IMPACT AND POLICY RESEARCH REVIEW

IPRR

Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR)

IPRR Volume 3 Issue 2 (July-December 2024)

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Managed & Published By

IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, New Delhi

www.impriindia.com

About the Journal

Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR) (e-ISSN: 2583-3464) is a biannual research journal managed and published by IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, New Delhi. IPRR hosts written contributions on topics having concrete implications for progressive development, covering a well-grounded policy analysis, that is interdisciplinary or focused on particular disciplines, for example, Economics, Politics, Governance, Geography, Sociology, Gender and Ethnic Discrimination, Development Studies, Environmental Degradation, Anthropology, and International Relations, with an expectation that all work is accessible to readers across the social sciences.

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Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR)

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EDITORS' NOTE

Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR)

IPRR Volume 3 Issue 2 (July - December 2024)

It is with great enthusiasm that we present Volume 3, Issue 2 (July-December 2024) of the IPRR Impact and Policy Research Review. This issue offers a diverse collection of articles addressing critical issues in policy, society, and the environment. The contributions in this edition emphasize the interconnectedness of these domains and provide actionable insights to address the challenges of our time.

In this issue, the Insights section delves into key economic, environmental, and historical perspectives, highlighting the need for innovative approaches to address longstanding challenges.

The Policy Perspectives section explores pressing issues such as migration, employment, and security, emphasizing the socio-economic and geopolitical dimensions that shape these debates.

The Special Articles section focuses on leveraging global platforms and frameworks to foster sustainable development, while also examining the intersection of gender and policy implementation through case studies.

In the Young Voices section, emerging scholars bring fresh perspectives on themes including secularism, regional marginalization, and alternative ecological conservation methods, showcasing the power of youth-led scholarship in driving change.

Each section of this issue underscores our commitment to fostering rigorous scholarship and meaningful dialogue on pivotal issues. We extend our deepest gratitude to all contributors, reviewers, and the editorial team for their unwavering dedication to making this publication a success.

We thank the Journal Advisory Board and Editorial Review Committee for their enthusiastic support of the journal. We congratulate the authors for their insightful and well-researched articles. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the reviewers, and editorial team for their dedicated efforts in bringing this issue to fruition. The IPRR Journal is committed to maintaining the highest standards of academic and policy-related discourse, and we are proud of the quality of work featured in this edition.

With Gratitude,
Editors,
Impact and Policy Research Review (IPRR)

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Fertilizer Sector at a Crossroad:
Insights from Economic Surveys and Union Budgets

Ajil Mankunnummal[1]

Abstract

Analyzing the last few Economic surveys and Union budgets, this paper points out two major contradictions in the suggestions and actions of the government for the fertilizer and agriculture sectors. While the government aims to reduce chemical fertilizer use and promote agricultural sustainability through promoting natural and organic farming, the heavy allocation of subsidies to urea and significant investments in conventional fertilizers suggest a contradictory approach. This puts the Indian fertilizer sector at a crossroads, struggling with conflicting policies and actions.

Keywords: Fertilizer sector, Union Budget, Economic Survey, Public Policy, India

1. Introduction

Union Budgets and Economic Surveys present the state of the economy and the priorities of the government, hence the policies associated with them. The recently presented Union Budget 2024-25 has identified agriculture as one of the government's priority sectors and given importance to increasing the productivity and resilience of the sector. Moreover, the Economic Survey 2024 also specifies the need for a sustainable agriculture sector and suggests measures for achieving it.

Such measures and suggestions affect the fertilizer sector which supplies an essential input to the agriculture sector and increases the crops' productivity too. Analyzing the last few Economic surveys and Union budgets, this paper points out two major contradictions in the suggestions and actions of the government for the fertilizer and agriculture sectors.

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2. Contradiction I

The first contradiction lies in the Economic Survey, 2024's (Govt of India, 2024a) aim to promote agricultural sustainability by reducing the use of chemical fertilizers and ensuring a balanced nutrient ratio in the soil while simultaneously increasing subsidies for urea, which exacerbates the imbalance in the soil's nutrient ratio. The NPK ratio in India has worsened, compared to the popular and accepted ratio of 4:2:1[2] or an estimated ratio of 2.6: 1.4:1[3], due to the flawed fertilizer subsidy policies that have been followed over the years (Mankunnummal, 2023). India provides subsidies for Urea products and non-urea products.

The largest produced and consumed fertilizer in India, Urea, is highly subsidized and sold at a rate that the government statutorily fixes which is much less than other fertilizer products. The difference between this rate and the net market realization by the manufacturing units of Urea is given as the Urea subsidy to the manufacturers/importers. The non-urea products come under the Nutrient Subsidy (NBS), where the government fixes the subsidy rate (in Rs/Kg) per nutrient (Nitrogen, Phosphate, Potash, and Sulphur) contained in the non-urea product on an annual basis.

According to the data from Fertiliser Statistics of Fertiliser Association of India, 2023, the NPK ratio of India has deteriorated from 5.9:2.4:1 in 1991–92 to 11.8:4.6:1 in 2022–23, which is much worse than the two ratios above. The disparity across the different zones in India is very significant, where it is 6.2:2.5:1, 34.3:10:1, 7.3:3.3:1 and 13.3:6:1 in east, north, south, and west zones, respectively.

High price differences between urea (a major source of Nutrient Nitrogen) and other decontrolled products force consumers to go after urea and substitute it for other high-priced fertilizer products like Di-Ammonium Phosphate and complex fertilizers (major sources of nutrients Phosphorous and Potassium) and hence led to an NPK ratio that is highly skewed towards the Nitrogen nutrient.

However, the budget allocated nearly 75% of the fertilizer subsidy to Urea (See Table 1). From 2021-22 to 2024-25, the subsidy shares for Urea increased from 68.3% to 74.9%, while that of the NBS share has decreased from 34.3% to 27.4%.

This structure of allocation will further deteriorate the existing NPK ratio of the soil which contradicts the suggested measure to ensure agricultural sustainability in the country.

Table 1: Share of different fertilizer subsidy heads in the Total fertilizer subsidy

Fertilizer Subsidy Heads	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (R.E)	2024-25 (B.E)
Indigenous Urea	36.8%	49.8%	54.1%	61.1%
Import of Urea	31.5%	17.3%	15.9%	13.8%
Total Urea	**68.3%**	**67.1%**	**69.9%**	**74.9%**

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[2] Emerged from a field-based study for two crops in the 1950s
[3] By Ramesh Chand and Pavithra S in 2015

Indigenous P&K Fertilizers	20.8%	19.9%	17.1%	16.1%
Import of P&K Fertilizers	13.5%	14.3%	14.8%	11.3%
Total NBS	34.3%	34.3%	31.9%	27.4%

Source 1: Union Budget, Various years, Govt of India

3. Contradiction II

The second contradiction is in terms of the promotion of natural farming and the promotion of alternative fertilizers to reduce the consumption of chemical fertilizers while also heavily investing in and subsidizing conventional fertilizers like urea. In the last few years, the government has stressed the need to move towards natural or organic farming[4]. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Chemicals & Fertilizers (2022-23) (Govt of India, 2023c) stresses to reduce urea use by 50 % in agriculture fields for soil health upgradation and gradually reduce the use of chemical fertilizers and eventually stop the use to protect soil health.

The Economic Survey 2021-22 (Govt of India, 2022) also specifies the importance of finding alternative fertilizers and reducing the use of chemical fertilizers in agriculture. Culminating all these, the government proposed a new program in the union budget, 2023-24, (Govt of India, 2023b) which is PM-PRANAM (PM Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment and Amelioration of Mother Earth) to promote alternative fertilizers in all the states and union territories and incentivize them in balanced use chemical fertilizers, which is possible through reducing the consumption of Urea, the most used nitrogenous fertilizer in India.

Through the 2023-24 budget, the government started facilitating the farmers to adopt natural farming through Bhartiya Prakritik Kheti Bio-Input Resource Centres. The Budget 2024-25 (Govt of India, 2024b) also aims to initiate 1 crore farmers across the country into natural farming in 2 years. However, the government is adopting conflicting policies through this.

On the one hand, it tries to reduce the consumption of chemical fertilizers through the promotion of natural farming and alternative fertilizers, and on the other hand, it promotes the consumption of conventional fertilizers like Urea by investing heavily in the sector. This can be seen from Figure 1. India is witnessing a massive investment boom mainly in conventional chemical fertilizers like Urea through the Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat schemes, especially since 2020-21 led by the public sector. Fertilizer Industry attracted Rs. 32783 crore investment in 3 years during 2020-21 to 2023-24. Among this, the public sector contributed Rs. 31458 crore which is 95.9 percent.

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[4] This can be seen from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches on 16th December 2021 at the National Conclave on Natural Farming to "liberate the country's soil from chemical fertilizers and pesticides" and on 1st January 2022 at a PM-KISAN programme urged the farmers to "switch to the chemical-free method of cultivation". On 28th May 2022 in the IFFCO seminar, the Prime Minister again pushed for organic farming by saying that 'it is the new mantra' and that it will reduce the dependence on other countries for fertilizer products.

Table 2: Cumulative investment in the fertilizer industry 2010-11 to 2023-24
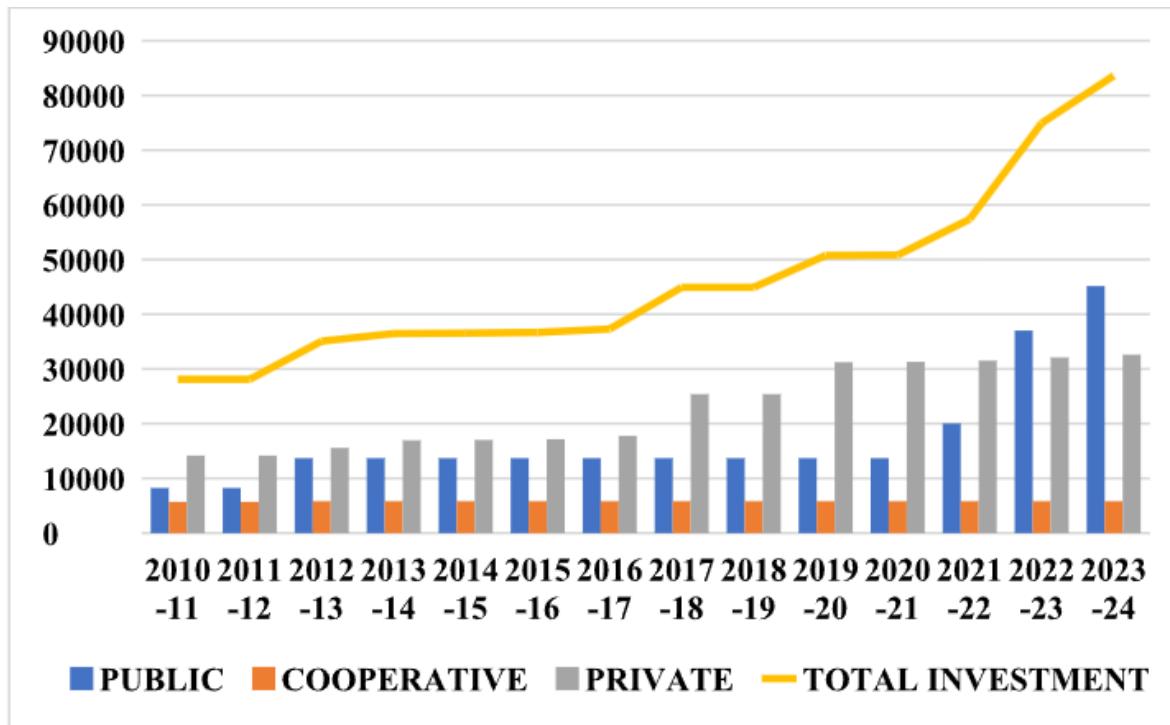
Source 2: Fertiliser Statistics, Fertiliser Association of India

4. World Fertilizer Consumption Scenario

However, compared to other countries, India's plant nutrient consumption is less. Table 2 presents the consumption of nutrients and the yield of paddy and wheat in selected countries in 2021. Countries like China, Bangladesh, Egypt, Korea, and Japan have much higher consumption of plant nutrients per hectare than India and in turn, they do have higher yields per hectare for crops like paddy and wheat than India. Hence, the point of increasing productivity by reducing the consumption of fertilizers in Union budgets and Economic surveys will yield adverse outcomes.

Table 3: Consumption of plant Nutrients per hectare of Arable land and land under permanent crops and yield of Paddy and Wheat in selected countries in 2021

Country	Consumption of plant Nutrients (Kg)	Paddy (kg/ha)	Wheat (kg/ha)
Egypt	379	10203	6454
Korea Republic	598	7114	5000
China	331	7114	5811
Bangladesh	328	4867	3300
Japan	206	7497	4986
India	**177**	**4214**	**3440**
World	124	4764	3492

Source 3: FAO Statistics

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the fertilizer sector in India is at a crossroads, struggling with conflicting policies and actions. While the government aims to reduce chemical fertilizer use and promote agricultural sustainability through initiatives like PM-PRANAM and support for natural farming, the heavy allocation of subsidies to urea and significant investments in conventional fertilizers suggest a contradictory approach. What India needs is scientific farming, which ensures food security in the world's largest populated country, rather than natural or organic farming. A move away from scientific farming will result in unfavourable outcomes as we have the example of Sri Lanka[5] that gave importance to organic farming. It will be too early to restrict the contributions of fertilizers in enhancing the productivity of agriculture and ensuring food security in the country through implementing these conflicting policies in India.

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[5] Sri Lanka completely banned the import of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on 6th May, 2021 through its 'vistas of prosperity and splendour' policy in 2019 and moved to organic farming. This had resulted in a decline in agriculture production and an uncontrollable price hike hence in massive protest from farmers. Sri Lanka, after six months, withdrew the decision and imported chemical fertilizers and pesticides in November, 2021.

Air Pollution:
A Silent Crisis More Urgent Than Ever

Smeer Unhale[1]

Abstract

Air pollution, responsible for 8 million deaths globally in 2021, is a pressing public health crisis often overlooked as a seasonal issue. This essay examines its causes, including vehicular emissions, construction, industrial pollution, stubble burning, and open waste dumping, and critiques the limitations of current governance frameworks. Despite advancements in municipal governance, institutional gaps hinder effective action against air pollution. The essay advocates for an ecosystem approach involving academic, regulatory, industrial, and community stakeholders, supported by emerging technologies like IoT sensors, AI, and digital twins. Addressing air pollution requires a whole-of-society approach, data-driven governance, and behavioral changes for sustainable outcomes.

1. Introduction: Air Pollution and Its Global Impact

According to a UNICEF press release, air pollution was responsible for approximately 8 million deaths globally in 2021. This staggering figure is ten times or 1000 percent more than the annual death toll attributed to World War II gas chambers. Despite these alarming numbers, air pollution is often treated as a seasonal issue, briefly highlighted during the winter months before fading from public discourse until the following year.

The problem is exacerbated by weather conditions during the winter, which overburden local air circulation systems, making it difficult to cleanse the air. As a result, urban air quality deteriorates, turning into what could aptly be described in a Raj Kapoor-esque movie title as, "India, Teri Hawa Bighadi."

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2. Air Pollution: An Invisible Pandemic

Air pollution is not merely a remote environmental concern but a pressing public health crisis comparable to a pandemic. Its silent, invisible nature belies its devastating impact, particularly in urban areas. The growing urban poly-crisis, including air pollution, could easily overwhelm municipal administrative boundaries, statutory powers, financial resources, and managerial capacities.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, with most urban activities halted, air quality improved dramatically. This temporary improvement highlighted the primary contributors to air pollution: vehicular emissions, construction activities, industrial pollution, and, in the case of northern Indian cities, stubble burning. Yet, the contribution of open dumpsites and untreated municipal waste remains underestimated in public discussions on air pollution.

3. A Brief History of Municipal Governance in India

To understand the institutional challenges in combating air pollution, it is important to review the history of municipal governance in India:

1. *The Municipal Phase (1850):* Indian cities entered the municipal governance phase with the implementation of Act No. 24 of 1850. This phase was characterized by city-level governance focusing on basic administration and service delivery.
2. *The Town Planning Phase (Post-1890s):* Health crises such as bubonic plague and cholera epidemics led to the establishment of town planning mechanisms through improvement trusts.
3. *The Parastatal Phase (1950s):* Around the time of independence, specialized agencies for water supply, sewerage, and electricity distribution were introduced. City buses, operated as state monopolies, became a common feature of urban transport.
4. *The Metropolitan Phase (1970s):* Organizations like the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) were established for regional land use planning and infrastructure development.
5. *The 74th Constitutional Amendment (1990s):* This amendment suggested environmental responsibilities in the 12th Schedule but left them largely indicative rather than mandatory.
6. *Post-2000 Innovations:* Central and state-run metro companies introduced mass rapid transit systems, while Smart City Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) were introduced in 2015. Private sector involvement has grown in areas such as data management.

Despite these developments, the institutional matrix remains inadequate to address emerging challenges like air pollution, carbon neutrality, and climate change.

4. The Role of Municipal Governments in Combating Air Pollution

Municipal governments play a crucial role in addressing air pollution but face significant limitations. While activities like construction, street sweeping, garbage fires, open dumping, and landfill sites fall within their jurisdiction, other major contributors, such as industrial emissions and vehicular pollution, often lie beyond their control.

The current institutional framework for tackling air pollution relies heavily on punitive mechanisms such as tribunals and pollution control boards. However, there is an urgent need to strengthen dedicated execution and implementation agencies. A sectoral framework needs to be reworked fundamentally, shifting from a punitive approach to one focused on execution and coordination.

5. Towards an Ecosystem Approach

An ecosystem or network approach is essential for combating air pollution. This approach should synchronize efforts across various stakeholders, including academic institutions, research organizations, regulatory bodies, industries, startups, media, and community-based organizations (CBOs). Currently, media coverage disproportionately focuses on activism, advocacy, and litigation, often sidelining actionable solutions.

Addressing air pollution requires a whole-of-society approach. This involves collaboration across all sectors, adoption of emerging technologies, and, most importantly, individual behavioral changes. Public participation and informed citizenship are essential to combat this invisible, silent crisis effectively.

6. Assessing the Real Extent of the Crisis

Accurate assessment of the air pollution crisis is a critical first step. This requires fostering an environment where genuine efforts are not punished, enabling better data collection and sharing. Data-driven governance and evidence-based policymaking are essential, especially in the rapidly urbanizing Global South.

6.1 Understanding the Air Quality Index (AQI)

The Air Quality Index (AQI) is primarily a communication tool designed to simplify complex air pollution data for public understanding. However, its limitations must be acknowledged.

6.2 Variations in AQI Frameworks

Different countries, such as the US, Canada, China, Japan, and India, have their own AQI frameworks. These vary in terms of monitoring frequency, benchmark pollution levels, and the number of pollutants measured (ranging from three to eight).

For instance, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calculates AQI based on six indicators: PM2.5, PM10, carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide. The highest single sub-index among these is reported as the AQI.

India's National AQI (NAQI) employs a different formula. This highlights the inconsistencies in air quality measurements, especially when data is sourced from diverse platforms. The reduction of air quality to a single number creates a paradoxical disconnect between the actual situation and public perception.

6.3 Limitations and Media Sensationalism

Media sensationalism around AQI and WHO standards often evokes negative emotions such as fear, guilt, and blame. Environmental journalism tends to follow predictable templates, focusing more on criticism than solutions.

7. Leveraging Emerging Technologies

Despite the availability of low-cost, indigenous technologies and real-time data sensors, cities have been slow to adopt them due to concerns over cost audits and lack of precedence. Wider, localized air quality monitoring can prepare an informed citizenry. Emerging technologies that should be prioritized include:

1. IoT-Based Sensors: Low-cost, real-time sensors for localized air quality monitoring.
2. Earth Observation Systems: Satellite-based tools for large-scale data collection.
3. Digital Twins: Advanced modeling systems for simulating urban environments.
4. AI and Photonics: Predictive analytics and advanced sensing technologies for better decision-making.

7.1 Personalized Advisory Systems

Air pollution disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. Integrated data systems and citizen apps could enable personalized advisories, improving public health outcomes.

7.2 Developing a Data Economy for Environmental Challenges

India's environmental data is often acquired by global entities and sold back to Indian businesses, highlighting a missed opportunity to develop a local data economy. By fostering local expertise in environmental data management, the Global South could enhance awareness and drive effective actions.

Conclusion

Air pollution is a silent pandemic that demands immediate attention. The institutional framework for addressing this crisis needs significant rethinking, moving

from punitive measures to coordinated, execution-focused efforts. By integrating traditional governance structures with modern technologies and fostering collaboration across all sectors, India can pave the way for sustainable urban living. Addressing air pollution is not just an environmental imperative but a critical public health and societal challenge that requires urgent and collective action.

Colonial Legacy and India's Agriculture Development:
A Critical Assessment

Pracheta Acharya[1]

Abstract

British-induced capitalist growth in agriculture came with a cost, which is still being borne by today's farmers. Extensive canal systems, commercial agriculture, the emergence of private land markets, and interlinkages of localized markets glorify the British government's efforts. But we fail to see the other side of this 'so-called' development which led to forceful commercialization, loss of food security, famine, imposition of global price fluctuations on farmers, the institutionalization of the money-lending system and resultant indebtedness, loss of common resources so as the negotiation power, and degradation of farmers to tenants. The scars of British intervention did not heal right after the independence. Although, the green revolution carried some hope for self-sufficiency in food crop production, soon under the effect of neoliberalism, structural adjustment policies and trade liberalization, India's agricultural production experienced a 'recolonization' situation. Land reforms did not truly work, rather, they reinforced the inequality of the British era. In this regard, inclusive rural development has become a priority. The role of co-operatives, balanced crop production, crop diversification, improved access to microfinance and procurement facilities, and knowledge dissemination are fundamental to rural development policies.

Keywords: British intervention, Criticism, India's agriculture, Post-colonial society

1. Introduction

India's agriculture is low-productive compared to the 'developed' West. A common assumption lies in the reluctance of farmers to technological changes, which has led to low-productive subsistence farming practices. Therefore, the blame is on internal factors. This notion is biased as it fails to see external reasons in a post-colonial economy, such as the intervention of Britishers.

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Whether British rule has made India's agriculture more dynamic and prospective is a long-debated question in the literature. This article aims to leap into the debate to see how British intervention has shaped India's agriculture and identify the specific elements that contributed to India's agricultural underdevelopment. Gunnar Myrdal argued that British intervention was one of the reasons for the twentieth-century deterioration of Asian agriculture, and India was no exception (Todaro & Smith, 2015).

The general claim is that India's agriculture was static and less capitalist before the British arrival. The markets were very limited. However, British rule planted the seed of rural capitalism as evident from the rapid commercialization in the 19th and 20th centuries. During this period, crop production was mainly cash-crop-oriented.

A new form of agricultural economy – 'plantation' was introduced. With the development of railways and ports, trade in agricultural commodities significantly scaled up with the remarkable expansion of the agricultural market (Roy, 2020). Such changes apparently infer agricultural development under British rule but fail to see the other side of the story, for instance, the threat to the local food crops and food security, farmers' plight due to market fluctuations, exploitation of farmers by moneylenders, loss of common rights on the land and a shift from independent cultivators to tenants.

The article focuses on the impacts of British intervention and today's Indian agricultural deterioration. British rule infused significant changes into India's rural agricultural economy. Indeed, some policies added dynamism to the static and localized agriculture sector, such as the irrigational development and expansion of the agricultural market. However, we also need to consider the cost of this capitalist development.

2. Questionable Developmental Elements in Agriculture in the British Era

Following a capitalist approach, under British rule, India recorded a growth in agriculture as commercialization imparted the scope for capital accumulation. From the mainstream economic perspective, commercial agriculture is more valuable than subsistence farming due to better profit.

However, here lies the question of who all gained. Landlords and the rich peasants benefited from the new agricultural system but created a limited scope for small peasants. Commercialization requires enough resources or cash to undertake risk as these crops are susceptible to price fluctuation in the market. But small peasants lack resources.

Moreover, the poor peasants produced their food without dependence on the market. It did not remain the same in commercialized agriculture. Actual agricultural progress for these small peasants required appropriate training, government support, and incentives before exposing them to market-based agriculture. However, the British failed to realize this human capital (Klein, 2008).

In Epstein's view (Klein, 2008), the cotton cultivators of western India gained much prosperity by reaping the benefit of the global cotton demand during the American Civil War as Manchester lost its raw cotton supply chain from the American South. The cooperative credit helped to get rid of moneylenders. A section of rich peasants emerged out of the new commercial agricultural system. However, the cooperative credit facilities did not reach most farmers (Klein, 2008), who could not bypass moneylenders. Also, the spread of literacy and knowledge was not uniform, depriving small farmers of gains from commercial advancement. Indian agriculture is highly dependent on rainfall. The variability of monsoonal rain poses a threat to Indian farmers. To deal with this situation, crop diversification is the most feasible solution. However, the specialization of cash crops in many provinces did not allow crop diversification to reach a desirable level.

Railways and irrigation – the other widely regarded developmental elements in the agricultural sector complemented the commercialization process. Extensive canal construction took place in the northwestern India. Irrigational progress was beneficial for the dry regions as more lands became arable. However, the motive behind such developmental constructions was to increase productivity and British revenue. Although there is a constraint of data availability, Roy (2020) has argued that an increase in income did not matter much for the farmers as rental value also increased. Rent for the irrigated lands was the highest in the Ryotwari system.

Additionally, these extensive canal systems did not work effectively in the wet regions as they hampered the natural drainage system (Roy, 2020). Railways revolutionized agriculture since the transportation of crops became easy across areas. It was possible to integrate the otherwise localized markets well with the help of improved connectivity. However, this explanation hides the truth of the easy exportation of food grains out of the locality, posing a threat to local food security (Roy, 2020). Britishers displayed irrigation and railways as symbols of development, which benefited only a fraction of the rural population, keeping the agrarian masses entangled with malnutrition, famine, and indebtedness (Klein, 2008).

Thus, agricultural development under British rule is elusive and requires further examination. As observed by Ira Klein, agricultural transformation and the coexistence of poverty question agrarian prosperity. Other aspects of British intervention in the rural economy of India are as follows:

2.1 Threat to the local food crops and food security

Britishers found a possibility of capitalist gain on Indian soil. They adopted the commercialization policy to benefit from the global demand for cash crops. Local food crops started losing importance because of their lesser economic value in the worldwide market. Previously, agriculture was driven by local needs, but with the onset of British rule, the global market started determining crop production. British linked Indian agriculture with global capitalism, which led to capital accumulation, but this capitalist development came at the cost of food crops in many places.

There was a significant increase in non-food or marketable crops compared to consumable crops (Roy, 2020). There were also many instances of forced commercialization in the British era. Let us understand this with the help of indigo, opium, and jute stories.

Opium was a great source of profit and a much-needed export item for Britain to maintain a balance against imported tea from China. So, they targeted the moist and fertile lands to expand opium cultivation in the eastern Gangetic plain. Although cash-advances in opium cultivation played a significant role in attracting cultivators, in some cases, village headmen employed force. The fertile lands that family farms used for food crop production were forcefully converted to commercial units (Richards, 1981). British policy pushed farmers to depend on the market for food crops, which led to a dependence on cash, making farmers more vulnerable to money lenders.

There was a rising demand for indigo in the 19th century because of the growing textile industry, and there was an expansion of indigo in Bengal, often at the cost of the local food-crop chain. The forced commercialization led to an indigo revolt in the first half of the 19th century, resulting in a decline in Bengal's dominant status as an indigo producer. In contrast, Bihar, which was predominantly a rice producer earlier, replaced Bengal in indigo production (Chaudhuri, 1970).

Jute was known to Indians through ropes, clothes, and bags far before the Britishers arrived. However, in the 19th century, the picture was different as jute production experienced a significant increase due to the growing international trade and demand for gunny bags. In this context, the emergence of the Bengal jute industry was an important phenomenon.

Farmers of North and Eastern floodplains produced jute as a major crop throughout the 19th century. British officials often used to justify that jute never substituted food crops (Saikia, 2015). However, evidence points to the sacrifice of food crops to a greater extent. The attempt at region-specific cash crop production threatened local food security. Although irrigational development benefited grain production, such as rice and wheat, it was not enough to support the British government's investment in local food grains. It is worth mentioning that the acreage and yield grew very rapidly for non-food grains from the 1890s to the 1990s, but the growth rate in food grains was negative (Roy, 2020). It implies that the overall picture of rural development was not that impressive.

The losing focus on the foodgrains and other distorted policies of the British government were responsible for famines in India. Natural factors such as flood and drought were present, but British policies amplified the threat to food security. Amidst commercialization in Indian agriculture, the export of foodgrains from India impacted the local food availability, intensifying the famine during a bad crop year (Roy, 2020). The Bengal famine is one well-known example that occurred due to faulty British policies. The British government could have dealt with the famine better by leveraging railways to distribute food. Instead, they restricted rice imports from Burma as Japan occupied it (Sen, 1983).

2.2. A sudden exposure to market fluctuations

Britishers linked Indian local markets with the global economy through agricultural trade and commercialization. It is often argued that such linkage made capital accumulation possible in the subsistence agricultural economy. As the market expanded, demand for agricultural commodities rose, creating new profit opportunities. After the 1870s, the price of farming commodities went high and persisted for a substantial period (Roy, 2020). However, farmers were far from the actual beneficiaries. It was the British traders who made windfall profits out of the exploitation of Indian soil and crops that ultimately fueled the British economy.

On the other hand, Indian farmers had to bear the brunt of global price fluctuations because of the sudden transition from subsistence farming to commercial farming. The share of agriculture in GDP increased, and rich peasants did gain. However, smaller and marginal peasants became victims of indebtedness, a volatile global market, and a shortage of food crops (Roy, 2020). Cash crops are more sensitive to price fluctuations than food crops, leading to financial risks for farmers.

2.3. Farmers became easy prey to moneylenders

British intervention changed the position of moneylenders in an agricultural society. Moneylenders are quite an integral part of the rural economy. They prevailed even before the British rule. However, with the British intervention, their social power increased due to the emergence of the land market. Lands remained no longer a public resource. They turned to private property (Murali, 2010) as an accessible asset to take loans.

On the one hand, land relations were changing, and on the other hand, commercialization was taking place. Farmers needed cash to bear the cost of commercial farming, deal with market fluctuations, and even for basic survival needs as they suddenly shifted away from subsistence farming. Poor farmers with no assets naturally became dependent on moneylenders to meet the growing need for money (Todaro & Smith, 2015).

Moneylenders benefited significantly from the British agricultural and land policies. They took advantage of the monetary needs of farmers. Moneylenders would deliberately fix a very high interest rate so the peasants would fail to repay, and moneylenders could take away lands from the peasants to resell them to the big landlords at a better price. Moneylenders even manipulated farmers to take more loans to tactfully grab land to sell them in the land market (Todaro & Smith, 2015). Many farmers lost their lands and turned to agricultural laborers due to indebtedness. The percentage share of agricultural laborers increased in the British era as small artisans lost their livelihood and small peasants lost their lands (Roy, 2020). Gunnar Myrdal has identified this power rise of the moneylending class as one of the reasons behind the 19th-century deterioration of the agricultural economy.

2.4 From independent cultivators to tenants: The deterioration of farmers' status

Before the arrival of the Britishers, India had no private property rights on the land. Peasants enjoyed a safety net within the common land regime. The village chief was responsible for providing public services and basic amenities. Farmers could negotiate with the village chief during drought or floods. A redistribution of land was also possible to ensure food safety (Todaro & Smith, 2015). However, with the intervention of the British, the common lands were targeted to enact private property law. Britishers perceived common land as wasteful and unutilized.

They enclosed land under the formal framework of 'permanent settlements' in Bangla, Bihar, and Odisha, and 'Ryotwari settlements' in the Western and southern parts (Whitehead, 2010). In the permanent settlement, the landlords were given private property rights in return for a fixed revenue to the company. The common land rights were abolished, landlords assumed absolute power, and farmers lost their power of negotiation and became tenants (Todaro & Smith, 2015). In the ryotwari settlement, although peasants had land rights, the rate of revenue was very high and not fixed.

3. Post-Independence era

British intervention left a deep scar on the Indian rural economy, as reflected in the immediate period of independence. India lost its self-sufficiency in food crop production, grappling with malnutrition and hunger (Doctor, 2020). By the time India gained independence, the whole economy had become dependent on food imports to a larger extent (Dantwala, 1976). The glorious picture of commercialization, agricultural dynamism, and capital accumulation faded.

After a long period of poor performance in Agriculture, the invention of New Agricultural Technology in the 1960s, known as the Green Revolution, carried some hope, especially, in food crop production. Although in some places, food crops experienced an increase in productivity, overall, India recorded a diversification towards non-food crops starting from the 1980s throughout the 1990s under the effect of neoliberalism (Bhalla & Singh, 2009). India's crop production was once again driven by the global market and not necessarily by local demand. In the view of Utsa Patnaik, today's export-oriented crop production in India can be defined as 'recolonization' with a close tie to global capitalism, serving the Western world.

The structural adjustment policies and liberalization in agriculture further worsened the situation. The continuous fall in coarse grain production posed severe threats to the food security of agricultural laborers and small farmers. Who benefited from the new open policy? Of course, a few capitalist entrepreneurs and metropoles reproduced a similar picture of colonial agriculture (Patnaik, 1996).

Commercial agriculture requires enough resources, a lack of which constrained small farmers in British India. In a neoliberal economy, the burden is again on the small farmers to cope with reduced government investment.

The majority of Indian farmers are small and marginal, and they are unable to take the risk of cash crop production without the government's assistance. Just like British policy did not benefit the mass rural people, the current neo-liberal era has produced the same scenario.

A noteworthy phenomenon in the post-independence period was the land reform program to eradicate the intermediaries by fixing a land ceiling on land and distributing the rest of the land among the landless and marginalized farmers. This program had the larger goal of reducing poverty and inequality. Although the program was able to abolish intermediaries, big landlords managed to bypass the land ceiling (Basu, 2007). Even today, a smaller fraction of people control the larger part of the land in India and receive disproportionate benefits compared to the actual tillers, which has its roots in British land policies.

A superficial understanding of the British introduced modern irrigation and railways paints a rosy picture of India's agriculture. But a careful examination unveils the darker side. For instance, extensive canal-based irrigation made rice cultivation possible in North-West India. However, rice is not a suitable crop to produce in semi-arid northern India, causing environmental issues such as salinization of soil due to overirrigation, decline in the groundwater level, and arsenic contamination (Singh, 2000). These are the 'blessings' of the same glorious irrigational revolution.

4. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The article highlights where Indian agriculture went wrong during the British intervention. For example, commercialization assisted in capital accumulation but not in the hands of the masses. Irrigation expanded arable land but also invited environmental consequences, and change in the land system provided private ownership of land but it remained a powerful tool in a few hands. Most importantly, colonial 'modern' agriculture and land systems have succeeded in making their way to independent India and have shaped the current agricultural scenario.

The inequality in land persisted in the post-independence period, rather, geographical inequality in terms of agricultural capital concentration intensified with the Green Revolution (Dhanagare, 1987). Economic reforms of 1991 and the structural lending program facilitated export-oriented food crop production (often at the cost of local food grains), catering to the global market, particularly the demand of the Global North (Chand, 1998). In the current neo-liberal context, where agriculture is driven by the global market, the following suggestions are fundamental to ensure inclusive rural development.

a. Export-oriented agriculture has failed to benefit the masses. Crop diversification and including food crops in the crop profile are crucial for small farmers from both livelihood and food security perspectives (Kankwamba et al., 2012). It would be illogical in the neoliberal regime to prescribe restrictions on agricultural trade.

However, there must be a balance between exportable crops and basic grains such as coarse grains, which are the staple food for most small and marginal farmers. A suitable crop diversification policy towards food crops needs to be encouraged by the government. If high-value crops are encouraged to produce, the government must invest in production input.

b. India-wide proper procurement system must be built to boost food crop production. Except for North India, the rest of the parts lack procurement facilities and need immediate attention (Amir, 2013).

c. Semi-formal microfinance facilities must be available and accessible to every rural household to improve their investment potential in agriculture.

d. The government needs to take responsibility for specific development roles, such as providing training to poor producers, conducting new research in agriculture, and disseminating crop-management knowledge at the grassroots level.

e. In the present-day context, cooperatives have a significant role in agriculture. The scarce resources of small farmers can be put together through cooperatives to produce crops more efficiently. In a neoliberal regime, where government investment has fallen, cooperatives can be a solution to overcome this investment barrier. Cooperatives get loans more easily than individual farmers. Cooperatives have the potential for inclusive rural development (Wedig & Wiegratz, 2018).

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Status of Tribal Migration for Employment in Jharkhand

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Abstract

Paper emphases on tribal migration for employment in Jharkhand. Against this backdrop, the paper focuses trend and pattern of tribal migration for employment in the state as well as in the country. Jharkhand is one of the tribal-dominated states of India where more than one-third population is tribe. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 and Census 2011 are used for data analysis. The result shows that the employment-related migration of tribes has increased compared to the last decade in India as well as Jharkhand. Analysis shows the casualization of tribal employment in the country. There is an inverse relationship between migration for employment and multidimensional poverty in Jharkhand. Thus, the paper accentuates the significance of understanding the process of tribal migration leaving their traditional set-up. It emphasizes the need for effective strategies for stabilizing the floating labor pool.

Keywords: Tribal Migrants, Spatial Dimension Trend and Pattern

1. Introduction

The paper focuses on the diversification of tribal work from traditional agriculture and forest-based economy to non-traditional sectors in urban areas. Over 90 percent of the labor force of India engaged in informal sectors. As per the Census of India and the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), there are three types of migrants in the country: permanent, semi-permanent, and temporary migrants. NSS78th round, 4.2 percent of temporary visitors from rural are migrated to other states whereas from urban areas 32 percent migrated to other states. Srivastava (2020) nearly 60-65 million workers are temporary and circulatory migrants who work in the informal sector. Almost 40% of these migrants work in the construction sector and 15% in agriculture. The rest are engaged in manufacturing, transport, and other services. With accompanying family members, their numbers would not be less than a hundred million.

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Dandekar, and Ghai (2020) most of the migrants worked in the informal sector like brick kilns, construction sites, services (maids to guards to drivers) industrial non-skilled workers, small and tiny roadside businesses like tea shops, dhabas, small eateries, hotels, restaurants. Many tribal migrants returned to their native places during the pandemic via various modes of transportation. Some came by buses/trains; some were taken out by different NGOs or Government aid, while many others also started their journey on foot. A large number of them want to stay back in origin with their families and work here. However, their integration into the employable mass seems unclear as per current policies of the Government while many of them went back to their destinations to seek post-pandemic work.

2. Literature Review

Tribal migration in search of work has been a burning phenomenon ever since the British Colonial period. Although, it has become a part and partial of life of the tribes in contemporary times. The trend of migration reflects that people leave their origin for financial betterment and better employment opportunities (World Economic Forum 2017; Chandra, J., Paswan, B. 2020). The current study proposes to focus on not only all migrant workers working in the informal sector but also the poor and vulnerable tribes. Most of the tribal migrants hail from underdeveloped areas of the country. At the destination, they work in the informal sector, mostly without written job contracts, paid leave facilities, and social security. Kujur and Minz (2021) observed that the migrants faced both mental and physical difficulties because of unawareness of labor laws and their implications.

In Jharkhand, for land acquisition for mining and development projects, tribes are displaced and migrate for work (Ashwani Kumar and Deogharia, 2017). Lack of employment opportunities is the prominent reason for the out-migration of tribes in Jharkhand (Deogharia 2012). Further, he observed that on average migration is about 2.3 members per household in the villages of Gumla, Simdega, and Lohardaga districts of the state. The destination of the tribes was Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh because of the availability of work.

Seasonal migration of the tribe, during agriculture lean seasons, from rural to urban areas was noticed in Gujarat (T. K. Jayaraman, 1979). Lack of local employment was one of the causes of tribal migration for employment from western Odisha (Ruchira Bhattamishra 2020). Less educated and poor tribal girls were migrating to ten million cities in India for employment (Planning Commission GOI). The background and relation were the main factors of migration and getting jobs among tribes of Jharkhand and West Bengal (Rajib Lochan Dhar, 2014).

Tribal migration has a long history since the 19th century; migration was the result of the double-edged, colonial policy of land alienation and labor recruitment (Singh, V., Jha, K. 2004). Pranav D. (2018) found that the rural population of the country is largely heading toward the urban areas with at least 25-30 people per minute for a better livelihood.

The migrant workers move out of their villages in search of employment, either they migrate alone or sometimes migrate along with their families. They decide to live in miserable conditions in the urban setup rather than living a life of misery at the origin.

Agrarian distress in rural areas is one of the leading causes of outmigration among tribes. The major reasons for agrarian distress range from small landholding, infertile land, lack of irrigation facilities low investments in agriculture, and debt-ridden farming (Dandekar, and Ghai, 2020). The current remigration of the workers is more distress-driven because their local economies have failed to provide them with sustainable livelihood choices. The escape of the return migrants' shows that a large number of them belong to the area of agrarian distress in a state like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha.

These areas remain underdeveloped after the post-liberalization period due to a lack of political will (EPW, 2020). Mohanty & et.al. (2016) found that federal migration accounts for a larger part of employment-related migration from the less-developed states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. Migration can be studied at two levels; firstly, the macro level is based on aggregated data of origin and destination and see the attraction power at both places while the second is based on microdata that is based on the attributes of the migrants (Margolis, 1977, pp. 139-142).

3. Data Sources and Methodology

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 and Census of India 2011 are used for data analysis. This is a descriptive analysis. The scatter plot used in which district-wise the association between tribal migration for employment and other variables like tribal literacy, level of urbanization, MPI (Multi-dimensional poverty index), district-wise percentage forested areas, and percentage tribal population are seen.

4. Data Sources and Methodology

4.1. *Macro Scenario of Employment*

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 shows that about 32.4 percent workforce was self-employed in urban India. Almost 52 percent of rural households have a major source of income through self-employment. The average income of self-employed workers was ₹8,000 per month, which is the lowest in the income bracket.

It reflects that the rural economy is not in the condition to absorb surplus return laborers. During 2017-18, the share of income of casual laborers was 25 percent in total rural households. The equivalent figure in urban areas was 11.8 percent.

The status of informal employment in the non-agriculture sector and AGEGC sector[3] has also been given in the PLFS. According to the usual status in non-agriculture and AGEGC sectors, around 68.4 percent of workers were engaged in the informal sector in the country. The figure for rural India was 72 percent, and the corresponding figure for urban India was 64.2 percent.

Figure 1:: Percentage Distribution of Workers in by Broad Usual Status in Employment for Each Social Group
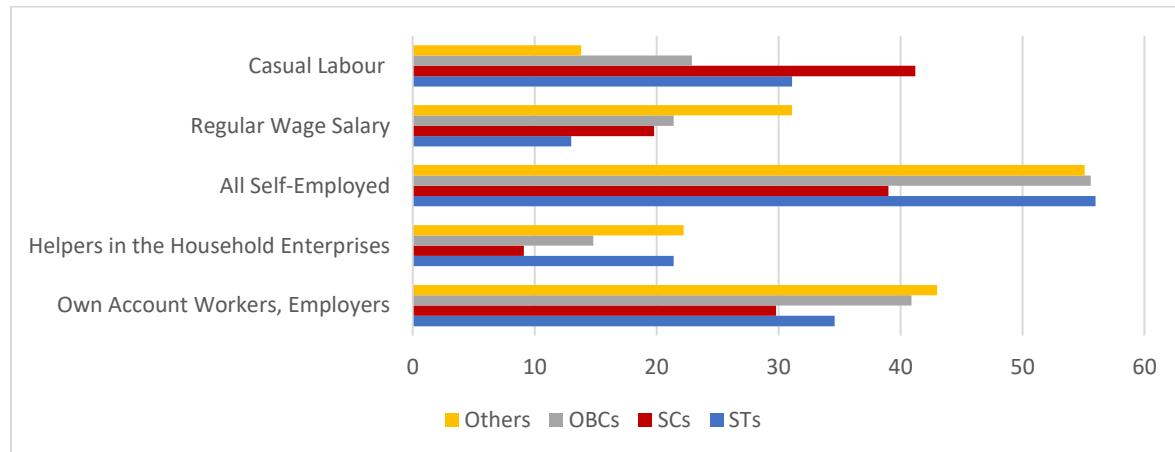
Figure one reflects the casualization of work in SCs and STs groups in India. The percentage of regular wage salary employees is the lowest among scheduled tribes followed by scheduled caste. Self-employment is also exceptionally high among scheduled tribes of the country. The proportion of scheduled tribes in household enterprises is also high among scheduled tribes. In the case of my account, work is also high among scheduled tribes of the country.

According to PLF (2017-18), almost 71 % of the regular salaried workers in the non-agriculture sector had no written job contract. In rural India, 69.2 % of regular salaried workers in the non-agriculture sector had no written job contract, and the same number for urban India was 72.4 percent. The workers with no written job contract are in a precarious situation.

Again, in India, around 54.2% of regular salaried employees in the non-agriculture sector were not eligible for paid leave. In rural and urban India, the figure was 56.2% and 52.8% respectively. In India, 49.6 % of regular salaried employees in the non-agriculture sector were not eligible for any social security benefit, and the equivalent figure for rural and urban India was 52.5 percent and 47.7 percent respectively. It reflects socioeconomic vulnerability among the workers.

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[3] The agriculture sector Excluding Growing Crops, plant propagation, and the combined production of crops and animals without a specialised production of crops or animals

Maps: Reasons for Tribal Migration 2011
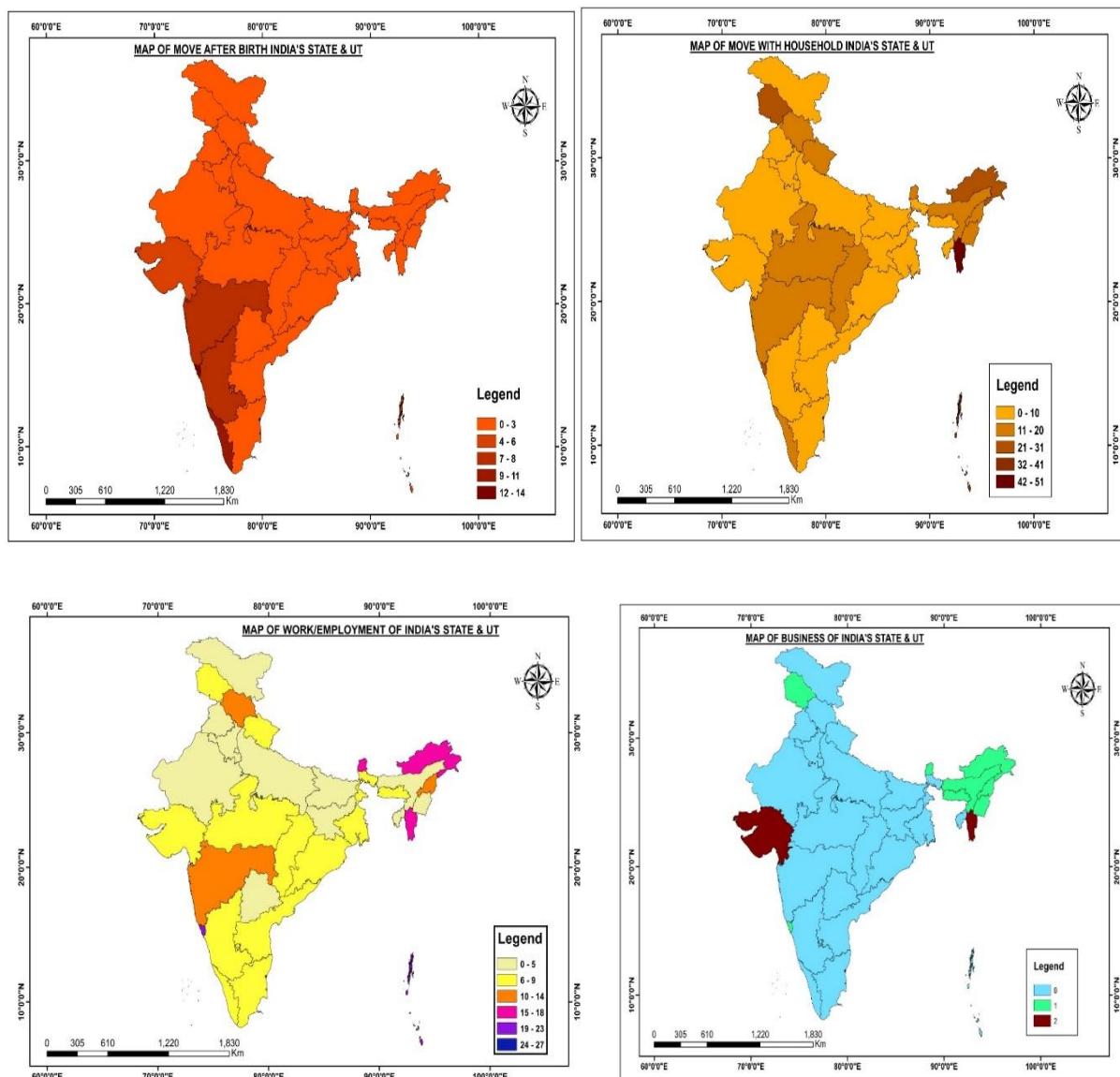
Tribal migration for education is noticeably high in coastal Andhra, Mizoram, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. It is the medium in Gujrat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Uttara Khand and Jammu and Kashmir. It is the lowest in Jharkhand and other states of India. Although migration related to marriage is the highest in central Indian states, it is the lowest in Punjab Haryana, Ladhakh, Telangana, Mizoram, Manipur, and Meghalaya. The migration for other reasons is very high in Tamil Nadu, Manipur, Mizoram, and Meghalaya (Maps).

The reasons for work/employment has increased from 2001 to 2011. Apart from the migration for education, moves after birth, and moves with household marriage have increased in a decade while a slightly declination has been observed in other areas and businesses (table 1).
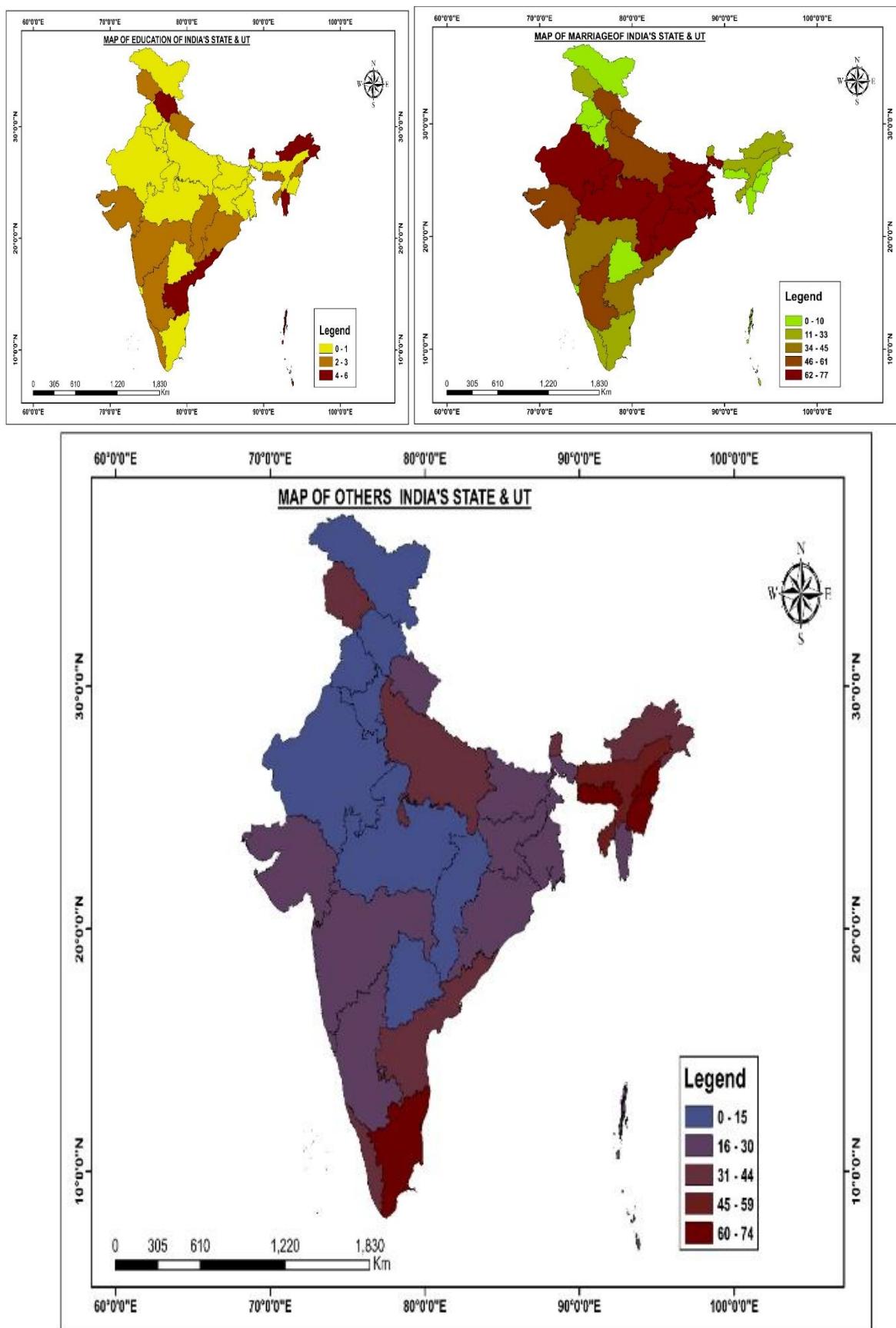
4.2. *Tribal Migration Based on Spatial Dimensions in Jharkhand*

Tribal migration for employment in the state is uneven. The tribal migration is the highest in the Ranchi district followed by the east and west Sighbhum district. It is the lowest in the Chatra district of Jharkhand. It is a matter of concern to think that the large number migration of employment within the state is higher in the Kolhan region.

Figure 2: Percentage of Tribal Migration for Employment within the State/UT 2011
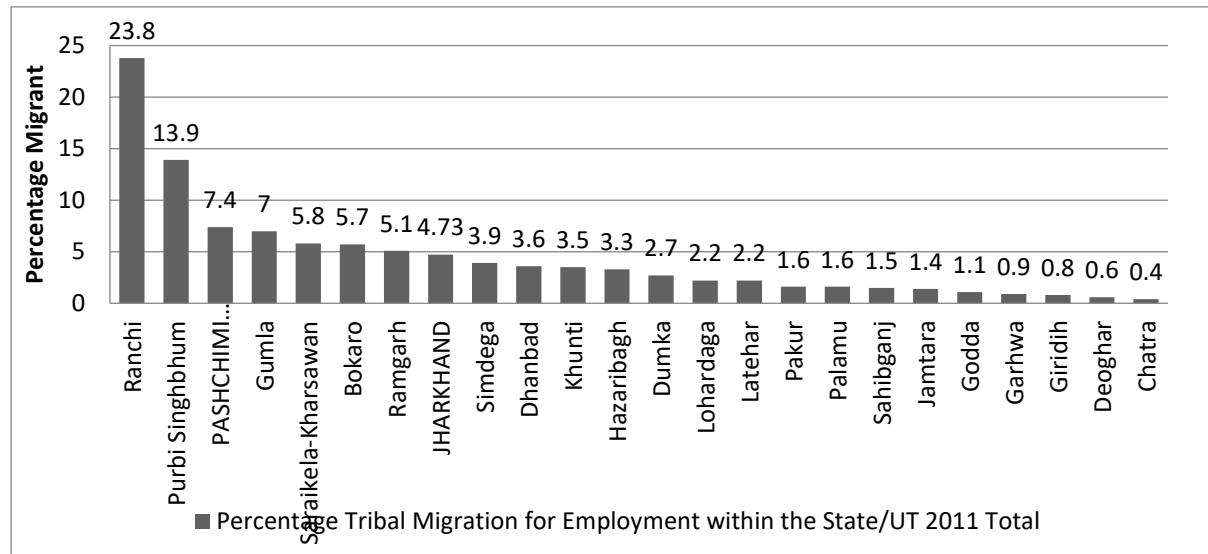
Tribal migration within the state for employment is almost 5 percent. A similar pattern can be observed for inter-district and intra-district migration for the state. Apart from unclassified migration, in the majority of the cases, an intra-district migration is higher for employment compared to the other two categories.

Table 1: Pattern of Migration with Reasons

State	Reasons for Migration	Employment	Business	Education	Marriage	Moved after birth	Moved with household	Others
Jharkhand	intra-district migrants	4.73	0.16	1.83	74.76	0.7	6.22	11.6
	Intra-district migrants	3.21	0.15	1.65	76.97	0.67	5.07	12.28
	Inter-district Migrant	10.26	0.18	2.57	67	0.75	10.36	8.88
	Unclassifiable	14.81	0.26	2.25	54.51	1.76	14.65	11.76

Source 1: Census of India 2011

4.3. A Trend of Migration in Jharkhand

The tribal migration for employment has increased from 2001 to 2011. Furthermore, education-related migration, moving after birth, moving with a household and marriage-related reasons for migration have increased in the states.

Table 2: Pattern of Migration in Jharkhand

Reasons for Migration in Jharkhand 2001 and 2011		
Reasons for Migration	2,011	2001
Marriage	74.8	74.6
Others	11.6	15.4
Moved with Household	6.2	4.4
Work/Employment	4.7	3.8
Education	1.8	1.4
Moved after birth	0.7	0.3
Business	0.0	0.1

Source 2: Cencus 2011

Table four presents a comprehensive picture of the migration in the state like percentage of tribal migrants is high in the Ranchi district while urbanization and tribal literacy are also better in the district. Although, the district has a medium tribal population (35.76%) and issues job cards for tribes is also low. Multidimensional poverty is low in the district. The highest percentage tribal population is observed in the Khunti district where migration is medium and urbanization is low.

Table 3: Determinates of Tribal Migration in Jharkhand

District	Percentage Tribal Migration for Employment(2011)	Urbanisation(2011)	Tribal literacy(2011)	Forested Covered(2021)	MPI(2022)	Tribal Population(2011)	ST MGNREGA Card Issued (2014)
Ranchi	23.8	43.14	67	22.93	15.8	35.76	8.3
Dhanbad	3.6	58.13	65	10.7	17.09	8.68	3.6
Giridih	0.8	8.51	53	18.26	30.29	9.74	4.2
Purbi Singhbhum	13.9	55.56	67	30.34	15.1	28.51	9.5
Bokaro	5.7	47.7	63	19.98	15.29	12.4	2.6
Palamu	1.6	11.65	55	27.67	32.34	9.34	2.6
Hazaribagh	3.3	15.87	59	38.35	26.1	7.02	1.3
Pashchimi Singhbhum	7.4	14.51	49	46.63	47.81	67.31	12.1
Deoghar	0.6	17.32	55	8.31	37.04	12.13	6.5

Garhwa	0.9	5.27	51	34.98	35.84	15.56	2.6
Dumka	2.7	6.82	52	15.36	37.98	43.22	
Godda	1.1	4.9	47	18.68	36.36	21.26	4.7
Sahibganj	1.5	13.88	44	27.82	48.45	26.8	7.8
Saraikela-Kharsawan	5.8	24.29	59	21.63	23.16	35.18	3.6
Chatra	0.4	6.04		47.93	37	4.37	1.2
Gumla	7	6.35	56	26.92	30.76	68.94	7.1
Ramgarh	5.1	44.13	64	24.7	18.06	21.19	1.5
Pakur	1.6	7.5	40	15.85	49.87	42.1	7.8
Jamtara	1.4	9.58	53	5.85	28.97	30.4	7.7
Latehar	2.2	7.13	50	56	41.68	45.54	6.5
Kodarma	0.3	19.72	56	40.28	28.21	0.96	0.2
Simdega	3.9	7.16	57	32.95	31.41	70.78	3.8
Khunti	3.5	8.46	54	36.04	33.38	73.25	5.2
Lohardaga	2.2	12.43	57	33.58	22.71	56.89	5.4

Multidimensional poverty is the highest in the Pakur, Sahibganj, and West Singhbhum districts of the state. The figure reflects that Tribal migration for employment and MDI have a negative relation, when Tribal migration for employment increases the Multi-dimensional poverty is decreased (figure 3). However, there is a positive relationship between tribal migration for employment and literacy rate among tribes. Urbanization and migration for employment have also a positive association.

Scatter Plot of the Determinants of Tribal Migration for the Employment and Attribute of the District:
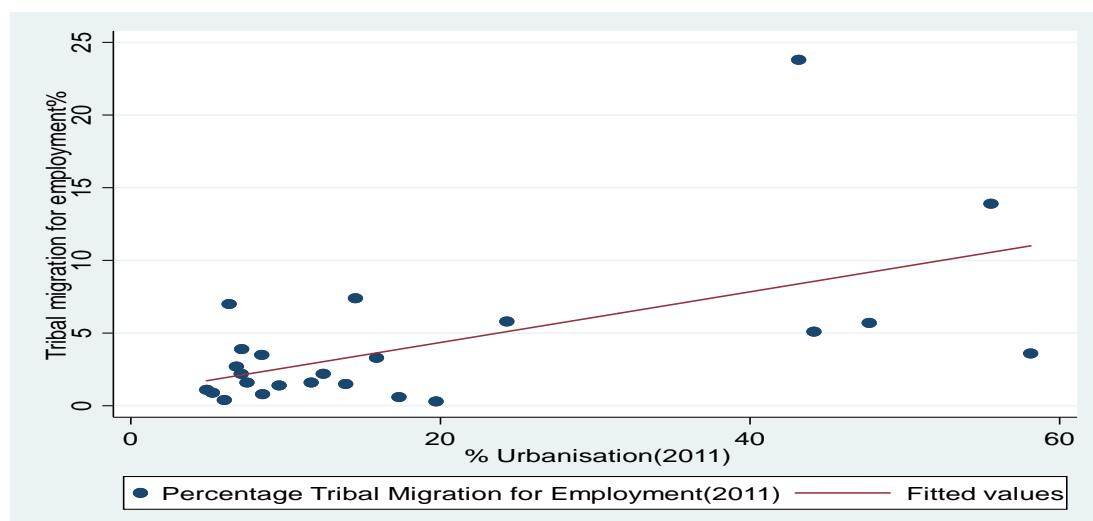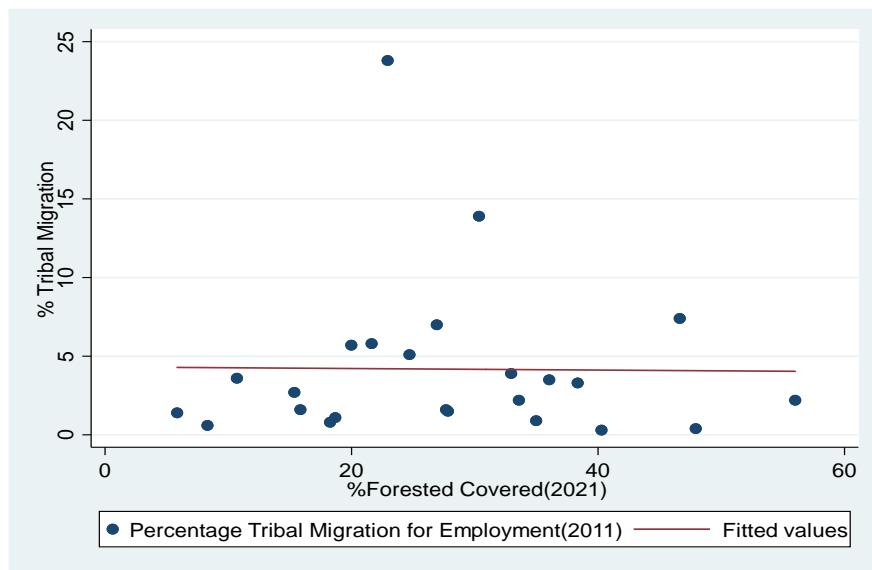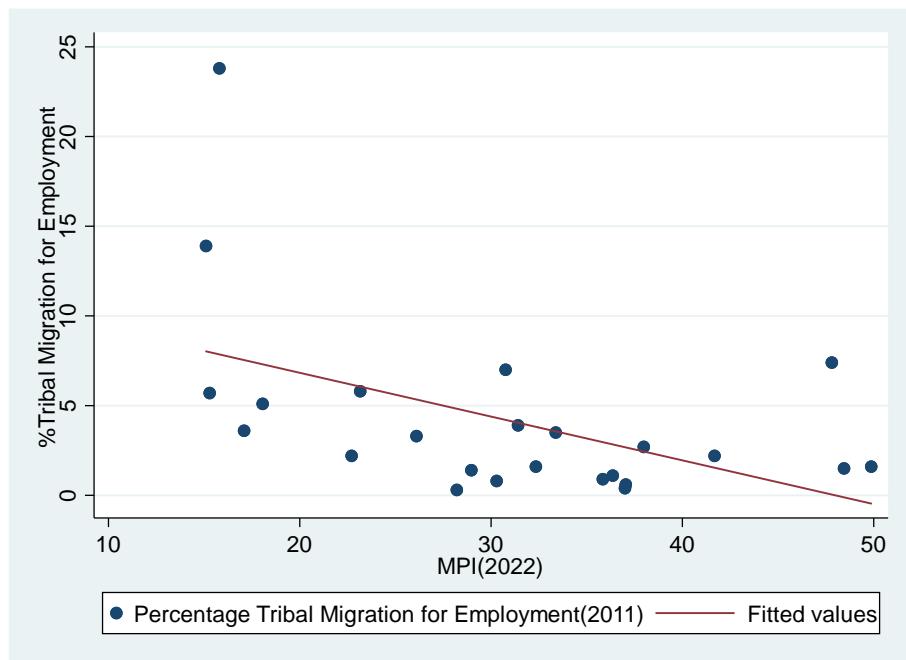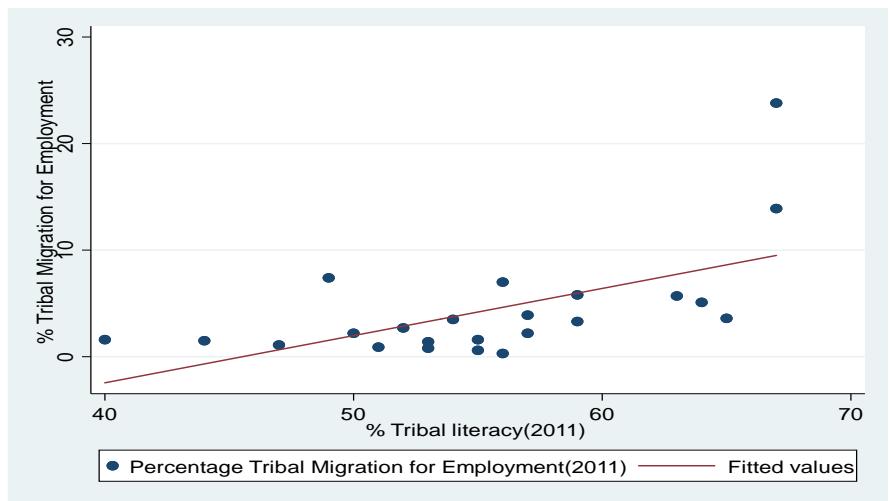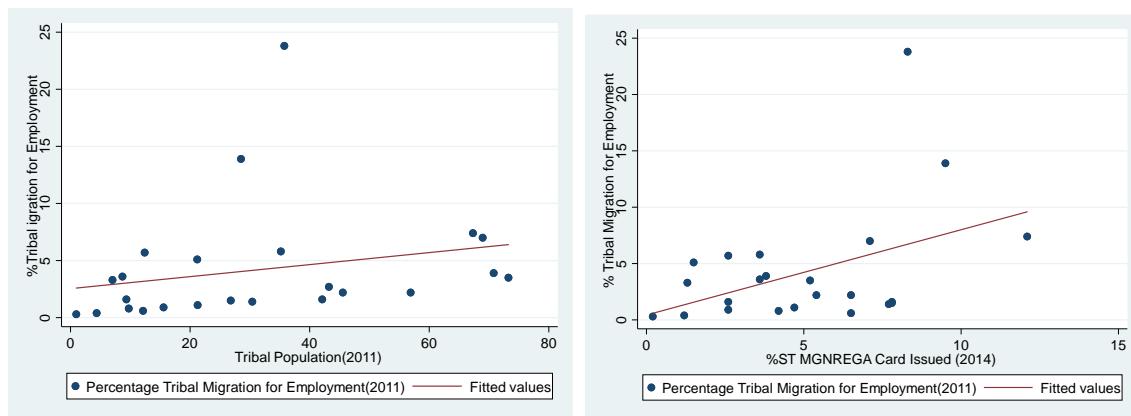
Tribal Migration for employment and level urbanization has a medium positive association however, forest cover also has a low positive association with employment-related migration. The district-wise proportion of the tribal population and Job cards issued to tribes has also medium and low positive relations.\

5. Conclusion

In India, as usual, the general population and tribes mostly migrate for marriage-related reasons. Around 10 percent of tribes in India moved with households according to the 2011 Census. The same figure for Jharkhand was 4 percent. The highest percentage of tribal migration with households occurred in Mizoram (41 percent) followed by 23 percent in Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh 22 percent. Work and employment-related migration of tribes in India was 6 percent. It was the highest in Sikkim and Mizoram followed by Arunachal Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. The corresponding figure for Jharkhand was 4 percent. Business-related migration in India was the highest in Mizoram followed by Gujarat such a figure in Jharkhand was very nominal.

The tribal migration for employment has increased in the country from 2001 to 2011. The result of the scatter plot predicts that tribal migration for employment has a negative relation with multi-dimensional poverty. Hence, tribal migration for employment increases, and multi-dimensional poverty will be decreased. Literacy has a significant positive impact on migration. Forest cover and urbanization have a marginally significant impact on tribal migration for employment. It is essential to focus on structural reform in the agriculture sector as well as Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the tribal areas.

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Migration as a Security Dilemma:
A Case Study on Bangladeshi Illegal Migration to Assam

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Abstract

Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety, and a better future. Non-traditional security concepts include migration as a threat. Here we have done a case study for a broad understanding of migration as a security threat for the nation. It analyses how globalization encouraged people to move from one country to another. Focused on contemporary global phenomena, security is the main component for a sovereign state, and illegal migration negatively affects the countries' socioeconomic security. It analyses the triangular relationship between globalization, security, and migration. To understand the security crises in the contemporary world, a case study has been made on illegal Bangladeshi migrants to Assam which is a part of South Asia. This study shows how migration negatively impacts both sides. The causes of Bangladeshi migrations are found due to poverty and religious violence in Bangladesh. As a result, the population in Assam has doubled within a few years. Therefore indigenous people suffer from deprivation from the various opportunities within their birth land; hence they started agitation against Bangladeshi migrants. To solve these issues migration diplomacy needs to be implemented in this concern.

Keywords: Globalization, Security, Migration, Assam, Bangladesh, Neoliberal, Diplomacy

1. Introduction

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another. In the international sense, migration refers to the movement where people move from their mother country to another country across the border. This process has created long and lasting effects that have been sustained since the existence of humanity. Generally, it seems like a simple concept, but this process is not simple.

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Migration is a core concept of security in contemporary times. It has long-lasting effects, specifically on the state; and regions' individual, societal, and international security, and hence, its relationship with security is quite close. Traditional security was related to military security that provides the security of territory and sovereignty of the state. But, after the post-Cold War, the world began to think about different ways of security that can be said as 'non-traditional' security which includes economic security, human security, regional security, food security, and so on. Migration emerged as a big threat to international security post-Cold War. Another Significant concept of non-traditional security is human security, which is closely related to the migration problem in contemporary areas. According to Amitav Acharya, the Western security concept is different from the East, specifically mentioned in the Asian context. Western idea of security focuses highly on 'rights and liberalism', at the same time, Eastern security focuses on 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' (Acharya, 2001).

In 1994, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) listed components of human security, which include economic security, food security, environment security, personal security, community security, political security, and health security. The most obvious threat to security is migration which is closely related to these components of security listed by the UNDP. Now, in this essay I'm going to discuss broadly this migration problem as a security threat in international relations in the contemporary world with a special case study, that is, the Bangladeshi immigrants to Assam, a state situated in the northeastern region of the world's largest democratic country, India, located in South Asia. In contemporary times, the idea of security is highly needed to discuss how globalization, security, and migration are interlinked with each other.

2. Globalization, Migration and Security

Globalization has serious impacts on migration and security. The neo-liberal current world is far from equal, which is now the main motto of the global world. It makes some countries, specifically of the Global North, richer, and at the same time, it makes some countries, especially of the Global South, poorer, which is a result of exploitation by Western countries.

Due to Globalization, problems like unemployment and underemployment, environmental degradation, community and identity security threats, civil war, internal threats within a country's territory, and international terrorism began to increase daily. All these threats created an atmosphere of insecurity, which led us to think about state security.

People suffering from individual insecurity and economic crises, and who think that their ultimate authority is unable to provide security, go on to search for protection with a hope for a better future. Globalization set an easy way in motion, population movement. Hence, crossing the border illegally is a threat to the state and human security. The presence of illegal migrants poses an obvious threat to the

nation and the native population in a country like India, which has already been recognised as the world's second-highest populous country.

Security concern whether it is internal or external is controlled by the authority of a territory or state. They are responsible for the smooth functioning of the state. Thus, any kind of threat to the security of the nation directly comes under their purview. The issue of migration is a threat to a sovereign state because international law says "state is the absolute authority over its territory including border; hence migration is state threat for a sovereign state". We can examine therefore a strong inter-connection between migration and security.

Neo-liberal economic policy badly impacts the global south, giving it less opportunity to develop smartly and quickly. Without ignoring the structure and history, the global south started to adopt a neo-liberal economic policy as a universal concept, which is a live example of Bangladeshi migrations to its neighboring country, India.

3. Migration and India

From the human perspective view, people do migrate for expecting a better security; no one wants to live in terrible conditions. Although there are several causes for migration, all the migrants can't be considered under the same category. Sometimes people are forced to flee to escape violence, conflict or persecution and they cross the international border illegally to find safety in another country. Generally, the state doesn't want to take responsibility for these refugees, but the case of political asylum seeker, who seeks protection threatened by the authority itself, is quite different.

In the case of political asylum seeker Dalai Lama, India has widespread sympathy because of cultural affinities with Buddhist Tibet. But, the highest threat for India is illegal immigration, entry by crossing the international border, which violates the immigration law. They continue to live within the territory without any legal rights. They become the user of the resources and the opportunities, without having any legal rights and duties. National security has been threatened in recent years by terrorist attacks, one of the biggest threats of the era. The Mumbai attacks in 2008 is the ultimate live example in the context of India, it was attacked by members of Lahkar-e-taiba, a terrorist organization from Pakistan.

The migrations to India have been flowing from the ancient era to the 21st century. But the modern era's migration issues become gradually very complex. Particularly, since 1947 it become an international security threat. Especially migrants flowing from its neighboring countries.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nation refugee Agency published that as of 31st of January in 2022, more than 46,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with UNHCR India, it is mainly from Afghanistan and Myanmar (UNHCR 2022).

However, Bangladeshi illegal migrants highly affected the North East area of it. In this paper, we are going to discuss the migration issue specifically in the

context of Bangladeshi migrants to Assam, a northeastern state of India that is located in south Asia through the lens of contemporary impacts on it which is an unending long-term security threat for the Assam as well as India.

South Asia faced the challenge of migration issues when it experienced partition twice, one in 1947 when the united India was divided by drawing an international border and created two dominions India and Pakistan and another in 1971, when Bangladesh was created as a sovereign country from Pakistan. The world's largest democratic country, India, has shared a 4,096-kilometre-long international border with Bangladesh, among this Assam solely shares 856 km (Wikipedia 2022).

However, India is the largest migrant host nation in Asia with an estimated 6.1 million migrants and the Bangladesh-India migration corridor is the fourth largest among the migration corridors in the world. Most of them come across the border. From the late 19th century to after the Independence of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi migrants come to India illegally to seek refuge from the genocide, widespread rape, economic security, environmental security, personal security and specifically for seeking human security.

Sharing the international border with Bangladesh, Assam is the most affected state in India. The migration took part in a particular phase in other parts of India, but in Assam, influx migration has continued till today, and as a democratic country India thus faces big challenges in the security dilemma in two senses, one is an external security threat and another is the internal threat within it, like the movement against Bangladeshi by its citizen, for example, Assam Agitation movement in 1986 led by Assamese people due to feeling of insecurity of economic, identity, community and cultural land and so on. This led to high political instability in this region.

However, the history of Bangladeshi migration to Assam has its own distinct story to tell, since the 19th century specifically between 1911 and 1931, more than a million Bengalis migrated to Assam and by 1951 more than a half million Bengalis migrated to Assam. After the Bangladesh independence war, more than 10 million refugees arrived in it. Although Bangladesh adopted a secular character, lots of Hindus suffer in Individual security due to religion, according to Piyali Dutta for this reason we see out of 10 million Bangladeshi, 80% were Bengali Hindus (Dutta 2022).

But the poorest thing is although in 1989 Bangladesh declared itself a Muslim Country, Muslim migrants who yet till 2022 haven't stopped themselves to leave their motherland, and their reason for migrating to Assam is economic insecurity. Due to underemployment and unemployment, they came illegally by crossing international borders and provided cheap labor to earn their livelihood, this section can be examined as labor class. To discuss elaborately this, it is highly needed to focus on Bangladesh's security context in international relations.

4. Structure of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, geographically a small deltaic country, located in south Asia, is the 9th populist country of the World. Post-independence Bangladesh adopted socialism; its current characteristic is the neo-liberal market economy.

Although its current economy is stable, it maintain between 5-6 percent gross domestic product growth for the last two years, it is not viable enough to create an effective platform to occupy all skilled, semi-skilled, and non-skilled in the country. Bangladesh ranks 140 among nations on the Human Development Index as presented in 2016 (Human Development Index, 2016). The country struggles to escape from poverty, by 2022, 20% of people suffer from food insecurity. In 2014, the World Bank identified Bangladesh as a low-middle-income country. The World Factbook of CIA shows that the total dependency ratio in Bangladesh is 52.6%, whereas the youth dependency ratio is 44.9%. As a result, Bangladesh faces formidable challenges in providing adequate job facilities for its job-seeking citizens. Therefore, people are trying to go abroad for economic security and a better future.

During the Bangladesh independence war, almost 10 million people came to India, specifically in Assam to escape the widespread rape, brutal violence and genocide action being carried out by the West Pakistan (Now Pakistan) armed forces. Women and children were the most affected category during this time. Women were unable to escape rape culture neither in their motherland nor in India. But the noticeable thing is the Hindu Bangladeshi came as refugees as a result of persecution and also economic need and the Muslim Bangladeshi came specifically by economic need.

Being a country rich in water resources, with a number of rivers flowing throughout, environmental or climate change factor plays a significant role in the movement of Bangladeshi people to settle. Natural hazards in Bangladesh are floods and cyclones, floods, earthquakes, riverbank erosion, sedimentation, environmental pollution etc are common problems. Bangladeshi people are also suffering from food security crises. Fifth million people in Bangladesh still live in extreme poverty and 40% of children lack the nutrition they need for healthy lives (Sarma, 2015).

The insecurity threat specifically, economic, human security and environmental changes have significant relevance in the context of illegal migration from Bangladesh to India. Individual security suffered when people lost their faith in their authority, which wasn't able to provide sufficient security for a better living standard. The Bangladeshi people suffer from these life-threatening security crises even after a long time of independence from their motherland. Since the partition of India in 1947, merely on religious lines, this problem is still occurring today. As a Muslim dominating country, Hindu Bengalis sometimes face torture from Muslim fundamentalism.

Since 2022 the anti-Hindu violence has been going strong, due to India being ruled by the Hindutva regime. This anti-Hindu violence is going on even today. Being less strict border security in India, and suffering from extreme human security, Bangladeshi people choose to migrate to the neighboring state of Assam. From a

humanitarian perspective, that is why maybe UN Secretary Koffi Annan once argued that "The refugee cannot be stopped and must be managed better, more humanely, protecting migrant's human rights whilst accepting states right to control their borders".

5. Migration: A threat to security in Assam

Barry Buzan, founder of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies argued that "security studies should not only focus on the military security sectors, but should be further developed to encompass societal, environment, economic and political security". In the case of migration, societal security threat refers to challenges to a state's traditional national identity and its core values. The inability of immigrants to integrate or assimilate is argued to have a negative effect on the society and government's stability.

This exactly happened in the case of Assam, a northeastern socio-economic-cultural development state in India. The region of Assam is surrounded by Bangladesh to the South and West, Myanmar to its East, China and Bhutan to the North and only 20km of land connects it to the rest of India (Naik 2016). Thus, its unique location makes the situation more and more challenging by itself. Assam's demography consisted of Assamese-speaking Hindus and Muslims and a range of colorful Indigenous groups, which viewed both the Muslim and Hindu immigrants with suspicion (Sarma 2015).

Both the Hindu and Bengali in large scale migrated to Assam in the early 19th Century and they continue to do so even today. This illegal Bangladeshi migration becomes a serious security threat for Assamese Indigenous people who have been suffering from land scarcity, unemployment, population crises, environment degradation, identity crises and so on. The highest threat for Assamese indigenous people is language imbalance and community insecurity.

A large scale of Bengali population day by day within this Indigenous area, among Indigenous people a threat has begun to grow of language insecurity as well as cultural insecurity with identity insecurity, that means, growing feelings of fear of becoming minor language and identity within their birth land. Besides, Bangladeshi migrants are unwilling to assimilate with the Assamese culture as they have also their own culture.

Gradually, they tried to establish a Bengali-dominating culture as they had sufficient population support, which wasn't acceptable to the original Indigenous people of this area and also they started to demand all the rights and opportunities from the Indian government.

But the problem is, being a developing country with limited resources, besides a huge population; India isn't in a condition to carry on such overload, irrationally where even 6 % of people live below the poverty line.

Hence, due to the large growth of the continuously growing population, Indigenous people are gradually deprived of their deserving rights and opportunities that are given by their country itself. Most of the immigrant people are settled down in forest land and they are chosen for manual labour and cultivation. But the dangerous thing is as they use chemical things to produce more and more that they

can earn a good income easily. This is a very threat to environmental security as well as health security. However, by cutting down the trees and clearing land for settling down within it, immigrants have created a serious threat to the biodiversity of Assam. However, as illegal migration, the income isn't included in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in India, and some Bangladeshi migrants go back to their motherland after earning their livelihood on this side.

Crossing the border with Indian currency to a foreign country is a big loss for the Indian economy. However, various insurgency groups of the northeast get the opportunity to take shelter in Bangladesh by crossing the international border. Similarly, terrorist groups from Bangladesh enter easily by crossing the international border. Both are the most obvious threats to the national security of India.

6. Governement Response

As a result, India faces several internal and external security threats; several agitations led to political as well as socio-economic instability within it. One remarkable agitation in the history of Assam is the Assam agitation, whose main parts were led by the young modern educated Assamese students. Assamese indigenous people started the agitation against the illegal migration, and their demand to the Indian federal government was to stop illegal migration from Bangladesh. As a response Indian government signed the Assam Accord by promising to give special protection and security in societal, economic, cultural and regional security to the indigenous people of Assam, but due to corrupted political culture it is unable to see any practical implications in this case. Sometimes politicians use this illegal immigration as a vote bank by giving voter cards and ration cards.

Every election in this region comes with promising security issues, but nobody wants to find a permanent solution for this security threat. Prominent writer Professor Sanjiv Baruah called it once as "unfinished business" of partition. (Baruah 2020). From this view, it seems that there is a huge number of illegal migrants, whose voting support does matter for politicians, it is very poor in such a democratic country, which is itself suffering a national security threat.

In the early times, several policies were introduced to protect security for Assam citizens as well as India's national security. These are the prevention of infiltration from the Pakistan Act of 1964, the Illegal Migration Act of 1983, the Assam Accord of 1985, the issue of national identity cards, etc. Regarding human security, a very interesting step was taken by the current BJP ruling government, whose ideological motto is making a Hindu country.

This government proposed the Citizenship Amendment Bill in 2014, and it became an act in 2019 (CAA 2019) where it proposes to shelter persecuted religious minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It seeks to put Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jains, Paris and Christians from this country that came to India on 31 December 2014, even if they entered illegally (Baruah 2020). But this protection excludes Muslims. But at the same time, it also violates the Assam accord which promised to protect the indigenous people.

Although this act was highly criticized in the rest of India for excluding Muslims, because under the umbrella of the Indian Constitution, secularism gives equal respect and value to Muslims also, the perspective of Assam including the entire North-East is not the same case. These people have been suffering from a security crisis for a long time from Bangladeshi migrants, which still reminds us of the unending and unsolved issues. The government's other response to the Indigenous people of Assam is the National Register for Citizens in Assam, whose purpose was to select Indigenous people. However, in terms of practical implications, it always faces challenges and various political issues. However, the implementation of CAA has already violated the NRC in Assam. Therefore, we are unable to search for a positive step that is taken by the government for Indigenous people. But it is seen by 2021, 3141 kilometers of the border was fencing out of 4096.7 kiloliters of the international border between India and Bangladesh.

7. Analysis

For globalization, the countries sometimes get relatively more equal levels and sometimes it is seen as far from equal. Some social scientists argue due to globalization, the global north has become more developed, and the global south is not in the position that it deserves. According to A G Frank, the global south is less developed not for lack of capital but because of the global north itself, which dominated the global south by importing resources. Neo-liberal economic policy in developing countries didn't much help for fast development, because without solving fundamental problems, capitalism doesn't suit developing countries.

However, due to industrialization, people in developing countries face more poverty issues. Existing poverty led human insecurity in a country, which is the main cause for leading other types of insecurity in a country. Bangladesh and India both have significant relevance in world politics, so the stabilization of socio-economic conditions in both these countries is most important. Therefore, it is highly needed to solve this issue and strengthen their security in international relations.

Bangladesh is India's one of the largest business partners, today the relationship between the two nations crosses above 50 years. Bangladesh's foreign policy is defensive because of its lower capabilities of being a non-nuclear state. Bangladesh's Security is primarily driven by its relationship with countries within the South Asia region (Foreign Policy of Bangladesh 2021). The foreign policy of Bangladesh highly is affected negatively by the population and economic problems. So, it is high time to focus on more human security by the Bangladesh government.

India and Bangladesh have maintained good relations for a long time, regarding national security both countries have various defense cooperation, cooperation over rivers, economic relations, cooperation power sector and so on. Both countries need to focus more on other activities such as investments, security connectivity development, cultural economy, environment, disaster management and so on, these all may be a positive way for human security, economic security, cultural security and finally it all would be led to the final goal, that is " national security".

Conclusion

Philippe Bourbeau explained security as a multidisciplinary dialogue, for example, the concept of security deals with personal threats to domestic violence and the political security of national to international security. Security can be different from different perspectives such as From an anthropology perspective security can be different from the perspective of geography. This paper has focused on the political concept of security in international relations.

It analyzed broadly the concept of security, from the perspective of Western as well as non-eastern, and the perspective of traditional to non-traditional security concepts. Security here is taken as a specific part that is migration. Migration has a close tie with security. This perspective is elaborated with a specific case study on Bangladeshi Migration to Assam, a north-eastern state of India. Through this case study we got a positive as well as negative effect due to migration. Migration issues are not an end issue, but they become a serious issue when its close relationship ties with security in a sovereign country.

In the case of Bangladeshi illegal migration to Assam, we see a pathetic scene for both the country. For the permanent solution to this, it must be established a close cooperation between both of the nations. Both the country should adopt the Migration diplomacy process, it is a multifaceted process, where it components two ways one, in terms of action involved and another in the strategies employed. In the article "Migration Diplomacy in World Politics", Adamson and Tsourapas explained that migration diplomacy involved linkages with other areas of state interest, including national and domestic security concerns, economic interests and interest and interests in promoting public diplomacy or other to reach forms of enhancing a state's soft power, in terms of strategies, migration diplomacy can be approached as a zero-sum game by pursuing relatives gains or as a positive sum game in order reach mutually beneficial outcomes. (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019).

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India's Trade Policy in the Context of the G20 Presidency:
Strategic Utilization of Global Platforms for Sustainable Economic Growth

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Abstract

In the last decade, India's trade policy has significantly transformed towards economic growth and increasing global competitiveness and strategic interests. Two of these fundamental initiatives, "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat," have been on the center stage of this transformation, focusing on the need for further enhancement of domestic manufacturing, developing capabilities to increase exports, and making India a country better integrated into global value chains. The growth in digital trade and the technology-driven sectors has also become essential to the Indian trade policy. India's presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) in 2023 marks a significant milestone in its global trade governance. This role allows India to influence the global trade agenda, focusing on sustainable and inclusive trade practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation, and supply chain disruptions. Additionally, India advocates for multilateralism and international trade agreements to strengthen globalization. A central theme of its G20 agenda is promoting sustainable trade in line with the Paris Agreement and advancing digital innovation to enhance trade facilitation. This article analyzes India's trade policy in the context of its G20 presidency, examining how it strives to make the global trading system more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient. The paper focuses on India's strategies for countering the global economic crisis, rebuilding international trade relations, and building the cause of fair trade. A special focus is placed on India's role in promoting multilateral cooperation along global value chains and furthering digital and green trade practices.

Keywords: India's Trade Policy, G20 Presidency, Sustainable Trade, Multilateralism

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1. Introduction

Taking over the G20 presidency in 2023 was a defining moment in India's economic and political development. At the helm of the regional order, stepping into the G20 presidency is also a moment for India to alter the rules of the game of international trade, mainly to promote closer economic relations and sustainability. Formed to address the most pertinent economic problems by collaborating with the world's leading economies, India is expected to harness the G20 collective political willpower during its presidency to promote inclusive development.

Numerous challenges remain as the economy slowly opens up after the global COVID-19 pandemic's adverse impacts. Disruption of international supply chains, high inflation rate, and the desire to accelerate innovation have changed the face of globalization and international trade. At the same time, the issue of global warming has become a growing threat, leading countries to seek to grow their economies without harming the environment. Sustainable trade practices have become critical with the world's economy slowly recovering from climate change and resource crunch. This reinforces the significance of the Indian G20 presidency as a forum to push for trade recovery and sustainability in trade processes to observe global policies such as the Paris Agreement.

This paper analyzes India's trade policy through the prism of its G20 presidency and how India is utilizing this forum to seek a better and sustainable trading system. Particular emphasis is given to promoting multilateralism, reviving trade deals, enhancing collaboration along the global value chains, and advancing sustainable and digital trade. In this context, the article analyses the strategies adopted by India in dealing with global economic crises, encouraging the rejuvenation of international trade relations, reconstruction of international hubs, adherence to fair trade development, new technologies, and international businesses. Within the framework of G20, India aims to help the economy recover more rapidly than before, improving regional engagement and promoting the inclusiveness of globalization.

2. Literature Review

The G20 is an international gathering of the world's leading governments and economic powers, impacting global economic governance and international trade, particularly in establishing a sustainable, developed world. The literature revealed that the G20 has had and still has its importance in international trade and global governance. The article highlights the literature on the role of the G20 in global trade, with special emphasis on India's G20 presidency.

2.1 The Role of the G20 in Global Economic Governance

G20 measures are strictly subjected to the most comprehensive reconstruction, which, in addition to other tasks, aims to consider the crisis response measures undertaken about the G20's role in managing the global economy.

Beeson and Bell (2009) noted that during the global financial crisis in 2008, the G20 became important in the international setting, acting as an institution for international cooperation as opposed to unilateralism in economic crises. Wade (2011) agrees with this view by examining the effectiveness of G20 in promoting financial stability and preventing protectionism from forming during an economic crisis. The researchers describe building up G20 as one of the main positive attributes in handling global problems.

However, besides the above, there are various criticisms regarding the effectiveness of G20. According to Drezner (2014), while the G20 may be an important body, it often suffers from a problem of enforceability because the agreements made between the members do not carry any obligation. Kirton (2016) correctly posited that even though the group had managed to achieve an agreement on more general economic issues, such as trade imbalances and tariff policies. Thus, while G20 has been important in global economic governance, it remains a subject of much debate regarding its potential to bring about actual reform in trade.

2.2 G20 and International Trade Policies

International trade policies and the role of the G20 have been at the center stage for research. Baldwin and Evenett (2009) argued that the G20 maintains open trade lines and combats protectionist tendencies, especially in bad economic junctures. Their study showed that the G20 conferences influence shaping global trading frameworks and reducing obstacles in trading. G20 has acted as a vehicle for building platforms for discussing pertinent issues in global trade, such as the ever-present disruptions in the supply chain and digital trade issues that are finding more relevance in the post-pandemic world.

However, how the G20 achieves balanced trade growth, particularly for developing economies, is hardly covered. G20 is opportunistic because the majority interest is usually large economies, often without voices from smaller economies, now emerging and developing countries. The authors found little concrete output regarding nations of the Global South in the implementation or resolution of results of trade agreements concluded by the members of the G20. Along these lines, Hopewell (2021) examined how the G20, espousing multilateral trade reforms, failed to adequately address those structural imbalances that adversely disadvantage the nations of the developing world in global trade.

2.3 India's Role in Global Trade and G20 Presidency

Recent studies focus on the growing influence of India globally in trade, especially with its leadership position in G20. It is changing India's trade strategy by examining the government's novel initiatives, such as "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" as responses to global supply chain disruptions and trade imbalances. It has emphasized India's strategic push through demographic and technological advantages to boost its negotiating power in digital commerce.

Kumar (2023) even discusses India's ambition under its G20 presidency, saying that India aims to advance sustainable trade practices and digital innovation as key components of its trade agenda. They depicted how India is enforcing its initiatives towards the standardization of multilateral trade systems and leadership toward the agendas of the developing world. However, with such studies, while providing less insightful lessons on how India may pursue strategies toward global trade, they generally remain bound toward understanding India's domestic policies rather than proactively considering how India's G20 presidency might alter global trade dynamics.

According to David (2022), this is an area in which India is still a relatively new player in promoting green trade practices, especially in the renewable energy sector. Although this study provides a valuable analysis of India's role in sustainable trade, more empirical research is required to determine how such initiatives have been received and implemented globally within the G20 framework.

2.4 Sustainable Development and Global Trade in the G20

Sustainable trade development is another important theme in the literature, mainly framed under the G20 commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. G20 should be done to improve sustainable trade. The authors noted that carbon footprint reduction and circular economies are two examples of sustainable trade development practices that have been strongly advocated for by the G20.

However, the coinciding issues of sustainable development and trade remain less discussed and mainly related to how each G20 country, individually-India, individuals can orient the trigger towards sustainable trade. Esty (2017) states that there remains further room for improvement; sustainability has been discussed widely in G20 dialogues, but concrete policies on how trade growth could be balanced with environmental preservation remain scanty. This gap, therefore, opens up the scope for further research in analyzing the G20 presidency of India in potential contributions to embedding sustainability within global trade systems.

The G20 has been studied at length in terms of its role in world economic governance, policies on trade, and sustainability. However, there is a lacuna in understanding how the G20 can be harnessed towards the interests of the developing world, primarily when India presides over it. Most studies focus on the more prominent institutional role of the G20 or India's domestic trade policies and do not work out an in-depth analysis of how India's term of presidency can alter world trade towards inclusivity and sustainability.

This paper tries to bridge the gap by focusing on the opportunity India offers under its G20 presidency to shape global trade in favor of developing countries and bolster global supply chains while contributing to sustainable practices in trade. Focusing on the strategic role India plays within the G20, this research will contribute to a better understanding of how emerging economies can navigate and influence global trade systems in the 21st century.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1. Data Sources

The study uses an extensive cross-section of international trade data and official reports to outline global trends in trade patterns and India's strategies during its G20 presidency. The main data sources used in this study are international organizations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, amongst others, which cover comprehensively the worldwide trends in international trade, economies' performances, and consequences of policies. Official reports from the G20 and the Indian government's trade statistics, including some data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, were used to capture details specific to India's trade policies and economic performance. The following are the key indicators to be analyzed:

- Global trade volume growth (2019–2023): Tracking changes in global trade during the pandemic and post-pandemic.
- Inflation rates (2020–2023): Analyzing inflationary trends of G20 economies, especially India.
- Foreign Direct Investment inflows to India (2015–2023): The impact of India's trade policies on FDI attraction.
- Indicators for sustainable trade: Export related to green technology and renewable energy.
- Digital trade growth: Metrics include increased transactions through UPI and how e-commerce growth is trending.

3.2. Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method approach, where qualitative and quantitative research methods offer an all-rounded analysis of the issue.

3.2.1. Qualitative Analysis:

Policy Analysis: This involves evaluating the main policy initiatives that include reviewing digital trade promotion, sustainable trade practices, and enhancing South-South cooperation, primarily through Africa.
Case Studies- Several case studies have been prepared to show India's progress in strategic sectors, such as semiconductor manufacturing and renewable energy exports. These case studies depict how specific policies can affect India's position on the global trading table.

3.2.2. Quantitative Analysis:

The statistical data of volumes, growth rates, and inflation have been drawn mainly from government reports and online databases.

Statistics have been compiled and formalized into graphs and tables to present major trade indicators and trends of the economy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Global Trade Trends and India's G20 Presidency

India took over the G20 presidency in 2023, and it has been the most crucial step in India's growth. It has introduced itself as the hub of the global economic governance model. India received the G20 presidency at the most critical time when the global economy faced challenges such as increased inflation and disruption in the supply chain, which offered a rare opportunity to influence the conduct of international trade and tariff exchange. The global economy is presently in the stage of gradual recovery from the disruptions that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The recovery has progressed unevenly, with advanced economies having a good cushion from massive fiscal stimuli.

At the same time, the majority of poorer nations still wallow in stagnant growth and rising inflation. In 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected a growth of 2.7% in the world economy, but inflation is an important issue and is predicted to be at 6.5%. (IMF,2023). This makes India's economic difficulties during its tenure a matter of much controversy (IMF, 2023). Economic conflicts between great powers like the US and China also contributed to inflation, creating barriers to international trade and global supply chains. (Zhang, 2022).

The growth patterns of India's trade from 2019 to 2023 have demonstrated promising trends, particularly in digital trade, sustainable trade, and FDI inflows. Digital trade, encompassing digitally ordered transactions—such as online marketplace purchases or booking stays via matching applications—and digitally delivered services like streaming content or architectural designs, is rapidly becoming a key driver of India's export growth.

This shift toward digital trade aligns with India's broader strategic goals, positioning the country to take advantage of multilateral agreements and initiatives like "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat." These initiatives aim to boost domestic manufacturing while reducing dependency on imports. By enhancing production capacities and promoting a self-reliant economy, these national policies have contributed significantly to export growth, further strengthening India's position in global trade.

Figures 1 and 2 highlight India's trade growth and trade deficit from 2021 to 2023. Exports increased from $400 billion in 2021 to $550 billion in 2023, while imports grew from $420 billion to $580 billion over the same period. Despite the high trade activity levels, the persistent trade deficit remains a concern as imports continue to outpace exports. In this context, initiatives like "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" are critical in addressing these risks by promoting local manufacturing and reducing import dependency. These programs aim to reduce

reliance on imports and foster self-reliance by encouraging foreign and domestic investments in manufacturing.

Additionally, FDI inflows into key sectors such as technology and manufacturing have further boosted India's production capacity, contributing to overall trade growth. By focusing on sustainability, these policies support local industries, create jobs, and drive technological advancements while aligning with global digital trade trends. Ultimately, these initiatives significantly ensure a balanced, resilient, and sustainable trade environment, reinforcing India's leadership in multilateral trade and securing favorable terms for global trade participation.

Digital trade will find more significance in India's export prospects, as the country's growth is now followed by its tech sector, which is leading many of the gains in growth. Further, with multilateral agreements, India's active participation will be significant in securing more favorable terms of trade and access to markets for its exporters, thus positioning the country for stronger export performance in the years ahead.

Figure 1: India's Trade Growth (2021-23)
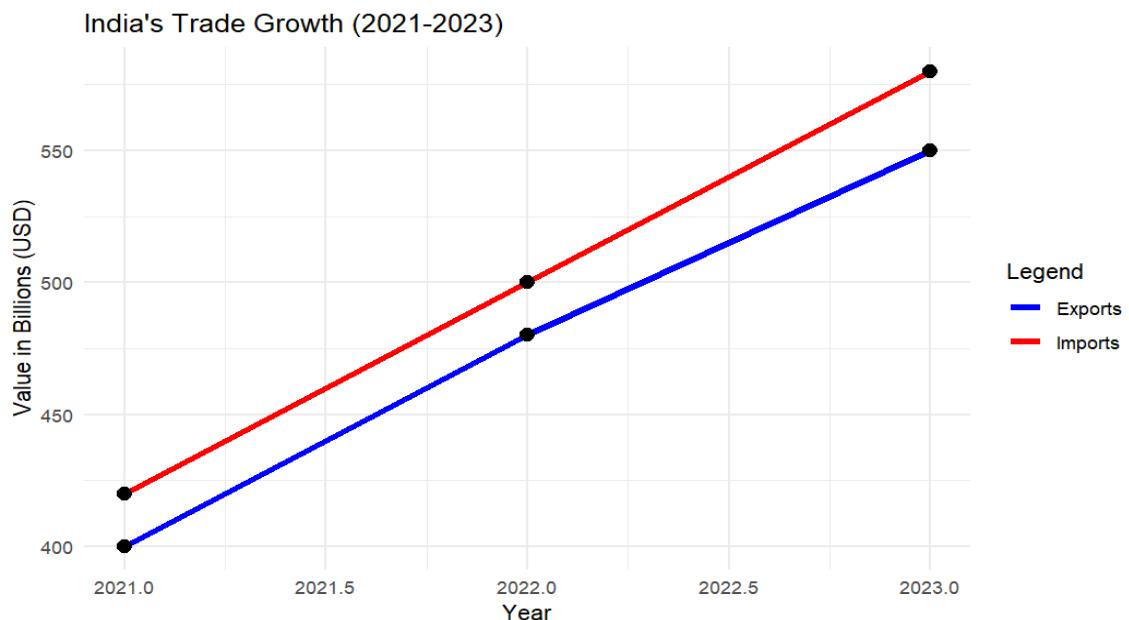
Source 1: Ministry of Commerce and Industry Trade Statistics: https://www.commerce.gov.in/trade-statistics/

4.2 Reviving Multilateral Trade Agreements

India has consistently demonstrated a committed role in reviving multilateral trade agreements to ensure that the perspectives and priorities of developing countries are adequately represented in global trade negotiations.

At the World Trade Organization (WTO), India has advocated for a more inclusive and equitable trading system. This involves promoting a rules-based, transparent, and non-discriminatory framework for regulating trade and investment, which is particularly significant for developing nations seeking to shield themselves from the potentially adverse effects of rapid trade liberalization (Baldwin, 2016).

Figure 2: India's Trade Deficit (2021-23)
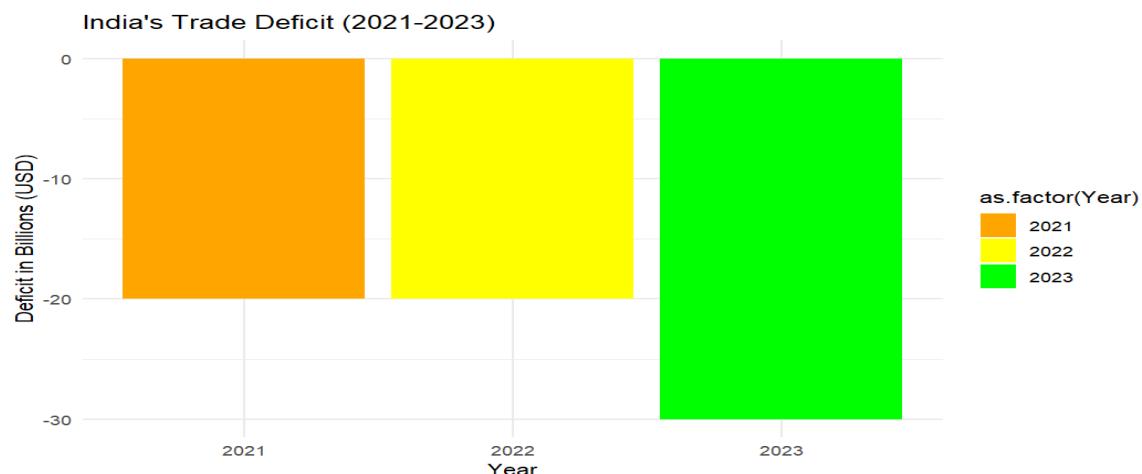
Source 2: Ministry of Commerce Publications and Reports

India's efforts are rooted in the understanding that the liberalization of world trade can disproportionately impact economies with weaker industrial bases or nascent sectors. By championing the cause of these nations, India not only strengthens its position as a voice for the Global South but also contributes to addressing structural imbalances within the global trade system. For example, India's leadership in ensuring special and differential treatment provisions at the WTO highlights its commitment to enabling equitable market access for developing economies.

However, challenges remain, as past research and policy analysis have highlighted persistent discrepancies between the interests of developing nations and the dominant global trade agenda. India's leadership is expected to mitigate these disparities by advocating for restructuring international governance mechanisms to reflect the realities of contemporary commerce.

This includes pushing for reforms in WTO decision-making processes to better align them with the interests of a diverse range of stakeholders. By doing so, India seeks to foster a multilateral trading environment that balances the need for liberalization with protections that ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.

4.3 Strengthening Global Supply Chains

The other primary concern during India's G20 presidency is the supply chain fragility that the pandemic has brought to the fore and the progressing geopolitical tensions. The expansion of semiconductor manufacturing in the country has become an exemplary example of the measures India is now adopting to address such matters. Such a strategic push for higher semiconductor production has thus attracted FDI and collaborative partnerships with global technology majors, further stabilizing the technology supply chains. (Government of India, 2023)

Other research studies have indicated that the strategy of the Indians toward establishing supply chain resilience through its self-reliance policy, namely "Atmanirbhar Bharat," has been mixed. While a few sectors have successfully increased domestic manufacturing in certain spheres, some have very high import dependency- that is, more policy correction will be required to improve global supply chain integration.

4.4. Sustainable Trade Practices

Sustainable Trade Practices involve the exchange of goods and services that generate social, economic, and environmental benefits while adhering to sustainable development principles. These include creating economic value, reducing poverty and inequality, and preserving environmental resources through responsible use and reuse. Such practices emphasize decent working conditions and sustainable resource management, with fair trade being a notable model within this framework. The Indian G20 presidency has continued to focus on the character of trade practice, especially climate change and green technology exports. One of the significant outputs of this research study is that India's trade policy goes hand-in-hand with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially regarding the agenda on renewable energy and green technology. The move to look for a green trade agenda for G20 under India's leadership has been realized by all as it attempts to balance economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The significant area left without robust reinforcement mechanisms is the lack of globally robust mechanisms for monitoring and reporting sustainability in trade practices. Suppose it works in the direction of building better frameworks toward facilitating monitoring and reporting. In that case, the Indian presidency can become quite strong by making it difficult for countries to hide behind commitments to sustainability.

4.5 Digital Trade and Innovation

India is today the future world leader in digital trade, particularly when considering e-commerce and digital payments. However, there has been a recent rise in India's digital economy with increased investments into digital infrastructure in the Unified Payments Interface and e-commerce.

Because cross-border data flows are promoted and because they allow for harmonization of digital regulations, India's digital trade will increasingly grow. The research found a growing digital divide between developed and developing countries. Of course, there has been remarkable progress in digital innovations in India, but there is still a lot to be done regarding digital inclusion.

The answer to this divide, especially at the grassroots level, will be providing an equal sharing of the benefits of digital trade. Table 1 presents the growth of the digital economy in India from 2019 to 2023; the digital sector's contribution to the GDP has risen by leaps and bounds, catapulting from an 8.5% position in 2019 to an excellent 11.8% in 2023. This tremendous growth was intertwined with the COVID-19 pandemic to hasten a leap towards digital platforms. When businesses and customers shifted towards online solutions for e-commerce and digital payments, India's digital economy also saw an enormous thrust in that direction. For example, investments in digital infrastructure - such as in the UPI - further spurred this growth through broad access, encouraging payment by digital means, and financial inclusion.

Leadership by India of the G20 has been crucial in shaping the global policies on digital trade, such as cross-border data flows and harmonization of digital regulations. These will enable India to take a leading position in digital trade in the future. This will make possible its influence over the extant or prospective global standards and increase its share in the developing digital economy.[3] International cooperation under South-South frameworks also promotes the increase in the digital trade of developing countries, which will strengthen India's relations with other developing countries and spur economic integration.

However, all this notwithstanding, the stubbornly substantial digital divide, i.e., the gap between individuals, businesses, etc., that have access to modern information and communication technology and those that do not. This gap persists between the developed and the developing nations; indeed, this is still even more pronounced within India itself.

While urban areas have made tremendous strides in digital adoption, rural areas are far behind both in terms of access and digital literacy. Closing such gaps would enhance equal benefits through higher access to digital trade. In this regard, under G20's digital inclusion emphasis for India, it is fundamentally important to bridge the gap and lead to sustained growth in the digital economy across all sectors of society.

Therefore, this table reflects the strong growth in India's digital economy and an emerging role in world digital trade powered by strategic investments, policy leadership, and a growing commitment to digital inclusion.

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[3] Refers to economic activities enabled by digital technologies, including producing, distributing, and consuming goods and services through online platforms and digital infrastructure. It encompasses areas like e-commerce, digital payments, online services, and the use of digital tools to enhance productivity across industries.

Table 1: Growth of the digital economy in India from 2019 to 2023

Year	Digital Economy Contribution to GDP (%)
2019	8.5%
2020	9.2%
2021	10.3%
2022	11.0%
2023	11.8%

Source 3: : Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). Annual Report

4.6 South-South Cooperation: India-Africa Trade Partnerships

India's role under the G20 presidency is increasingly visible in promoting South-South cooperation[4]. India's collaboration with Africa is a prime example of mutually beneficial partnerships between developing nations. India and Africa's trade relations, particularly in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and renewable energy, have grown significantly over the last decade. These sectors have contributed to both regions' economic and humanitarian development (Kumar & Shah, 2021). The India-Africa case study demonstrates the positive impact of low-cost medicines and agricultural technology transfers, which have been pivotal in improving health outcomes and food security in Africa. However, infrastructure deficits and regulatory hurdles still hinder deeper trade integration.

Figure 3 illustrates the bilateral trade trends between India and Africa from 2015-2016 to 2022-2023. The data shows a steady increase in trade, exports, and imports up until 2020-2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a notable decline in trade volumes due to disruptions in global supply chains and economic slowdowns. However, from 2021-2022 onwards, India-Africa trade has sharply rebounded, particularly in the pharmaceutical, agricultural, and renewable energy sectors.

This recovery reflects India's leadership within the G20 and its focus on strengthening South-South cooperation, particularly in sectors that directly contribute to Africa's development. India's trade policies aim to encourage South-South cooperation by promoting the sale of low-cost medicines and facilitating agricultural technology transfer, aligning with broader goals of ensuring sustainable development in developing economies.

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[4] South-South Cooperation is a framework of collaboration among developing countries in the Global South, aimed at fostering economic, technical, and social partnerships to achieve mutual development goals. This cooperation often involves sharing resources, knowledge, and technology to address common challenges and promote sustainable development.

India is also actively shaping global policies on digital trade and South-South cooperation by advocating for a more inclusive, multilateral approach to trade agreements. Through initiatives like "Digital India," India is working to bridge the digital divide in developing nations, including Africa, by enhancing digital infrastructure and promoting digital literacy. India's policies also emphasize strengthening partnerships in renewable energy and technology transfer, which have become key pillars of South-South cooperation. By fostering digital connectivity and technology exchange, India aims to create a more resilient global trade system that benefits developing countries. These strategies, aligned with India's leadership role in the G20, help to enhance trade relations with Africa and other developing regions, ensuring a more equitable and sustainable global trading environment.

Figure 3: India-Africa Trade (2015-23)
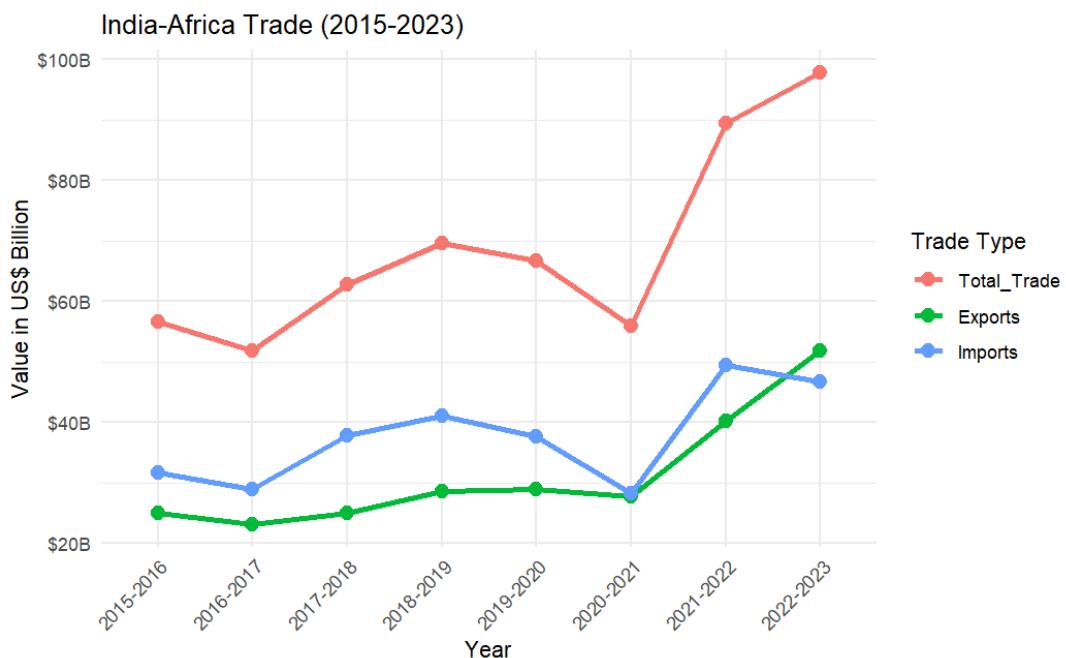
Source 4: Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. India-Africa Trade and Investment Report 2023. Confederation of Indian Industry (CI

4.7 Facilitating Global Trade Recovery Post-Pandemic

Due to the post-COVID-19 period, India has, in a very special manner, taken part actively in the reconstruction of the world and increased its recognition in the global order with the distribution of vaccines, expansion of the healthcare system, and attracting foreign investment. This pandemic occasioned disruption of international trade and economic activities on an incomparable scale, with many countries struggling to restore their economies. How India has shied away from complacency in tackling these challenges has not only improved the resilience of its economy but also the recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 worldwide.

Another of India's achievements regarding COVID-19 was seen in its commitment to the cause of global vaccination. Manufacturing vaccines for internal requirements and for the 'Vaccine Maitri[5]' global program, India was the biggest vaccine manufacturer in the world. WHO records indicate India provides over 200 million vaccination doses to 90 countries, primarily in the global south. This promotional activity aided these countries in fighting the pandemic and salvaged their healthcare systems. With such a global approach to vaccine distribution, India established closer trade and diplomatic relations with many developing countries because it was committed to global health equity.

Apart from this, in terms of their emphasis on vaccine delivery, India has also focused on augmenting the healthcare systems on the domestic continent and globally in all nations. Some resources and strategies worked towards enhancing the availability of medical devices, increasing the pharmaceutical trade, and engaging in technological transfers, which proved helpful for this purpose. India's pharmaceutical sector, also called the pharmacy of the world, was one of the main contributors to keeping the world supplied with essential drugs and vaccinations throughout the pandemic.

The Indian economy has undergone drastic changes that would enable more significant foreign investments. Determined to rebuild, the country has been expanding FDI from many sectors like healthcare, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and digital technology, knowing the importance of strong supply chains. These measures have made India one of the countries ready to step in the recovery of global trade, and since 2021, the volume of India's foreign trade has shown steady growth.

With a strong focus on the distribution of vaccines, developing the healthcare infrastructure, and promoting trade and investment, China is leading the way in global recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic. Supporting policies that foster economic development domestically and abroad continues to posit India as one of the countries reconstituting the global trade architecture in the aftermath of COVID-19.

India's focus on healthcare investment and vaccine delivery was more significant, and it not only boosted its economic growth but also gained an upper ground as a reliable health stakeholder in the global aspects, which is important for future trading relationships. While India seeks to protect its immediate trade in a multifaceted manner, it is fully aware of the importance of restoring foreign trade, including competition in attracting long-term investments with resource-distributed countries.

4.8 Challenges and Criticisms

The research served to bring forth some issues and criticism related to India's G20 presidency and, more broadly, the strategy for trade.

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[5] India's initiative aimed to supply COVID-19 vaccines to countries worldwide, particularly in the Global South, as part of its commitment to global health equity and solidarity. Through this program, India distributed millions of vaccine doses to over 90 countries, bolstering healthcare systems and fostering diplomatic goodwill.

First, though India has been a champion for the cause of developing countries, there are caveats with the increasing protectionist policies towards trade, especially when some of its current supply chain segments may come under threat from back-hauling domestic investments. This often says that India's self-reliance drives contradict the country's demands on global trade being 'open and inclusive.'

The rest of the world has yet to see positive economic recovery, not to mention anything else brought upon by the pandemic, given that several developing countries are still experiencing inflation and slow growth issues. The presidency in India will face challenges inside and outside its borders, espousing policies that promote further global economic stability and growth.

Based on this, this study fills critical gaps in India's strategic role in G20 terms: the sustainable practice of trade, digital innovation, and South-South cooperation. Indeed, despite optimism over the presidency of India revitalizing multilateralism and reinforcing global supply chains, more remains to be done with respect to crafting a balance between protectionist policies and ongoing trade liberalization efforts and ensuring that all sections of the population are included in new digital applications.

5. Conclusion

India marked a critical turning point in global trade governance during its G20 presidency. Due to its unique positioning, India has driven change in many significant areas: it has promoted sustainable trade practices, embarked on digital trade, and restarted multilateral trade agreements. As such, India will also strengthen its economic posture while contributing toward designing the future of global trade.

To this end, India's policy of South-South cooperation and its trade ties with several African countries show that the country is committed to inclusive economic development and ensures that the Global South is not left behind in the dynamics of international trade. One must note that with all these advances, there are still problems in achieving a balance between protectionist policies and open, clear, and transparent global trade systems for the welfare of all parties involved, especially for developing nations.

There lies an opportunity under the G20 presidency of India to form directions for economic recovery from the pandemic's effects. There is a focus on equitable growth, sustainability, and innovation, ensuring a lasting impact on global approaches to trade policies and guaranteeing resilience and inclusiveness for future growth.

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The Feminization of Responsibility and Obligation:
A Case Study of Kudumbashree in Two Cities

Meenu Mohan[1]

Abstract

This article investigates the gendered dynamics within Kerala's Kudumbashree program, focusing on its dual role as a poverty alleviation initiative and a platform for women's empowerment. While Kudumbashree has achieved significant strides in improving livelihoods, it often disproportionately shifts the burden of poverty alleviation onto women. This dynamic perpetuates inequities, positioning women— already the most affected by poverty—as the primary agents of systemic change. The research examines how these responsibilities redefine women's roles in households and communities, exclude men from shared obligations, and bring in time poverty for the women involved via a comparative case study on the lives of women in Kudumbashree from two cities—Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. Employing frameworks like Bourdieusian field theory and feminist critiques of neoliberal welfare, this analysis calls for a reimagining of empowerment narratives, advocating for more equitable developmental practices that transcend symbolic gestures and address structural inequalities. It critically interrogates the changes brought about by Kudumbashree in the lives of Kerala women to raise a rather pertinent question—Are there better practices to best practices?

Keywords: Kudumbashree, feminization of responsibility, gendered division of labor

1. Introduction

The Kudumbashree initiative originated within the socio-political framework of the People's Plan Movement in Kerala, a pioneering participatory governance strategy launched in 1996. An offshoot of the seventh and eighth Five-Year Plans, this movement emphasized grassroots engagement in planning and decision-making as part of the decentralization of state power (Isaac & Franke, 2002).

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This was a marked shift from the earlier lens of planning which viewed women as encumbrances in the path of development and as passive recipients of the fruits of progress, which undermined their roles as active citizens and did little to address the systemic injustices that led to discrimination and subordination.

Central to Kudumbashree's innovative approach is the concept of Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), which were designed not only as financial collectives but also as platforms for participatory planning and localized development. NHGs are government-sponsored entities that specifically target high-risk households identified through rigorous, multi-dimensional criteria. They operate within the Panchayati Raj framework, leveraging funds like the Women Component Plan (WCP) to implement women-centric projects. This integration highlights Kudumbashree's commitment to collective action at the neighborhood level, aligning with Kerala's broader traditions of inclusive community organization.

The organizational structure of Kudumbashree operates as a three-tiered framework, federating NHGs into Area Development Societies (ADS) at the ward level and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the municipal or district level. This system, an extension of the Panchayati Raj framework, ensures seamless coordination and implementation of poverty eradication programs. By promoting self-help over subsidies, Kudumbashree fosters empowerment among below-poverty-line families, with a particular focus on women and children. A key feature of this structure is the establishment of Thrift and Credit Societies (TCS), which facilitate savings and credit access for NHG members (Anand, 2023).

Kudumbashree's mission underscores its holistic approach to poverty eradication, aiming to tackle multiple dimensions of deprivation through community-driven action. It moves beyond income-based assessments by empowering communities to self-assess vulnerabilities and adopt corrective measures. Such transparency and inclusivity ensure that the root causes of poverty are addressed comprehensively (Shihabudheen, 2013).

Through active participation in NHGs, women progress to leadership roles within ADS and CDS structures, gaining visibility and influence in local governance. Practical engagement in thrift mobilization, loan management, and micro-enterprises enhance their financial literacy and self-reliance, breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.

The very motto of kudumbashree is women empowerment through Community-Based Organizations. The aim is *"Reach out the family through women and reach out the society through family."* In such paradigms, women are positioned as conduits of policy, with resources channeled through them in the expectation that they will translate into broader familial and societal well-being (Molyneux, 2006; Gilbert, 2002). While such an approach may yield immediate developmental benefits, it risks entrenching unequal gender roles by reinforcing traditional norms of female altruism and sacrifice.

This dynamic not only perpetuates systemic inequalities but also imposes severe costs on women's health, well-being, and agency. The reliance on women's unpaid or poorly remunerated and less acknowledged labor, coupled with the exclusion of men from these responsibilities, entrenches a highly unequal model of family and community dynamics.

As noted by Bradshaw (2010), the failure to involve fathers or male family members in unpaid domestic work perpetuates a model of family life that is fundamentally inequitable.

It is noteworthy that while the term *Kudumbashree* transliterates from Malayalam as "prosperity of the family," the program's NHGs predominantly target womenfolk, often to the exclusion of men. This focus persists despite the patriarchal realities in which men exercise significant control over familial resources and decision-making. The seeming paradox of Kudumbashree's structure lies in its gendered foundation, wherein women are positioned as both the beneficiaries and primary agents of its poverty alleviation initiatives.

Therefore, Kudumbashree's operational framework has unintended consequences that are often left unaddressed. While fostering women's participation, it reinforces systemic inequities by disproportionately assigning responsibilities to women. This phenomenon, often described as the "feminization of responsibility" (Chant, 2008), raises critical questions about the program's long-term effectiveness and equity.

2. The Feminisation of Responsibility and Obligation

The "feminization of responsibility" describes the increasing expectations placed on women to shoulder economic and caregiving burdens within households, often internalizing these roles as obligatory (Chant, 2008). The "feminization of obligation" further emphasizes women's restricted agency in fulfilling these roles, even when the associated burdens exceed their capacity. Kudumbashree exemplifies these dynamics by positioning women as primary agents of poverty alleviation without adequately engaging men.

Women's resilience and adaptability are celebrated, but these narratives obscure the systemic inequalities and poorly paid labor underpinning their contributions. In being positioned as policy conduits, women are expected to translate limited resources into community well-being. While this approach yields short-term developmental gains, it entrenches unequal gender roles by normalizing women's unpaid labor.

Although Devika's (2016) incisive critique in "*The 'Kudumbashree Woman' and the Kerala Model Woman*" highlights the unintended consequences of such initiatives—such as the reinforcement of traditional gender roles—much of the current scholarship surrounding Kudumbashree tends to tacitly accept of women's triple shift (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993) as the norm; prioritizing the same over addressing social conditioning and deeper structural inequities. These veneers, crafted from narratives of empowerment and agency, emphasize the program's successes while concealing the feminization of responsibility, obligation, and the systemic reliance on female altruism.

3. Bourdieusian Field Theory

The concept of feminization of responsibility and obligation in Kudumbashree can be analyzed through Pierre Bourdieu's field theory by conceptualizing Kudumbashree

as a social field. This field is defined by its specific rules, stakes, and power dynamics, which influence how women participate, compete, and navigate their roles within the organization. By applying the theoretical constructs of field, habitus, and capital, we can explore the relational and structural aspects of this phenomenon.

3.1 Kudumbashree as a Social Field

In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, Kudumbashree constitutes a social field—a structured system of positions where agents (e.g., NHG members, ADS leaders, CDS leaders, and government actors) engage in struggles to accumulate and mobilize various forms of capital. The field's primary stakes revolve around community development, poverty eradication, and empowerment, which are mediated by the framework's operational dynamics, including thrift operations, micro-enterprises, and participatory governance. As a structured field, different forms of capital (economic, social, symbolic, and cultural) interact within hierarchical positions.

Women's NHGs and leadership roles (e.g., presidents and secretaries of NHGs, ADSs, and CDSs) operate within this field to advance Kudumbashree's objectives while simultaneously embedding women within a framework of societal obligations, reinforcing their roles as caregivers and community stewards.

The roles occupied by women in this field are shaped by both their positionality within Kudumbashree and the rules governing its operation. For instance, women's leadership roles in Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) and higher tiers like ADSs and CDSs position them as critical agents in delivering state-mandated programs, managing financial resources, and driving community welfare initiatives. However, these positions also place disproportionate obligations on them, reinforcing their roles as caregivers and community stewards.

3.2 The Dynamics of Incumbents and Insurgents

Field theory's distinction between incumbents and insurgents can illuminate the stratification within Kudumbashree. Incumbents, such as male family members and government actors, often aim to maintain the field's current structure, which integrates women into formalized yet feminized roles. In contrast, insurgents—represented by certain grassroots NHG members and key office bearers in Kudumbashree, pushing for more equitable distribution of responsibilities—may challenge these dynamics, seeking systemic change to reduce the burdens placed on women while increasing their agency.

Significant change within Kudumbashree could arise from such insurgent actions—however, there is a notable lack of external governmental interventions or a reevaluation of the rules governing participation and capital accumulation.

3.3 Habitus

Women's participation in Kudumbashree is deeply influenced by their habitus—a system of ingrained dispositions shaped by their socio-cultural and economic experiences.

In this context, women are often well aware of the prevalent dispositions regarding Kudumbashree meetings in public discourse—as a neighborhood gossip congregation that indulges in petty quarrels. Many women interviewed actively countered and challenged these societal habitus, highlighting the constructive work that was being done.

- Disputes in Kudumbashree meetings reportedly mostly surrounded financial matters such as the defaulting of loans. While the better-off Kudumbashree members opposed humiliating defaulters during meetings, their lower-earning peers acknowledged that defaulting often strained their relationships, for they contribute a greater proportion of their income while bearing the same absolute risk, which worsens their relative risk position.

- Most women respondents noted increased receptiveness and support from male family members for their participation in Kudumbashree activities. There is a reported shift from the predominant male habitus when women in their households participate in Kudumbashree, as reported in Devika & Thampi, 2007. However, certain families—particularly the well-off, upper caste households with multiple male earning members still tend to view it as an 'unnecessary' use of women's time. This indicates a persistence of paternalistic attitudes towards women's leisure, wherein women's spare time is believed to be best utilized to improve the comfort and state of their homes.

Additionally, women's own habitus aligns with the field's implicit nomos (organizing principles), which value caregiving and community service as central to women's contributions. This alignment perpetuates the social illusion or *illusio*, that these responsibilities are empowering, even as they extend traditional gendered roles and increase the pressure and expectations on them.

Household work still largely remains relegated to the female members of the family. Many women respondents admit that they have not thought about how unfair or unequal the domestic division of labor really is. Many feel that status-quo traditional and cultural factors have led to the same, and some preferred giving priority to male family members. The triple burden persists as doxa, ingrained in the habitus. Participation in Kudumbashree reshapes women's perceptions of their societal roles but does not fully dismantle patriarchal expectations.

3.4 Capital and Power Dynamics

Kudumbashree's field dynamics revolve around the accumulation and deployment of economic, social, and cultural capital.

- **Economic Capital**: TCS enables women to generate savings and access loans, enhancing their financial independence (Kudumbashree, n.d.-d) while also tying them to responsibilities like household finance, accounting for other family members' financial profligacy with their own incomes, assuming the role of a provider—all in addition to their respective remunerative work, household chores, and caregiving responsibilities.

- **Social Capital**: Social networks formed within NHGs, ADSs, and CDSs provide women with communal support, social cohesion, and access to resources

(Bhoola et al., 2024) but also reinforce expectations of unpaid or low-paid labor in implementing welfare schemes. Several women respondents also admitted that Kudumbashree's programs and festivities led to increased workload which further constrained their already pressed time.

- **Symbolic Capital**: Women in leadership roles within NHGs and higher tiers like ADSs and CDSs are pivotal in implementing government programs, managing community finances, and spearheading local welfare initiatives. However, these roles often impose a heavy burden on women, exacerbating their existing responsibilities as caregivers and community stewards. Accompanied by increased social obligations and responsibilities, this capital can be both empowering and burdensome.
- **Cultural Capital**: Training programs increase women's abilities and skills, elevating their status in the community. Noteworthily, in the interview, all women (without exceptions) reported their satisfaction in gaining the ability to visit banks and direct transactions and other procedures. However, this capital often remains constrained by systemic structures that limit their decision-making power.

The interplay between these forms of capital reveals how the field sustains itself: by creating incentives that simultaneously empower and overburden women.

3.5 Stabilization and Symbolic Violence

Kudumbashree operates as a relatively stable field, sustained by rules that standardize competition and maintain the dominance of incumbents. However, this stability may perpetuate symbolic violence—subtle forms of domination that legitimize and normalize women's expanded obligations. For instance, while Kudumbashree promotes empowerment, the additional responsibilities placed on women in NHGs often extend unpaid labor under the guise of participatory development, without offering equitable rewards.

3.6 Feminization of Responsibility

Bourdieu's framework suggests that the feminization of responsibility in Kudumbashree is not merely a byproduct of operational necessity but a structural feature of its field dynamics. Women's roles are shaped by the field's nomos, which prioritizes their labor in community and household spheres, framing it as both a duty and a privilege. The challenge lies in redefining the rules of the field to distribute responsibilities equitably and ensure that empowerment translates into genuine agency.

4. Citizenship: A Gendered Perspective

T.H. Marshall's *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950) conceptualizes citizenship as a collective status encompassing equal rights and obligations within a community. Marshall delineates a linear progression of rights—civil, political, and social— reflecting democratization over time.

However, feminist critiques challenge this framework's universality, highlighting how marginalized groups, particularly women, often encounter disrupted sequences of rights acquisition. Gail Omvedt notes that for historically disadvantaged groups, political enfranchisement often precedes civil rights, leaving systemic exclusions intact.

Carol Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* critiques the social contract's patriarchal underpinnings, demonstrating how citizenship perpetuates gendered hierarchies that render women subordinate. Contemporary scholars like Rian Vloet advocate for "sex-equal citizenship," emphasizing dismantling structural inequalities to achieve substantive equality.

5. Active Citizenship and the Kudumbashree Paradigm

Kudumbashree, Kerala's poverty eradication mission, provides a feminist lens to explore active citizenship. By fostering women's participation in governance and development, it transforms them from passive welfare recipients to active decision-makers, facilitating the exercise of political, social, and economic rights. Women in Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) manage thrift operations, lead community initiatives, and engage in local governance, enhancing their social capital and leadership potential.

However, this empowerment often reinforces traditional caregiving roles, perpetuating a "feminization of responsibility." Women's labor, framed as community duty, shifts poverty alleviation burdens onto them, often without adequate structural support.

6. Rethinking Citizenship

Kudumbashree's achievements and limitations underscore the need to reimagine citizenship beyond patriarchal frameworks. Achieving sex-equal citizenship demands dismantling socio-political structures that tie women's rights to disproportionate obligations. True empowerment lies in an equitable redistribution of rights and responsibilities, ensuring women's agency is neither symbolic nor constrained by systemic inequities.

7. Labelling Theory

Howard Becker's Labelling Theory (1963) provides a critical lens through which to examine the perpetuation of patriarchal structures in Kudumbashree. Labels such as "altruistic" and "selfless", often attached to women's roles in domestic and community settings, serve to normalize and valorize their overwork. By internalizing these labels, women are socialized to conform to societal expectations of being omnipresent, reliable caregivers.

This internalization reinforces the systemic undervaluation of women's labor and entrenches their subservient roles both in the household and in broader community contexts.

8. Mobility Avenues and Patriarchal Bargain

Kudumbashree offers significant avenues for physical and social mobility, particularly for women from marginalized communities. These opportunities for visible socio-economic empowerment, however, often come at the cost of reinforcing patriarchal norms through what Ebaugh (1993) terms the "patriarchal bargain." This compromise allows women to navigate and partially benefit within the constraints of patriarchal structures without fundamentally challenging them. While women gain access to leadership roles and financial resources, their labor is disproportionately relied upon to sustain community welfare initiatives, thereby maintaining the patriarchal status quo.

9. Patriarchal Structures

In Walby's Theorizing Patriarchy (1989), six key structures through which patriarchy operates were identified. This study focuses on three of these: the patriarchal state, patriarchal relations in paid work, and patriarchal relations in culture. These structures reveal the complex interplay of institutional and cultural forces that shape women's experiences within Kudumbashree.

9.1 Patriarchy of the State

State policies and programs, including Kudumbashree, can inadvertently reinforce patriarchal norms and expectations. Walby's framework highlights how states, even while championing women's empowerment publicly, often perpetuate subtler forms of patriarchal control. For example, while Kudumbashree ostensibly empowers women by integrating them into decision-making roles, it simultaneously assigns them the unpaid or underpaid labor of community development, reinforcing traditional gender roles. As Walby asserts, "When patriarchy loosens its grip in one area, it only tightens it in other arenas."

9.2 Patriarchy of Culture

Cultural norms and values, disseminated through media, religion, and education, play a significant role in shaping gender roles and expectations. These norms glorify female altruism and normalize the triple burden of domestic work, childcare, and community service. Within Kudumbashree, this cultural patriarchy manifests in the tacit acceptance of women's labor as a natural extension of their roles as caregivers, further embedding patriarchal ideals in the guise of community participation.

9.3 Patriarchy of Paid Work

The gendered division of labor in the formal economy has direct implications for women's participation in Kudumbashree. Women are often relegated to low-paying, monotonous tasks that align with traditional gender roles, such as tailoring, food processing, or caregiving services. These structural inequalities within Kudumbashree's operational model limit women's ability to access more lucrative or diverse opportunities, thereby perpetuating their economic marginalization.

10. Power, Structure, and Agency

10.1 Power, Structure, and Agency in the Context of Kudumbashree

Giddens' concept of *structuration* and Lash's perspectives on power (Layder, 1985) provide a valuable framework for analyzing the feminization of responsibility and obligation in Kudumbashree. Structuration emphasizes the duality of structure and agency—structures are both the medium and outcome of human action. This dynamic interplay allows women within Kudumbashree to exercise agency, even as they navigate entrenched patriarchal structures.

Women in Kudumbashree operate within a context of structural constraints that delineate their roles and responsibilities, often reinforcing traditional gender norms. These structures, as defined by Layder (1985), represent a set of reproduced social relations that possess enduring qualities. For example, Kudumbashree's operational model positions women as key agents of community welfare, drawing upon their labor for thrift operations, micro-enterprises, and caregiving tasks. While these roles enhance women's visibility in public and economic spheres, they simultaneously reinforce a gendered division of labor.

10.2 Exercising Agency Within Structural Constraints

Despite these constraints, women in Kudumbashree exercise agency by reinterpreting and negotiating the norms that govern their participation. Giddens argues that agency is intrinsically linked to power; through their actions, individuals draw upon and potentially reshape structures. In Kudumbashree, this is evident in the way women utilize collective platforms, such as Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), to question inequities and assert their interests.

11. Negotiating Structures

- **Confrontation**: Women challenge traditional norms by assuming leadership roles in ADSs and CDSs, leveraging these positions to advocate for community needs and push back against gendered expectations.
- **Navigation**: Some women adapt to the patriarchal bargain by strategically balancing their public responsibilities with private obligations, ensuring they meet societal expectations while carving out space for empowerment.
- **Succumbing**: For many, the weight of structural constraints limits their ability to fully exercise agency, resulting in compliance with gendered labor demands and the perpetuation of symbolic violence.

12. Power Dynamics and Structural Reproduction

Lash's emphasis on the reproduction of structures underscores how Kudumbashree's framework, while transformative in some respects, remains tied to the existing power dynamics of gender. The patriarchal state subtly enforces norms that valorize women's labor without addressing the root causes of inequality. This duality aligns with Giddens' notion that while structures constrain action, they also enable it.

The exercise of agency by women in Kudumbashree does not occur in a vacuum but is shaped by the structural power embedded in societal norms and institutional frameworks. These enduring structures often co-opt women's agency, directing it toward sustaining the very systems they aim to challenge.

13. Time Poverty and Leisure

The feminization of responsibility in Kudumbashree exacerbates what Clair Vickery (1977) termed "time poverty"—a lack of sufficient discretionary time due to the cumulative demands of paid and unpaid labor. Vickery's framework identifies time poverty as a distinct dimension of deprivation that intersects with income poverty, disproportionately impacting women.

In Kudumbashree, women's involvement in NHGs, ADSs, and micro-enterprises often comes on top of their pre-existing responsibilities for domestic work and caregiving. Nearly all interviewed women reported facing time constraints. Women, in particular those with remunerative work found it difficult to regularly attend weekly meetings so much that most Kudumbashree office bearers have relaxed this requirement.

Additional responsibilities have also prevented women from having leisure. A key concept in the Marxist theoretical strand, leisure is considered a basic need for the overall development of the individual and essential for self-actualization.

Hyde et al. (2020) further argue that time poverty is not just an individual burden but a structural issue that undermines women's human rights, health, and sustainable development.

For women in Kudumbashree, the demands of fulfilling community obligations, attending meetings, managing thrift operations, and engaging in livelihood activities leave little room for rest, leisure, or personal development. This relentless cycle of overwork reinforces gendered inequalities, as women's time is systematically devalued and appropriated for the benefit of familial and communal welfare.

Moreover, the normalization of women's time poverty within Kudumbashree aligns with patriarchal cultural norms that valorize female self-sacrifice. As Hyde et al. note, this dynamic has far-reaching implications for women's mental and physical health, limiting their capacity to fully benefit from the socio-economic opportunities provided by programs like Kudumbashree.

While the initiative aims to empower women, its operational model often fails to address the root causes of time poverty, such as the unequal distribution of unpaid labor within households and communities.

The structural nature of time poverty also limits women's ability to exercise agency and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. As Vickery highlighted, time poverty diminishes the quality of participation by constraining individuals' ability to invest fully in civic and economic activities.

In Kudumbashree, this results in a paradox where women are active contributors to development initiatives but remain trapped in cycles of obligation that hinder their personal and professional growth.

14. Conclusion

Kudumbashree exemplifies a transformative model of grassroots development but raises critical questions about equity and sustainability. True empowerment requires a shift from gendered labor expectations to an inclusive model of development. Engaging men and redistributing responsibilities are essential for achieving the program's transformative potential.

Through the lens of field theory, Kudumbashree emerges as a complex social arena where the feminization of responsibility is both a product of systemic structures and an outcome of women's strategic engagement with the stakes of the field. Addressing this issue requires destabilizing the existing power dynamics and reconfiguring the rules to balance empowerment with equitable responsibility distribution. This theoretical approach provides a robust framework for analyzing and addressing gender inequalities within development programs.

By situating Kudumbashree within the broader discourse of feminist citizenship, this analysis underscores the need for frameworks that go beyond formal equality to address the deeper, systemic inequalities that shape women's experiences as citizens. Only then can initiatives like Kudumbashree transcend the paradox of empowerment through obligation and foster genuine agency and autonomy for all participants.

The interplay of these patriarchal structures highlights the need for a critical examination of how programs like Kudumbashree, while fostering socio-economic mobility, often operate within and reinforce existing gendered hierarchies. To achieve genuine empowerment, it is essential to address these structural and cultural barriers, ensuring that women's agency and labor are not constrained by the very systems claiming to liberate them.

Addressing time poverty within Kudumbashree requires a paradigm shift that prioritizes the equitable redistribution of labor and challenges the cultural norms that glorify women's overwork. Policymakers and program designers must recognize that genuine empowerment involves not only providing opportunities for participation but also ensuring that women have the time and resources to engage meaningfully. Without tackling the structural roots of time poverty, the promise of programs like Kudumbashree will remain limited, perpetuating the very inequalities they seek to dismantle.

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Alternative Ways of Ecological Conservation: A Study of Sacred Groves

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Abstract

The T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India judgment on December 18, 2024, highlighted the ecological importance of sacred groves like Rajasthan's Orans. These groves, preserved through cultural and religious practices, regulate resource use and sustain biodiversity, as seen in Uttarakhand's Hariyali Devi grove. In contrast, scientific conservation methods, such as national parks, often exclude local communities and overlook traditional knowledge. This essay critiques such approaches while recognizing efforts like the Forest Rights Act, Joint Forest Management, and the Convention on Biological Diversity to involve communities in conservation. Despite progress, challenges like unequal power dynamics persist. Integrating sacred groves into formal frameworks can combine indigenous knowledge with scientific methods for more holistic and sustainable biodiversity conservation.

Keywords: Sacred Groves, Ecological Conservation, Indigenous Knowledge, Biodiversity, Protected Areas, Forest Rights, Joint Forest Management

1. Introduction

December 18, 2024, witnessed a landmark judgment in the case T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India, the Supreme Court of India made a significant ruling that emphasized the protection of sacred groves in Rajasthan, the Orans. This recognition underscored the critical role that indigenous practices, such as those related to sacred groves, play in ecological conservation, which has long been overlooked in favor of more scientifically driven methods developed in policy-making corridors. While these scientific methods of conservation have their merits, they often fail to consider the invaluable insights held by local communities that have coexisted harmoniously with nature for centuries.

This essay tries to provide an alternative to the methods of scientific ecological conservation in the form of encouraging sacred groves that have been practiced by different communities across India.

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Sacred groves are forest patches that have survived due to strong cultural forces that make it distinct from the rest of the surrounding agricultural or pastoral landscapes (Negi 2005). The scientific notion portrays local communities as a threat to the forest (Randeria 2007) thereby depriving the forest-dwelling and tribal communities of their livelihood and cultural and religious practices. Also, in order to restrict the movement of these people within protected areas deterrence through arrest and harassment is often adopted by the state institutions. Apart from this, the failure of scientific conservation methods to curb ecological destruction can be noted from the constant rise in biodiversity hotspots[2].

This essay explores an alternative to conventional scientific methods of ecological conservation by advocating for the recognition and revitalization of sacred groves as a viable solution to the current environmental crises. It delves into the indigenous knowledge systems that sustain these practices and contrasts them with modern scientific approaches to environmental protection. Additionally, the essay examines recent innovations introduced by the Government of India, particularly through the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, and Joint Forest Management practices. Thereby, the essay underscores the importance of blending traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary policy frameworks to ensure sustainable environmental management in India.

2. Epistemology of Sacred Groves: The Alternative Understanding of Ecology

In this section, the essay will discuss the ways of how knowledge systems have been used by the indigenous communities to allocate a patch of forest as a sacred grove. The essay has studied the sacred groves of the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. The Himalayas cover more than 31.05% of India's forest cover and 40% of the species endemic to the Indian Sub-continent (Anthwal, 2008), thereby making it an important geographical zone in terms of ecological conservation.

Sacred sights are one of the oldest ways of protecting habitats, and they continue to form a large and mostly unrecognized network of sanctuaries around the world (Anthwal, 2008). These sacred groves are maintained by communities through several religious beliefs, rituals, and social conventions that restrict the excess use of forest resources, thereby helping in the conservation of biodiversity (Singh et al., 2017). 'Religious beliefs, tradition, and culture are the products of logical internalization of human experience and learning' (Anthwal 2008).

One such example of religious belief helping in the conservation of biodiversity is the deitification of forests. The sacred grove of Hariyali Devi is located above Kodima village in Rudrapayag, Uttarakhand. The grove has a temple in which a bejeweled idol of *Ma Hariyali Devi* astride a lion. Multiple beliefs surround the sanctity of the sacred grove of Hariyali Devi.

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[2] Bio-diversity hotspots must contain at least 1,500 species of vascular plants found nowhere else on Earth (known as "endemic" species) and have lost at least 70 percent of its primary native vegetation.

"According to Hindu Mythology, when Devi Mahamaya was conceived in the form of Devaki's seventh child, the cruel brother of Devaki, Kansa threw Devi Mahamaya aggressively on the ground. Immediately multiple body parts of Devi got scattered all over the earth. The hand fell at Hariyali Devi. Since then, it has become a revered place as Siddha Peeth.

The myth also prevails according to which Yogmaya was the sister of Lord Krishna, and she replaced him in the cell of his parents during his birth. When Kansa threw her against the wall, she turned into lightning and came to Hariyali Parvat to make her abode. Since then, the adjoining forest has been known as "Hariyali" and is worshipped by people" (Singh et al., 2017, p. 9).

The sanctity of the grove is also maintained by restricting the movement in the groves. It is women who have mainly the responsibility to collect fodder and other household necessities from the forests, therefore restricting their movement ensures that the sacred groves are not exploited for the daily needs of the community (Negi, 2012; Singh et al., 2017).

Another example of restraint on the exploitation of resources for short-term gains can be seen in the grazing pastures in Hya-Roshe Bugyal located in Uttarakhand. It is regulated by allowing the grazing of only sacred yaks, this reduces the load on the grazing land. (Negi, 2012). Also, the community regulates the duration of harvests in a sustainable manner. For example, only those Brahmakamal are collected for offering prayers to goddess Nanda that are fully opened. The collection of the flowers is also done according to the environmental clock, i.e., after the seeds are shed by the species so that the activity does not affect the regeneration of the flower (Negi, 2012).

The tradition is carried forward and maintained by a celebration of festivals and the organization of fairs within these communities (Singh et al., 2017). At these fairs that are organized during festivals, the local communities reaffirm their commitment to the forest and the deity. The heads of the communities supervise the utilization and maintenance of the sacred groves to ensure that there is no deviation from the village-appointed rules (Singh et al. 2017).

The other ways of forest conservation that are scientific in nature will be discussed in the following section.

3. Contrast with the Scientific Epistemology

All kinds of representations of the environment have certain power relations hidden and prioritize one kind of knowledge system over others (Tomalin, 2005). The ecological conservation policy presently is dominantly guided by the scientific conceptions that are considered to be universal (Randeria, 2007) negating the indigenous knowledge, practice, and norms.

The concepts of conserving ecology that are scientific in nature include: the idea of classification of the environment, removing animals and plants from a context and putting them into an artificial category (Suchet, 2002), large-scale conservation strategies in the form of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and

conservation and significance strategies based on scientific measurement (Randeria, 2007) for example to qualify as a biodiversity hotspot two criteria should be met, they are- it must contain at least 0.5% or 1,500 species of vascular plants as endemics, and it has to have lost at least 70% of its primary vegetation.

The essay has studied protected areas as one of the ways of scientific methods of ecological conservation. Protected areas are one of the dominant ways of forest conservation, they cover nearly 15% of the world's surface (Khan et al., 2008).

Protected areas are organized by the state offices and actors thereby making protected areas sites of territorialization and state formation (Lunstrum et al., 2018). Territorialization by state takes place through various activities, one of them is the responsibility that the state acquires itself to protect resources deemed valuable and vulnerable as 'national resources' or 'national heritage' (Lunstrum et al., 2018). For example, in India, the concept of protected areas was brought by the Britishers. The justification for establishing such an area was to place a considerable part of the country under the control of the Forest Department (Brockington et al., 2008).

The concept of protected areas also promotes the idea that wilderness needs to be separated conceptually and physically from anthropogenic landscapes. It develops the perspective that landscapes that are distant and exotic are worth saving (Brockington et al., 2008). Moreover, national parks are often presented as examples of nature in all its glory, unspoiled and pristine (Suchet, 2002). Therefore, the removal of Indigenous communities also became important to realize the essence of national parks as spaces of 'wilderness'. (Lunstrum et al., 2018). Protected areas, thus reflect conservation as a mode of 'biopolitical governance' that aims at controlling, managing, and regulating not only the nonhuman but human populations as well (Massé, 2020).

The following section has dealt with the innovations by the government in order to accommodate local communities in the scientific conservation of ecology and discusses several measures adopted at the national and international levels.

4. Dimensions of Innovation

It is being noted that scientific methods of ecological conservation have overtly tried to remove the local communities who were a part of the ecosystem. The centralized control during the 19th and 20th centuries failed either to conserve resources or to contribute substantially to the well-being of local populations (Bhattacharya, 2009). It is noted that where people are involved in forest management not only the degraded forest was re-generated but also the community's subsistence needs were met. As a result of the recognition of the significance of traditional ecological knowledge and the importance of involving local communities in conservation efforts, the Government of India has introduced several legislative measures and signed international conventions aimed at accommodating and empowering indigenous populations in the protection of biodiversity.

On the international front, India has been a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity since 1994, which stresses the need to preserve and maintain traditional practices of indigenous communities in situ. Article 10(c), which encourages the protection and encouragement of customary use of biological resources, reinforces the importance of integrating traditional knowledge in global conservation efforts. Additionally, India endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, which recognizes indigenous peoples' rights to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or occupied lands and territories.

On the legislative front, one of the key legislative provisions is Section 36C of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which acknowledges 'community reserves. Further, Section 36(5) of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 mandates that the Central Government must "endeavor to respect and protect the knowledge of local people relating to biological diversity."

Moreover, under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (FRA), 2006, Section 3(1)(i) recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling communities to protect, regenerate, or conserve community forest resources that they have traditionally protected for sustainable use. Section 5(a) empowers these communities to safeguard wildlife, forests, and biodiversity, while Section 5(c) mandates the prevention of activities that could harm their cultural and natural heritage. These provisions ensure that local communities play an integral role in managing and conserving their natural surroundings, promoting both sustainable use and biodiversity protection.

The Government of India introduced guidelines on Joint Forest Management based on the National Forest Policy of 1988. Joint Forest management is a decentralized and people-centered forest management technique. Although Joint Forest management has been administered nationally, decisions on ways of implementation have been left to the individual states, leading to different strategies (Bhattacharya, 2009). Decentralization in forest management is also done through the formulation of micro-plans based on area visits by the local population.

Several field studies have indicated improvement in the forest condition in the areas where joint Forest Management has been adopted (Bhattacharya, 2009). A Case study of Choukoni Vanpanchayat Ranikhet, Uttarakhand has been taken to substantiate the claim. The association of the villagers with the forest was before the establishment of Vanpanchayat. The forest surrounding the village has a large number of chir pine trees, and due to their high oil content, the forest was highly inflammable. It was the villagers who for centuries protected the forest from fire. "Looking at their interest and relentless efforts of protecting the chir pine forests, the forest department proposed the formation of Van Panchayat in 1999.

They took the offer and became associated with the forest department formally for managing and protecting the forests by creating the VP" (Joint Forest Management Handbook, 2000).

The Vanpanchayat which is constituted of the villagers now makes decisions for the sustainable usage of non-timber forest products[3] and also ensures immediate action in case of fire outbreaks.

Together, these legislative measures and international commitments have created a framework for recognizing and empowering indigenous communities in the conservation of biodiversity, fostering a more inclusive approach to ecological preservation that integrates both traditional and scientific knowledge.

5. Challenges in Integrating Cultural Practices, Legislation, and Ecological Action

Simply blaming the West and Eurocentric understanding of ecology as the sole cause of the present ecological crisis is problematic. Normative cultural practices that are considered eco-friendly, do not guarantee whether people will be able to actualize those practices (Tomalin, 2005). Such as by simply linking goddess with earth may not translate into a practice of saving the earth as portraying women as goddesses has not led women to be placed in a higher position in society (Narayanan, 1997). It is often argued that the very basis of conserving nature is to follow the rituals and not for the sake of environmental protection (Tomalin, 2005).

Despite religio-cultural tradition playing an important role in day-to-day life, it has not been made one of the issues in cleaning of river Ganga. The government has spent millions of rupees in cleaning the river but little has improved (Chapple and Tucker, 2000).

The legislative innovations, while progressive, are also fraught with limitations. Even though the concept of Joint Forest Management was a positive step towards decentralized government and forest management, with the potential of empowering the community and increasing the livelihood security of the impoverished forest-dependent communities, the unequal participation of stakeholders, i.e., the local communities in the key decision-making process has made community forestry invaluable. The continuing imbalance in power and authority between the villagers and the Forest Department has emerged as a serious shortcoming of Joint Forest Management (Bhattacharya, 2009).

The implementation of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (FRA), 2006 has been hindered by a disproportionate focus on Individual Forest Rights (IFRs), which are often treated as a mere land distribution scheme rather than acknowledging the pre-existing collective rights of forest-dependent communities (Samal 2020). This approach risks undermining the core objectives of the FRA, which is intended to recognize and secure both individual and community rights over forest resources. This disconnect between belief and action limits the effectiveness of sacred groves and traditional beliefs in achieving long-term ecological goals.

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[3] According to the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act non timber forest produce includes bamboo, brushwood, cane, honey, wax, etc.

6. Conclusion

Protected areas and sacred groves have a common aim of conservation of ecology by restricting human activity in certain patches of forested lands. However, the stark difference between the two approaches is their methods of such restrictions. As already noted in the above sections of the essay, protected areas have a more exclusionary nature of conservation, whereby the communities that have been part of the forest ecosystem get left out, on the other hand, sacred groves have tried to accommodate both human and non-human populations.

Biodiversity outside the protected areas however is richer when compared to the state-established conservation centers (Anthwal, 2008). The reason behind this is the symbiotic relationship between biological and cultural diversity (Anthwal Ashish, 2008). It is one's culture that provides perspective to an individual to look at different things surrounding oneself including ecology (Milton, 1996). Therefore, the notion of ecology itself is a result of social construct. It is the value that people place on themselves, plants, and animals that determines their actions toward nature (Schultz, 2000). Therefore, the driving force towards the conservation of biodiversity will remain primarily ethical (Anthwal, 2008).

Sacred groves, though criticized for their lack of scientific basis, social restraints like taboos have succeeded in providing protection to the selected habitat patches, and plant and animal species (Anthwal, 2008). For example, sacred groves have played an important role in soil conservation by improving soil stability[4] (Kandari, 2014). Sacred groves also are spots of high carbon sequestration thereby contributing to reduced concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere, due to their thick vegetation cover (Kandari, 2014).

Therefore, the essay argues that accommodation of the practice of sacred groves in the conservation of ecological diversity. Reaching out to the indigenous communities who have been living in harmony with nature and transforming them into active participants in the formulation of ecological conservation policies is the need of the hour.

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[4] Plants like vetiver grass (Vetiveria zizanioides) and Eucalyptus act as a soil binder that prevents soil erosion.

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Young Voices

Secularism in Bangladesh:
A Paradox?

Amira Fazal[1]

Abstract

As interim PM Prof Yusuf was sworn in, PM Modi was among the first few to receive a phone call as the new PM gave assurances that the safety of the Hindu and other minorities shall remain a priority for the new Bangladesh, after the fall of Sheikh Hasina earlier this month. However, this begs the question, as to why the kerfuffle regarding the threat to Hindu minorities was on the rise in the first place, following the hastened departure of the former PM as student revolutionaries took over Ganabhaban. This paper seeks to understand how secularism in Bangladesh has panned out over the years.

Keywords: Secularism, Bangladesh, Political Islam, Bengali Nationalism, Religious Minorities

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a country of contradictions. When Awami League leader SK Mujibur Rahman won the country's independence, the basis for separation was clear—founded on language and cultural identity rather than Islamic identity. The Awami League particularly won the hearts of the people because it represented not only Bangladeshi interests but also emphasized minority communities, especially Hindus. It was envisioned as an egalitarian, secular state built on the pillars of Bengali nationalism (Guhathakurta, 2012). However, the ideals of secularism have faced challenges from the rising influence of political Islam and sectarian tensions, often portraying Islamic identity as opposing Bengali nationalism and secular governance (Absar, 2014). This situation worsened with the constitutional declaration of Islam as the state religion in 2011, leading many to believe it revoked the secularist ideals encouraged at the country's founding, fueling religiously motivated political agendas and trends of exclusion for religious minorities (Absar, 2014). Bangladesh's secular ideology can be traced back to the anti-colonial movement and the Bengali language movement of the 1950s, which unified Bengalis in the fight for linguistic and cultural recognition (Absar, 2014).

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It was, therefore a turning point in the country's history as it formed a war of liberation during 1971 to liberate Bangladesh from religious nationalism that had underpinned the united Pakistan and form an independent secular nation.

2. Challenges to Maintaining Secular Principles

Over time after achieving independence, the early-year promises of secularism gradually lost ground and eventually paved the way as political parties and religious groups began focusing more on regaining their influence and gradually introducing the influence of Islam into governance as well as social life. During the 1970s, dictatorships in Bangladesh adopted the device of using Islamic rhetoric and symbols to strengthen their positions toward legitimacy and consolidation. This was a long way from the country's founding principles as a secular nation-state by Mujibur Rahman. (Hasan, 2012).

3. Secularism and National Identity

Further fueling this process was the rise of global Islamist movements and the expanding role of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, which began to provide financial and ideological support for a variety of Islamist groups in Bangladesh.

Islamic political movements began to resurge once again with the coming of the post-Bangladesh identity crisis along with an influx of Arab oil wealth. Thus, the initial cradle of robust Bengali nationalism defining Bangladesh's national identity gradually made way for a religiously-influenced "Bangladeshi" nationalism increasingly positioning Islam at the center of the country's consciousness (Hasan, 2012). It's set the pattern for this ceaseless tug-of-war in which the two dominant parties, the Awami League, which has nurtured secular Bengali nationalism, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, have historically identified with Islamist outfits and sought to affirm its more religiously-grounded national identity.

This fight has important implications for what has happened to religious minorities in Bangladesh. This has tended to mean the protection of rights and security for Hindus, Buddhists, and other small minorities during the rule of the Awami League, while the Bangladesh Nationalist Party embracing Islamism has often strengthened the trend toward increased persecution and marginalization of them. In recent years, violence, discrimination, and forced conversions against Hindu, Christian, and other minorities have increased during the BNP regimes, as Islamist factions attempted to push for a more prominent role of Islam in the social and political life of the country. This situation has led to insecurity and vulnerability among many of the country's minority citizens and challenges the founding vision of Bangladesh as an egalitarian, inclusive state.

Thus, the struggle between these two groups is a very important determinant of the future status and treatment of religious minorities in the country. More than that, while formally all Bangladeshi political parties are secular, none of them wishes to lose the Islamic votes that make up a considerable part of the electorate. And Islamist votes count too.

This is why, as the world mourns, right and left act very warily towards radical Muslims, even ambiguously at times, despite their official declarations. It is for this

reason that many are afraid that the image of Bangladesh as a tolerant country, proudly upheld in official speeches, is wavering.

4. Media Narratives and the Perpetuation of Stereotypes

The marginalization of Religious minorities, which include Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and other smaller faith groups, has usually been relegated to the periphery in political and social discourses about secularism. They have had to balance their need to assert their rights and identities with the complex dynamics of a state that has increasingly privileged Islamic identity and influence. Many of these communities are concerned about the erosion of secularist principles and growing public incarnations of religious nationalism. They have been vocal in demanding the re-establishment and strengthening of secular governance because it is meant to protect their rights, preserve their respective cultural and religious practices, and foster an egalitarian and inclusive society.

Minority perspectives on secularism are diverse and reflect their unique historical experiences, cultural traditions, and socio-political contexts. Some minority groups have called for a more activist and inclusive form of secularism that actively promotes and accommodates the country's religious diversity, whereas others have emphasized the need to maintain a strong distinction between religion and state to ensure equal treatment of all citizens. In any event, it is the voices and experiences of religious minorities themselves that will shape the ongoing discourse on secularism in Bangladesh. Their views, therefore, are useful in understanding the stringent challenges and opportunities of staying pluralistic and truly inclusive, and for that engagement, this dialogue is truly fundamental to the realization of the founding principles of this land of secularism and equality.

5. Conclusion

Northeast Bangladesh has a new ground to cover: going that distance in its state and political discourses and thinking about restructuring its ideological constructs. It could learn from the experience of countries that have had to endure a similar trend of political development-drain, like Turkey, Indonesia, and India, which were all struggling to find the right tone between secularism and religious influences on governance.

One such measure could be further strengthening the institutional and legal framework-sustaining the secular foundation of the state. This may include going into the constitutional recognition of Islam as the state religion and reaffirming principles of equality rights and non-discrimination for all citizens. Bangladesh could also think of enhancing the role of civil society and independent media as key players in safeguarding the secular identity of the country and in promoting narratives that are inclusive and pluralistic.

Furthermore, Bangladeshi political parties might get better focused on more constructive and nuanced dialogue concerning the role of religion in public life, finding a common point and compromise between the competing visions of secularism and religious nationalism. This could involve the cultural-historical significance Islam has in Bangladeshi society while at the same time upholding the

fundamental rights of religious minorities and corresponding between state and religion.

In the end, it will require the multidimensionality of the approach in taming the political Islam and religiosity in Bangladesh. It requires an understanding of what goes political and ideological regarding this challenge. Learning from other experiences and embarking on a critical self-reflection and rethinking process will take Bangladesh far along this path.

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Defining the Other:
Systemic Alienation, and the Perpetual Marginalization of Northeast India in Modern Indian Policy

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Abstract

This article examines the ongoing marginalization of Northeast India through Indian state policies, focusing on systemic alienation perpetuated by legislation like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and socio-cultural exclusions ingrained within Indian society. Northeast Indians frequently experience prejudice, often misrecognized as "foreigners" despite being Indian citizens. Policies have historically deprioritized development in Northeast India, ostensibly to limit resource access for adversaries. Through a critical examination of AFSPA, economic neglect, cultural policing, and media representation, this article argues for policy reforms to dismantle exclusionary frameworks and establish a more inclusive national identity that respects Northeast India's unique diversity.

Keywords: AFSPA, northeast India, culture, society

1. Introduction: The Cost of "Indianizing" Northeast India

India's Northeast is one of the most culturally rich and diverse regions in the country, home to a mosaic of ethnic groups, languages, and traditions that contribute to its unique identity. However, for decades, the Indian state's approach to this region has been driven by an impulse to integrate and homogenize it under a singular, pan-Indian identity (Sankhyan et al., 2020).

This impulse to "Indianize" Northeast India—often through cultural, linguistic, and social mandates—has created a fraught relationship between the state and its Northeastern citizens (Lego, 2023). Instead of celebrating the Northeast's rich diversity, national policies have tended to overlook its unique cultural, ethnic, and historical identities, leading to widespread discontent and alienation (Lego, 2023) (Das, 2009).

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Efforts to define a singular Indian identity have often included encouraging or mandating Northeastern citizens to adopt mainland customs, ranging from language to dress. This strategy has resulted in stereotypes that associate Northeast Indian women, in particular, with "exotic" and "anti-national" characteristics (Dowerah, 2017). Such assumptions not only perpetuate harmful biases but also serve as a means of social control, reinforcing the marginalization of Northeast Indians within their own country. Scholars like Arambam have argued that these policies reflect a deep-seated fear of the "other," casting Northeast India as both a cultural outsider and a security threat (Arambam, 2008).

This paper will thereby critically examine the roots and manifestations of Northeast India's marginalization, focusing on discriminatory policies, media stereotypes, and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). By analyzing these dimensions, the paper aims to uncover how Indian policy has entrenched a perception of the Northeast as a "separatist frontier," with its people deemed suspect and disposable. The article concludes with a call for a more inclusive approach to governance, one that respects Northeast India's unique identity and values its contributions to the national fabric.

2. Northeast Indian Women and the Blame Culture: A System of Marginalization

A striking example of the systemic alienation of Northeast India can be seen in the treatment of Northeast Indian women within the larger social narrative. Northeast women often face discrimination that is rationalized through victim-blaming and racial stereotyping. An incident reported by Arambam illustrates the prejudice embedded within institutional attitudes (Arambam, 2008). In 2005, a college principal at a prestigious Indian university mandated that Northeast women wear salwar-kameez, a traditional North Indian attire, claiming that their "Western" dress was the cause of the harassment they experienced.

This directive encapsulates the pervasive cultural bias against Northeast Indian women, associating them with "loose" lifestyles and "exotic" sexuality that purportedly incite violence against them (Mukherjee, 2018). McDuie argues that such victim-blaming narratives perpetuate the idea that Northeast women are outsiders whose cultural norms do not align with those of "mainstream" India (McDuie, 2012).

The Delhi Police have also issued guidelines suggesting that Northeast women adopt more "conservative" clothing to avoid harassment. Their pamphlet cautioned Northeast women against "revealing dress" and urged them to "dress according to the sensitivity of the local populace." Such statements are not merely "tips" but reflect a deep-seated prejudice that holds victims responsible for the violence they endure while absolving the perpetrators. For Northeastern women, these policies are both alienating and dehumanizing, reinforcing the notion that they are culturally incompatible with "Indian" norms (Arambam, 2008).

More disturbingly, there are reports that suggest Northeast women are seen as deliberate "threats" to Indian unity. In a 2005 press release quoted by the Northeast magazine Eastern Frontier, a college principal argued that "all the NE girls

are sent by the militants of the region in order to seduce the mainland people so they are molested (and) raped" (Arambam, 2008). The principal's statement, linking Northeast women's cultural expression to sedition, reflects an astonishingly xenophobic belief system that is not an anomaly, but a symptom of the pervasive "othering" of the Northeast. When such views are held by educated, influential figures, they become representative of a broader, institutionalized prejudice, leaving Northeast Indian women vulnerable to both physical and psychological harm.

3. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Militarization of Identity

The enduring application of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Northeast India serves as a stark example of how policy treats the region as a separate, dangerous "other." AFSPA, which grants the military extensive powers in "disturbed" areas, effectively renders large parts of the Northeast into militarized zones where civil liberties are subordinated to security concerns. Since its introduction in 1958, AFSPA has faced significant criticism for its role in facilitating human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and torture (Kimura, 2018). By enforcing such a law exclusively in Northeast India and other peripheral regions, the Indian state reinforces the notion that these areas—and by extension, their residents—are inherently unruly and untrustworthy, necessitating military control.

Scholars have noted that AFSPA does not address the underlying political grievances that drive insurgency; rather, it exacerbates them by creating a sense of alienation and mistrust among the local populace (Sahni et al., 2023). Ngaihte argues that AFSPA perpetuates a cycle of violence, where state-imposed militarization fuels resentment, which in turn spawns further resistance (Ngaihte 2015). This dynamic creates a "security theatre" in which the Indian government's response to insurgency focuses on suppressing dissent rather than addressing its root causes. By prioritizing control over engagement, AFSPA ensures that Northeast India remains distanced from mainstream India, cast perpetually as a frontier in need of subjugation rather than integration (Farrelly, 2014).

4. Strategic Non-Development and Economic Exclusion

The marginalization of Northeast India extends beyond security policy into economic development (Datta, 2011). In the years following independence, policymakers deprioritized infrastructure development in border regions, including the Northeast, fearing that resources would fall into enemy hands in the event of conflict. This "strategic non-development" has left the Northeast severely lacking in infrastructure, education, and healthcare resources. Although the policy was initially intended as a security measure, its enduring impact is an economic exclusion that perpetuates poverty and underdevelopment in the region (Rajeev et al., 2016).

Economic exclusion compounds the alienation experienced by Northeasterners, as the lack of investment reinforces their dependence on mainland India (Haokip, 2012). Moreover, economic underdevelopment is frequently cited as a justification for the continued imposition of AFSPA and other repressive measures. This creates a feedback loop in which economic neglect and military repression feed into each other, leaving the Northeast marginalized both politically and economically. Ashrafuzzaman suggests that meaningful development initiatives, driven by local needs and perspectives, could serve as an antidote to this vicious cycle (Ashrafuzzaman, 2015).

By investing in education, healthcare, and industry on the region's terms, the Indian state could foster a sense of belonging rather than suspicion among its Northeastern citizens (Barua, 2020).

5. Media Narratives and the Perpetuation of Stereotypes

India's mainstream media has also played a role in alienating Northeast Indians by focusing on narratives of violence, insurgency, and cultural exoticism. Media portrayals often emphasize the region's conflicts, overshadowing its achievements and perpetuating a monolithic view of Northeast India as a "dangerous" and "backward" frontier (Mukherjee, 2014). Such depictions not only reinforce stereotypes but also influence public opinion and policy, as negative perceptions are internalized and reproduced in governance frameworks.

The effect of these media narratives is twofold: they isolate Northeast India from the national consciousness while also legitimizing the state's repressive and regressive policies. The media's focus on conflict obscures the region's contributions and achievements, rendering its people invisible except as subjects of violence and unrest (Sitlhou, 2023). As Raj points out, a more balanced representation of Northeast India in the media could go a long way in dismantling harmful stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive understanding of the region within the national psyche (Raj, 2016).

6. Toward an Inclusive and Pluralistic Approach

Addressing the marginalization of Northeast India requires a shift in policy from assimilationist to pluralistic approaches. Rather than imposing a monolithic Indian identity, the Indian state should recognize the unique cultural, ethnic, and historical backgrounds of Northeast Indians as integral to the nation's pluralism. The repeal of AFSPA would be a significant step toward restoring civil liberties and trust, demonstrating that the Indian government is committed to a more democratic and humane approach to governance (McDuie, 2009).

Investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare—based on local needs rather than security concerns—could help integrate the Northeast into the national economy without sacrificing its cultural autonomy.

Finally, media reforms that encourage balanced and respectful coverage of the Northeast would contribute to dismantling stereotypes and normalizing the region within the broader Indian identity (Raj, 2016). By embracing these reforms, the Indian state can foster a relationship with Northeast India that is based on respect, inclusion, and mutual understanding.

7. Conclusion

Northeast India's marginalization is deeply embedded in Indian policy, from the imposition of restrictive cultural norms to the militarization of its lands under AFSPA. These policies have fostered an environment of alienation and resentment, casting Northeast Indians as perpetual outsiders within their own country. A shift towards inclusive governance—marked by the recognition of Northeast India's unique identity, the repeal of oppressive laws, and investment in development—offers a path forward. Such changes would honor the region's contributions to India's diversity, creating a more cohesive and equitable society where all citizens feel valued and respected. By dismantling the structures that "other" Northeast India, the Indian state can begin to mend historical wounds and build a more just, inclusive nation.

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Book Review

Asia After Europe: Imagining a Continent in the Long Twentieth Century
Sugata Bose

Katyayni Champawat[1]

Asia After Europe is an exploration of Asia beyond Europe—both temporally and conceptually. Beginning with Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, the book analyzes the diverse Asian Universalisms and models of solidarity with instances of fractures in the face of the two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the Nationalist Movements across the continent. It questions the Eurocentric idea of the Asian continent as a vastly differentiated cartographic space and presents an alternate interconnected and often overlapping history founded on shared values and sensibilities. Tracing the movements of ideas and peoples through Asia's colonial, anti-colonial, and post-colonial struggles, Sugata Bose boldly challenges the imported European geopolitical thought and forces readers to ponder over the possibility of an alternate future for Asia.

The central aim of this book is to explore Asia as constructed by Asians, that is, to reconstruct an understanding of Asia that is free from European thought. This is not to deny Europe's interaction with Asia and its people; indeed, it is these very interactions that have affected the evolution of Asianism(s). Instead, the aim is to remove the European conceptualization of some of the key ideas that form the basis of current political thought and view Asia as an idea built on circulation and connection as opposed to a tapestry of nation-states. To this end, through an interpretative historical analysis of a vast range of sources, including art, fiction, travelogs, and other verbal, visual, and symbolic texts, the book presents Asia as forged by Asian intellectuals and subalterns alike. Still, the idea of Asia or Asian Universalism is far from being a solitary, unified concept; rather, what emerges is a web of ideas- competing and overlapping- existing "alongside Islamic and Buddhist Universalism as well as Leninist and Wilsonian Internationalism." (Bose, 2024, p. 2) The evolution and interactions of these thoughts are ultimately connected to periods of decline and prosperity, and thus, the book traces the political and economic developments in Asia to discern the evolution of Asian identity.

Bose begins his seven-chapter analysis of the twentieth century by highlighting the poppy trade as a connected space of decline for both India and China. This space of decline overlapped with a new space for collective resistance and a quest for an identity to hold on to in the face of incipient European orientalism.

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The brutal repression by the colonial powers meant that many revolutionaries were on the run. Their interactions and intellectual musings, thus, became the subject of analysis in this book. India's Rabindranath Tagore, Japan's Okakura Tenshin, and China's Liag Qichao are some of the prominent intellectuals who wondered and worried about the Asian Revival. Of course, their ideas are contextualized within the political and economic trends of the time.

In 1905, Japan's victory over Russia led to an increased enthusiasm in young Asians. Japan came to be recognized as a leader who may guide Asia toward freedom. Interestingly, the Japanese state had developed its own imperial ambitions, which subsequently led Japan to invade China, to the disappointment of many proponents of Asian solidarity. This 'fracture' deepened with the dawn of the Great Depression and the accompanying hardening of colonial borders. Nevertheless, new connections of Asian solidarity continued to flourish[2]. Similarly, even as waves of nationalism surged across the continent, it stayed rooted in the 'cultural cosmopolitanism' of Asianism[3].

Asianism was by no means the only intellectual cement of the time. It had its competitors and partners in Communist Internationalism and Buddhist and Islamic Universalism- all refusing to see the nation-state as the 'natural' political unit. Other similar contradictions existed not only in political thought but also in practice. For instance, during World War II, India was fighting the British while China battled against Japan, effectively putting them on opposing sides of the war. And yet, the war years helped forge deeper connections between leaders and movements resisting the British, French, Dutch, and American colonizers. At the same time, wartime famines in Bengal, Henan, and Tokin undermined the legitimacy of the colonial state, while Japan's victory over the Western powers in Southeast Asia renewed anti-colonial fervor.

Ironically, it is the post-colonial experience that caused the biggest fracture in Asia. Once the common enemy was defeated, the newly independent peoples decided to let their minds remain colonized- trapped in European maps and ideas of unitary sovereignty, as a result of which Asian solidarity weakened. Still, the great powers were trying to recreate an Asia that best served their interest, temporarily bringing Asian leaders together at Bandung in 1955. However, a closer look at the contents of the conference reveals that a very Euro-American statist politics had already taken root.

From 1979 to 2019, Asia witnessed greater economic growth, connection, and interdependence, which led to rapid and mass intra-Asian migration. Precolonial trade and maritime networks, as well as the anti-colonial sentiments, were recalled time and again to soften borders. Alas, the lines have only grown rigid. Indeed, the borders have become the single most contentious issue pushing Asian relations from that of bonhomie to rivalries since independence.

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[2] For instance, the Indian Medical Mission to China in 1938.
[3] as symbolised in Rabindranath Tagore's Bharat Mata- a symbol of Indian Nationalism made with Japanese wash technique.

Bose concludes that the root of this slide toward animosity lies in a lack of political imagining bound by the divisive nature of national pride and a unitary conception of sovereignty.

Bose's ability to present such complex, contrasting, and yet overlapping concepts in not only a comprehensible but interesting way is one the biggest strengths of this book. Despite the vast scale and scope of research, the book successfully engages the reader in an intellectual exercise that provokes retrospection into their own understanding of the world. Another strength of this monograph lies in its gender sensitivity. Bose does not invisibilize the role played by women, nor does he add them as an afterthought in a small subsection[4]. Women and their contributions are well integrated into the overall narrative.

In uncovering the obscure and forgotten history of Asia, Bose adopts a hopeful yet practical vision for Asia's future. He writes, "An Asia without borders may not be on the near horizon, but an Asian free trade area and a shared Asian cultural ecumene are already in the process of formation." (Bose, 2024, p. 15) This new Asia of shared cultural ecumene, however, is not discussed. With the arrival of social media and digital streaming platforms, Bollywood, K-pop, Japanese Anime, Chinese, Korean, and even Thai and Pakistani dramas and movies have contributed immensely to cultural exchange and understanding. It could have been interesting to trace their influence on modern Asian identity.

Nevertheless, the book is timely and well-situated in the current geopolitics. Bose warns against the threat of rising majoritarianism and centralized authoritarianism within Asia, specifically in India and China- the two competing nation-states vying for a new hegemonic order based on nationalistic imperialism. This international power struggle and authoritarian domestic politics are against the idea of Asianism. Hence, there is a need to address the economic, religious, and social inequality in the coming 'Asian Century' to ensure greater continental prosperity.

Overall, the book presents a well-written and accessible historical narrative that builds on earlier readings of the time while challenging modern understandings. With strong examples of political and intellectual connections built on mutual regard for all cultures and religions, the book emphasizes a project to build a future on familiarity and solidarity of Asia's varied peoples. It not only critiques the Eurocentric understanding of Asia but launches an epistemological inquiry into the existing hierarchies within the global order. In my opinion, therefore, it is a must-read for students interested in not only history but also the future of international order.

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[4] A tendency noted in many other historical analysis that do not specifically deal with gender.

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Volume 3, Issue 2, July – December 2024

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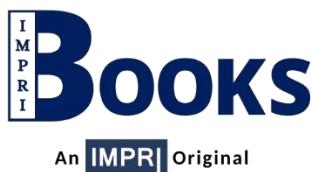
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