाते हुए आखिर तक किस प्रकार वह इस भेदभाव से लड़ते है इसका वह स्वयं दस्तावेज तैयार कर रहे है। जब उन्हें अपने मौलिक अधिकारों का ज्ञान हो जाता है तो वह उन अधिकारों के लिए लड़ती भी नजर आती हैं। मौलिक अधिकार हर नागरिक के लिए आवश्यक है और दलित स्त्रियों के लिए और अधिक आवश्यक हो जाते है क्योंकि उनके शोषण का भी दोहरा-तिहरा

होता है। जरूरत इस बात की भी है कि इन अधिकारों को राज्य द्वारा भली-भांति प्रदान किए जाएं और यह सुनिश्चित किया जाए की समाज से जातिगत तथा किसी भी अन्य प्रकार का भेदभाव समाप्त हो। डॉ. आंबेडकर के विचारों का दलित समाज के लोगों के ऊपर बहुत गहरा प्रभाव पड़ा है। यह प्रभाव पड़ना स्वाभाविक था क्योंकि डॉ. आंबेडकर ने ही पहली बार दलित समाज में यह बोध जगाया कि वे भी इंसान हैं, इस देश पर उनका भी हक है, उन्हें भी सम्मानित जीवन जीने का अधिकार तथा सभी मौलिक अधिकार है। उन्होंने दलित समाज की हिम्मत बढ़ाई, संघर्ष करने के लिए और अपने मानवीय हक के लिए लड़ने को उन्हें प्रेरित किया। आज जो भी उन्नति दलित समाज कर रहा है और करने के लिए अग्रसर है, उसमें डॉ. आंबेडकर की सबसे अहम् भूमिका है।

सीमाएं

हिंदी साहित्य की दलित स्त्री आत्मकथा लेखन की कुछ सीमाएं भी है। जैसे आत्मकथाओं को पढ़ते समय यह रूचि बनाने में अत्यधिक सफल नहीं हो पाती। वहीं दूसरी ओर कुछ प्रसंग अतिश्योक्तिपूर्ण भी प्रतीत होते है या कहे उन पर यकीन करना मुश्किल लगता है।

<center>सन्दर्भ सूची</center>

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पत्र-पत्रिकाएं

- कथादेश
- प्रतिबद्ध
- आलोचना

Economic Reforms in India: A Tale of Resistance and Caution

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between economic reforms and mass protests in India since the liberalization process began in 1991. It argues that successive Indian governments have been cautious in implementing reforms that directly impact the livelihoods of ordinary citizens due to the potential for widespread opposition. This hesitation was particularly evident in sectors such as retail and agriculture, where the fear of public backlash led to delays in liberalizing policies. The paper examines two major instances of protest: the resistance to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in retail under UPA II and the nationwide protests against the farm laws during 2020-21 under the Modi government. These cases illustrate how governments have balanced economic reform efforts with identity politics to divert attention from contentious changes. However, once reforms directly affecting the masses was introduced, mass protests erupted, forcing governments to confront popular resistance. The study highlights how political rhetoric, including labeling dissent as "anti-national," has been used to suppress opposition and advance reform agendas. In conclusion, the paper suggests that political constraints will continue to influence the trajectory of economic reforms in India, as governments must navigate public opposition while addressing the need for economic modernization.

Keywords: India's Economic Reforms; Mass Protests; Identity Politics; Liberalization

1. INTRODUCTION

India's journey of economic reforms, initiated in 1991, has been marked by resistance. The opening of the economy has consistently faced opposition from various segments of society, particularly when reforms directly impacted the lives of ordinary citizens. This pattern of protest can be traced back to the Rajiv Gandhi era when early attempts at economic liberalization met significant backlash (Singh, 1991). Learning from this experience, successive governments have been hesitant to push forward reforms that would have an immediate and noticeable effect on the masses.

Since 1991, Indian governments have navigated economic policy complexities, particularly during times when the political landscape was dominated by identity politics. In the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition and the Mandal-Kamandal debates, reforms affecting sectors linked to the livelihoods of ordinary citizens went largely uncontested (Wilkinson, 2010). The political focus on identity-based divisions diverted attention away from economic changes, allowing reforms in certain areas to proceed without significant opposition. However,

as reforms progressed, this hesitancy faded, and sectors previously protected from market forces, such as retail and agriculture, were opened up to global competition. These decisions, which had a direct and immediate impact on people's daily lives, unsurprisingly led to mass protests, as witnessed during the opposition to foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail under UPA II (Jayashree and Ramanakumar, 2014) and the nationwide protests against the farm laws in 2020-21 (Baviskar and Levien, 2021).

The hypothesis of this paper argues that the Indian political system remains cautious in introducing reforms that directly affect the masses. This caution is well-founded, as the mass protests during the later phases of economic reforms suggest that liberalization in India continues to be politically sensitive when it intersects with the everyday livelihoods of citizens. This study uses historical accounts, political analysis, and a wide range of secondary sources including academic articles, and media coverage to explore how India's journey of economic reforms, initiated in 1991, has been marked by persistent resistance. It examines the social and political factors shaping these reforms and the mass protests they have often triggered.

2. POLITICS OF THE ECONOMIC REFORM SINCE 1991

Since 1991, India has successfully implemented neoliberal economic reforms in sectors such as banking and insurance without significant protest. However, the government faced resistance to reforms in the late 1980s, and opposition persists in areas like labor and agriculture. Two key questions arise: (1) Why was the post-1991 minority government able to introduce reforms, while Rajiv Gandhi's stronger government in 1985 could not? (2) Why have reforms succeeded in some areas but stalled in others since 1991? The answer lies in the connection between mass and elite politics. The government has avoided reforms in areas that directly impact people's livelihoods, where united opposition raises concerns. In contrast, reforms have progressed in areas perceived as less directly affecting the masses in the short term, receiving little opposition (Ahluwalia, 1995). Mass politics is influenced by factors like public understanding of reforms and political parties' role in shaping protests. In rural India, where many lack knowledge of economic reforms, people tend to respond more to issues of identity than broader economic policies, unless directly affected in their daily lives.

The economic reforms initiated under Rajiv Gandhi's government in 1985 faced significant opposition from a united opposition, stalling the process (Harriss, 1987). Rajiv Gandhi came to power in December 1984, two months after Indira Gandhi's assassination, with a landslide victory, securing 415 out of 545 Lok Sabha seats, the largest electoral win since independence. The opposition, by contrast, struggled, with no party winning more than 30 seats. This overwhelming majority gave the government a sense of autonomy to address the faltering economy. Rajiv Gandhi's administration appointed pro-market reformers to key economic positions and, in its first budget, introduced policies such as delicensing industries, raising investment ceilings for big businesses, easing foreign technology imports, and simplifying tax structures. These measures reflected a clear departure from the previous import substitution strategy, signaling a shift toward economic liberalization (Bardhan, 2005).

The economic reforms introduced by the Narasimha Rao government in 1991 marked a pivotal shift in India's economic policy, transitioning from a state-controlled model to one focused on market liberalization and globalization (Pandit, 2012; Sengupta, 2009). Despite lacking a parliamentary majority, the Rao administration successfully enacted wide-ranging reforms, including the delicensing of industries, tax reductions, and the liberalization of foreign investment regulations (Nayar, 1998). These reforms were driven by a severe balance of

payments crisis, pressure from international financial institutions, and the emergence of a new government. Although opposition parties criticized the reforms, claiming they ceded economic sovereignty to the IMF and World Bank, they stopped short of obstructing the government's budgets. The reforms' long-term success, despite shifts in political leadership, has been credited to various factors, including the focus of mass politics on ethnic issues, which allowed reformers the political space to advance their agenda (Varshney, 1998).

The political landscape of India in the 1990s was marked by a complex interplay between economic reforms and ethnic politics. Although economic reforms were implemented, they were often overshadowed by more urgent issues of identity and religion in mass politics. Political parties, while recognizing the necessity of economic reforms, primarily mobilized support based on identity issues rather than economic policies (Kumar 2008). The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 triggered widespread communal violence, raising concerns about India's secular fabric and the government's crisis management capabilities (Thakur 1993). This event, coupled with discussions on reservations for Other Backward Classes, dominated political discourse and pushed economic reforms to a secondary status (Mooij, 2005). Paradoxically, this focus on ethnic issues created political space for reformers to advance economic changes, even under minority governments (Varshney, 1998).

The politics surrounding whether to advance economic reforms hinges on their immediate impact on the masses. In economies heavily reliant on foreign trade, such as India and Brazil during the same period, changes like lowering tariffs often have direct and noticeable effects, while trade is less significant in some contexts, leading to less intense protests (Uba, 2005). Consequently, India implemented various trade regime changes in the 1990s without significant opposition. However, reforms that adversely affect the masses, such as changes in labor laws, the agricultural sector, and public sector privatization, tend to provoke stronger protests, often supported by political parties. The history of protests, like the nationwide railway workers' strike in May 1975, serves as a cautionary tale for the ruling class regarding potential unrest linked to privatization in critical sectors. Thus, ideological concerns and the risks associated with opening sensitive areas have resulted in a slower pace of reform in agriculture, labor laws, and privatization compared to foreign trade reforms.

The politics surrounding economic reforms in India during the UPA I and II administrations were characterized by considerable challenges and protests. Economic liberalization initiatives faced resistance, especially from organized labor and rural communities (Mooji, 2005; Teitelbaum, 2010). The election results of 2004 were viewed as a rejection of urban-centric economic reforms, underscoring the rural-urban divide. A significant reform initiative, the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), encountered substantial opposition due to land acquisition controversies and concerns about regional inequalities (Jenkins, Kennedy, and Mukhopadhyay, 2014). The UPA II government's decision to permit 51% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail and 100% in single-brand retail in 2013 sparked widespread debates and protests (Jayashree and Ramanakumar, 2014). Proponents argue that FDI in retail could stimulate economic growth, enhance supply chains, and benefit both consumers and suppliers. The retail sector in India was projected to grow significantly, reaching $660 billion by 2015 and potentially $1.3 trillion by 2020 (Vijayakumar, 2014). However, opponents expressed concerns about potential job losses for small retailers and the risk of cultural distortions. Despite these apprehensions, some experts believe that FDI in retail could increase farm produce, reduce wastage of perishable goods, and create job opportunities (Bisaria, 2012). While the government's decision has attracted interest from multinational companies, effective implementation of the policy remains a challenge.

3. POLITICS OF REFORMS AND PROTEST UNDER MODI GOVERNMENT

The Modi government's economic reforms since 2014 have aimed to boost growth and employment, but their impact has been mixed. Key initiatives include demonetization, GST reforms, labor law changes, and the "Make in India" campaign (Echeverri-Gent, Sinha, and Wyatt, 2021). While these policies were designed to improve the business environment and attract investment, they have often fallen short of their goals. The Modi government introduced labor reforms through amendments to the Factories Act of 1948, the Labour Laws Amendment Act of 2011, and the Apprenticeship (Amendment) Act of 2014. However, an examination of current job creation trends reveals that, despite promises of increased employment through these reforms, actual job growth has remained limited. In fact, there is little evidence to suggest that these reforms have significantly boosted employment, even in the short term (Shukla, Purohit, and Gaur, 2017). While the labor reforms aimed to make the market more competitive, critics argue that they may weaken worker protections (Gopalan, 2016). The GST reform was intended to unify the tax system across states, potentially benefiting foreign investors. However, policies like demonetization have had adverse effects on ordinary citizens (Proch, 2020). Overall, Modi's economic policies appear to be more influenced by political strategy than effective economic management, resulting in centralized decision-making and a reduction in state capacity.

The Modi government's economic policies have been characterized by a centralized, technocratic approach designed to build political support and consolidate BJP's dominance. While promoting urbanization, manufacturing, and infrastructure through liberalization and reforms, the government has simultaneously weakened labor protections and environmental regulations (Ruparelia, 2015). Despite below-average economic performance, the BJP's hegemony endures, bolstered by its Hindutva ideology and new caste and poverty-related politics (Chowdhury, 2023). Modi's slogan, "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance," has resulted in increased executive power and reduced transparency, narrowing democratic spaces. Although the government has introduced new insurance schemes and digital cash transfers, it has reduced spending on education and health.

One of the biggest challenges the Modi government faced in its economic reform process was the farmers' protests against reforms in the agriculture sector. The farm laws introduced in 2020 aimed to deregulate agricultural markets, allowing farmers to sell directly to private buyers, bypassing state-regulated markets. The government argued that this would provide farmers with more freedom and better price opportunities. However, the laws sparked widespread protests, particularly in Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh, where farmers feared losing the minimum support price (MSP) system and being exploited by corporations (Krishnamurthy 2021). The protests lasted over a year, culminating in farmers camping at the borders of Delhi, demanding the repeal of the laws. In November 2021, the government withdrew the laws, marking a significant victory for the farmers (Behl, 2022). Overall, Modi's economic strategy extends the reform trajectory initiated in the 1990s, with an emphasis on socio-economic integration (Sadovnikova, 2020).

The Modi regime in India has faced criticism for its intolerance toward dissent, often branding critics as "anti-nationals". This stance is viewed as harmful to India's multicultural democracy, prompting calls for the protection of constitutional rights and nonviolent protest (Pinto 2023). However, some argue that Modi's governance has not undermined democracy, judicial independence, or religious pluralism, suggesting that criticism arises from the old establishment's efforts to regain influence (Dasgupta, 2019). Conversely, others

characterize the regime as proto-fascist, pointing to the RSS's vision of a Hindu nation, the merging of state power with vigilantism, and the use of legal mechanisms to suppress opposition (Sundar, 2020). The government's actions have been likened to cultural McCarthyism, aimed at silencing dissent and raising concerns about the erosion of democratic values in favor of majoritarianism.

The 2020–2021 farmers' protests posed a significant challenge to the increasingly authoritarian Hindu nationalist government (Baviskar and Levien, 2021). Mainstream media frequently sought to delegitimize the movement, labeling protesters as separatists and terrorists (Anand and Sharma, 2022). However, the protests represented an alternative vision of democracy rooted in radical egalitarianism, aiming to hold the government accountable to constitutional principles (Behl, 2022). Farmers' concerns centered on the potential dismantling of the minimum support price (MSP) mechanism and the risk of exploitation by large corporations through contract farming (Shakeel et al., 2023). These protests also underscored the transformed agrarian reality of the 21st century, characterized by economic distress, ecological crises, and semi-proletarianization (Baviskar & Levien, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

The Indian economic reform process has consistently been accompanied by mass protests, particularly when such reforms have had direct and immediate negative impacts on the public. This recurring dynamic has made successive governments hesitant to liberalize sectors that directly affect the common masses. Governments have remained vigilant and cautious in pushing forward these contentious reforms, often diverting public attention toward identity politics. For instance, the communal tensions surrounding the Babri Masjid demolition and the Mandal-Kamandal debates were used to shift focus away from reform phases that could spark public resistance. Despite this cautious approach, in later stages of the reform process, governments could no longer avoid addressing sectors with direct implications for the public, as economic realities demanded changes. As these reforms advanced, mass protests inevitably erupted. Notable examples include the resistance to the opening of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the retail sector during UPA II and the protests against the farm laws in 2020-21 under the Modi government. Both instances illustrate how the fear of public backlash continues to shape the trajectory of economic reforms in India. In such contexts, political rhetoric has also been employed to undermine opposition. Protests have been labeled as "anti-national" to delegitimize dissent and advance reform agendas. The Modi government effectively utilized this strategy during the farm laws protests, framing the opposition as being against the national interest in order to push the reforms forward.

The mass protests against economic reforms in India highlight the broader implications of how reforms reshape the country's political economy. While liberalization has driven growth, it has also exposed deep socio-economic divides, particularly when reforms directly impact vulnerable populations. These protests underscore the persistent challenge of balancing economic modernization with social stability. As India continues on its reform path, political constraints will likely remain a major influence, as governments must carefully navigate public opposition to avoid unrest. The future of economic reforms will hinge on how effectively the state can address the concerns of the masses while pushing for necessary changes. Without mitigating these tensions, the scope and scale of reforms may continue to be limited by political and social resistance.

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Native American Cultural Survival in Louise Erdrich's Novel *Tracks*: The Politics of Land, Language and Identity

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the interconnected politics of land, language and identity in Louise Erdrich's Tracks, emphasizing their role in the survival of Native American communities. Drawing on theories of cultural identity and Indigenous land rights, it examines how the Ojibwe people, represented by characters like Fleur Pillager and Nanapush, confront land dispossession and cultural erasure. The novel portrays land loss as a threat to both material survival and the spiritual foundation of Ojibwe identity. Language and storytelling serve as key tools of resistance, preserving cultural memory and identity amid displacement. By blending Indigenous oral traditions with narrative techniques, Erdrich underscores the essential link between land, language and identity, showing how they form the core of the Ojibwe's fight for survival and autonomy against colonial forces. The study critiques these colonial forces, highlighting the profound connection between land, language and cultural preservation in Indigenous resistance.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Resistance, Indigeneity, Native American Literature, Settler Colonialism, Cultural Imperialism

1. INTRODUCTION

The loss of Native American land due to the Dawes Act of 1887 serves as the central conflict in *Tracks* (1988), where the contemporary Chippewa writer Louise Erdrich intricately explores the connection between land, language and identity within Indigenous communities. This relationship is portrayed with subtlety, reflecting a complex negotiation of power, resistance and survival. The novel critiques the colonial mindset that seeks to commodify and exploit Native land, positioning environmental justice as a core theme. From a postcolonial perspective, this paper argues that Erdrich presents land as a sacred, communal entity intimately linked to cultural identity rather than merely as material property. Additionally, land symbolizes the struggle for identity and autonomy. Through characters like Fleur Pillager and Nanapush, the study highlights how both land and language serve as foundations for cultural identity and arenas for political resistance. The natives' deep connection to the land embodies Indigenous cosmologies, which regard it as essential for preserving cultural identity and heritage.

2. LAND, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Postcolonial studies delve into the intricate narratives of indigenous cultures and how these narratives were appropriated by colonial powers. In addition to the task of reclaiming and reinterpreting their histories, postcolonial critics often explore the past in connection with the land. The significance of land in postcolonialism is profound. It holds immense political and cultural value as it encapsulates a wealth of

memories, histories, beliefs, and faith that are deeply intertwined with one's sense of self. The profound connection between land and identity is embedded in language and storytelling, shaping individuals' perspectives and understanding of the world. As Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin claim in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, "place is so embedded in language" and "narrative" (6). Here, land and language intersect, with both playing crucial roles in preserving Indigenous worldviews.

In *Tracks*, the interconnectedness of land and language is portrayed as both tools of oppression and resistance. Erdrich emphasises the resilience of Native languages through the characters' multilingualism, showing how they navigate linguistic dominance. Just as land is a site of cultural survival, language becomes a powerful means of resisting colonial erasure. Drawing on Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's theory of language and cultural survival, this paper argues that language in *Tracks* preserves cultural identity and continuity. The characters' fight for their land mirrors their struggle to retain their language, reflecting the broader postcolonial quest for autonomy and self-expression. Ngugi's theory of language and cultural survival, particularly mentioned in works like *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), addresses the vital role that language plays in shaping cultural identity and resisting colonial domination. According to Ngugi, colonial powers imposed their languages on colonized peoples, aiming to erase indigenous languages and, consequently, indigenous cultures. Ngugi says that "any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture." (13) Language connects memory and identity. By promoting colonial languages, colonizers sought to dominate both the physical and mental landscapes of indigenous peoples.

Ngugi argues that reclaiming indigenous languages is essential for cultural survival and resistance against colonial dominance, as these languages preserve the values and histories of their people. In Native American spirituality, the concept of the extended self connects humans to animals, spirits, and the land, reinforcing the holistic relationship between land, language, and identity. Through storytelling and oral traditions, both land and language serve as vital repositories of memory and belief, essential to the survival of Native cultures. Every native belongs to a clan, which is, in turn, connected to a totem animal. There is an "interconnectedness and relationship between all things, between animals, land, peoples" and an intense need "to seek individual, communal and environmental balance" (Porter 43). The interconnectedness of spiritual and non-spiritual elements within nature, as well as the equality between humans and non-humans, is a fundamental belief. Animals and plants, referred to as the animal and plant people, are thought to embody spiritual essence. The intricate bond between land, animals, plants, spirits and community is profoundly acknowledged.

In Native traditions, the spoken word was thought to possess great power. It was believed that words could shape reality, manifesting whatever was spoken into existence. They believed there was a time when the earth was like heaven, and all living beings shared a common language. As Peter Nabokov states in his article "American Indian Literature: A Tradition of Renewal", man and animals "enjoyed equal access to the conjuring potency of words". In the past, the "human mind had mysterious powers" and spoken words possessed the magical power to create "strange consequences". A spoken word may "suddenly come alive" and bring forth the desired effects. "What people wanted to happen could happen" (21) due to the ceremonial power of words. For Native peoples, the act of speaking a word is a creative event. When a word is spoken, it merges with the object it represents, making the act of utterance sacred. This process is a ceremonial or ritualistic practice. In "Traditional Origins", Vizenor sees storytelling as a creative act of recollecting memories. "The teller of the stories is an artist" who skillfully brings to life the "memories of the visual past" through the faculties of "wit and imagination" and

transforms them into "the metaphors of the present" (7). In tribal cultures, creation occurs at the moment a story is told within oral traditions. The variations in these mythic tales represent the creative aspirations of tribal storytellers, allowing each retelling to reflect unique interpretations and cultural insights. This dynamic process keeps the myths vibrant and relevant, engaging the community with their current experiences and aspirations.

Native storytellers share their stories in a natural manner, allowing them to emerge organically. At times, the storyteller may pause and then continue the narrative later, placing emphasis on specific words and sounds. Their expressions can change throughout the telling, and they might imitate another person's mannerisms or dialect. They can convey a range of emotions, such as being "angry or surprised", he may be "serious or sarcastic", and "he may use a gesture where a word would have been expected" (Tedlock 508). All of this occurs through the power of words and the act of utterance. Since speaking is considered sacred, storytelling becomes an "act of deliverance" (Hogan 341) and holds significant power to heal the tribe from illness and trauma.

The Native people's connection to the land is complex and multifaceted, covering "personal and collective memory, history, and narrative" (Ash-Milby 71). The land in Native spirituality is sacred and animate, deeply tied to Mother Earth. Native American literature, including Erdrich's *Tracks*, uses spiritual discourses to explore identity and honour land-based traditions. The novel chronicles the struggle of Indigenous people to retain their land against looters, reflecting their deep spiritual connection to the wilderness. Colonialism, defined as "the conquest and control of other people's land and goods" (Loomba 8), led to the displacement of Indigenous communities. Settlers focused on material gain, imposed colonial laws that prioritized trade and agriculture, dehumanizing Native peoples and leading to their removal, poverty and illness. This displacement caused mental trauma and the disintegration of Indigenous social, and cultural structures and identity. In his essay "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native", Patrick Wolfe studies the connection between genocide and settler colonialism. He adds that "the two have converged, which is to say, the settler-colonial logic of elimination has manifested as genocidal . . . Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element." (387–388)

The displacement and elimination of Indigenous populations were primarily driven by territorial expansion. Settler colonialism operates fundamentally through territoriality, as Indigenous tribes were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands and relocated to new settlements. The erasure of these communities was a necessary condition for settlers to occupy Indigenous territories and exploit their land and resources. Consequently, settler colonialism is inherently based on the suppression and displacement of Indigenous peoples. Modern Westernized societies, often described as multicultural melting pots or cultural mosaics, have been constructed at the cost of Indigenous erasure. Colonial discourse played a pivotal role in legitimizing invasion by normalizing the perceived inferiority of the colonized. Indigenous peoples were systematically misrepresented as uncivilized and subordinate. As Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington assert in the introduction to *Studies in Settler Colonialism*, settlers from the metropole encroached upon tribal territories, advancing ideological narratives of modernization and development while constructing "a new society" in lands portrayed as "vacant and free" and readily available for expansion (1). Within colonial narratives, Indigenous peoples were ideologically depicted as deviant, mysterious, subhuman, and uncivilized 'others,' further justifying their marginalization and dispossession.

As Elleke Boehmer suggests in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, contemporary fiction remains saturated with the "stereotypical representations of the colonised" (3), reinforcing the historical dominance of Europe over the rest of the world. While such prejudiced representations have traditionally shaped mainstream narratives, Native American scholars, critics, and writers like Louise Erdrich actively challenge these distortions by reclaiming Indigenous histories and voices. Novels such as *Tracks* seek to dismantle colonial stereotypes by

portraying Indigenous characters with depth, resilience, and agency, countering the long-standing misrepresentations of Native peoples as vanishing, subhuman, or uncivilized. Through the use of Indigenous storytelling traditions, Louise Erdrich and other Native American writers rewrite dominant narratives, offering alternative perspectives that foreground cultural survival, communal memory, and resistance to settler colonial erasure. By doing so, they contribute to an evolving literary discourse that not only critiques colonial constructions of identity but also affirms the complexity and continuity of Indigenous cultures in the face of historical and ongoing oppression.

In *Tracks*, Erdrich emphasizes the vital role of land in the lives of Indigenous peoples and reveals the profound consequences of settler colonialism on their communities. Fleur Pillager's fight to protect her ancestral land illustrates the ongoing struggle against colonial displacement, with government policies and settler encroachment threatening Indigenous identity. The imposition of property taxes emerges as a deliberate strategy for dispossession, forcing many, including Fleur, to forfeit their lands. Nanapush, a tribal elder and paternal figure to Fleur, plays a crucial role in supporting her resistance, recognizing that land represents not only a material asset but also a source of cultural and spiritual survival. Through these characters, the novel portrays the land as a vital link to Indigenous identity and community.

A significant event in this ongoing struggle takes place when Nanapush confronts both the Bureau of Indian Affairs and local authorities. Their narrow view reduces land to its economic value, disregarding its sacred importance to the tribe. This confrontation exemplifies the broader colonial agenda, which aimed to undermine indigenous autonomy by severing the deep-rooted connection between Native peoples and their lands. Despite Nanapush's efforts, the systemic forces of colonialism prevail, leading to the eventual loss of the Pillager land, which is both a symbolic and material devastation. The entire narrative of conflict, suffering and survival is told alternately by two characters: Nanapush a reflection of the legendary trickster Nanabozho who is deeply connected to Ojibwe land and traditions, and Pauline Puyat, a young girl who embraces Christianity. Through Nanapush's reliable voice, Erdrich seeks to preserve Native traditions while acknowledging cultural shifts. He remains committed to tradition despite the tribes' challenges, unlike Pauline, who abandons her native beliefs for Christian devotion. Over time, a syncretic perspective emerges, blending and enriching both belief systems. Despite their differences, Nanapush's and Pauline's stories explore universal themes of life and death, love and hate, struggle and submission, and survival on the reservation.

In the opening of *Tracks*, Nanapush narrates the tale of Fleur Pillager, effectively capturing the land's mysterious and spiritual dimensions that are deeply connected to the lives of the characters. During the winter, the landscape assumes a dark and foreboding nature, with *manitous* and ghosts haunting the areas around Matchimanito Lake and the surrounding oak forests, resulting in a haunting and nearly supernatural ambience. The ancestral spirits of the Pillagers, the mysterious medicine men of Matchimanito "who knew the secret ways to cure and kill" (2), inhabit these woods. Matchimanito is a lake close to the reservation that people are too afraid to visit. When Edgar Pukwan, the policeman, is instructed to go to the Pillager cabin, he is "caught between his official duties and his fear for Pillagers" (3). He is afraid that the spirits of the unburied Pillagers might turn him into a *windigo*. While the authorities hesitate, Nanapush displays the courage to handle the bodies of the Pillagers, showing a deep commitment to the warrior men of Matchimanito. Louise Erdrich effectively portrays the strong bond Native Americans have with spirits, viewing them as all-powerful forces that must be appeased. Although many believe that the restless, unburied spirits of the Pillagers are responsible for the troubles they face, Nanapush remains steadfast in his connection to the ancestral spirits.

Tracks emphasizes the indissoluble connection between land and spirituality. For Natives like Nanapush, "the earth is limitless". He chronicles the transformations that have occurred to the land in the recent past. He says, "I saw more change than in a hundred upon a hundred before" (2). Treaties are signed, and native people are forcibly removed from their lands. Nevertheless, the land retains its spiritual significance, serving as a repository of memories and ancestral spirits. It is approached with reverence and possesses the capacity for destruction. This is reflected in Edgar Pukwan's hesitance to venture into the woods surrounding Matchimanito, where he is caught between his fear of the Pillagers and his official responsibilities. For Indigenous peoples, the land is imbued with meaning, and they derive their identity in connection with it. In *Tracks*, Erdrich politicises land to explore and negotiate Ojibwe cultural identity. The land symbolises the social, political, and cultural forces that shape Native identity, and it is for the land that both the Pillagers and the Nanapushes contend. Thus, the land becomes a focal point for struggle and resistance. As the land transforms, so do their beliefs, rituals, and practices.

Expansion leads to the disintegration of lands, families, and cultures. Winona LaDuke, a prominent environmentalist, sees land as a crucial site for revival and resistance. The encroachment of white settlers involves the exploitation of tribal lands for resources such as gold, silver, copper, timber, fur and leather. Strategies employed to dispossess Indigenous tribes of their lands include land treaties, military conflicts, genocide and forced relocation to reservations. In response, Indigenous peoples demonstrate a strong commitment to preserving their culture through environmental stewardship, reflecting their determination to uphold their faith, beliefs, and practices. Consequently, Native environmentalism can be interpreted as a manifestation of Indigenous spirituality and religion. In her introduction to *All Our Relations*, LaDuke notes that a significant aspect of Native environmentalism is defined by the "struggle to preserve" and the "struggle to recover" tribal lands. "Native communities will resist with great determination", demonstrating the true spirit of Native environmentalism. (2)

In the novel *Tracks*, Nanapush and Fleur embody a revolutionary zeal to fight for their land. Erdrich's storytelling not only highlights the importance of politicizing Native identity but also emphasizes themes of resistance, revival and environmentalism. This passion for land preservation is deeply rooted in Native American animism, a belief system that recognizes the inherent spirit within all things. Through Nanapush's narratives in *Tracks*, it becomes evident that the Indigenous peoples maintain a profound trust in their ancestral spirits. He reflects on the loss of his family during a past winter, expressing that their spirits are always present around him. Fleur's references to her ancestors evoke vivid memories for Nanapush, in which their spirits continue to exist. There is a reluctance to speak their names aloud, as it is feared that the spirits may "hear them and never rest" (5). Nanapush adds, "They would sit in the snow outside the door, waiting until from long we joined them. . . . Their names grew within us, swelled to the brink of our lips, forced our eyes open in them in the middle of the night. . ." (5–6).

Native Americans establish a connection between winter deaths and spirits, intertwining every experience with spiritual significance. For each challenge they face and every loss of loved ones, there is a narrative related to spirits and ancestors. Land holds immense importance in Indigenous spirituality and practices; thus, the loss of land equates to a profound loss of faith. In his essay "Death and Religion", published in *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, Vine Deloria Jr. writes, "Most tribes were very reluctant to surrender their homelands to whites . . . their ancestors were still spiritually alive on the land . . . the whites would not honor the ancestors and the lands in proper manner" (171). In *Tracks*, Erdrich illustrates the relationship between the Ojibwe Indians, their land, and their ancestral spirits while documenting their struggle to preserve both their land and heritage. Nanapush says, "The sound of my own voice convinced that I am alive" (7). Over time, they blend with various beliefs and

practices. Storytellers such as Nanapush and Pauline reveal the Native American spiritual connection to Mother Earth and their interactions with the materialist European tradition.

In his introduction to *Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*, Basil Johnston asserts that *manitous* serve as guardian spirits for the Native American Chippewa tribes. To them, *manitous* are "as much a reality as trees, valleys, hills, and winds. . . men and women felt the presence of *manitous* all around them". They must "adhere to the natural laws of the world" and are therefore "dependent on the goodwill of the manitous" (xx-xxiii). Nanapush vividly recounts the stories of the spirits that permeate their existence, elaborating on how these narratives are interwoven into all aspects of their surroundings, including plants, animals, air, food and water. At the beginning of *Tracks*, he is depicted engaging in lengthy conversations with Father Damien about the spiritual foundations of Ojibwe life, its connection to the land and the Ojibwe's ongoing struggle to preserve their land from colonizers. Nanapush captivates Father Damien, keeping him engaged throughout the night as he strives to convey the enduring and relentless efforts to uphold land and land-based spirituality. When Father Damien baptizes Fleur's newborn, Lulu, he expresses considerable joy in this custom, embracing the new practices introduced by his friend and fellow priest. This act is not specifically aimed at conversion; rather, it serves primarily as a ritual. In *Tracks*, many Indigenous individuals adopt Catholic practices, adapting them into their cultural framework while simultaneously engaging with Native American spirituality to varying degrees. In his book Native American Religion, Joel W. Martin, a professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, discusses the emergence of a new religious orientation among Native Americans:

"Native peoples found within this kind of Christianity a divine affirmation of their value as human beings. They emphasized the inward change of a person's heart as a result of a warm relationship with Christ. Piety and prayer mattered most, not status and education. . . . Converting to Christianity, they made Christianity their own. To this very day American Indians in New England practice Christianity in a way that is distinctive from that of their non-native neighbours." (72) Erdrich's narratives are rich with images of syncretic religious practices, spirituality, and a hybrid cultural ethos, raising profound questions about identity. Nanapush frequently finds himself caught in the conflict between traditional and modern ways. He observes the decline of the Ojibwe in the face of colonial power, and his storytelling serves as a tribute to the ancestors who resisted and ultimately yielded to the white government. Most importantly, he reveals how his people reconcile their traditional ways of life with new belief systems and political realities.

In the words of Nanapush, "Land is the only thing that lasts life to life" (Erdrich, *Tracks* 33). He is reluctant to sign with the Lumbar Company, which seeks to exploit their land. Both the Nanapush and Pillager families have resisted this encroachment. Death and loss permeate their communities. Historically, the tribes have "been massacred and fought", "cheated, and robbed of their ancestral lands" and now "their lands are subject to the most invasive industrial interventions imaginable" (2), as noted by Winona LaDuke in her introduction to *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*.

In *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich presents various narratives that illuminate the Ojibwe religious and spiritual orientation through adept storytellers. Nanapush shares tales of the past with his granddaughter Lulu, detailing how her ancestors were compelled to submit to the "storm of government papers" (1) and relinquish their sacred land during the conquest. He considers himself one of the least colonized and proudly asserts that he has experienced and learned what future generations may struggle to understand, "My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know guided the last buffalo hunt saw the last bear shot trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth" (2). The natives relied on animals such as beavers for sustenance, clothing, blankets, and tools.

Nanapush speculates that future generations may lead a different life influenced by colonial modernity. He takes pride in being among the last to experience a pre-colonial way of life. The wilderness connects individuals like Nanapush to the spiritual realm. Native religions foster the union between humans and the natural world, as Vine Deloria Jr. discusses in his essay "The Problem of Creation". He emphasizes that "the relationships that serve to form the unity of nature" are essential to Indigenous peoples. "The Indian is confronted with a bountiful earth" where "all things and experiences have a role to play", and the "awareness of the meaning of life" arises from understanding how "various living things appear to mesh to provide a whole tapestry" (87).

Winona LaDuke's *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* addresses the necessity of preserving land and land-based traditions that colonizers dismantled. Resources were exploited, Native peoples were dispossessed, and new industries were established on sacred lands. In the chapter titled "What is Sacred?" she examines the loss of tribal lands and its impact on their spiritual connection to the land. This situation reflects two distinct spiritual paradigms and a dominant culture driven by an insatiable demand for tribal resources. Minerals, water and various resources have been taken from Native American territories without their consent, leading to considerable losses of both land and resources. When the law ensured to guard their ceremonies and rituals, "it did not protect the places . . . and elements central to these ceremonies." (12–13).

During colonization in America, treaties led to the dispossession of Indigenous lands, disrupting their spiritual connection and way of life. Nanapush foresees younger generations assimilating into the dominant culture while retaining traditional values, resulting in new hybrid post-colonial identities shaped by both assimilation and acculturation. As articulated by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, an outcome "of European intervention and settlement throughout the world was a mixing of different peoples whose philosophies, languages, and ways of seeing and valuing" once rested on the "belief in monoculturalism, to ancestry and purity of race or lineage. Much innovative, philosophical and theoretical debate in post-colonial areas centres on the relationships between pure ancestry and cultural and racial hybridization" (152).

Nanapush positions himself as the custodian of Native spirituality, recounting his daring rescue of Fleur Pillager from a frozen cabin haunted by ancestral spirits. He portrays the Pillagers as the most resilient Native community, resisting the Dawes Act and refusing to abandon their woodland homes, exemplifying their defiance against colonial dispossession. Nanapush suggests that the Pillagers played a central role in the Native rebellion, driven by revolutionary zeal, which unsettles Pukwan, a law officer too fearful to approach the Pillager cabin. By saving Fleur, the last surviving Pillager, Nanapush not only pleases the spirits but inherits their power, infusing his storytelling with revolutionary energy. Despite his Jesuit education, Nanapush rejects colonial knowledge, reaffirming his commitment to preserving Indigenous culture and highlighting the Native struggle for cultural decolonization.

Stories serve as a vital link for Native peoples, connecting them with the land, spirits, and collective memories. In his introduction to *The Land Has Memory*, titled "Introduction: Remembering the Experience of Past Generations," Indigenous scholar Johnpaul Jones explores how storytelling creates these connections. As Jones notes, "There is no place without a story. Every plant, every animal, every rock and flowing spring carries a message" (1). These stories are not merely narratives; they impart valuable knowledge about the environment and habitat, preserving memories and experiences. They communicate essential lessons about survival, the earth, the wind, the sky, the rain, and the spiritual bonds between the people and the land. This deep understanding is nurtured through the act of listening to these stories. As Jones further observes, "Native peoples have an extraordinary relationship with the land and the world around them that stems from the broadest sense of kinship with all life" (2). Accordingly, when

Native people build on the land, they seek permission from it. When they hunt for food, they offer gratitude. They also perform "ceremonies to mark each season and give thanks for what the earth has provided" (3). For Native Americans, the land is not merely a physical space; it is a living, vibrant and dynamic space.

3. REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

The character of Fleur Pillager exemplifies the complex ways in which marginalized identities navigate the tensions between erasure and resistance. Her struggle to assert her voice in a sociopolitical context that seeks to suppress it reflects the broader dynamics of cultural representation and identity formation. This paper explores how Fleur's identity is shaped through her resistance to these forces, as Erdrich's portrayal of Native women, especially through Fleur, disrupts colonial narratives, reclaiming Indigenous perspectives and emphasizing the agency of Native women. Fleur's resistance aligns with Stuart Hall's theories on culture and representation, as both highlight how identities are shaped, represented, and contested within power structures.

Stuart Hall is a key figure in cultural studies, viewing culture as a complex and dynamic site of meaning production. In his introduction to *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall explains that "meanings are produced at several different sites" (3) and circulate in various ways within a cultural circuit. According to Hall's concept of the circuit of culture, meaning is created and circulated through numerous social processes and practices, with language serving as a key tool. Hall emphasizes that language "is one of the 'media' through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture. Representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced" (1). He highlights the importance of studying how language is politicized to represent culture. Hall's view of culture as a dynamic entity and a site of meaning production, with language playing a critical role in expressing and interpreting these meanings, makes his framework particularly relevant for analyzing Native American literature.

Language serves as the medium through which culture and meaning are articulated. Stuart Hall, in the introduction to Representation, describes culture as a set of "shared meanings" or "a set of practices" (1). He explains how language produces meaning through representation, where ideas are symbolized, depicted, or described. Hall describes language as a "representational system," functioning as a channel for expressing "thoughts, ideas, and feelings" pertinent to culture. Linguistic representation is, therefore, central to "the processes by which meaning is produced" (1). According to Stuart Hall, meanings are constructed by "the system of representation" (21) and are outcomes of "a signifying practice" (24). They are constructed through signs, with words functioning as signs imbued with meanings that represent ideas, thoughts or concepts. Louise Erdrich's use of Ojibwe terminology within her English-language novels serves as a crucial mechanism for conveying Ojibwe cultural values that may not be easily captured in English. By integrating terms such as *windigo* and *manitou*, which signify spirit, Erdrich bridges the gap between two distinct languages and cultures, creating a literary text that negotiates between both. These terms function as signs carrying specific cultural and spiritual significance, contributing to the rich symbolic layers within her narratives.

The cultural significance of these terms is vital to their use, as they carry meanings far deeper than their English equivalents. For example, while the English word "spirit" might seem to offer a similar meaning, it fails to encapsulate the specific cultural, spiritual, and philosophical nuances embedded in *windigo* or *manitou*. These Ojibwe terms are deeply rooted in Indigenous cosmology and belief systems and replacing them with more general terms like "spirit" would result in a significant loss of meaning, stripping away the layers of cultural context and reducing the complexity of the original concepts. Erdrich's incorporation of culturally specific terminology

functions as a political act of resistance. Within the Ojibwe language, terms such as "Misshepeshu" signify an evil spirit, while "jeesikeewinini" denotes a medicine man. Additionally, "ikwe-inini" refers to a woman-man, "aadizokaanag" translates to story, and "ogichidaa" signifies a ceremonial chief. Words like *windigo*, representing a malevolent spirit and *manitou*, denoting a spirit or supernatural force, are frequently employed in her narratives. These terms operate not only as cultural symbols but also as vessels of profound philosophical and spiritual significance, thereby enriching the text and highlighting the complexities of Indigenous worldviews.

Erdrich's use of culturally specific Ojibwe terminology is not only linguistically significant but also deeply informed by the cultural context from which it originates. These terms, such as *windigo* and *manitou*, are essential to the coherence of her narrative, communicating layered meanings and cultural values that cannot be fully expressed through translation. Symbols like *windigo* and *manitou* function as powerful cultural tools, carrying meanings that transcend language and reflect the deeply rooted ideas of the Ojibwe community. Language, often seen as a means of communication, becomes a medium for negotiating meanings and a site of struggle in the context of discursive representation. In Erdrich's work, this struggle is evident as her use of Ojibwe terms engages with and challenges colonial power structures. Through culturally significant language, her narratives articulate political resistance, aligning with Stuart Hall's framework of discursive control and the power dynamics embedded in language, land, and spirituality.

4. CONCLUSION

Louise Erdrich skilfully interweaves land, language, and identity to critique colonial power dynamics. This paper draws on Stuart Hall's theories of cultural representation, Winona LaDuke's views on Indigenous land rights, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's concept of cultural survival to analyze how Erdrich's narrative engages with Native American resistance. By examining characters like Fleur Pillager, the study highlights how land and language are vital for cultural survival amid dispossession and marginalization. Erdrich's work offers a powerful

commentary on the resilience of Indigenous identity, challenging colonial oppression and emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and resistance. In addition, the Ojibwe tribes, to which Erdrich herself belongs, continue to assert their identity despite centuries of colonization. Although colonial histories have imposed different names upon them, these tribes embrace their Indigenous identity as an act of resistance, reaffirming their dignity and self-respect. This self-definition counters the erasure imposed by settler narratives, reinforcing the endurance of Indigenous sovereignty and cultural pride. Through *Tracks*, Erdrich not only reclaims Indigenous histories but also underscores the political significance of naming, identity, and self-representation in the ongoing struggle for cultural survival and autonomy.

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Reclaiming Shakti: How Hindu Philosophy Empowers Women

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ABSTRACT

Shakti in Hindu and tantric thought transcends a mythological persona but something extremely ancient that compels creation, destruction, and transformation, and has shaped Hindu philosophy for centuries. The paper presents a counter-narrative to the existing feminist literature through the lens of Shaktism – where it subverts the existing and deeply rooted patriarchal paradigms in Hindu traditions and yet at the same time presents a spirituality-based model of women's empowerment. It discusses the contradictions between the theological ideals and the socio-religious practices where on one hand Hinduism revered the divine feminine forces and on the other hand social practices such as Sati, gender restriction, and temple exclusion present a very different picture. The paper is about Shakti energy which is worshipped through various Avatars of Goddesses like Durga, Kali, Parvati, Tantra philosophy, and Shakti paths, which are ways of understanding how girls can find their power and be empowered. Observing the research by Woodroffe (2003) and Holdrege (2024) the paper suggests the new approach to power that follows the tantric philosophy of energy as coming from the inside and not from the outside and the fact that Hindu feminism is different from that of the West as it is based on spiritual autonomy and not political activism. The paper connects Indian philosophy with feminist discourses and demonstrates the spirituality in all paths of feminism that go with the ideology of gender equality, Shaktism.

Keywords: *Shakti, Divine, Balance, Feminism, Empowerment*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Tantric and Hindu thought, Shakti is the original cosmic energy that is responsible for processes of creation, destruction, and transformation. Unlike monotheistic religions, which are inclined to think of divinity in purely masculine terms, Hinduism thinks of power as both masculine and feminine, as indicated by the duality of Shiva and Shakti (Gonda, 1973; Hawley & Wulff, 1998). The feminine divine, or Shakti, is worshiped in numerous forms—Durga, Kali, Parvati, Lakshmi, and Saraswati each personifying different facets of power, wisdom, and protection. Tantric theology goes a step further, thinking of Shakti as the supreme power for spiritual awakening and liberation, as symbolized in Kundalini Shakti, which is latent in human beings and can be woken up through certain esoteric rites (Woodroffe, 2003).

Despite theological sanctity accorded to feminine divinity, Hindu society for centuries has imposed gendered limitations on women, such as Sati practices, widow seclusion, and limited access to religious leadership (Rastogi, 2012). This paradox evokes a fundamental question: How is it possible that a tradition glorifying feminine power is also keeping women out of social practice? The patriarchal recontextualization of Hindu scriptures is the main reason for this issue as the liberatory potential of Shakti has been consistently blocked by

the social culture norms, which enforce male hegemony. This research proposes that Shaktism is a kind of indigenous feminist theory that is very different from Western feminist theory".

Western feminism is concerned with political action and revolutionizing forms, in a sequence of waves from liberal to radical to intersectional in orientation (Beauvoir, 1949; Hooks, 1984; Butler, 1990), while Shaktism presents a unique model of empowerment metaphysical authority, self-awareness, and spiritual independence (Holdrege, 2024). Based on a critical examination of the expression of Shakti in goddess cultures, Tantric philosophy, and Shakti Peeths, this research concludes that Hindu feminism is not concerned with the field of rights but with reaffirming an immanent cosmic sovereignty.

2. EXPRESSION OF SHAKTI

Shakti, being the earliest female power, is incarnated in several ways in Hindu traditions, each reflecting some unique characteristics of power, wisdom, destruction, and protection. The cult of the adoration of Shakti as Durga, Kali, Parvati, Lakshmi, and Saraswati reflects the dynamic and fluid character of feminine divinity. They are not theological conceits by any means but representations of female agency, power, and transformation (Kinsley, 1997).

2.1. Durga: Warrior Goddess & Feminist Resistance

Durga represents strength, justice, and the annihilation of oppression. As a slayer of Mahishasura, she represents women challenging patriarchal authority (Erndl, 1993). The figure of Durga seated on a lion, and holding weapons offers a strong challenge to traditional female subordination. She is a symbol of feminist resistance to gender violence, consistent with modern movements like the Me Too movement calling for justice for women.

The nine Durgas (Navadurga) symbolize various aspects of female power, from intelligence (Shailaputri) to courage (Kushmanda). They symbolize women as carers, nurturers, and warriors, rather than the patriarchal opposition of violence and passivity (Hawley & Wulff, 1998).

2.2. Kali: The Fierce Destroyer & Rebellion Against Patriarchy

Kali is the most extreme expression of feminine power, showing unbridled fury and destruction of injustice. Adorned with a garland of skulls, with the tongue sticking out and an unencumbered stance, she embodies a liberation from convention (Kinsley, 1997). In contrast to traditional images of feminine deference, Kali defies the purity theme that restricts female sexuality and power. In Tantric practice, Kali symbolizes ego destruction and the awakening of higher consciousness, specifically through those practices that welcome the divine feminine in oneself (Bühnemann, 2000). In a feminist context, Kali symbolizes women embracing their rejection of patriarchal practices shattering oppressive practices such as child marriage, dowry, and purity taboos (Erndl, 1993).

2.3. Parvati: The Balance of Care and Autonomy

Parvati embodies love, fertility, and mental wisdom, but also unshakeable determination. She is different from Durga and Kali, whose strength is one-sided she is the duality of strength and compassion. As the reincarnation of Sati, she subjects herself to harsh austerities to reach Shiva, exercising agency in controlling her fate. In contemporary feminist philosophy, Parvati's transformation into Kali and Durga during times of adversity reflects women's capacity to evolve with society's hardships (Hawley & Wulff, 1998). Her capacity to alternate between motherly and demanding roles defies strict gender roles.

2.4. Tantric Interpretations: Kundalini & Feminine Spiritual Awakening

Shakti, in Tantric rituals, is not external but an internal force within every being, known as Kundalini Shakti. Kundalini, represented in the form of a serpent curled at the base of the spine, rises through chakras when it is awakened, representing spiritual freedom. This work offers a feminist counterpoint to the external legitimation of power asserting that women's empowerment is not bestowed by society but is acquired from within. The sexual and spiritual dimensions of Tantra also overturn the Western sacred, profane dichotomy, providing a counter-feminist discourse in which female sexuality is sacred and not taboo (Woodroffe, 2003).

3. SHAKTI CULT AND TANTRIC PHILOSOPHY

3.1. The Shakti Cults: Beyond the Vedas Worship

The Shakti cults are among the earliest goddess cults of India, tracing their history to the Indus Valley Civilization (Erndl, 1993). The cults venerate Shakti as a personal and universal power, in temples known as Shakti Peethas, where devotees pray to receive favors from the goddess for power, fertility, and protection. The Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, for instance, is a celebration of the goddess's menstruation, transgressing patriarchal purity taboos by celebrating women's natural cycles (Bühnemann, 2000). Shakti cults also emphasize the role of women in religious and ritual life. Unlike priestly Vedic cults, Shakta sects historically allowed women to be spiritual masters, tantras, and yoginis (Kinsley, 1997). This aspect of Shakti worship returns religious authority to women, and they become worshippers and symbols of the divine.

3.2. Tantra and Embodiment of Shakti

Tantric philosophy resists externalized imagery of the divine, and instead, underscores Shakti as internal energy shared by all beings (Woodroffe, 2003). Kundalini Shakti symbolized as a snake wrapped around the base of the spine, is a dormant sacred power that is to be invoked through Tantric practice (Bühnemann, 2000). Unlike Brahmanical sects that tend to idealize renunciation, Tantra affirms material existence, sexuality, and body as sacred embodiments of the divine. Women are not only actors in Tantric rituals but are living manifestations of Shakti (Erndl, 1993). Unlike Vedic religions that limit the religious role of women, Tantra fosters gender equality in religious life with women as gurus, initiators, and bearers of divine knowledge.

3.3. Kundalini and the Feminist Interpretation of Tantra

Kundalini Shakti, which is a core Tantra concept, has been understood by feminist authors as an icon of inner empowerment (Kinsley, 1997). Rather than calling for external validation of power, Tantra suggests that power belongs to women and must be awakened. This is in contrast to Western feminism and its tendency to call for change in the system through external activism, while Shaktism emphasizes inner spiritual power (Holdrege, 2024). In addition, Tantric traditions resist patriarchal domination of feminine sexuality by acknowledging it as a source of divine power instead of impurity. The Shiva-Shakti union in Tantric metaphysics represents the union of masculine and feminine energies instead of one over the other (Woodroffe, 2003). On this ground, Tantra presents a liberatory gender equality model based on spiritual equilibrium instead of hierarchical domination (Bühnemann, 2000).

3.4. Shakti Peeths: The Powerhouses of Feminine Energy

Shakti Peeths are the most sacred sites of the goddess cult, representing the earthly presence of Shakti. Shakta traditions view that they are created from the dismemberment of Sati's body into fragments, a representation of the inseparability of Shiva and Shakti. In contrast to conventional temple architecture in the worship of male deities,

Shakti Peeths emphasize the centrality of the feminine power and thus are a hub of Tantric cult, feminist reinterpretations, and counter-culture to patriarchal orders.

3.5. Mythical Beginnings & the Cosmic Balance of Power

The Sati myth is the foundation of the history of Shakti Peeths, in which Sati immolated herself in protest against her father Daksha's humiliation of Shiva. In her lamentation, Shiva carried her burning body across the universe, and his Tandava caused cosmic devastation. To avoid cosmic chaos, Vishnu's Sudarshan Chakra cut Sati's body into pieces, and her pieces fell into different parts of the Indian subcontinent, forming 51 sacred sites, although some texts mention as many as 108 Peeths. Every Peeth relates to a corresponding part of Sati's body or accessory with a bond that is associated with various attributes of divine energy:

• *Kamakhya Temple (Assam*) – Represents Sati's Yoni (womb), signifying fertility, creativity, and feminine energy. The Ambubachi Mela here is a celebration of menstruation, going beyond purity-based taboos

• *Kalighat Temple (Kolkata)* – Connected with Sati's right toe, signifying her endurance in the spiritual world.

• *Jwala Mukhi Temple (Himachal Pradesh*) – Connected with Sati's tongue, where there are burning fires all around, symbolizing her power of speech and transformation. (Rupa Publications, n.d.).

3.6. Shakti Peeths as Sites of Feminine Resistance & Power

Outside mythology, Shakti Peeths are places where women regain spiritual power. Unlike male priesthoods of the Vedic tradition, Shakta traditions recognize female spiritual masters (sadhvis, tantras, and yoginis). Certain Peeths, such as Tarapith in Bengal, are closely associated with esoteric Tantric practices, where women practitioners were an integral part of Shakti sadhana (spiritual discipline) (Woodroffe, 2003).

The Kamakhya Temple Ambubachi Mela is a counter-hegemonic festival, in the sense that it celebrates the goddess's menstruation a radical defiance of the usual stigma of menstrual pollution (Erndl, 1993). The rituals challenged patriarchal prohibitions that kept women out of the temples during menstruation. Instead, Shakti Peeths validates biological consciousness as sacred, not filthy, situating them as sites of feminist resistance.

3.7. Tantric Interpretations: Shakti Peeths as Centres of Energy

Tantric Shakti Peeths are not only sites of pilgrimage but also the locations of very strong energy vortices, where Shakti is experienced most strongly (Woodroffe, 2003). While in orthodox Hindu tradition, there is often a focus on devotion (bhakti), Tantric practitioners view Shakti Peeths as a location of Kundalini energy awakening. Shiva and Shakti coming together at these locations represent a union of cosmic masculine and feminine energies, which justifies Tantra's philosophy of non-dualism (Bühnemann, 2000). Some Peeths are reported to be the sites of esoteric Tantric practices where sadhana is performed to attain self-realization by the initiates. Temples like Tarapith are sanctified for their association with Mahavidya Tara, cremation ground practices, and the elimination of fear (Kinsley, 1997). These understandings subvert orthodox Hindu hierarchies by placing Shakti as something that transcends social boundaries**.**

4. EMPOWERING WOMEN: THE SPIRIT OF SHAKTI

Shakti, in Hinduism, is not merely a theistic concept she is an energizing living force that embodies strength, wisdom, and self-awareness. Ancient scripture portrays Shakti as cosmic feminine power over creation, destruction, and transformation, but her power extends beyond religious scripture into modern feminist theory. Historically, Shakti manifests in goddess forms like Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, embodying different aspects of power. Shakti is also a modern ideological basis for women's empowerment, highlighting that women have the inherent capacity to transcend institutional barriers (Morales, n.d.).

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4.1. Shakti and the Strength of Confronting Social Conventions

Women's empowerment is not a legal right or static idea it is unleashing untapped leadership, imagination, and self-governance, just as Hinduism represents Shakti. Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati together represent strength, courage, economic independence, and wisdom, qualities that go beyond conventional gender roles (The Indian Panorama, 2020). Goddess Durga is perhaps one of the strongest examples, whose imagery is depicted as a warrior atop a lion holding several weapons. She symbolizes resistance to tyranny and the battle for justice and inspires women to assert their rights and dignity (Sharma, 2021). Contemporary feminist movements frequently borrow Durga's imagery during protest and social justice movements, upholding her status as a figure of resistance. Likewise, the fierce form of Kali is symbolic of unshackling oneself from conventional societal norms, a metaphorical representation of women tearing down patriarchal structures and regaining their power in the fields of politics, business, and education (DailyO, 2018).

4.2. Economic and Intellectual Empowerment: Lakshmi & Saraswati

Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, symbolizes economic independence among women. Economic independence is the core of gender equality, which liberates women from oppression and dependency cycles. Modern-day women entrepreneurs and equal pay activists invoke the symbolism of Lakshmi as they seek economic stability and positions of leadership (Rupa Publications, n.d.). The phrase "women are the Lakshmi of the house" is a recognition of women as generators of wealth in the past, but modern society limits their economic participation. Similarly, Saraswati, the goddess of education and knowledge, symbolizes education as the most powerful instrument of empowerment. Women in most cultures have been deprived of education, but since Saraswati is present in Hindu society, it means education is a doorway to self-determination. Literacy campaigns for girls and education mostly employ Saraswati as the symbol to bridge the gender divide in stereotypically male professions.

4.3. Shakti in Contemporary Feminist Philosophy

Shakti today is not only a religious ideology but also a force of social change. Empowerment of women derives its ideology from Shakti, i.e., change and power are intrinsic (Morales, n.d.). For example, Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple honors menstruation as divine, which stands in direct opposition to societal prohibitions against women entering temples and taking leadership roles in religious organizations (The Indian Panorama, 2020). By realizing the spiritual and social power of Shakti, women are reclaiming themselves in all spheres work, education, politics, and home institutions.

4.4. Shakti and Feminist Discourses

Hinduism symbolizes two natural energies of the world masculine and feminine energies that together maintain cosmic equilibrium. Shakti, the feminine divine power, is not only a mythological figure but an active force that energizes women generation by generation. Each woman in Hinduism is considered to be an embodiment of Shakti, with the same potency as Durga, Kali, and Parvati, each symbolizing different aspects of power and change (Erndl, 1993). This belief is a cornerstone for feminist literature, which imagines an equal society not in theory but in reality. The essence of Shakti negates the idea of women as passive agents; rather, it makes them creators, caregivers, and active agents of change (Morales, n.d.).

4.5. Shakti and the Struggle for Gender Justice

Women's roles in society have never been monolithic across ages, they have experienced oscillations of oppression and empowerment. Hindu goddesses themselves are a testimony to this strength-resilience duality. Goddess

Parvati, for example, is the very definition of nurturing and strength, yet when the cosmic balance is under siege by evil, she transforms into Kali the destroyer of injustice Kinsley (1997). This transformation is the hallmark of women's capacity to resist, transform, and hold space in masculine domains. But Hindu tradition itself has too frequently betrayed Shakti's ideals. The brutality of practices like Sati where women were forced to burn themselves alive betrays Shakti's story of empowerment (The Indian Panorama, 2020). Sati, literally "devotion and purity," was originally misinterpreted and used to dominate women, rather than to honor their autonomy (Sharma, 2021). This paradox raises a fundamental question: How can a society that worships Shakti also restrict women's rights? Feminist scholars argue that Shakti's role in feminism today is to reclaim the divine feminine from victimhood to honor women's strength, resilience, and agency.

4.6. Relevance to Contemporary Feminist Movements

The applicability of Shakti to contemporary feminist language is apparent in today's gender justice and leadership movements. Perhaps the most potent example is the #MeToo movement, which resonates with Kali's position as the destroyer of injustice. Like Kali destroying poisonous forces, #MeToo aims to destroy institutional gender-based violence by empowering survivors to take back their dignity (DailyO, 2018). Although the platform has evolved, the core struggle against injustice is unchanged both aim to destroy cultural norms that uphold gender-based discrimination. Shakti is also in line with women's leadership and environmental activism. Politicians such as Kamala Harris, teachers such as Malala Yousafzai, and environmental activists such as Vandana Shiva are the personification of Shakti in the contemporary world (Rupa Publications, n.d.). In Hinduism, the earth is typically represented as a woman, Prithvi, the great mother, linking environmental consciousness with the divine feminine principle. Feminist environmental philosophers are of the view that women's natural affinity towards nature is evidence that they are the keepers of harmony, both ecologically and socially.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of Shakti transcends mythology and tradition and becomes an eternal force of feminine power, strength, and transformation. Contrary to passive representations of femininity, Shakti is creation and destruction, shattering limiting norms and redefining feminine power as an active force of transformation. The Shakti cult, Tantra, and Shakti Peeths are living testaments to this eternal legacy, demonstrating that the divine feminine is not a sign of subordination but of sovereignty and freedom. Shakti's teachings in our modern world revive the quest for equality and gender justice, validating the belief that empowerment is within. At the moment when women reclaim their power spiritually, socially, and politically they are the living embodiment of the very essence of Shakti. The sacred feminine is not within temple walls or between the lines of a book; it is in every moment of rebellion, leadership, and transformation. Shakti is not mythic power alone; it is a living truth that shapes the path of societies as they move toward a more balanced and equal future. As women continue to break barriers, dispel illusions, and find their inner strength, Shakti is an omnipresent force, leading the path to freedom and balance in the universe.

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Mallinatha: Redefining Gender In Jainism

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the legacy of Mallinatha, the 19th Tirthankara of Jainism who challenged the traditional narratives, as the only female Tirthankara. Jainism, one of the most ancient religions of India, is known for its emphasis on non-violence (ahimsa), spiritual liberation (moksha), and ascetic discipline. Among the 24 Tirthankaras, Mallinatha, the 19th, stands out not only for her spiritual significance but also for the controversies surrounding her identity. The gender debate between both sects of Jainism, i.e. Shwetambara and Digambara analyse the role of women in achieving moksha and broader implications for gender equality through two distinct perspectives. This paper explores these complexities, focusing on Mallinatha's story, the concept of Tirthankaras, and the evolving role of women in Jainism. From the exclusion of women in early doctrinal interpretations to their eventual recognition as monks and spiritual leaders, the evolution of gender roles in Jainism mirrors broader societal changes. This debate has been extensively discussed in Jain academia which highlight the sectarian differences in how they interpret gender and spiritual liberation. Through an analysis of Jain texts and historical viewpoints, this study seeks to challenge conventional narratives and highlight Jainism's evolving stance on gender inclusivity.

Keywords: Gender, Inclusivity, Jainism, Tirthankaras, Mallinatha, Asceticism

1. INTRODUCTION

Jainism is one of the ancient Indian religions in which its belief is anchored upon the path of non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-stealing (asteya), celibacy (brahmacharya), and non-possessiveness (aparigraha). The religion respects all forms of life due to its belief that everyone is born with a soul, which can be freed from bondage or moksha. In Jain philosophies, the concept of karma is something that one should get rid of through self-control, meditation, and being good. Jainism supports positive interaction with the world while preaching spiritual growth through compassion and austerity.

According to Jainism, the universe, along with all its substance or entities, is infinite. The universe and whatever is present in it do not have any beginning and end in time. The universe runs automatically according to its cosmic laws. No one is needed to create and to operate the universe. Hence, Jainism does not have faith in God as the creator, supporter, and destroyer of the universe. But, Jainism does believe in God, but not as the creator. When an individual eliminates all his karmas, he attains liberation and exists in eternal perfect bliss known as Moksha. The liberated soul possesses infinite knowledge (keval jnana), infinite vision, infinite power, and infinite bliss. A liberated soul is divine or god-like in Jainism. Believed, it is so because everybody can reach this

divine perfection. Hence, there is no one God of the Jains but infinite Jain gods and their count goes on indefinitely as with every new liberated living being, this count gets added. As believed, all the living beings are since birth bound with the effects of their deeds or karma and have no understanding of their true, sinless self.

Jainism aims at freeing the soul from the bindings of ignorance, albeit through self-awareness and conscious effort. True knowledge and renunciation of attachments of karma can free the soul from such bindings. Once all karma is eliminated, the soul attains liberation and experiences eternal peace and bliss. After achieving keval jnana, if any person achieves the fourfold religious order (sangha) of bhikshus, bhiksuni, sravaks (male householder), and sravikas (female householder) then one is termed Tirthankara. He spreads Jain philosophy, religion, ethics, mannerisms to all his devotees. Jainism beliefs that twenty-four Tirthankara are born with each descending and ascending segment of the time cycle in this area referred to as Bharat Kshetra in the cosmos.

No two Tirthankaras can be in the same time. Normally, the Tirthankara born is at the time of religion's decadence. He renews the immortal principles of Jainism and modifies the religious practices according to the situation of the time, place, and human society's customs prevailing during his life (Jaina.org, n.d.). Although Jainism emphasizes equality on the spiritual plane, Tirthankaras have always been represented as male. According to Jaini (1991), the Digambara tradition maintained that "a woman's body, perceived as inherently impure, cannot achieve liberation in its current form". The Mulachara, a foundational Digambara text, reinforces this belief by stating that only male ascetics can undertake the rigorous path of nudity required for spiritual purification. Conversely, the Kalpasutra, a prominent Shwetambara text, acknowledges women as capable of ascetic practice but stops short of granting them Tirthankara status (Balbir, 2003).

All the Tirthankaras were males, except Mallinatha in the Shwetambara as well as Digambara traditions. This also goes as an expression of then prevailing patriarchal social norms in the ancient Indian context. Spiritual as well as social leadership had been accredited to males. So, such a representation of Mallinatha as a female Tirthankara is unique for the Shwetambara tradition which goes exceptional to this general rule. However, even this recognition has been challenged by accounts that have changed the gender of Mallinatha to suit orthodoxy. The concept of Tirthankaras is also a view through which one can view the peculiar stance Jainism has taken on the issue of divinity. With the negation of the creator god and with self-realization as its central theme, Jainism goes against the typical religious stratification. The gender aspect in Tirthankaras, which seems to be majorly male, raises some serious questions about how spiritual values align with the prevailing social values.

2. GENDER INEQUALITY IN JAINISM

Gender discrimination has been an issue for the human race over time and across cultures. The concept of gender-based inequality is understood as unequal treatment of people regardless of their race, religion, caste, or creed by virtue of their gender. The situation has improved considerably with growing awareness, education, and advocacy in recent times, but there are challenges still facing gender inequality. Despite the progress, inequality remains evident in all aspects of life, and therefore the need for change and equality still remains relevant.

Gender inequality from the religious point of view, is that men and women are people of different caliber hence they need to be treated differently since discrimination can manifest in responsibility, experiences, practice rule or norms. Gender inequality in Jainism has deep roots in doctrinal interpretations. The Digambara sect asserts that only a male body can endure the demands of asceticism required for moksha, while the Shwetambara sect,

though more tolerant of female ascetics, still refuses them Tirthankara status (Jaini,1991). Despite their spiritual achievements, female ascetics often occupied inferior positions in Shwetambara groups (Bordiya,2015). Historical customs, such as the restriction of women to domestic duties, served to further this exclusion. Chandanbala, whom Mahavira freed from bondage, is a prime example of this, representing the possibility of female spiritual growth (Balbir, 2003).

3. EARLY VIEWS ON WOMEN AND LIBERATION IN JAINISM

In the early centuries of Jainism, particularly within the Digambara tradition, women were considered spiritually inferior to men. The Mulachara, a foundational Digambara text, asserts that only male ascetics, capable of practicing nudity, can achieve ultimate renunciation and moksha (Jaini,1991). As per Digambara ideology, a woman must be reborn as a man in order to achieve liberation. According to Dr. Hirabai Bordiya (2015), this belief was rooted in the idea that the female body, due to its biological functions, was impure and thus unfit for the highest spiritual practices.

On the other hand, the Shwetambara tradition was more inclusive regarding the spiritual roles of women but still reflects gendered hierarchies in monastic leadership. These teachings allowed for the possibility of women achieving moksha within their current bodies. The Shwetambara tradition, as documented in the Kalpasutra, allowed women to become sadhvis (nuns) and pursue spiritual discipline. Women in this tradition could partake in the same religious practices as their male counterparts, though they were often still expected to follow a more constrained role within the monastic order. Despite these allowances, the dominant societal structure continued to relegate women to secondary positions, and even the Shwetambara tradition did not allow women to serve as Tirthankaras, thereby reinforcing male-centric spiritual leadership (Balbir, 2003).

4. THE STORY OF MALLINATHA: A FEMALE TIRTHANKARA

The story of Mallinatha, the 19th Tirthankara, is detailed in the Trishashti Shalaka Purusha by Hemachandra, a 12th-century Jain scholar. According to Hemachandra, Mallinatha's birth as a female Tirthankara defied traditional Jain beliefs, emphasizing that spiritual purity transcends gender. The Dada Bhagwan Foundation (n.d.) further supports this account, highlighting Mallinatha's ascetic journey and her ultimate attainment of Keval Jnana. The story of Mallinatha reveals not only spiritual richness of Jainism, but also underlying societal tensions as regards gender roles that have seen the passage of time.

According to the Jainsattva (n.d.), Lord Mallinatha was a 19th Tirthankara, born to King Kumbha and Queen Prabhavati in Mithila. She is the first and only female Tirthankara in the existing time cycle which is one among the ten wonders in spiritual world. Despite the general understanding among Jain texts that only males can be a Tirthankara she broke this barrier and came to be a Tirthankara. Generally, a Tirthankara has thousand queens as wives, Mallinatha Bhagwan, and Naminath Bhagwan are exceptions because both are unmarried Tirthankaras. Let's explore the reason before discussing her birth. In the western part of Pushkaradwipa (present-day Africa), there was a province called Salilavati, with a city named Vishoka. The ruler of this province was King Mahabala. His kingdom was encircled by six smaller kingdoms, and all seven kings shared a strong bond of friendship, living in peace and harmony with one another. Once King Mahabala felt he should renounce worldly pleasures and take "Diksha" (Initiation). He expressed his decision to his six friends who, unanimously informed them that

they too would undergo Diksha. The seven kings went to Muni Varadharma and acquired the sacred initiation (Diksha).

They vowed together in a promise that they will always do all their spiritual practice and penances just like in their current manner. Whatever penance one king did, others did as well; they wouldn't do more and wouldn't do less and would not begin before one another and also not complete before the rest. Now Mahabala was keener than others and started to deceive his friends. He was participating with the others in the penance. But when it was their turn to take meals, he would feign himself sick and continue with the penance. In such a way, Mahabala secretly performed more of penance than the other people. Due to this deceit and breaking of the vow, he could bind karmas by which he became a female in his next life. However, his good and virtuous intention during the penance also caused him to tie karmas to become a Tirthankara.

King Kumbha and Queen Prabhavatidevi of Mithila gave birth to a girl child and named her Mallikuvri who became an extremely beautiful and intelligent girl. It was unprecedented in the entire history of the Tirthankaras to be born as a female, and everyone was amazed. While the birth of Mallinatha as a Tirthankara was a wonder story in itself, her own story defied all imagination. Meanwhile, King Mahabal's six friends, who had vowed to undertake penance together, took birth as princes in various kingdoms. When she attained marriageable age, the neighbouring kings of Kosala, Anga, Kasi, Kuru, Panchala and Kunala who were the other six friends of King Mahabal arrived at the Swayamvara. All of them were rejected by Malli. The six rejected Kings, feeling insulted, decided to combine their forces and attack Mallinatha's kingdom. King Kumbha, though strong, was on the verge of defeat against their combined might. In response, wise Princess Malli asked her father to invite all six Kings to her inner quarters, or "Anthahpura," after a week. When the Kings came, they were shocked to see a statue that resembled Malli like an identical twin. They admired its life-like beauty and wondered if she had spent seven days making it. Princess Malli invited each King to touch the statue, and each of them had a different experience when they touched it.

With a smile, Malli opened the detachable head of the statue and released a terrible stench. To their amazement, the statue inside was hollow, full of food once the finest delicacies now rotten and with a terrible stench. Malli used this image to drive home that there was no more to her attractive outside than ephemeral matter, like decaying food, ultimately imperfect and unclean. At that moment, she gave them a very great lesson about the nature of physical beauty, which comes and goes, and about the superiority of spiritual insight over any external appearance. She also told them that getting into this Moh, for which they're fighting and ready to kill each other will take them to hell. Princess Malli, having exposed the truth about the transience of the physical world, wished to renounce worldly pleasures and take up the life of an ascetic. Her words of wisdom touched the hearts of the six Kings, who, after contemplating her teachings, overcame their worldly attachments.

They decided to leave their kingdoms to their heirs and followed Malli on the ascetic path. Malli, even before formally taking initiation, had the good fortune of guiding these six mighty rulers to the path of spiritual enlightenment. Malli renounced her marriage and chose a life of celibacy, dedicated herself to the pursuit of self-realization. The celestial deities recognized her divine potential and pleaded with her to help mankind reach Moksha and disseminate the teachings of Self-Realization. Heeding their call, Malli renounced her royal life, and on the same day, she attained Keval Jnana, or absolute knowledge. After attaining Keval Jnana, Malli delivered

her first divine sermon (Deshna) in front of the six Kings, who were present. Moved by her wisdom, they too renounced their worldly lives and attained Self-Realization.

Malli's profound teachings led her to gather 28 Ganadharas, chief disciples, who spread her wisdom. She kept proclaiming the right path to salvation for a long time until she traveled to Sammet Shikhar, and from there, she gained Nirvana, which means soul liberation. (Dada Bhagwan Foundation, n.d.; Hemachandra, n.d.)

5. GENDER AMBIGUITY AND REINTERPRETATION

The gender ambiguity surrounding Mallinatha reflects the tension between spiritual ideals and patriarchal orthodoxy. As Jaini (1991) observes, Digambara texts, adhering to the belief that only male ascetics could achieve moksha, often reinterpreted Mallinatha as male to align with their doctrinal views. Similarly, Balbir (2003) notes that while Shwetambara texts honored her female identity, they downplayed her Tirthankara status to maintain male-centric spiritual leadership. Since neither the Digambara tradition accepts female monks (sadhvis) nor the possibility of women achieving liberation in their own bodies, Mallinatha being a female Tirthankara would have created immense controversies. The fact that the Digambara canon does not know anything about female Tirthankaras reveals how immensely gendered in its division Jainism was. Already, within the Shwetambara tradition, which had permitted women to become nuns and attain liberation, such institutions of the elevation of Mallinatha to Tirthankara status challenged gendered ideologies of spiritual authority.

The reinterpretation of Mallinatha's gender throughout history underscores the discomfort with female spiritual leadership and highlights the tension between doctrinal teachings and societal expectations. While Shwetambara texts honor Mallinatha as a female Tirthankara, this acknowledgment is not without controversy, as the male-centric ideology of Jainism often overrides her original identity. The female ambiguity of Mallinatha is not only a reflection of attitudes toward women in history and society but also a powerful symbol within the larger context of Jain teachings. The story of Mallinatha challenges rigidly ingrained gender roles in the religious and society structures of ancient India. Her acknowledgment as a Tirthankara, yet as female, subtly brings about a critique of the patriarchally imposed limitations on women's spiritual potential.

Significantly, Mallinatha's story reflects a possibility for spiritual attainment that's beyond gender. Liberation in Jainism means that one attains liberation from the cycle of birth and death, moving into a state that is beyond human form and gender. Mallinatha's spiritual accomplishment negates the fact that only the male body can fulfill the most profound forms of enlightenment. So, by becoming a Tirthankara, Mallinatha shows that liberation is accessible for everyone-not attached to any gender. Something still to be debated in this modern interpretation of Jainism. This history also inspires the continuous reinterpretation and reevaluation of the role of women in Jainism. Since this religion is constantly evolving, the legacy of Mallinatha has plenty to say in promoting gender equality in the religion and allowing greater female participation in religious gurus and monks' offices.

6. THE DEBATE BETWEEN SHWETAMBAR AND DIGAMBARA TRADITIONS

The cleavage between Shwetambara and Digambara has implications for practice, philosophy, and social roles within Jainism: the divergent stances assumed by the two, especially on such issues as female moksha or whether the form of woman is itself a barrier to liberation in the very act of their monastic participation, illuminate the tensions surrounding gender and spiritual authority in the history of Jainism. Jaini (1991) highlights that Digambaras viewed the female body as an obstacle to ascetic purity, while Shwetambaras allowed women to

pursue monastic life but denied them Tirthankara status. Dr. Hirabai Bordiya (2015) further explains that this exclusion reflects broader patriarchal norms prevalent in ancient Indian society.

6.1. Significance of the Digambara Tradition and Denial of Women

The Digambara sect, being more austere and rigorous in its practices, traditionally argued that the female form could not attain liberation. The woman, according to Digambara belief, needed to be reincarnated as man to attain the highest state of spiritual perfection and liberation. It presumes a female body is, by nature of the case, impure, and only a male body can in fact institute the rigorously extreme asceticism that would achieve liberation. Digambara monks are considered the only ones liberated, as within them are enshrined renunciation and relinquishment of all material goods, such as wearables. In this way women are barred from this monastic ideal.

As in the Digambara sect, they do not admit female monks (sadhvis) and thereby do not find space for women within their monastic order. The exclusion of women to the highest spiritual ranks within the Digambara tradition reflects an all-encompassing ideological paradigm in which gender may be considered an impediment to spiritual parity. This denomination considers women not of significant value in matters regarding religiously possible, and their role predominantly stays within the household, miles away from the spiritual power and leadership that monks of the male species have. This presents patent chauvinistic systems, which are archaic patriarchal routines that categorize men as the epitomical exponent of spiritual knowledge and position women as secondary figures. Therefore, it is clear that the Digambara perspective of the female countenance represents the chauvinism prevalent in the old Jainism: the former were supposed to attain religious enlightenment and leadership alone.

6.2. The Shwetambara Tradition and Gender Inclusivity

Conversely, the Shwetambara sect is more liberal towards women and encourages them to take part in the sadhvis -order of nuns-and strive for salvation. Having weighed the possibility of having both female and male renunciants lead ascetic lives and spiritually disciplined, Shwetambara Jainism frequently asserts that the female renunciants somehow are inferior to their male counterparts. Shwetambara monks wear white, and the taboos they maintain regarding material goods are not as scrupulous as those upheld by the Digambaras.

The Shwetambara tradition, on the other hand, did much more to open up this possibility of women attaining moksha within their bodies. This was complete opposite of the otherwise strict and exclusionist attitude of the Digambara sect. While Shwetambara women were allowed to engage in spiritual activities and to lead an ascetic life, women were barred from becoming Tirthankaras, one of the highest spiritual positions. The Shwetambara texts and, indeed community leadership have, for generations, permitted the promotion of female ascetics even though, recognition of female Tirthankaras was-and, in some cases remains-a point of contention.

This makes the acceptation of Mallinatha as a female Tirthankara in Shwetambara tradition a significant, although controversial, step toward gender inclusivity. However, there is no evidence that Shwetambara tradition followed with a generally female inclusive view on Tirthankaras; they too seem to be describing Tirthankaras as only males, and only Mallinatha and some other deities have tried to break this norm.

7. DEBATE OVER MALLINATHA'S GENDER

Even the controversy around the matter of gender surrounding Mallinatha is an example of the theological divide between the two sects. The Digambaras not only find a female Tirthankara controversial but impossible. Their belief in the necessity of a male form to achieve salvation thoroughly goes against the Shwetambara tradition's acceptance of Mallinatha as a female Tirthankara. This further reflects the attitude towards gender and the authority

associated with spirituality in the two sectors. Although the Shwetambara sect concedes that Mallinatha was indeed a female, the Digambara sect remains obstinate in its position that women are barred from spiritual enlightenment to the extent of such an exalted status. This split representing a more general division within Jainism over the issues of gender in the religious hierarchy, since the Digambaras are invariably more conservative on the issue of gender and the Shwetambaras have at times been more liberal. The story of Mallinatha thus becomes a symbol of the tensions between these two traditions and their differing approaches to the issue of gender equality.

There is one more area of controversy between shwetambar and Digambara, whether the idols of Mallinatha should be installed as female (as per the practices followed by earlier saints) or male (as per the shwetambar logic). Shwetambars believe that Lord Mallinatha attained Moksha as female, however they do not worship Lord Mallinatha's image in female form today because-

1. One worships the soul of the Vitraag Tirthankara and not the body. So, it does not matter whether the body is male or female.
2. It will be against the code of decency to display the female anatomy on the image of Tirthankara.
3. Since human soul is corrupted, it was noted that a layman may not get vairagya on viewing the female form of a Tirthankara. (Stories by Arpit, 2017)

From antiquity to present, it has never been stated in any of the Jaina literature or through Lord Mahavira that women are in a way inferior to men as it contrasts with Mahavir Swami's actions, virtues, teachings, and characteristic traits teaches us equality, however, things changed slowly after his nirvana (Britannica, n.d.).

The social and cultural influence in those days had an extremely influencing effect on the religious sphere and, eventually, the deep-seated inequality towards women started seeping into Jainism. In those days, women were more or less perceived as men's commodity, and their worth decreased to an extent that they were even sold in open markets. One example is Chandanbala who was sold in the market by her master. It was Mahavir Swami who liberated Chandanbala from the existing stereotypes and dogma at the time. He made her the first female disciple, also known as Sadhvi, of the Jain Sangh, signifying a transition toward the respectable potential of women. Yet, these scriptures, written hundreds of years after Mahavir Nirvana, usually reflect the prejudices of the culture during that time, upholding both genders' inequalities. These biases, embedded in the later texts, highlight the ongoing challenges faced by women in the religious and social context. (Jainism Says, 2020)

8. EVOLUTION OF GENDER ROLES IN JAINISM

Gender orthodoxy in early Jain thought created barriers for women's religious participation, but Jainism has gradually evolved to embrace gender equality, as seen in the recognition of female monks today. This gradual inclusion of women in Jain monastic life reflects broader societal changes. In the early period, Jain women were largely relegated to the periphery of monastic life. However, in recent decades, things have changed and women monastics in both Shwetambara and Digambara have gained positions, although at a different pace, in the overall hierarchy of monastic life. Even in the most traditional Shwetambara sects, women have been permitted to become monks for some time and have increasingly been recognized for their spiritual contribution and leadership. According to Balbir (2003), modern Shwetambara communities increasingly recognize female ascetics as spiritual leaders, though they remain excluded from Tirthankara status. Female monks are now quite more visible in Jain communities. They are both teachers and spiritual guides as well as administrators within the monastic order. Such recognition forms part of a wider movement within Jainism to create more equal practices, thereby accepting women's spiritual capabilities and greater authority within the religious community. Similarly, Bordiya (2015)

highlights the rise of influential Jain sadhvis, challenging patriarchal norms within Jain monastic structures. This change has also influenced Digambara attitudes toward women, though it is still more conservative.

For women, the recognition remains slow and ongoing, as they have yet to gain acceptance as proper monastics. At a pace often more slowly than their Shwetambara counterparts, however, some texts and practices of the Digambara tradition came to express a relatively inclusive attitude toward women's spiritual potential. Increasingly accepted is the possibility that women may achieve moksha, even if the order of female monks remains rejected by many.

9. THE LEGACY OF MALLINATHA IN MODERN JAINISM

As the religion continues to grow, one important factor continues to be Mallinatha's part in the ongoing conversation over gender roles within Jainism. Her strong recognition as a female Tirthankara brings a great potency of role and spiritual equality between men and women. Mallinatha is now, after years of being marginalized or reinterpreted in her story, a center of inspiration for many in modern Jain communities that would seek to create a religious atmosphere of greater equality.

The legacy of Mallinatha today is such that discussion on the inclusions of women in all aspects of Jain monasticism can be built upon-whether, for instance, a future generation would accept female Tirthankaras. As Jainism reflects modern values of gender equality, the example of Mallinatha can resonate with seekers who seek to integrate the old value system of the tradition into a more pluralistic and respectful stance for women's spirituality. Through this research, an attempt has been made to revive the unheard stories of Jainism, which were prevalent during the ancient times. But with the passage of time, India in particular had to face various invasions, leading to increased male-centric domination in history, caused the female figures to lose their stance in history.

10. CONCLUSION

The legend of Mallinatha, a female 19th Tirthankara, forms this spiritual and social commentary on the role of gender in Jainism. Spiritually everyone is equal under Jainism, but historically, Tirthankaras have been male and represented the patriarchal roles of ancient Indian society. So, Mallinatha, being a female Tirthankara, particularly in Shwetambara tradition, acted in concert contrary to these conventions, unveiling the great tension between the ideals of the religion and the social gender roles. The exegeses of the gender of Mallinatha, and debates between the Shwetambara and Digambara sects, in turn exemplify profound hostility towards female religious leadership within Jainism. Still, her life also symbolizes a potential for spiritual liberation beyond the gamut of gender categories and might be used as a model to reconsider gender inclusivity within Jainism in moves toward greater acceptance of women as religious leaders and monks. Through the legacy of Mallinatha, Jainism can introspect its flexibility as well as its commitment to spirituality and equality-all within a push toward more fluid gender and liberationist approach.

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Fearless Freedom Fighter Neera Arya (Rani of Jhansi Regiment)

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ABSTRACT

The Jhansi Regiment is seen as a symbol of both the national struggle for freedom and gender equality. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose said Indian culture and traditions were always Wonderful and Rani of Jhansi exemplifies India's glorious traditions to perfection. He had complete faith in the soil of India and its ability to produce more sublime blossoms of femininity such as Jhansi ki Rani, Ahilya Bai, Rani Bhawani, and many others. The regiment was founded in Singapore in 1943. The refrain is: "Khoob ladi mardaani vo toh Jhansi wali Rani thi." This phrase signified that Rani Lakshmi Bai fought like a man till her last breath, yet her spirits and patriotism are still alive on Indian soil. Thus, Bharat can produce more Ranis of Jhansi (Selected Speeches of Subhash Chandra Bose, p. 28). He addressed the women's division of the Indian Independence League, encouraging the ladies of dependent India to join the Jhansi Regiment and demonstrate to the world that this is the final war for freedom (Selected Speeches by Subhash Chandra Bose, p. 192).There were many women leaders who participated in the Subhash Fauj, but Neera Arya was the first female INA spy. She took on the responsibility of heading the Rani Jhansi Regiment, which was made up entirely of women troops, and battled for our freedom and dignity. Arya was also one of the founding members of the All India Democratic Women's Association.The contribution of Netaji and his leaders from the Jhansi Regiment in freeing the nation will remain unforgettable and serve as a strategy to make India self-reliant and sufficient.

Keywords: *Jhansi Regiment, Indian culture, Women soldiers, Indian National Army (INA), Indian Independence League, Gender equality, Freedom struggle.*

1.   INTRODUCTION

Netaji was highly influenced by Rani LakshmiBai, who was martyred in the Battle of 1857, and as a result, he established a regiment in the Indian National Army in her honor. Netaji labeled the regiment Rani of Jhansi after reading an Englishman's essay which stated that if the Indian army had more women like Rani, India would never have conquered (Hildebrand, 2016, p.p.1). The regiment was established on June 12, 1943, in Singapore. The regiment became a powerful symbol for both the national war and the struggle for gender equality. It was led by Captain Lakshmi. In his address to the women's section of the Indian Independence League, he mentioned Rani Lakshmi Bai and how she fought the battle of 1857, and now we need many Jhansi ki, Rani, like her for the last battle of freedom. He therefore requested the women of dependent India to come and join the Jhansi Rani Regiment and show the entire world that the Jhansi Rani Regiment was also preparing itself for the last battle for freedom, and guaranteed that this will be the last battle for Freedom. The Jhansi Rani Regiment held its first training camp on October 22, 1943, and during the inaugural ceremony, Netaji delivered a brief but emotional speech.

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In his articulation, he defined the emergence of the Jhansi Rani Regiment as a milestone in the movement's advancement, it was not only a milestone for the liberation movement, but also for the establishment of equality: "Our past has been great and glorious. India could not have produced a heroine like the Rani of Jhansi without a rich tradition. In the same manner that we had characters like Maitreyi in ancient times, we have inspiring models like Ahilyabai of Maharashtra, Rani Bhawani of Bengal, and Razia Begum and Noor Jahan, who were bright administrators in recent history prior to British occupation in India. I am very confident in the fertility of the Indian soil. I am optimistic that India, like in the past, would produce the best blooms of femininity" (Subhas Chandra Bose's Selected Speeches, p.208).

According to Netaji, Indian culture and customs have always been glorious, and Rani of Jhansi exemplifies India's glorious traditions. He cited the examples of Ahilya Bai and Rani Bhawani as inspirational figures. The women of pre-colonial India such as Razia Begum and Noor Jahan displayed tremendous administrative acumen. He wanted to emphasize that he had complete faith in India's soil trusted that it will produce more sublime blossoms of womanhood like Jhansi ki Rani or Ahilya bai, among others. He stated that the fall of Jhansi ki Rani meant the defeat of all of India. She fought until her dying breath, though she was not alive, but her spirit and patriotism continues to live on in Indian soil, and India should and can produce more women figures like Rani of Jhansi or Maitreyi (Selected speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose, pp. 208).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the paper titled: *FEARLESS FREEDOM FIGHTER NEERA ARYA (RANI OF JHANSI REGIMENT)* incorporates both primary and secondary sources to provide an in-depth study of this topic. This methodology seeks to collect qualitative data The data is extracted from many sources and required information collected from different Primary sources, secondary sources like Previous research findings, speeches, newspapers, magazines, social media platforms and book. Some significant data captured from different sites, published journals. The methodology also focuses on,influencing the future generation, contributing to both academic scholarship and public understanding.

3. HISTORY OF INA LEGACY

It would be beneficial today, to look at Bose and his army who struggled for freedom. India had seen the first upsurge of nationalism in 1857, upraised wide-spread mutiny. It was brutally suppressed.(Bakshi,2016,p.21) Britishers said that India will never rise together. When Giani Pritam Singh (Sikh Missionary and a freedom fighter) left Bangkok, he actively contacted the officers of Indian army. Captain Mohan Singh, who was the seniormost officer at Jitra, met Giani Pritam Singh and requested him to join the Indian National Army. (Ayer,1972 ,p.31)

Thus, Dr. Mithi Mukherjee writes in her book-In The Shadow Of Empire that the British caste based census to depend the idea caste as a major divide and rule tactic.(Bakshi,2016,p.21) The Second world war opened a way to uprise the revolt for freedom and Subhas Chandra Bose. From that time, hope arose. Subhas felt it is now or never. The British panicked due to the mass revolts and movements, finally they decided to leave India. They transferred power to Nehru and his band of lawyers who were leading the Congress. Nehru claimed that independence had come due to the non-violent struggle and now India had become a new and independent nation with the soft power of Ahimsa alone. India would not need any armed forces, police would be sufficient.

(Bakshi,2016,p.26). He marginalized Gandhi and completely buried the role of Bose and his army. He proclaimed himself as a champion of world peace and tied India to a doctrine of pacifism. Thus, that is the Nehruvian legacy we must keep to understand our freedom struggle and war. Several debates took place on pacifism and the use of force, which actually goes back to the intra-Congress struggle between Gandhi - Nehru and Bose (Bakshi,2016,p.28) They had ideological differences between Bose and Gandhi-Nehru . They did not give preference to his ideas.

4.   CONTRIBUTION AND IMPACTS

Azad Hind Fauz showed determination, courage and sacrifice, reached the people of India and witnessed a surging wave of revolution. The impact of Azad Hind Fauz is not only military but also seeded the courage and determination in the hearts of Indians. The Fauz made the British government realize the great patriotism of Indians that they would not follow the service to the foreign reign. (Roye,2020) Many countries and social reformers contributed in the revolt for the establishment of I.N.A. The army got support from different parts of the world. Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose in his book has mentioned a few observations on the principles of national planning which were introduced by Meghnad Saha. Some of are as follows There should be a permanent research council. The world is one unit from the industrial point, we should focus in the field of our principal needs and requirements at the national autonomy. We should aim and adopt a policy for the growth and development of basic industries- metal production, power supply, machines and tools manufacture, transport and communication industries, etc. A step towards national planning. There should be surveys regarding economic and security of industries necessary for the National Planning Commission. (Bose, 1995,p-71). Bose gave importance to planning and economic reconstruction. In the 51st Session of the Indian National Congress in February 1938, he mentioned the ideas about economic and industrialization planning in India.

5.   NEERA ARYA: INA's FIRST WOMAN SPY

India's war for independence was complex and tough, and millions died without ever being mentioned. Aside from the well-known a few, the majority of independence fighters served the country anonymously, and Neera Arya, an unsung INA warrior, was one of them.
Arya served in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment of theIndian Army and is called the first woman spy for the
Indian National Army.. Her bravery and sacrifice became symbols of resistance and commitment to the nation's cause, challenging the traditional narratives that often marginalize women's roles in history (Malik, 2021). Arya's life serves as a reminder of the unrecognized contributions of countless individuals who laid the foundation for India's independence (Sen, 2020).

6.   BIRTH AND EDUCTION

Neera Arya was born on March 5, 1902, in the small town of Khekra, Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat area. She was the beloved daughter of Seth Chhajumal, a well-known businessman at the time. Her father's business was spread all over the country, but Calcutta was the centre of business; therefore, Neera's education was also done in Calcutta. She had learned few languages like Bengali, Hindi, English. Growing up amid the turbulent years of British colonial rule, Neera developed an unyielding devotion for her motherland at a young age, immersing herself in the intensity of India's freedom struggle. She visualized freedom as a driving force that could motivate her to live and make courageous decisions. With strength and patriotism oozing out of her veins, Neera soon emerged as a symbol of resistance against injustice, motivating all around her to envision a free India.

7.   TWIST IN HER LIFE

Neera's father got her married to a CID Inspector "Srikant Jai Ranjan Das". Her husband was a true british servant whereas Neera was a true Nationalist. When Neera Arya's husband, Jairanjan Das, was assigned the duty of spying on and assassinating Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Neera had already vowed to protect him at all costs. One occurrence changed the direction of their lives: Jairanjan Das fired at Netaji, but fortune intervened, and the bullet missed Netaji and struck his driver instead. When Neera learned of her husband's infidelity, she took a heartbreaking decision. In order to save Netaji's life, she stabbed her husband, fulfilling her vow.

8.   THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

Netaji, aware of Neera's actions, gave her the title "Naagin" (serpent) for killing her husband. However, after the surrender of the Azad Hind Fauj and during the trials at the Red Fort, while most of the prisoners were released, Neera faced a harsher fate However, Neera's destiny was worse. She was sentenced to "Kalapani" (life imprisonment in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands) for her husband's murder. Every day in that bleak prison, she was subjected to unthinkable suffering. Neera's autobiography detailed her traumatic experiences. Several of these accounts were eventually revealed by Farhana Taj, an Urdu writer whose novel brilliantly captures Neera's fortitude and agony. One especially moving passage from Neera's biography captures the breadth of her struggles: "During her trial and imprisonment in Kalapani, she was transported from Calcutta Jail to the Andaman Islands. The cells were small, frigid, and bereft of hope. Many women, like her, were imprisoned for speaking out against political persecution. She often wondered if she would ever see freedom again when

marooned on that lonely island. The nights were really cold. Without any bedding, she would sleep on the hard ground. One night, at midnight, a guard threw two blankets into her cell without speaking. "The sound woke her, and for a moment, She felt a small sense of comfort. But even as she wrapped the blankets around herself, Arya said "my thoughts remained heavy with worry how would I endure the days to come?" . The next day, a blacksmith entered her cell to remove the shackles from her hands. As he worked, a piece of skin from her hand was torn off, but she tried to endure the pain. However, when he began cutting the shackles from her legs using a hammer, he struck her bones two or three times instead of the metal. The pain was so terrible that she exclaimed, "Are you blind? You're hitting my legs, but why? "I can even hit your heart if I want what can you do about it?" the blacksmith said icily. She was angry even though she knew she was a powerless prisoner. She screamed, "Learn to respect women!" and spat at him in disgust. "We can let you go if you tell us where Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is," stated a jailer who had been observing the entire situation. "He died in a crash of plane and the entire world knows it," she said firmly." The jailer sneered, "You're lying. He's still alive." Without hesitation, she answered, "Yes, he is alive in my mind and in my heart!" The jailer, enraged by her words, shouted, "Then we will remove Netaji from your heart!" What followed was a nightmare. The jailer assaulted her, tearing her clothes at her chest, and ordered the blacksmith to use a breast ripper on her. The blacksmith pressed the device against her right breast, attempting to mutilate her, though the tool lacked sharp edges. "If you ever argue or defy anyone here, I will have both your breasts removed entirely!" the jailer said, snatching her by the neck as the blacksmith performed this heinous act. "Be thankful to Queen Victoria that this tool isn't heated otherwise, your breast would have been burned off!" he said, ridiculing her even more after striking her with a pair of tweezers.(Guruji,2023)

9.   NEERA ARYA: HER FINAL DAYS OF SACRIFICE AND STRUGGLE

Many brave warriors from India's freedom struggle have remained unsung heroes, their contributions largely absent from our textbooks. Among them was Neera Arya, a courageous freedom fighter who made immense sacrifices for the nation. Despite her dedication, she never received the recognition she truly deserved. Neera Arya lived in a small hut in Falaknuma, Hyderabad and made her living in her last days by selling flowers. Tragically, even her modest dwelling, constructed on government land, was demolished. She passed away on 26 July 1998, leaving behind a legacy of sacrifice and patriotism. Although her story is etched in the hearts of those who value her contributions, the nation has yet to honor her adequately.

Freedom fighters like Neera Arya, who endured hardship for India's independence, remind us of the cost of our freedom. Her life serves as an example of tenacity, sacrifice, and the strength of patriotism. Yet, her sacrifices have been overshadowed by history's selective memory. Documenting and sharing her story can inspire future

generations to value their freedom and recognize the contributions of lesser-known heroes (Harishankar, n.d.). Her tale, marked by struggle and determination, deserves a prominent place in India's historical narrative. Neera Arya is not just a forgotten name but a symbol of the countless individuals who gave everything for their motherland without expecting anything in return.

10. CONCLUSION

The story of Neera Arya, the fearless freedom fighter and the first female spy of the Indian National Army, serves as an enduring symbol of resilience, patriotism, and empowerment. Her journey, from enduring the challenges of British oppression to making immense personal sacrifices for India's freedom, inspires not just women but every individual to embrace courage in the face of adversity. Neera Arya's life exemplifies how women can transcend societal expectations and contribute to the nation in powerful ways. Her actions, rooted in unwavering conviction, showcase that true strength lies in the ability to stand by one's values, even in the face of personal loss. In a time when women were largely confined to traditional roles, her leadership and bravery in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment shattered barriers, paving the way for the idea of gender equality in India's freedom struggle.

For today's women, Neera Arya's story serves as a beacon of inspiration, urging them to fight for their dreams, stand against injustice, and live a life of their own choosing. It demonstrates that women, when empowered with self-belief and determination, can defy norms, make impactful contributions, and shape history. Her narrative also emphasizes that personal sacrifice, when aligned with a greater cause, can leave an indelible mark on society. Neera Arya's legacy challenges us to recognize the sacrifices of unsung heroes and to honor them not just through memorials, but by drawing strength from their lives to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Her indomitable spirit continues to remind us of the values of freedom and self-respect, inspiring every woman to strive for independence in thought, action, and ambition.

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Politics and Political Parties in Modern Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Modern Egypt's politics is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social and economic factors. Since the 2011 revolution which removed longtime president Hosni Mubarak, Egypt has experienced significant political changes, transitioning from an authoritarian regime to a brief period of democratic government, and moving back to highly centralized military dominance government under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The dominance of military in political life remains a defining feature. In Egypt political parties are often constrained by legal restrictions, controlled by the state and lack of political freedoms, though some groups continued to advocate for reforms. Despite this, the political polarization is evident, with significant divides between Islamist movements, secular and liberal groups, and those loyal to the military establishment. The evolving role of political parties and the struggle for political freedoms remain key to understanding Egypt's modern political identity and its future trajectories. This article is highlighting the role of political parties in the politics of modern Egypt.

Key words: Politics, parties, authoritarian, military, democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of a political party or parties is a phenomenon that is common to all modern states whether it is liberal democratic, Marxist or totalitarian. In contemporary period there are states with one party system, two party system and a multi-party system. The two party and multi-party systems are associated with the liberal democratic states, whereas one party system is generally associated with a Marxist/socialist or a totalitarian state. However, during the last few decades many countries, particularly in Africa have emerged with one-party system although they are neither Marxist nor of totalitarian character. Even the military rulers that have come to power through a coup d'etat have, in due course of time, created a political party. The characteristic resort to party system is that they all claim to be democratic. No country can be really democratic unless it involves its people in the political process. This is possible only if there is a system of universal adult franchise, free and fair periodical elections, and a legislature comprising of the representatives of the people. A political party in this entire process plays a very important part. Political parties are crucial in a democratic set-up. Finar has rightly stated: "political parties make policies, create platform, obtain seals in the legislative assemblies, and, if they attain majority, their platforms tend to become law" (S.C. Saxena, 1988: 208). A healthy party system goes a long way in strengthening the democratic structure of a country. In all healthy democracies, political parties are, and have been, instrumental in inducing and then speeding up socio-economic development.

2. IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF POLITICAL FOR DEMOCRACY

According to Sartori, "both political parties and democracy goes hand in hand" (Sartori, 1976:63). Many research scholars believe that 'without political parties' democracy cannot exist, it is also unlikely to thrive and survive. "Therefore, the nature of party system and the key political parties in Middle East and North African states, say lot about the prospects for democracy in the region in the wake of the Arab Spring" (Szmolka (ed), 2017:64). Quoting Norris, Inmaculada Szmolka (ed), 2017, mentioned that "political parties act as a vehicle for citizen representation by uniting people with shared interests, structuring their voice, and therefore ultimately strengthening and empowering them. In a nutshell, it is easy for a regime to ignore the voice of a single individual, who feels she or he feels alone , but difficult to disregard the demands of a populous, organized force" (Szmolka, 2017:64).

A major criterion for assessing "the stages of political development in any nation are the degree to which political participation by various segments in the society occurs; especially by those who do not belong to the dominant political elite. Political participation can be viewed as a psychological process that induces the involvement of the masses in the political system. In a civic society, such involvement is broad" (Fahmy, 2002:66). This does not mean that in 'a civic culture, or in democratic countries the citizens are all times constantly participating in politics and in checking the behaviours of elite, but rather as "Almomd and Verva argue, that the citizen has potential to act if there is need, he is rarely active in political groups. But he thinks that he can mobilise his ordinary social environment if necessary for political use. He is not the active citizen. He is the potential active citizen" (Fahmy, 2002:66). Citizen's political awareness develops in very intimate nature starting from very local grass root level and in particular environment and circumstances, and influence by common factors like language, believe, social system and custom, and socio-economic structure etc., this spaces become politically useful when party is seeking support from people.

3. FOUNDATION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM IN EGYPT

Political parties have long struggle to gain traction in the Arab world due to a number of inhibiting factors, among them a potent mix of repression and government co-optation. But this is not to say that the region has lacked viable opposition forces. "Islamist movements most of which are branches or descendants of the Muslim Brotherhood have over time consolidated their position as leading political actors in the region" (Hamid 2016: 131). However, in the Arab world, parties were rarely given the opportunity to govern or to even think about governing at the local or national level. Citizens saw little utility in joining parties that would never be permitted a real stake in the political process. "Only in one country, Morocco, there was a semblance of genuine multi-party competition. During 1998s alternance, the Socialist Union of Populist Forces (USFP) led a left-of-center government, after winning a plurality in parliamentary elections. Unlike Morocco, most Arab countries do not have a tradition of political party activity. On the eve of the 2011 uprising, most of Egypt's legal parties, for example, had memberships in the mere hundreds or thousands and were derided as cardboard parties, or ahzab cartoniya" (Hamid 2016: 132). The liberal Wafd Party was different from other political parties of Egypt. It maintained a storied tradition as one of Egypt's pro-independence parties during the country's short-lived liberal era of the 1930s and 1940s. "During a brief political opening after Hosni Mubarak became president in 1981, the Wafd party which had reconstituted itself in the 1970s seemed poised to regain some of its former prominence.

But despite a solid showing in the 1984 elections, it subsequently descended into irrelevance, demonstrating the impossibility of developing healthy party politics in an authoritarian context" (Hamid, 2016: 132).

According to Article 74, 2014 constitution, citizens of Egypt have freedom to form political parties by notification as regulated by the law. "No political activity may be exercised or political parties formed on the basis of religion, or discrimination based on sex, origin, sect or geographic location, nor may any activity be practiced that is hostile to democracy, secretive, or which possesses a military or quasi-military nature. Parties may only dissolved by a judicial ruling" (Egypt's Constitution of 2014: 25). Currently there are more than 100 registered political parties in Egypt. "Among them largest and most actives perhaps are, Free Egyptians Party, New Wafd Party, Conference Party, and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party"(CIA World Factbook, July 9, 2017**). The smaller parties have not really been successful in creating influential mass base. This is owing to the frequent changes in the state structure dominated by authoritarian government supported by influential military persons. Political parties in Egypt did not evolve from within society, but rather as tools within the arena of political power under the complete control of single individual rulers. "Throughout Egypt's modern history, political parties have struggled to project clear identities and maintain their independence while operating in environments dominated by fervent rulers. Since the partial democratic framework was abolished in the 1950s following the country's first military coup, Egyptian parties representing different ideological platforms have faced legal and political constraints. This has been particularly true for secular parties, and to analyze their present and future political relevance, a historical understanding of these struggles is needed" (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017).

Egyptian political parties can also be classified according to the era in which they were founded. "The party which is currently operating in Egypt Wafd was founded nearly a century ago (1919) during the country's partially democratic era before the 1952 Free Officer's coup; it thus has had the experience of relatively free elections and an active parliamentary life, albeit one constrained by a monarchy and colonial power" (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017). The Free Officers banned political parties in 1953 and Nasser established a single-party rule so no new parties were founded during that time. "Presidents Sadat and Hosni Mubarak (1970-1981 and 1981-2011, respectively) restored limited pluralist politics and allowed the reemergence of political parties. The New Wafd Party was founded in 1978, along with other parties. Numbers of new parties were born during Egypt's brief post-Mubarak political opening (2011-2013), and a few more were founded after the military coup of 2013" (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017). While the founding circumstances and historical experiences of parties are instructive, those parties which were founded during the eras of political openness and relative competition generally tend to maintain the vitality today than those founded during restrictive eras. Political parties do not reveal enough about the actual functioning of the parties which is still standing today.

4.   EMERGENCE OF MULTI PARTY SYSTEM FROM THE SINGLE PARTY SYSTEM IN EGYPT

Political parties in Egypt emerged gradually and gone through successive stages. National Democratic Party (NDP) was the first political party founded in 1907 by Mustafa Kamel. "During 1907-1920, the already formed political parties in Egypt were a starting signal for the emergence of political parties in Egypt; however, newly formed political parties were restricted due to the British occupation and the Egyptian subordination to the

Ottoman Empire. But after acknowledging Egypt's independence in February 1922 Declaration and the issuance of the 1923 Constitution have led to establishing a royal constitutional rule based on party pluralism and principles of liberal democracy"(globalsecurity.org). During 1919 and 1952 revolutions in the neo-liberal era, "the power of the Wafd party was completely under its leadership. Compare to this party other political parties during that period did not have the same political presence; some were created under the cloak of the Palace while others expressed new global aspirations post-World War II. Palace political parties were very similar in the structure to the NDP, and were parties of interest groups" (globalsecurity.org). During 1923-1952 Egypt political structure was very different from now. "Egypt witnessed and experienced rich political and democratic practices during that period; however, such an experience was marked with many defects such as the British occupation, foreign intervention in Egypt's internal affairs and interference by the royal palace in the political life of Egypt. New political parties which were formed during 1940s were very similar to post-January revolution parties, a force of protest more than anything else, promising a new world without possessing the tools of change. However, the forces of the 1940s seemed more cohesive and solid, and were with clear ideologies and firm beliefs" (globalsecurity.org).

5. PARTY SYSTEM AND POLITICAL IN EGYPT

THE NASSER PERIOD

In 1952 a military movement took place in Egypt against the Monarchy. Military officers who were involved in the Free Officers' Movement in1952 Revolution were "Lieutenant Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser, Major Abd al Hakim Amir, Lieutenant Colonel Anwar as Sadat, Major Salah Salim, Major Kamal ad Din Husayn, Wing Commander Gamal Salim, Squadron Leader Hasan Ibrahim, Major Khalid Muhi ad Din, and Wing Commander Abd al Latif al Baghdadi. Major Husayn ash Shafii and Lieutenant Colonel Zakariyya Muhi ad Din joined the committee later" (Helen Chapin Metz, 1990). All these nine military officers were led by the Nasser.

After the movement, Ali Mahir, a previous Prime Minister was asked to head the government. The Free Officers formed the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), and it played important role in the government of Egypt. "RCC dictated policy to the civilian cabinet, abolished all civil titles such as Pasha and Bey, and ordered all political parties to reconstitute their executive committees and purify their ranks. The RCC elected Muhammad Naguib president and commander in chief. He was chosen because he was a popular hero of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and an officer trusted by the army. In 1951 the Free Officers had elected him as president of the Egyptian Army Officers Club over the candidate chosen by Faruk. It was extremely important for the Free Officers to ensure the loyalty of the army if the coup were to succeed" (Helen Chapin Metz, 1990). As per the decision taken by the Wafd government after "the Anglo- Egyptian Treaty of 1936 to allow sons of nonaristocratic families to join into the Military Academy had proved an important one for the future of Egypt. It meant that men such as Nasser and Sadat who belong to very humble family background were able to become officers in the army and thus be in a position to shape events in Egypt" (Helen Chapin Metz, 1990).

Just after assuming the power Nasser abolished all the political parties that had functioned under old regime as a means of breaking up the old elites. "In July 1952 Revolution broke out and the Egyptian regime worked to liquidate the opposition. In January 1953, an enactment was adopted on disbanding the political parties and

adoption of the one-party rule. After enacting the law of disbanding the political parties, Nasser created his own party" (Fahmy, 2002: 56). Since then Egypt witnessed an era of the one-party rule which lasted till 1976 when late president Anwar Sadat declared the era of party pluralism in the country. "Nasser denounced the word party, which to him signified partnership, conflict and division within the politics. Nasser favored the term organization and labeled his own party system political organization. He attempted to establish in order to fill the vacuum created by the sudden disappearance of all other parties from the political scene. Three such attempts were carried out for the main purpose of mobilizing the masses, where in fact their existence coincided with the leader's need to sustain his hegemony or otherwise his policy" (Fahmy, 2002 : 56).

6. DURING ANWAR SADAT ERA

In 1970, after the death of Nasser, Anwar Sadat became the president of Egypt who was Vice President during Nasser. "A major problem Sadat faced and confronted as Nasser's successor was the consolidation of his authority vis-à-vis Ali Sabri, the leader of the ASU. After coming to the power he pured the ASU of Sabri and his colleagues and imprisoned most of them, and formed new party National Democratic Party (NDP)" (Lucy Dean, 2004: 300). He also initiated the liberalisation of the economy and society by purging the state apparatus of the committed supporters of Nasser's secular, nationalist and socialist ideology. "In September 1971, new constitution was introduced, in which the yes/no referendum system of presidential elections was maintained with a modification the candidate was to be nominated by Parliament and no longer by the ruling party'(Presidential referenda 1956–2005)" (Lucy Dean, 2004:300). Though 'Open Door Policy' was launched by President Sadat in 1974 to improve economic crisis of Egypt, "but political reforms were only accelerated after the outbreak in January 1977 of the 'Bread Riots' against the removal of state subsidies on flour, rice and cooking oil and Sadat's visit to occupied Al-Quds (Jerusalem), which led to escalating confrontations with the opposition. During 1976 Egypt experienced severe economic crisis and in January1977 Sadat announced a budget that outlined significant price increases, major riots erupted in Cairo capital of Egypt and other centers. Consequently, Sadat revoked the price increases, and in February he introduced a new law that made a wide range of new offences (including some relating to industrial action) punishable by hard labour for life. The legislation was subsequently endorsed by a national referendum" (Lucy Dean, 2004:300).

"In 1977 new law was enacted, Law No 40 on Political Parties System marked Egypt's transition from a one-party socialist regime to a pluralistic semi-competitive regime" (People's Assembly elections 1979-2010). According to Law No 40 no party ideology should counter the Sharia tenets and must preserve national unity, social peace, the socialist and democratic system along with the promotion of socialist ideas and principles. "After signing the peace accord with Israel in 1979, it was made compulsory that founders and members of any political party should not be opposed to the peace accord. Sadat's home and foreign policies were opposed and criticised by few opposition parties. Sadat could not control this happening as; ironically these political parties were using their very freedom which was granted in 1976. The right-wing liberal socialist believed open door and free enterprise policy of Sadat , so they did not challenged President Sadat but to the Marxist and Nasserist groups, though a minority in the assembly, were a thorn in Sadat's side" (Finklestone, 2003: 266-267).

 During the Sadat's regime, number of new political parties emerged. He liberalized the politics and allowed people to involve in politics and take part in the election. "Sadat encouraged the establishment of his own National Democratic Party (NDP) under his leadership and this party emerged as the largest party in the

assembly, and the number of opposition parties represented during that time were Liberal Socialist Party (LSP), National Unionist progressive Party (NPUP), Wafd Party, and Socialist Labour Party (SLP) in Egypt. Even the old Wafd party, which Sadat so detested in his younger days, re-emerged as the New Wafd party" (Finklestone, 2003: 267). Parties were not happy with many issues that developed during that time, most political parties of Egypt believed that "their true strength was not represented in the Assembly and that they were being illegally harassed by police of Sadat regime. Sadat believed that the Nasser's followers and Marxists were plotting against him and the state. He began to understand the personal threat that he faced from the Muslim fundamentalist though he was still not aware of to which extent they had penetrated in to the army" (Finklestone, 2003: 267). In May 1978 Sadat acted decisively but aroused an even greater enmity among his critics. The question of the political rights of the individuals who were corrupt. "Having obtained massive mandate in the assembly to act, Anwar Sadat was able to remove all those members of the assembly whom he considered objectionable. The New Wafd party voluntarily dissolved itself, and protested that Sadat's limited democracy could not stand the test of criticism and independent opposition" (Finklestone, 2003:267). The government took various measures to restrict channels of political participation, and new laws were enactment to restrict and crack down the political activities on opponents. "Anwar Sadat arranged a new national referendum in May 1980 which gave him extra ordinary powers and led to the major constitutional changes. According to Joseph Finklestone, Sadat thought of retiring in 1982, when the last stretch of Sinai was due to be returned by Israel, were abandoned. A proud man, he could not consider leaving the scene when the country was in such turmoil and when his opponents were vocal. Besides that he was more worried about the peace with Israel which he had achieved. For his peace initiative was his greatest achievement which one day all the Arab world would recognize and applaud. The more the Arab leaders condemned his peace with Israel, the more he castigated his Egyptian critics" (Finklestone, 2003:267). Opposition parties were not happy with Sadat's policies and criticized him and his party but despite criticism his political party the NDP remained in the power until 2011. On 6 October 1981 Anwar Sadat was assassinated and his Vice President, Hosni Mubarak, became the president of Egypt.

7. DURING HOSNI MUBARAK ERA

Sadat's successor Hosni Mubarak, who did not have any ideological direction as such other than being a nationalist. Though secular, he had conservative approach to politics and it was due to his closeness that he rose in rank during Sadat. The National Democratic Party founded by Nasser has been inflicted by nepotism. This has been the biggest challenge for political system in Egypt, leading to endemic system failure that gave rise to people's uprisings and revolutions for change. What made the situation worst during Mubarak was his inexperience of running government, which was evident from his non-decisive way of doing politics. There was no vision or political will to bring about a change in the state of affairs, including foreign policy matters and economic liberalization.

"After the fall of President Mubarak the NDP was dissolved and its properties confiscated by the state. During the Sadat-Mubarak era, Egypt's opposition was weak and divided and did not have confident to raise against policies of the government. Most parties were split or paralysed by internal strife. In 2010, more than half of the 21 official, legal parties that made up the opposition were no longer functioning. Development of a strong opposition was controlled by Mubarak regime, mainly by making it difficult to obtain a license for an official

party. In the last years of Mubarak's regime only a few new parties emerged and were allowed take part, such as the Democratic Front Party, in May 2007, which consisted of former NDP members" (Hassan, 2011) who had good terms with Mubarak.

It has been observed that most of the Arabian countries political parties were hardly given the opportunity to take part in the decision making of the government. Also because of the various restrictions very few Citizens developed the interest of joining politics and political activities. Morocco, was the only Arab country which practiced genuine multi-party competition. "During 1998's alternance, the Socialist Union of Populist Forces (USFP) led a left-of-center government, after winning a plurality in parliamentary elections. On the eve of the 2011 uprising, most the legal parties in Egypt, for example, had memberships in the mere hundreds or thousands and were derided as cardboard parties, or ahzab cartoniya. The liberal Wafd Party was something of an exception, as it could claim a storied tradition as one of the pro-independence parties of Egypt during the short-lived liberal era of the 1930s and 1940s" (Hamid Shadi, 2016). After Hosni Mubarak became president in 1981, for a very brief period the reconstituted 'Wafd party' was able to regain some of its former prominence. "But despite a solid showing in the 1984 elections, it subsequently descended into irrelevance, demonstrating the impossibility of developing healthy party politics in an authoritarian context" (Hamid Shadi, 2016).

State intervention in many Arab countries like Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Algeria, and Tunisia weakened the political activities and political party life particularly in the 1990s. "Due to the state intervention many citizens who wished to joint politics, they end up joining civil society organizations, professional associations, and involved in religious movements**. During Mubarak and Ben Ali's era, both Egypt and to a some extent Tunisia had legal parties and candidates participated in parliamentary election. After the uprisings in both the countries, political parties did not have to start from a zero slate in terms of both popular perceptions and organizational structures" (Hamid Shadi, 2016). Political parties were not new to these countries, people were very much aware with party structures and system.

8.   MUBARAK'S STEPS TOWARDS POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

Mubarak was a slow learner in dealing with matters of politics. It took him a while to realize that in order for him to bring stability there was need to transform the administration and governance of the regime to a more democratized system. To win the goodwill and confidence of political opponents as well as the people of Egypt he took two major steps: release all political prisoners and re-conciliation of the polarized political factions of the country. This he tried to keep up by declaring the first parliamentary election process of 1984 (Hassan, 2010). He conducted the first formal election with an objective to send a message of reconciliation to political parties which was well regarded by electorates too. However, it was the government machinery that took charge of the entire process of electioneering in which five political parties, the NDP, Liberal Party (LP), NWP (New Wafd Party), SLP (Socialist Liberal Party) and the NPUP (Nationalist Progressive Unionist Party), put up their representatives for the election. It is only understandable that Mubarak, with the huge state bureaucracy at his disposal to mobilise and oversee the election, would have landed a massive victory that saw his party getting all but 58 of the total 448 seats. In reality this election was an eyewash to legitimize his reign and to silence the opposition from criticizing his rise as a President. Nevertheless, it was an important step in Egypt's slow move towards democratization, especially when the court ruled that the election law during 1984 election was

unconstitutional and the second parliamentary election was held in 1987. This was time the results showed a marked shift with the increase in the vote and seat share for the opposition.

The second parliamentary election saw participation of more political parties including the earlier excluded Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian Marxists. It was a significant development considering the fact that Muslim Brotherhood was banned from any form of representation and now as they formed alliance with the SLP they could win seats. The opposition parties, however, seemed dissatisfied with the outcome and complained to the court of irregularities during the 1987 election, including the flawed election law. This was even as Mubarak in his Presidential address after the victory hailed the democratic process of electing representative to the assembly and declaring that democracy in Egypt is an integral part of the state politics. His acknowledgement of the democratic principles for political stability and economic prosperity did not seem to have much influence on the opposition parties who believed that Mubarak misused his power to influence the election outcome. Mubarak was gaining confidence that his efforts to reform politics in Egypt would eventually make him the rightful leader of the country and in response to the continued complaints by the opposition he dissolved the 1987 Assembly to hold election again towards the end of 1990. The tussle between Mubarak's party and his oppositions was never ending with the opposition deciding to boycott the new election, which finally took place in 1995, where again Mubarak and his party came back to power with huge margins. This was a big blow to the opposition and also it revealed many weaknesses that the opposition parties had in dealing with electoral politics.

The single party domination of the government particularly post these elections further boosted the confidence of the Mubarak which began to exert control over the society even more tightly. This also meant little or no public influence in the state affairs whatsoever which inadvertently convinced the opposition conviction that all the elections conducted under strict government supervision have been mired by irregularities and without the intervention of the Supreme Constitutional court no fair election can be expected. In a miraculous development the constitutional court declared in 2000 that all past elections have been unlawful constitutionally and the parliaments formed thereafter, illegal. It was a big moment of victory for the opposition which have been claiming the same for a long time ever since Mubarak initiated the superficial electoral reforms to legitimize his control over the state and its functionaries. Some of the important observations made by the court included that elections be held not within a day, as there was no reason for it to be completed in one single day and secondly, the restriction on participation of non-government organization in the supervision and conduct of election as per the 1999 law was overturned by the court to prevent future irregularities by government in conducting elections. For the first time in the history of Egypt, judiciary stepped in to act as supervisor to monitor the election process in the year 2000. But for whatever reasons, the ruling NDP led by Mubarak emerged again as the winner capturing majority of the seats with no change in its share of votes. There could be multiple reasons for this one of the factors could be people's inability to connect with the opposition due to their long time non-active role in politics or lack of identifiable leadership in the opposition camp. Except for the Muslim Brotherhood which won largest number of seats among the oppositions parties, no other party could manage a decent number.

The negligible number of seats won by most known parties even in the next round of parliamentary election held in 2005 indicated an inherent problem in the political system of Egypt. The political reform and liberalization initiated by Mubarak allowed more parties to emerge but it also meant further division of the Egyptian society along different socio-cultural lines. The clear deficit of unity and trust among the opposition worked every time

for the ruling party as they returned to power without change in the voting pattern. The implications of it, which perhaps the voters failed to understand, was that long time continuation of a single party was not going to bring about a change in the overall situation and condition of Egypt. Mubarak regime was also under the influence of NDP leaders and individuals who did not believe in sharing power with the people and therefore, wanted to maintain the status-quo.

Many new political parties emerged during Egypt's brief post-Mubarak political opening (2011-2013). "Following Mubarak's removal by the military, which had always played a central role in Egyptian politics, a new constitution was swiftly adopted in preparation for the holding of legislative elections and return to the civilian rule. The elections were originally scheduled for September 2011, but were eventually postponed, officially with the view to giving new parties a better chance to establish themselves before the polls" (Szmolka, 2017:72). With the former regime party dissolved, the way had undeniably been paved for party system change, and not surprisingly there was a huge number of new parties increased who readying themselves to compete in the election. "For the first time in the history of Egypt free and competitive national election took place from 2011 through to January 2012. Many new parties participated in the election, as the previously repressed Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the winner under the banner of its recently licensed electoral outfit, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). In the second place came another Islamic party, the brand new and more conservative party al-Nour" (Szmolka, 2017:72). The Islamist wave of success continued in to the Presidential elections of 2011, Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) candidate Mohammad Morsi, backed by the Muslim Brotherhood emerged victorious. "However, after becoming president Morsi's attempts to concentrate power in his own hand led to a second military coup detate within as many years. The military's grip on power was eventually legitimized in spring 2014, when General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who played an important role in removing Morsi won the presidential election against the activist Hamdeen Sabahi" (Szmolka, 2017:72).

9. OPPOSITION PARTY IN EGYPT

During the Mubarak regime, opposition parties in the parliament were just only for name sake. Political and social movements started against the government where large number of common citizens, professional syndicates and independent labour unions actively participated. "The Muslim Brotherhood in particular became increasingly dominant within syndicates, and continues this drive today. The Kefaya! (Enough!) movement in 2004,was considered one of the most important among all the movements, it established in 2005 and played an important role in galvanizing protests both in 2005 and in the run-up to the January uprising"(Andrea Teti, 2011:9). All those groups who participated in the movement had the same objectives like political reform, genuine representativeness in the parliament, and economic reform to achieve social justice in a greater measure. Because People of Egypt were fed up with the authoritarian regime and their policies and wanted change from the arbitrary administration.

10. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR WEAK POLITICAL PARTIES IN EGYPT

There are few factors responsible for weakening of political parties in Egypt. These are-

➢ *'Long time rule by one leader*: major demand of the party members in Egypt is to limit the number of times a president can run for office and constitution change. There is no internal party rules and regulatins to monitor and limit their period of office' (Fahmy, 2002:95).

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➢ *'Lack of democracy:* the political parties in Egypt have been historically known for not exercising democratic spirit. Just like the government where masses are not given right to give their say and opinion in the different decisions and policies making, the same situation occurs within the political parties also where all the major decisions are taken by their leaders without consultation with other party members' (Fahmy, 2002:95).

➢ *'Internal division and factionalism:* ideological differences and individual domination in the party creating 'the factionalism and division within the party in Egypt. This provides opportunity to the government to weaken the party more.

➢ *Intorence and repressive character:* generally, parties accuse the government for not being tolerant of the opposition and repressive towards the parties, but party leaders are themselves repressive towards any opposition to their rules within their parties and are intolerant towards other competing parties' (Fahmy, 2002:96).

➢ *'Inability to delvelop their own ideology and political outlook:* 'political parties in Egypt are more "parties of person" most of the time they are revolve around the prominent personalities of their party leaders rather than around the specific ideology, this also accounts for their weakness in their legislative capacity' (Fahmy, 2002:97).

➢ *'Failure to connect with masses and grass roots:* political parties and weak leadership together contribute to public apathy, which is reflected by the low turn out for voting during election. 'Another indication of the failure of the political parties to perform their major function, that is to bring into the system those people who are alienated and isolated. Instead of institutionalizing the party system among the masses, political parties enhance, through their inefficiency and inadequacy behavior, which is not good for development of political system'(Fahmy, 2002:97).

➢ *"Government control of election and results*: Although Egypt has a long history of parliamentary life stretching back to the nineteenth century, the rules for parliamentary elections have always been contested and are often shaped to guarantee a particular outcome. Since the regime launched a limited liberalization program in the 1970s, it has carefully crafted electoral rules to allow for real opposition representation in parliament but in insufficient numbers to embarrass the government or significantly affect policy. It has also manipulated the sort of opposition allowed, working at times to exclude more strident voices. The regime has deployed a wide variety of tools before elections to serve these ends closely controlling licensing of political parties, monitoring nongovernmental organizations, harassing previously legalized groups and parties, and carefully devising electoral rules to entice opposition elements to participate while depriving them of the possibility of winning more than a smattering of parliamentary seats" (Hamzawy, A. and Brown N. J., 2005: 1)

11. CONCLUSION

Throughout Egypt's modern history, political parties have struggled to project clear identities and maintain their independence while operating in environments dominated by fervent rulers. In Egypt political parties have evolved gradually from the political vacuum and repression of Nasser's era. Not without long term repercussions on their performance. Both external and internal factors are responsible for weak performance of the political

parties in Egypt. "Externally, factors represented in the inherent contradictions in the Egyptian political system, the various legal and constitutional limitations imposed on political party's formation and function, and harassment of the government on opposition have created lots of obstacles in the development of political parties. Internally, internal conflict, factionalism, differences and intolerance, the longevity and dictatorial nature of the leaders, their inability to unite against the government and fraud and violent during the elections weakened the political parties" (Fahmy, 2002: 98). It is an important duty for political parties in Egypt to properly assess their role in current transition in relation to extrapolated components of good governance such as transparency, participation and representation, effectiveness, rule of law, accountability and capacity building, among other elements. That will also provide insights on the potential opportunities for these institutions in Egypt, in terms of what they can bring to the transition if empowered and nurtured. It is important to see what opportunities can allow for stronger parties to have a more significant role in promoting good governance in Egypt's ongoing transition moving forward. To deliver good governance ruling party also need to have discussion and involve the opposition parties in decision making and policy implementation.

All the political parties demanding for the right to freedom of opinion and expression, particularly the Islamist parties have been struggling to get their voices heard. But these rights were never upheld or respected. After 2011, January 25th revolutions around 50 political parties were formed in Egypt. "During Mubarak regime there were only 24 parties. Also several coalitions group and blocs were formed after 25th January2011, revolution. Most of the New political forces, which were not connected and linked with the corrupt regime of Mubarak, and which were formed after January 25th revolution are enjoying people's trust. "As per the constitution of 2014 certain rights have been provided to the citizens of Egypt. According to Article 4, sovereignty belongs only to the people, who shall exercise and protect it. The people are the source of powers, and safeguard their national unity that is based on the principles of equality, justice and equal opportunities among all citizens, as stated in the Constitution. Article 5 the political system is based on political and partisan pluralism, peaceful rotation of power, separation and balance of powers, the inevitable correlation between powers and responsibilities, and respect for human rights and freedoms, as stated in the Constitution. According to the Article 74 it is already mentioned that citizens have the right to form political parties by notification as regulated by the law" (Comparing Egypt's constitution).

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New Media Technology and Refurbished Portrayal of Gender on Digital Platforms in India

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed socialisation processes within a networked society. Technological breakthroughs have resulted in unprecedented alterations in societal order. These innovations have permeated our daily lives, influencing our communication, mobility, and access to information and pleasure. The Internet has emerged as a primary source of information and entertainment. The proliferation of affordable internet data plans has rendered OTT platforms highly popular and accessible. The COVID pandemic has significantly expedited its growth and demand. The audience now possesses an expanded array of options and can binge-watch content in multiple languages. OTT platforms have expanded the scope of film and web series from simple enjoyment to addressing many social issues. While television series focus on themes such as family, marriage, property, and love triangles, OTT platforms explore a diverse array of unorthodox themes. This paper analyses the growth trajectories of OTT platforms pre- and post-COVID-19, emphasising the influence of media technology on society, especially on women's representation in the digital realm and virtual social reality.

Keywords: Technology, Representation of women, Digital Platforms, OTT platforms, Indian Television.

1.   INTRODUCTION: EVOLUTION OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology advancements have revolutionized society by providing access to various media, improving communication speed, and enabling flexibility in accessing information at any time. In Understanding Media Theory, Kevin Williams highlights the transformation of traditional media like television, cinema, radio, music, and the press, with the emergence of new media like the Internet significantly impacting mass communication. With a greater abundance of media platforms, information processing is faster and more efficient than ever (Williams, 2003). Advancements in the Internet and 5G technology have revolutionized global communication, enabling people to connect from anywhere, breaking geographical boundaries. This has transformed the world into a Global Village, as described by Marshell McLuhan. Electric technology is reorganizing social

dependencies and affecting personal lives, transforming the way people interact and communicate (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). He observed that media technologies are extensions of human body. He asserts that all forms of media act as an expansion of a certain human ability, whether it be mental or physical McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). For instance, McLuhan considers the wheel as extension of foot and clothing as extension of skin. Further, he thinks books are extension of eyes and radio is presented as augmentation of ears. Technology offers information and entertainment, enabling people to access information from anywhere. Technological determinism suggests that technology significantly shapes society and culture, with artistic innovators potentially creating technology. Dusek defines this as the determining factor in shaping society and culture, despite the potential for artistic freedom in technology creation (Dusek, 2006).

Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, contemporary media technologies are causing significant transformations in the way global communication occurs. While cultural imperialists perceive information flow as unidirectional, globalisation recognises the ability of audiences to participate in interactive communication through technologies like the Internet, email, and the World Wide Web. It also acknowledges the increasing exchange of information between individuals across national borders, beyond the jurisdiction of the nation-state (Williams, 2003. Before the Internet, oral culture was prevalent. Texts were written on rocks and leaves, but as mediums changed, so did communication and content. Oral culture dominated before the Internet. Communications and content altered as mediums varied, including rocks and leaves. Literary and visual representations developed myths, patriarchal stereotypes, and discrimination. Linguists say these discriminations are ingrained in daily conversations. Internet has changed our awareness of these concerns, emphasising the significance of understanding how technology affects us. Manuel Castells identifies five key attributes of the information technology revolution: the use of information as a fundamental resource, the wide-ranging impact of new technologies, the logic of networking, adaptability, and the increasing integration of different technologies into a cohesive system where previous distinct technological paths become indistinguishable (Castells, 1996).

Internet as a medium has revolutionized the way we consume information and entertainment. According to Martin Lister and others, "in an age of trans-mediality we now see the migration of content and intellectual property across media forms, forcing all media producers to be aware of and collaborate with others" (M Lister, J Dovey, S Giddings, I Grant, 2009). The audience is no longer a passive and choiceless receiver. They are now considered as active users and consumers of the content. The Internet has given them a lot of choices to pick which type of content they want to use. Earlier, the audience had to see whatever was being shown on TV. In India, for a long time, Doordarshan was the only TV channel available to the audience. People had to wait for a particular day and time to see their favourite programmes. After the arrival of 24x7 cable TV, people got more choices but still, flexibility of time was not available to them. Neither they could access the old content as per their wishes. All these issues are no longer there due to the Internet and OTT platforms. With the arrival of OTT platforms people can watch any content as per their convenience at any time.

2.   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study aims to trace the growth of OTT platforms from 2015 to 2023, analyzing their evolution in terms of content diversity and technological advancements. A key objective is to examine how this growth has influenced the representation of gender, particularly women, on OTT platforms compared to traditional television. The research seeks to identify shifts in narrative themes, character portrayals, and societal issues addressed, focusing

on whether OTT platforms have challenged or reinforced traditional gender stereotypes. Additionally, the study aims to explore the broader societal impact of these representations and how they contribute to evolving gender norms in the digital age.

3.   METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the expansion of OTT platforms and the portrayal of women in both traditional media (films and television) and digital platforms. The study examines secondary data, comprising industry publications, market research analyses, and newspaper articles from 2015 to 2023, to identify the growth trajectories of OTT platforms, offering insights into market trends, user demographics, and content evolution. A comparative analysis of prominent films, television shows, and OTT series is performed using primary data, with content chosen based on popularity as indicated by IMDb ratings and Television Rating Points (TRPs) (tv shows featuring in top 10 list), ensuring a representative sample of commonly consumed media. This study analyses the portrayal of women in traditional media versus OTT platforms, emphasising major themes, character archetypes, and story structures to identify differences and similarities in roles, agency, and how they address societal concerns. A narrative analysis of chosen television shows and OTT series is conducted to investigate the construction of women's stories, focusing on plot development, character arcs, and conflict resolution while emphasising reoccurring themes such as empowerment, stereotypes, and societal difficulties. The study explores the expansion of OTT platforms and its effects on gender representation, emphasising changes in storytelling techniques and their consequences for social views of women.

4.   THE OTT REVOLUTION: REDEFINING VIEWING PREFRENCE

OTT platforms, including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, Zee5, Voot, and others, have experienced a surge in popularity in recent years. Moreover, regional language entities are entering the OTT sector. Prior to over-the-top (OTT) services, online video streaming and video-on-demand platforms were already in existence. Cost-effective mobile internet data plans have augmented the popularity of these OTT services. Jio played a major role in establishing affordable mobile internet within the telecommunications industry. Other telecommunication companies followed the suit. Mobile phone users benefited. Individuals in their 20s and 30s are transitioning to OTT platforms due to the extensive variety of content and the flexibility of consumption they provide.

5.   TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

Technological improvements have provided faster access to information, enabling women who have historically encountered prejudice and societal obstacles owing to patriarchal society. Digital technology enables women to access extensive information from their homes, hence undermining conventional gender roles. Stereotypical 'feminine' attributes often limit women's roles, leading to prejudice and relegation to household responsibilities. Despite education and earning, women still face challenges, as highlighted by Simon De Beauvoir in The Second Sex. Over time, gender roles have become a norm in society and have become institutionalized. According to her, humanity is male. Man defines woman not as an individual but in relation to him. She is not considered an autonomous being (De Beauvoir, 1953). However, male dominance and patriarchy faced a challenge as women started raising their voices against this inequality. In his book, Manuel Castells observes that the patriarchal

family is currently being confronted by the interconnected processes of women's labour transformation and women's awareness change at the turn of the millennium (Castells, 2010). In addition, he observes that the significant integration of women into the workforce has enhanced women's ability to negotiate with men and impaired the authority of males as the primary providers for their families (Castells, 2010). But this also overburdened them as they had to do household chores along with paid work (Castells, 2010; De Beauvoir, 1953). Women are increasingly expressing themselves online despite facing stereotypes and biases. The digital platform offers freedom but also exposes them to internet stalking and abuse. Women have sought adequate representation in visual media, a male-dominated sphere. Critics argue that the digital representation of women as the male gaze or sex objects is concerning.

6.   DTH AS A PRECURSOR TO OTT

In the past few years, Over the Top platforms (OTT) have witnessed rapid growth not only in India but across the globe. Throughout the world, media consumption is happening in digital formats (Deloitte, 2015). Online video streaming platforms and video-on-demand services were already being used before the arrival of OTTs. However, the audience of these services were limited. Video-on-demand services were packaged with the Direct to Home (DTH) services. DTH can be considered as a precursor to OTT platforms. In India, DTH services started in 2003 with the arrival of Dish TV (Gupta, 2014). Previously, DTH installation cost more than cable. However, its high-resolution programming, which can be recorded and rewound, gradually won over viewers. The expansion of DTH was limited. After STAR, Airtel, Reliance, and Sun TV entered the market, things changed. Surajeet Das Gupta says DTH unintentionally helped the government deploy DAS (Digital Addressable System) against heavy opposition from local cable operators. The government set time constraints for the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting during DAS implementation. The four largest cities started this practice. This will provide MSOs and broadcasters with precise information on their paying subscribers, improving transparency. Local cable companies used to mislead about subscriber numbers to avoid paying broadcasters and MSOs (Gupta, 2014). The Deloitte report also notes that the Indian consumer is steadily consuming content on digital platforms, in line with worldwide trends (Deloitte, 2015). The poor connectivity, high installation costs and low-speed internet were few hurdles in front of online streaming services to get popular. With the availability of cheap internet data packs for mobile phones, these OTT platforms have gained popularity. According to a report, "Data traffic in India grew approximately 60 times over the last five years which is amongst the highest globally…" (IANS, 2021). The report says that in the year 2020, the data traffic rise to 36% year over year due to the rise in 4G data consumption (IANS, 2021).

A report by CRISIL indicates that mobile data traffic is growing in every financial year. From 2016 onwards there has been a significant rise in this trend. CRISIL Research report attributes this rise to the launch of 3G & 4G services and the rollout of free services by Reliance Jio (Crisil, 2016). Internet speed has increased in recent years. This improved video loading and simplifies audio-visual content downloads. Telcos competed with Jio's modest and unlimited data offerings to keep subscribers. This led to higher Indian mobile phone penetration. IAMAI report notes a constant rise of active Internet users in urban and rural areas (IAMAI, 2019). As per this data Internet penetration in urban areas is higher as compared to rural areas. Still, penetration in rural India is taking place at a faster pace. OTT platforms were once paid platforms where people could watch films and soap operas immediately after airing. Later, Hotstar premium offered new episodes before TV airing. Many streaming

sites offer live channel streaming, which has changed cable TV viewing. Internet service providers (ISPs) are also collaborating with OTT platforms to provide their services with their exclusive data bundles. Airtel, for example, provides a one-year subscription to Hotstar VIP. Vodafone recharges include Zee5 programming. Netflix is available for one year on Vodafone REDX, a postpaid service. This has aided OTT platforms.

OTT platforms are experiencing a positive development trajectory. The BCG analysis indicates that Asia Pacific is anticipated to be the most rapidly expanding market for OTT content from 2017 to 2022 (Samtani & Jindal, 2018). Traditional television is undergoing a drastic change due to this. The rise of over-the-top (OTT) services poses a significant challenge to traditional linear television. This is likely causing concern among DTH operators in India. Dish TV is striving to provide a combination of traditional live TV and the dynamic features of streaming apps on its platform. This is an effort to retain customers who might have otherwise switched entirely to streaming apps. The introduction of a device similar to Amazon Fire TV Stick is expected to be the key element in achieving this goal. Prerna Lidhoo notes that Airtel has introduced Xstream, a comprehensive media platform that enables consumers to access satellite TV channels, films, shows, songs, and over-the-top (OTT) channels on their preferred screen through a uniform user interface (Lidhoo, 2020). OTT platforms offer diverse content. It can be short, feature, or online series. Indian consumers exhibit a predilection for both short-form and long-form videos when consuming online content, according to the Deloitte survey. People of different ages, genders, and locations prefer films. Additionally, there is a strong inclination to pay subscription fees for this category. (Deloitte).

7. GROWTH IN REGIONAL LANGUAGE OTT CONTENT

Today there are several OTT platforms available for the audience such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney Hotstar, Alt Balaji, Max Player. These platforms offer content mainly in English or Hindi. Slowly there is a rise in the demand for content in regional languages as well. In order to cater to the demands of the regional language audience, regional players like Hoichoi, OHO Gujarati, Sun NXT (Malyalam), Aha (Telgu), Addatimes (Bengali), etc. have come up. They are primarily focusing on the local audiences. The BCG analysis highlights that rural internet users are projected to surpass urban users, leading to an increase in local content consumption (Kanchan Samtani and Kohli).

8. IMPACT OF COVID ON OTT PLATFORMS

The BCG analysis states that the Covid pandemic has expedited the transition to digital platforms. The report predicts that the share of digital platforms is expected to reach 15%, which is two years earlier than previously projected (Kanchan Samtani and Kohli) The report also notes that due to Covid there has been a surge in consumption of both television and OTT platforms. There has been a significant rise in the subscriptions of OTT platforms (Samtani & Kohli, 2020). The report also notes that there has been a significant growth in terms of original content on all major OTT platforms in past three years from 2018-2020.

9. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MEDIA

Jane Sunderland writes, "representation can be of something or someone, and representation is usually used when the subject is 'other' rather than self. Representation occurs (and can be seen) in spoken, written and visual texts in the form of discoursal 'traces'" (Sunderland). Feminists have been deeply concerned about the gender

representation of women in the media. Media institutionalises male domination because males rule it. Media portrays women as mothers, wives, etc. Cinema has changed some of this, but commercials still reinforce preconceptions. This is a matter of concern to us, as these types of images generate specific meanings in the minds of individuals, which subsequently result in the formation of a specific ideology in their minds, as demonstrated by Saussure, Barthes, and others.

Laura Mulvey, in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," discusses the portrayal of women in film and the concept of the male gaze. She argues that in a society characterised by sexual inequality, the enjoyment derived from looking at images has been divided between active males and passive females. The male gaze, which plays a decisive role, projects its fantasies onto the female form, which is then fashioned to conform to these projections (Laura Mulvey, 1975). She says that woman in films performs two functions: she acts as an erotic object for the characters in the story and as an erotic object for the audience in the theatre. In films, women are often treated as an object of desire whereas in television women are often portrayed as submissive, ideal daughters or daughter in laws. Women in India take care of the home and children. They are submissive because they depend on their husbands' wages. With modern business and digital media, things are changing fast. Digital media portrayals of women are too. Internet has made two-way communication faster and easier. It is also a democratic platform, as the audience is no longer passive consumers. Internet portrayals of women differ from TV and advertising. Target audience differences are a big factor. OTT audiences are younger than TV audiences. Younger audiences are more open to new ideas than television audiences.

10.   IMPACT OF OTT PLATFORMS BEYOND ENTERTAINMENT

The realities of life frequently serve as the inspiration for stories, which in turn influence societal transformations across media platforms. OTT platforms have introduced a greater audacity in programming that was previously rare in movie and television. The primary reason is the lack of censorship on OTT services. Consequently, numerous OTT platforms commenced broadcasting adult, blatantly sexual content. Nevertheless, these platforms are also featuring stories that depict harassment, violence, and abuse, which are uncommon on other platforms. It has begun to provide enriched content that markedly differs from what is shown in cinema or television. *Paatal Lok, Breath, Mirzapur, Criminal Justice Season 2*, and *Delhi Crime* are several instances. It is no longer conventional, nor does it solely centre on family. Certain societal issues are being highlighted, such as caste discrimination and sexual assault in Patal Lok, as well as domestic sexual harassment in Criminal Justice 2. The proliferation of OTT platforms has expanded the array of roles available to women. Traditionally seen as carers, they are now also envisioned in leadership positions. The quantity of such films has likewise risen significantly. Examples such as *Shakuntala Devi, 100, Aarya, Sherni, Gunjan Saxena, Code M, and Delhi Crimes* clearly illustrate this point. Additionally, there are short films available on OTT platforms that depict the challenges faced by housewives or rape victims, such as *Chutney, Chhuri, That Day After Everyday, Burning, Devi,* and *Ghar ki Murgi*. Such short films and online series present numerous hitherto unexamined themes on these platforms. In addition to this, the primary themes consist of multiple interrelated narratives inside web series. These online series feature a limited number of episodes, resulting in superior narrative execution compared to daily soap operas that extend for years.

11.   PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN ON TELEVISION AND OTT PLATFORMS

The concepts of television shows mostly revolve around family, marriage, love triangles, children and ancestral property. *Balika Vadhu 1 & 2, Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, Kasauti Zindagi Kay 2, Shakti Astitva Ke Ehsaas Ki, Kum Kum Bhagya, Kuch Rang Pyar Ke Aise Bhi, Uttran*, etc. revolve around these issues. Even if they try to bring different concepts still the main focus of the show will always be on family and marriage. For instance, *Balika Vadhu, Shakti Astitva Ke Ehsaas Ki, Uattran, Na Ana Iss Desh Laado,* etc. brought different concepts focusing on the societal evils of child marriage, LGBT and female infanticide later all of them focused on the issues of family and marriage. Even their spin-offs and sequels focus on the same concepts with a different star cast. If we look at recent tv shows there is no dearth of such kinds of family dramas. Very recently there has been a new trend to start sequels and spin-offs of popular shows. So, we now have *Balika Vadhu 2, Saath Nibhana Saathiya 2, Sasural Simar Ka 2, Bade Achhe Lagte Hain 2, Kundali Bhagya, Yeh Rishte Hain Pyaar Ke, Happu Ki Ultan Paltan*, etc. to name a few. The female characters are frequently shown as reliant, conventional, and submissive wives or daughters. For instance, in *Balika Vadhu, Saath Nibhana Saathiya,* and *Uttaran,* the female protagonist embodies the role of a devoted daughter-in-law. Conversely, in all these shows, highly educated women are depicted as conspiring against the female protagonist. The characters are depicted in unfavourable light, possessing lofty aspirations that frequently culminate in their marriage to the female lead's spouse, so creating a love triangle in the television series. In *Balika Vadhu* (Sengupta, 2008), the primary protagonist is depicted as a devoted, submissive, and exemplary daughter-in-law. In the series, Anandi is wed to Jagiya at the age of eight. She is depicted as self-sacrificing from an early age. Upon reaching adulthood, Jagiya is dispatched to Mumbai for further education, as male family members are permitted to pursue academic opportunities while females are prohibited from attending school. At the medical college, Jagiya encounters Gauri and resolves to marry her. Jagiya's family repudiates Gauri and disinherits Jagiya. Despite her education and established position, Gauri exhibits insecurity and begins to conspire against Anandi. Anandi divorces Jagiya and then assumes the role of sarpanch in the village. Shiv arrives in their area as the collector and develops romantic feelings for Anandi. Both individuals enter into matrimony. In this series, Gauri is portrayed as a confident and intelligent individual, however she is depicted as malevolent, engaging in schemes and plots against her family. Gauri is portrayed in a negative manner in order to portray Anandi as a good person.

The show *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* (Kumar, 2010) tells the story of two cousin sisters, Gopi and Rashi. Gopi is adopted by Rashi's parents after the death of her parents. Gopi is illiterate and Rashi gets educated. Both of them get married in Modi family. Gopi is shown to be submissive and dutiful bahu whereas Rashi is shown as cunning and troublemaker for Gopi. Even if some shows portray working female characters or having some ambitions those are set aside in the story to bring focus on family and marriage. Take for instance *Sasural Simar Ka* (Marut et al., 2011). Initially, the lead character wanted to become a dancer but during the course of the story she ends up getting married and lots of supernatural things start to happen in the story. The show *Main Maike Chali Jaungi Tum Dekhte Rahiyo* follows the same suit. The lead is a wedding planner who gets married and the show then starts focusing on family issues. In some cases, such as *Diya Aur Baati Hum*, the issue is brought again to bring more drama in the show and then again it starts revolving around the family issues. Some of the television shows have also tried to raise issues of social evils like *Balika Vadhu* (Child marriage), *Na Ana Iss Desh Ladoo* (Female Infanticide), *Shakti Astitva Ke Ahsas Ki* (LGBT) to name a few. However, these shows end up emphasizing the same stereotypes. Often characters are shown either black or white in the story. There are clear

lines drawn between good and bad characters. The good character will be submissive, ideal, self-sacrificing, helpful whereas the bad character will always be scheming against the main character, trying to get hold of family property or wanting to break the family. Generally, the audience of these tv shows is middle-aged group of people (FICCI, 2020) who spend more time watching these shows. The target audience is the entire family. Therefore, most of the television shows focus on family drama. The stories hardly deviate from family problems. According to a report, tv has deep penetration in rural India (Livemint.com, 2021). Apart from this, there are fewer women in top decision-making positions in the television Industry (Gaurav Laghate, 2021). This is one of the reasons for the regressive content on television. Most of the scripts and stories that we see on television and media are written by men. Therefore, the point of view of women in the storylines of tv soap operas is often missing. Even if any show is written by female writers, the story hardly deviates from family drama for the sake of good TRPs. However, in such cases lead woman is shown to have some courage to stand up against the injustice done to her.

In addition to this tv shows have a long run time. They go on for more than a year or so. Storyline is changed according to the response received from the audience. If a particular track is liked by people, the makers keep stretching that part for more episodes. This results in slow progress of storyline. In the case of television serials, the focus is on female characters. Whereas it is quite opposite in the case of films. In films, prime attention is on male characters. Television serials are seen mostly with family audiences. Drama as a genre is less on theatre because the older generation doesn't go to the theatre anymore as they get their daily dose of entertainment from television. On the other hand, the younger generation prefers romantic, action or thrillers. Apart from these other popular genres are horror, comedy and adult films. In India pure horror is less on screen. Now there is a trend of horror comedies. Films like *Stree, Ruhi, Bhoot Police, Laxmi, Bhool Bhulaiyaa, Bulbul, Ghoul, Golmaal Again, Bhootnath* got good response from the audience. Thriller genres on OTT platforms mainly focus on women characters, for example, *Girl on Train, Mrs. serial Killer, Bulbul, Criminal Justice 2, Code M, Arya, Delhi Crime,* etc. which is not the case in mainstream cinema or television.

If we talk about the action genre, it is considered as a male domain. In Hindi cinema, there are very few films where females are seen doing action sequences. In the action genre, there is a requirement of masculinity. Similarly, comic roles are not given to females. In films, we hardly see female comedians. Stand up shows do have female characters but all the famous comedians are men for example Rajpal Yadav, Mehmood, Johnny Lever, Paresh Rawal, Keshto Mukherjee, Deven Verma, Asrani, Johny Walker, etc. In old Hindi films, Tuntun was placed to create humour. However, the humour was created just due to her physique and facial expressions rather than dialogues and situations. She was so famous for her comic roles that her physique became synonymous with her name. So all the fat girls were known as Tuntun. Except for TunTun we hardly see any female comedians in cinema. Female characters are often inserted to bring glamour in the films. Therefore, we have characters of Helen, Bindu, Aruna Irani, etc who have been shown in scantily clad clothes. Furthermore, the films having adult content show women only as an object of desire for example *Jism, Murder, The dirty Picture,* etc to name a few. Hence, the portrayal of women is majorly restricted to meek and submissive women or glamorous roles.

12.   DISCUSSION

After examining and contrasting different television and over-the-top (OTT) narratives, it has been noted that the rise of OTT platforms has had a substantial impact on gender representation, resulting in more varied, nuanced, and forward-thinking depictions of women. OTT programming frequently showcases women-centric storytelling, challenging stereotypical roles and delving into subjects such as empowerment, mental health, and unconventional

relationships. Female characters are shown with greater independence, autonomy, and intersectional identities, representing a variety of backgrounds and experiences. OTT platforms tackle social concerns like gender inequality and workplace harassment with depth and sensitivity, promoting awareness and empathy. Romantic tales have evolved to prioritise egalitarian relationships, highlighting mutual respect and consent. Moreover, older women are given greater prominence and dynamic positions, thereby combating aged stereotypes. The global scope of OTT platforms has enhanced representation by integrating innovative topics from various cultures. These trends deviate from the limited and frequently stereotypical portrayals of traditional media, which are suggestive of the changing societal attitudes and the audience's desire for inclusive, authentic, and empowering storytelling. Web series on OTT platforms depict female experiences and issues that resonate with a broader audience. OTT platforms have democratised narrative structures, enabling the presentation of diverse perspectives. The success of programs like *Sacred Games, Delhi Crime, Family Man,* and *The Railway Men* illustrates that audiences are receptive to more complex, realistic, and diverse forms of material.

13. CONCLUSION

OTT platforms are becoming more popular among the masses due to the availability of cheap internet data plans, fast internet speed, and affordable smartphones and smart televisions. Furthermore, there is no restriction on the timings and the type of content being displayed. The availability of content in regional languages also upsurges the popularity of OTT platforms. It has started giving enriched content which is quite different from what we see in cinema or television. Popularity of OTT has also improved the representation of women in media which has been a major cause of concern. Now we are witnessing the content about the success of women (*Gunjan Saxena*, *Shakuntala Devi),* sexual harassment of women (*Patal Lok, Mirzapur, Criminal Justice 2, Delhi Crime),* authoritative and assertive women (Hundred, Aarya), etc on the OTT platforms. Female-led stories were very successful on television but the stories mostly revolve around family, marriage, love triangles, children and ancestral property. However, the portrayal and treatment of female led stories is completely different on OTT platforms. This is completely different from what we see in films where stories are often male character driven. These are very popular and commercially successful as evident from the popularity of the web series and films released on OTT platforms. Due to the rise of OTT, the range of roles offered to females has been widened and has been changed from mere caregivers to leadership roles. Now, women are not just a source of glamour or an object. The OTT platforms have given a space to showcase varied storylines and untouched issues in the audio-visual medium like issues of caste, LGBT etc. On OTT platforms we see women from different walks of life. The portrayal of women has improved. However, there is a long way to go.

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Optimizing Recruitment through Artificial Intelligence: Insights, Trends, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

In the swiftly evolving domain of talent acquisition process, artificial intelligence (AI) stands as a pivotal force, shaping various facets from job advertisement to recruitment to nurturing employee growth. This paper undertakes a meticulous review of the literature to delve into the seamless integration of AI into recruitment. Spanning articles published between 2018 and 2024, culled from prominent database Scopus, this PRISMA- based systematic literature review endeavors to furnish invaluable insights for human resource managers, employees, job seekers, and AI developers alike. By meticulously analyzing existing research on 93 articles screened, this study strives to unveil novel perspectives on AI's pragmatic applications in recruitment across diverse sectors. Its overarching aim is to steer strategic decisions and managerial practices within HR, ultimately fostering organizational performance. The findings are categorized into three focal points: (a) the detailed yearly analysis of studies dealing with AI-based hiring practices, (b) network analysis of studies influencing AI- enabled recruitment in different geographic locations, (c) network visualization of all keywords, and (d) future trajectories for research in this domain. Furthermore, beyond its academic merits, this research furnishes practical insights for HR practitioners, empowering organizations to fine-tune recruitment strategies leveraging AI as a potent decision-support tool and introduction of a new model AARIF (Artificial Intelligence Assisted Recruitment and Interview Framework). Through methodical AI deployment, HR practices stand to be fortified, culminating in amplified outcomes and heightened organizational performance. By synthesizing existing literature and offering actionable recommendations, it paves the way for deliberate AI integration into HR practices, fostering innovation, efficiency, and competitive prowess in the realm of recruitment.

Keywords: AARIF, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Recruitment. Systematic literature review (SLR), Human resource (HR) managers, Organizational performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

AI can be succinctly defined as a smart machine that can understand things it sees or hears, learn from them, and then use what it learned to do certain jobs in diverse manner as desired like humans (Manroop et al., 2024; Nawaz, 2019). The transition from traditional to technology-based talent acquisition methods has been gradual but inevitable, primarily driven by the necessity to address cost and time constraints. Over the years, the process of talent acquisition has traditionally relied on conventional, non-technical methods to identify suitable candidates

for organizational roles (Tian et al., 2023). Historically, talent acquisition was predominantly perceived as a task managed by human resources. However, there has been a significant shift in this landscape, with recruitment now being heavily influenced by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies (Bukartaite & Hooper, 2023; Chakraborty et al., 2020; Nawaz, 2019; van Esch & Black, 2019; Votto et al., 2021; Abdul, 2020; Stanley DS, et al., 2019). Therefore, the adoption of technology, particularly AI, in recruitment, has gained momentum due to the limitations of conventional methods in navigating a highly competitive talent pool. AI offers an objective and unbiased approach, treating all candidates equally regardless of demographic factors. Nonetheless, concerns persist among managers regarding the costs, privacy implications, and ethical considerations associated with AI-driven recruitment processes (Chen, 2023; Gélinas et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2021; Špadina, 2023; Ore, et al., 2022). However, AI negatively affects procedural and general justice perceptions among certain racial or ethnic groups, indicating potential bias in AI systems and highlighting implications for both theory and practice (Bedemariam & Wessel, 2023; Drage & Mackereth, 2022; Keppeler, 2024; Nawaz, 2019, 2020).

The implementation of AI in recruitment involves significant investment and risk, necessitating managers to thoroughly assess its effects, outcomes, and potential changes prior to adoption (Lee & Cha, 2023). Analyzing the ethical risks linked to hiring algorithms within the framework of international human rights law and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) aims to establish global standards for algorithmic accountability (Kim & Heo, 2022; Todolí-Signes, 2019; Yam & Skorburg, 2021; Franca, et al., 2023). As competition for talented employees intensifies, companies are turning to advanced technologies to meet their recruitment needs efficiently. Emphasizing the importance of deploying suitable technological solutions, such as AI video recruitment programs, can save both time and cost (Bailao Goncalves et al., 2022; Dalv, 2021; Denis et al., 2020; Dominique-Ferreira et al., 2022; Elmohandes & Marghany, 2024; Gethe, 2022; Kazim et al., 2021; Kim & Heo, 2022; Tambe et al., 2019). To contradict AI- assessed job applicants often report feeling less certain and connected compared to evaluations conducted by humans, despite demonstrating greater fluency (Liu et al., 2023). However, as AI evolves from passive observation to a vital tool in talent acquisition, it enhances recruitment efficiency and accuracy (van Esch et al., 2019). Moreover, the widespread adoption of AI-driven recruitment systems, particularly through social platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook, is a significant aspect of modern talent acquisition. Nevertheless, the influx of data from these sources, along with Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques, poses risks of unconscious bias and resulting inequalities (Simon, 2023; Drage E., 2022; Hunkenschroer, 2022; Lukaszewski et. al, 2024; Tilmes, 2022).

Addressing discriminatory practices involves scrutinizing excessive data requests and potential biases in collected information, with a focus on uncovering legality issues related to candidate documents and data (Mačernyte-Panomarioviene, 2023; Manroop et al., 2024; Todolí-Signes, 2019). AI has revolutionized recruitment by enabling organizations to efficiently sift through a vast pool of applicants (Aydın & Turan, 2023; Bello et al., 2020; Nawaz, 2020; Almansoori, et al., 2021). To ensure fairness and transparency, hiring managers must integrate automated tools into a balanced evaluation process, addressing challenges posed by automated technologies (Johnson et al., 2020; Kong & Ding, 2024). This transformation has significantly reduced hiring time, allowing human resource departments to focus on other critical tasks (Kshetri, 2020; Sithambaram & Tajudeen, 2023). AI-enabled recruitment leverages algorithms and technologies to streamline various stages of the recruitment process, driven by the pursuit of efficiency and scalability (Guyard & Deriaz, 2023; Pandya & Al Janahi, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, companies are increasingly integrating technology into traditionally resistant divisions, contemplating the adoption of AI and Robot Process Automation for HR tasks (Chilunjika et al., 2022; da Costa

et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2018; Pan, et al., 2022). Sustainable development of the organisation is also supported by technologies like learning management systems and AI, green HR practices (Saputra, et al., 2024) which offer employees new career prospects (Ogbeibu et al., 2024; Oncioiu et al., 2022; Shayegan et al., 2023). These initiatives signify a broader trend towards leveraging technology to optimize HR practices, ensuring organizational efficiency and sustainability. While extensive literature exists on the topic, SLRs are limited and often focus on specific subdomains. This highlights the necessity for comprehensive reviews encompassing the breadth of AI applications in recruitment. Thus, exploring emerging themes and trends from the literature enhances understanding and offers recommendations for HR professionals to navigate AI adoption effectively and leverage its potential for organizational performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into talent acquisition represents a fundamental shift in recruitment methodologies. This paper initiates with a succinct outline of the research methodology, detailing the approach to literature search, data extraction, and rigorous selection for subsequent analysis. Subsequently, it delves into a comprehensive examination of findings, aimed at pinpointing significant research gaps within the domain of AI-enhanced talent acquisition. This critical assessment lays the groundwork for delineating future research directions and offering insights for scholarly investigation. The incorporation of AI in talent acquisition presents both challenges and opportunities for organizations. By examining existing literature gaps and offering insights for future research, this paper contributes to advancing knowledge in AI-enhanced recruitment practices.

A. *Recruitment* It focuses on attracting and selecting individuals with the right skills and attributes to meet organizational needs (Abdul, Wang, & Li, 2020). In the dynamic job market, recruitment has become more challenging due to increased competition, technological advancements, and the need for diverse and inclusive workplaces (Pan et al., 2022). Artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized recruitment processes by efficiently ranking candidates based on their skills, experience, and suitability for the job, thus reducing the time and effort required for manual screening (Pessach et al., 2020). This efficiency is particularly beneficial in the tourism sector, where social networks like LinkedIn and Twitter play a crucial role (Oncioiu et al., 2022). However, it is essential to ensure transparency and fairness in AI applications to maintain trust in the recruitment process (Drage and Mackereth, 2022). Theories such as the Person- Environment Fit and Resource-Based View underpin modern recruitment practices, emphasizing the alignment of employee values and skills with the organizational environment and the strategic value of unique employee capabilities (Abdul, Wang, & Li, 2020; Rab-Kettler & Lehnervp, 2019). AI also offers potential benefits in terms of inclusivity and diversity in recruitment (Lee and Cha, 2023). By enhancing explainability and augmenting traditional recruitment processes, AI can help create a more equitable hiring environment (Lee and Cha, 2023).

B. *Artificial Intelligence:* AI is at the forefront of technological innovation. It encompasses various technologies, such as machine learning, natural language processing, and robotics, each contributing to the development of intelligent systems capable of performing complex tasks. In human resource management, AI has significantly enhanced recruitment and selection processes. AI-driven applicant tracking systems (ATS) efficiently scans resumes and applications, identifying the most suitable candidates based on predefined criteria (Pessach et al.,

). AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants are increasingly used to engage with job applicants, answer queries, and schedule interviews. These tools provide a seamless candidate experience and allow HR professionals to focus on more strategic tasks (Pan et al. ,2022). The Socio-Technical Systems Theory, emphasizes the interaction between people and technology within an organizational context. It suggests that successful AI implementation requires a balance between technical capabilities and social factors (Prikshat et al., 2023). Another relevant framework is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model, which explores how users come to accept and use technology. TAM posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use are critical determinants of technology adoption (Kaushal & Ghalawat, 2023). AI's impact extends beyond recruitment to performance management and training. Predictive analytics forecasts employee performance and identify potential areas for improvement and helps organizations address issues before they escalate, fostering a more productive and engaged workforce (Kim and Heo, 2022). However, integrating AI in HR processes poses ethical challenges, such as data privacy and algorithmic bias (Drage and Mackereth, 2022). Algorithms and technologies are subject to errors alike humans but individuals tend to react more negatively, showing reluctance to assign blame, irrespective of understanding the algorithm's maturity or the severity of the mistake committed by it (Renier et al., 2021).

C. *Relationship between recruitment and artificial intelligence:* There is an uneven distribution in prior studies focusing on integration of Human Resource Management, with fewer investigations dedicated to specific sectors or countries, favoring routine HR functions like recruitment while overshadowing other empirical domains (Prikshat et al., 2023). Despite the surge in digital job offers, skills and managerial competencies (Anghel D, 2023; Deepa et al., 2024), particularly in fields like data engineering and cybersecurity, traditional roles remain prevalent, primarily revolving around technology tasks with limited integration of advanced functions like machine learning or AI (Ceide C.F, 2023; Soleimani, et al., 2022). These developments underscore the transformative potential of AI and digital technologies in reshaping recruitment practices and enhancing organizational efficiency. Moreover, they stress the significance of strategic decision-making and ongoing evaluation in effectively leveraging these technologies. This shift signifies not only a change in recruitment methodologies but also heralds a new era of organizational optimization and performance with prudent talent acquisition. The deployment of AI streamlines candidate sourcing, optimizes recruitment processes, and benefits recruiters (Black & van Esch, 2021). Business psychologists contribute to the development of AI systems for measuring individual differences in work settings, while advocating for systematic algorithm audits to ensure fair hiring practices (Kazim et al., 2021).

Concurrently, research explores AI's potential in revolutionizing human resource management ethically, stressing the importance of careful consideration (Sharif & Ghodoosi, 2022). Despite the nascent adoption of modern algorithms, a study aims to identify antecedents of AI-based technology adoption in recruitment, leveraging the UTAUT and TAM model (Islam et al., 2022). In addressing the digital talent gap in SMEs, research proposes a pragmatic solution by analyzing digital skills literature and utilizing AI algorithms. It underscores the accessibility of powerful and affordable AI tools for SMEs, challenging assumptions about constraints and usability barriers (Sommer, 2023). Through these endeavors, the integration of AI promises to reshape human resource management practices, ensuring fairness, efficiency, and ethical consideration in talent acquisition and management processes. The transformative potential of AI underscores the need for organizations to adapt and evolve their recruitment strategies, while also emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations and ongoing evaluation in leveraging these technologies effectively. Ultimately, strategic decision-making and scholarly engagement are key to harnessing the full potential of AI in recruitment while avoiding potential pitfalls.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design: This study employs a review research design to investigate the relationship between recruitment and artificial intelligence. A cross-sectional analysis was used to collect secondary data from Scopus database.

Research Question: Based on the introduction and findings of the paper, the research study is primarily based on the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the key findings and insights derived from previous studies with respect to AI- enabled recruitment processes?

RQ2: What are the different keywords that pertain most to AI- aided recruitment process?

Objectives: In the domain of technology adoption, pivotal factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and organizational support significantly influence the adoption of innovative tools. Additionally, theories on AI interaction underscore the paramount importance of user experience and interface design in shaping user perceptions and behaviors. As such, the forthcoming objectives aim to delve into the technological factors affecting the adoption of AI in the recruitment process, while also scrutinizing how candidate experience influences the integration of AI in recruitment. Through this investigation, the study aims to illuminate the intricate interplay between human factors and technological adoption in talent acquisition.

1. To investigate the latest years that shape the evolution of AI in the recruitment process.

2. To explore the influence of different keywords and authors on the integration of AI in the recruitment process across different geographies.

3. To propose a new model AARIF (Artificial Intelligence Assisted Recruitment and Interview Framework) to facilitate the recruitment and interview process.

Article Identification and Screening:

The authors followed a structured approach based on Lacey et al.'s (2011) methodology. Multiple keywords and combinations were used to identify the appropriate papers about the area of artificial intelligence-based recruitment. Abstracts and relevant sections of articles were examined to align with research questions. Articles focusing on AI in recruitment from 2018 to 2024 were identified based on the keywords- AI, artificial intelligence, and recruitment. Keywords were paired with Boolean operators "OR" and "AND". Search query: "AI" OR "Artificial Intelligence" AND "Recruitment". TITLE-ABS-KEY ("AI" OR "Artificial Intelligence" AND "Recruitment") AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")).
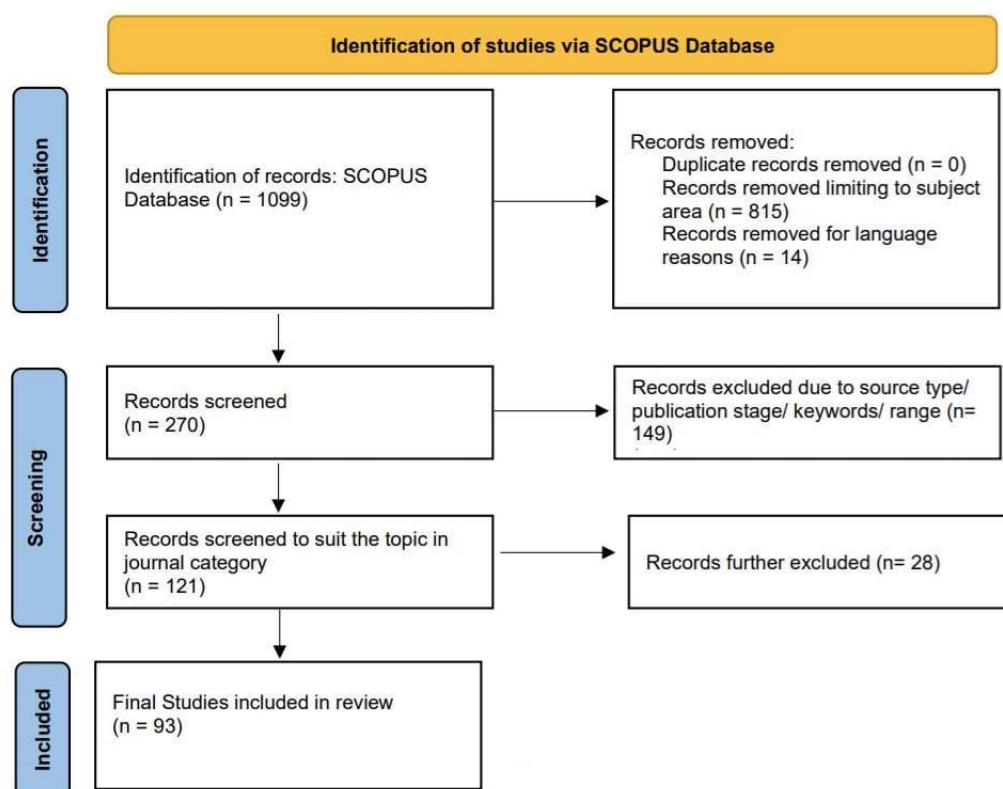
Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for Systematic Literature Review

Source: Scopus Database (Data Collection) & http://www.prisma-statement.org/ (PRISMA template)

The search commenced with a predefined set of criteria aimed at identifying pertinent documents concerning AI-based recruitment. Initially, 1099 articles were identified across Scopus databases. However, to ensure relevance, articles lacking full text, proceedings, conference papers, book chapters, editorials, non- English language content, and those falling outside the business/management categories were excluded. Following this refinement, 93 articles meeting the inclusion criteria were meticulously compiled into an Excel spreadsheet. This systematic process facilitated a comprehensive review of relevant literature, enabling the identification of key trends and insights in the domain of AI-based recruitment. By adhering to a structured approach, the review successfully navigated through a wealth of information, distilling it into a focused set of resources for analysis. This methodical approach ensured the thoroughness and depth of the literature review, offering valuable insights into the contemporary landscape of AI-based recruitment research.

1. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

AI has become a prominent topic in technology, machine learning, hiring, and HR. It demonstrates how these factors can alter how businesses operate. While AI began as a tiny tech, it has grown to be a major HR tool that benefits businesses worldwide. This combination demonstrates how collaborating across domains is critical to improving AI for employment and hiring. To properly utilize AI to make hiring easier and businesses better, more research and collaboration are required. Ultimately, this is about human ingenuity and collaboration in the digital age, not just about technology advancing.
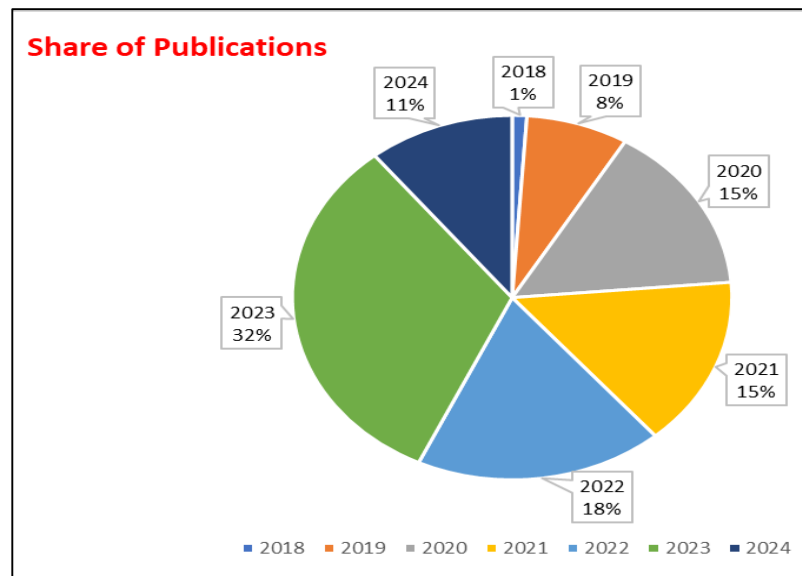
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Year- wise Publications

Figure 2 (a) Year- wise publication with percentage and (b) Graphic representation of 93 documents under review between 2018- 2024
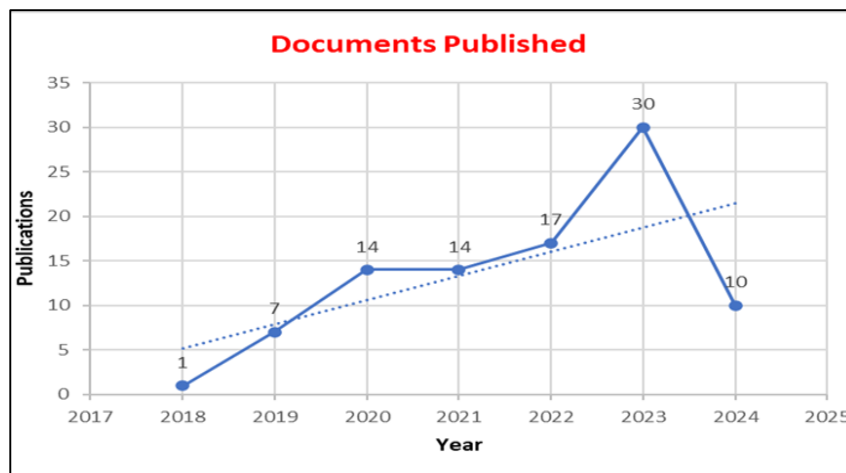

Figure 2 (b) Year- wise publication with percentage and (b) Graphic representation of 93 documents under review between 2018- 2024 (*Source: Scopus database as screened on 22nd Mar, 2024.*)

As Fig. 2 illustrates, there has been a significant increase in research articles concerning AI hiring. Over time, more and more papers become visible. There was just one publication in 2018, however in 2020, 2021, and 2022, there were seven, fourteen, and seventeen publications. The highest number of papers was 30, up from 2023. In early 2024, by March 22nd, already 10 papers came out, and more would likely arrive later in the year. The growth is seen in the pie chart and graph, which indicates that AI is playing a bigger role in recruiting. The percentage of publications increased from one percent in 2018 to thirty two percent in 2023, demonstrating the increased interest in this subject. This significant increase in studies demonstrates that AI can significantly alter the employment process.

Network of Keywords

The picture in Figure 3 shows a clear view of the most common keywords used in the realm of technology, digital stuff, and automation over the last ten years. The researchers found these keywords by looking closely at 93 papers shortlisted for the study. They used a tool called VOSviewer to make a network to study the keywords. In order to ensure methodological rigor, a threshold of four least co- occurrences of keywords was set.
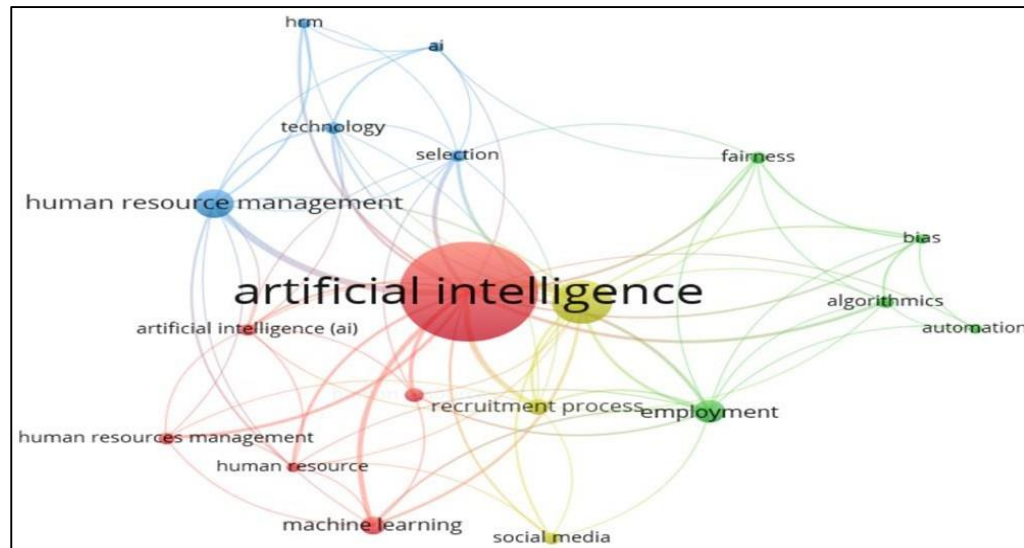

Figure 3. Network Visualization of all keywords (*Source: Authors- compiled using VosViewer software*)

This meticulous approach yielded four distinct clusters based on the interconnections among all indexed and author keywords. Among these clusters, AI emerged as the most prominent keyword, exhibiting a frequency of fifty-three, followed by recruitment twenty-three, human resource management thirteen, employment ten, and recruitment process seven, among others. Notably, AI assumed the central node, signifying its pivotal role within the network. The analysis underscored the prominence of certain topics within the scholarly discourse, with AI, recruitment, selection, HRM, machine learning, employment, technology, algorithms, automation, fairness, and bias emerging as the most studied themes. Fig 2 further delineated the interconnectedness within these clusters, with Cluster one, centred on AI, exhibiting the highest number of links eighteen and a total link strength of seventy-nine, indicative of its robust interconnectivity and significance within the broader network. This elucidation not only highlights the evolving landscape of research within the domain of technology-driven recruitment but also underscores the interconnectedness and centrality of AI within this discourse. It signifies a paradigm shift towards leveraging advanced technologies for enhancing recruitment processes and underscores the imperative for continued scholarly inquiry into these emergent themes.

Geographic Distribution of Articles

The geographical analysis of research publications in Fig. 4 highlights that most of the studies come from the United States, with India close behind. But, when looking at the bigger picture, rich countries are doing way more research than poor or developing ones. South Africa is one of the few poorer countries doing a good amount of research. The United States and United Kingdom are the biggest players because they have strong technology and systems in place. This is expected because these countries lead in new technology, especially in using AI to make

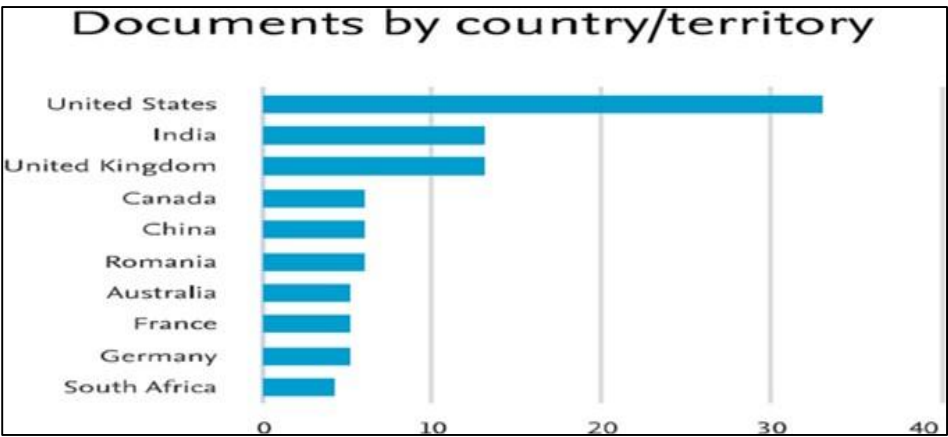hiring faster and with less human work.

Figure 4. Geographic location-based depiction of documents under study (*Source: Scopus database data analysis table*)

The disparity between developed and developing nations underscores systemic challenges such as resource availability, technological infrastructure, and educational disparities. While developed nations leverage their technological edge to spearhead advancements in AI-driven HRM, the narrative for developing countries like South Africa is evolving, albeit at a slower pace. Nevertheless, their participation signals a burgeoning interest and potential for growth in this domain. Ultimately, this disparity emphasizes the importance of equitable access to resources and concerted efforts towards capacity building in developing regions. Bridging this gap not only fosters global collaboration but also ensures that the benefits of AI-driven HRM practices are accessible to a broader spectrum of stakeholders, thereby advancing organizational efficiency and fostering inclusive growth on a global scale.

Co- Author Countries Visualization

In Fig. 5, we see how authors from different countries team up to write papers, just like friends collaborating on school projects. The United States, United Kingdom, Australia, France, and Canada are the main groups, working together on twenty-two papers with a total strength of six (Table 1). The United Kingdom has its own group, contributing to ten papers. However, India seems to mainly collaborate with the UK and not much with others.
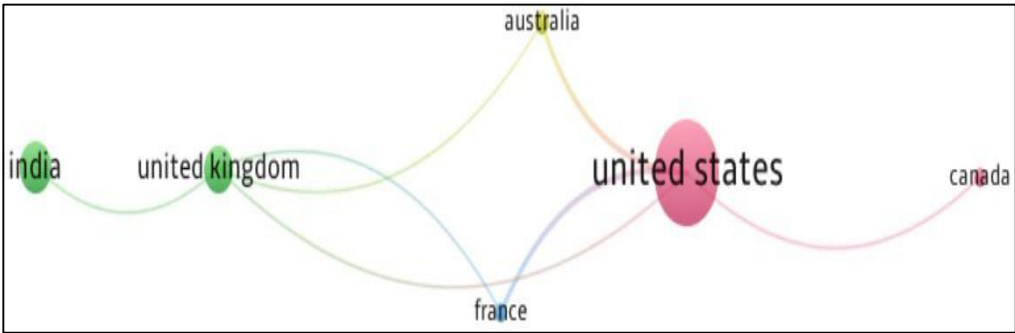

Figure 5. Network Visualization of Co- author countries

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Table 1 *Link and Strength between Countries in Publishing AI enabled Recruitment articles between 2018 - 2024*

Clusters	Countries	Link	Total Link Strength	Documents
Cluster 1	Canada & US	4	6	22
Cluster 2	India & UK	4	4	10
Cluster 3	France	2	3	4
Cluster 4	Australia	2	3	5

Source: VosViewer

When it comes to citations, the United States is leading with seven hundred fifty- four citations, followed closely by France with four hundred twenty-five. The analysis also grouped authors into four clusters, showing how they stick together in their collaborations. This insight gives us a peek into how researchers from around the world come together to share ideas and knowledge, making the field of AI and HRM more interconnected and vibrant. It's like a global team effort to advance our understanding and applications of these technologies.

Co- author authors Visualization

Figure 6. Network Visualization of Co- author authors

In exploring author connections within the network, it's evident that only six pairs of authors met the criteria of co-publishing two documents together (Figure 6). Interestingly, only four pairs of authors showed interlinking in their publications within the domain of artificial intelligence and recruitment. Notably, pairs such as Van Esch and Patrick Black, along with Stone and Dianna L. Lukaszewski, collaborated on publications within this realm. This limited but meaningful collaboration underscores the importance of fostering partnerships among researchers to advance knowledge and insights in the field. Therefore, the study shows how AI is changing hiring and HR. Over time, more people are studying this, especially in rich countries, but some work is also coming from underdeveloped countries like South Africa. The research also shows that authors from different countries are working together in this area, and expanding the pool of existing knowledge. Furthermore, the in-depth analysis of keywords and how authors are paired revealed the main ideas and themes the research community emphasized.

Introduction of Model

The *AARIF (Artificial Intelligence Assisted Recruitment and Interview Framework)* helps make hiring better using advanced AI. It uses things like machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and predicting tools to choose candidates and keep them engaged. A key part of AARIF is that it looks at what candidates say, not just matching words. It checks their feelings and how they talk to see if they fit the job and the company culture. AARIF makes hiring faster and better by using AI to change interview questions for each person and improve their experience. It also uses fairness rules to make sure there's no bias, helping to promote diversity.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Practical Implications: AI hiring is a significant shift. This paper examines research from 2018 to 2024 to provide fresh perspectives on the application of AI in hiring. AI expedites the employment process and aids in finding candidates quickly. In (Kaushal, N., et al., 2021; Kaushal, N., et al., 2023) the AIHRMI framework is discussed in relation to AI in hiring. AI also reduces workloads and the need for outside assistance, which lowers the cost of recruiting. Enhancing the candidate experience benefits a company's reputation and attracts top talent (Kot et al., 2021). However, we must also consider ethics. To maintain trust, we need moral principles and regulations.

Social Implications: After looking at 93 studies, the social effects of using AI in hiring are big and will last for years. More companies are using AI to hire, so it's important to make sure it's fair and open. AI can have biases, so improving it is important to make hiring fair. By improving how companies find workers, AI can help them work better and grow. But it could also cause job losses, so companies need to help people learn new skills. Preparing for these challenges is key to making the job market better in the future, and workers need to keep learning new things.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study has some limits because it didn't look at important things like company culture, leadership support, and rules. The findings are based on a few HR practices, so they might not work for everyone (Bedemariam, 2023). The methods are not strong because the study used self-reported data and a small scope, which could lead to bias (Islam, 2024). Making the study longer and using a different method could make the results stronger. Also, more research is needed on ethical issues like privacy, fairness, and bias in AI (Elmohandes et al., 2024; Allal-Cherif et al., 2021; Bonomi Savignon et al., 2024; Yi PK, Ray et al., 2023). AI's effect on justice and how different groups see it should also be studied (Bonomi Savignon et al., 2024). It's important to solve problems with AARIF and make AI and humans work better together for more human-centered and fair hiring (Niehueser W et al., 2020; Wuisan DSS et al., 2023; Oberst U et al., 2021). Future research should focus on making digital hiring better, avoiding mistakes with reality tests, and making hiring fairer and more inclusive (Buranasing, A., 2020; Cardon, D., 2023; Cug, J., 2023; Fritts, M., 2021).

7. CONCLUSION

This research shows that AI can make hiring better, faster, and fairer. But it's really important to think about things like culture, laws, and changes in the market to avoid any issues. The AARIF model helps companies use AI in a

smart way for hiring. It helps reduce bias and gives candidates a better experience. AARIF can change with the times, so it will still be useful in the future. By using AARIF, companies can manage AI in HR better, which is good for both employers and job seekers. It makes the hiring process easier and fairer while also handling ethical issues. This research gives practical advice for using AI, helping companies make more money and keeping everyone happier.

List of Abbreviations:

AI – Artificial Intelligence
AARIF- Artificial Intelligence Assisted Recruitment and Interview Framework
AIHRMI- Artificial Intelligence Human Resource Management Integration Model
EU – European Union
FAT- CAT - Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency- Complexity, Anxiety, and Trust Model
GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation HR – Human Resource
HRM – Human Resource Management NLP - Natural Language Processing
PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta- Analyses
SLR – Strategic Literature Review
SMEs – Small Medium Enterprises TAM-
Technology Acceptance Model
TOE- Technology Organization Environment model
UTAUT – Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology

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From Patriarchy to Equality: The Feminist Ideology of B.R. Ambedkar

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ABSTRACT

A lot of things differentiate India from other nations, one of the major differentiating aspect is that it is a multilingual and multicultural society. It is our strength but sometimes it poses challenge in the way of the Indian government and stakeholders to deal with the needs of citizens of India. The nation's dynamic linguistic and multicultural fabric has made the problems of equitable development and social justice for all members of society even more difficult to solve. Considering India's history, the most important thing to deal with and get over, the irrational and detrimental biased thoughts which is still prevalent within the society. This is important for creating opportunities for development and progress of each individual living in India. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a prominent social reformer, politician, and feminist, was a key champion who fought for the marginalized, and among them for women and Dalit women. His invaluable contribution included his leadership in drafting the Indian Constitution and championing of the principles of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity though his valuables contribution. Serving as a leading voice for Dalit and women rights, his work has played an important part in creating a legal framework that can amplify social justice within the context of Dalits and women issues in Indian society today. The focus of this paper is to explore what Ambedkar contributed and what he envisioned for the social justice agenda that is still relevant in the contemporary Indian society, with a special nexus to those marginalized sections, such as women and Dalit.

Keywords: Feminism, B.R.Ambedkar, Feminist, Women, Society, India, Constitution

1. INTRODUCTION

"Unity is meaningless without the accompaniment of women. Education is fruitless without educated women and agitation is incomplete without the strength of women." Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Desk, 2022)

When we refer about Earth and India, we typically use the word "Mother" as an adjective. Also known as "Dharti Mata," "Mother India," or "Bharat Mata," these terms are also available. A metaphorical usage of the word "Mother" is being made here. The phrase "Mother Earth" alludes to the fact that we anticipate getting love from our mothers. Mothers are protective and caring. Mothers will even sacrifice their lives if necessary to ensure the survival of their offspring. The planet sustains and gives us life. You wouldn't be here without a mother, just as we wouldn't be here if Earth didn't sustain us. Indians view their country as more than just a piece of ground. They love, revere and respect India as the true mother.

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She takes care of our general development as well as feeds and protects us. Perhaps we would consider that the oxygen we breathe, the water we drink, the grains we eat, the cotton produced and made into the clothes we wear, the shelter she provides us with and the safety we crave are her loving gifts to us her children. Every proud Indian aspires like all children, to lay his mortal body on the lap of her loving hands. The 'mother' word and traits that society expects a person to hold and exhibit are widely known with its obvious conditions of its person who gives birth, hence the female. Few personality traits are exclusively attributed to a female. The female gender is therefore by default always connected with the mothering process in our society. The love, care, affection etc. are also the things a father does to his child. He decides to fulfill all his child's wish, he wishes his child gets all the basic needs done, he wishes that is child gets a good health, and he does whatever he could do to make his child happy, protect his child etc. For that reason, the process of mothering is not solely the woman's life part, but also a process which includes the impact and participation of the father.

2. UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM: BEYOND GENDER BOUNDARIES

The term feminism is taken from the Latin word 'fēmina,' meaning 'woman,' and the suffix '-ism,' which denotes a principle or doctrine. The Cambridge Dictionary defines feminism as the belief that women should have equal rights, power, and opportunities as men, and be treated with the same fairness and respect. It also refers to the actions and efforts aimed at achieving this equality. As the word it, means woman. Hence, we find many female feminists around the world, like Kamla Bhasin, Malala Yousafzai, Alice Stone Blackwell, Tarabai Shinde, etc. We usually relate the term 'feminism' to a female, to female rights, power, opportunities, etc. But what about men? Men cannot be feminists. Does this feminist term exclusively apply to women? We see many males participate in the protection of women's rights, the promotion of women's rights, equality among all genders and empowering of women and many more like that. Shouldn't we be able to describe a man as a feminist if he advocates for these rights and discusses them? In his recent book 'Why Feminism is Good for Men,' "Dutch activist Jens van Tricht argues that feminism is about more than just enhancing women's positions and status; it is also about liberating men (and women) from the confining constraints that hold them back." (Ruxton, 2020) Feminism can inspire males to pursue more cooperative and egalitarian relationships and friendships, better sharing of care and job obligations, and efforts to minimize organized and individual violence.

3. THE NEED FOR FEMINISM IN TODAY'S WORLD

Being a feminist is the need of the hour. In history, the movements' are focused on women's issues because, in many instances, they are the most acute and endemic of all. It fits with the history of how suffragettes have lobbied for women to have a vote during the first wave of feminism. Second wave feminism was about women winning equal representation and opportunities for the workplace. We are concentrating on reproductive rights, sexual exploitation, and equal pay today, thanks to third-wave feminism. Along with other problems, such as sexual assault and the increase in the number of women in positions of leadership. For example, let's use Saudi Arabia. In 2018, women were only allowed to operate motor vehicles. However, they still need the approval of a recognized male guardian to get married, go on a vacation or some

medical treatment. It is obvious that Saudi Arabia has a far different standard of feminism than many other nations have. This is why it is important to take into account in this argument how much your nation of origin or where you live will influence how you feel about feminism. For example, in the Indian patriarchal family system, where only the man is the leader and takes decisions. At home a father or husband is discussing with daughter or wife, the decisions that must be taken. Here, the father/husband is accepting the role of women in the decision making process. A brother saw her sister being abused by his husband, so he supported her and helped her to get a divorce, irrespective of how society will react towards a divorced woman. A husband accepts the work in the house like cleaning, cooking, making children study, and feeding children as the responsibility of both father and mother, not just a mother. The unwritten rules: 'be tough', 'be hard,' and if needed, 'use violence' for the males in society. Mentally, male children add these rules or expectations that they had already assimilated on playgrounds, on sports fields, and in the classroom: 'boys don't cry', 'don't be weak', and 'don't act like a girl'. All these instances could be marked as how any man can promote and contribute to the feminist movement. Hence, all these men are feminists. Various feminist men could also be found in society, like Robert Franken, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, B. R. Ambedkar, John Stuart Mill, Jyotiba Phule, etc.

In Indian society, the patriarchal and masculine power systems deter potentially supportive men from participating in feminist fights and knowledge development. The father of the Indian Constitution was Dr B.R. Ambedkar who made his presence felt by his work on bringing about a change in the Indian society for the women. In modern India, B.R. Ambedkar is a very strong advocate of social justice. He said social justice was based on human beings' equality, liberty and fraternity, in the sense all human beings are equal before the law. Social justice aims at the removal of all inequalities due to caste, race, gender, power, position and wealth and equitable sharing of the society's political, social and economic resources amongst the citizens of the country.

4. FEMINISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India needs feminism because no male, whether it be her father, brother, spouse, or son, should be expected to take care of her throughout her life. The level of male dominance is highlighted by customs like 'kanyadaan,' 'Raksha Bandhan,' and the 'purdah system,' in which women are covered behind a ghoonghat. The customs here speak to the idea that men are strong, capable, and this means that they are the guardians of the weak frail women; that women are not meant to guard, but to be guarded. As Rout (2016) states, women in Rig Vedic society were respected and valued, but their status deteriorated in the later Vedic period. This decline was marked by restrictions on education and the denial of various rights and opportunities. Furthermore, practices such as child marriage, sati, polygamy, and the purdah system exacerbated the marginalization of women, reinforcing their subordinate position within society. These developments contributed to the further deterioration of women's social and cultural standing. Also, the epics and Puranas tended to denigrate women so much that they became property, this is the reflection of deep seeded gender inequalities. Dr. Ambedkar, in his famous book 'The Partition of India,' said that the Muslim population was impacted by the compulsory social order. According to Dr. Ambedkar, India's Muslim community has the same social issues as Hindu community. Yes, Muslims do have some

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extra social issues on top of the ones Hindus do. That extra thing is the purdah rule that all Muslim women have to follow. In India, seeing women in hijabs walking down the street is one of the most disgusting things to see. Such isolation can only be bad for Muslim women's health. Their deformed bodies have twisted backs, jutting bones, and crooked hands and feet due to anemia, TB, and pyorrhea. Their ribs, joints, and almost all of their bones hurt. A lot of the time, they have heart palpitations. Because of this problem with the pelvis, the baby dies before it's time during birth. This purdah system is a moral and psychological nightmare for Muslim women. It's already upsetting enough that these issues happen among Muslims. Greater concern is the lack of a large-scale social reform movement among India's Musalmans to secure their extinction. (Ambedkar, 1945)

5. AMBEDKAR'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The importance of maternity benefits in the Indian mainstream was introduced by B.R. Ambedkar in the 1920s when women, especially manual labourers, suffered of overworking in pre and post-natal period. He said provision of maternity benefits was crucial for the nation's welfare and emphasized the importance of it. That is why he stressed that the government must ensure that there is enough rest for mothers' right from prenatal and postnatal periods and it is a government responsibility. It underlined his dedication to social justice and ensuring women's rights. The Maternity Benefits Act for Factory Workers went into effect in Bombay in 1929, and it has since been expanded to include other provinces as well. As a result of his influence, several laws that were favorable to women, such as the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, were passed into law.

6. AMBEDKAR'S VISION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Ambedkar wrote voluminously about women's oppression, founded newspapers such as 'Mook Nayak' and 'Bahishkrit Bharat' with articles exclusively devoted to women's concerns. Ambedkar, the first Law Minister of independent India, introduced the Hindu Code Bill to promote gender equality, particularly in matters of marriage and inheritance. His efforts aimed to address the unequal treatment of women within the Hindu legal system, striving for justice and equal rights for all. The aim of the bill was to destroy the 'graded inequality' of the caste Hindu system in which women were treated like second class citizens under the law. Combined with their desire to create a more just and more inclusive legal system, Ambedkar wanted to do something about the inequalities he saw, and wanted to extend the same protections and the same opportunities to women that had been denied them within traditional societal structures. In addition to the basic alteration in order of succession for Hindus, the Bill brings for consideration four more changes. Ambedkar (2014) highlighted one somewhat peculiar modification to inheritances is that daughters, widows and widows of sons who die are treated equally with the son. The daughter is also entitled to receive a portion of her father's estate, as 50 percent of the son's portion. According to Singh (2020), Ambedkar extensively theorized about the role of women in the Indian social system. His exclusive writings on the development of women in India include, The Women and the Counter-Revolution, The Hindu Code Bill, Castes in India, Manu's Madness or the Brahminic explanation of origin of missed castes, and The Change from

Paternity to Maternity: What did the Brahmins wish to gain by Kali Varjya or the Brahmanic art or suspecting the operation of sin without calling it sin are some of the exclusive writings that he has produced on the subject of the development of women in India. Compulsory Matrimony, The Rise and fall of the Hindu women: who was responsible for it? Progress of the Community is measured by progress of women. These writings establish Ambedkar as one of the most influential thinkers who had compassion for the lowly position that Hindu women held inside the hierarchical structure of the Hindu religion.

Different parts of society reacted differently to the feminist perspective presented by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His ideas gave Dalit women both motivation and solid principles, which led to the creation of gender justice movements. Both the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM) and the Dalit Women's Self-Respect Movement have taken inspiration from Ambedkar's philosophy to fight dual discrimination against Dalit women. Dalit feminist scholars Urmila Pawar and Sharmila Rege have researched extensively about how Ambedkar made education and legal rights accessible to marginalized women. In the 21st century our country is facing issues of inequality, injustice, backwardness, economic imbalance, violence against individuals belonging to marginalized communities as well as various forms of gender and caste based discrimination. To remove all of these social evils, Ambedkar's work on building a just and equal society is more important than ever for not only understanding social orders but also for eradicating Indian society's current social evils. Dr. Ambedkar wanted that today's women should be confident and self-sufficient. The execution of numerous sections of Constitution and laws has added self-confidence, individualism, self-respect and overall empowerment to women. Only because of Dr. Ambedkar's tireless efforts did the old, distrusted traditions eventually fade away from society. On the negative side, however, women get victimized as a result of other social evils like deep rooted cultural norms, their family care roles, child bearing and so forth, as well as a lack of an adequate judicial, administrative acts and ignorance in laws, which make women to be victim of discrimination, exploitation and domestic violence. Women are viewed as a source of enjoyment and exploited by men in Hindu culture prevalent during and after the Vedic period since society at that time moved according to Manusmriti. In Ambedkar's efforts and reforms women gained independence and learned to live with honour and pride. Women with higher self-esteem started to go to school, work and take part in the wider society as men did. In one of the addresses by B.R. Ambedkar, he said: "I am a great believer in women's organizations. I know what they can do to improve the condition of society if they are convinced. In the eradication of social evils, they have rendered great services. I will testify to that from my own experience. I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress that women have achieved." (Secretary, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's persistent efforts were instrumental in shaping the Indian Constitution, which enshrines a wide range of rights aimed at securing social and economic justice for women. The Constitution provides various provisions to improve women's status and ensure their equality. Some key constitutional articles that contribute to the empowerment and protection of women are: (Kumar, 2016)

o   Article 14 guarantees all individuals equality before the law, ensuring that everyone, including women, is treated equally within the legal framework.

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- o Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth, safeguarding women's rights to equal treatment in all spheres of life.

- o Article 15(3) allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, acknowledging their need for protection and upliftment in certain areas.

- o Article 16 mandates equal opportunities for all citizens, ensuring non-discrimination in public employment based on gender.

- o Article 23 prohibits human trafficking and forced labor, two practices that historically contributed to the exploitation and subjugation of women.

- o Articles 39(a) and (d) emphasize the state's responsibility to guarantee equal livelihood opportunities and equal pay for equal work, both essential for economic empowerment.

- o Article 42 calls for the provision of maternity benefits and humane working conditions, underscoring the state's duty to support women in the workforce, especially during pregnancy.

- o Article 51A(e) holds every citizen accountable for refraining from practices that undermine the dignity of women, highlighting the importance of social respect and justice for women.

- o Article 243D(3) mandates that at least one-third of the seats in panchayats (local government bodies) must be reserved for women, promoting their political participation at the grassroots level.

- o Article 243T(3) ensures that at least one-third of the seats in municipalities, which are local urban bodies, must be reserved for women to encourage their active involvement in local governance.

- o Article 243T(4) specifically reserves the position of chairperson in municipalities for women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, further supporting their leadership roles in local administration.

These articles, along with others in the Constitution, are a testament to Dr. Ambedkar's commitment to safeguarding women's rights and ensuring their equal participation in society. His visionary work continues to serve as the foundation for social justice and gender equality in India.

7. CONCLUSION

In the wake of the twentieth century, as India struggled through political tumult, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision for humanity was a vision for a better future which stood a beacon. Human rights are universal, he believed, and all are invited at the table an idea he personally lived out his entire life. Ambedkar may justly be celebrated as architect of the Indian Constitution and a tireless champion of Dalit rights; but he has much to be credited for as a forthright feminist, too. Ambedkar was first Indian Minister of Law in British India, and reformer, especially in favour of progressive reforms, like family planning for women and universal adult suffrage. This new step in land mark achievements, extended the privilege to women and other marginalized communities to vote. When Ambedkar fought for justice and rights, he had no distinctions between men and women. Ambedkar, however, warned the recognition of deep rooted inequalities of women did require constitutional protection to eradicate harmful practices and dignify women. All prejudice directed at women he fought against throughout

his life. Reminded us his work is that seeking true social justice cannot happen through legal frameworks alone, but needs the transformation of a society's attitudes. Today, we must take Ambedkar's revolution to a logical conclusion. Our vision will remain incomplete until attitudes towards women also transform. The opportunity to carry on his legacy is an obligation, it's a crucial step toward achieving equal and inclusion we all fought so hard for.

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Shifting Cultures from Taboo to Awareness: Media Influence on Young Women's Hygiene Practices and Menstrual Cup Use

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ABSTRACT

In India, the use of menstrual cups among women still remains a taboo topic. The popularity of traditional menstrual products such as sanitary pads and tampons often overshadows the use of menstrual cups. Despite the growing global acceptance of menstrual cup usage in modern societies, their adoption in India is still limited. Using the survey method, this study tried to examine the awareness, usage patterns, and perceptions of menstrual cups among young women at Gurugram University. Data was collected through a survey focusing on menstrual hygiene practices, awareness level, and sources of information. The findings reveal that a majority of young women still rely on sanitary pads, and awareness about menstrual cups is also varied. The influence of the media in promoting menstrual cup awareness is also perceived as limited.

Keywords: Women, Menstrual-Cup, Media, India, Awareness

1. INTRODUCTION

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) remains a critical issue in India, with awareness and access to safe menstrual products being particularly limited in many regions. While traditional products like sanitary pads and tampons dominate, menstrual cups have gained global recognition as a safe, sustainable alternative. However, their adoption in India remains limited due to cultural taboos, a lack of education, and insufficient awareness (Vayeda et al., 2022). Studies in rural and tribal areas of Gujarat have shown that increasing awareness and improving access to menstrual hygiene products can have a significant positive impact on the hygiene practices of adolescent girls (Varghese et al., 2022). Despite these successful interventions, many young women in urban India still rely heavily on sanitary pads, and the transition to menstrual cups has been slow. Cultural stigma surrounding menstruation and deep-rooted beliefs often deter young women from exploring innovative menstrual hygiene products such as menstrual cups, even though they are more sustainable and cost-effective. This reluctance is exacerbated by the limited presence of menstrual hygiene management in public health initiatives, particularly in rural areas, where access to absorbents and safe practices remains a challenge. As a result, menstrual cups remain underutilized due to a combination of social, cultural, and logistical barriers. Media, with its capacity to shape public perceptions, plays a critical role in bridging these awareness gaps.

While previous research has studied media campaigns and educational programs in improving menstrual hygiene awareness, there is limited study on how media influences the adoption of menstrual cups among university students. Previous research suggests that well-structured media campaigns and educational programs significantly improve both knowledge and usage of menstrual cups, helping women overcome socio-cultural barriers (Varghese et al., 2022). Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions can help create a more informed and empowered approach to menstrual hygiene management. For example, a study on the project "Thinkal" in Kerala revealed that awareness sessions significantly increased menstrual cup usage, underscoring the importance of media and healthcare professionals in promoting sustainable menstrual hygiene practices (Varghese et al., 2022). Similarly, research conducted across urban India shows that socio-economic and educational factors critically influence the use of hygienic menstrual methods, with many women still unaware of sustainable alternatives (Roy et al., 2022). However, the role of media in destigmatizing menstruation and promoting menstrual hygiene products remains underutilized, with few targeted campaigns addressing this gap (Rahman et al., 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by specifically investigating how media exposure influences menstrual cup awareness and usage among students at Gurugram University, that provide understanding into the effectiveness of media-driven mediations in shaping menstrual hygiene practices.

This study aims to explore the influence of media on young women's hygiene practices and menstrual cup use, focusing on students at Gurugram University. It seeks to understand the relationship between media exposure and menstrual hygiene awareness, with particular attention to the barriers that prevent the adoption of menstrual cups. By understanding these factors, this research intends to contribute to the growing body of work on culturally appropriate interventions for enhancing menstrual hygiene management in India. The adoption of menstrual cups in India remains significantly lower than in other countries, largely due to cultural taboos, inadequate information, and a lack of media-driven campaigns. By categorising key sources of menstrual hygiene information and analyzing how they shape women perceptions, this study will provide a significant understanding of media's role in addressing menstrual health challenges. Addressing these issues is critical for fostering a cultural shift towards more sustainable menstrual hygiene practices in India.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A community-based study conducted in Delhi by Garg and Colleagues found that 84.4% of adolescent girls exclusively used pads for menstrual hygiene, higher than the national average, but about one in four girls used absorbents beyond the recommended time, increasing the risk of infections. While nearly half were prepared for menstruation, most relied on their mothers for menstrual health information, with minimal input from teachers or health workers, emphasising on lack of educational opportunity and the need for structured awareness programs in schools and community health initiatives (Garg, et al., 2022). Similarly, Bharatnur and Aishwarya delve that awareness and acceptance of menstrual cups are higher among educated, employed, and unmarried women in Mangalore. However, there is a significant gap between awareness and actual use, particularly in rural areas. The study addressed that socio-economic and cultural perceptions significantly influence menstrual product choices, highlighting the necessity of region-specific awareness strategies to bridge the gap. To promote

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menstrual cup usage, awareness programs and accessibility initiatives should be implemented by health authorities (Bharatnur and Aishwarya, 2023).

Seth and Collegues in their study highlights how menstrual hygiene plays a crucial role in improving women's health, and awareness programs are key to achieving this. The research emphasises that while menstrual cups are financially viable and environmentally sustainable, their adoption is hindered by a lack of awareness and misconceptions. The menstrual cup, a more sustainable and hygienic alternative to traditional methods, has the potential to replace sanitary napkins. Educating women and girls about menstrual cups is essential, as many are unaware of their usage and benefits. More research is needed, especially in understanding the qualitative factors influencing women's decisions to use or not use menstrual cups, as social taboos and misinformation continue to pose significant barriers (Seth, et al., 2023). In addition, Behera and colleagues in their work, focuses on the necessity of capacity-building, mass awareness programs, and celebrity endorsements as essential tools for dispelling myths and increasing acceptance among women. Village Health Nutrition Days offer an ideal platform for educating rural populations, paving the way for a "pad-free" India through positive examples from healthcare providers. In their study they highlight on the importance of integrating menstrual health education into existing government programs to maximize outreach and acceptance (Behera, et al., 2024).

Some scholars also reveals a significant regional disparities in the use of hygienic period products, with central districts of India showing lower usage rates. For instance, Biswas and colleagues witnessed a financial constraints as a primary factor that limiting access, reinforcing the need for grassroots awareness campaigns and local production of affordable menstrual products through Self-Help Groups. High costs are a major barrier, making sanitary napkins inaccessible to many women. The study calls for policy-level interventions to address structural inequalities and ensure equitable access to menstrual hygiene products among women (Biswas, et al., 2024). By drawing connections between these studies, it is evident that gaps in education, socio-economic barriers, and cultural perceptions significantly influence menstrual hygiene practices in India. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a multi-pronged approach involving education, accessibility, policy support, and targeted awareness campaigns.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the relationship between media influence and young women

2. To find out the usage, awareness, barrier, and knowledge level of menstrual hygiene products among young women.

3. To identify the primary sources of information that are influencing perceptions and decisions.

4. QUESTIONS

1. What are the predominant menstrual hygiene products that are used by young women?

2. What is the level of awareness, usage, barrier, and knowledge of menstrual cups among the study participants?

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3. From which sources do young women primarily receive information about menstrual cup usage?

5. HYPOTHESIS

Table 1. Hypothesis

S.No	Hypothesis Description	Null Hypothesis (H_0)	Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)
1	Types of Menstrual Products Used	There is no significant association between media influence and the type of menstrual products used by young women at Gurugram University.	There is a significant association between media influence and the type of menstrual products used by young women at Gurugram University.
2	Understanding of Menstrual Cups	There is no significant association between media influence and the level of understanding of menstrual cups among young women.	There is a significant association between media influence and the level of understanding of menstrual cups among young women.
3	Perception of Ease of Use of Menstrual Cups	There is no significant association between young women's perception of the ease of use of menstrual cups and their decision to use them.	There is a significant association between young women's perception of the ease of use of menstrual cups and their decision to use them.
4	Barriers to Menstrual Cup Adoption	There is no significant association between perceived barriers (such as cultural taboos, fear, and cost) and the adoption of menstrual cups.	There is a significant association between perceived barriers (such as cultural taboos, fear, and cost) and the adoption of menstrual cups.
5	Sources of Information on Menstrual Cups	There is no significant association between the sources of information (social media, family/peers, traditional media) and awareness of menstrual cups.	There is a significant association between the sources of information (social media, family/peers, traditional media) and awareness of menstrual cups.
6	Role of Media in Awareness Formation	There is no significant association between the role of media and the level of awareness of menstrual cups among young women.	There is a significant association between the role of media and the level of awareness of menstrual cups among young women.
7	Awareness of Menstrual Cups and Actual Usage	There is no significant association between the awareness of menstrual cups and their actual usage among young women at Gurugram University.	There is a significant association between the awareness of menstrual cups and their actual usage, with perceived barriers (such as cultural taboos, cost, and misconceptions) and personal attitudes influencing this relationship.

6. METHODOLOGY

Table 2. below summarizes the methodology used in this study.

Aspect	Details
Approach	The present study employs a quantitative research approach that enables statistical analysis of data, allowing for objective measurement of changes in hygiene practices and menstrual cup adoption.
Method	The survey method is used to explore the influence of media on young women's hygiene practices and their adoption of menstrual cups. The survey method is essential for this study as it enables the collection of quantitative data from a large sample. It also seeks to understand how media has contributed to shifting cultural taboos toward awareness, probing changes in knowledge, perceptions and behaviour regarding use of menstrual cup.

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Target Population	The present study employs a quantitative survey method to investigate the influence of media on college-going women of reproductive age (17-27 years) in Gurugram, focusing on their hygiene practices and adoption of menstrual cups. This demographic is crucial as it represents a key group for understanding shifts in hygiene practices and menstrual health awareness, particularly in relation to media influence and the adoption of menstrual cups.
Sample Size	The study will utilize a sample size of 100 college-going women of reproductive age (17-27 years) in Gurugram. This sample size is deemed adequate for conducting meaningful statistical analysis while allowing for the exploration of trends and patterns related to media influence on hygiene practices and menstrual cup usage within this demographic.
Sampling Method	A stratified random sampling method will be employed instead of convenience sampling to ensure a more representative sample. Participants will be categorized into strata based on factors such as age groups (17-19, 20-22, 23-27) and educational background (undergraduate, postgraduate) to ensure a diverse and balanced representation. This approach will enhance the generalizability of findings, providing a more accurate reflection of media influence on menstrual cup adoption.
Data Collection Method	The data collection method for this study will involve a structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative data from the targeted population. This questionnaire will include closed-ended questions to assess participants' awareness, attitudes, and behaviours regarding hygiene practices and menstrual cup usage. The structured format will ensure consistency in responses, facilitating statistical analysis and allowing for the efficient comparison of data across participants. Additionally, the questionnaire will be distributed through online platforms to enhance accessibility and encourage participation among college-going women in Gurugram.
Survey Sections	The structured questionnaire for the survey will consist of the following sections: 1. **Demographic Information**: Collect data on participants' age, education level, and other relevant background information. 2. **Menstrual Product Usage**: Assess current practices regarding the use of various menstrual products, including sanitary pads, tampons, and menstrual cups. 3. **Knowledge about Menstrual Cups**: Evaluate participants' understanding of menstrual cups, including their benefits, usage, and hygiene. 4. **Perceptions on Menstrual Cups**: Gather insights on participants' attitudes and beliefs about menstrual cups, including comfort, safety, and convenience. 5. **Barriers to Adoption**: Identify perceived obstacles that may prevent the use of menstrual cups, such as cultural taboos, lack of awareness, or accessibility issues. 6. **Sources of Information**: Determine where participants obtain information about menstrual health and hygiene products, including friends, family, healthcare providers, or online resources. 7. **Role of Media**: Investigate the influence of various media channels (social media, advertisements, health campaigns) on participants' awareness and perceptions of menstrual cups and hygiene practices.
Data Analysis Techniques	For this study, data analysis will incorporate several techniques: 1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Utilize percentages and frequencies to summarize survey responses, providing a clear overview of trends and patterns. For example, report that 70% of participants use sanitary pads, while 20% use menstrual cups, and 10% use tampons. 2. **Pie Charts:** Create pie charts to visually represent the distribution of responses in key areas, such as menstrual product usage and knowledge about menstrual cups. This will help convey information in an easily digestible format, showing the proportion of respondents for each category (e.g., 40% aware of menstrual cups). 3. **Percentage Comparisons:** Analyze and present comparative percentages across different demographic groups. For instance, assess how awareness and usage of menstrual cups vary by age group or educational background, such as finding that 60% of women aged 20-22 are aware of menstrual cups compared to only 30% of those aged 17-19.

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	4.	**Chi-Square Test:** Conduct chi-square tests to examine relationships between categorical variables, such as demographics and attitudes toward menstrual cups. This statistical test will help determine if there are significant associations between variables, providing deeper insights into the influence of media and cultural factors.
	5.	**Tabulation:** Present data in tabular format to organize and display findings systematically. This will include frequency tables showing the number of respondents for each category and percentage calculations for demographic information and summary statistics for each survey section, facilitating comparisons and highlighting key results (e.g., 60% of participants report learning about menstrual cups from social media).
Tools and Instruments	6.	**Questionnaire (Structured):** A structured questionnaire will be developed to collect data from participants. The questionnaire will include closed-ended questions organized into sections such as demographic information, menstrual product usage, knowledge about menstrual cups, perceptions, barriers to adoption, sources of information, and the role of media. This format will ensure consistency in responses and facilitate easy data analysis.
	7.	**Excel for Data Analysis:** Microsoft Excel will be utilized for data entry and analysis. Excel will allow for the organization of survey data, calculation of descriptive statistics (such as percentages and frequencies), and the creation of visual representations (like pie charts) to display findings effectively. Excel's built-in functions will assist in managing the data efficiently.
	8.	**Chi-Square Test:** The chi-square test will be conducted using Excel to examine relationships between categorical variables, such as demographics and attitudes toward menstrual cups. This statistical test will help determine if there are significant associations between variables, providing deeper insights into the influence of media and cultural factors on hygiene practices.

7. INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSES

This section detailed the interpretation and analyses of sub themes of survey conducted on collage going women of reproductive age in Gurugram primarily focus on young women. Total of 100 respondents were covered age groups between 17 -27. Among them 56.4% respondents were belongs age group 17-21, while the remaining 43.6% fell within the age group of 21-27. This age distribution was significant for understanding the target population for menstrual cup awareness. Women respondents ages between 17-21 was the younger group, likely consists of first-year to third-year undergraduate students. These respondents were relatively new to university life and limited regarding menstrual products. Women respondents ages between 21-27, belongs to older group, graduate and post-graduation pursuing students. These women have more established and modern personal preferences and practices regarding menstrual products.

The study demographically targeted those respondents that are actively managing their menstrual health and are of reproductive age. The study tried to find out the gap between shifting behaviours from traditional products to modern by identifying the contemporary menstrual product usage (such as sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or cloth). Another key variable to explored is the level of knowledge, understanding and awareness about the about menstrual cups. In addition, the study examined what are the sources of information about use of menstrual products specifically menstrual cups. Finally it looked into the kind of role media play in awareness of modern and hygiene methods of menstrual safety. The dependent variable in this study is the usage of menstrual cups, it is influence by independent variable or not that is identified by distinguishing between those who have used a menstrual cup and those who have never used one. These variables helped in understanding

the independent factors that are influencing menstrual product choices and the level of awareness among young women in Gurugram.

7.1. Description of Variables

1. **Dependent Variable:** in this study are type of menstrual product used are this is a categorical variable representing the specific menstrual product chosen by participants including Sanitary Pads, Tampons, Menstrual Cups and Cloth.
2. **Independent Variables:** These variables are factors that may influence the choice of menstrual product and are classified as age, department, and knowledge level (low, medium or high).
    *   Low refers to Limited knowledge
    *   Medium refers to Moderate awareness
    *   High refers to well-informed

7.2. Types of Menstrual Products Used by Young Women

According to Figure 1, the use of sanitary pads is the most popular choice among young women, with a percentage of 94.6%. In an open-ended answer, the reason for selection for many of them is due to availability, ease of use, comfort, and some personal habit preferences. Personal preferences include lifestyle fit and individual comfort. It also suggests that effective marketing strategies and efforts made for this product make it a highly saturated product. There is a very low percentage of young women who use tampons, as only 1.8% of women opted for using tampons. This low usage can be attributed to factors such as lack of awareness, cultural or social taboos, discomfort, or health concerns related to toxic shock syndrome. For instance, one respondent mentions in an open-ended answer that cultural norms play an important role in product choice in some cultures. There might be a notion of preference for using pads over tampons due to beliefs about virginity.
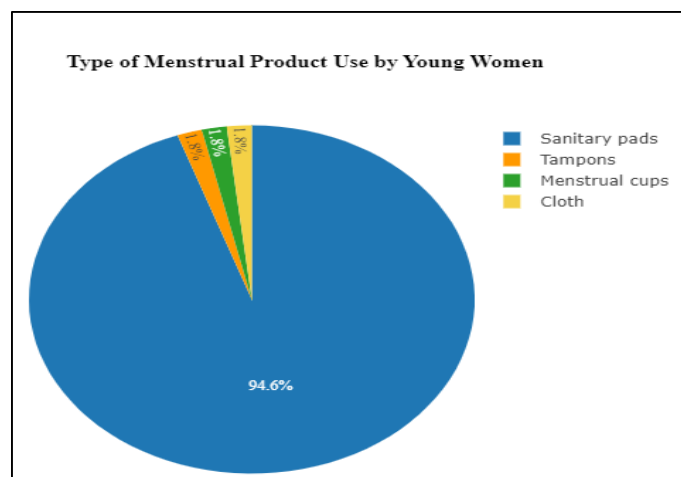

Figure 1. Percentage of Types of Menstrual Products used by Young Women

Many women admitted that menstrual cups are a more sustainable, re-usable, and cost-effective option in the long term; however, only 1.8% agreed with this option. Lack of awareness, the initial cost, and the learning curve associated with using menstrual cups are witnessed as major barriers to adoption. A similar percentage (1.8%) of young women said they still use cloth during the menstrual cycle. This is more prevalent for women who belong to rural or economically disadvantaged families. Although they are aware of and concerned about the hygiene and infection issues of using cloth if it is not properly cleaned and maintained.

7.3. *Understanding for Use of Menstrual Cups among Young Women*

Figure 2 shows the level of familiarity and usage of menstrual cups. 41.8% of respondents said they were not familiar with the benefits and uses of menstrual cups. About 36.4% of respondents said they were somewhat familiar with the uses of menstrual cups, which indicates that there is moderate awareness among young women. Only 21.8% of respondents say they are very familiar with the use of menstrual cups.
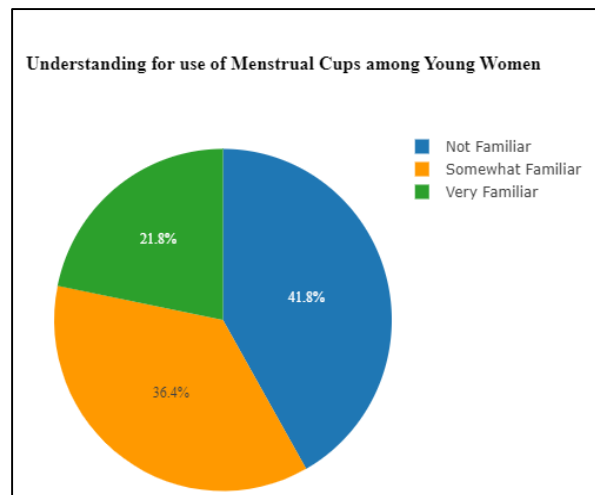

Figure 2. Percentage of Understanding level of young women for Use of Menstrual Cups

8. USAGE OF MENSTRUAL CUP AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

Figure 3 reveals that sanitary pads are the most popular choice among young women, with 94.5% of respondents preferring them. Open-ended responses suggest that the reasons for this preference include availability, ease of use, comfort, and personal habit preferences, such as lifestyle fit and individual comfort. The high adoption rate of sanitary pads indicates that effective marketing strategies have made them a highly saturated product. In contrast, tampons are used by only 1.8% of young women. This low adoption rate can be attributed to factors such as lack of awareness, cultural or social taboos, discomfort, or health concerns related to toxic shock syndrome. For instance, one respondent mentioned in an open-ended response that cultural

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norms significantly influence product choice; in some cultures, there is a preference for pads over tampons due to beliefs about virginity.
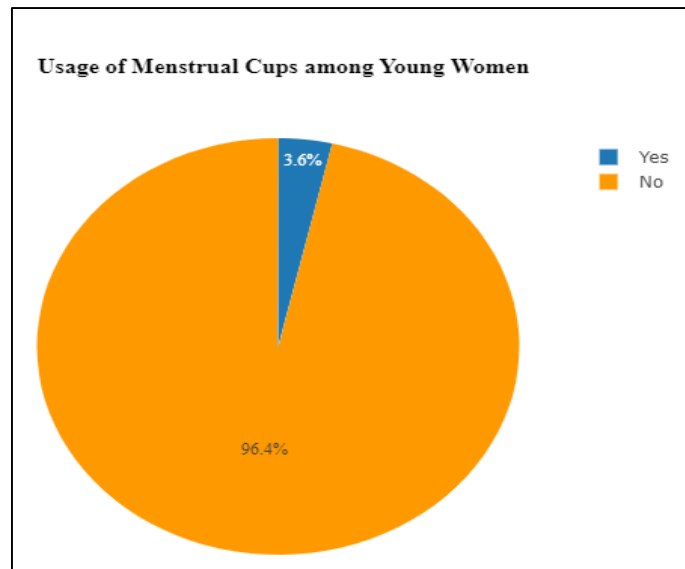

Figure 3. percentage of Usage of Menstrual Cup among Young Women

Similarly, only 1.8% of respondents reported using menstrual cups, despite recognising them as a more sustainable, reusable, and cost-effective option in the long term. Barriers to adoption include lack of awareness, initial cost, and the learning curve associated with using menstrual cups. Additionally, 1.8% of young women reported still using cloth during their menstrual cycle, which is more prevalent among women from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Although they are aware of the hygiene and infection risks associated with using cloth if not properly cleaned, economic constraints continue to drive this choice. These findings suggest a need for targeted educational initiatives and awareness campaigns to promote alternative menstrual products, emphasising health, sustainability, and overcoming cultural and social barriers.

9. PERCEPTION OF YOUNG WOMEN ON WEATHER MENSTRUAL CUPS ARE EASY TO USE

Figure 4 provides insights into young women's perceptions of the ease of use of menstrual cups, highlighting significant gaps in awareness and experience. The majority of respondents (67.3%) expressed uncertainty about how easy menstrual cups are to use, indicating a widespread lack of information or experience. This uncertainty underscores the need for targeted educational initiatives to clarify misconceptions and provide accurate, accessible information about menstrual cups. A notable minority (21.8%) perceived menstrual cups as difficult to use, citing challenges with insertion, removal, or discomfort associated with unfamiliarity or incorrect usage. Addressing these concerns through educational efforts that offer practical guidance on proper techniques for insertion and removal can help alleviate these apprehensions.

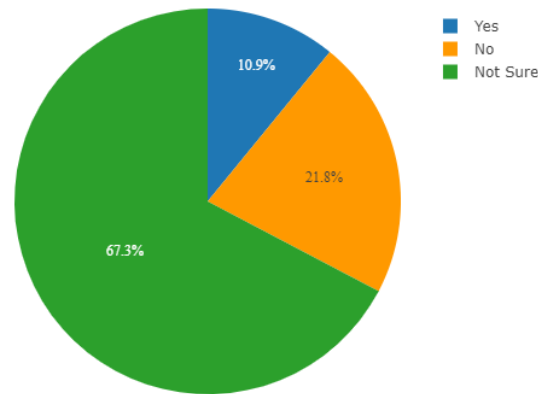Perception of Young Women on weather Menstrual Cups are easy to use

Figure 4. Percentage of Perception of Young Women on weather Menstrual Cups are easy to use

Conversely, a small group (10.9%) found menstrual cups easy to use, likely comprising individuals with personal experience or sufficient information about the product. This segment represents potential advocates who could share their positive experiences and encourage others to consider menstrual cups as a viable menstrual hygiene option. To address the widespread uncertainties and concerns, comprehensive educational campaigns are essential. These should provide clear, step-by-step instructions on how to use menstrual cups correctly, emphasising practical tips to build confidence among potential users. Organising demonstrations and workshops can offer hands-on experience, allowing young women to practice insertion and removal techniques under expert guidance and ask questions in a supportive environment. Additionally, utilising peer educators with positive experiences can foster a community of support, making it easier for newcomers to navigate initial challenges. Highlighting the health benefits of menstrual cups, such as a reduced risk of infections compared to tampons, along with their environmental sustainability, can further appeal to environmentally and health-conscious individuals. By implementing these strategies, educational and awareness initiatives can play a crucial role in transforming perceptions and promoting the wider adoption of menstrual cups among young women.

10. YOUNG Women Facing Barriers to Menstrual Cup Adoption

Figure 5 represents various barriers that are influencing the adoption of menstrual cups among young women, and reveals the correlation between cultural taboos, perceived difficulties, and fears. About 29.4% of women believe that Taboos emerge as a significant barrier around menstrual hygiene products that play a substantial role in creating strong resistance and hindering adoption. These taboos might include beliefs about cleanliness, discomfort discussing socially about menstrual health, or perceptions of menstrual cups as unconventional or inappropriate methods. Both processes of use and fear are indicated as

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prominent barriers with 31.3% of responses. Many young women are discouraged by uncertainties related to the use of menstrual cups, including concerns about insertion, removal, hygiene practices, and overall comfort. Fear also plays a crucial role, surrounding worries about leakage, discomfort, health risks, or simply unfamiliarity with the product.
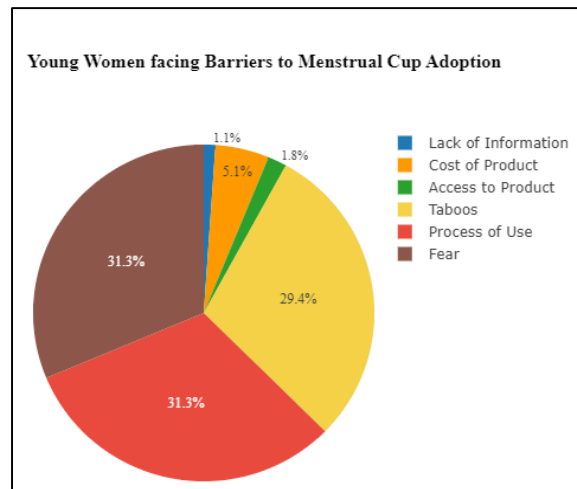

Figure 5 Percentage of Young Women Facing Barriers to Menstrual Cup Adoption

Further cost of the product was opted by 5.1% of women as a barrier and remains a consideration for some, particularly those with limited financial resources. Affordability can influence decisions, making it a relevant factor in the broader adoption context. In addition, 1.8% of women opted for access to products as a minor barrier, indicating that availability is also sometimes an issue for some young women due to challenges such as geographic or logistical. Also ensuring a recommendation that better distribution channels could enhance accessibility. Finally, 1.1% of women believe that lack of information is the least cited barrier, suggesting that while awareness about menstrual cups is relatively high, other factors like taboos, fear, and practical concerns overshadow the need for more information. This indicates that, despite having access to information, the practical and emotional barriers may be more significant.

11. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT MENSTRUAL CUPS USAGE AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

Figure 6 highlights the various sources from which young women gather information about menstrual cups with the dominant role of social media and minor influence of traditional media. Around 76.5% of women say that social media is the most significant source of information, indicating its crucial role in shaping perceptions and providing knowledge about menstrual cups. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook are playing key roles in spreading awareness. Influencers, bloggers, and user-generated content on these platforms play a major role in regulating discussions around menstrual health, offering reviews and tutorials that guide young women in understanding and using menstrual cups.
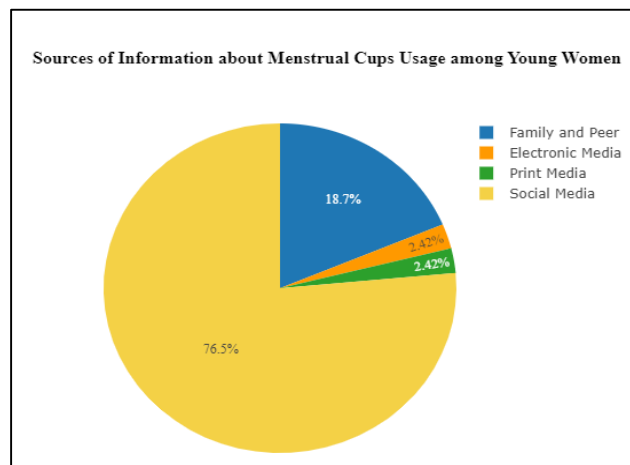
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Figure 6. Percentage of Sources of Information about Menstrual Cups Usage among Young Women

About 18.7% of women say that family and peers also play an important role in influencing personal networks on information dissemination. Conversations within families and among friends contribute to sharing experiences and recommendations, addressing concerns, and shaping perceptions toward menstrual products. Only 2.4% of women say that electronic media and print media (such as websites, blogs, and online articles, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets) represent the traditional sources of information.

12. ROLE OF MEDIA IN PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS FORMATION

According to figure 7, 47.3% of women believe that mainstream media significantly contributes to menstrual cup awareness. A substantial portion of participants (30.9%) is uncertain about the role of mainstream media in promoting menstrual cups. This uncertainty may arise from a lack of promotion of menstrual cups in traditional media.
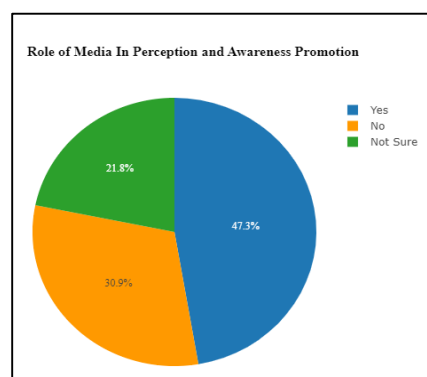

Figure 7. percentage of Role of Media in Perception and Awareness Formation

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A notable minority (21.8%) disagrees with the notion that traditional media are less influential as compared to newer, interactive platforms such as social media. These respondents may view other sources as more effective in shaping awareness and perceptions.

Tabulation of (Summarized Data)

Table 3 details the tabulation of above summarised data

Category	Respondents (%)
Types of Menstrual Products Used	
Sanitary Pads	94.6
Tampons	1.8
Menstrual Cups	1.8
Cloth	1.8
Understanding of Menstrual Cups	
Not Familiar	41.8
Somewhat Familiar	36.4
Very Familiar	21.8
Perception of Ease of Use (Menstrual Cups)	
Uncertain	67.3
Difficult to Use	21.8
Easy to Use	10.9
Barriers to Menstrual Cup Adoption	
Cultural Taboos	29.4
Fear	31.3
Cost	5.1
Lack of Access	1.8
Lack of Information	1.1
Sources of Information	
Social Media	76.5
Family and Peers	18.7
Electronic/Print Media	2.4
Role of Media in Awareness Formation	
Mainstream Media Contributes	47.3
Uncertain Role of Media	30.9
Disagrees (Traditional Media Less Effective)	21.8

The chi-square test is applied on above data to examine the relationship between different variables.

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Table 4 represents the chi-square analyses of above data

Comparison	Observed Frequencies	Expected Frequencies
Uncertain vs Major Barriers	67, 29	69.06, 26.94
Difficult to Use vs Minor Barriers	22, 7	20.86, 8.14
Easy to Use vs Minor Barriers	11, 3	10.07, 3.93

Chi-Square Test Results:

- Chi-Square Value: **0.746**

- p-Value: **0.689**

- Degrees of Freedom: **2**

This analysis shows that the differences between observed and expected values are not statistically significant (p-value > 0.05), indicating no strong relationship between the variables.

The chi-square test results are as follows:

- **Chi-square statistic (χ^2)**: 0.746

- **p-value**: 0.689

- **Degrees of freedom (dof)**: 2

The expected frequencies for each category in the contingency table are:

- Uncertain vs Major Barriers: 69.06 (expected), 29 (observed)

- Difficult to Use Vs Minor Barriers: 20.86 (expected), 7 (observed)

- Easy to Use Vs Minor Barriers: 10.07 (expected), 3 (observed)

Since the p-value is 0.689, which is greater than the standard significance level (typically 0.05), we do not have enough evidence to reject the hypothesis. This suggests that there is no significant association between the variables.

Findings

1. Young women predominantly use sanitary pads (87%), with minimal adoption of menstrual cups (5%), tampons (3%), or cloth (5%). Factors influencing this preference include availability, ease of use, and personal comfort.

2. Awareness of menstrual cups is varied (62%) of respondents have heard about menstrual cups, but only (12%) have used them. Many women lack familiarity with the benefits and usage of menstrual cups.

3. Major barriers to menstrual cup adoption include cultural taboos (58%), perceived difficulties with use (47%), and fears about health and comfort (42%). The initial cost (35%) and lack of information (50%) are also significant hindrances.

4. Social media is the primary source of information about menstrual cups (73%), while traditional media plays a minor role (14%). Family and peer discussions contribute to information dissemination (28%).

5. There are mixed perceptions about the role of mainstream media in promoting menstrual cups (41%) believe it contributes to awareness, (33%) are uncertain, and (26%) disagree about its impact.

13. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that young women predominantly use sanitary pads, with minimal adoption of menstrual cups, tampons, or cloth. Despite acknowledging the benefits of menstrual cups, such as sustainability and cost-effectiveness, their use remains low due to several barriers. Cultural taboos, perceived difficulties in usage, and health concerns significantly hinder the adoption of menstrual cups. Awareness of menstrual cups among young women is inconsistent. Many lack sufficient knowledge about their benefits and usage, contributing to their limited use. The initial cost and the learning curve associated with menstrual cups further discourage their adoption, highlighting the need for more targeted educational initiatives. Social media emerges as the most influential source of information on menstrual cups, overshadowing traditional media. While mainstream media's role in promoting menstrual cups is recognised by some, others remain uncertain or skeptical. To improve adoption rates, it is crucial to address cultural taboos, provide practical guidance, and leverage social media for effective educational and awareness campaigns. Specific actions should include collaborations with influencers and healthcare professionals to dispel myths and promote menstrual cup adoption through engaging content. Additionally, structured educational programs in schools, universities, and community spaces should be implemented to provide accurate information and practical demonstrations, ensuring better awareness and acceptance.

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"ज्ञानं शीलं धर्मश्चैव भूषणं"

"सच्चे आभूषण हैं – ज्ञान, विनय और कर्तव्यबोध ।"

"The Real Ornaments are Knowledge, Modesty and Sense of Duty"

1967 में अपनी स्थापना के पश्चात कालिंदी कॉलेज ने एक सुदीर्घ यात्रा पूर्ण की है, और आज यह एक ऐसे प्रतिष्ठित संस्थान के रूप में पहचाना जाता है जहाँ छात्राएँ आशा, आत्मविश्वास तथा संकल्प के साथ अपने भविष्य की दिशा निर्धारित करती हैं। दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के एक प्रमुख महाविद्यालय के रूप में, कालिंदी कॉलेज देश-विदेश से आने वाली छात्राओं को गुणवत्तापूर्ण उच्च शिक्षा प्रदान करता है। प्रबुद्ध संकाय सदस्यों द्वारा संचालित एक समर्पित शिक्षण-संकाय के माध्यम से यह संस्थान न केवल शैक्षणिक विकास में योगदान देता है, अपितु खेलकूद एवं अन्य पाठ्येतर गतिविधियों में उत्कृष्ट प्रदर्शन हेतु भी छात्राओं को प्रेरित करता है।

यह महाविद्यालय उन तीन गुणों – ज्ञान, विनय एवं कर्तव्यबोध – को अपने आदर्श वातावरण में मूर्त रूप देता है, जो किसी भी सभ्य जीवन के मूल स्तंभ माने जाते हैं। विगत वर्षों में कालिंदी कॉलेज ने न केवल शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में उल्लेखनीय प्रगति की है, बल्कि राष्ट्र निर्माण में भी अपनी महत्त्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। हमारी अनेक वर्तमान एवं पूर्व छात्राएँ विभिन्न प्रतिष्ठित संस्थानों तथा राष्ट्रीय-अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों पर विशिष्ट पहचान बना चुकी हैं। यह महाविद्यालय अपनी छात्राओं के भीतर बौद्धिक प्रखरता के साथ आत्मचिंतन की क्षमता को विकसित करने का निरंतर प्रयास करता है, तथा विद्यार्थियों की रचनात्मकता एवं वैज्ञानिक सोच को भी प्रोत्साहित करता है।

इस वर्ष वार्षिक एकेडमिक जर्नल के गत 24 अंको में भी अकादमिक गुणवत्ता, व अंतर अनुशासनात्मक विषय के साथ समकालीन विमर्श को भी समावेशित किया गया है। पुराने अंको को पढ़ने के लिए तथा किसी भी अधिक जानकारी के लिए कृपया हमारी वेबसाइट देखे kalindi.du.ac.in ।

The College has come a long way since its inception in 1967 and is now seen as a destination where students can embrace their future with hope and confidence. As a constituent college of University of Delhi, Kalindi College strives to cater to higher education to young women with a vision of a new, fulfilling future for all. A nourishing environment supported by a combination of competent infrastructure and a dedicated teaching faculty helps our students to achieve the highest accolades in Academics, Sports and other Extra-Curricular Activities.

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