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Generation Z and the Transformation of Grassroots Democracy in India

Prof. Shailendra Kumar Chaturvedi*

Abstract

This article identifies a major gap in the literature on youth participation and grassroots democracy in India: most studies treat youth either as an electoral category or as a digital generation, leaving under-theorized the institutional consequences of Generation Z participation for local governance. The paper argues that Gen Z is not merely participating differently from earlier cohorts; it is transforming the operating logic of grassroots democracy by shifting participation from periodic, face-to-face, and organization-mediated forms toward networked, issue-based, and digitally amplified engagement. This transformation is visible in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Gram Sabhas, Urban Local Bodies, student leadership, civil society, NSS, NYKS, Youth Parliament, and digital governance platforms. Drawing on participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, political socialization, and governance literature, the paper argues that Gen Z strengthens grassroots democracy through three mechanisms: digital agenda-setting, connective accountability, and hybrid civic learning. However, these gains remain constrained by misinformation, digital inequality, patriarchal norms, elite capture, and weak institutional responsiveness. The analysis uses qualitative secondary evidence from post-2018 scholarship, constitutional provisions, and official reports from the Election Commission of India, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the UN, UNDP, and the World Bank (Barber, 2003; Habermas, 1996; Pateman, 1970; Torney-Purta et al., 2020; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016; UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2025). The article concludes that India's grassroots democracy will increasingly depend on whether institutions can convert Gen Z's networked participation into durable and inclusive governance influence (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026; World Bank, 2025).

Keywords : Generation Z, grassroots democracy, digital participation, Panchayati Raj, Gram Sabha, civic engagement, India

Introduction

Grassroots democracy in India has always depended on more than elections. It requires citizens who can enter local institutions, question authority, influence spending, and monitor implementation. Generation Z matters because it is reshaping how these activities occur. Young citizens today are not simply waiting to inherit democracy; they are actively remaking its

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local practices through digital participation, civic engagement, and new expectations of responsiveness (Dahlgren, 2021; Norris, 2019; Preece & Stoddart, 2022).

The policy relevance of this shift is visible in official and institutional data. The Election Commission of India's voter-turnout module provides public access to turnout data and signals the growing centrality of digital transparency in electoral administration (Election Commission of India, 2025). The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has also recognized persistent low participation in Gram Sabhas and introduced the Model Youth Gram Sabha initiative to encourage younger participation in local deliberation (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026). These developments show that youth participation is now a governance question, not only a mobilization issue.

This article argues that Gen Z is transforming grassroots democracy in India through three mechanisms. First, it changes how local issues are made visible. Second, it reduces the distance between grievance and publicity. Third, it forces local institutions to respond to a digitally networked citizenry. In this sense, Gen Z does not merely add participation to existing institutions; it alters their operational logic. The core research question is therefore not whether youth participate, but how their participation changes democratic governance, accountability, and citizen engagement at the grassroots (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016; UNDP, 2023).

Research Gap and Contribution

The literature on youth politics in India has grown, but a major gap remains. Most studies either focus on voting behavior, youth protest, or social media use in isolation. They do not sufficiently explain how Generation Z reshapes the institutional functioning of grassroots democracy. Likewise, work on Panchayati Raj and Gram Sabhas often highlights decentralization, reservation, and local development, but rarely integrates youth participation as a central explanatory variable (Heller, 2001; Manor, 1999; Sharma, 2021).

A second gap concerns digital participation. Recent studies increasingly show that Indian youth use social media to express political views and mobilize around issues, but much of this research stops at awareness or expression (Preece & Stoddart, 2022; Zhang & Skoric, 2021). What is missing is an explanation of how digital participation affects accountability in local governance. Put differently, the literature recognizes that youth are online, but not enough attention has been paid to how online participation travels into offline democratic institutions.

The article's contribution is to propose a novel argument: Generation Z is producing a networked model of grassroots democracy. In this model, citizens use digital platforms to amplify local grievances, coordinate participation, and pressure local authorities; local institutions then face a more visible and more demanding public. This does not replace traditional democratic institutions, but it changes the standards by which they are judged. The article therefore connects digital participation to governance outcomes in a way that is both theoretically grounded and empirically relevant (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Coleman, 2020; Warren, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The analysis draws on four bodies of theory. Participatory democracy argues that democracy is strengthened when citizens directly shape public decisions, not merely elect representatives. This framework is especially relevant to local governance because Panchayati Raj and Gram Sabhas are meant to create direct links between citizens and authority. For Gen Z, participatory democracy matters because young people increasingly expect to intervene in decisions that affect their everyday lives (Barber, 2003; Pateman, 1970).

Deliberative democracy adds that participation must involve reasoned discussion, inclusion, and public justification. Youth participation is significant because it can expand debate, challenge entrenched hierarchies, and introduce new issues into public life. But the theory also warns that visibility is not enough; institutions must provide meaningful opportunities for dialogue (Fishkin, 2018; Habermas, 1996). Political socialization theory helps explain how participation becomes durable. Young people learn civic habits through family, school, peers, and organizations. Gen Z is being socialized in a digitally dense environment, where political learning often occurs through online networks, short-form content, and peer-to-peer communication (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Torney-Purta et al., 2020).

Governance literature focuses on accountability, responsiveness, and institutional capacity. Youth participation matters when it improves the ability of local institutions to respond to citizens. The World Bank's decentralization work in India emphasizes the importance of inclusive and accountable local governance, which aligns with the argument that participation and governance quality are mutually reinforcing (World Bank, 2025). Together, these frameworks support the article's claim that Gen Z influences democracy not only through mobilization, but through institutional transformation.

Methodology

The paper uses a qualitative secondary-data design. It synthesizes constitutional provisions, government reports, official press releases, and academic literature published after 2018 wherever possible. The method is interpretive rather than statistical, because the research question concerns mechanisms and institutional change rather than a single measurable outcome. The analysis is organized thematically across rural and urban local governance, digital participation, student leadership, civil society, and state-supported youth programs (Election Commission of India, 2025; Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026).

The empirical foundation includes reports and press releases from the Election Commission of India, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the UN, UNDP, and the World Bank, alongside post-2018 scholarship on digital participation and youth politics (Coleman, 2020; Dahlgren, 2021; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016; UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2025). The advantage of this approach is that it allows the paper to connect institutional design to generational political behavior across multiple arenas of grassroots democracy.

Generation Z and Local Democracy

Generation Z differs from earlier cohorts in politically significant ways. It is more digitally native, more comfortable with networked communication, and less dependent on traditional party gatekeepers. It is also more issue-oriented and more skeptical of inherited authority. These traits matter because grassroots democracy depends on repeated interaction between citizens and local institutions. Gen Z's participation style

changes that interaction (Dahlgren, 2021; Norris, 2019; Preece & Stoddart, 2022).

The first transformation is speed. Local grievances can now be documented and circulated instantly. A failed public service, a corrupt decision, or an exclusionary practice can become visible before local authorities can control the narrative. The second transformation is reach. Youth can connect a village, ward, or municipal issue to wider publics through social media and digital platforms. The third transformation is expectation. Gen Z often expects a faster institutional response than older citizens did. This shifts the standards of accountability (Coleman, 2020; Zhang & Skoric, 2021).

Recent research on Indian digital participation supports this interpretation. Studies of youth political engagement in India show that digital media has expanded the avenues for participation while also generating risks of misinformation and superficial involvement. A 2025 study of Instagram and political engagement among Indian Gen Z also suggests that online engagement often remains passive unless it is connected to offline action. This is why Gen Z should be seen as a transforming force only when digital participation is linked to institutionally meaningful engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Preece & Stoddart, 2022; Zhang & Skoric, 2021).

Panchayati Raj Institutions

Panchayati Raj Institutions are the constitutional foundation of grassroots democracy in rural India. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment gave local self-government constitutional status, while Part IX of the Constitution and the Eleventh Schedule created the formal basis for decentralized governance. This matters because Gen Z is entering a political system where local institutions already exist in principle, but often function unevenly in practice (Heller, 2001; Manor, 1999; Sharma, 2021).

Gen Z influences Panchayati Raj in at least three ways. First, young citizens increase the pressure for transparency, especially when they use digital tools to track local works and spending. Second, they expand the range of public issues brought into local discussion. Third, they can act as catalysts for accountability by challenging elite closure and bringing newer concerns into the local agenda. The democratic effect is not just participation, but institutional scrutiny (Fox, 2015; Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025).

The problem is that PRIs remain constrained by uneven capacity, weak fiscal autonomy, and elite capture. The World Bank's analysis of decentralization in India emphasizes the need for inclusive and accountable local governance, which implies that formal decentralization alone is not enough (World Bank, 2025). Gen Z participation becomes meaningful only when local bodies are capable of receiving input and acting on it. The recent Model Youth Gram Sabha initiative shows that the state is beginning to recognize this gap and is trying to create youth-friendly local democratic spaces (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025).

Gram Sabha Participation

The Gram Sabha is the most direct institution of rural democracy, but it often suffers from low attendance and weak deliberation. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj's national study on low participation in Gram Sabhas confirms that this is a structural problem across states and Union Territories (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026). The significance of this finding is not simply procedural; it indicates that local democracy is often not socially dense enough to generate meaningful participation.

For Generation Z, the Gram Sabha is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity because it offers a direct forum for engagement without party mediation. It is a challenge because young citizens often perceive Gram Sabhas as dominated by older elites, bureaucratic ritual, or predetermined outcomes. If young people do not believe their participation will matter, they are unlikely to invest time and energy in attendance (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026; Pateman, 1970).

Gen Z can change this dynamic through digital agenda-setting. Youth can publicize Gram Sabha dates, circulate issues in advance, document outcomes, and compare promises with performance. In this sense, digital participation can increase the democratic pressure surrounding the Gram Sabha. However, the institution itself must also adapt. Meeting timings, public notices, issue-based agendas, and feedback mechanisms matter. Without such changes, the Gram Sabha risks becoming a symbolic forum rather than a site of substantive deliberation (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016).

Urban Local Bodies

Urban Local Bodies are increasingly important because India is becoming more urbanized and youth are disproportionately concentrated in towns and cities. For Gen Z, urban governance is deeply political because it touches everyday concerns such as transport, housing, sanitation, safety, waste management, and environmental quality. These institutions are therefore critical sites of grassroots democracy (Sharma, 2021).

Youth participation in urban local governance often takes the form of resident mobilization, neighborhood digital campaigns, civic complaints, and issue-based advocacy. In cities, Gen Z can use social media and digital platforms to expose service failures and pressure authorities. This can strengthen accountability by making municipal decision-making more visible and contestable. However, as with Gram Sabhas, visibility does not guarantee influence (Coleman, 2020; Dahlgren, 2021; Preece & Stoddart, 2022).

The problem is institutional fragmentation. Many municipal systems lack strong ward committees or meaningful channels for youth voice. As a result, young citizens may participate online but remain detached from formal city governance. The democratic challenge is to create institutional pathways that connect digital youth participation to planning, budgeting, and follow-up. If urban bodies fail to do this, youth activism may remain episodic and reactive rather than systemically influential (Sharma, 2021).

Student Leadership

Student leadership is one of the most important pathways into democratic participation. Student unions, campus elections, and youth organizations teach public speaking, organizational discipline, negotiation, and collective action. For Generation Z, student leadership remains important, but it has changed in form. Campus politics now interacts with digital media, allowing student leaders to mobilize beyond campus boundaries and connect student issues to larger governance debates (Torney-Purta et al., 2020; Verba et al., 1995).

The democratic value of student leadership lies in political socialization. It teaches young people how to participate, contest, and represent. It also often serves as a bridge between youth concerns and broader public life. Many local leaders, activists, and civic organizers develop their political identities in

student spaces. This makes student leadership a key site where Gen Z acquires the skills needed for grassroots democracy (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Pateman, 1970; Torney-Purta et al., 2020).

At the same time, student politics can be captured by parties, prone to factionalism, or detached from local governance. Its contribution to democracy depends on whether it remains issue-oriented and inclusive. For Gen Z, the strongest forms of student leadership are those that connect civic education to local problem-solving rather than reducing campus politics to partisan competition (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Preece & Stoddart, 2022).

Civil Society, NSS, NYKS, and Youth Parliament

Civil society organizations provide the organizational infrastructure that helps youth participation become sustained. NGOs, advocacy networks, and community groups can train young people in rights awareness, public speaking, and accountability practices. They can also connect youth to marginalized communities and local issues that are often absent from mainstream politics. This is especially important in India, where class, caste, and geography shape access to participation (Heller, 2001; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016).

State-supported youth programs also matter. NSS encourages volunteerism and civic responsibility through education-linked service. NYKS organizes youth at the block and village levels and can connect them to community action. Youth Parliament programs teach institutional literacy, debate, and procedural understanding. Together, these programs provide structured routes into civic engagement (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016; UNDP, 2023).

Their democratic significance lies in socialization. They can convert young people from passive observers into participants with civic skills. But this requires more than ceremonial events. If these programs are poorly integrated with local governance, they remain symbolic. Their full democratic value emerges when they connect youth to local monitoring, public deliberation, and sustained civic action (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026; UNDP, 2023).

Women Youth Participation

Young women are central to any serious account of grassroots democracy. They often face additional barriers relative to young men, including patriarchal norms, safety concerns, mobility constraints, and exclusion from public spaces. Youth participation is therefore not gender-neutral. A democratic system that ignores women youth is incomplete (Rai &Spary, 2019; Ray & Basu, 2020).

The importance of women youth participation lies in both representation and governance. Young women are often directly affected by issues such as sanitation, education, health, transport, and safety. Their participation can broaden the agenda of local democracy and make institutions more responsive to lived experience. Digital participation can sometimes reduce the barriers of physical exclusion, but online spaces also expose women to harassment and surveillance (Preece & Stoddart, 2022; Zhang & Skoric, 2021).

The policy implication is that youth participation must be explicitly gender-sensitive. Institutional design should include safe meeting spaces, mentoring, flexible participation formats, and stronger support for women's leadership. Without these measures, Gen Z's transformative potential

will remain partial, because half of the youth population will continue to face unequal access to democratic participation (Rai &Spary, 2019; Ray & Basu, 2020; Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025).

How Gen Z Transforms Grassroots Democracy

Gen Z influences grassroots democracy through three linked mechanisms. First, it strengthens digital agenda-setting. A local issue can now be documented and circulated rapidly, forcing public attention on matters that local elites might otherwise ignore. This alters the power of publicity and makes local governance more visible (Coleman, 2020; Norris, 2019; Preece & Stoddart, 2022).

Second, it creates connective accountability. Gen Z can connect local grievances to wider networks, media, and institutions. This makes local authorities more accountable because their decisions are no longer insulated within village or ward boundaries. The mechanism is not centralization, but distributed scrutiny (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Fox, 2015; Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026).

Third, it enables hybrid civic learning. Gen Z often moves between online expression and offline institutional action. A digital campaign may lead to attendance at a Gram Sabha, a petition, a student forum, or a municipal complaint. This hybrid pattern matters because it develops civic competence and makes participation more flexible. It also means that democracy is now learned through blended digital and institutional experiences (Dahlgren, 2021; Torney-Purta et al., 2020).

These mechanisms are not automatic gains. They work only when institutions are receptive. If officials ignore digital grievances, if local bodies remain opaque, or if participation is reduced to symbolism, then Gen Z's engagement may turn into frustration. The real transformation, therefore, is conditional: Gen Z reshapes grassroots democracy when institutional responsiveness exists, but it exposes democratic weakness when it does not (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026; Sharma, 2021).

Challenges

Several barriers limit the democratic impact of Generation Z. Misinformation and algorithmic amplification distort political communication. Digital inequality excludes many rural and low-income youth. Patriarchal norms continue to restrict young women's participation. Elite capture reduces the influence of local deliberation. Student politics can become partisan rather than civic. Civil society networks are often urban-centered and uneven. Local bodies may be formally decentralized but substantively unresponsive (Coleman, 2020; Preece & Stoddart, 2022; Sharma, 2021).

These challenges suggest that the issue is not youth apathy but institutional absorption. Gen Z often wants to participate, but the democratic system may not be designed to listen. This is why the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's attention to low Gram Sabha participation and youth-oriented local reforms is important (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026). The state is beginning to recognize that participation requires infrastructure, not just slogans.

Policy Implications

Policy should focus on turning Gen Z participation into institutional accountability. Gram Sabhas and ward committees should use youth-friendly meeting times, digital notices, and clearer feedback systems. Civic education should connect digital literacy to local governance literacy. NSS, NYKS, and

Youth Parliament should be tied to real local monitoring and public reporting. Women youth should receive safe, structured, and supported participation pathways. Municipalities and Panchayats should publish youth-facing summaries of decisions and expenditures (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026; UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2025).

Digital grievance systems should be public, traceable, and linked to local response obligations. Civil society partnerships should connect online mobilization to offline institutions. These measures follow from the argument that youth participation matters only when it changes the behavior of institutions. The goal is not simply more youth visibility. It is more democratic responsiveness. International evidence on civic engagement and local accountability supports this broader institutional approach (Fox, 2015; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016; World Bank, 2025).

Conclusion

This article identified a major gap in the literature: the lack of a theory explaining how Generation Z transforms grassroots democracy in India. The paper argued that Gen Z is not merely participating differently from earlier generations; it is changing the operating logic of local democracy. Through digital participation, civic engagement, and hybrid institutional action, Gen Z is making local governance more visible, more contestable, and potentially more accountable (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Dahlgren, 2021; Preece & Stoddart, 2022).

The central conclusion is that youth participation strengthens grassroots democracy when it creates agenda-setting, connective accountability, and hybrid civic learning. These effects are visible in Panchayati Raj, Gram Sabhas, Urban Local Bodies, student leadership, civil society, NSS, NYKS, Youth Parliament, and digital activism. Yet the democratic gains are conditional. They depend on institutional responsiveness, gender inclusion, and the capacity of local bodies to absorb youth voice (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025, 2026; Rai &Spary, 2019; UNDP, 2023).

India's grassroots democracy therefore stands at an inflection point. Gen Z has the potential to deepen accountability and citizen engagement, but only if institutions evolve fast enough to make participation meaningful. The future of democratic governance at the local level will depend on whether youth remain outside the system as critics, or become inside the system as active democratic agents (Norris, 2019; Sharma, 2021; World Bank, 2025).

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Revisiting the Ups and Downs of Indo-US Dynamic Defence Relations: Challenges and Prospects

Prof. Kundan Kumar Singh *
Vinod Kumar Yadav**

Abstract :

There has undoubtedly been a transformational change in the Indo-US relations, in terms of quality as well as the quantity of exchanges, since the end of the Cold War. India and the US have moved forward from being "estranged democracies" at one time to "engaged democracies".

India and the US today recognise their importance to each other. This transformational change can be attributed to the changing balance of power in world politics (particularly in Asia), increased recognition of common interests and shared values, India's economic growth and the increased influence of the Indian American lobby in the US. India is one of the few countries which has been mentioned in the US strategic defense guidelines as a long-term strategic partner which can "serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region". Hillary Clinton's article in Foreign Policy titled 'America's Pacific Century' announced the US 'pivot to Asia' talks about deepening ties with India. Similarly, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta recently described India as the linchpin of the US rebalancing towards the Asia Pacific. Clearly, both the State and the Defense Departments agree on the importance of India for the US in the coming years.

Keywords : Revisiting, Defence Relations, estranged democracies, engaged democracies, Nixon's tilt, military-to-military cooperation.

Introduction

For India, the US is an important partner in its inexorable rise towards great power status. India also sees the US as an important force for stability in Asia. Economically too, the US is an important trading partner and is one of the top sources of foreign investment in India. India's growing national capabilities, especially its large and professional military, give it more tools to pursue its national interests to the benefit of the United States. Thus, the need to build closer relations is mutual and has bipartisan support in the US and support from all the major political parties in India. This paper looks at the history of Indo-US defence relations, the current state of play in defence relations, the reasons why the two countries are now engaged more than ever in

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defence cooperation, prospects for greater cooperation and the hurdles and obstacles to further engagement on this front.

Defence relations constitute one of the most important areas of the US-India bilateral relationship. The importance of Indo-US defence relations lies in the fact that both countries face similar challenges today and in the future: terrorism, proliferation of WMDs and the security challenges emanating from the rise of China. They therefore share a need to have similar strategic doctrines and operations to meet these challenges. The India-US defence relationship as it exists today has, to a large extent, been propelled by the increased trust between the two countries. This is evident from the large number of high-level visits between defence officials of the two countries and the number of joint military exercises. The aim of the defence ties is to develop capabilities and confidence, jointly tackle multilateral security issues like protecting sea lanes of communication and energy supplies, conduct peacekeeping, and fight terrorism and piracy. However, the picture was not so rosy during the 'Cold War as can be understand from the following sections :

Defence Relations during the Cold War

In the years immediately after India gained independence, the Indo-US defence relations were limited, because of the need to develop a degree of mutual trust. Defence relations between India and America can be traced to the 1950s when they engaged in joint exercises with the UK and Australia. Arms sales from the US to India date back to 1951 when the US gave India five T-6 Texan Trainer aircrafts. In 1952, India asked for a large number of tanks and aircraft to modernize its armed forces. The request for 200 Sherman tanks worth $19 million, was approved quickly though a request by India to sell its 200-jet aircraft was not approved. However, the US acceded to India's request to sell its 54 C-119 aircraft. In 1954, Nehru refused to accept President Eisenhower's offer of military assistance. In May 1960, the US delivered the US C-119 aircraft bought by India. Again, in 1962, the US rushed in emergency military assistance during the Sino-India war though this would have hampered its ties with Pakistan.

It is notable that at this time, India's close friend at the time i.e. the USSR first adopted a position of neutrality and then almost supported the Chinese suggesting that India and China talk was based on Chinese proposals to solve the border issue, and even stopped MIG-21 deliveries to India temporarily. Even India's non-aligned friends, other than Nasser and Tito, did not come out in support of India. However, the US only sent in equipment like light arms, communications equipment and ammunition that would be more useful in mountain warfare against the Chinese than against the Pakistanis. It also promised military assistance in the future to India.

In December 1962, President Kennedy approved an emergency military aid programme for India worth $60 million. Shocked by its defeat by the Chinese, India asked for air defence against Chinese attacks." The US and India even held joint air defence exercises in September 1963, but this became a one-off incident and the idea did not catch on after that. Dennis Kux claims that President Kennedy was on the verge of approving a five-year military package for India when he was tragically assassinated.

The Johnson administration approved a five year military aid package to India, though it refused to provide the F-104s that India wanted, as the Pentagon felt that these would not really be useful against the Chinese and would cause strains in US-Pakistan relations. After the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the US stopped all arms exports and military assistance to India. In 1969, India received ten Hughes-300/TH-55 Light helicopters from the US which were delivered in 1971-1972. But again, on 2 December 1971 during the Bangladesh War, Washington announced a suspension of military sales to India (of which the most important was a $70 million communications system designed to improve air defense capabilities). Nixon's tilt to Pakistan and his support for the country during the 1971 war saw relations plum-meting to their lowest ever.

During the Reagan administration, the US approved some high technology cooperation with India's defence industry and eased barriers to technology transfer and a MOU on transfer of technology was signed in 1984."

This allowed items that were on the US government's export control lists to be transferred to India, showing Washington's willingness to develop closer ties with New Delhi. On its part, India assured the US that it would not use the equipment supplied by it to inappropriate end-uses and that it would not be re-exported to the USSR.12 The MOU further established a forum where non-proliferation issues one of the major reasons for Washington's misgivings with India-could be raised and addressed. Essentially, the MOU was 'designed to reconcile India's weapons procurement politics with American technology transfer conditions, and thereby expand military links. The most significant cooperation in defence in the late 1980s was the collaboration with the US Air Force in India's Light Combat Aircraft project and India received F-404 engines for use in the project. The Reagan administration also offered to India advanced military equipment and weaponry including. surveillance and fighter aircraft. 14 But this proposal fell through because of Rajiv Gandhi's unease over continued US support for Pakistan's military modernisation programmes.

Thus, arms sales and consequently defense and bilateral relations during the Cold war were hampered by India's fears about the US' reliability as an arms supplier and sensitiveness to the terms of US government agreements as the US had unilaterally stopped arms sales after the 1965 war and was reluctant to carry out the Tarapur contract. This fear continues to cast a long shadow over the Indo-US defence relations. Another reason for the limited defence cooperation was the absence of an overlapping strategic concern. India's status as a recipient of arms from the Soviet Union also reduced the US' enthusiasm in providing military aid to India while India's concerns about its strategic autonomy being affected if it got arms from the US made it also less than enthusiastic about the US arms. Likewise, the US' alliance with Pakistan was another impeding factor. Moreover, India simply could not afford to buy American weapons systems; the Soviet weapons that India got were sold to India on a concessionary basis and they were paid for in soft currency with low interest rates and long-term repayment schedules. 15 The end of the Cold War, however, changed the scenario due to a variety of reasons.

The Post Cold War Era

The end of the Cold War began auspiciously

for the Indo-US defence relations as India gave the US refuelling rights during the first Gulf War. The Indo-US defence cooperation was strengthened by the Kicklighter proposals which recommended that Indo-US defence cooperation and military-to-military ties could be promoted through joint seminars, training, etc. and mooted the idea of expanding the defence cooperation framework. Executive Steering Groups were established in both India and the US so as to deepen military-to-military cooperation.

In 1991, as the US government was not able to confirm that Pakistan was not developing nuclear weapons, under the Pressler amendment, the US had to stop all economic and military aid to India. The While US-Pakistan relations deteriorated, this inversely improved US-India relations. Nevertheless, in 1992, the Indo-Russian agreement to collaborate on the Agni missile programme made Washington suspicious about New Delhi's commitment to arms control. So it threatened to suspend military and technology transfer programmes to India and imposed a two-year ban on 'sensitive' technology exports to India." In February 1992, Indian and the US army and Air Force paratroopers held their first joint training exercise codenamed 'Teak Iroquios' followed by another exercise in October 1993.19 Subsequently, the Indian and the American navies conducted joint exercises in the Indian Ocean in May 1992 and September 1995 and 1996 in keeping with the US policy of cooperative engagement with friendly militaries. 20 In 1995, India and the US signed the Agreed Minute of Defense Relations, which became the foundation of defence relations between New Delhi and Washington till the New Framework for the India-US Defense Relationship was signed in 2005.

As per the 1995 agreement, bilateral cooperation was sought to be achieved through multi-level interactions: ministerial level, service-to-service levels, defence research and production and at the level of senior officers form the Ministry of defence and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Three groups were created to aid discussion and improve interaction. These were : 22

Joint Defence Policy Group (DPG) of the Ministries of Defence for tackling issues of defence cooperation. It was meant to review issues of joint concern such as post-Cold War security planning and policy perspectives on both sides, to provide policy guidance to the Joint Technical Group and Joint Steering Committee. The joint Indo-US Defence Ministry-Department of Defence Group also tackled sensitive issues like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Kashmir.

Joint Technical Group (JTG), for discussing issues related to defence research and production cooperation which was to develop the scope and content of further expansion of cooperative defence research and production activities. However, this was to be within the laws, policies and treaty commitments of each country.

Joint Steering Committee (JSC), to increase the frequency and scope of Service-to-Service cooperation. It was agreed that the emphasis of such cooperation would be on professional contacts and functional cooperation, high level exchanges, presence of observers at each other's military exercises, attendance at seminars on subjects of mutual professional interest,

professional/technical training and joint exercises at progressively higher levels of scale and sophistication.

The Agreed Minute promoted greater mutual understanding and facilitated greater interaction, identification of issues of mutual concern and led to high-level visits, more joint exercises, etc. However, the US stressed that arms sales and transfer of technology were not part of the agreement and that no arms/technology transfer would be done at the expense of Pakistan." The DPG is even today the prime mechanism to guide the Indo-US defence relations.

Overall bilateral relations and therefore defence relations took a turn for the worse when India conducted nuclear tests in 1998. Soon after the nuclear tests, the US imposed sanctions on it under the provisions of the Arms Export Control Act, which (among other things) terminated military sales to India and withdrew product support for the F-404 engines in India's LCA project. Many of these sanctions were lifted between 1998-2000 by President Clinton and the rest were lifted by President Bush on 22 September 2001. This change in America's policy was propelled by India's quick response to the 9/11 attacks and its support for the US war on terrorism. The lifting of sanctions paved the way for a major improvement in defence relations and subsequently led to major arms purchases by India from the US. The India-US Defence Policy Group, which was stalled after the 1998 nuclear tests, was revived in 2001 and now meets every year. In 2000, sanctions imposed on India were revoked and since then defence cooperation between India and the US has reached a new high.

Defence sales, joint military exercises, subject matter expert exchanges, high-level visits and seminars and conferences are the important components of the new Indo-US defence relationship. The first major arms sale to India was in 2002, when India bought 12 counter-battery radar sets ("Fire finder" radars) worth $190 million. 24 In 2003, India became eligible for Excess Defense Articles (EDA) on grant basis under the US Foreign Assistance Act. This was meant to support the war on terrorism, promote interoperability of systems and to modernise previously sold equipment. 25 This was followed in 2005 by a momentous development: the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) agreement which was signed in January 2004. The NSSP sought to expand cooperation on nuclear and civilian space technology, missile defence and dual use high-technology trade. Another agreement on High Technology Trade resulted in the removal of ISRO from the US' Entity List.

Later, during the tsunami of 2004, the armed forces of the two countries worked along with those of Japan and Australia in a multilateral disaster management effort, showing that cooperation in the military field was no longer constrained by bureaucratic formalities.26 The next big breakthrough came with the ten year 'New Framework in the India-US Defence Relationship' signed on 28 June 2005, which charts a course for defence relations in the coming years as a key component of the burgeoning Indo-US strategic partnership. 2" This replaced the Agreed Minute of 1995 and seeks to remove mutual suspicion of the past and replaces it with an active agenda for military

cooperation." The Agreement aimed at advancing "shared security interests", namely :

Maintaining security and stability;

Defeating terrorism and violent religious extremism; preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials, data, and technologies; and protecting the free flow of commerce via land, air and sea lanes.

In pursuit of these interests, India and US agreed to:

a) Conduct joint and combined exercises and exchanges;
b) Collaborate in multinational operations if it is in common interest;
c) Strengthen capabilities of militaries to promote security and defeat terrorism;
d) Promote regional and global peace and stability;
e) Enhance capabilities to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
f) Increase opportunities for technology transfer, collaboration, co-production, and research and development;
g) Expand collaboration relating to missile defence;
h) Strengthen abilities of the Armed Forces to respond quickly to disasters, including in combined operations;
i) Conduct successful peacekeeping operations;
j) Conduct and increase exchanges of intelligence.

Under this framework, the institutionalized framework for cooperation was further strengthened with the creation of the Defence Procurement and Production Group and the Joint Working Group on Defence, under the comprehensive bilateral mechanism of the Defence Policy Group. 30

Recent Trends in Defence Cooperation

In 2006, India bought the USS Trenton, a decommissioned American amphibious transport dock, for $44 million. This was later named the INS Jalashwa. Subsequently, India spent another $39 million on six Sikorsky UH-3H Sea King helicopters. In 2008, India decided to buy six C-130J Hercules military transport aircrafts worth nearly $1 billion from the US. The same year, the Indo-US civil nuclear deal was signed, showing the growing trust between the two countries. In 2009, it agreed to buy eight P-81 maritime surveillance aircraft worth $2.1 billion, six C-1301J transport aircraft worth $1 billion and 99 jet engines for the Tejas LCA worth around $800 from General Electric.

During his visit to India, President Obama announced that Washington would sell to New Delhi US military equipment worth $5 billion to India, including ten C-17 Globe-master III military transport aircraft and 100 F-414 fighter aircraft. The Security Cooperation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-266) authorized the President to transfer to India two Osprey-class coastal mine hunter ships as Excess Defense Articles. Obama also removed as many as nine Indian defence and space-related companies from the Entity List. Yet, the US lost out on by far the mostlucrative potential sale i.e. the bid for 126 new medium, multi-rolecombat aircraft (MMCA) worth some $11 billion. However, this should not affect defence ties between the two countries as it was a decision based purely on technical

evaluation. The strength of Indo-US relations can be seen from the fact that despite its disappointment over not getting the deal, the Pentagon has said that it will continue to defence cooperation with India. In the months since the MMRCA fracas, India has agreed to buy 145 Howitzer guns worth $560 million from the US-based BAE system. There are more deals in the offing as India has announced a military modernisation for which it will spend around $100 billion over the next decade and thus India is a lucrative market for American weapons manufacturers.

Aims of Indo-US Defence Cooperation

Interoperability is a key aim of the Indo-US defence relationship, if not openly for India, at least for the US. Interoperability is possible only when the armed forces of both countries are familiar with each other's procedures, systems and methodologies and when there is trust between them. Interoperability also depends on compatibility of equipment.

Joint exercises are one way of enhancing interoperability. They are therefore the key component of Indo-US defence relations. Since early 2002, India and the US have held several substantive joint military exercises. The Indian and US navies have annually held joint exercises called the Malabar Exercises. These are held to reinforce maritime tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) of both nations. In some years, these were also held as multilateral exercises with the navies of Japan, Singapore and Australia joining in. The Indian and American navies conduct three other exercises annually i.e. Habu Nag (naval aspects of amphibious operations), Spitting Cobra (explosive ordnance destruction focus), and Salvex (diving and salvage). Moreover, the Indian and American navies have cooperated operationally on four separate occasions: security by the Indian Navy for US ships transiting the Strait of Malacca after 9/11; disaster relief efforts after the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004-2005; non-combatant evacuation operations in Lebanon in 2006; and counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden since 2008." The US Coast Guard also conducts exercises with the Indian Coast Guard.

The US and the Indian armies have been conducting the "Yudh Abhyas' exercises annually since 2004. Similarly, the US marines and Indian Army hold a joint exercise called "Shatrujeet which focuses on amphibious operations. The Air Forces have held the bi-annual 'Cope India' air exercises. Special Forces of both countries have held joint exercises called the 'Vajra Prahar' which focus on advanced rifle marksmanship, combat marksmanship, close-quarters combat, helicopter insertion, medical evacuation, combined mission planning, and scenario-based missions." The Indian Air Force is also all set to join the 'Red Flag' combat aviation exercise hosted by the US Air Force in 2013, having participated in it in 2008 as well. Hundreds of Special Forces soldiers from the US have attended courses in India's Counter-Insurgency Jungle Warfare School and India has allowed US Special Forces to conduct joint manoeuvres in the mountainous regions of Kashmir. Over the last ten years, Indian and American forces have participated in over sixty joint exercises and military-to-military training." These exercises have helped to improve interoperability between US and Indian armed forces.

Another major aim for both countries is of course India's need to buy superior weapons and technology from the US. India is poised to spend over $100 billion on military modernisation over the next ten years. So, it needs to find reliable suppliers who can provide it with state of the art weapons systems and technology. This makes it a huge market for the US' military-industrial complex's need at a time when Pentagon's budget is coming under severe fiscal constraints due to the US' domestic travails and accumulated debts. This would also create a large number of jobs in the US.

A major imperative for closer defence cooperation without doubt is the fact that New Delhi and Washington share similar concerns about the rapidly-changing geo-strategic situation in Asia. Washington has already announced that its focus in the coming years is going to be on Asia, through its announcement of the "pivot to Asia". India is also wary of the situation in Asia and is boosting its defences and going in for modernisation of its military. So, clearly there is a convergence of aims related to defence and security.

Obstacles in Defence Relations

The main obstacles in India-US defence relations are American laws. India wants access to technology and the manufacturing process when it buys equipment. But US laws prevent the transfer of sensitive defence technologies to countries that have not signed certain agreements with the US. Examples of such restrictive and intrusive defence cooperation agreements are the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for geo-spatial cooperation (BECA), Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and End User Monitoring Agreement (EUMA).

While India believes that the LSA compromises on its strategic autonomy as it could be dragged into US conflicts in the Middle East and Asia, CISMOA and BECA could imperil its operational autonomy.36 India signed the EUMA in 2009. This allows American representatives to regularly check and transfer inventory items to India. But there has been no forward movement on the CISMOA, LSA and BECA so far. Both countries need to make political concessions and adopt a policy of give and take to get around these laws. In fact, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, during his visit to India in June 2012, said that "not signing these agreements is no barrier to furthering bilateral military relations", adding that the US is committed to providing the best defence technology to India." This statement reflects a major change in US policy. So, there seems to be some room of hope on the issue of the foundational agreements.

Another hurdle is India's procurement system, which is perceived to be non-transparent, corrupt and lacks legitimacy by some scholars.38 An additional problem is Indian laws (offset policy) which require foreign suppliers to source components and invest in R&D in India, but prevent them from establishing wholly-owned or majority-owned subsidiaries in India. Though meant to ensure that foreign technology is eventually transferred to Indian companies, the Americans will not agree to it till the US law on transfer of technology are amended

and India guarantees the protection of IPRs.40 India's nuclear liability bill has also put off American companies. Other structural obstacles include India's long-standing defence procurement relationship with Russia and American military aid to Pakistan." With the current downturn in US-Pakistan relations, reduction in aid to Pakistan and the US' interest in a role for India in Afghanistan, this last hurdle is showing signs of gradually being crossed.

Conclusion :

The India-US strategic partnership, which now has the glue of strategic convergence on many issues, would be meaningless without more defence cooperation and military-to-military ties. Indo-US defence relations over the years have mirrored the state of overall relations between the two countries: when relations were bad, defence relations never took off and today when relations are at their best, defence cooperation too has gained support in both countries. Defence cooperation is the litmus test in any bilateral relationship and the state of the Indo-US defence cooperation buttresses the Indo-US strategic partnership, though there is much room for more cooperation. Given the fact that both countries face similar challenges and share long-term strategic convergence, it is important that they cooperate in defence and have interoperability.

But defence cooperation, despite having increased exponentially since 2001, has not realised its full potential. This is because of mutual suspicion and non-understanding of each others' concerns, particularly because of India's distrust of America's domestic laws that have a bearing on defence trade and cooperation. One way of getting around American and Indian laws would be for India and the US to pursue joint projects for technology development. 42 India's highly-skilled personnel can make significant contributions in this and also learn from the Americans. Joint ventures would also reduce unpredictability in future military cooperation and sales.

The US suspension of military sales in during the 1965 and 1971 war continues to cast a long shadow in the minds of Indian policymakers about the reliability of the US as a weapons supplier and as a strategic partner. This mutual suspicion can only be reduced through greater interaction and more joint exercises. New Delhi and Washington should move away from a buyer-seller relationship in arms transfers and lay the foundation for more defence industrial collaboration, co-production of weapons systems and joint research in advanced areas. 43 In fact, New Delhi and Washington have already moved forward in this direction as is seen in the joint statement issued after the Annual Strategic Dialogue in 2012 in which both sides agreed to "strengthen defense cooperation through increased technology transfer, collaborative joint research and development, and co-production of defense items"." This is a good sign and holds immense opportunities for Indo-US defence cooperation in the future. The Indo-US defence cooperation is in the long-term mutual interest of both countries and therefore must be enhanced in the future.

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Investigating Democratic Nuances in the Indian National Movement

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Abstract

Ancient Greek origin of democracy is celebrated and contested even today. Democracy, as an idea can be either procedural or substantive. Whatever its nature, its evolution has gone through various stages and interpretations. In India democracy has been practised for ages but with different perspectives. Indian national movement also evolved democratic ethos in its various phases. From the First War of Independence (1857) to the enactment of the Freedom Act (1947) elements of democracy gained maturity.

This work tried to contemplate the issue ofthesis and anti-thesis of democracy operating within the framework of the liberation movement. The transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown, exposure to English education, and the passing of Acts subsequently strengthened the principles of democracy. The formation of the Indian National Congress ushered in a new era of liberal nationalism and the entry of Mahatma Gandhi embarked upon a nation-making formula with mass participation. The trajectory of democracy saw many upheavals but ultimately laid down the basis of a post-independent democratic setup which is thriving even today despite several odds.

Keywords : Indian National Movement, Democracy, Gandhi, INC

One of the earliest attempts at measuring democracy was that of Robert Dahl. (Jayal,2001) According to Robert Dahl (1989) democracy as practised today has four historical sources: The direct democracy in ancient Greece, the republicanism of Roman, and Italian city-states in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Twentieth century witnessed unparallel extension of democracy in global set up. In Kautilaya's Arthshashtra, the Manusmriti and the other Brahmanical texts reflected monarchy in practice in the ancient Indian political system but the evidence of the widespread practice of republicanism was also confirmed by several research writings of the 19th century. Greek accounts of the Indian political system affirm the process of republicanism. The experience of representative institutions in colonial India made the process of establishment of democratic institutions easy after gaining freedom from British rule.

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The Indian Renaissance repudiated absolutism in all forms and recognised the necessity of a philosophy of Indian nationalism. (Lal,1910:.5-8). Democracy took a proper shape after the end of absolutism in the late 17th century, followed by popular revolutions. The consolidation of the British empire in India's territory was based on the principle of liberalism which culminated in the protests of the liberation movement in democratic practices. However, the culture of democracy is alive in India since civilisation is toldand often told. Proceduraldemocracy involving the rule of law and free and fair electionswere followed but the substantive democracy pertaining to value-based judgments and accountability towards an egalitarian society failed to penetrate. The actualisation of democratic ethos happened in the 20th century with the liberation movement. A dialogue, not argument, a consensus not conflict, empathy not dominance, peace not violence takes place then, substantive democracy will flourish. National movement strengthened democratic values. This work tried to test the hypothesis with value-free facts of the national movement. Democracy is valued in itself; but its integral characteristics-the competitiveness for power among parties, is devalued and held with suspicion. This demonstrates that political consciousness in India is (potentially) inherently contradictory. The legitimacy of the democratic system in India has to be situated in this inheritance of a deep-rooted contradiction in the popular consciousness. (Alam,2012:19)

With the waning of the Mughal Empire and the rise of the East India Company until 1857, when the British Crown took control, the map of India was nothing like it is today. As Mughal power waned post Aurangzeb, there was an assertion of power by local rulers including Tipu Sultan, the Marathas, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The princely families that survived accepted British suzerainty even while they retained their own kingdoms. It was under the British rule that India became a compact political unit. The Indian National Movement was more than just a fight for independence; it was a movement that embedded democratic values into the fabric of the nation. The struggles, sacrifices, and aspirations of freedom fighters laid the groundwork for a democratic republic that upholds justice, liberty, and equality. Today, India stands as a testament to the vision of its leaders, embracing democracy as its core identity while continuing to evolve as a diverse and vibrant nation. (Pradeep Jain v. Union of India (1984) 3SCC654,12). The socio-religious reforms movement became fragmented by the communal divide as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan confronted each other but separately led to the emancipation movement which liberated both Hindus and Muslims, the two larger conservative segments. It embarked upon a new era of progressive liberals who championed the cause of freedom in terms of justice and equality.

The Indian national movement since its inception had a very specific objective– getting freedom from the colonial power. Ideologically the Indian Renaissance paved the way for the people of India, to discover their own identity, in the frames of reference of their history, their culture, and the mores and values of their society. (Mazumdar, 2010:33). Democracy became indispensable in this process. There was a steady extension of greater representation in provincial and central legislative councils and at the same time rigorous demand for civil liberties and freedom of speech and expression. India's pathway to democracy could hardly have been less promising. English education also

became instrumental in arousing consciousness in Indian people towards their identity. Charter Act of 1833 and 1853 did not specify any representative principle but however separated legislative and executive functions followed by the first War of Independence of 1857 or sepoy mutiny as described by the Britishers, not having any principle of democracy as it was mainly oriented towards securing the throne of Rajas. But the consequences of the mutiny inched towards democratic ethos by the government being transferred from East India Company to the Crown, in response to this movement, Britain from 1892 onwards started working on parliamentary self-government. The Act of 1858 resolved to provide good government but did nothing substantial in this direction. (Roy, 2005:71). It developed a sense of realization that rulers must be accountable to people, as a beginning towards parliamentary democracy. lord Ripon's1882 resolution on local self-government envisaged elected representation for the first time. There was an established rule of law along with cultural unity despite diversity. India no doubt achieved political unity.

Many undemocratic laws were enacted The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, the Arms Act of 1878 Indian Press Act of 1908, Rowlatt Act of 1919 known as the Black Act of 1919 with dyarchy provision as an eye wash for duping Indian nationalists. There was a great urge for democratization among the freedom fighters irrespective of their conflicting ideologies. Democracy is no doubt a contested concept but equally popular and impactful. However, it was only with the freedom movement that the leaders of the time who were from different creeds, races, castes, and colours create a truly nationa-listic movement towards freedom and assertion of rights of natives of this land, both in the princely states (as they existed pre-1947) and in British India. The freedom movement was the catalyst that led to, as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad put it, the moulding of a common nationality through a thousand years of joint life. "(Habib 2017: 237- 240.)

The formation of INC started a new era of political freedom which was shaped by Gandhian ideology, commitment, and action. Democracy as a concept of accountability of the government and autonomy of public was mooted and reinforced. Unfortunately, was not practiced. Initially, the Indian National Congress (1885) was dubbed as an upper-middle-class body, an assembly for politically active individuals who sought reforms within the British Empire. The elite stream led the national movement and subaltern groups were denied active and voluntary participation. Inner contradiction in terms of class and caste prevailed in the movement which was also reflected in the organization. The Congress movement to begin with did not attract people of all classes and communities The movement also took the right-wing stand. Therefore, a nation in making formula was not initially cherished. later The INC epitomized an indigenized democracy in its action after realizing its functional lacunae. There was a strong feeling among the emerging middle class and the intelligentsia that Indians needed a greater say in how their country was governed. The rigorous demand for **Swaraj** (self-rule) was not meant for political independence, it also desired establishing a governance system based on democratic ideals.

If we turn the pages of history, the Calcutta congress in 1906 became alarming for the British ruleas swaraj and swadeshi became the major slogans. The legacy of the Swadeshi Movement is not limited to its role in India's freedom struggle. It has left an indelible mark on the country's ethos, still echoing in the “Make in India” initiative and other contemporary movements that promote self-sufficiency. Its principles of economic independence and national pride continue to inspire and shape policies even today in our democratic edifice. The Swadeshi movement took a major leap towards democracy but got a setback from the Muslim community which was incited by Curzon's divide and rule policy and partition of Bengal formula, followed by extremist ideologies. In 1906 formation of the Muslim League and the 1907 Surat split weakened the fervor of oneness, belongingness, and nationalism in the movement.

The cleavage was visible and the gap widened which proved dangerous for India's nation-making strategy.The isolated movement did not promote nationalism in true sense of the term. People of India thereafter spearheaded the mobilization of the organization and eventuallyseries of civil rebellions happened against Rajas, Nawabs and Zamindars. Peasant movements and agrarian outbreaks taking place in and around India against the ryotwari or feudal system. The element of uniformity and feeling of nationalism gradually nurtured out of necessity. So, it can be said that the movement became democratic with the passage of time and experience. It was not democratic and fully representative, but even then, the objective was highly liberal which consequently transformed the governance into an accountable rule.

The reforms incorporated by Montague Chelmsford of1919 gave space to dyarchy which can be regarded as the usher in of democratic principles into the British mighty structure. Indian ministers were not allowed charge of Transferred subjects. Coercive measure prevailed so basically Act was regarded as an eyewash for the reformers as the dyarchy was made powerless and teethless. As a result, the non-cooperation movement as an effective expression of democratic protest under the able guidance of Mahatma Gandhistarted in 1920. There was also a demand for adult suffrage which was finally realized in the Indian Constitution.The national movement demanded fundamental rights in the Nehru Report (1928), Purna Swaraj in the Lahore Resolution (1929) and civil liberties in the Karachi Resolution (1931) The Moti Lal Nehru Report proposed the same constitutional provision for India as the self-governing dominions enjoyed in the British empire. Lahore resolution demanded complete independence. And the Karachi Resolution under the influence of Gandhiji demanded socio-economic rights for all. But the ramifications of all these were not democratic. Amidst contradictions, the movement dwindled between constitutional and radical norms. The inherent conflicts damaged the spirit of nationalism within the movement. In 1937 the Indian National Congress introduced local and provincial representative government. The elections saw the entry into the legislatures of a new breed of congressmen, less cosmopolitan, more representative of rural and small-town India and more comfortable with the language of community and caste.

It was undoubtedly one of the biggest mass movements human societies have ever seen. It popularized democratic ideas and

institutions in India. Nationalists fought for the introduction of representative government based on popular elections based on adult franchise. Nationalists fought for freedom of press, expression and association and extended the scope of civil liberties. It adopted a pro-poor orientation which was strengthened by the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi. He gave a democratic twist by identifying Congress with the masses involving women, schedule castes, Muslims and marginalized.

The need was felt to give national leadership to the movement for promoting democratic values. Congress was a movement for freedom, not a political party for sharing power. Mahatma Gandhi identified Congress with the masses. He gave a social democratic change over to the national movement. He made a constructive programme of decentralization of power, village sufficiency, emancipation of women, abolition of untouchability, hygiene, and sanitation with cleanliness. The idea of a community development programme emerged. The concept of mazdoor, Kisan Raj or Workers' and Peasants' rule was very much a part of the nationalist movement. The Home Rule Movement and the entry of Gandhiji after the victory of passive resistance to India gave a new insight into democracy. The non-cooperation movement was initiated by Gandhi ji against undemocratic rules in 1920. Civil Disobedience Movement was launched against Salt Tax Law-1930 and the Quit India Movement in 1942, hencelawful protest became the intrinsic value of democracy. Political democracy was present in Indian nationalism not only in terms of ideas and aims. It was also inherent in the method of struggle adopted by the nationalist movement. In 1937, the Indian National congress, albeit against the advice of its 'high command' 'voted to buy British conception of democracy as devolution and 'entered' the institutions of 'representative' local and provincial self-government. (Washbrook, 2001:89) Democracy was thus seen as an absolute value, on which there could be no compromise. Congress emerged not as a party but as a parliament, a place where people come together to discuss and make decisions for the nation from all streams without any discrimination. There was an election held every year in the party. This practice of democracy showed the people what democracy was going to be in post-independent India. That is how democracy was internalized. The freedom struggle imparted certain values to Indian people which took the form of practices as they were internalized by the people. The most important among these were incorporated in the framing of the Constitution of independent India. Anti-imperialist Nationalism, Democracy and Popular Participation, Secularism and Religious Freedom, Non-Violence and peace, A pro-poor orientation, and above all Human equality, freedom and brotherhood became the cardinal principles of democracy in post-independent India. By 1946 limited democracy expanded to the Indian population to make democracy a liberal one. The State as conceived was essentially a secular, democratic state." Mahatma Gandhi said on 31 August 1947, sixteen days after India became independent.

The strategy of struggle based on making imperative the active participation of the mass of the people in non-violent 'satyagraha' or civil disobedience move-

ments, perhaps was most instrumental in internalizing democracy. The movement was also based on innovation, creativity, and autonomous activity at the local levels, and this too built the habit of democracy. Dr. Ambedkar at the time of the adoption of the Indian Constitution warned against being content with mere political democracy which could not last unless social democracy lay at its base. (Jayal, 2001:23). The hypothesis is partially proved. Democracy was incorporated but with inherent dissent, interestingly, a note of dissent is a basic right in a democracy.

The trajectory of Democracy shows that it had, has and will see many upheavals even in future. But it will survive, and flourish and we need to cherish the ideals of democracy. The salient feature of democracy is its acceptance of the foundational notion of human equality and treating persons as having equal moral worth. This objective itself is self-sufficient in proving the Indian freedom movement as a democratic social and political movement. (Mukherjee,2005: 23) The ideological commitment of the Indian liberation struggle was not confined to independence, it was also committed to socio-economic change which will ensure the people of India, emancipation from social inequality, economic exploitation, and educational and cultural backwardness. (Kaul, 1998:114).

In fine, it can be safely asserted that the whole process of the Indian freedom movement nourished the democratic values, despite many setbacks, is in continuity. The movement championed the principles of justice, equality, and representation. The formation of the **Constituent Assembly in 1946**, which drafted the Indian Constitution, was a direct outcome of the movement's democratic aspirations.

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The Indian Diaspora and National Security : Opportunities and Risks

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Abstract

This paper critically views the Indian diaspora as both an asset and a threat to India's national security. This study aims to identify and assess significant avenues of opportunity and risk flowing from the global Indian diaspora for policy formulation and national strategy. Using a qualitative analytical framework, the study under takes an extensive literature review, content analysis of policy documents, and detailed geopolitical case studies. The primary sources include government policy papers, international reports, and journal articles covering diaspora interactions' economic, diplomatic, security, and socio-political aspects. The findings show that the Indian diaspora provides huge remittances, foreign direct investments, advocacy in host states, and diplomatic leverage for national security. On the other side, threats arise from the diaspora being a target for radicalization, threats of espionage, transnational criminal activities, and diplomatic conflicts owing to harboring diaspora politics. National security management needs a comprehensive and balanced approach to diaspora engagement. Indian policy should ideally engage and strategically leverage the diaspora strengths in the economy and diplomacy, while resolving mechanisms robust enough to address security hazards suchas radicalisation and espionage. Greater cooperation, diaspora intelligence, and engagement targeting among nations are required to realise more significant benefits while containing the attendant risks posed by the global Indian diaspora.

Keywords: Indian diaspora; National security; Economic diplomacy; Radicalisation; Espionage; Transnational crime; Diaspora engagement; Policy analysis.

Introduction

With an estimated upward strength of 32 million, the migration community exercises a forceful push in India's geopolitics and national security discourse (MEA, 2022). Historically, Indian migration has witnessed various reasons, including economic opportunities, colonial policies, and socio-political unrest. The Indian diaspora, being spread across the world, possesses strong ties to India at various levels: family-based, cultural, economic, and political, thus engendering a distinct socio-political dynamic that exerts a strong magnifying influence on national security implications therein (Kapur, 2010).

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What lends credibility and fame to the Indian diaspora nowadays is their economy: big businesses, significant investments, and big times in remittances, which crossed $100 billion per annum and went on to shore up India's foreign exchange reserves and economic stability (World Bank, 2022). Abroad, Indian diaspora investments and businesses have transformed increasingly into the repository of FDI funds in the country, growing ever so strategically in India's economic develop-ment and global positioning (Chaturvedi, 2020).

By foreign policy machinery, several Indian diaspora individuals function as unofficial ambassadors, thereby increasing India's soft power score worldwide. These politically conscious Diasporas, especially in powerful host countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, wield enormous political clout for policies favourable to India's geopolitical interests and bilateral relations (Tharoor, 2012). These advocacies give rise to enhanced strategic leverage India can exploit while wrestling with various international negotiations and coalitions.

Despite the apparent benefits, Indian Diasporas pose certain inherent security risks. For one, these very communities serve as potential targets for radicalisation by global extremist ideologies. Since there have been cases of radicalisation targeting Indian diaspora youth connected to international terrorist networks, this security vulnerability demands the implementation of strong counterterrorism measures (Singh, 2019). Secondly, diaspora communities can also be subject to espionage and foreign influence, thus constituting an outright threat to India's strategic interests, particularly in geopolitically sensitive areas (Pandey, 2015).

The other grave matter that holds Indian international relations hostage is transnational crime within and across diaspora groups. Groups involved in human trafficking, money laundering, and drug smuggling take advantage of diaspora networks to undermine attempts at law enforcement and international collaboration. Such criminal acts seriously harm India's international standing, and simultaneously, the respective diplomatic ties with the host countries are being strained so that the broader national security management of the Indian state becomes immensely complicated (Sharma, 2017).

The double-edged nature of the Indian diaspora poses a plethora of issues. An associated diaspora policy has to be formulated on varied parameters. The entire diaspora management must vigorously embrace opportunities to use its economic and diplomatic clout while systematically seeking to eradicate security concerns. In this regard, policymakers must give precedence to an intelligence-sharing mechanism with diaspora host countries, improvement of counter-radicalisation structures, and implementation of a focused engagement program to ensure Diasporas remain integrated on the positive side to work constructively towards the national security framework in India.

It is concluded that, owing to the Indian diaspora's multidimensional influences, the national campaign changing transformations should retain its neutral orientation. Neutral-oriented policies should capitalise on positive facets like economic and cultural diplomacy but mitigate risks of radicalisation, espionage, and transnational crimes. A considered strategic policy is required to invest maximally in the diaspora while simultaneously neutralising required security threats.

Opportunities Provided by the Indian Diaspora

The foreign Indian diaspora provides strategic opportunities that enhance India's national capabilities. Key areas are economics, diplomatic channels, technology, and cultural impact (MEA, 2022; Kapur, 2010).

In an economic sense, the diaspora is a considerable income source through remittances, directly impacting India's macroeconomic condition and foreign exchange positions (Ratha et al., 2022). These remittances also encourage invest-ments in India from overseas, especially in technology, infrastructure development, healthcare, and real estate, all of which are key to India being economically resilient and competing in the global market place (Chaturvedi, 2020; Khadria, 2019). These companies and entrepreneurial ventures operated by the diaspora increasingly bring knowledge transfer, innovation, and technology to bear upon India's economic transformation and sustainable develop-ment (Singh, 2020).

As a power base for international relations, the diaspora actively promotes India's cause. Active diaspora communities in strategically important countries, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, have responded through advocacy, lobbying, and political activism to influence foreign policies favouring India (Tharoor, 2012; Varadarajan, 2021).

Diaspora communities have always proved crucial in advocating favourable immigrant policies, treaties for bilateral trade, defence arrangements, and cultural diplomacy activities aligned with India's strategic objectives (Pant, 2017; Mukherjee & Chatterjee, 2021).

Further, the Indian diaspora substantially contributes to India's global soft power. Cultural exchanges, educational programs, diaspora-driven public diplomacy, and numerous networks created abroad establish the Indian authority concerning culture and politics worldwide (Nye, 2020). With such soft power resources, India can forge stronger international partnerships and utilise these to facilitate diplomatic negotiations and bolster geopolitical stature and influence in the global arena.

Thus, the Indian diaspora's contribution in all fields of economics, diplomacy, technology, and culture must be considered a critical strategic asset capable of providing India with unique opportunities to strengthen its national security and extend its global reach.

Economic Benefits

Situated in the Indian diaspora, providing remittances and investing foreign monies, the diaspora significantly impacts India's economic capability. The increasing trend of remittances through the diaspora has led India with USD 100 billion just in 2022, being declared bythe World Bank (2022) as the top recipient of remittances in the world an inflow stabilizes foreign exchange reserves in India; hence, it buffers the economy from shocks of globalized economic activities and, thereby, shores up the economy for such shocks (Ratha et al., 2022). The dynamism has grave economic implications, as the remittances contribute to household incomes, make poverty reduction possible, and add to the growth of local-level economic activities in rural or semi-urban areas of India (Singh, 2020). Moreover, investment sectors, increasingly supported by the diaspora, have become a more important channel for FDIs, particularly in India, for technology, health, and real estate

services (Chaturvedi, 2020). Recent research has shown that the diaspora's entrepreneurship and business networks abroad have greatly enhanced technology transfers and innovations, positively influencing India's economic modernisation and global competitiveness (Khadria, 2019).

Diplomatic and Political Leverage

The Indian diaspora in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom has extensive political and diplomatic influence. Due to their advocacy, these American, British, and Canadian Indians serve as unpaid representatives of the Indian country and its policies and interests (Tharoor, 2012; Varadarajan, 2021).

As an example, the Indian diaspora in America has participated in the development of bilateral strategic relations between America and India. Support for immigration, defence, and economic relations with India has especially highlighted this fervent activity (Pant,2017). Besides, some politically active members from the diaspora in Canada and the United Kingdom have, alongside Indian politicians, intervened in parliamentary debates and policy discourse regarding India's international relations and human rights issues instead of using military force (Mukherjee & Chatterjee, 2021).

In addition, initiatives by the diaspora enhance India's image abroad as a target of international relations without formal diplomacy or cultural contacts. These interactions usually guarantee favourable diplomatic relations that enable India to control international diplomatic relations and, thus, increase its strategic position (Nye, 2020).

Risks Associated with the Diaspora

While highly advanced, the extreme gaps, risks, and strategic flaws within the global Indian diaspora challenge India's national defence. Solutions involving radicalisation, espionage, and transnational crime require complexities to understand the outlined risks fully.

Addressing the issue of radicalisation in the younger cohort of the diaspora community is one of the foremost security challenges. The resulting vulnerabilities are worsened due to exposure to radical online platforms, local extremist groups, and organised propaganda. India's socioeconomic identity struggles, ostracisation, and deep-seated feelings of alienation among many youths serve as key reasons that increase the chances of recruitment into extremist activities (Rai, 2020). Recruitment campaigns targeting the Indian diaspora face very real risks with the presence of Indian-origin youths in the UK, Canada, and Australia who join extremist groups (Bhatt & Silber, 2020). This threat can be mitigated through comprehensive intelligence gathering, strategic outreach, and community-centred intervention programs disguised as education (Kumar, 2018).

Espionage and foreign influence operations seeking to exploit the diaspora community build another troublesome area of concern. Community of Indians living abroad, especially in areas of great importance or in sensitive occupations, become potential targets for hostile state espionage (Pandey, 2015). With the aid of transnational networks and gaps in the diaspora, hostile states attempt to exploit the vulnerabilities to gain insights into India's infrastructural, economic and technological prowess and military strength, which com-promises national security (Jain, 2016). The foreign intelligence community's recruiting or attempting to influence affiliated diaspora for recruitment

underscores the more profound and tangible reality of espionage threats. Strengthening counter-intelligence and international security measures, greater cooperation, and fostering diaspora mitigation awareness programs are essential in solving the problems of espionage induced vulnerability (Verma, 2017).

Sent as remittances, the diaspora constitutes an important component of India's international economy. As they bridge domestic expectations and overseas possibilities, they provide critical support for spearheading new development and innovation.

India's security and governance are highly vulnerable to crimes involving diaspora constituents, including transnational organised crime. Apart from the conveniences provided as a result of the diaspora, organised crime syndicates use the diaspora for sophisticated forms of money laundering, human and drug trafficking, and several other criminal enterprises (Sharma, 2017).

Criminal activities frequently exploit social networks and familial ties that cross national boundaries, making it difficult to uphold diplomatic relations between India and the participating nations and enforce the law (Raghavan, 2021). Strong cross-border law enforcement partnerships, extensive regulations, and targeted intelligence efforts are urgently needed to dismantle the diaspora-affiliated crime networks, which pose significant threats to international cooperation, economic stability, and domestic security (Singh & Malhotra,2022).

To put it briefly, the problems of transnational crime, espionage threats, and diaspora radicalisation necessitate a comprehensive, integrated security strategy. Developing strategic policy frameworks, proactive community engagement, strong international collaboration, and increased intelligence capabilities are all necessary to address these challenges and safeguard national security.

Radicalisation and Security Threats

The vulnerability of diaspora communities, particularly young people, to radicalisation creates major national security issues. Exposure to extremist ideas spread through online platforms and local radical networks usually leads to radicalisation. Identity crises, marginalisation, socioeconomic complaints, and the impact of extremist groups aggravate the diaspora's vulnerability, which could creat esecurity problems for India (Singh, 2019). Events like the participation of diaspora youth from Western nations in extremist groups highlight the need for intense monitoring and preventive measures (Rai, 2020). Reducing these dangers depends on thorough counter-radicalisation plans, including intelligence cooperation, community out reach, and educational programs (Kumar, 2018).

Espionage and Foreign Influence

Often targets for foreign espionage and influence operations, diaspora communities, because of their transnational ties, greatly influence India's national security situation. Hostile governments use diaspora networks to collect information on sensitive military, technological, and economic sectors by exploiting their positions inside strategic institutions overseas (Pandey, 2015). Examples of diaspora members enlisted by foreign intelligence services show the actual danger espionage operations cause. Geopolitically sensitive areas, especially in the Middle East and Europe, have seen more espionage aimed at diaspora communities to sway

policy choices harmful to India's interests (Jain, 2016). To properly handle these espionage threats, improved counter-espionage capabilities and cooperative intelligence-sharing systems are necessary.

Transnational Crime

Diaspora members' participation in transnational criminal activities like human trafficking, drug smuggling, and financial crimes poses a significant national security concern. These criminal networks use diaspora channels for their worldwide reach to avoid law enforcement examination using cross-border family and business ties (Sharma, 2017). Schemes of money laundering run by diaspora-linked financial institutions compromise India's economic stability and the efficacy of its law enforcement, the refore requiring more robust international cooperation and rigorous regulatory systems (Raghavan, 2021). The spread of diaspora-linked criminal enterprises also strains diplomatic relations with host countries, possibly impeding bilateral cooperation on security and intelligence issues. Strong law enforcement cooperation, thorough transnational crime systems, and focused intelligence sharing are needed to dismantle diaspora-involved criminal networks and fight the sedifficulties properly.

These dangers, taken together, highlight the need for a sophisticated, proactive national security approach to tackling the several weaknesses linked to the Indian diaspora.

Policy Recommendations for Effective Diaspora Engagement

Engaging the Indian diaspora for national security effectively calls for a multi-pronged and complex policy approach that balances opportunity maximisation with threat mitigation. Strategic diaspora engagement should emphasise economic and diplomatic contributions and include strong security frameworks. This part describes in depth a set of forward-looking policy suggestions backed by modern research and government insights drawing from international best practices, policy literature, and India's changing global position.

Enhanced Intelligence Cooperation

Monitoring and reducing threats resulting from radicalisation, transnational crime, and espionage involving diaspora members depends on international intelligence cooperation. Indian security agencies must strengthen ties with intelligence agencies in nations with significant diaspora populations including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the Gulf states (Kumar, 2018). Real-time intelligence sharing, coordinated surveillance operations, and inter-agency task forces can improve situational awareness and enable preemptive actions against security breaches. Projects like the Joint Working Group on Counter terrorism between India and the U.S., for instance, illustrate effective frameworks for exchanging information on sleeper cells, terrorist financing, and extremist propaganda networks operating in diaspora environments (Chhibber, 2020).

Building diaspora intelligence capacity should also include placing intelligence liaison officers in Indian diplomatic missions and consulates to gather, examine, and disseminate diaspora-related security data (Verma, 2017). Israel's and China's diaspora monitoring initiatives' success both countries have extensive outreach and surveillance networks worldwide offers helpful models for India (Barabantseva, 2010).

Strategic Engagement Programs

Strategically involving the diaspora means moving from symbolic outreach to deliberate participation in national development, economic diplomacy, and policy creation. To carry out diaspora engagement projects with a national security aspect, the Overseas Indian Affairs Division of the Ministry of External Affairs should be further empowered with greater budgetary and diplomatic power (MEA, 2022).

Security-oriented forums and discussions meant to educate diaspora leaders on India's national priorities and counter-extremism goals should be added to programs such as the Know India Program and the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Sinha, 2021). Targeted diaspora advisory councils and strategic alliances with overseas business chambers, cultural institutions, and think tanks will help to align diaspora narratives with India's geopolitical message. Soft power integration can help prevent radical ideas and foreign propaganda (Nye, 2020).

Furthermore, developing next-generation diaspora leaders via civic diplomacy initiatives, educational exchanges, and scholarships will foster long-term confidence and guarantee alignment with India's strategic culture. By strengthening diasporic ties through positive incentives instead of reactionary monitoring, India can create a credible overseas constituency that actively fights anti-India narratives (Kapur, 2010).

Robust Monitoring and Security Mechanisms

Engagement is important, but intense monitoring is still the foundation of a safe diaspora strategy. Mapping threat hotspots and suspicious activity patterns requires institutionalising diaspora security monitoring systems inside agencies, including the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and National Investigation Agency (NIA) (Singh, 2019).

Digital tools, including open-source intelligence (OSINT) platforms, financial transaction tracing, and AI-enabled sentiment analysis of diaspora social media conversations, can offer early warning signals of radicalisation or espionage attempts (Bhatt & Silber, 2020). The government should invest in building risk-mapping matrices and diaspora vulnerability indexes that feed into national security dashboards at the Ministry of Home Affairs (Raghavan, 2021).

Moreover, legal systems must be modernised to enable worldwide collaboration in prosecuting diaspora-linked criminal activities. To guarantee compliance and hasten the investigation of transnational crimes, India's Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) with foreign nations require strengthening (Sharma, 2017). Creating diaspora-specific investigative task forces in metropolitan areas like Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad could enhance responsibility and coordination.

Ultimately, more diaspora integration in homeland security projects like counter terrorism summits, cybersecurity alliances, and civil defence collaborations will guarantee a more participative and open involvement. To avoid backlash and maintain goodwill, these policies should be weighed against privacy standards and the civil liberties of the diaspora (Rai,2020).

Legal and Institutional Reforms

India has to update its institutional framework to ensurethat diaspora involvement is a

central pillar of its national security approach. Policy, intelligence coordination, and diaspora welfare integration could be overseen by a dedicated National Diaspora Security Cell (NDSC) under the National Security Council Secretariat, acting as a nodal agency (Pant, 2017). This body could coordinate among Indian missions, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement, publish policy white papers, and annual diaspora threat assessments.

Legal changes are also necessary to enhance extradition procedures and to more efficiently prosecute diaspora-linked cyber crime and terror financing activities. Laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act(UAPA) and the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) should be updated to target mainly foreign-based extremist financing and political influence operations (Mukherjee & Chatterjee, 2021).

Strategic Communication and Narrative Building

Managing diaspora narratives is as vital as tracking activities in the information war. Strategic communication policies must be created to combat propaganda, false information, and ideological manipulation aimed at diaspora communities. Partnerships with digital platforms, diaspora media, and influencers can amplify counter-narra-tives, clarify policy positions, and highlight India's accomplishments in security, development, and pluralism (Nye, 2020).

India should also spend money on training intelligence officers and diplomatic personnel in psychological operations and transnational communications (Verma, 2017). Rooted in opennessand shared values, a globally coordinated, culturally informed messaging campaign can preempt diaspora disinformation campaigns that could otherwise foster distrust or radicalisation.

Conclusion

As this study has shown, the Indian diaspora sits strategically and potentially dangerously in the larger context of India's national security. This conclusion thoroughly analyses why controlling diaspora dynamics is vital for India's future geopolitical and security path, consolidating the main points made throughout the earlier sections.

The diaspora's many economic, diplomatic, technological, and cultural contributions give India unmatched global power and reach. As ambassadors of Indian soft power in host nations, diaspora communities enable significant foreign remittances, guide foreign direct investments (FDIs), and promote technological innovation (Kapur, 2010; Chaturvedi, 2020; MEA, 2022). These constructive interactions support India's strategic diplomacy and help to improve its world reputation. Key platforms where Indian-origin populations influence policy environments favourable to India's interests are provided by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Gulf countries (Nye, 2020; Pant, 2017).

On the other hand, the growing complexity of world politics, the spread of digital radicalisation, and the politicisation of identity in diaspora environments have caused a parallel range of national security issues. Emerging issues that jeopardise India's internal stability and international standing are diaspora radicalisation, recruitment into extremist networks, foreign intelligence agency espionage, and involvement in transnational criminal networks (Singh, 2019; Sharma, 2017; Rai, 2020).

India has to start the other. Israel, Ireland, and China are among the nations that have effectively created diaspora policies combining cultural integration with strategic control (Barabantseva, 2010; Jain, 2016).

To sum up, the Indian diaspora is a complicated security issue and a strong strategic tool. A sophisticated, multi-sectoral, long-term policy commitment is required to capitalise on its strengths and minimise weaknesses. Given that national security is not compromised, India's diaspora can be a pillar of its global rise at a historical cross roads. India can change its diaspora from a subject of security worry to a partner in national renewal and international leadership using inclusive, forward-looking policies anchored in intelligence, diplomacy, and civic involvement.

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Energy Market Disruptions Evaluating the Economic Consequences of US-Iran Escalation

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Ms. Mohini Gupta ***

Abstract :

The increasing tensions between the US and Iran have created significant energy market risks that threaten economic stability and security. The current study examines the potential economic impacts of the escalating tensions between the US and Iran on the energy market. The study focuses on the effects of the tensions on oil price volatility, supply chain disruptions, and their potential impact on energy-importing countries. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach that combines historical data analysis with scenario-based modeling. The study examines the potential short- and long-term impacts of the escalating tensions between the US and Iran on the global energy market. The study highlights the energy market's vulnerability to the tensions between the two countries.

Keywords : US-Iran Conflict, Energy Market Disruption, Oil Price Volatility, Global Energy Security

Introduction

The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea. This waterway is an important choke point in the global energy trade, through which about 21 million barrels of oil are transported daily, which is about a third of the world's oil trade. The rising tensions between the US and Iran, which are both important global energy producers, have turned the Strait of Hormuz into a flashpoint, which can have far-reaching implications for the stability of the global energy trade. The decision of the US to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, which was aimed at controlling Iran's nuclear ambitions, and the imposition of sanctions on Iran's oil exports, banking, and shipping industries have led to increased military deployments, cyber-attacks,and aggressive rhetoric

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between the two countries. Any disruption in the oil trade from the region, which produces about 20% of the world's oil production, can have important implications for energy-importing countries like India, China, and those in the European Union. The impact of the disruption can be seen on different sectors like transportation, industries, and individuals, which can lead to economic instability, thereby resulting in economic recession.

Literature Review

The economic impact of a US-Iran escalation on energy markets has been a popular area of research interest. Research has indicated that conflicts in the Middle East, especially those involving the larger oil-producing economies such as Iran, have the potential to cause considerable disruptions to the energy markets (Hamilton, 2003; Kilian, 2008). Additionally, the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for a considerable percentage of the total global oil exports, has been identified as a significant chokepoint in the energy markets. Disruptions to the energy markets via the Strait of Hormuz have the potential to cause considerable economic consequences (EIA, 2020). Research has also been conducted on the possible impact of a US-Iran escalation on the energy markets, and the research has indicated considerable potential for price increases in the event of a moderate disruption in Iranian oil exports (IMF, 2019; IEA, 2020). The economic impact of such price increases would be considerable, especially to energy-importing economies (Abiad et al., 2011; Cashin et al., 2014).The research has also indicated the possible impact of a US-Iran escalation on the energy markets, and the impact would depend on a number of factors such as the severity of the conflict, the energy markets' responses, and the effectiveness of the mitigation strategies (Borenstein et al., 2004; Kilian, 2014). Other research has been conducted on the possible benefits associated with the diversification and cooperation strategies in the energy markets (Bhattacharyya, 2011; Goldthau, 2013). However, further research on the economic impact of a US-Iran escalation on the energy markets would be necessary in the context of the evolving dynamics in the energy markets.

Research Objectives

1. Assess the potential economic consequences of a US-Iran escalation on global energy markets
2. Evaluate the vulnerability of global energy markets to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and identify potential mitigation strategies to minimize economic risks.

Research Methodology

The study utilizes a mixed research approach in assessing the economic impacts of a US-Iran escalation in global energy markets. This includes quantitative methods in analyzing historical oil price trends, energy market reports, and economic indicators. It also includes content analysis in studying news reports, policy reports, and expert opinions. Simulations are used in estimating potential disruptions in oil supplies, oil price volatility, and economic impacts on energy-importing countries. This study helps identify potential vulnerable sectors and regions, including recommendations for addressing economic impacts. This study utilizes econometric modelling, macro economic analysis, and case study approaches in order to have a holistic view of the economic impacts of a US-Iran conflict in global energy markets.

Discussion and Interpretation :

- **Consequences of a US-Irane scalation on global energy markets–** The escalation of the US-Iran conflict has the potential for significant implications for the global energy market, which might lead to a rise in oil prices by 20-50%. This would have significant effects on the global energy market, leading to economic volatility in importing countries and increasing the rate at which alternative sources of energy are being explored. This would have significant effects on the global economy, including potential losses in terms of GDP for importing countries, effects on global trade and investment, and increased geopolitical risks. Energy-importing countries like India would have significant economic risks due to the import of oil from Iran.
- **Vulnerability of global energy markets to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz :** The global energy market is highly vulnerable to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, as it is the conduit for the transportation of 21 million barrels of petroleum liquids per day. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz will cause a severe oil supplyshock, which will cause oil prices to rise by as much as 20-50%. The US and its allies are working towards restoring the confidence of oil shippers in the Strait of Hormuz. The impact of the oil supplyshock will be severe in the Asian countries because of their high dependence on crude oil imports through the Strait of Hormuz. The oil supply shock will have severe economic consequences in the form of reduced economic growth rates and increased inflation rates.
- **Potential mitigation strategies to minimize economi crisks :** In order to mitigate the economic risks of a US-Iran escalation, several steps can be taken. Diversification of energy sources is one major step in this regard. This involves looking for alternative sources of oil and increasing oil production in the country. This would help in reducing the country's dependency on oil from Iran. Tapping into strategic oil reserves would also help in managing oil prices during supply disruptions. International cooperation is also important in this regard. This involves cooperation among different countries in managing oil supplies. Emergency response plans would help in managing supply disruptions and oil price shocks. Encouraging energy conservation and efficiency would also help in managing oil supplies. Alternative routes for transporting oil, like pipelines and others, would help in bypassing the Strait of Hormuz. Diplomatic efforts would also help in reducing tensions in the region. Investing in alternative sources of energy would help in diversifying the energy mix and would also help in reducing dependency on oil.

The study suggests that in the event of a US-Iran conflict, the energy markets will be significantly affected, and the price of oil can rise by 20-50%. This will be more pronounced in the case of energy-dependent countries. For instance, India and China will be in a state of economic crisis owing to the high dependence on Iranian oil imports. The study has also indicated that the economic consequences of a US-Iran conflict will be severe, and the GDP can be affected by 0.5-

1.5%. The study's findings have indicated the importance of maintaining strategic reserves and the economic impact in the event of a US-Iran conflict. The research has also indicated the importance of cooperation and diver-sification in the energy sector in order to avoid the economic consequences of a US-Iran conflict. The research has also indicated the importance of a coordinated international response in the event of a US-Iran conflict in order to avoid the economic consequences.

Conclusion :

In conclusion, the importance of the current study is underscored by the economic risks involved in the escalation of the conflict between the US and Iran, particularly with regards to energy-importing countries like India. The potential disruptions in the global energy market can create significant oil price volatility, which can affect economic growth in these countries. To address these economic risks, it is therefore important that energy diversification, cooperation, and strategic reserves be prioritized. It is therefore important that energy security be pursued in the best interests of the countries involved in the conflict in order to minimize the economic consequences of the disruptions in the energy market.

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Reimagining the University : Karl Jaspers, Culture and the Neoliberal Turn

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Abstract

This article revisits Karl Jaspers' philosophical conception of the university to critically examine the contemporary transformation of higher education under neoliberalism. Drawing upon Jaspers' emphasis on intellectual freedom, the unity of teaching and research, and the cultivation of culture, the article traces the historical evolution of the university from its medieval religious foundations to its modern form as a site of autonomous inquiry. It highlights how Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant laid the groundwork for viewing the university as a space for reason, autonomy, and moral development. The discussion then turns to the growing influence of neoliberal ideology, which has redefined the university as a site of economic productivity governed by market principles, performance metrics, and managerial oversight. Concepts such as “quality” and “excellence” are shown to have displaced earlier ideals of culture and critical engagement, threatening the university's foundational mission. By engaging with thinkers such as Bill Readings and Alan Bloom, this article argues for the urgent need to reclaim the university as a cultural and intellectual institution capable of resisting instrumentalization and preserving its democratic and transformative potential.

Keywords : Autonomy, Critical, Intilectual, Neo Liberal, University.

Introduction

The idea of a university is rooted in institutionalizing creativity and intellect. Dissemination and production of knowledge and culture are central to the site of university. While many philosophers have shed light on the institution and attached immense importance to it in terms of its tasks and value and contribution Immanuel Kant, Paul Henry Newman and Karl Jasper's have extensively elaborated upon each constitutive unit of the university as an institution. The later philosophers have built upon the idea of these three philosophersKant's idea of the university is rooted in the Enlightenment principles of reason and autonomy. He viewed university as a place where the pursuit of truth and the cultivation of critical thinking are paramount. Kant emphasized the importance of academic freedom, where scholars should be free to explore ideas without external interference, particularly from the state or church. He believed that the university should serve the public by advancing knowledge, especially in the fields of science, philosophy, and ethics. Karl Jaspers and Immanuel Kant both saw university

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as a space for the rational development of individuals, contributing to the moral and intellectual progress of society.

This article primarily traces the idea of university as proposed by Karl Jaspers in his various works. Taking a clue from his writings, this article briefly elaborates upon the shift from medieval to modern universities. It is argued that modern universities are primarily spaces to conduct autonomous research and the state, or any other funding agency, must not attempt to control the universities political, culturally and in terms of research outcome. The advent of neoliberalism has gradually necessitated a shift in overall institutional framework of universities as academic spaces. Neoliberalism is not only an economic discourse that affirms the supremacy of market but also a political discourse that forges a sharper control over all kinds of public institutions. It is for this reason that the very idea of university has undergone a shift worldwide as well as in India post 1980s.

The Idea of University through Jasper's Lens

Karl Jaspers, a leading existentialist philosopher and advocate for academic values, emphasized the university's role in fostering equality and universal human values. In *The Idea of the University*, (Jaspers, 1959) he argues that cultural education helps individuals live harmoniously and internalize values such as aesthetics, ethics, rationality, and decision-making— making university education essential for all.Karl Jaspers conceptualized the university as a space fundamentally devoted to the pursuit of truth through reason, communication, and intellectual freedom. In his view, the university is not merely a place of vocational training or technical instruction, but a community of scholars and students engaged in the ongoing process of critical inquiry. He emphasized the unity of teaching and research, arguing that both are essential to the cultivation of independent thought and the formation of individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to society. For Jaspers, the true mission of the university lies in fostering an environment where knowledge is pursued for its own sake, guided by philosophical reflection and a commitment to ethical responsibility. In this sense, the university serves as a guardian of cultural and intellectual continuity, while also encouraging innovation through the freedom to question established truths.

For Jaspers the idea of modern university was fundamentally different from that of medieval university. The shift from medieval to modern universities can be analyzed from the perspective of Kant who has extensively written around these themes. He argued that Medieval universities were the institution of power and prestige, largely autonomously conceived by the spirit of the guilds. But there existed a hard-core authoritarian established doctrine that was obligatory for all scholars and teachers. To quote him- “It was expected that each new accretion of knowledge would be consistent with a single system of truth, anchored in Christian dogma” (Wellmon, 2015, p.2015). Chad Wellmon argues further argues “medieval universitieswere not simply extension of church or state, but they were supported both politically and financially by one or the other, or both in a few cases.” (Wellmon, 2015, p.117). Even the directions and regulations on Oxford in the 13th century put by these authorities were never to be realized in collaboration with any secular

authorities. The allegiance of medieval universities was to local religious bodies, and to fellow members of the university guild.

Wellmon characterizes the university as having roots in a religious mission. Similarly, Michel Sanderson (Sanderson, 2018) notes that during the medieval period, over half of Oxford graduates pursued careers in theology or church-related roles, challenging the modern liberal notion of higher education as a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake or for scientific rationality (Wellmon, 2015). At that time, universities primarily focused on producing scholarly work in medicine, law, and theology. However, it is important to recognize that the liberal concept of higher education had not yet developed during the medieval era. Academic life was governed by authoritative doctrines, which all scholars and teachers were expected to follow. Sanderson observes that knowledge was required to align with a unified system of truth rooted in Christian dogma. He argued that the ideal university was not defined by medieval guild structures like the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, nor by serving the interests of the state, but rather by an ongoing contest among faculties, where philosophy played a crucial role in ensuring continuous critical engagement. A university, in this sense, should be a space dedicated to the rigorous interrogation of knowledge, cultivating the capacity to discern valid knowledge from mere data or opinion. Its foundation lies not only in physical structures, but in the people, norms, and practices that sustain its intellectual mission.

Karl Jaspers, a 20th century philosopher, expanded on Kant's ideas, emphasizing the university as a community of scholars and students engaged in the search for truth. For Jaspers, the university is not just an institution for transmitting knowledge but a space for existential exploration and the development of the whole person. He highlighted the importance of university as a place where individuals are encouraged to confront fundamental questions about existence, freedom, and responsibility. Jaspers also stressed the importance of the unity of research and teaching similar to Kant, where the process of learning is deeply intertwined with the pursuit of research. He believed that universities should foster a spirit of open dialogue and critical thinking, this will help inculcate a sense of culture in society.

In summary, Kant and Jaspers both saw the university as a vital institution for the cultivation of reason, autonomy, and truth. While Kant focused on the role of universities in advancing knowledge and moral progress (Manhoozi, 2021), Jaspers emphasized the existential and communal aspects of university life, where the search for truth is a collective, transformative experience. Jaspers and Kant both believed universities are the most crucial sites of culture. Jaspers related the notion of cultures to aesthetics, use of reason, use of scientific temperament and conducting oneself through building characters and morals. The idea of university relies upon building universities as sites of culture, as this culture is invariably to be proliferate in the larger society.

The Centrality of Culture in Universities

In the critique of Kant, another German philosopher Schelling argues how to move forward from state of nature to state of reason, without destroying the innate qualities of nature. The answer by Bill Readings is thatthrough ” culture as a process of aesthetic education we can swiftly

move from state of nature" (Reading, 1996, p. 63). Culture can direct us towards reason without destroying nature. This must be done through the development of the process of moral character. The intermediate institution that we call university shall embody the process of culture by which mankind is prepared for the state of reason. The process of hermeneutic reworking is called culture, and it has a double articulation, on one hand cultures names an identity, is a unity of all knowledge that are an object of study i.e object of *wissenchaft*(scientific *and* philosophical study). On the other hand, culture names a process ofdevelopment of the character building. In his work 'University in Ruins' (1996) Bill Reading argue , these two meanings of culture were to combine in research and teaching, and they are inseparable. That is what gives the unity to the university, their inseparability of 'Wissenschaft' and character building, this makes the university the sites of culture. The universities proliferate this culture and since culture is a common good, it is then practiced and enhanced by the scholars receiving it.

This culture also has a bearing in shaping the society, as it is practiced by the scholars inside and outside the society, gradually cultivating the similar culture of reason in the otherwise ignorant individuals. This is the reason the philosophers haveemphasised upon the urgency of university education for each individual. But as Alan Bloom argues in *The Closing of The American Mind* that culture has no more remained the watchword for the university, it is not a decisive instance of intellectual activity. It is being revived and replaced bypursuit of performance indicators and excellence (Bloom, 1987, p. 63). Bill Readings in his work further argues, that there has occurred a shift in the purpose of universities. Earlier, they were visualized as the sites of culture', and now they are perceived as 'sites of excellence'. The term 'excellence' has never been defined accurately. However, it is often used to describe the best 'quality' but contradictions arise when each measure is justified in the name of quality and excellence.

Universities under Neoliberalism

Particularly in the era of neoliberalism, quality and excellence have become the watchwords to describe educational institutions (Newfield, 2021). All measures and policies are implemented in the name of enhancing the quality to achieve excellence in academic and infrastructural quality. It can be argued that the understanding of the university as a site of excellence has necessitated its regulation based on a specific and rigid model. The model that could be used tomold universities to fit the agenda of privatization under a state that aims to regulate them in a certain manner. As the academic world is evolving to fit under the neoliberal regime, university administrative structures are also undergoing transformation. New Public Management principles now dominate institutional operations, emphasizing outcomes-based education and research, along with enhanced accountability, performance measurement, and managerial control. The concept of "quality" is often applied to all aspects of university life without justification or clear definition, leading to arbitrary and unrealistic evaluation criteria. Under neoliberalism, universities are increasingly evaluated by measurable outcomes, such as the earning potential of graduates, shifting the focus away from the traditional aims of education—wisdom, sensitivity, historical awareness,

interpretive ability, and theoretical understanding. Education is now geared toward producing technically skilled, entrepreneurial individuals, undermining the Socratic model of dialogue and critical engagement that once defined universities.

Principles of New Public Management (NPM) have become increasingly prominent in institutional governance, prioritizing outcomes-based education and research alongside intensified accountability, performance measurement, and managerial oversight. The notion of "quality" is frequently invoked across all dimensions of university life, yet often without adequate justification or clear conceptual grounding. This indiscriminate application of quality standards has resulted in arbitrary and unrealistic evaluation criteria, thereby compromising the very idea of university as an academic institution engaged in the task of producing thinking beings.

Higher education flourishes through imaginative and critical inquiry, but the prevailing market-driven focus on strict assessment standards now seeks to measure such inquiryusing tools like Research Productivity Ratings. This transforms educators and learners into bureaucratic functionaries, pressured to deliver quantifiable outcomes within narrow deadlines. These systems disincentivize engagement beyond predefined institutional roles, overlooking the reality that meaningful intellectual work cannot be captured through statistics alone. This managerial approach cultivates "knowledge laborers" instead of original thinkers.

Although the effects of neoliberalism on higher education institutions vary by context, several consistent trends can be identified. Higher education, once valued primarily as a public good, is increasingly framed as a private investment aimed at enhancing individual career prospects. As public funding continues to decline, universities are compelled to diversify their income sources, particularly through the commercialization of research outputs. Additionally, neoliberal reforms have brought about significant administrative changes, marked by increased political oversight often justified in terms of transparency and institutional accountability.

It is for this reason that Jaspers had suggested that universities must ensure that their primary funding agencies must not intervene in universities, day-to-day functioning. He envisioned that in future universities will ultimately tamper with research output in order The control of funding agencies would be detrimental to the very nature of universities as academic spaces. Universities will be reduced to a factory that produces only a particular kind of citizens and professionals, fit to undertake specific job profiles in a typical economic framework.

Conclusion

This article has explored Karl Jaspers' vision of the university as a space for intellectual freedom, critical inquiry, and cultural formation, grounded in the traditions of Enlightenment thought and expanded through existential philosophy. Drawing on the works of Kant and Jaspers, it argues that universities are not merely institutions for vocational training or economic output, but foundational spaces for fostering reason, ethical responsibility, and the collective pursuit of truth. Tracing the historical transition from medieval to modern universities, the article emphasizes how

neoliberal reforms have gradually shifted the purpose of higher educationfrom a cultural and intellectual enterprise to one driven by metrics, market logic, and performance indicators. Under this regime, universities risk becoming mechanized spaces that prioritize quantifiable outcomes over intellectual depth and humanistic values. Jaspers' warning about the dangers of external interference, particularly from funding agencies and political bodies- remains highly relevant today. Reclaiming the university as a site of culture, dialogue, and autonomous thought is essential for preserving its role in cultivating critical, informed, and morally grounded citizens.

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Governance and Society : Analyzing the Political Socialization Process among Scheduled Caste Youth in Bihar

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Abstract

Governance is the process, system, and institution through which the government sets and implements policies to manage public affairs in a society. These policies, programmes, and schemes are meant to serve, enhance and develop the condition of the people in that society. This study focuses, elaborates and analyses those policies of the government which are designed to advance the political socialization process among Scheduled Caste Youth in Bihar at large. This study is all about how political socialization takes place in youth of this category, how different agents of Political socialization reinforce this process.

The government policies which are meant to uplift, educate, and socially advance their condition in this multicultural world, are still left behind. The concept of equality and equity is everywhere mentioned in policies, schemes, programmes, but their actual outcome is negligible in society. The harsh realities that society faces in case of Scheduled Caste is often referred to as systemic imbalances, that is some castes within Hinduism or within caste system are meant to serve the above four Varna, and this stance, often impacts negatively to that particular category we call Scheduled Caste as constitution mention this category are homogeneous mixture.

The criteria to bring a caste under Scheduled Castes are that – They occupy a low position in Hindu social structure, they are backward in education, they have inadequate representation in government service and in the fields of trade, commerce and industry, and that they suffer from social and physical isolation from the rest of the population. The Scheduled Castes have been suffering from three social disabilities: Untouchability; Atrocity, which is an act of extreme cruelty committed against them; and Bonded labour.

Keywords : Political socialization, Governance, scheduled castes, youth society, youth socialization, Gen-Z.

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Introduction

The term "Socialization" has wider connotation in state, society, and across different subjects. Socialization is a fundamental, continuous and lifelong process through which people learn the norms, values, behaviours, and social roles of their society. Here the term Political Socialization simply indicates the fundamental process through which the individual acquires political values, beliefs, orientations and behaviours towards any political or social system that prevails in any particular state or in any region. Political attitude and orientation of the individual are formed through the process of learning which may be termed as "the process of Political socialization". Political Socialization generally refers to a distinct part of the socialization process that takes place in Political context. It is the means for acquiring knowledge, skill and disposition which help an individual to become an effective member of a societal polity. It also refers to the process by which a junior member of a group or institution learns its values attitudes and other behaviours.

Governance, in simple terms, means "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)". The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it as an "act or manner of governing" and "the office or function of governing". Governance has also become a term used to describe a particular set of changes. It signifies a set of elusive but potentially deeply significant shifts in the way in which government seeks to govern (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

Socialization and Agents of Political Socialization :

Gabriel A. Almond and G. B. Powell both these social scientists identified a number of agents of Political Socialization, it is through these agents the political socialization reaches out to individuals. These agents play their part in the process of norm internalization. How these factors have their latent as well as patent or manifest influence on the mind of individual and thereby make up his personality.

Since individual is continually being influenced in the shaping of his political attitudes, orientations and values, the process of socialization goes throughout his life. That's why Alan R. Ball observed that "political socialization is not a process confined to the impressionable years of childhood, but one that continues throughout adult life."

These Political Socialization agent includes following –

1. Family or Home
2. School
3. Peer groups
4. Social, political, religious institutions
5. Mass media, social media platforms
6. Educational system
7. Symbols or important events, attire or slogans
8. Political system
9. Workplace.

Caste, Scheduled Caste and Society

India is a caste-based society. Caste is the predominant factor and feature of Indian society. The caste in Indian society is still the most powerful factor in determining a man's dignity, calling and profession. In India every Hindu necessarily belongs to the caste of his parents and in that caste he inevitably remains. No accumulation of wealth and exercise of talents can alter his caste status and marriage outside his caste is prohibited

or severely discouraged. It almost invariably happens that every man's caste is known to his neighbours. In some cases, the application of the rule of caste seems almost to prescribe the means of livelihood of its members. Thus the caste system, which may have originated in the preservation of ceremonial purity in social relations and in rules designed to limit admixture of blood has in the course of the ages developed into an institution which assigns to each individual his duty and his position in orthodox Hinduism.

Scheduled Castes are the most deprived castes in India facing such discrimination. The Scheduled Castes Constitute 16.63 per cent of the total population of the country as per 2011 Census. This population forming about one – fifth of the total population in Bihar, have been socially, economically and educationally backward. Such a situation arose due to the social stratification system which is based on caste hierarchy in India. Their status all over the country is still precarious as they live in abject poverty and are mostly concentrated in low paid material occupations. For these people, the shifting in occupational base has largely been denied by social customs and conventions. Overwhelming majority of them are living at the pleasure of other higher status people of either social or political or economic authority. It became a common tendency that as one belongs to SC/ST category, everyone looks at in another way. They neglect his/her existence and they tend to keep away him/her. Atrocities on the scheduled caste people, especially on the scavenging castes and women of these SC's, have been found to a large extent in the form of various kinds of discriminations, killings, beatings and putting them to all kinds of physical torturing. Recent incidents of inhumane and brutal killing of Scheduled caste youths from Bihar Sharif and Barh cities, where a teenager was killed only for the sake of a lemon and a mango respectively. This simply conform that caste-based violence against Scheduled caste is still prevalent in society.

There is caste discrimination among the sub-castes of the Scheduled Castes and also within a particular caste. The elite group among the Scheduled Castes are keeping themselves at a distance from other ordinary people of their own castes. Probably, the richer and educated sections are isolating themselves from the uneducated poor people as well. That's why the scheduled castes are not developing.Caste is defined as a system incorporating within it a structure and organization, and is based on endogamy, hierarchy, and commercial restrictions. It also prescribes the pattern of group relations that may bind the interacting individuals in routine life. The groups in caste system are exhaustive, exclusive, and discrete, i.e., every person is a member of such a group and of only one. Membership in-group influences the members in their roles and activities; there is a degree of 'role summation'. The groups are independent; each needs the services or goods provided by others. (Anjini Kochar, 2007).

“Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy”. In his view, Chaturvarnya is the root cause of all its inequality and is also the parent of caste system and untouchability which are merely other forms of inequality. (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, 1990).

In terms of social status, the Indian population can be grouped into four categories: Scheduled Castes (SC) or Dalits, Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Adivasis, other Backward Classes (OBC), and Others. (Fuchs, M & Linkebach 2003).

Constitutional appearance of Scheduled Caste

In India particularly in Bihar, no discussion on democracy, justice, equality, development, liberty, or any other area of Indian politics is complete without shedding light on caste. Caste often influences the electoral outcome, voting behavior, and party affiliation or alliances. Caste has interacted with and embedded itself in religious, linguistic, regional, and ethnic variations. Scheduled castes are officially designated groups of people and among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in India. These are historically marginalized, oppressed having neutral universe from mainstream and excluded from socio, economic, political and educational spheres. The term "Scheduled Castes" was first used in Government of India Act 1935 and adopted during the drafting of the Indian constitution. According to the Article 366(2) of the Indian Constitution, Schedule Caste means such castes, races or tribes as are deemed to be Scheduled Castes under Article 341 of the Indian Constitution. Article 341 empowers the President of India to specify the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in various states and union territories. It plays a central role in identifying communities eligible for reservation and other constitutional protections.— According to Article 341, The President may, with respect to any State or Union Territory, and where necessary in consultation with the Governor of the State, by public notification, specify the castes, races, or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races, or tribes which shall be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory. This means: The President of India, after consulting the Governor (if it's a State), issues a notification declaring certain castes as Scheduled Castes for that particular State or UT. **Youth, Gen-Z and Political Socialization**

Youth is the most energetic and productive section of a society. A country's ability and potential for growth is determined by the size and strength of its youth population. It is believed that developing countries with large youth population could see tremendous growth, provided they invest in young people's education, health and protect and guarantee their rights. It can undoubtedly be said that today's young generations are tomorrow's innovators, creators, builders and leaders. As youth are increasingly demanding more just, equitable and progressive opportunities and solutions in their societies, the need to address the multi-faceted challenges faced by young people (such as access to good education & health, better employment and gender equality) have become more pressing than ever.

The United Nations defines "youth" for statistical purposes as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24. This definition, established in 1981, is used for UN statistics on areas like demography, education, employment, and health. The African Union (AU) defines "youth" as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 years. This definition is outlined in the African Youth Charter (2006).

The Term Gen-Z

Generation Z is the youngest individual in our society, this generation consists of indivi-

duals born between 1997 and 2012 who are presently 25 years old and younger. Generation Z's only frame of reference is a digital dominant world, one in which technology has been with them from birth, and is present, always in-hand, literally at one's fingertips. Research on Generation Z shows that 95% of this generation owns or has access to a smartphone and almost all (97%) use the internet daily (Vogels et al., 2022)

In "Social Exclusion-Its Types and Impact on Dalits in India" pointed out that the concept of social exclusion is a process of blocking the progress of marginalized population. The system of social exclusion had made the Dalits dependable on higher caste. The study pointed out social exclusion still exists in society in other new forms and strategies. (Kadun and Gadkar 2014)

In "Youth among the Disadvantaged Classes" studied about their backwardness and reveals that these youths are socially, economically and politically backward. These youths must be empowered. All the vacant post in the Government office should be fill up. They are in need of special assistance to be equalized among the other advantaged groups in the society. (Bhatnagar & Dwivedi (2013)

In "Education Among Scheduled Castes, Privatization and Enrolment Perspectives in Higher Education" analyzes various policies, five-year plans, enrolment pattern, gap between the Scheduled Castes and general category, gender gap and other in higher education. He highlighted that privatization in higher education has not made any change in the gender disparity among Scheduled Castes in terms of male. (Gautam (2012)In "Dalit and Economic Reforms" studied on economic, social, culture and movements of Dalit. Government should re-distribute land to landless peasants. Back-log posts should be filled up among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs, special component plan should be properly implemented, infrastructure should be developed, and irrigation for un-irrigable lands, untouchability to be rooted out and prevention of atrocities act should be strengthened. (Arora 2012)

In "Organizations of Scheduled Castes and Social Change" highlighted the role of Scheduled Caste Organizations and Scheduled Castes elites. It is observed that they brought a substantial managerial and structural change in the Indian society. They had played a very important role in social transformation. (Jaganath 2005)

In "Implementation of Scheduled Castes Development Programs, Impact and Status" highlighted the attempts made by the Government to improve the socio-economic status of the Scheduled Castes population by setting up different committees, commissions, working groups, advisory boards, five-year plans etc. But such step fails to improve the employment opportunities and unable to solve their problems. (Kumar 2006)

In "Education Status and its impact on development of Scheduled Castes: An Overview" analyzed on educational status and impact on the development of scheduled castes and revealed that due to low income, poverty, landlessness, hunger etc. majority of scheduled castes has low literacy in spite of various plans. So, special plan must be brought for the educational development among them. (Chandrasekharay& Babu (2015)

In “Towards Social Change: Essays on Dalit Literature” highlighted on the writings of Dalit Authors. The study has pointed out that these authors are characterized as a sense of defiance, revolt and assertion of their identity. Their writings are aimed at social change. All the essays in this collection discuss many important themes and bring out issues specific to different regions and add regional flavors to the readers. Some lessons of this book, deals with a comparative study of Dalits and Holocaust literatures, which shares experiences of subjugations, sufferings and tortures. (Singha and Acharya (2014)

Socialization has been a continuous process throughout the ages. While studying the political socialization process, it is observed that youth are far more exposed to field researchers than to academic institutions. The recent movements in Nepal, along with Gen-Z youth protests across various nations of the world, have brought this term into frequent global discussion. In India, on 15th May 2025, when the Chief Justice of India (CJI) commented on youth that “There are already parasites of society who attack the system… there are youngsters like cockroaches, they don't get any employment and don't have any place in the profession. Some of them become media, social media, RTI activists… and start attacking everyone.” It sparked widespread attention and debate. This led to a sudden surge of movement across social media platforms such as Instagram, Meta, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). Within a week, an Instagram page named CJP went viral, garnering a following of 22 million. According to this page, the CJP works for the youth, by the youth, and of the youth. Their primary concern is to reform and enhance the educational system in India, recognizing that educational institutions constitute the foremost agent of political socialization.

Conclusion

Finally, we argue that caste still remains a decisive factor through which the mechanism of political socialization operates. It shapes one's identity, social capital, and overall socialization. Other factors— including education, media, and modern agents of political socialization— also play a significant role in politically socializing Scheduled Caste youth. However, their historical marginalization in society, coupled with their limited presence in educational, social, and political spheres of life, remains deeply prevalent in Bihar and across the country. Notably, this community does not have a single MP or MLA elected from an unreserved constituency. Caste is so deeply entrenched in Indian society that even inter-caste marriages within this category frequently lead to brutal conflict, honour killings, and social boycotts in different parts of the country. En-route to becoming a developed nation by 2047, the youth of India must play a vital role in every segment of society. However, when a significant portion of the population feels systematically segregated from mainstream society, national progress becomes difficult to achieve — particularly when a large share of the youth population belongs to Scheduled Caste communities. Therefore, in order to realize the vision of a developed India by 2047, society must accept, adapt, and integrate them, while simultaneously preserving their identity, culture, and lived experiences. At the same time, they must be politically socialized so that their decisions

and consensus on public matters align with the democratic values of a truly multicultural society, and the youth of this community have to play an important role here.

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The Transformation of Indian Democracy in the Era of Digital Politics

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Abstract

Indian democracy has entered a decisive phase in which digital technologies are no longer peripheral tools but central arenas of political contestation, participation, and governance. The expansion of smart phones, social media platforms, data analytics, and platform-mediated communication has altered how political parties mobilize voters, how citizens encounter political information, and how electoral legitimacy is defended or challenged. This transformation has widened access to public debate and lowered barriers to political expression, yet it has also intensified misinformation, polarization, surveillance concerns, and unequal participation. In India, where democratic competition operates across vast linguistic, regional, and socio-economic diversity, digital politics has reconfigured the relationship between representation and participation. This article argues that Indian democracy has not simply been digitized; it has been structurally reshaped by new communication infrastructures, algorithmic mediation, and networked political behavior. The result is a democracy that is more immediate and participatory in some respects, but also more fragmented, strategic, and vulnerable to manipulation. The analysis draws on recent scholarship on digital democracy and Indian electoral politics, as well as institutional responses such as the Election Commission of India's 2024 guidelines on ethical social media use and its Myth vs Reality Register (Das; Suna; Election Commission of India, “ECI Directs Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media”; Election Commission of India, “Myth vs Reality Register”).

Keywords : Digital politics, Indian democracy, Social media , Misinformation, Electoral participation

Introduction

The relationship between democracy and technology has always been dynamic, but digital politics has introduced a qualitative shift in the functioning of democratic systems. In India, this shift has become especially visible over the last decade, as political parties, candidates, activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens increasingly operate within digital environments shaped by mobile connectivity, social media platforms, and algorithmic visibility. What once

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depended largely on rallies, newspapers, television, and party cadres now unfolds continuously through messaging apps, livestreams, short-form videos, online advertisements, has htags, and data-driven micro targeting. This has changed not only the speed of political communication but also its form, audience, and democratic consequences (Das; 2026 Suna, 2024).

India's democratic transformation in the digital era is inseparable from its scale. The country's internet and social media base has grown to massive proportions, creating one of the world's largest digital publics and making online political communication a decisive component of electoral competition. Contemporary reports indicate that India's internet user base has surpassed 950 million, while social media use continues to expand rapidly ("India's Internet User Base Crosses 950 Million"). In such an environment, digital politics influences not only campaign strategy but also political identity, public opinion, and the very terms through which citizenship is performed. The voter is now also a content consumer, a sharer, a commentator, and, at times, a participant in online mobilization. This transformation has deep democratic significance because it alters the pathways through which power is legitimated and contested.

At the same time, digital politics has not produced an uncomplicated democratization of public life. While it can broaden participation, it can also magnify misinformation, deepen partisan echo chambers, and privilege those with greater digital literacy, network access, and platform influence. The 2024 general election period made these tensions highly visible, prompting the Election Commission of India to issue directions on the responsible and ethical use of social media and to warn political actors against deepfakes and misleading synthetic content (Election Commission of India, "ECI Directs Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media"). It also launched the Myth vs Reality Register to help voters identify false claims and election-related misinformation (Election Commission of India, "Myth vs Reality Register"). These interventions indicate that digital politics is now central to democratic integrity, not merely to communication strategy.

Conceptual Frame

The transformation of Indian democracy in the digital era can be understood through three interconnected shifts: mediation, participation, and regulation. First, political communication has moved from heavily mediated mass channels toward platform-based, direct, and often personalized interaction. Second, participation has expanded beyond voting and party membership to include online expression, digital activism, meme politics, and networked campaigning. Third, regulation has become more difficult because digital platforms are transnational, rapidly evolving, and often governed by opaque algorithms rather than transparent editorial rules (Das, 2026).

This article treats digital politics not as a neutral technological layer but as a political environment with its own incentives and inequalities. Platforms reward engagement, not necessarily deliberation. Viral content

may travel farther than verified content. Emotional and identity-based messaging can outperform policy discussion. Political communication becomes compressed into visual, symbolic, and often hyper-partisan formats. As a result, democracy is transformed from a slower process of persuasion and organization into a faster contest of reach, narrative control, and attention capture (Suna, 2024).

From Mass Politics to Networked Politics

Traditional Indian democracy was built around mass politics: large parties, printed manifestos, local intermediaries, and physical mobilization. Digital politics has not replaced this architecture, but it has altered its internal logic. Political organizations now operate through a networked model in which messages are circulated simultaneously across multiple channels and tailored to different audiences. This is especially visible in social media campaigning, where leaders can communicate directly with supporters, bypassing some forms of journalistic gate keeping and party hierarchy (Das).

This shift has had major consequences for political leadership. The contemporary political leader is expected not only to govern and campaign but to maintain a continuous digital presence. Visibility itself becomes a form of power. Frequent posts, live addresses, short clips, and image-based messaging help construct an accessible persona and reinforce emotional connection with supporters. Social media thus transforms leadership from a periodic electoral performance into a continuous communicative practice. In India, this has contributed to a more presidentialized style of political communication, even within a parliamentary system, because digital platforms reward centered, personalized, and leader-driven messaging (Suna, 2024).

At the same time, digital politics has strengthened the role of intermediaries other than journalists and party workers: influencers, volunteers, digital cell workers, fact-checkers, meme creators, and platform moderators. This broader ecology changes the nature of political production. Political narratives are now co-produced across formal and informal actors. The boundaries between activism, propaganda, and entertainment are increasingly blurred, making democratic communication more dynamic but also more unstable.

Participation and Inclusion

One of the strongest claims made in favor of digital politics is that it enlarges democratic participation. In India, this claim has real force. Social media and mobile internet have made political information more accessible to citizens who previously relied on a narrow set of news sources or physical party networks. For young voters, especially, digital platforms are often the first site of political encounter. They provide a space where citizens can discuss elections, criticize leaders, share campaign content, and organize around issues without needing formal organizational membership (Das, 2026).

This expansion matters because participation in democracy should not be reduced to election-day voting. In digital politics, participation can include sharing a policy explainer, fact-checking a claim, joining an

online protest, amplifying marginalized voices, or engaging in local issue-based campaigns. Such practices can increase civic awareness and make public life more interactive. Recent work on digital democracy in India notes that social media has reconfigured political participation into a more continuous and visible process, extending engagement beyond conventional institutional channels (Das, 2026). This is an important democratic gain, particularly in a country where many citizens have historically felt distant from formal political processes.

Digital participation has also created new forms of political literacy. Many users now encounter policy debates through short explainer videos, podcasts, info graphics, and visual thread-based discussions. While these formats may simplify complexity, they also introduce new audiences to questions that might otherwise remain confined to elites. This widening of political encounter matters in a multilingual democracy because digital platforms can translate, localize, and distribute content across different public spheres.

Digital inclusion, however, remains uneven. Access to smart phones, affordable data, stable connectivity, and digital literacy is distributed unequally across class, gender, caste, region, and age. The expansion of digital politics can therefore deepen some inequalities even as it lowers others. Citizens who cannot navigate digital platforms effectively may become less visible in public discourse, even if they remain fully entitled to vote. The result is a paradox: democracy becomes more participatory in form, but not necessarily more equal in substance. In such a context, the digital public sphere may reflect the voices of the connected more than the voices of the representative public as a whole (Das; “Digital Democracy and Its Challenges in India”).

Campaign Strategy and Data Politics

The rise of digital politics has changed how elections are fought. Political parties now combine social media campaigning with data analytics, audience segmentation, and rapid-response communication. This creates a more precise form of electoral management in which voters are not addressed only as members of broad social groups but as individuals or micro-publics with specific concerns, preferences, and emotional triggers. The strategy is efficient, but it also intensifies the personalization of politics (Suna; 2024).

Indian elections in the social media age are not simply contests of ideology or policy. They are contests over visibility, narrative framing, and emotional resonance. Digital campaigns can rapidly amplify a slogan, a clip, or a controversy. This favors political actors who can generate continuous online momentum. It also means that campaign success may depend as much on digital organization as on grassroots mobilization. In practice, the two often reinforce each other: rallies are live-streamed, clips are repackaged for social media, and online narratives feed offline mobilization (Suna, 2024).

This evolution has advantages. It can reduce communication costs, increase outreach, and make political messaging more

responsive. It can also bring new entrants into public debate, especially smaller issue-based groups or regional actors that can exploit digital visibility. Yet the same mechanisms also encourage simplification. Complex policy debates are compressed into striking visuals, emotional slogans, and polarized frames. Political communication becomes optimized for circulation, not necessarily for understanding.

Data-driven politics also creates ethical concerns. When campaign teams rely on user behavior, engagement metrics, and targeted segmentation, democratic persuasion can shift toward manipulation. The line between informing voters and influencing them becomes thin. If political communication is tailored too narrowly, citizens may receive different realities rather than different arguments. This weakens the common basis of the public sphere, which democracy depends on.

Misinformation and Deepfakes

No analysis of digital politics in India is complete without addressing misinformation. The speed and scale of online circulation make falsehoods harder to detect and correct than in older media systems. Political misinformation can travel through public platforms, closed messaging groups, influencer ecosystems, and synthetic media, making it difficult for ordinary voters to distinguish evidence from fabrication. This is not a marginal issue but a central democratic threat because informed consent is the basis of electoral legitimacy (Election Commission of India, "ECI Directs Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media").

The 2024 general election demonstrated the seriousness of this problem. The Election Commission of India explicitly directed political parties and their representatives to use social media responsibly and ethically, warning against deepfake audio and video, misinformation, and misleading synthetic content. It also instructed parties to remove such content within three hours of being notified (Election Commission of India, "ECI Directs Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media"). In parallel, the Commission launched the Myth vs Reality Register, a public repository designed to identify and debunk election-related falsehoods, including myths about EVMs, voter services, and the conduct of elections (Election Commission of India, "Myth vs Reality Register"). These measures reflect a recognition that digital politics requires active institutional countermeasures.

The democratic damage caused by misinformation is not limited to factual distortion. It corrodes trust in institutions, polarizes citizens, and shifts political competition away from persuasion and toward suspicion. Once political communication is saturated with false or manipulated claims, every institution becomes contestable and every fact becomes partisan. In that environment, democratic debate loses its shared ground. The challenge is made worse by deepfakes and AI-generated content, which can create highly convincing but false audio-visual material. As these tools become cheaper and easier to deploy, the regulatory burden on electoral institutions grows considerably ("Advisory on Ethical Use of Social Media and Deepfakes in Elections").

Polarization and Echo Chambers

Digital politics has also intensified polarization. Social media platforms are structurally designed to reward content that attracts attention, which often means content that is emotionally charged, conflict-oriented, or identity-based. Users tend to engage more with material that confirms pre-existing beliefs, and algorithms often reinforce that tendency. The result is an environment of selective exposure, where citizens increasingly encounter information that validates their own political positions while minimizing contact with opposing views (Suna, 2024).

In India, this dynamic intersects with pre-existing social divisions, including religion, caste, region, and language. Digital platforms can transform these identities into politically amplified categories. When political debates are framed in absolute terms, compromise becomes harder and disagreement becomes morally charged. This weakens the delibera-tive quality of democratic life. Instead of treating demo-cracy as a space for negoti-ation among different interests, users may come to see it as a battleground between hostile camps.

Polarization is strengthened by the archite-cture of digital platforms themselves. Likes, shares, reposts, and comments function as rewards for emotionally resonant content. This means that political actors have incentives to produce content that provokes strong reactions. Over time, this can normalize outrage as a primary political style. In such conditions, the possibility of respectful disagreement declines, and democracy becomes harder to sustain as a shared civic project.

Civic Activism and Issue Publics

The digital era has also expanded the repertoire of civic action. Online campaigns allow citizens to organize around specific causes without waiting for party structures or formal movements. Hashtag activism, viral petitions, community mobilization, and digital fundraising have created issue publics that can draw attention to concerns that mainstream politics might ignore. This is especially important in a diverse democracy like India, where many local, social, and gender-based grievances have historically struggled for visibility (Suna, 2024).

Digital activism can create pressure quickly. It can expose abuses, mobilize sympathy, and force institutions to respond. It is particularly effective at shaping discourse, even when it does not immediately produce policy change. This makes it an important democratic resource. Yet digital activism can also be volatile. Online outrage may fade rapidly, and symbolic participation can sometimes substitute for sustained organization. The democratic value of digital activism therefore depends on whether online attention is translated into durable collective action, institutional reform, or policy accountability.

Still, its broader significance should not be underestimated. It has opened up political space for citizens who might otherwise be excluded from formal structures. It has also expanded the meaning of participation beyond voting and party loyalty. In this sense, digital politics has pluralized democratic practice.

Governance and Accountability

Digital politics has changed not only elections but also governance. Governments now communicate directly with citizens through official accounts, apps, dashboards, and digital grievance systems. These tools can improve transparency and service delivery. Citizens can receive updates, lodge complaints, and monitor policy implementation more easily than before (Das, 2026).

However, governance in the digital age also raises concerns about surveillance, data privacy, and centralization. The same tools that enable public communication can also enable monitoring. When political communication, administrative data, and platform analytics converge, the state's capacity to observe and shape behavior expands significantly. This makes regulatory safeguards essential. A democracy that becomes too dependent on digital infrastructure may also become more vulnerable to misuse of personal data and platform power.

The Indian case is particularly complex because digital governance and digital politics often overlap. A state that promotes digital inclusion and digital service delivery may simultaneously face the need to regulate platform-based political manipulation. Thus, democratic modernization and democratic risk advance together. The challenge is not to reject digital governance, but to embed it within stronger norms of privacy, transparency, and accountability.

Digital governance can also create a symmetries in access. Citizens who are more digitally literate can navigate online systems more effectively, while others may struggle to understand or use them. This means that the same tools designed to simplify access can reproduce inequality if support systems are weak. Democratic governance in the digital age must therefore be inclusive not only in theory but in usability.

Federalism and Regional Politics

Digital politics has also reshaped India's federal democratic structure. Regional parties, state leaders, and localized movements now use digital media to contest national narratives and assert regional identities. In a multilingual and federal system, digital communication helps political actors tailor messages to specific linguistic and cultural publics. This can strengthen representational diversity. It can also reduce the monopoly of national media centers by enabling decentralized political expression (Suna, 2024).

At the same time, digital platforms can centralize attention around a few dominant voices. National leaders with large followings can overshadow regional debate, and platform algorithms can magnify majoritarian narratives. The balance between decentralization and centralization is therefore unstable. Digital politics can empower regional identities, but it can also flatten them into shareable content optimized for national visibility. The effect on democracy depends on whether digital infrastructure supports pluralism or simply redistributes attention within a hierarchical system.

Federalism in India has always depended on negotiated visibility among national and regional actors. Digital politics changes that balance by giving regional actors new tools,

but it also imposes new pressure to compete in national attention markets. As a result, regional issues may be reframed to fit platform logic rather than local complexity. The democratic danger is that distinctive regional concerns become compressed into content optimized for virality.

The Post-2024 Democratic Environment

The 2024 election cycle marked a turning point in how Indian institutions understand digital politics. The Election Commission's actions against misinformation and synthetic content show that the electoral process can no longer be protected by traditional oversight alone. Digital communication has become a core component of election management. The state must now monitor online falsehoods, coordinate with platforms, and respond quickly to synthetic manipulation. This is a major institutional adaptation, and it is likely to become more important in future elections (Election Commission of India, “ECI Directs Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media”; “Advisory on Ethical Use of Social Media and Deepfakes in Elections”).

The broader democratic lesson is that digital politics is now embedded in the functioning of India's representative system. It affects campaigning, turnout, citizen trust, issue framing, and institutional legitimacy. It also influences how younger citizens encounter politics and how public debate is structured. Indian democracy is therefore in a transitional phase: still electoral and competitive, but increasingly networked, platformdriven, and algorithmically mediated (Suna, 2024).

This phase is likely to deepen, not diminish. As artificial intelligence tools become more accessible and platform ecosystems continue to evolve, the boundaries between organic political expression and computationally assisted influence will become harder to distinguish. That makes the present moment especially important for democratic regulation and civic education.

Conclusion

The transformation of Indian democracy in the era of digital politics is both enabling and disruptive. Digital technologies have expanded access to political information, created new forms of participation, and altered the relationship between citizens and political authority (Das; Suna). They have also introduced serious risks, including misinformation, polarization, unequal access, and weakened deliberative norms (Election Commission of India, “ECI Directs Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media”; Election Commission of India, “Myth vs Reality Register”).

Indian democracy has therefore not been replaced by digital politics, but reorganized through it. The central challenge is to ensure that digital tools deepen democratic inclusion rather than amplify manipulation. That will require robust regulation, stronger institutional responses, digital literacy, and greater platform responsibility. The future of Indian democracy will depend not on whether digital politics disappears, but on whether democratic norms can adapt quickly enough to govern it.

A democratic system is strongest when technology expands the public sphere without destroying the shared standards that

make public debate possible. India's experience shows both the promise and the peril of digital politics. Its future democratic health will depend on which of those two forces proves stronger.

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Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Transformation of Higher Education in Bihar: Challenges, Opportunities and Policy Implications

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Abstract

Bihar's developmental trajectory hinges critically on reclaiming its storied historical status as the global epicenter of world knowledge, a legacy epitomized by the ancient universities of Nalanda and Vikramshila, which once drew scholars from across continents. In today's landscape, the state's deliberate alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emerges as a strategic imperative, propelling India toward the ambitious "Vishwa Guru" (Knowledge Superpower) paradigm envisioned for the nation. Within this transformative context, digital transformation transcends mere technical upgrades such as AI-driven platforms and online learning ecosystems and serves as a vital mechanism for "socio-emotional anchoring." This approach directly counters the pervasive "brain drain" plaguing Bihar's youth, who often migrate elsewhere in search of opportunities, eroding the state's human capital. By systematically institutionalizing tech-enabled learning through tools like adaptive AI tutoring, virtual labs, and data analytics for personalized education Bihar can harness and redirect its massive demographic dividend toward fostering local socio-economic vitality, including job creation, innovation hubs, and regional entrepreneurship. This forward-looking vision, though undeniably ambitious, is now firmly underpinned by a robust regulatory framework, including NEP guidelines and state initiatives, meticulously designed to bridge the chasm between the state's ancient prestige and the demanding standards of 21st-century academic rigor.

Keywords : Digital transformation, Artificial Intelligence, NEP, structural transformation,

Introduction

The higher education landscape in Bihar is currently positioned at a critical juncture, attempting to reconcile a prestigious intellectual history with the "Vishwa Guru" aspirations of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. To meet these goals, the state has implemented the SMART Investor IT Policy 2023 (formally the Bihar IT Policy 2024), recognizing that the convergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital transformation is a strategic imperative for socio-economic

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survival. In an era of rapid technological displacement, Bihar must treat digital integration not as a luxury, but as the primary engine for reclaiming its status as a global knowledge superpower. Strategic alignment is anchored in the "Saat Nishchay-3" (2025–2030) programme, which prioritizes "Double Employment, Double Income" through skill-linked education. By focusing on Resolve 1 (Employment) and Resolve 6 (Strong Foundation/Digital Connectivity), these frameworks aim to transform Bihar from a "destitute destination" for knowledge seekers into a premier technology hub. This shift is designed to leverage Bihar's demographic dividendyouth skilled in information and technology to systematically reverse the historical out-migration of talent that has drained the state's intellectual capital for decades.

However, a profound tension exists between Bihar's glorious past, defined by the world-renowned centers of Nalanda and Vikramshila, and the modern realities of regional disparity and infrastructure deficits. To bridge this chasm, the state must move beyond incrementalism and embrace the rigorous, quality-driven goals of the NEP 2020, utilizing technology to democratize excellence.

The NEP 2020 Vision : Aspirations for Quality Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)

For Bihar to emerge as a knowledge superpower, it is mandatory to align state-level pedagogy with the 18 key aspirations of NEP 2020. This transformation requires moving away from the rote delivery of information toward a reformative model that fosters holistic student growth.

The most transformative NEP aspirations for the Bihar context include –

- **Multidisciplinarity** : Phasing out single-stream institutions in favor of integrated environments that merge sciences, social sciences, and humanities.
- **Strategic Impact**: It cultivates a student's full range of intellectual, aesthetic, and moral capacities, preparing them for a complex, non-linear job market.
- **Holistic Curriculum**: Reviving the ancient Indian tradition of the "64 Kalaas," which integrated subjects such as chemistry, medicine, carpentry, and clothes-making.
- **Strategic Impact**: The "Design your own degree" model allows students to combine vocational skills with STEM or liberal arts, ensuring a versatile and future-ready workforce.
- **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC**) : A digital repository for storing academic credits earned across various recognized HEIs.
- **Strategic Impact**: This facilitates seamless student mobility and supports multiple entry/exit points, preventing academic loss for students who may need to pause their studies for economic reasons.
- **Internationalization:** Fostering "Internationalization at home" by attracting global students and partnering with Ivy League or Russell Group universities.
- **Strategic Impact**: By offering premium education at affordable costs, Bihar can gain a unique competitive advantage over metrocity alternatives, restoring its reputation as a global study destination.

Despite the strength of this vision, awareness remains a critical barrier. Current data (Jha, 2022) indicates that only 6% of respondents in Bihar are aware of just 15% of the NEP 2020 aspirations. This staggering lack of policy literacy necessitates a "mission-mode" deployment of AI to bridge the implementation gap.

The AI Opportunity: Enhancing Pedagogy and Administrative Efficiency

AI serves as a transformative force, shifting the focus from passive content consumption to adaptive, reformative learning. In Bihar, AI can serve as a "quantum jump" to bypass traditional infrastructure limitations, particularly in underserved regions.

The research findings on AI's impact on performance are summarized below –

- The application of "Learning Analytics" and "Intelligent Tutoring" is particularly vital for rural education. For example, in the Ganga Diara region, institutions like Sri Tridandi Swami Govt. Degree College can utilize smart boards and virtual labs to reduce the need for long student commutes, providing rural youth with the same caliber of instruction found in urban centers. This technological leap is essential for leveling the playing field across the state's socio-economic strata.

Structural and Ethical Challenges in the Bihar Context

Digital transformation in Bihar faces unique sub-national constraints that generic urban models fail to address–

- **The Rural-Urban Digital Divide :** Limited infrastructure and digital literacy in rural zones threaten to exacerbate inequality. Resolve 6 (Strong Founda-tion) of Saat Nishchay-3 must be fast-tracked to ensure that digital connectivity reaches the most remote HEIs.
- **Faculty Preparedness and Motivation** : A critical gap exists in Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Furthermore, low remuneration in private HEIs dampens motivation, hindering the adoption of creative AI tools.
- **Ethical Dimensions :** Algorithmic bias and data privacy are significant risks. In an underserved population with lower digital literacy, students are highly vulnerable to "unfair" automated assessments and the misuse of personal data.
- **Institutional Capacity** : There is a stark contrast between the state's SMART goals and reality; 33% of HEIs in Bihar demonstrate dismal governance, suggesting that visionary leadership is often absent where it is most needed.

Overcoming these barriers requires a "mission-mode" governance approach, characterized by departmental convergence between the Education and IT departments to ensure technology benefits the many, not just the techliterate few.

Policy Implications and Remedial Measures for a SMART Transformation

To achieve a "SMART" transformation (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), the state must adopt a composite 1-point registration system and outcome-based indicators.

The following remedial measures are mandated for implementation –

- **Institutional Development Plans (IDP):** By Q4 2025, every HEI is required to submit a 5-year blueprint (2025–2030) integrating curricular improvement and industry connect. These IDPs are now a mandatory prerequisite for state funding.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** HEIs must implement fee-waivers for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), bridge courses for students from rural backgrounds, and the development of bilingual degree courses.
- **Industry-Academia Collaboration :** Leverage the Bihar Business Connect and the ICC Bihar State Council to align curricula with market needs. To drive employment, the state will utilize the EPF-related Manpower & Employment reimbursements and subsidies (Capital, Interest, Electricity) provided in the 2024 IT Policy.
- **Mission-Mode Governance :** Establish a cross-departmental task force (Education + IT + Industry) to eliminate policy silos and ensure time-bound ICT project clearances.

Conclusion

The "Saat Nishchay-3" goals provide more than a policy roadmap; they offer a mandate to restore Bihar's illustrious intellectual heritage. By weaving AI into the fabric of higher education, the state can move from "trial and error" implementations to a coordinated, strategic framework that prioritizes human capital.

Policymakers must act with urgency to bridge awareness and infrastructure gaps. If Bihar can successfully execute these mission-mode frameworks and incentivize faculty excellence with a rigorous ethical lens, the state is poised to hit the "bull's eye" of digital transformation by the 2028-29 period, reclaiming its rightful place as a leader in the global knowledge economy.

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India's Foreign Policy Toward the Indian Ocean Region

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Abstract

India's foreign policy toward the Indian Ocean Region constitutes a consequential dimension of its contemporary international engagement because the region concentrates several forms of national vulnerability and strategic opportunity within a single maritime space: dependence on seaborne trade and energy, exposure to nontraditional threats, proximity to strategically significant littoral and island states, and intensifying major-power competition (Dutta, 2025; Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023). The Indian Ocean is therefore central not merely by virtue of geography, but because it structures India's access to West Asia, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the wider Indo-Pacific (Jaishankar, 2016; Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). Over the past three decades, India has progressively shifted from a predominantly continental and autonomy-centered outlook toward a more active maritime posture combining naval capability, strategic partnerships, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and institutional engagement (Ghosh, 2020; Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). This article conceptualizes that posture as a layered strategy in which balancing and reassurance perform complementary functions: India seeks to secure sea lines of communication, preserve strategic autonomy, and manage competition with China, while simultaneously cultivating legitimacy through cooperative regionalism and public-goods provision (Pakanati, 2019; Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015). The effectiveness of this strategy depends not only on military modernization but on whether India can convert material capability into politically accepted regional influence by delivering public goods, sustaining trust with littoral and island states, and integrating security policy with economic and environmental governance (Dutta, 2025; Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023). India's Indian Ocean policy thus reflects a transition from territorial defence toward limited order-shaping, but one constrained by capacity, implementation, and the autonomous choices of smaller regional states (Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023).

Introduction

India's foreign policy toward the Indian Ocean Region has assumed a central place in contemporary debates concerning geopolitics, Indo-Pacific strategy, and regional order because maritime space increasingly mediates the relationship between India's domestic development, external vulnerability, and international status. India's rise cannot therefore be interpreted solely through land-based threats, continental rivalries, or major-power diplomacy in Eurasia. It must equally be situated within the maritime environment that links the subcontinent

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to multiple strategic theatres and exposes it to both economic interdependence and geopolitical pressure (Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023). The Indian Ocean is consequently not merely an adjacent body of water in India's strategic imagination; it is the arena through which economic dependence is translated into security priorities and through which strategic capability is converted into claims of regional leadership.

The Indian Ocean Region matters to India through several causally connected dimensions. Maritime trade and energy flows create dependence on stable sea lanes; this dependence, in turn, generates incentives for naval presence, domain awareness, and diplomatic cooperation (Jaishankar, 2016). The political alignments of island and littoral states matter because their ports, infrastructure choices, and security partnerships can either reinforce or erode India's strategic depth (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). Meanwhile, China's expanding role in maritime infrastructure, port development, and naval outreach transforms commercial connectivity into a potential balance-of-power issue (Pakanati, 2019; Scott, 2015). These dynamics make India's regional policy simultaneously economic, military, and political rather than a collection of separate sectoral initiatives.

The relationship between India and the Indian Ocean is historically rooted, but the strategic weight assigned to maritime power has varied with changes in India's threat perceptions, economic model, and material capabilities. In the early decades after independence, anti-colonial commitments, non-alignment, and immediate continental insecurities privileged landward defence and diplomatic autonomy. Maritime considerations remained present, but they lacked the bureaucratic and strategic centrality required to organize foreign policy. Economic liberalization altered this hierarchy by increasing India's exposure to seaborne trade, imported energy, and transnational supply chains; the expansion of rival external influence then transformed that exposure into a security concern (Jaishankar, 2016; Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). The maritime turn was therefore not simply an ideational reorientation but a response to the interaction of economic dependence, changing threat perceptions, and expanding state capacity.

The shift toward a maritime-centric policy has been conceptual as well as operational. The Indo-Pacific, strategic autonomy, SAGAR, and maritime governance do more than expand the vocabulary of Indian statecraft: they organize different policy instruments around a common problem of regional order (Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). Strategic autonomy preserves decision-making flexibility; SAGAR supplies a legitimizing language of shared security and development; and the Indo-Pacific framework connects the Indian Ocean to wider balances of power. Taken together, these concepts present India not merely as a territorial state defending its coastline, but as a resident power seeking influence through a combination of deterrence, reassurance, and institutional cooperation (Dutta, 2025; Ministry of External Affairs, 2011).

This article provides a systematic analysis of the evolution, objectives, instruments, and constraints of India's foreign policy toward the Indian Ocean Region. Its central analytical claim is that India's maritime strategy combines three logics: balance-of-power behaviour directed at limiting adverse external entrenchment; strategic autonomy designed to preserve freedom of manoeuvre; and cooperative regionalism

intended to render Indian influence politically legitimate. These logics are mutually reinforcing but also potentially contradictory. Balancing can alarm smaller states, autonomy can limit the depth of strategic partnerships, and cooperative rhetoric can lose credibility when material delivery is delayed. India's policy is therefore neither exclusively hegemonic nor merely normative. It is a pragmatic but contested attempt to convert geographic centrality into influence, economic vulnerability into security activism, and public-goods provision into regional consent (Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023).

The Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean Region for India

The Indian Ocean Region is strategically indispensable to India because it constitutes the maritime foundation of the country's trade, energy security, and geopolitical outreach. The causal relationship is direct: dependence on seaborne commerce makes the continuity of maritime access a core security interest, while dependence on imported energy increases the domestic economic costs of disruption (Jaishankar, 2016). The Indian Ocean is therefore not simply relevant to India's economic interests; it is an enabling condition of growth and, consequently, a domain in which economic policy and national security become inseparable.

The sea lanes of communication across the Indian Ocean connect India to major commercial and strategic partners. Routes through the Arabian Sea tie India to the Gulf and East Africa, while routes through the Bay of Bengal and onward to the Strait of Malacca link India to Southeast Asia and the western Pacific (Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023). Disruption across these spaces would directly affect supply chains, trade flows, energy imports, and the movement of strategic goods. For a country seeking sustained economic growth and global integration, the stability of the Indian Ocean is consequently inseparable from India's development trajectory.

India's geography further amplifies the region's strategic significance, but geography creates leverage only when supported by usable capability. India's central location in the northern Indian Ocean, long coastline, and island territories provide surveillance potential and access to critical routes. Yet these advantages also widen the area requiring monitoring, protection, and logistical support (Ghosh, 2020; Scott, 2015). Geographic centrality should therefore be understood as a conditional asset: it lowers the costs of regional presence relative to distant powers, but it does not automatically produce strategic primacy.

The Indian Ocean's significance extends beyond conventional state security. The region is increasingly characterized by non-traditional threats such as piracy, maritime terrorism, arms and narcotics trafficking, illegal fishing, and climate-related disasters. These issues affect governance, economic security, and coastal resilience across the region (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). For India, such challenges demonstrate that maritime security cannot be reduced to naval competition. It includes law enforcement, surveillance, humanitarian readiness, and sustained cooperation with neighboring states.

A further dimension of significance derives from the region's centrality in great-power politics. China's expanding footprint in ports, logistics, maritime infrastructure, and naval deployments is salient not because every commercial project is necessarily military, but because cumulative access can expand strategic options over time (Pakanati, 2019; Scott, 2015). This produces uncertainty for

Indian planners and encourages precautionary balancing. The Indian Ocean is thus understood in New Delhi both as a neighborhood requiring cooperative stabilization and as a competitive arena in which failure to remain engaged may permit others to shape the regional order.

The Indian Ocean also conditions India's claim to major-power status. Regional leadership is not established by declaratory ambition alone; it rests on the ability to protect shared routes, respond to crises, influence institutional agendas, and remain a preferred partner for smaller states. Naval presence, development cooperation, connectivity projects, and multilateral agenda-setting therefore function not only as policy instruments but as tests of India's capacity to translate material resources into recognized authority (Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023).

Historical Evolution of India's Maritime Outlook

India's maritime outlook has undergone a substantial but gradual transformation since independence. This transformation is best explained not as a linear awakening to geography, but as the product of changing external threats, economic dependence, and state capacity. In the decades immediately following 1947, anti-colonial solidarity, nonalignment, and pressing continental threats concentrated political attention and resources on landward security (Ministry of External Affairs, 2011; Scott, 2015). The maritime domain remained relevant, but it was institutionally subordinate because immediate continental risks appeared more urgent and India lacked the capability to sustain a wider oceanic role.

India's early support for limiting external militarization and for an Indian Ocean zone of peace reflected both normative commitments and strategic asymmetry. A state with limited maritime capacity had an interest in constraining the military freedom of stronger external powers while preserving its own autonomy (Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). The normative and strategic dimensions were therefore not mutually exclusive: anti-militarization discourse simultaneously expressed postcolonial principles and compensated for material weakness.

The end of the Cold War and economic liberalization changed the incentives underlying maritime policy. Greater integration with global markets increased the value of secure shipping, while rising energy imports exposed domestic growth to disruptions beyond India's land borders (Jaishankar, 2016). Maritime security consequently expanded from a narrow concern with coastal defence to a broader concern with commercial access, logistical resilience, and the protection of transnational economic networks.

During the same period, nontraditional maritime threats became increasingly difficult to disregard. Piracy in the western Indian Ocean, the threat of maritime terrorism, and the broader vulnerability of sea routes demonstrated that strategic vulnerability extended beyond territorial borders (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). The 2008 Mumbai attacks, though not addressed in every source used here, often symbolize in Indian strategic discourse the reality that the coastline and maritime domain can be exploited by adversaries. This strengthened the case for an expanded maritime security architecture.

The twenty-first century added an explicit balance-of-power dimension to this maritime shift. China's emergence as a major economic and naval actor raised concerns that commercial infrastructure and regular naval access could gradually alter the strategic environment around India (Pakanati, 2019;

Scott, 2015). India's response— naval modernization, island diplomacy, and security cooperation with like-minded states— can therefore be read as a form of limited external balancing constrained by the continuing preference for strategic autonomy.

The Indo-Pacific framework widened the spatial scale of Indian maritime strategy and created a conceptual bridge between the Indian Ocean, Act East policy, Southeast Asian partnerships, and cooperation with extra-regional powers (Sen, 2023). Its importance lies not merely in redrawing a map, but in recasting local maritime pressures as part of a larger regional balance. At the same time, India's insistence on an inclusive Indo-Pacific reflects an effort to benefit from strategic cooperation without embracing a rigid alliance structure.

SAGAR marked a further stage by providing a legitimizing framework for India's expanded maritime role. By linking security with development, it sought to reassure smaller states that India's activism would generate shared benefits rather than exclusive dominance (Jaishankar, 2016; Schöttli, 2019). SAGAR therefore performs a dual function: it coordinates diverse policy instruments and supplies a normative justification for regional leadership.

Thus, the historical evolution of India's maritime outlook reveals a transition from normative caution and continental preoccupation to strategic activism and maritime governance. The shift has not displaced land-based concerns, but it has made the Indian Ocean an indispensable sphere of Indian foreign policy (Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023).

India's Indian Ocean policy rests on principles that mediate between material interests and political legitimacy. Strategic autonomy is the most enduring of these principles, but in the maritime context it should be understood as institutionalized flexibility rather than equi-distance. India cooperates selectively with external actors where interests converge while resisting arrangements that could limit independent choice (Dutta, 2025; Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). Strategic autonomy thus enables India to balance China and expand partnerships without accepting alliance dependence.

A second principle is the interdependence of security and development. Secure sea lanes, stable governance, connectivity, disaster preparedness, and economic growth form a causal chain: insecurity disrupts development, while weak institutions and economic fragility generate new security risks (Jai Shankar, 2016; Schöttli, 2019). India's maritime strategy therefore treats development cooperation not as separate from security policy but as a mechanism for reducing regional vulnerability and building influence.

A third principle is respect for sovereignty and consultative regionalism. This emphasis responds to the structural asymmetry between India and smaller regional states. Because such states often fear domination and hedge among competing partners, India's influence depends on demonstrating restraint and responsiveness (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). Consultation is therefore not merely normative etiquette; it is a strategic requirement for converting asymmetrical power into durable consent.

A third principle concerns respect for sovereignty and consultative regionalism. India remains acutely conscious that many smaller Indian Ocean states are sensitive to external influence and wary of being drawn into rival strategic camps. Consequently, India often presents its regional engagement as partnership-based, demand-driven, and

respectful of local agency (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). This principle is not merely normative but also strategic, because durable influence in the region depends heavily on political trust.

Taken together, these principles produce a hybrid strategy. Its realist component seeks to preserve influence, prevent strategic encirclement, and protect maritime interests. Its institutional and normative component seeks to reduce balancing against India by emphasizing consultation, public goods, and shared outcomes (Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015). The core political problem is therefore not simply how India can accumulate power, but how it can exercise power without generating resistance that erodes its regional position.

These principles impart a hybrid character to India's policy. The strategy is realist insofar as it seeks to preserve influence, resist encirclement, and protect maritime interests. Simultaneously, it remains cooperative insofar as it emphasizes consultation, public goods, and shared regional outcomes (Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015). This combination of competition and legitimacy is one of the most distinctive features of India's Indian Ocean policy.

Core Objectives of India's Policy Toward the Indian Ocean Region

India's foreign policy in the Indian Ocean Region is organized around a set of overlapping objectives that reflect security, economic, and diplomatic concerns. The first is to secure sea lines of communication and maintain a stable maritime environment for trade and energy transport. Given India's extensive dependence on maritime commerce, the protection of commercial routes is a national priority (Ghosh, 2020; Jaishankar, 2016). Disruption at sea would affect everything from domestic energy prices to industrial production and export competitiveness.

A second objective seeks to prevent hostile military or strategic entrenchment in India's maritime periphery. India seeks to avoid a situation in which rival powers acquire the capability to monitor, pressure, or constrain it from nearby waters or dual-use facilities in neighboring states (Pakanati, 2019; Scott, 2015). This objective explains India's sensitivity to external naval access arrangements and its vigilance regarding infrastructure projects with potential strategic use.

A third objective is to build regional influence and leadership. India aims to be recognized as a trusted and capable actor that contributes to maritime security, emergency response, regional development, and institutional coordination (Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). This aspiration is not merely symbolic. Influence shapes the choices of neighboring states, affects the strategic landscape, and reinforces India's claim to a larger international role.

A fourth objective concerns connectivity and economic partnership. India's Indian Ocean strategy increasingly includes maritime infrastructure, logistics, blue economy cooperation, and commercial integration with littoral states (Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023). This objective reflects the recognition that long-term influence in the region must be anchored in material interdependence rather than military presence alone.

A fifth objective is the effort to maintain strategic autonomy while participating in larger regional frameworks. India seeks to work with major powers and regional partners where interests converge, but it also wants to retain flexibility and avoid entrapment in fixed blocs (Dutta, 2025; Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). This

balancing act is central to India's external posture in the wider Indo-Pacific.

Taken together, these objectives demonstrate that India's Indian Ocean policy is multidimensional. It cannot be reduced to military strategy, nor can it be understood solely through development diplomacy. It is an integrated project aimed at securing India's maritime environment while enhancing its regional legitimacy and strategic leverage (Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015).

SAGAR and the Normative Architecture of India's Maritime Vision

SAGAR is analytically significant because it reframes maritime security as a regional collective-action problem rather than a purely national military problem. Sea-lane protection, disaster response, coastal surveillance, and sustainable growth generate benefits that no state can fully provide or consume in isolation (Schöttli, 2019). By presenting India as a provider and coordinator of such goods, SAGAR seeks to translate capability into legitimacy.

SAGAR also responds to the preferences of smaller Indian Ocean states, which frequently seek economic and security assistance without sacrificing strategic autonomy. Its language of consultation, inclusiveness, and shared gains attempts to reduce fears that Indian leadership will become hierarchical or intrusive (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). The doctrine's political effectiveness therefore depends on whether local actors experience Indian engagement as demand-driven rather than imposed.

SAGAR also performs an important political function. Smaller Indian Ocean states are often wary of domination by larger powers and seek external relationships that do not compromise sovereignty. By emphasizing consultation, inclusiveness, and shared gains, India attempts to reassure these states that its regional role is intended to support rather than overpower them (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). Such reassurance is essential in a context where influence depends heavily on consent.

The principal limitation of SAGAR is the gap that can emerge between declaratory doctrine and distributive outcomes. A framework promising shared security and growth must be judged by the timeliness, scale, and reliability of infrastructure delivery, training, crisis response, and institutional support (Schöttli, 2019). Implementation failure is not merely administrative; it weakens the causal mechanism through which public-goods provision is expected to generate trust and influence.

Its credibility, however, the success of SAGAR depends on implementation. A doctrine that promises growth and shared security must produce tangible outcomes in infrastructure, training, institutional support, and timely crisis response. Where implementation lags, the credibility of the framework may weaken (Schöttli, 2019). Even so, SAGAR remains central to understanding how India seeks to legitimize its role in the Indian Ocean.

Naval power is a central instrument of India's regional policy because it enables presence, deterrence, reassurance, and crisis response. These functions are politically distinct: deterrence seeks to raise the costs of coercion, reassurance reduces fears among partners, and persistent presence signals commitment (Ghosh, 2020; Scott, 2015). The Indian Navy therefore contributes to foreign policy not only through combat capability but through the management of expectations among allies, partners, competitors, and smaller states.

Mission-based deployments, anti-piracy operations, escort duties, logistics agree-

ments, and white-shipping arrangements reveal a shift from episodic deployment toward networked maritime presence (Dutta, 2025). Their significance lies in producing information and access before crises occur. Modern maritime influence depends less on isolated platforms than on the ability to sustain awareness, interoperability, and logistical reach across a dispersed theatre.

India's naval posture in the Indian Ocean has increasingly focused on mission-based deployments, anti-piracy operations, escort duties, and maritime domain awareness. Khanna highlights that New Delhi has expanded its surveillance networks, logistics agreements, and white-shipping arrangements to improve situational awareness and coordination (Dutta, 2025). This emphasis reflects the fact that modern maritime strategy does not rest solely on combat power but on information, persistence, and networked partnerships.

Maritime domain awareness is especially critical given of the scale and complexity of the Indian Ocean. Monitoring shipping, suspicious activity, illegal fishing, and nontraditional threats requires continuous information gathering and dissemination. India's support for coastal radar systems and information sharing with partner countries extends its situational awareness beyond its immediate shores (Dutta, 2025; Ghosh, 2020). These mechanisms deepen India's role in everyday regional security governance.

Nontraditional operations also support India's claim to be a net security provider. Anti-piracy missions, search-and-rescue operations, and protection of commercial shipping generate benefits for multiple states and commercial actors (Dutta, 2025). Yet the political return from these activities is not automatic : public-goods provision enhances legitimacy only when regional partners perceive it as reliable, non-coercive, and responsive to their priorities.

Importantly, India's security policy in the Indian Ocean also incorporates non-traditional and humanitarian dimensions. Anti-piracy missions, search-and-rescue operations, and protection of commercial shipping all contribute to India's image as a provider of public goods (Dutta, 2025). This posture departs from a purely balance-of-power approach and supports the broader legitimizing narrative associated with SAGAR.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief constitute especially effective instruments because they compress the distance between material capability and political legitimacy. In a disaster-prone region, the ability to mobilize ships, aircraft, medical supplies, and evacuation capacity quickly demonstrates usefulness in ways that declaratory diplomacy cannot (Jaishankar, 2016; Schöttli, 2019). HADR therefore operates as both emergency governance and reputational statecraft.

Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief, and Soft Power

Humanitarian missions transform abstract claims of leadership into observable performance. They can generate trust because they reveal not only whether a state possesses capabilities, but whether it is willing and able to deploy them for others. However, the reputational effect remains contingent on speed, local coordination, and the absence of political conditionality (Schöttli, 2019). Responsiveness, rather than capability alone, is what converts relief operations into durable diplomatic influence.

India has repeatedly acted as a first responder in crises affecting neighboring countries and has used its naval and air assets to deliver emergency supplies,

conduct evacuations, and restore communication and relief support (Dutta, 2025; Jaishankar, 2016). Such actions reinforce India's practical image of India as a dependable regional power.

Humanitarian missions are strategically significant because they translate abstract leadership claims into visible action. A state may possess military capability, but if it uses that capability only for deterrence, its regional reputation remains limited. By contrast, a state visibly engaged in saving lives and supporting communities during emergencies gains trust that cannot be generated by rhetoric alone (Schöttli, 2019). This trust possesses strategic value because smaller states often judge partners not only by strength but by responsiveness.

Soft power in the Indian Ocean is further shaped by historical, cultural, and diasporic links. Longstanding commercial and civilizational connections connect India with East Africa, the Gulf, Mauritius, and other parts of the region (Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). These ties do not determine policy outcomes in themselves, but they provide reservoirs of familiarity that can complement diplomatic and developmental engagement.

Nevertheless, soft power is most effective when it is matched by delivery. Cultural affinity cannot substitute for infrastructure, security support, or crisis management. India's success in using humanitarian diplo-macy lies precisely in the way it combines symbolic goodwill with concrete assistance (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019).

Relations with littoral and island states are not merely one component of India's strategy; they are the political arena in which claims of regional leadership are accepted, resisted, or renegotiated. Geography gives these states strategic significance, while domestic political change can alter their external alignments and willingness to cooperate (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). Bilateral diplomacy therefore functions as a continuous process of coalition maintenance rather than a fixed hierarchy between a regional power and passive neighbors.

India's policy toward the Indian Ocean Region is operationalized through relationships with specific littoral and island states. These states are central to India's security environment owing to their geographic location, domestic political volatility, and openness to multiple external partners. Consequently, bilateral diplomacy remains one of the most important tools in India's Indian Ocean strategy (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019).

Sri Lanka occupies a position of particular importance because of its proximity to India and its location near major shipping routes. Political developments in Colombo can directly influence Indian maritime calculations, especially when external powers seek strategic footholds through economic or port engagement (Dutta, 2025). India's diplomacy with Sri Lanka has therefore combined aid, infrastructure support, political outreach, and strategic vigilance.

The Maldives constitutes another crucial component in India's maritime neighborhood. Despite its small size, its position in the central Indian Ocean confers strategic significance disproportionate to its territorial size. Instability or external strategic penetration there would have major implications for India's maritime security (Dutta, 2025). India has accordingly invested in defense cooperation, capacity building, and rapid-response diplomacy in the Maldives.

The central tension in India's bilateral diplomacy arises from asymmetry. India seeks to remain the partner of first resort, yet overt expectations of deference can

encourage smaller states to hedge more actively among external powers (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). Effective leadership consequently requires calibrated restraint: India must remain sufficiently engaged to prevent strategic vacuums, but sufficiently consultative to avoid producing the resistance its policy seeks to prevent.

Bilateral diplomacy with smaller states also exposes a central tension in India's policy. On the one hand, India seeks to remain the partner of first resort in its maritime neighborhood. On the other hand, it must avoid appearing paternalistic or intrusive. Many smaller states value autonomy and often hedge among multiple external partners to maximize economic and strategic room for maneuver (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). India must therefore reconcile strategic intimacy with diplomatic restraint.

China's growing presence has become a major driver of India's maritime policy because its cumulative effect may alter regional access, influence, and strategic options. The analytical issue is not whether every Chinese-funded port is a military base, but whether commercial infrastructure, political relationships, and recurring naval activity can together create dual-use possibilities over time (Pakanati, 2019). Uncertainty about future use encourages India to respond before intentions and capabilities become fully observable.

China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean has become a primary driver of India's maritime foreign policy. From India's perspective, the challenge lies not in a single Chinese action but in the cumulative implications of infrastructure investments, port access, dual-use possibilities, naval visits, and expanding political influence across the region (Pakanati, 2019). This cumulative pattern has intensified Indian concerns about strategic encirclement and long-term erosion of its regional primacy.

India's response combines internal balancing, external partnerships, and competitive regional engagement. Naval modernization and domain awareness strengthen autonomous capability; intensified relations with neighboring states reduce opportunities for strategic exclusion; and issue-based Indo-Pacific cooperation distributes some of the costs of balancing (Dutta, 2025; Sen, 2023). The strategy stops short of formal containment because India seeks to preserve autonomy and avoid forcing smaller states into a binary alignment.

India's response has unfolded across several layers. First, it has invested in naval modernization and domain awareness. Second, it has intensified engagement with neighboring states to prevent strategic vacuums. Third, it has linked its Indian Ocean policy to broader Indo-Pacific partnerships and issue-based cooperation with like-minded powers (Dutta, 2025; Sen, 2023). This response is not always articulated as containment, but it is unmistakably shaped by competitive concerns.

The China factor has therefore been catalytic rather than merely threatening. It has exposed weaknesses in India's infrastructure delivery, maritime awareness, and sustained diplomatic attention, thereby accelerating institutional adaptation (Pakanati, 2019; Scott, 2015). Competition has pushed India to treat economic connectivity and political responsiveness as strategic variables rather than supplementary instruments.

The China factor has also exercised a catalytic effect on Indian strategy. It has encouraged India to think more seriously about maritime infrastructure, island diplomacy, and the political economy of connectivity. In this sense, Chinese expansion has

not only posed a challenge; it has also accelerated India's own maritime adaptation (Pakanati, 2019; Scott, 2015).

Economic statecraft is a pillar of India's maritime strategy because regional influence depends on the density of material relationships as well as on naval capability. Infrastructure, logistics, trade links, and development finance shape the incentives of partner states and can produce forms of dependence, diversification, or strategic access (Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023). Economic engagement is therefore not simply a developmental complement to security policy; it helps structure the political alignments within which security competition occurs.

Economic statecraft constitutes an increasingly important pillar of India's Indian Ocean policy. Maritime influence in the contemporary era does not rest solely on naval power. It also depends on infrastructure, logistics, trade links, and access to development finance and commercial networks (Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023). India's foreign policy in the Indian Ocean therefore incorporates a substantial economic dimension aimed at deepening connectivity and interdependence.

The Brookings analysis underscores that the Indian Ocean is central to India's trade, energy security, fisheries, and resource access (Jaishankar, 2016). Maritime diplomacy and domestic economic growth are therefore directly interconnected. Ports, shipping efficiency, connectivity corridors, and secure trade routes are not peripheral issues; they are essential to India's long-term development.

Connectivity projects possess geopolitical consequences because financing arrangements, ownership structures, and operational control may shape long-term access and political leverage. India may be unable to match the scale of competing finance, but it can seek a different comparative advantage through local consultation, project sustainability, and lower perceptions of political coercion (Dutta, 2025; Pakanati, 2019). Whether this advantage is realized depends on delivery speed and institutional credibility, not on normative claims alone.

Connectivity projects also carry geopolitical implications. External powers often use infrastructure and financing to build influence in the Indian Ocean. India may be unable to match consistently the scale of such financing, but it can compete by offering trust-based partnerships, local sensitivity, and sustainable political engagement (Dutta, 2025; Pakanati, 2019). This comparative advantage may become increasingly important as smaller states seek alternatives that do not generate strategic over dependence.

Economic statecraft therefore operates at two interrelated levels in India's policy. At one level, it supports growth and maritime integration. At another, it functions as a strategic instrument for building influence and preventing unfavorable alignments. The stronger India's economic linkages with regional states become, the more durable its political position in the Indian Ocean is likely to be.

Multilateralism strengthens India's policy when institutions reduce transaction costs, socialize common rules, and legitimize leadership beyond bilateral power asymmetries (Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). Regional forums allow India to frame maritime security, disaster preparedness, connectivity, and sustainability as shared problems rather than as domains of unilateral influence. Institutional leadership can therefore help transform Indian preferences into regional norms.

India's foreign policy toward the Indian Ocean Region is reinforced when regional order is pursued through institutions rather than through bilateral bargaining alone. Multilateralism provides India with a mechanism to shape rules, coordinate responses, and legitimize its leadership in non-coercive ways (Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). This is particularly useful in a diverse maritime region where large and small states have sharply different capacities and concerns.

Institutional engagement enables India to advance issues such as maritime security, disaster preparedness, connectivity, and sustainable development within a cooperative framework (Schöttli, 2019). By supporting regional forums and issue-based mechanisms, India can present itself as a convener and coordinator rather than simply a power seeking strategic advantage.

The limitations of multilateralism arise from uneven capacity, divergent threat perceptions, and weak implementation. India's recourse to bilateral and minilateral mechanisms is therefore not necessarily a rejection of multilateralism, but a functional response to institutional under performance (Ghosh, 2020; Schöttli, 2019). The resulting architecture is layered: broad institutions provide legitimacy and agenda-setting, while smaller arrangements deliver operational outcomes.

Nevertheless, multilateralism in the Indian Ocean has limitations. Regional institutions often suffer from broad mandates, uneven participation, and weak implementation capacity. Accordingly, India must combine formal institutional engagement with bilateral and minilateral mechanisms that can produce practical outcomes more quickly (Ghosh, 2020; Schöttli, 2019). The result is a layered diplomatic architecture in which multilateral institutions, bilateral partnerships, and operational mechanisms perform comple-mentary functions.

Environmental Change and the Future of Maritime Politics

Environmental vulnerability is becoming a strategic variable in the Indian Ocean rather than a separate policy domain. Sea-level rise, extreme weather, ecological stress, and livelihood insecurity can intensify fiscal pressure, displacement, political instability, and dependence on external assistance (Schöttli, 2019). Climate effects therefore influence the regional distribution of power by shaping which states can provide adaptation finance, disaster response, and technological support.

For India, environmental governance possesses both normative and strategic value because it aligns Indian capabilities with the priorities of smaller states. Climate resilience, sustainable fisheries, coastal adaptation, and disaster preparedness address concerns that are often more immediate to island societies than great-power rivalry (Jaishankar, 2016; Schöttli, 2019). Leadership in these areas can generate legitimacy precisely because it responds to local definitions of security rather than imposing a narrowly military agenda.

Environmental diplomacy also converges with humanitarian assistance. The same capabilities used in naval operations can support disaster relief, emergency logistics, and reconstruction after climate shocks. This reinforces the proposition that maritime capability in the Indian Ocean should be understood in broad governance terms rather than purely military ones (Dutta, 2025; Jaishankar, 2016).

If India is to shape the region successfully in the coming decades, it must treat climate and sustainability not as secondary concerns but as integral components of maritime strategy. The future politics of the Indian Ocean will increasingly be shaped by the intersection of ecological vulnerability, economic governance, and strategic competition.

Constraints and Challenges in India's Indian Ocean Policy

India's Indian Ocean policy is constrained by an ambition-capability gap that is both material and institutional. Sustained naval presence, infrastructure delivery, development cooperation, crisis response, and competitive diplomacy draw on different agencies, budgets, and time horizons (Dutta, 2025; Ghosh, 2020). The challenge is therefore not only resource scarcity but coordination: fragmented implementation can prevent aggregate national capability from producing coherent regional effects.

Naval capability remains uneven when measured against strategic aspirations. Khanna notes concerns related to budgetary constraints, shipbuilding delays, and the difficulty of sustaining presence across the full maritime expanse India seeks to influence (Dutta, 2025). This assessment does not negate India's progress, but it highlights the practical challenge of matching strategic narrative with operational reach.

A second constraint is the agency of smaller states. Their hedging is not simply opportunistic behaviour; it is a rational response to asymmetry and uncertainty. By engaging multiple partners, they diversify economic benefits, avoid dependence, and preserve bargaining leverage (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019). India's geographic proximity consequently creates neither automatic loyalty nor exclusive influence. Its regional position must be continually reproduced through performance and political sensitivity.

A third challenge concerns policy implementation. Strategic concepts such as SAGAR may be compelling, but they require bureaucratic coordination, financial backing, and long-term follow-through. Governance-oriented scholarship points to the difficulty of translating vision into sustained institutional and project-based outcomes (Schöttli, 2019). Delays and uneven execution can weaken India's credibility.

The most significant conceptual tension lies between balancing and legitimacy. A policy framed too heavily around China may instrumentalize smaller states and reduce their complex interests to the logic of great-power rivalry. Yet a policy relying on cooperative rhetoric without adequate capability risks becoming strategically inconsequential (Scott, 2015; Sen, 2023). India must therefore calibrate a strategy in which balancing supplies protection, public-goods provision supplies legitimacy, and strategic autonomy preserves flexibility.

Future Prospects and Strategic Direction

The future effectiveness of India's policy will depend on whether it can align three variables: strategic capability, implementation credibility, and regional consent. Capability without delivery produces unfulfilled expectations; delivery without consul-tation can generate resistance; and consultation without credible power may fail to shape outcomes. Maritime policy will remain central to India's external relations, but its influence will be determined by the interaction of these variables rather than by geographic location alone (Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023).

A primary requirement is continued investment in maritime capability. This includes not only naval assets but also logistics, maintenance, surveillance systems, and domain awareness architecture (Dutta, 2025; Ghosh, 2020). Without such capacity, India will struggle to meet the expectations that accompany its regional role.

A second requirement concerns sustained engagement with littoral and island states. India's long-term advantage lies in being a resident power with geographic proximity,

historical ties, and the ability to respond quickly to regional needs. To translate this advantage into durable influence, India must remain visible, dependable, and respectful of sovereignty (Dutta, 2025; Schöttli, 2019).

A third requirement is the integration of economic and environmental governance into security strategy. Infrastructure, trade, fisheries, resilience, and climate adaptation are not secondary to regional order; they are increasingly part of its foundation (Jaishankar, 2016; Schöttli, 2019). A comprehensive maritime policy must therefore address both deterrence and development.

India's broader strategic opportunity lies in developing a form of leadership that is central but not coercive. In theoretical terms, this requires converting asymmetrical power into accepted authority by supplying public goods, respecting local agency, and avoiding demands for exclusive alignment (Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). India is most likely to become indispensable not through regional control, but by lowering the security and governance costs faced by other states. Such influence would be more resilient because it rests on repeated utility and consent rather than on hierarchy alone.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy toward the Indian Ocean Region has emerged as a defining expression of its contemporary strategic identity because maritime policy connects economic interdependence, national vulnerability, regional competition, and international status (Dutta, 2025; Jaishankar, 2016; Sen, 2023). The Indian Ocean is therefore not simply one theatre among others; it is a domain in which India's development strategy and order-shaping ambitions increasingly converge.

The evolution of India's maritime outlook reflects a broader transformation in statecraft driven by changing economic dependence, threat perceptions, and material capacity. India's shift from a predominantly continental posture toward naval modernization, littoral diplomacy, development cooperation, humanitarian response, and regional institutional engagement is therefore neither automatic nor complete (Ghosh, 2020; Schöttli, 2019; Scott, 2015). SAGAR captures the political logic of this transition by attempting to reconcile expanded capability with a legitimizing commitment to shared security and growth.

Nevertheless, the strategy contains persistent tensions. Competition with China encourages balancing, while strategic autonomy limits formal alignment; the pursuit of regional leadership requires visible capability, while the agency of smaller states demands restraint and consultation (Dutta, 2025; Pakanati, 2019; Scott, 2015). The decisive variable is therefore not ambition alone but the credibility with which India coordinates and implements its commitments.

Ultimately, India's Indian Ocean policy is best understood as an attempt to combine realism with legitimacy through a layered strategy of deterrence, autonomy, partnership, and public-goods provision (Ministry of External Affairs, 2011; Schöttli, 2019; Sen, 2023). Its success will depend on whether naval and economic capabilities can generate regional consent rather than merely strategic visibility. If India can align power with delivery, and leadership with the autonomous priorities of littoral and island states, it will be better positioned to shape an Indo-Pacific order without reproducing the coercive hierarchy it publicly rejects.

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Advancing Gender Equality : A Human Rights Perspective

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Abstract

Gender justice has emerged as a core pillar of contemporary human rights discourse, reflecting the global aspiration for equality, dignity, and inclusive development. Despite advancements in legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms, gender-based inequalities persist across societies in complex forms. This article critically examines the relationship between gender justice and human rights in a contemporary global context, focusing on conceptual foundations, global realities, institutional responses, and emerging challenges. It argues that while formal equality has largely been institutionalized, substantive equality remains constrained by structural inequalities and socio-cultural norms. The article concludes that the journey towards gender justice and human rights is an ongoing process, requiring persistent efforts from governments, civil society, and individuals. It involves education, advocacy, and policy changes to create a world where gender equality is a reality, and all people can live with dignity and freedom (Fraser, 2013). Achieving gender justice requires a shift from formal equality to transformative change. Economic empowerment, access to education, and cultural transformation are critical components of this process.

Keywords **:** Gender justice, human rights, intersectionality, law, globalization, equality

Introduction

Gender justice today occupies a central position within the broader framework of human rights, reflecting a global commitment to equality and dignity. Over the past several decades, international institutions, national governments, and civil society organizations have worked toward embedding gender equality within legal and policy frameworks. Despite these efforts, gender-based inequalities continue to persist across societies, revealing a gap between normative commitments and lived realities (United Nations, n.d.). The contemporary global landscape is marked by both progress and contradiction. While many countries have adopted progressive legal frameworks, the effectiveness of these measures varies significantly depending on socio-cultural contexts and institutional capacity. Achieving gender justice requires moving beyond formal equality toward a more substantive and transformative approach.

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Conceptual Foundations of Gender Justice and Human Rights

Gender justice represents an evolution in the understanding of equality, moving beyond formal parity to emphasize fairness in outcomes. Traditional legal frameworks often focus on equal treatment, but such approaches may fail to address structural inequalities that disadvantage certain groups. Fredman (2015) conceptualizes substantive equality as encompassing redistribution, recognition, participation, and transformation, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for addressing gender-based inequalities. On the other hand, the Human Rights framework has played a crucial role in institutionalizing these principles. However, early human rights discourse was often criticized for its gender-neutral orientation, which overlooked the specific experiences of women (Charlesworth, 1994). The development of instruments such as CEDAW marked a significant shift toward recognizing gender as a critical category of analysis. Intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw (1989), further enriches this framework by highlighting the interaction between gender and other forms of inequality. This perspective is particularly relevant in comparative analysis, as different societies exhibit distinct patterns of intersectional disadvantage.

It becomes apparent that gender justice and human rights are intertwined concepts that seek to promote equality, dignity, and well-being for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression. At its core, gender justice is about recognizing and addressing the systemic inequalities and injustices that people face due to their gender, often resulting from patriarchal norms, stereotypes, and power imbalances (Merry, 2006). Human rights, on the other hand, are universal and inalienable, applying to every person simply because they are human.

There is universal consensus that pursuit of gender justice is integral to the realization of human rights. Gender-based discrimination and violence are pervasive issues that affect individuals across the globe, manifesting in various forms such as unequal access to education and employment opportunities, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and restrictions on reproductive rights (UN Women, 2020). These violations not only harm individuals but also perpetuate cycles of inequality and poverty, hindering social and economic progress. Efforts to advance gender justice involve challenging and transforming discriminatory laws, policies, and social norms that perpetuate inequality. This includes advocating for equal rights and opportunities, promoting women's empowerment, and supporting marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals who face unique challenges (Butler, 2004). International frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, underscore the global commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (UN, 2015).

The intersectionality of gender with other factors like race, class, caste, and disability further complicates the struggle for justice, requiring nuanced and inclusive approaches (Crenshaw, 1989). Ensuring gender justice means recognizing these diverse experiences and addressing the multiple layers of discrimination individuals may face. By

integrating a gender perspective into human rights frameworks and activism, we can work towards a more equitable society where everyone's rights are respected and protected.

Historical Evolution and Global Convergence

The evolution of gender justice has been shaped by both global movements and local struggles. Early feminist movements focused on securing civil and political rights, while later movements expanded the agenda to include social and economic rights. The post-World War II human rights framework provided a universal platform for articulating these demands. Over time, there has been a degree of convergence in global norms, particularly through international instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, this convergence has not eliminated differences in implementation. Comparative analysis reveals that while countries may adopt similar legal frameworks, their effectiveness depends on institutional capacity and cultural context.

The historical evolution of gender justice is a narrative of gradual progress, marked by struggles, milestones, and shifting global norms. The early 20th century saw women's suffrage movements gain momentum, with countries like New Zealand (1893) and the United States (1920) granting women the right to vote, setting a precedent for future gender equality efforts. The post-World War II era witnessed the establishment of international frameworks aimed at promoting women's rights, notably the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (1946) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979).

The 1975-1985 UN Decade for Women played a pivotal role in galvanizing global attention to women's issues, culminating in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies (1985), which emphasized women's empowerment and equality. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action further solidified international commitment to gender equality, addressing critical areas like violence against women, education, and economic participation. The turn of the 21st century saw increased recognition of intersectionality and the diverse experiences of women, influenced by factors like race, class, and sexuality. Global movements like #MeToo and LGBTQ+ activism have pushed for broader understandings of gender justice, challenging traditional norms and advocating for inclusive policies. Regional convergences, such as the African Union's Maputo Protocol (2003) and the European Union's gender equality directives, demonstrate localized approaches to advancing gender justice. Internationally, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015), particularly Goal 5, underscore the global commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Despite progress, challenges persist, including resistance to gender equality, inadequate implementation of laws, and emerging issues like digital gender gaps. The ongoing evolution of gender justice requires adapting to these challenges, ensuring inclusivity, and addressing the needs of marginalized groups. As global norms continue to shift, the pursuit of gender justice remains a dynamic and multifaceted endeavor, reflecting changing understandings of equality, rights, and dignity.

Comparative Perspectives on Gender Justice

The experience of gender justice varies significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting differences in legal traditions, political structures, and social norms. In India, constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality have been interpreted expansively by the judiciary. Landmark cases such as *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997) and *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) demonstrate the transformative potential of judicial intervention in advancing gender justice.

In the United States, gender justice has been shaped by constitutional interpretation and judicial review. Cases such as *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which recognized reproductive rights, and its subsequent reversal in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), illustrate the contested nature of gender rights. The shifting judicial landscape highlights the vulnerability of rights that are not firmly embedded in legislative frameworks (Siegel, 2007).

The United Kingdom presents a different model, where gender justice has been advanced through statutory frameworks such as the Equality Act 2010. This legislation provides comprehensive protection against discrimination and reflects a more centralized approach to equality law (Fredman, 2011). However, challenges remain in ensuring effective implementation and addressing intersectional inequalities. These comparative perspectives reveal both convergence and divergence in approaches to gender justice. While there is a shared commitment to equality, the pathways to achieving it differ significantly across contexts.

Contemporary Global Realities

Despite advancements in legal frameworks, gender inequality remains a persistent global challenge. Economic disparities continue to disadvantage women, who are over represented in informal employment and underpaid relative to men (World Bank, 2024). The unequal distribution of unpaid care work further reinforces these disparities, limiting women's economic participation (Folbre, 2006).

Gender-based violence remains a widespread violation of human rights. Comparative studies indicate that while legal frameworks addressing such violence exist in many countries, enforcement remains inconsistent. In both developed and developing contexts, societal attitudes often hinder effective implementation (Heise, 2011). Health and reproductive rights also reveal significant disparities. The divergence between jurisdictions is particularly evident in the regulation of reproductive rights, with some countries expanding access while others impose restrictions. This variation underscores the influence of political and cultural factors on gender justice. Political representation remains uneven across regions. While countries such as Rwanda have achieved high levels of female representation through quotas, many others continue to lag behind. This disparity highlights the importance of institutional design in promoting gender equality (Phillips, 1995).

Institutional Mechanisms and their limitations

International organizations have played a crucial role in promoting gender justice by establishing norms and monitoring progress. However, their ability to enforce compliance

is limited. National institutions, while more directly accountable, often face challenges related to implementation and social resistance. Comparative analysis reveals that the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms depends on their ability to address both legal and social dimensions of inequality. India's experience, characterized by judicial activism, highlights the importance of interpretation in advancing rights. Civil society organizations play a vital role in complementing these efforts. Their ability to mobilize communities and advocate for change is particularly important in contexts where formal institutions are inadequate.

Emerging Challenges in a Globalized World

The global landscape of gender justice and human rights is facing unprecedented challenges. On one hand, there's been significant progress - women's representation in parliaments and access to education have reached historic highs in many regions (UN Women, 2020). However, this progress is being met with a backlash, with many governments rolling back women's rights and promoting misogyny (Fraser, 2019). The contemporary era presents new challenges that complicate the pursuit of gender justice. The digital revolution has created opportunities for empowerment but has also introduced new forms of inequality and violence. Women are disproportionately affected by online harassment, which limits their participation in digital spaces (UN Women, 2020). Climate change represents another significant challenge, disproportionately affecting women in developing countries. Comparative studies indicate that gender-sensitive policies are essential for addressing these vulnerabilities (Agarwal, 2010). Conflict and displacement further exacerbate gender inequalities. Women in conflict zones face heightened risks of violence and exploitation, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive approaches to humanitarian interventions (Tickner, 2001).

In countries like Afghanistan, women are being erased from public life, with restrictions on education, employment, and even speaking in public (Afghanistan Human Rights Commission, 2022). Similarly, in some parts of the world, reproductive freedoms are being curtailed, and LGBTQ+ rights are under attack (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The rise of authoritarianism and far-right populism is fueling this backlash, with leaders using "traditional family values" to justify restricting women's and LGBTQ+ rights (Kawther, 2021). The impact of conflict and economic instability is also disproportionately affecting women. In war-torn countries, women are facing increased violence, displacement, and economic hardship (UNHCR, 2022). Women perform nearly three times as much unpaid domestic work as men, limiting their participation in the labor force and reducing their political and social bargaining power (Oxfam, 2020).

Despite these challenges, feminist movements are resisting and pushing back. Global mobilizations, like the Women's Marches, are demanding action on issues like femicide, sexual violence, and economic inequality (Al Jazeera, 2020). International frameworks, such as the UN's Beijing+30 review, are also being used to hold governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality (UN Women, 2020). To address these emerging challenges, it's crucial to support feminist movements and advocacy efforts, particularly in countries where women's rights are

under attack. This includes providing funding, resources, and platforms for marginalized voices (AWID, 2020). The concept of transformative constitutionalism, as seen in South Africa, offers a promising framework for addressing structural inequalities. Similarly, the integration of intersectionality into policy design can enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

Conclusion

The pursuit of gender justice and human rights remains a pressing and evolving challenge in the contemporary global landscape. Despite significant strides in advancing equality and empowerment, the backlash against women's and LGBTQ+ rights, fueled by authoritarianism and patriarchal norms, threatens to undermine decades of progress (Fraser, 2019). The disproportionate impact of conflict, economic instability, and the care penalty on women underscores the need for inclusive and intersectional approaches to addressing these issues (Oxfam, 2020).

As feminist movements continue to resist and push back against these challenges, it is crucial to support and amplify their efforts. This requires governments, international institutions, and civil society to prioritize funding, resources, and platforms for marginalized voices (AWID, 2020). The implementation of international frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action, must be strengthened to hold governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality (UN Women, 2020). Ultimately, achieving gender justice and human rights requires a fundamental transformation of power structures and social norms. It demands a shift towards a more equitable and just society, where all individuals can live with dignity, freedom, and equality (UN, 2015). The journey ahead is complex and fraught with challenges, but the resilience and activism of feminist movements offer a beacon of hope for a more just and equitable world.

It needs to be reiterated that Gender justice remains a central yet contested element of the contemporary human rights framework. While significant progress has been made in establishing legal and institutional structures, persistent inequalities highlight the limitations of existing approaches. Comparative analysis reveals that while there is a global convergence in principles, their implementation varies significantly across contexts. Gender justice must be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional concept that goes beyond formal equality. Achieving it requires not only legal reform but also broader social and economic transformation. Ultimately, gender justice is not merely a legal objective but a continuous process of redefining and realizing human dignity in an ever-changing world.

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Patriarchy in Indian Society : Constitutional Ideals in Conflict with Tradition

Dr. Chhavi Ahlawat *

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

– Swami Vivekananda, Philosopher and Spiritual Leader

Abstract

Nearly all Indian women have experienced patriarchy at some point in their lives, and this article speaks to them. Even if pupils have been taught the same lessons of equality and justice for decades in the educational institutions, "patriarchism" which combines comfort and power remains a constant in society because, after all, who does not like holding onto power? However, the question remains: Is it possible for education to truly achieve its objective of promoting social change? Or is it something that needs personal effort? The Preamble of the Constitution of India mentions about, apart from the other two fundamental pillars, justice (social, economic and political)and equality (of status and of opportunity).Nevertheless, in practice, society does not uphold the values set forth in the Indian Constitution. Women, more than men, are the ones who perpetuate patriarchy. If women want to overcome the massive sea of patriarchy in society and prevent the next generation from experiencing the same problems, they must take the initiative to fight it.

Keywords : *Patriarchy, Constitution of India, Preamble, Justice, Equality*

INTRODUCTION

India is regarded as a country that follows the principle of "Unity in Diversity". India, being a diversified country with individuals from various religions, castes, genders, communities, and tribes, has upheld "tolerance" among these groups. The arrival of the Aryan community in India during the Vedic era brought various customary practices that were introduced and gradually integrated into Indian society. Among them was the Varna system, which stratified Indian society according to class and caste. The people were classified according to their professions. The Manusmriti set forth the responsibilities, rights, laws, behavior, and ideals for various genders and classes within Indian society.It contributed to the formation of social norms and functioned as a Dharmashastraa text on dharma (righteousness or duty)offering guidance rather than mandatory laws within Indian society. During this period, the division of roles between men and women led society to begin developing a gender disparity between the two groups. As time

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passed, women's roles began to be suppressed as men were entrusted with greater authority to manage responsibilities both outside and within the home. They began to dominate various areas: social, economic, and political. The role of women was to manage the household and bear children.

Even today, discrimination is often observed in various or all communities in India, where women are granted fewer rights than men since birth. However, the Constitution of India states about the essential principle of non-discrimination and that every Indian citizen (irrespective of religion, race, caste, gender, or birthplace) has the right to this principle. Despite this, discrimination appears to be ingrained in those who uphold the notion of patriarchy.

As Raja Ram Mohan Roy critically observed,

"The Hindu wife is never regarded as the partner of her husband, but rather as his slave, to be treated with severity and kept in utter subjection."

This early critique of gender oppression laid the groundwork for reform movements advocating women's rights and education.

In India, the judiciary has taken on a proactive role in tackling and eradicating different manifestations of injustice in society by upholding the principles laid out in the Indian Constitution. Although judicial processes can occasionally take a long time, the courts have reliably served as a watchful protector, drawing attention to important social problems and providing remedies designed to promote equality and harmony. In the end, the judiciary serves as a cornerstone of justice, protecting the rights and dignity of every citizen in the nation.

Status of Women and the Current Indian Patriarchy Trend

In the Indian society, patriarchy exists in varying degrees, it is scattered unevenly, with some places having more of it and others less. Women are frequently targeted in various environments, including their work-places and their in-laws' homes. This targeting also occurs within their own homes, where parents may show preferential treatment to sons over daughters, hoping that their sons will care for them in old age. However, they overlook the fact that it is their own actions that are causing their sons to remain detached from empathy and justice. In many workplaces, women face sexual and psychological harassment from their superiors or colleagues. Often, they endure this mistreatment in silence, fearing that if they speak up or resist, their husbands or parents may force them to quit their jobs and restrict their independence.

With growing awareness in society about the challenges and atrocities faced by women, many families are adopting a more progressive approach in raising their children—treating sons and daughters as equals. Parents, in particular, are becoming increasingly mindful of providing their daughters with quality education and encouraging financial independence, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-reliance from an early age. This is a commendable step by parents, especially in the context of prevailing societal attitudes toward women. By empowering their daughters with education and independence, they aim to ensure that their daughters are not reliant on their husbands after marriage and can lead dignified, self-respecting lives.

While modern Indian women increasingly enjoy independence— choosing their careers, managing their finances, and leading self-directed lives the shadow of patriarchy still looms large. This traditional force has not vanished but rather evolved, adopting modern forms to subtly undermine women's autonomy. It now operates in more covert ways, attempting to remind women of the so-called "reality" of Indian society, as defined by patriarchal norms, and push them back into roles long challenged by progress. Married working women often face criticism for pursuing careers, exercising financial autonomy, and making independent decisions. Ironically, one of the major forces hindering their progress is other women particularly those who have themselves endured patriarchal constraints. Rather than breaking the cycle, some of them perpetuate it, expecting the next generation to conform to the same limitations they once faced. This resistance is not limited to in-laws; many husbands, too, perceive their wives' independence as a threat to their “male ego,” revealing how deeply ingrained gender norms continue to shape attitudes, even in modern households. One of the major tools of constraint used by the husbands is taking away of their wives' financial autonomy and their decision-making power.

Wives are often expected to seek permission before making decisions, rather than being trusted to act on their own will. But why is the same expectation not placed on husbands? The imbalance is clear. That said, there are couples who genuinely respect each other's autonomy, boundaries, and choices, relationships built on mutual understanding and equality. Such couples often come from backgrounds where either they were raised with strong values of fairness or witnessed inequality firsthand and chose a different path, grounded in justice and mutual respect. However, most men today, having grown up without facing consequences for neglecting household responsibilities and often relying on their mothers to manage such tasks, have learned to control and manipulate their wives into assuming these duties. They expect their wives to suppress their own voices and comply without question.

The modern methods of suppressing women's rights and confining their independence have become so widespread that, despite financial autonomy and professional success, many women feel compelled to adopt submissiveness to preserve their families. A large number of women are forced to relinquish the independent ideals and aspirations they cultivated through years of education and personal growth, surrendering them to manipulative and controlling husbandswho remain the primary enforcers of patriarchal norms.

Transformation of the Indian Society : Constitutional Analysis

Women's active participation in the independence struggleexemplified by leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay brought critical attention to gender issues. These prominent figures in the freedom movement, closely intertwined with the emerging women's rights movement, advocated for political, social, and educational equality for women. The post-independence period, marked by the drafting of the Constitution, was a defining moment that laid the formal foundation for gender rights in India.

The Costitution of India, as the supreme law of the land, is founded on the core principles of Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, which collectively shape its entire framework. Part III of the Constitution outlines the Fundamental Rights, essential rights that are inalienable and cannot be taken away from any individual, whether a citizen or a non-citizen. These rights are conferred upon every citizen of India from the moment of birth.

In addition to granting women equality, the Constitution of India empowers the State to implement measures of positive discrimination in their favour to counteract the cumulative socio-economic, educational, and political disadvantages they experience. Among others, Fundamental Rights guarantee equality before the law and equal legal protection; prohibits any form of discrimination against citizens based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth and ensures equal employment opportunities for all citizens.

However, despite educational institutions actively promoting awareness about women's rights, families that reject these values often create environments that hinder their children from truly understanding the principles of equality and justice. Fathers who mistreat their mothers— neglecting their needs and failing to support them in times of difficultyset damaging examples. Moreover, many mothers reinforce traditional gender roles by teaching their sons from a young age which tasks are “meant” for men and which for women, often preventing their sons from participating in household chores and fostering dependence instead. At the same time, daughters are raised with the expectation that their primary role is to serve the family.

The historical context in which the Indian Constitution was framed, combined with its fundamental provisions serves as the cornerstone of legal efforts to dismantle patriarchal structures. The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy, have reinforced these constitutional guarantees, driving significant social and legal advancements toward gender justice. Yet, despite these powerful tools embedded within the Constitution, the pursuit of gender equality remains a continuous and evolving struggle one that demands persistent vigilance, sustained activism, and robust legal enforcement to challenge and transform deeply rooted societal norms.

Imposition of Justice in the Indian Society : Judicial Activism

The Indian judiciary, often regarded as a guardian of justice and equality, functions within the broader societal fabric of a nation rich in cultural diversity and tradition. Yet, woven into many of these traditions is the enduring presence of patriarchya social system in which men historically occupy dominant positions of power, including in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control over economic resources. This pervasive influence inevitably shapes legal interpretations and institutional practices, posing complex challenges to the judiciary's mission of upholding constitutional ideals of gender equality.

In a Supreme Court's judgment in the *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* case was a landmark moment in the struggle for Muslim women's rights in India. It revolved around Shah Bano's plea for maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC after being divorced by her husband. The Supreme Court ruled in

her favour, holding that a Muslim husband isobligated to provide maintenance to his divorced wife beyond the *iddat* period if she cannot support herself. This judgment highlighted the gaps in Muslim personal law regarding financial support and sparked intense public debate. While some saw it as judicial overreach into religious matters, others viewed it as a critical step toward ensuring gender justice. The case had lasting legal, political, and social implications for Muslim women's rights in India.

In another case of *Vishaka and Ors. v. State of Rajasthan and Ors.*, related to sexual harassment at workplace, the Supreme Court of India addressed workplace sexual harassment stemming from the gang-rape of a social worker in Rajasthan. Responding to petitions by women's rights groups, the Court held that sexual harassment at work violates women's Fundamental Rights (Arts. 14, 15, 21) of the Constitution of India. The Court also emphasized the urgent need for protective measures and laid down comprehensive guidelines to prevent and redress such incidents. These guidelines later formed the basis of the statutory law, i.e., Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

In a landmark judgment on decriminalizing Adultery in *Joseph Shine v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court struck down Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code, declaring it unconstitutional for violating Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution. The Court held that the provision, which criminalized a man for engaging in sexual relations with a married woman without her husband's consent, was inherently patriarchal and discriminatory. The law did not penalize the woman or allow her to take actionagainst her husband for similar behaviour. It was widely criticized for treating women as the property of their husbands and denied them agency, thereby infringing upon the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and personal liberty enshrined in the Constitution.

Justice Krishna quoted the statute to emphasize its patriarchal framework –

"It is only on this paternalistic notion of a woman being likened to a chattel... that no offence is committed if the husband consents or connives."

In another case of Sabarimala Temple, *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala*, wherein the women in their menstruating stage were denied the entry in the temple of Lord Ayyappa, that infringed the Fundamental Rights of the women (Arts. 14,15,21, 25), Hon'ble Chief Justice of India at the time, Ranjan Gogoi, held that –

"The attribute of devotion to divinity cannot be subjected the rigidity and stereotypes of gender. The dualism that persists in religion by glorifying and venerating women as goddess on one hand and by imposing rigorous sanctions on the other hand in matters of devotion has to be abandoned. Such a dualistic approach and entrenched mindset and results in indignity to women and degradation of their status. The society has to undergo a perceptual shift from being the propagator of hegemonic patriarchal notions of demanding more exacting standards of purity and chastity solely from women to be the cultivator of equality where the woman is in no way considered frailer, lesser, or inferior to the man."

The Supreme Court's verdict triggered widespread protests, especially after women attempting to enter the temple in October were blocked by demonstrators. Tensions peaked when Bindu Ammini and Kanaka-durga successfully entered the temple on January 2, sparking outrage and unrest across the State.

Prior to the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, daughters in a Hindu Joint Family did not have coparcenary rights and could only inherit their father's separate property, not ancestral property by birth. The 2005 amendment to Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act granted daughters equal coparcenary rights from birth, placing them on par with sons in matters of inheritance and ownership within the joint family property. The Supreme Court in the case of *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*, clarified that the 2005 amendment to the Hindu Succession Act applies retrospectively, granting daughters equal coparcenary rights from the date of enactment. It also ruled that only genuine partitions made before December 20, 2004, would be recognized, preventing misuse through notional partitions. This landmark judgment marked a significant step toward gender equality in Hindu family property rights.

The Indian judiciary has shown a mixed trajectory in its approach to women's issues over the years. In the decades following independence, particularly up to the 1970s, the judiciary largely reflected a conservative and restrictive mindset, often reinforcing prevailing social norms. However, from the late 1980s onward, a shift toward judicial activism became evident, with courts increasingly adopting a progressive stance on gender justice. This trend gained momentum in the 1990s and beyond, marking a significant transformation in the judiciary's role in advancing women's rights.

Conclusion

A courageous vision for a fair and egalitarian society is established by the Constitution of India. However, the enduring presence of patriarchymanifested both openly and subtly highlights the limitations of legal reform when it is not accompanied by social change. While judicial activism has opened the door for gender-sensitive interpretations of the law, laws by themselves cannot eradicate centuries of entrenched bias. Only through the commitment of families, schools, institutions, and individuals to internalize the values of justice and equality can true transformation become possible. It is essential to combat patriarchy in both living rooms and courtrooms.

Even with the constitutional guarantees of justice, liberty, equality, and dignity, Indian society is still profoundly rooted in patriarchal norms that restrict women's freedom and potential. Although education, legal reforms, and judicial interventions have been vital in addressing gender-based discrimination, these measures alone cannot eradicate the effects of social conditioning that has persisted for centuries. The true challenge is not only found in legal texts or judicial settings, but also in the domestic sphere, at work, and in daily exchanges— these are the places where patriarchy is quietly and steadily upheld.

Women in India, while being victims of patriarchy, sometimes also act as enforcers of its normsan irony that highlights the deep entrenchment of these actions. Due to factors such as unequal marriage expectations and limitations on financial independence, women frequently have to battle for rights that

were granted to them by the constitution many years ago. Until women are valued by society not just as dependents or caretakers, but as equal participants in all areassocial, economic, and politicalthe principles of the Indian Constitution will only be partially fulfilled.

While Indian women today are more educated, independent, and professionally accomplished than ever before, the grip of patriarchy remains far from loosenedit has merely evolved. No longer limited to overt restrictions, patriarchal control now manifests through more subtle yet equally damaging means: emotional manipulation, mental abuse through taunts by in-laws, verbal degradation by husbands, and the curbing of financial autonomy. These modern tactics are designed to push women back into silence, despite the progress they have made.

This raises a critical question are bangles still a symbol of grace and culture, or have they become shackles that bind women to oppressive traditions masked by social norms? True liberation lies not just in education or financial independence, but in reshaping mindsetswithin families, marriages, and society at large. Until mutual respect, dignity, and equality become the foundation of all relationships, the struggle against patriarchy will remain an ongoing battle. The need of the hour is not just reform, but transformation where equality isn't granted as a favor, but upheld as a right. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who is known as the "Father of the Indian Constitution" emphasized the centrality of women's progress to society's advancement –

"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved."

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Indian Knowledge System and B. R. Ambedkar's Ideas: Towards Social Justice and Inclusive Development

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Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a diverse intellectual tradition that has contributed significantly to India's philosophical, ethical, scientific, and cultural development. It includes various streams of knowledge such as Vedic philosophy, Buddhist ethics, Jain thought, indigenous practices, medicine, ecological wisdom, and political ideas. However, the historical evolution of these traditions has also been shaped by social hierarchies, particularly the caste system, which restricted access to knowledge and reinforced unequal social relations.

This research paper critically examines the Indian Knowledge System through the perspective of B. R. Ambedkar's ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity, and constitutional morality. The study argues that while IKS contains valuable intellectual resources, its contemporary relevance depends on a critical and democratic reinterpretation that rejects exclusionary practices. Ambedkar's critique of caste and his emphasis on social democracy provide an important framework for transforming knowledge systems into inclusive instruments of social justice.

Using a qualitative and analytical approach, the paper explores the relationship between traditional knowledge systems and democratic values. It highlights the significance of inclusive education, equal access to knowledge, and representation of marginalized communities in knowledge production. The paper concludes that integrating Ambedkarite principles with the progressive dimensions of IKS can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive model of development in contemporary India.

Keywords : Indian Knowledge System, B. R. Ambedkar, Social Justice, Constitutional Morality, Inclusive Development, Caste, Democracy

Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a broad and multidimensional intellectual heritage developed through centuries of philosophical inquiry, scientific exploration, ethical reflection, and social experience. Indian traditions have produced significant contributions in areas such as philosophy, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, literature, governance, and ecological understanding. Institutions such as ancient universities, including Nalanda and

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Takshashila, symbolize India's historical engagement with knowledge and learning.

At the same time, the development of knowledge traditions in India cannot be separated from the social structures within which they evolved. The caste system created unequal access to education and intellectual resources, resulting in the exclusion of large sections of society from formal knowledge production. The control of knowledge by privileged groups contributed to the continuation of social hierarchy and discrimination. In this context, the ideas of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar provide a critical framework for understanding and transforming knowledge systems. Ambedkar viewed social equality as the foundation of democracy and argued that political freedom cannot survive without social democracy. His principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity offer a basis for evaluating traditional institutions and practices.

Ambedkar's critique of caste was not merely a social criticism but also an epistemological challenge. He questioned systems that denied human dignity and restricted access to knowledge. Therefore, examining IKS through an Ambedkarite perspective helps in identifying both its contributions and contradictions. This paper argues that the integration of Ambedkarite thought with the progressive elements of IKS can create a transformative framework for inclusive development. Such an approach does not reject India's intellectual heritage but seeks to reconstruct it according to constitutional values and democratic principles.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Scholars have extensively studied B. R. Ambedkar's contribution to social justice, democracy, and caste analysis. Gail Omvedt describes Ambedkar as a radical social thinker who challenged traditional structures of inequality and developed a democratic vision based on human dignity and equality. Similarly, Christophe Jaffrelot examines Ambedkar's struggle against untouchability and highlights his role in transforming marginalized communities into political subjects.

Gopal Guru emphasizes the experiential dimension of caste and argues that social exclusion affects not only economic opportunities but also the production and recognition of knowledge. His work demonstrates that marginalized communities have historically faced epistemic exclusion, where their experiences and perspectives were denied legitimacy.

Amartya Sen highlights the argumentative and pluralistic nature of Indian intellectual traditions. According to Sen, Indian civilization has always included debates, disagreements, and multiple perspectives. This approach provides support for a more inclusive understanding of IKS.

Sharmila Rege's analysis of Brahmanical dominance further contributes to understanding the relationship between caste and knowledge. She argues for alternative epistemologies that recognize the experiences and voices of marginalized communities.

Although existing scholarship has examined Ambedkar's philosophy and Indian intellectual traditions separately, limited research has focused on their possible synthesis for contemporary inclusive development. This paper attempts to address this research gap by exploring how Ambedkarite principles can guide the reinterpretation of IKS within the framework of constitutional morality.

Research Objectives

The major objectives of this study are –

1. To examine the historical contributions and limitations of the Indian Knowledge System.
2. To analyze B. R. Ambedkar's ideas regarding knowledge, equality, and social justice.
3. To explore the possibility of integrating Ambedkarite philosophy with IKS for inclusive development.
4. To examine the contemporary relevance of this synthesis in education, governance, and public policy.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology. The research is based on textual analysis of primary and secondary sources related to Indian Knowledge Systems and Ambedkarite thought. Primary sources include Ambedkar's major works such as *Annihilation of Caste* and *States and Minorities*. Secondary sources include scholarly writings by Gail Omvedt, Gopal Guru, Christophe Jaffrelot, Sharmila Rege, Amartya Sen, and other scholars working on caste, democracy, and knowledge traditions.

The analytical framework of the study is based on critical social theory and normative political analysis. The research evaluates the compatibility between traditional knowledge systems and constitutional values such as equality, justice, dignity, and democratic participation. The study recognizes that IKS is not a single homogeneous tradition but a complex collection of diverse intellectual practices. Therefore, it focuses on those aspects of IKS that promote ethical development, social welfare, and human dignity while critically examining historical forms of exclusion.

Indian Knowledge System : Contributions and Contradictions

The Indian Knowledge System represents a wide range of intellectual traditions that have contributed to philosophy, ethics, science, medicine, governance, and environmental understanding. Ancient centres of learning such as Nalanda and Takshashila reflected a culture of intellectual inquiry and debate. Indian contributions in mathematics, astronomy, Ayurveda, yoga, linguistics, and political thought demonstrate the depth and diversity of these traditions. The ethical dimensions of Indian philosophical traditions emphasized concepts such as harmony, duty, compassion, and the interconnectedness between human beings and nature. Buddhist and Jain traditions, for example, promoted non-violence, ethical conduct, and compassion as important principles of social life. Indigenous knowledge traditions also contributed significantly to sustainable practices, agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and community-based resource management.

However, the historical development of knowledge systems was also influenced by social inequalities. Access to education and intellectual resources was often controlled through caste-based structures. The exclusion of marginalized communities from formal learning institutions created unequal participation in knowledge production. The caste system not only organized social relations but also affected access to intellectual and cultural resources. B. R. Ambedkar critically examined this relationship between caste and knowledge. According to him, caste represented a

system of graded inequality that denied equal opportunities and human dignity. Therefore, any contemporary understanding of IKS must recognize both its intellectual achievements and its historical limitations.

A critical approach does not mean rejecting the entire tradition but rather distinguishing between knowledge that promotes human welfare and practices that reinforce social inequality. Such an approach allows IKS to evolve according to democratic values.

Ambedkarite Thought and the Idea of Social Justice

B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy is fundamentally based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He argued that democracy is not merely a political arrangement but a way of social life based on mutual respect and equal dignity. For Ambedkar, political democracy could not survive without social democracy. His critique of caste was central to his vision of social transformation. In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar argued that caste destroys the possibility of social unity and prevents the development of a genuinely democratic society. He believed that social reform requires challenging institutions and traditions that legitimize inequality.

Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality provides an important framework for evaluating social institutions. Constitutional morality requires citizens and institutions to uphold equality, justice, and individual dignity. Therefore, traditional knowledge systems must be interpreted through constitutional principles rather than accepted without critical examination. Ambedkar's engagement with Buddhism also reflects his search for an ethical and rational social philosophy. He viewed Buddhism as a tradition based on equality, compassion, and rational inquiry. His interpretation of Buddhism offered an alternative moral framework against social discrimination.

Thus, Ambedkarite thought provides a valuable perspective for transforming IKS into a more inclusive knowledge system where every community has equal participation in the creation and transmission of knowledge.

Contemporary Relevance and Case Analysis

The synthesis of IKS and Ambedkarite thought has significant relevance in contemporary India. The constitutional framework of India reflects many values emphasized by Ambedkar, particularly equality, social justice, and protection of disadvantaged groups. Reservation policies in education and employment represent an attempt to address historical exclusion and provide opportunities for marginalized communities. Although debates continue regarding affirmative action, these policies reflect the principle that social equality requires corrective measures.

The National Education Policy (2020) emphasizes Indian knowledge traditions, multidisciplinary learning, and inclusive education. However, the incorporation of IKS into education requires careful attention to diversity and constitutional values. A balanced approach should include multiple perspectives and avoid presenting knowledge traditions through a single social or cultural viewpoint.

Digital education and expanding access to technology also provide opportunities for democratizing knowledge. Online platforms, open educational resources, and multilingual education can help reduce barriers to

learning. Furthermore, contemporary Dalit movements continue to highlight the importance of dignity, representation, and equality. These movements demonstrate the continuing relevance of Ambedkar's ideas in addressing social inequalities.

Challenges and Future Prospects

The integration of IKS with Ambedkarite principles faces several challenges. One major challenge is the tendency to view traditional knowledge either through complete acceptance or complete rejection. A balanced and critical approach is necessary for meaningful transformation. Another challenge is institutional inequality. Despite constitutional guarantees, social and educational disparities continue to influence access to knowledge. Ensuring representation and participation of marginalized communities remains an important task.

There is also a need for greater academic research on the relationship between traditional knowledge and social justice. Universities and research institutions should encourage interdisciplinary studies combining history, political science, sociology, philosophy, and education. The future of IKS depends on its ability to adapt to democratic principles. A knowledge system that promotes equality, scientific thinking, and human dignity can contribute significantly to inclusive development.

Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge System represents a valuable intellectual heritage with significant contributions to philosophy, science, ethics, and social thought. However, its historical relationship with caste-based hierarchy requires critical examination. The ideas of B. R. Ambedkar provide an important framework for this evaluation by emphasizing liberty, equality, fraternity, and constitutional morality. The integration of Ambedkarite thought with the progressive dimensions of IKS can create a transformative model of knowledge production. Such a model would preserve valuable intellectual traditions while eliminating exclusionary practices. It would ensure that knowledge becomes a tool of empowerment rather than a source of inequality. In contemporary India, the objective should be to develop an inclusive knowledge system that recognizes diversity, promotes rational inquiry, and ensures equal participation. A reimagined IKS guided by Ambedkar's vision of social justice can contribute meaningfully to democratic development and the creation of an equitable society.

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Evolution of Affirmative Action Policies and Their Political Implications in India

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Abstract

This paper traces the evolution of affirmative action policies in India from the colonial period to the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations. It argues that while reservations for the SCs and the STs institutionalised constitutional safeguards against historical discrimination, the struggle over OBC reservations produced a new political consciousness that reshaped democratic competition. The paper, therefore, considers affirmative action not merely as a redistributive policy but as a catalyst for the democratisation of political power in India.

Keywords : Reservation, caste, mobilisation, representation.

Introduction

Affirmative action has been one of the defining instruments of social justice in postcolonial India. Designed to address centuries of structural exclusion rooted in the caste system, it sought to improve access to education and public employment for marginalised communities. While the constitutional commitment to reservations for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) emerged from the recognition of their historical oppression, extending similar safeguards to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) proved considerably more contentious. The debate over OBC reservations centred on a fundamental question: should caste remain the principal criterion for identifying social backwardness, or should an economic indicator replace it? The answer to this question shaped the trajectory of democratic politics in India.

Affirmative Action Policies before Independence

The origins of affirmative action in India predate independence and can be traced to provincial initiatives introduced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These early measures were primarily intended to improve educational opportunities and public employment for communities that had long remained outside the sphere of state administration. Although they were limited in scope, they established the principle that historically disadvantaged social groups required targeted state intervention to achieve meaningful equality.

Among the provinces, Madras pioneered some of the earliest experiments in preferential policies (Government of India, 1980). The Grant-in-Aid Code of 1885 provided educational assistance to students belonging to the depressed classes, reflecting the growing recognition

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that formal equality alone could not overcome entrenched social dis-advantages. During the early twentieth century, the Madras Presidency further expanded representation for non-Brahmin communities in government employment through a series of administrative measures, thereby introducing one of the earliest quota systems in colonial India. Similar developments occurred in Mysore, where the Miller Committee recommended increased representation of non-Brahmins in public services and greater educational opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups. In Bombay, the State Committee classified backward communities into depressed classes, aboriginal and hill tribes, and other backward classes, recommending targeted interventions in education and government recruitment.

These provincial initiatives gradually influenced policy at the all-India level. The Montague–Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 marked the first systematic attempt to recognise the claims of historically disadvantaged communities by introducing separate representation for the depressed classes in various public institutions (Government of India, 1980). Although the terminology used for the communities during this period was fluid, these developments laid the foundations for later constitutional categories such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.

Early Post-Independence Policies

The adoption of the Constitution transformed affirmative action from a collection of provincial experiments into a national commitment to social justice. Recognising that formal legal equality could not eliminate deeply embedded social hierarchies, the Constitution empowered the state to adopt special measures for historically disadvantaged communities. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) authorised the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes as well as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, while Article 340 empowered the President to appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes and recommend measures for their advancement.

Reservations for SCs and STs became an integral component of India's constitutional architecture from the very beginning. Their implementation represented not only a policy of compensatory discrimination but also an attempt to integrate historically excluded communities into the institutions of the democratic state. The position of the Other Backward Classes, however, remained considerably more uncertain. While the Constitution recognised the existence of socially and educationally backward classes, it did not specify the criteria for identifying them. This ambiguity generated one of the earliest debates in independent India regarding the relationship between caste, backwardness, and equality. The Union Government sought to reconcile the constitutional commitment to social justice with concerns that explicit reliance on caste might perpetuate rather than diminish social divisions. Consequently, the identification of backward classes became the responsibility of the First Backward Classes Commission, chaired by Kakasaheb Kalelkar.

The First Backward Classes Commission and Contention over Caste

The President appointed the First Backward Classes Commission under the chairpersonship of Kakasaheb Kalelkar on 29 January 1953 in accordance with Article 340 of the Constitution. The Commission was entrusted with identifying socially and educationally backward classes, examining the nature of

their disadvantages, and recommending appropriate measures for their advancement (Government of India, 1955). Although its immediate objective was to address the concerns of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the Commission adopted a broader perspective by examining the multiple dimensions of backwardness, including educational, social, economic, occupational and political deprivation.

The Commission recognised that backwardness in India was deeply embedded in the hierarchical caste order. While factors such as poverty and lack of education contributed to social disadvantage, it argued that these conditions were themselves products of historically unequal social relations. Consequently, caste emerged as the principal criterion for identifying backward classes. On this basis, the Commission recommended a wide range of measures extending beyond reservations in public employment. These included educational concessions, scholarships, hostels, improved representation in public services, economic assistance, rural development programmes and institutional reforms aimed at enhancing the socio-economic status of backward communities. Thus, the Commission envisaged affirmative action as a comprehensive strategy of social transformation rather than merely a policy of reservations.

Despite the breadth of its recommendations, the Commission failed to present a unanimous report. Five commission members disapproved of the report (Jaffrelot, 2003a). Even the commission chairperson distanced himself from the report after signing it. Although the report had identified caste as the most reliable indicator of social backwardness, Kalelkar, in a detailed forwarding letter accompanying the report, argued that reservations based primarily on caste might perpetuate caste consciousness and deepen social divisions(Government of India, 1955). Instead, he favoured greater reliance on economic measures and developmental programmes that would benefit disadvantaged sections across communities. Kalelkar's reversal considerably weakened the political authority of the Commission.

Government Response and Divergent Regional Trajectories

The Union Government ultimately declined to accept the recommendations of the Kalelkar Commission. When the report was presented before Parliament in 1956, the accompanying memorandum emphasised the absence of consensus within the Commission and questioned the desirability of identifying backward classes primarily through caste (Government of India, 1980). Although the Government rejected an all-India policy, it delegated considerable discretion to the states. In 1961, the Ministry of Home Affairs advised state governments to determine their own criteria for identifying backward classes and implementing appropriate welfare measures. This decision produced significant regional variation in affirmative action policies.

The southern states responded much more proactively than most states in northern India. Building upon pre-independence provincial reservations, states such as Tamil Nadu, Mysore (later Karnataka), Kerala and Andhra Pradesh established commissions and expanded reservation policies during the 1950s and 1960s (Jaffrelot, 2003). In contrast, most northern states initiated similar exercises only during the 1970s. These regional differences had political consequences. In North India, the prolonged absence of comprehensive OBC reservations transformed affirmative action into an issue of political mobilisation.

Mobilisation of the Backward Castes

The Union Government's reluctance to implement the recommendations of the Kalelkar Commission did not diminish demands for affirmative action; instead, it stimulated a new phase of political mobilisation among backward caste organisations. The rejection of caste as the principal criterion for identifying backwardness was perceived by many leaders as a denial of the structural realities that shaped social and educational disadvantage. Consequently, the demand for reservations gradually evolved from an administrative issue into a broader political movement centred on representation, dignity and participation in state institutions.

A significant role in this mobilisation was played by the All India Backward Classes Federation (AIBCF), which emerged as one of the principal platforms articulating the interests of the Other Backward Classes during the 1960s (Jaffrelot, 2003). Its national conferences brought together activists from different regions and castes who demanded the implementation of the Kalelkar Commission's recommendations, publication of an all-India list of backward classes, expansion of educational opportunities and reservations in public employment proportional to their population. Unlike earlier caste associations that largely represented the interests of individual communities, the Federation attempted to construct a broader political identity encompassing diverse backward caste groups. In doing so, it argued that caste, rather than economic status alone, constituted the principal basis of social exclusion and therefore had to remain the foundation of affirmative action policies.

The movement also encouraged collaboration among communities that had previously pursued separate social and political agendas(Jaffrelot, 2003). Organisations representing Kurmis, Koeris, Yadavs and several other backward castes increasingly recognised that collective political action offered greater prospects for securing state recognition than isolated caste-based mobilisation. The emergence of the category "Other Backward Classes" itself facilitated this process by providing a common administrative and political identity under which diverse communities could organise. Affirmative action, therefore, did more than promise access to education and public employment; it created a new framework through which historically dispersed caste groups could articulate shared political interests.

The Second Backward Classes Commission

Responding to the growing demands for reservation, Prime Minister Morarji Desai constituted the Second Backward Classes Commission on 1 January 1979 under the chairpersonship of Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal. The Commission sought to overcome earlier controversies by developing objective criteria for identifying backwardness. Recognising that social disadvantage in India could not be understood solely in economic terms, it employed a combination of social, educational and economic indicators while continuing to acknowledge caste as the principal unit through which historical discrimination was experienced (Government of India, 1980). This multi-dimensional approach reflected the Commission's attempt to reconcile constitutional principles with the social realities of Indian society. It also provided a more rigorous empirical basis for identifying backward communities than had been available to the Kalelkar Commission.

After estimating that the Other Backward Classes constituted approximately 52 per cent of India's population, the Commission recommended 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in appointments under the Union Government(Government of India, 1980). This figure was deliberately fixed so that the total reservation, including the existing 22.5 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, would remain within the judicially accepted ceiling of 50 per cent. The Commission further recommended that OBC candidates selected on merit should not be counted against the reserved quota, that reservation should extend to promotions, and that unfilled vacancies should be carried forward for a limited period. In addition, it proposed relaxation in age limits, a roster system for appointments, and extension of reservations to public sector undertakings, universities and institutions receiving government assistance.

Importantly, the Commission viewed reservations as only one component of a broader programme for social transformation. It recommended expansion of educational facilities in backward areas, establishment of residential schools and hostels, financial assistance for students, technical training, support for village artisans, land reforms and the creation of dedicated institutions for the socio-economic development of backward classes (Government of India, 1980). It also proposed establishing separate Backward Classes Development Corporations and specialised ministries at both the Union and state levels to supervise the implementation of welfare programmes. These recommendations reflected the Commission's understanding that reservations alone could not eliminate the structural inequalities produced by caste-based exclusion.

Although the report was submitted in 1980, successive governments hesitated to implement its recommendations because of the political sensitivity surrounding caste-based reservations. Nevertheless, the Commission fundamentally transformed the national debate on affirmative action. By providing a comprehensive empirical justification for recognising the Other Backward Classes as a distinct category deserving constitutional protection, it supplied the intellectual and administrative foundation upon which the next phase of democratic mobilisation would be built.

Transformation of Democratic Politics

The issue of reservations for OBCs re-emerged during the 1989 general elections when the Janata Dal pledged to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations. Following the formation of the National Front Government under Prime Minister V. P. Singh, the Union Government announced on 7 August 1990 that it would reserve 27 per cent of vacancies in Central Government services for the Other Backward Classes. The decision marked one of the most consequential policy interventions in post-independence India, extending the constitutional logic of affirmative action beyond the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to a much larger segment of the population.

The announcement triggered intense political and social reactions across the country (Jaffrelot, 2006; Kumar, 2018). Sections of the upper castes, particularly students in several northern states, organised widespread protests against the decision. Organisations opposing the implementation of the Mandal Commission demanded the withdrawal of reservations and, in some instances, questioned the continuation of existing quotas for the Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes. The anti-reservation movement highlighted the persistence of deep social divisions over the meaning of equality and the appropriate methods for addressing historical disadvantage.

Equally significant, however, was the counter-mobilisation generated by the implementation of the Mandal recommendations. Backward caste organisations and political leaders interpreted the protests as an attempt to preserve the traditional dominance of upper castes within state institutions. The implementation of reservations therefore reinforced a shared political identity among diverse OBC communities and encouraged greater participation in democratic politics. Rather than treating reservations merely as employment benefits, backward caste leaders increasingly framed them as instruments of social justice, political representation and democratic inclusion. The Mandal moment consequently strengthened alliances among OBC communities and facilitated closer cooperation between backward caste and Dalit political leadership on issues relating to representation and social equality(Jaffrelot, 2003).

The political consequences of this transformation were profound. The implementation of OBC reservations contributed to the restructuring of electoral competition, particularly in North India. Communities that had previously remained under-represented in legislatures and executive institutions increasingly mobilised behind parties that claimed to represent backward caste interests. As electoral participation among lower caste groups expanded, the social composition of Parliament and state legislatures gradually became more representative of India's broader social structure(Hasan, 2006, 2011; Jaffrelot, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2021; Witsoe, 2012, 2013; Yadav, 2000). Political authority, once concentrated primarily among upper caste elites, became increasingly dispersed across historically marginalised communities.

The significance of the Mandal Commission therefore extends well beyond the introduction of reservations in public employment. Its implementation transformed the relationship between caste and democracy by converting historically excluded social groups into organised political constituencies capable of influencing public policy and electoral outcomes. Affirmative action thus emerged not merely as an instrument of redistributive justice but as a mechanism through which democratic participation itself was broadened. The politics of representation that followed the implementation of the Mandal recommendations fundamentally altered the balance of power within Indian democracy and continues to shape electoral competition and public policy in contemporary India.

Conclusion

The evolution of affirmative action in India demonstrates that policies designed to address historical inequalities can also reshape the nature of democratic politics. Beginning with limited provincial initiatives during the colonial period, affirmative action gradually developed into a constitutional commitment to social justice through safeguards for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the recognition of socially and educationally backward classes.

The implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations represented the culmination of decades of mobilisation by backward caste organisations seeking greater representation within state institutions. More importantly, it transformed affirmative action from an administrative

policy into a powerful instrument of political mobilisation. By providing historically disadvantaged communities with a common political identity and greater access to public institutions, affirmative action contributed to the democratisation of political power and altered the social composition of India's representative institutions.

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Working on the Platform : The Gig Economy and Its Effects on Labor Rights, Job Security and Collective Bargaining

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital labor platforms has reorganized how a growing share of the global workforce finds work, is managed, and is paid. Synthesizing legal, sociological, and economic evidence, this article assesses how the gig economy affects three interlocking pillars of the employment relationship: labor rights, job security, and collective bargaining. Drawing on institutional data from the International labor Organization, the European Commission, Eurostat, the World Bank, and the Pew Research Center alongside peer-reviewed scholarship, it argues that the gig economy does not abolish the employment relationship so much as disguise it recharacterising controlled, dependent work as independent enterprise, a move that simultaneously withdraws statutory rights, transfers market risk onto individuals, and, through competition law, can render collective action unlawful. Platform numbers rose roughly fivefold between 2010 and 2020, yet earnings are low and volatile, involuntary underemployment is widespread, and most workers remain outside social protection. Assessing recent correctives from *Uber BV v Aslam* (2021) to Directive (EU) 2024/2831 and the ILO's 2026 Convention on decent work in the platform economy, it concludes that decent platform work requires a rebuttable presumption of employment, portable social protection, algorithmic transparency, and enabling frameworks for collective representation.

Keywords : Gig economy, platform work,labor rights, job security, collective bargaining, algorithmic management, employment classification, social protection

Introduction

Over little more than a decade, the digital labor platform has moved from a Silicon Valley curiosity to a structural feature of labor markets across the world. Platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and Up work now mediate the exchange of labor for pay through Smartphone applications and websites, matching the supply of workers with the demand of consumers and businesses in real time. The economic model has been celebrated for the flexibility and market access it offers, and criticized for the insecurity and diminished

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rights it can entail. What is no longer in dispute is its scale: the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2021) estimates that the number of digital labor platforms grew roughly fivefold between 2010 and 2020, and the World Bank now places the global population of online gig workers at between 154 and 435 million people, equivalent to 4.4 to 12.5 per cent of the global labor force (Datta et al., 2023).

This article examines the consequences of that transformation for three interdependent pillars of modern labor relations. The first is *labor rights*the floor of statutory entitlements, from minimum wages and working-time limits to protection against unfair dismissal, that attaches to the legal status of "employee." The second is *job security*the reasonable expectation of continued work and predictable income that allows workers to plan their lives. The third is *collective bargaining* the capacity of workers to combine and negotiate the terms of their labour, long regarded as the principal institutional counterweight to the asymmetric power of employers. These three pillars are analytically distinct but causally entangled: the classification of a worker as an independent contractor simultaneously removes statutory rights, shifts market risk onto the individual, and, through competition law, can render collective bargaining unlawful.

The central argument advanced here is that the gig economy does not so much abolish the employment relationship as *disguise* it. Platforms typically exercise substantial control over how, when, and at what price work is performed through algorithmic direction, rating systems, and the power of deactivation while contractually characterizing workers as independent businesses (De Stefano, 2016; Prassl, 2018). This mismatch between the economic reality of subordination and its legal form is the fault line along which the debates over rights, security, and voice all run. Recent years have seen a wave of judicial, legislative, and international responses seeking to close the gap, culminating in Directive (EU) 2024/2831 and the adoption in 2026 of the first binding international labor standard dedicated to platform work.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 conceptualizes the gig economy, distinguishing its principal forms and documenting its scale and demographics. Section 3 analyses labor rights and the problem of employment classification, reviewing the landmark cases and statutes that have reshaped the field. Section 4 examines job security and precarity, focusing on algorithmic management, income volatility, and social-protection gaps. Section 5 turns to collective bargaining and worker voice, considering the competition-law barrier, international standards, new organising forms, and platform co-operativism. Section 6 draws the threads together and considers policy implications, and Section 7 concludes.

Conceptualizing the Gig Economy

The gig economy is a family of platform-mediated arrangements that use algorithms to match labor supply and demand (Vallas & Schor, 2020), commonly divided into location-based work (ride-hailing, delivery) and web-based cloud work (Wood et al., 2019a). Platforms cast themselves as neutral intermediaries rather than employers (Prassl & Risak, 2016), a self-characterization courts increasingly reject (Aloisi, 2016). The number of digital labor platforms rose from 142 in 2010 to more than 777 in 2020, with taxi and

delivery platforms multiplying almost tenfold (ILO, 2021; Figure-1), while online-free-lancing demand grew about 90 percent between 2016 and 2021 (Kässi & Lehdon-virta, 2018; Stephany et al., 2021).

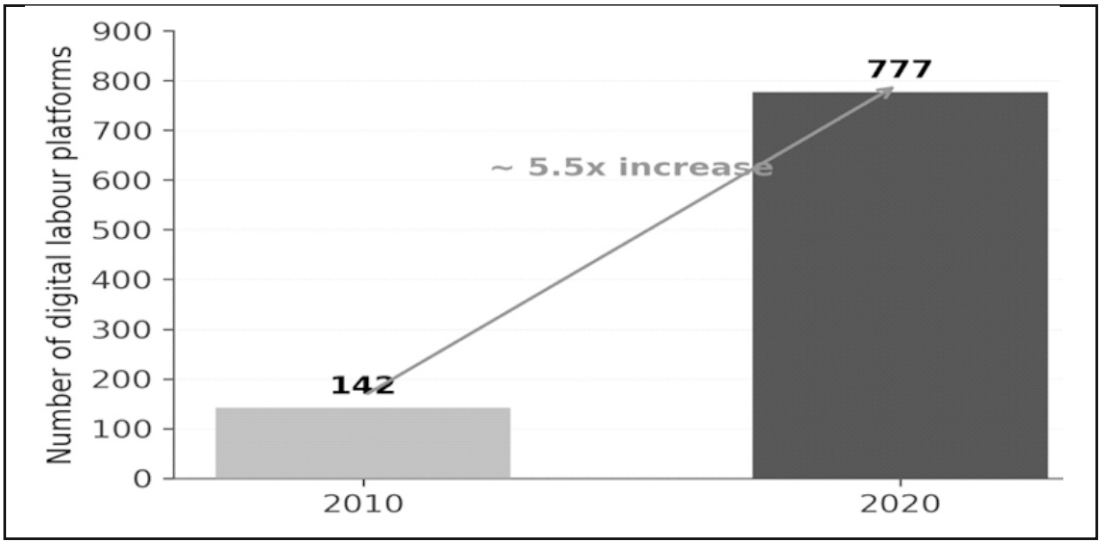


Figure 1: Global growth in the number of digital labor platforms, 2010-2020. Source: ILO (2021).

Worker counts vary with definitions : The World Bank estimates 154-435 million online gig workers in 2023 (Datta etal., 2023); the European Commission, 28.3 million EU platform workers as of 2021, projected to reach 43 million by 2025 (Figure 2); and Pew, 16 per cent of US adults who have ever earned through a platform (Anderson et al., 2021). Table 1 collates these figures.

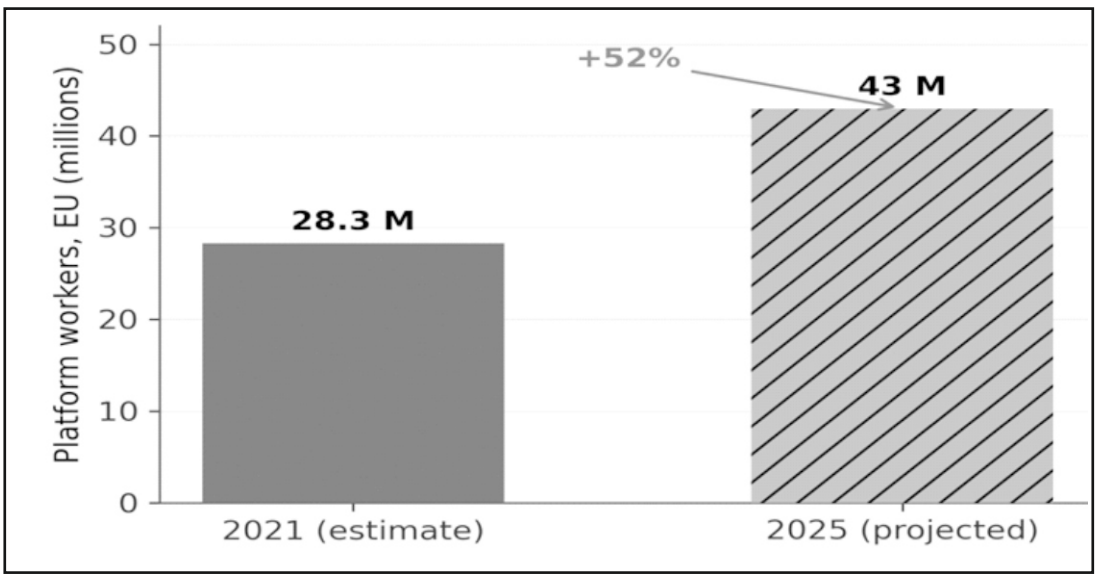


Figure 2 : Platform workers in the European Union: 2021 estimate and 2025 projection. Source: European Commission (2021); the 2025 value is an official projection.

Table 1: Scale and reach of the platform economy: selected estimates.

Indicator	Estimate	Year	Source
Number of digital labor platforms (global)	142 → 777+ (≈ 5.5×)	2010–2020	ILO (2021)
Online gig workers (global)	154–435 million (4.4–12.5% of workforce)	2023	Datta et al. (2023)
Online platforms serving clients in 186 countries	545	2023	Datta et al. (2023)
Platform workers, European Union	28.3 million	2021	European Commission (2021)
Platform workers, EU (projection)	43 million	2025	European Commission (2021)
US adults who have ever earned via a gig platform	16%	2021	Anderson et al. (2021)
Gig economy gross volume (industry estimate)	~US$204bn → ~US$455bn	2018–2023	Mastercard & Kaiser Associates (2019)

Note : Dollar figures are a private-sector projection; the EU 2025 figure is a projection, and the upper World Bank bound is a contested estimate.

Participation is uneven. In a Eurostat (2023) pilot survey, about 3.0 per cent of adults aged 15–64 had done platform work in the previous yearmore among men, the young, and the tertiary-educatedand earnings are mostly supplementary (52.2 per cent derive under a quarter of their income from platforms; only 23.4 per cent three-quarters or more; Figure 3), while US participation varies sharply by ethnicity, from 30 per cent of Hispanic to 12 per cent of White adults (Anderson et al., 2021; Figure 4). These risks fall hardest on the minority for whom platform work is the principal livelihood.

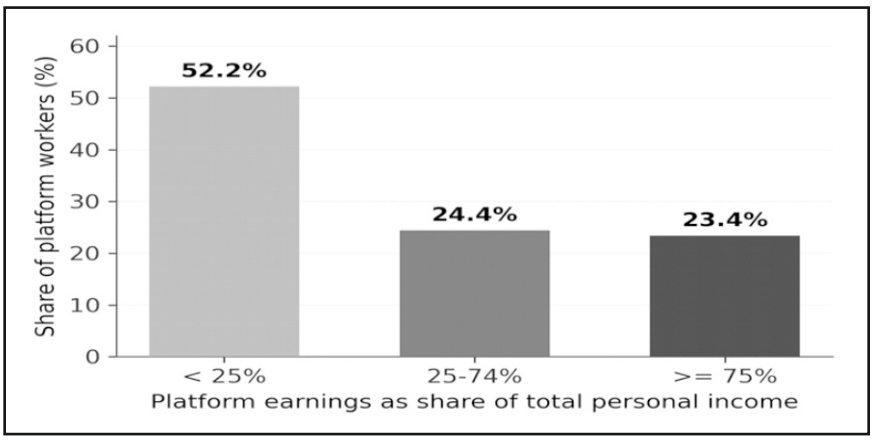


Figure 3 *: Share of total personal income that platform workers derive from platform work (EU, 2022). Source: Eurostat (2023).*

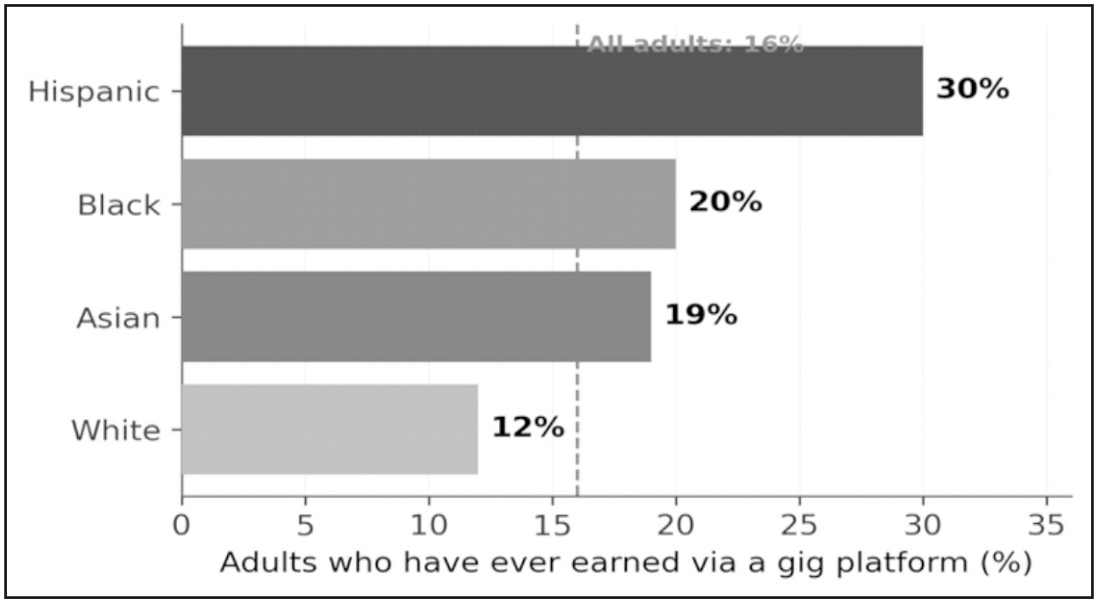


Figure 4 : Gig-platform participation by ethnicity in the United States, 2021. Source: Pew Research Center (Anderson et al., 2021).

Labor Rights and Employment Classification

Labor rights turn on a binary: employees enjoy the protective floor of labor law, while independent contractors do not (De Stefano, 2016). Platform work strains that binary by exhibiting the substance of employment subordination, control, and dependence in the form of self-employment, producing what De Stefano (2016) calls a "just-in-time workforce" and making the contractor label a legal fiction that offloads risk onto workers (Prassl, 2018; Prassl & Risak, 2016). Courts have responded (Table 3): the UK Supreme Court held Uber drivers to be “workers” (*Uber BV v Aslam*, 2021); California adopted the “ABC test” (*Dynamex*, 2018; Assembly Bill 5, 2019) before the industry-financed Proposition 22 (2020) carved drivers back out, a carve-out upheld in *Castellanos* (2024); and Spain's Tribunal Supremo (*STS 805/2020*) and France's Cour de cassation (2020) found riders and drivers to be, in substance, employees.

Reform has since become structural. Spain's Ley 12/2021 presumes riders are employees and grants algorithm-transparency rights; Directive (EU) 2024/2831 requires a rebuttable presumption of employment with the burden on the platform and is the first EU instrument to regulate algorithmic management directly. In 2026, the International Labor Conference adopted the Convention on Decent Work in the Platform Economy (No. 193), the first binding global standard extending core protections regardless of classification, building on ILO Conventions No. 87 (1948) and No. 98 (1949).

Table 3 : Selected judicial and legislative developments in employment classification.

Jurisdiction	Instrument or case (year)	Effect on worker status
United Kingdom	*Uber BV v Aslam* [2021] UKSC 5	Drivers are "workers"; minimum wage and paid leave; working time begins when logged in.
California, USA	*Dynamex* (2018). Assembly Bill 5 (2019)	Adopts and codifies the “ABC Test”; presumption of employee status
California, USA	Proposition 22 (2020); *Castellanos* (2024)	Exempts app-based drivers; exemption upheld as constitutional
Spain	STS 805/2020; “Ley Rider” / Ley 12/2021	Riders held to be employees; statutory presumption; algorithm transparency
France	Cour de cassation No. 19-13.316 (2020)	Self-employment “fictitious”; subordination found
European Union	Directive (EU) 2024/2831	Rebuttable presumption of employment; regulates algorithmic management
International	ILO Convention No. 193 (2026)	First binding global standard; protection regardless of classification

4. Job Security and Precarity

Algorithmic management shapes daily work and drives insecurity. Platforms govern nominally independent drivers through information asymmetries (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016) and control that Kellogg et al. (2020) frame as restricting, recommending, recording, rating, replacing, and rewarding; the result pairs valued scheduling autonomy with surveillance, overwork, and isolation (Wood et al., 2019a). Pay is low and volatile: the ILO (2021) reports median web-based pay near US$3.40 per hour (half below US$2.10) and a roughly 60 percent developing-country penalty, with 86 percent of web-based and 69 percent of delivery workers wanting more work than they can obtain (Figure 5). Because platforms guarantee neither hours nor income, the risk of demand falls on the worker (Wood et al., 2019b; Farrell & Greig, 2016).

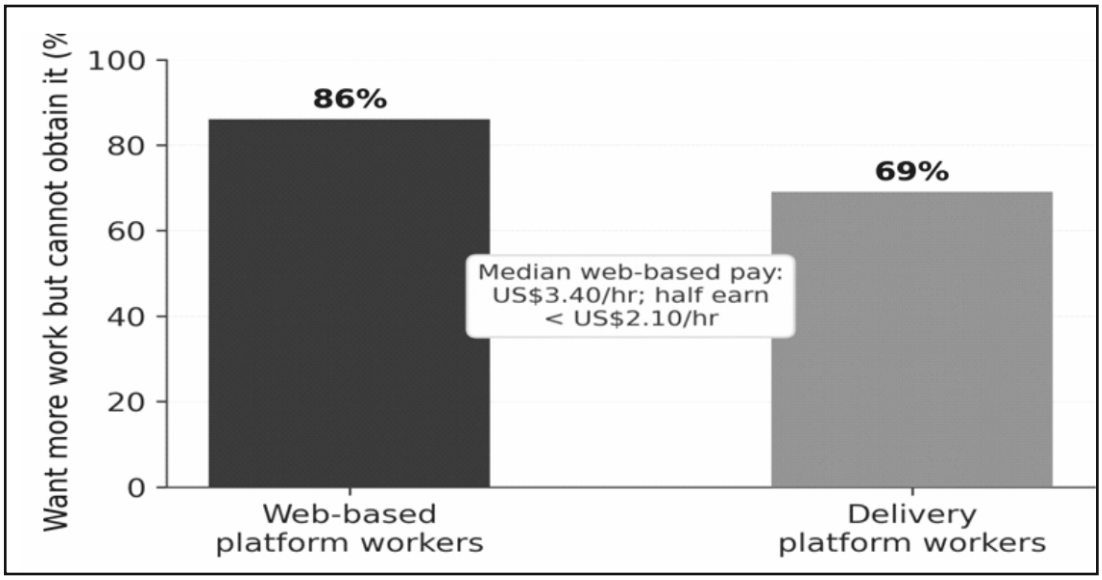


Figure 5 : *Involuntary underemployment among platform workers, with pay context - source: ILO (2021).*

Table 2 : Working conditions and income dependence in platform work.

Indicator	Figure	Source
Median hourly pay, web-based platforms	US$3.40 (half earn < US$2.10)	ILO (2021)
Want more work but cannot obtain it (web-based / delivery)	86% / 69%	ILO (2021)
Developing-country pay penalty (freelance platforms)	~60% lower	ILO (2021)
EU workers deriving < 25% of their income from platforms	52.2%	Eurostat (2023)
EU workers deriving ≥ 75% of income from platforms	23.4%	Eurostat (2023)
App-based workers without sick pay/compensation (COVID-19)	~70%	ILO (2021)

Insecurity is compounded by thin social protection: contributory systems built around the standard employee leave gig workers exposed (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018; Pesole et al., 2018; Eurofound, 2018), with roughly seven in ten app-based workers lacking sick pay during the pandemic (ILO, 2021). Deactivation adds a distinctive riskplatforms can withdraw access to work unilaterally, without notice or appeal (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017): dismissal without due process, which the ILO (2021) flags and Kellogg et al. (2020) describe as the power to "restrict" and "replace." The cumulative effect is the insecurity of the "precariat" (Standing, 2011), with measurable consequences for health (Bajwa et al., 2018).

Collective Bargaining and Worker Voice

Collective bargaining, the classic counterweight to employer power, is doubly constrained: misclassification strips rights and can turn coordination into illegal price-fixing, since self-employed "undertakings" fall under competition law (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018), as when a US court allowed antitrust claims to proceed against Seattle's 2015 collective-bargaining ordinance (*Chamber of Commerce v. City of Seattle*, 2018). The European Union has eased this through its 2022 Guidelines, exempting collective agreements for solo self-employed persons comparable to workers (European Commission, 2022), while ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98 are increasingly read as covering platform workers (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018).

Workers have organized, including the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (2012), New York's Independent Drivers Guild (2016), and strikes from Deliveroo (2016) to the 2019 Uber–Lyft action (Vandaele, 2018). New models are emerging too (Table 4): Denmark's 2018 Hilfr–3F deal, widely regarded as the platform economy's first collective agreement (Vandaele, 2018), and *platform cooperativism*, which would transfer ownership and governance to workers and users (Scholz, 2016; Scholz & Schneider, 2016; Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022).

Table 4 : Selected worker-voice and collective-bargaining initiatives

Initiative	Jurisdiction	Year	Form	Outcome/significance
IWGB gig campaigns	United Kingdom	2012	Independent trade union	Litigation and recognition drives for couriers and drivers
Independent Drivers Guild	USA (New York City)	2016	Guild (non-CBA representation)	Voice for app-based drivers is absent, bargaining rights
Deliveroo / Uber–Lyft strikes	UK, USA, and international	2016; 2019	Strike action	Coordinated a protest over pay and conditions
EU Guide-lines on solo self-employed	European Union	2022	Competition-law guidance	Permits collective bargaining without breaching Art. 101 TFEU
Hilfr–3F agreement	Denmark	2018	Collective agreement	First collective agreement in the platform economy
Platform cooperativism	Global	2016	Worker/user ownership	Alternative model of democratic platform

Discussion and Policy Implications

The evidence assembled in this article points to a consistent conclusion across all three pillars. The gig economy's central innovation is less technological than institutional: it recharacterises a controlled and dependent labor relationship as a transaction between independent businesses, and in doing so it simultaneously withdraws labor rights, transfers market risk onto the individual worker, and through competition law casts a shadow of illegality over collective self-help. The three effects are not separate problems but three expressions of one underlying move. This is why classification recurs as the pivotal variable: it is the switch that governs rights, the mechanism that allocates risk, and the doctrine that constrains voice.

Any balanced assessment must nonetheless take seriously the genuine benefits that platform work confers, which explain its popularity. Flexibility over when and whether to work has real value, particularly for those balancing work with education, caring responsibilities, or other employment; platforms lower barriers to entry and expand market access for workers who might otherwise struggle to find clients; and for the majority who use them for supplementary income, they provide a convenient buffer against income shocks (Anderson et al., 2021; Farrell & Greig, 2016). The policy challenge, therefore, is not to abolish platform work but to reconcile its flexibility with a floor of security and rights to retain what workers value while remedying what leaves them exposed. Critics of aggressive reclassification argue that it can reduce the very flexibility workers prize and may cost some of them access to work; the Californian experience, in which drivers themselves supported the Proposition 22 carve-out, illustrates that the interests at stake are not monolithic and that reform must attend to workers' own heterogeneous preferences.

Three design principles emerge from the analysis. First, a *rebuttable presumption of employment*, of the kind adopted in Directive (EU) 2024/2831 and Spain's Ley Rider, addresses misclassification while preserving the possibility that genuinely independent work is treated as such; by shifting the burden of proof onto the platform, it corrects the informational and power asymmetries that make individual litigation an inadequate remedy. Second, *portable and universal social protection*, decoupled from employment status, would close the coverage gaps documented in Section 4.3 and reduce the stakes of the classification question itself; the ILO's 2026 Convention points in this direction by attaching a floor of protection to platform work as such. Third, *algorithmic transparency and accountability* rights to information about, and human review of, the systems that allocate work, set pay, and terminate access would subject the managerial power now exercised through code to the kind of scrutiny long applied to managerial power exercised through people. To these must be added *enabling frameworks for collective representation*, including competition-law carve-outs of the kind the European Commission adopted in 2022, without which workers cannot themselves negotiate the balance between flexibility and security that best fits their circumstances.

These instruments are complementary rather than alternative. Presumptions of employment without effective enforcement invite avoidance; social protection without collective voice leaves workers as the

passive objects of policy rather than its authors; algorithmic transparency without bargaining power yields information that cannot be acted upon. The coherence of the emerging regulatory settlement EU Directive, national statutes, competition-law guidance, and international convention suggests a gradual reconstitution of the employment relationship for the platform age, in which a floor of rights and security is re-attached to work that markets had sought to define as something else.

Conclusion

The gig economy has expanded too far and too fast to be treated as a marginal or transitional phenomenon; it is now a durable feature of the global division of labor, engaging hundreds of millions of workers and growing. This article has argued that its effects on labor rights, job security, and collective bargaining are best understood as three consequences of a single institutional manoeuvre the reclassification of controlled, dependent work as independent enterprise. That manoeuvre withdraws the protective floor of labor law, shifts market risk onto individuals who are poorly placed to bear it, and can render unlawful the collective action through which workers have historically defended their interests. The empirical record reviewed here low and volatile pay, pervasive involuntary underemployment, systematic exclusion from social protection and termination without process documents the human cost of leaving that manoeuvre unchecked.

Yet the period examined has also produced the beginnings of a response. Courts from London to Madrid have looked past contractual form to economic substance; legislatures have enacted presumptions of employment and rights to algorithmic transparency; the European Union has both regulated platform work and cleared a path for collective bargaining; and in 2026 the international community adopted its first binding standard dedicated to the sector. Whether these initiatives cohere into an effective settlement will depend on enforcement, on the portability of protection across an increasingly fragmented labour market, and on the capacity of workers to organize and bargain in forms adequate to a digitally mediated economy. The task ahead is not to resist technological change but to ensure that the platforms which now organize so much of the world's work are made compatible with decent work. The tools to do so exist; their coordinated application is the unfinished business of labour policy in the platform age.

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Digital Privacy and Surveillance

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Abstract

The digital revolution has changed human life in many important ways. It has created new opportunities for communication, business, government services, and technology. At the same time, it has also increased concerns about privacy and surveillance. Governments, companies, and digital platforms now collect and study large amounts of personal information through smartphones, biometric systems, social media, artificial intelligence, and internet services. Because of this, people are constantly being tracked and monitored in both public and private spaces.

This growing use of surveillance creates serious ethical, legal, and political concerns related to freedom, privacy, democracy, and human dignity. Personal data has now become an important economic and political resource. Governments often defend surveillance by saying it is necessary for national security, public safety, and better administration. However, too much monitoring can threaten civil liberties and democratic rights.

This paper studies the idea of digital privacy, the growth of digital surveillance, and the legal and ethical problems connected with data collection and monitoring technologies. It also examines important laws such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. In addition, the paper discusses the important Supreme Court case Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India and explains the conflict between government surveillance and individual freedom. The paper concludes that although digital technologies are necessary for modern development and governance, strong legal protections, transparency, and accountability are needed to protect privacy rights in democratic societies.

Keywords : Digital privacy, surveillance, data protection, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, privacy rights.

Introduction

Digital technology has completely changed modern society. In the last two decades, internet access, smartphones, cloud computing, social media, and artificial intelligence have become important parts of everyday life. People now depend on digital systems for communication, banking, education, healthcare, shopping, and government services. Although these technological developments have made life easier and faster, they have also created new dangers related to privacy and surveillance.

Digital privacy has become one of the biggest concerns of the twenty-first century because people constantly create personal data through online activities. Every internet search, social media post, online payment, and mobile app leaves behind digital information that can be

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collected, stored, and analyzed by governments and private companies. Zuboff (2019) explains that modern capitalism has entered a stage called "surveillance capitalism," where human behavior and experiences are turned into data for economic profit. In this system, personal information becomes a valuable product.

At the same time, governments around the world are increasingly using digital surveillance technologies for national security, preventing terrorism, and controlling cybercrime. Tools such as facial recognition systems, biometric databases, CCTV cameras, internet monitoring, and AI-based analysis allow authorities to monitor people on a very large scale. Lyon (2018) points out that surveillance has changed from limited observation into widespread mass monitoring supported by digital technology.

The conflict between privacy and surveillance has become an important issue in democratic societies. Governments argue that surveillance is necessary for safety and governance, while critics believe that too much monitoring weakens freedom of speech, personal independence, and democratic participation. Constant surveillance can create a "chilling effect," where people change their behavior because they fear they are being watched (Richards, 2013).

In India, debates about digital privacy became stronger after the expansion of the Aadhaar system and reports of electronic spying through spyware technologies. The Supreme Court's important judgment in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) declared privacy to be a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. This judgment greatly influenced discussions about data protection, informational privacy, and government surveillance.

This paper examines the meaning of digital privacy, the growth of surveillance technologies, and the legal, political, and ethical issues connected with digital monitoring in modern society. It also studies laws created to protect privacy rights and discusses the challenge of balancing national security with civil liberties.

Digital Privacy

Digital privacy means the right of individuals to control how their personal information is collected, used, stored, and shared in digital spaces. It includes protecting online communication, financial details, biometric data, browsing history, and social media activity. Privacy is closely connected to human dignity, freedom, and independence because people need private space to think, communicate, and make decisions without outside interference.

Westin (1967) defined privacy as the ability of people to decide when, how, and to what extent information about them is shared with others. In the digital age, this control has become much harder because modern technologies continuously collect information through apps, websites, surveillance cameras, and digital devices.

Digital privacy has many dimensions. Informational privacy refers to protecting personal data from misuse and unauthorized access. Communication privacy means keeping emails, phone calls, and online conversations confidential. Bodily privacy relates to protecting biometric data such as fingerprints, iris scans, and facial recognition information. Location privacy refers to protecting information about people's movements collected through GPS and mobile devices.

The growing business value of personal data has increased privacy concerns. Technology companies collect large amounts of user information to improve services and earn advertising revenue. Social media platforms track user interests, browsing habits, and interactions to create profiles that can influence consumer behaviour and political opinions. According to Zuboff (2019), digital platforms use predictive systems to shape human behaviour for business purposes.

Another major issue is the lack of meaningful consent in data collection. Most people accept long privacy policies without understanding how their data will actually be used. Solove (2021) argues that modern privacy systems often create a false feeling of consent because users usually do not fully understand the extent of data collection and surveillance.

Because of these issues, digital privacy is not just a technological problem. It is also an ethical and political issue connected to power, freedom, and democratic accountability.

Evolution of Digital Surveillance

Surveillance has always been connected with state power and governance. In the past, surveillance mainly involved physical observation, intelligence gathering, and police monitoring. However, the digital revolution has transformed surveillance into a highly advanced technological system capable of tracking people continuously and secretly.

Michel Foucault's idea of the "Panopticon" helps explain modern surveillance. Foucault (1977) argued that people change their behaviour when they think they are being watched. In today's digital world, surveillance exists not only in physical spaces but also on social media platforms, websites, and digital devices.

Governments now use digital surveillance tools for national security and crime prevention. Intelligence agencies monitor internet communication, collect online data, and track digital activities to identify possible threats. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many countries increased surveillance powers in the name of fighting terrorism.

Edward Snowden's revelations in 2013 exposed large-scale surveillance programs run by agencies such as the NSA, leading to worldwide debates about privacy and government power (Greenwald, 2014).

Corporate surveillance has also grown rapidly. Technology companies gather massive amounts of personal information through search engines, online shopping websites, social media platforms, and mobile applications. Unlike older forms of surveillance that were mainly controlled by governments, modern surveillance often involves cooperation between governments and private companies. Lyon (2018) calls this a "surveillance society," where monitoring becomes a normal part of everyday life.

Artificial intelligence and big data have made surveillance even more powerful. AI systems can study huge amounts of information, identify patterns, predict behaviour, and automate decisions. Facial recognition technology can identify people in public places through CCTV cameras and biometric databases. Although these systems improve efficiency and security, they also raise concerns about discrimination, wrong identification, and mass tracking.

The Internet of Things (IoT) has further increased surveillance. Smart devices,

vehicles, and wearable technologies connected to the internet continuously collect information about people's habits, locations, and preferences, creating new risks for privacy.

Privacy as a Fundamental Right

The recognition of privacy as a human right developed slowly through court decisions and international law. International human rights documents such as Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) protect individuals against unfair interference in their privacy, home, family, and communication.

In India, the Constitution does not directly mention the right to privacy. Earlier Supreme Court decisions took a limited view of privacy rights. In M.P. Sharma v. Satish Chandra (1954), the Court stated that the Constitution did not specifically guarantee privacy. Similarly, in Kharak Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (1962), privacy was not accepted as an independent fundamental right.

Later, however, the Court gradually expanded protections under Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. The most important change came in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2017), where a nine-judge bench unanimously declared privacy to be a fundamental right. The Court explained that privacy includes bodily integrity, control over personal information, and freedom in making personal decisions. It also stated that any restriction on privacy must meet the tests of legality, necessity, and proportionality. The judgment emphasized that constitutional rights must adapt to technological and social changes.

The Puttaswamy judgment became a turning point in Indian constitutional law because it recognized the importance of informational privacy in the digital age. It also highlighted the need for strong data protection laws and safeguards against arbitrary surveillance by the state.

Legal Frameworks for Data Protection

As digital privacy has become more important, many countries have introduced data protection laws to regulate the collection and use of personal information.

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), introduced in 2018, is considered one of the strongest privacy laws in the world. GDPR gives individuals more control over their personal data and places strict responsibilities on organizations that handle such information. It provides rights such as the right to access data, correct data, erase data, and transfer data (Voigt & Von dem Bussche, 2017).

GDPR also requires organizations to obtain informed consent before using personal information. Companies that violate the law can face heavy financial penalties, which encourages accountability and compliance. Because of its strong protections, GDPR has influenced privacy laws in many countries.

India introduced the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) in 2023 to regulate data processing and protect personal information. The law gives rights to individuals, called data principals, and places duties on organizations responsible for processing personal data. It also creates penalties for data breaches and unauthorized use of information.

However, critics argue that the DPDPA gives broad exemptions to government agencies for reasons such as national security and

public order. Some scholars believe that too much executive power may weaken privacy protections and reduce accountability.

Before the DPDPA, India mainly depended on the Information Technology Act, 2000 and related rules dealing with sensitive personal data. These rules were considered insufficient for handling modern digital privacy problems.

Ethical Concerns Related to Surveillance

Digital surveillance creates serious ethical concerns because it affects freedom, dignity, and democracy. One major concern is the loss of personal autonomy. Constant monitoring can discourage independent thinking and behaviour because people may fear being watched and judged.

Another issue is the lack of informed consent. Many digital platforms collect large amounts of data without clearly explaining how the information will be used. People often agree to data collection without fully understanding the consequences.

Mass surveillance can also threaten freedom of speech and political participation. Richards (2013) argues that surveillance creates psychological pressure that discourages criticism and open discussion. Journalists, activists, and political opponents may censor themselves because they fear monitoring.

Algorithmic bias is another important ethical problem. AI systems used in surveillance and predictive policing often depend on biased data, which can unfairly target marginalized communities. Research shows that facial recognition technologies sometimes make more mistakes when identifying women and minority groups, leading to discrimination (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018).

Data breaches and cyberattacks further increase privacy risks. Large databases containing financial records, medical information, and biometric data can be hacked or accessed illegally, causing serious harm to individuals.

Digital Privacy and Surveillance in India

India's fast digital growth has increased concerns about privacy and surveillance. Government programs promoting digital governance, online payments, digital education, and biometric identification have expanded data collection in many sectors. The Aadhaar system is one of the largest biometric identification programs in the world. Aadhaar provides a unique identification number connected to fingerprints and iris scans. Supporters believe the system improves welfare delivery, reduces corruption, and increases administrative efficiency. Critics, however, argue that centralized biometric databases create risks of mass surveillance, profiling, and misuse of data.

In 2018, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Aadhaar but placed restrictions on its mandatory use by private organizations. The Court stressed the importance of balancing welfare benefits with privacy protection.

The Pegasus spyware controversy further increased concerns about illegal surveillance in India. Reports claimed that spyware was used against journalists, activists, lawyers, and opposition

leaders. The controversy raised serious questions about accountability and misuse of government power.

India's growing dependence on digital systems requires stronger protections for informational privacy. Experts believe that independent regulators, judicial oversight, and transparent surveillance rules are

necessary to prevent misuse of surveillance powers.

Balancing Security and Privacy

The relationship between national security and privacy is one of the biggest challenges in modern governance. Governments argue that surveillance is necessary to fight terrorism, cybercrime, and organized crime. Surveillance technologies help intelligence agencies detect threats, monitor suspicious activities, and maintain public safety.

However, excessive surveillance can lead to authoritarianism and misuse of power. Democratic societies must therefore ensure that surveillance measures remain lawful, proportionate, and accountable. The principle of proportionality means that restrictions on privacy should only be used for legitimate purposes and should use the least restrictive methods possible.

Judicial oversight is important for protecting civil liberties against unfair surveillance. Independent courts and parliamentary institutions should review surveillance activities to ensure they follow constitutional principles. Transparency can also increase public trust by informing citizens about data collection and monitoring practices.

Public awareness about digital rights is equally important. People should understand how their personal information is collected and used so they can make informed choices about privacy protection.

Conclusion

Digital privacy and surveillance are among the most important issues of modern society. Technological progress has created major opportunities for economic development, governance, and communication, but it has also enabled large-scale monitoring and data collection. Governments and corporations increasingly depend on digital surveillance systems that can threaten personal freedom, freedom of expression, and democratic accountability.

The recognition of privacy as a fundamental right in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India was a major constitutional development in India. Similarly, laws such as GDPR and India's DPDPA show the growing importance of protecting personal data in the digital age. However, legal protections alone are not enough unless they are supported by transparency, independent oversight, and ethical regulation of surveillance technologies.

The future of democracy will depend greatly on how societies balance security and liberty. While surveillance may sometimes be necessary for governance and public safety, uncontrolled monitoring can weaken constitutional freedoms and human dignity. Therefore, governments, courts, technology companies, and civil society must work together to create systems that protect privacy while supporting responsible technological progress.

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I simplified the entire content into clear, everyday English while keeping the original meaning, structure, citations, and references the same.

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Application of Blockchain-based Academic Certification : Lessons from Global Practices for Bihar's Education System

Aqib Murtaza *

Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital transformation in higher education has created new opportunities for secure, efficient, and transparent academic administration, particularly in developing regions such as Bihar. One critical area of transformation is the management and verification of academic certification. Traditional paper based and centralized digital systems are often vulnerable to fraud, data manipulation, and inefficiencies in verification processes. In this context, blockchain technology emerges as a transformative solution for academic credentialing.

Blockchain, as a decentralized and immutable digital ledger, enables secure storage, issuance, and verification of academic certificates without reliance on intermediaries. Its key features; transparency, tamper-resistance, and distributed validation significantly reduce the risks of fake credentials and enhance trust among stakeholders such as universities, employers, and government agencies. Moreover, blockchain-based systems allow instant verification of certificates, thereby improving administrative efficiency and reducing operational costs.

Recent studies highlight that blockchain can empower students with ownership and control over their academic records, enabling secure sharing across institutions and borders while maintaining privacy (MDPI). Additionally, integration with emerging technologies such as smart contracts and decentralized storage systems enhances automation and scalability in certificate issuance and validation processes.

In the context of Bihar's higher education system, adopting blockchain-based certification aligns with broader goals of digital governance, transparency, and skill mobility. However, challenges such as infrastructural limitations, lack of technical expertise, and policy gaps must be addressed for effective implementation. This study explores the potential of blockchain applications in academic certification as a key driver of AI-enabled digital transformation in higher education, offering a pathway toward a more secure, efficient, and trustworthy educational ecosystem.

Keywords : *Blockchain, Academic Certificates, Digital Transformation, Higher Education, Bihar, Credential Verification, Decentralization, AI Integration, Transparency, Cryptography.*

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Introduction

Higher education systems around the world are undergoing major changes due to the rise of digital technologies. Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data, and cloud computing are increasingly being used to improve both teaching and administration. In India, policies like Digital India and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have encouraged the use of technology in education. Bihar, as a developing state, is also trying to adopt these changes, although it faces several challenges such as limited infrastructure and administrative inefficiencies.

Academic certification is the cornerstone of the relationship between educational institutions and the broader socioeconomic system. Degrees, diplomas, and certificates serve as formal acknowledgments of knowledge, competence, and professional eligibility. However, the integrity of this system has been severely compromised by the proliferation of fraudulent credentials. According to a report by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM, 2015), over 50% of resumes submitted by job seekers in India contain some form of misrepresentation, with academic qualifications being the most commonly falsified element. The problem is particularly acute in states like Bihar, where examination irregularities, ghost candidates, and certificate fraud have historically undermined public trust in formal education (Kumar, 2018).

For Bihar, a state that has witnessed significant educational reforms under successive administrations including the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana, and the ambitious BPSC-driven meritocracy push, blockchain-based academic certification represents the next frontier of innovation. With the Government of Bihar emphasizing digital governance and the state's inclusion in India's broader Digital India and NEP 2020 frameworks, the conditions for blockchain adoption are becoming increasingly favourable (Government of Bihar, 2020).

Blockchain is a type of digital ledger where information is stored in blocks that are linked together in a chain. Each block contains data that is verified through cryptographic methods. Because the system is decentralized, no single authority controls the data. This makes blockchain more secure and less vulnerable to manipulation. In education, blockchain can be used to store academic records such as degrees, diplomas, and transcripts. Each record is given a unique digital identity, which ensures that it cannot be duplicated or altered (Kumutha & Jayalakshmi, 2021). A blockchain is a distributed ledger, a continuously growing list of records, called blocks that are linked and secured using cryptographic hashing. Each block contains a cryptographic hash of the previous block, a timestamp, and transaction data. This chain structure ensures that once a record is entered into the blockchain, it cannot be altered retroactively without altering all subsequent blocks, which would require the consensus of the majority of nodes in the network (Nakamoto, 2008).

The architecture of blockchain can be understood through three core components :

(a) **Distributed Network :** Unlike centralized databases controlled by a single authority, blockchain data is stored across a peer-to-peer network of nodes. This eliminates single points of failure

and reduces the risk of data manipulation by any single actor.

(b) **Consensus Mechanisms :** Blockchain networks use consensus algorithms such as Proof of Work (PoW), Proof of Stake (PoS), and Practical Byzantine Fault Tolerance (PBFT) to validate and agree upon the state of the ledger. In educational applications, permissioned blockchains using PBFT or similar mechanisms are often preferred for their efficiency and regulatory compatibility (Buterin, 2014).

(c) **Smart Contracts :** Introduced by the Ethereum platform, smart contracts are self-executing contracts with the terms of the agreement directly written into lines of code. In academic certification, smart contracts can automate the issuance of certificates upon the fulfilment of predefined academic criteria, reducing administrative overhead and human error (Buterin, 2014).

Types of Blockchain Relevant to Education

(a) **Public Blockchain :** Open to all participants; high transparency but lower transaction speed. Examples include Bitcoin and Ethereum.

(b) **Private Blockchain :** Controlled by a single organization; suitable for internal institutional use.

(c) **Consortium Blockchain :** Governed by a group of organizations; most suitable for inter-institutional academic credential sharing (Hyperledger Fabric is a prominent example).

(d) **Hybrid Blockchain :** Combines elements of public and private blockchains; offers flexibility for government-led educational credential systems (Hyperledger Foundation, 2020).

In a state like Bihar, a consortium or hybrid blockchain, governed by the State Education Department, universities, and verification agencies, would be most appropriate, because of its nature to balancing transparency with regulatory control. The current system of academic certification has several weaknesses.

First, there is the problem of fake certificates. Many individuals use duplicate degrees to get jobs/employment or admission. This reduces trust in the education system and creates unfair advantages. Second, the process of verification is slow and complicated. Employers or institutions often need to contact universities directly, which can take weeks or even months to verify the legitimacy of the records. This delay affects students' opportunities for further career related achievements and inhibits future endeavours. Third, centralized databases are not always secure. They can be hacked or manipulated, leading to data loss or misuse. This requires the need of a decentralized platform that is immutable and open source. Finally, students do not have full clout over their own records. They depend on institutions to issue and verify their certificates, which can be inconvenient and time lagging for most of the time.Hence, Blockchain technology addresses all these issues by creating a secure, transparent, and efficient system (Jain, 2024).

Applications of Blockchain in Academic Certification : Blockchain can be used in several ways in the education sector –

One of the main uses is digital certificate issuance. Universities can issue certificates that are stored on the blockchain. These certificates are permanent and cannot be changed. For example, Digi Locker. Another important application is verification. Emplo-

yers can verify a candidate's qualifications instantly by accessing the blockchain. This removes the need for intermediaries and reduces delays and hastens the process rapidly.Blockchain can also be combined with smart contracts. These are automated programs that execute certain actions when conditions are met. For example, a certificate can be issued automatically when a student completes all requirements. This may prove helpful for the ABC (Academic Bank of Credits) and multiple entry exit programs of NEP 2020. In addition, blockchain supports the concept of lifelong learning. Students can store all their achievements, including short courses and skills, in one secure system. This is especially useful in today's job market, where continuous learning is important (Rachel, 2022).

The use of blockchain in academic certification offers many advantages :

It improves security by making records tamper-proof. Once a certificate is issued, it cannot be altered or deleted. It increases transparency because all transactions are recorded and can be verified. It saves time and cost by eliminating manual processes and intermediaries. It empowers students by giving them control over their data. They can share their certificates easily with employers or institutions. It also supports global recognition, as blockchain-based certificates can be verified anywhere in the world. These benefits make blockchain a robust technology for modernizing education systems.

Global Applications of Blockchain in Academic Certification

The *Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)* developed the Blockcerts system in 2016, which allows students to receive digital diplomas. MIT began issuing digital diplomas to graduates using the Bitcoin blockchain. Each certificate is cryptographically signed, timestamped, and linked to the student's identity via a digital wallet. Employers and institutions can verify the authenticity of these credentials instantly, without needing to contact MIT directly (Greenwald, 2017). Further this technology was adopted by institutions across the United States, Canada, and Europe, becoming an open standard for blockchain-based credentials.

The University of Nicosia (Cyprus) became the first university in the world to issue academic credentials on a blockchain network when it began recording its Certificate in Digital Currency on the Bitcoin blockchain in 2014. This initiative demonstrated that blockchain-based credential systems could be operationalized at an institutional level without requiring major infrastructure overhaul (Grech & Camilleri, 2017).

Malta national Blockchain technology is another example of academic certification using the blockchain-based education system. Under its National Skills Passport initiative, the Maltese government began digitizing all educational and professional qualifications on a blockchain, enabling citizens to carry verifiable credential portfolios throughout their careers. This government-led model can be encouraging for India, where state governments can play a pivotal role in blockchain adoption (European Commission, 2019).

China has also invested heavily in blockchain-based education systems as part of its broader digital economy strategy. The Chinese government's 2019 Blockchain+ Action Plan explicitly included education as a priority sector to test the power of blockchain adoption. Several Chinese universities, including *Tsinghua University*, have piloted

blockchain credential systems in partnership with the Ministry of Education to test its efficacy. (Chen et al., 2020).

India's Policy Regarding Blockchain certification

The NEP 2020 represents the most comprehensive overhaul of India's education system since independence. Among its many provisions, the NEP 2020 explicitly calls for the use of technology in education, including the digitization of academic records, the creation of a National Academic Depository, and the development of an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). (UGC,2021). The ABC, in particular, envisages a system where students can store, accumulate, and transfer credits across institutions, a use case that is ideally suited and complemented via blockchain implementation (Ministry of Education, 2020).

National Academic Depository

Launched by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), the National Academic Depository is a digital repository of academic awards lodged by academic institutions. While the NAD represents a significant step toward digital credential management, it relies on a centralized database architecture, which remains vulnerable to data breaches, system failures, and institutional non-compliance. Transitioning the NAD to a blockchain-based architecture would address these vulnerabilities and gaps while retaining its institutional credibility (UGC, 2018).

National Blockchain Strategy (2021)

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) released India's National Blockchain Strategy in 2021, which identified education as one of the priority sectors for blockchain deployment. The strategy recommended the development of a National Blockchain Framework (NBF) that could serve as the backbone for inter-institutional credential verification across India (MeitY, 2021).

Bihar's Educational Landscape and innovation regarding Blockchain applications

Bihar has a paradoxical relationship with education. On one hand, it is the birthplace of Nalanda, arguably the world's first residential university and has a deep-rooted tradition of scholarship. On the other hand, post-independence Bihar has struggled with low literacy rates, poor educational infrastructure, examination fraud, and a significant brain drain of educated youth to other states. The state's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, while improving, remains below the national average (AISHE, 2021). Bihar has been repeatedly plagued by high-profile examination scandals. The 2016 Bihar Board topper controversy in which students who topped the Class 10 and Class 12 examinations were found to be functionally illiterate. This exposed deep structural and systemic failures in the state's examination and certification system. Similar cases of paper leaks, ghost candidates, and mass copying have been documented across university examinations as well (Kumar, 2018). These incidents have not only tarnished the credibility of Bihar's educational institutions but have also directly harmed meritorious students whose genuine qualifications are viewed with suspicion by employers.

Several structural factors exacerbate the credentialing crisis in Bihar including the

institutional capacity gaps where many of Bihar's affiliated colleges under Patna University, Magadh University, and other affiliating universities lack the administrative infrastructure to maintain accurate and updated academic records. The issue of digital divide is also a big hurdle in large parts of rural Bihar suffering from poor internet connectivity and low digital literacy.

Bureaucratic inefficiencies for the verification of Migration and documentation are the other constraints. Also, Bihar sends a large number of migrant workers and students to other states and countries. The difficulty of verifying Bihar-issued credentials in other jurisdictions further disadvantages Bihari students and workers (Government of Bihar, 2020).

Therefore, the verification of credentials is extremely essential for the successful implementation of various schemes including Bihar students credit card scheme where verification of real beneficiaries is important for loan disbursement. Similarly, Mukhyamantri Nischay Swayam Sahayata Bhatta Yojana that provides financial assistance to youth seeking employment, with credential verification as a key component.

In recent years, Bihar has started an innovative ecosystem that could support blockchain adoption. The Bihar Startup Policy 2022 offers incentives for technology startups, including those working on EdTech and GovTech solutions. Institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Patna and the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Patna have research groups working on distributed ledger technologies and their applications. The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) has established Atal Tinkering Labs in several Bihar schools, fostering a culture of technological experimentation among young students (Bihar Startup Policy, 2022).

IIT Patna, in collaboration with the state government, can play a pivotal role in developing and piloting blockchain credential systems tailored to Bihar's specific context. Research partnerships with international universities and technology companies facilitated through schemes like IMPRINT (Impacting Research Innovation and Technology) and the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems can provide both technical expertise and funding for such initiatives (Meity, 2021).

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

1. **Digital Infrastructure Gaps :** The biggest significant challenge for block-chain adoption in Bihar is the lack of digital infrastructure in rural areas. While Bharat Net has made progress in connecting gram panchayats, last-mile connectivity remains inconsistent. Block-chain systems require continuous digital connectivity for real-time credential issuance and verification.
2. **Digital Literacy :** Digital Literacy is the most important component to operate blockchain-based systems effectively. Bihar's Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (digital literacy campaign) provides a founda-tion, but targeted training programs for educational administrators, examination board staff, and students will be essential for effective adoption.
3. **Data Privacy and Security :** Block-chain's immutability, while a security advantage, creates challenges for data privacy. Once a record is entered on the blockchain, it cannot be easily deleted that poses a potential conflict with the right to be forgotten and data protection

principles. India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP), 2023 introduces regulatory requirements for personal data management that any blockchain system must comply with and there is a provision for punishment as well.

4. **Cost and Sustainability :** The initial costs for blockchain infrastructure including server hardware, software development, staff training, and system integration can be substantial. However, the long-term savings from reduced fraud investigation, faster credential verification, and lower administrative overheads are likely to outweigh these upfront investments. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) with EdTech companies and CSR funding from corporates operating in Bihar could help reduce this implementation costs up to some extent.
5. **Equity and Access :** There is a risk that blockchain-based credential systems may inadvertently disadvantage students from downtrodden communities including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically weaker sections who may have limited access to smartphones, internet, or digital wallets. These must incorporate provisions for assisted access and community-based digital support centres to ensure equity of the digital transformation.
6. **Interoperability and institutional resistance :** For blockchain credentials to be genuinely useful, they must be recognized across institutions, states, and countries. Many older universities with entrenched administrative cultures may resist the transition to blockchain-based systems. Resistance may stem from concerns about loss of institutional control, fear of exposing historical irregularities, or simple inertia. Successful adoption will require strong political will, confidence building measures, institutional incentives, and capacity-building support.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Blockchain technology offers a robust, scalable, and cost-effective solution to the crisis of academic credential fraud that has long plagued Bihar's education system. By creating an immutable, transparent, and instantly verifiable record of academic achievements, blockchain can restore trust in Bihar's educational institutions, enhance the employability of its graduates, and position the state as a leader in educational technology innovation.The future of blockchain in education looks very encouraging and promising in the near future. It can easily be combined with internet connectivity and digital platforms for creating a unified record of a student's achievements and restricting malpractices related to education like forgery, duplication, paper leaks and corruption. Recently, BPSC also decided to store copies, marksheet, academic certificates on a safe and digitised blockchain systems of network that will definitely increase the transparency and will limit the incidents like paper leaks in examination. Hence as technology improves, blockchain systems will become more efficient and accessible.

However, successful implementation demands sustained political commitment, institutional capacity building, digital infrastructure development, regulatory clarity, and a deliberate focus on equity and inclusion. In conclusion, blockchain-based academic

certification is not a distant futuristic aspiration for Bihar, it is a practical, achievable, and urgently needed reform. In a state where education remains the central ladder of social mobility, the integrity of academic credentials is a matter of social justice, not merely administrative efficiency. Bihar's embrace of blockchain in education would honour its ancient intellectual and educational heritage while charting a bold course for its digital future for a comprehensive and holistic development of education system in India.

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Artificial Intelligence and Its Impact on Economic Decision Making by Indian Citizens

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence is the term used to describe computer programs that simulate human intelligence in order to carry out activities like learning, thinking, solving problems and making decisions. AI is incorporated into commonplace technologies in the current digital era, such as virtual assistants and predictive analytics and is influencing how people and companies use data, technology and services. This, in turn, improves productivity, efficiency and personalization in social and economic contexts. Economic decision-making involves choices related to spending, saving, investing and resource allocation based on available information, risks and future expectations. In today's AI-driven world, citizens increasingly rely on digital tools, financial apps and automated systems that provide real-time insights and recommendations, enabling smarter, faster and more data-driven economic choices across income groups and sectors. Indian citizens, spanning rural to urban populations, are becoming increasingly aware and adaptive to digital tools. With the rapid spread of smartphones, internet access and fintech solutions, even common people in India are integrating AI-backed platforms into their daily financial decisions, shaping the way they manage their income, investments, credit and consumption in a transforming economic landscape. Objective of this research article is to analyze how AI influences economic decisions of Indian citizens across different socio-economic backgrounds. Research Methodology applied in this research article includes secondary data analysis to assess AI's role in citizens' economic decisions. The Findings of this research paper will help to enhances economic decision-making especially among urban Indians with better digital access and awareness.

Keywords:Artificial Intelligence, Economic Decisions, Indian Citizens, Digital Tools, Financial Behavior, Urban-Rural, Fintech.

Objectives:

- To study how AI affects personal financial decisions of Indian citizens.
- To examine AI's role in shaping consumer spending and saving behavior.

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- To assess awareness of AI financial tools among urban and rural populations.
- To identify challenges faced by citizens in using AI for economic choices.
- To evaluate the impact of AI on income management and investment planning.

Methodology :

The methodology used in this research is based on secondary data analysis. To understand the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on economic decision-making by Indian citizens, we collected and analyzed existing information from various reliable sources. These include government reports, fintech industry publications, academic journals, digital economy surveys and AI research articles. These sources provided valuable data on how AI tools like mobile apps, chatbots, automated financial advisors and machine learning algorithms are being used by people in India.

Review of Related Literature :

- **Russell & Norvig** (2016), "Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach" explains how machines are designed to think and act like humans. It describes how AI uses algorithms and data to make decisions faster and more accurately than humans. This work is useful for understanding how AI can help people with everyday decisions, especially in fields like finance and technology where fast, data-based decisions are very important.
- **Richard Thaler** (1980), "Economic Decision Making" explains that people often make financial decisions based on emotions and habits, not logic. He introduced ideas like mental accounting and limited self-control, which show how real-world economic choices often differ from theoretical models. His ideas help explain why AI tools can be helpful & they give logical, data-based support to reduce emotional errors in spending or investing.
- **MeitY** (2020), "Indian Citizens and Digital Adoption" The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in India published a report under the Digital India initiative showing how digital access is spreading across urban and rural areas. It highlighted how Indian citizens are increasingly using mobile phones and the internet to access government and financial services. This shows that even people in villages now use digital tools, and with AI growing fast, they too can benefit from AI-based decision tools.
- **NITI Aayog** (2018), "AI for Economic Inclusion in India" explains how AI can help improve banking, insurance and online services for Indian citizens. It shows that AI tools can guide low-income users to save better, invest wisely, and borrow safely. This work directly connects AI to personal finance in India, showing its potential to support economic growth and inclusion.
- **Reserve Bank of India** (2021), "Fintech, AI, and the Indian Economy" explores how financial technology and AI are changing economic behavior in India. It talks about digital lending, AI-based fraud detection, and personal financial management apps. The RBI observed that people now rely more on AI-powered platforms for faster and safer decisions, proving AI's growing role in India's financial system.
- **IAMA I**(2022), "Citizen Attitudes Toward AI Tools" The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) conducted a study on how Indians interact with AI-

based apps. It found that younger citizens are more comfortable using AI for decisions like budgeting or paying bills, while older citizens still trust human advisors. This helps us understand the behavioral side of AI adoption in India.

Introduction :

- **Artificial Intelligence** (AI) refers to the ability of machines or computer programs to perform tasks that usually require human intelligence. These tasks include learning from data, solving problems, understanding language, recognizing patterns, and making decisions.For example, when you ask your smartphone's voice assistant like Siri or Google Assistant a question, it uses AI to understand what you said and to find the correct answer. Similarly, when you shop online and see product suggestions like "you may also like," it is AI predicting your preferences by analyzing your past actions.AI works using algorithms,sets of rules and big data. It processes huge amounts of information quickly, far faster than a human can. This makes it helpful in many fields, including healthcare (for diagnosing diseases), transportation (like self-driving cars), and especially in finance (helping people manage money or suggest investments).AI is used in the background of several Indian apps these days, including Paytm, Google Pay, Phone Pe, Zerodha, and Cred. These applications assist users in making investment, saving, and spending decisions. AI makes it easier for people to grasp financial data, which improves their financial management. Additionally, it aids banks in risk management, fraud detection, and service personalization.
- **Economic decision-making** is the process of choosing how to use money and other resources wisely. Every day, people make economic decisions—whether to save or spend money, what to buy, where to invest, and how to plan for future needs. These decisions depend on several factors like income, needs, desires, available resources, and market conditions. For example, when a person gets a salary, they decide how much to spend on rent, food, and transport, how much to save, and if possible, where to invest. These are economic decisions. Similarly, a small shopkeeper deciding to take a loan to expand his business is also making an economic decision. Traditionally, these decisions were made based on personal experience, advice from others. However, with digital tools and financial technology (fintech), people now have access to more information and support. Apps like Groww, Zerodha, or ET Money help users compare investment options, track expenses, and plan budgets. AI plays a big role here—analyzing trends, giving alerts, and even predicting future expenses. Smart economic decision-making helps individuals and families achieve financial stability. It also contributes to the larger economy, as when millions of citizens make better financial choices, the country grows economically.
- **Indian Citizens** are from a diverse spectrum of social, cultural, and economic origins. India, home to more than 1.4 billion people, is among the world's most diverse nations. People work in a variety of industries, from IT to farming, speak a wide variety of languages, and reside in

both urban and rural areas. In the digital age, a large number of Indian citizens are becoming digitally active. The rise of smart phones, cheaper internet, and government initiatives like Digital India have helped connect people across the country. Now, more Indians use mobile phones for banking, shopping, learning, and managing their daily lives.For example, a farmer in Bihar may now use an app to check weather forecasts or get crop prices. A college student in Mumbai might use an app to track her monthly budget or invest in mutual funds. A homemaker in a small town might use Paytm or Google Pay to pay bills or send money. These are everyday Indian citizens making economic decisions using AI-supported digital tools.The Indian government is also encouraging this digital growth by promoting financial literacy, digital banking, and online public services. However, challenges remain especially in rural areas such as lack of digital literacy, poor internet access, and trust issues. Still, the digital transformation is visible, and more citizens are getting comfortable with AI-enabled tools.

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has started playing a major role in our everyday lives. From how we shop to how we talk to machines, AI is changing the way we live. One of the most important areas where AI is making a strong impact is in economic decision-making especially in a country like India where a growing number of people are using digital tools for managing money. This research focuses on how AI is influencing the financial choices made by Indian citizens. With mobile apps, online platforms, and smart digital assistants, people are now able to take decisions about saving, spending, borrowing, and investing in smarter ways. AI offers real-time data, compares multiple options, and gives personalized suggestions things that were not possible just a decade ago. Indian citizens, especially in urban areas, are adapting quickly to these changes. Whether it's choosing the best mutual fund, tracking monthly expenses, or applying for a digital loan, AI is helping them take informed steps. In rural areas too, AI is slowly reaching through mobile phones and fintech apps.

The Growth of Artificial Intelligence in India

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has quickly become part of our daily lives in India. It is now used in mobile apps, websites, customer services, and even in home appliances. From big cities like Delhi and Mumbai to smaller towns, AI tools are helping people in many ways. The Indian government and private companies are also supporting the development of AI. For example, AI is used in Google Maps to show traffic conditions, in Amazon or Flipkart to recommend products, and in banks to suggest loans. AI also powers apps like Cred, which gives reminders for credit card payments, or Jar, which helps people save small amounts of money automatically. These tools are now popular among middle-class and working-class Indians. India has also launched national-level programs like Digital India and India AI. These aim to spread digital awareness and create more AI tools that are helpful for citizens. The country is also building AI centers, training people in digital skills, and improving internet access in villages. As a result, AI is slowly becoming accessible to people from different backgrounds.

The Role of AI in Rural vs Urban Areas

In urban areas, people have better internet access, smartphones, and digital knowledge. They use AI-backed apps for shopping, banking, investing, and learning. Youth and professionals are more confident in using AI for financial planning. For example, urban residents often use UPI apps, do stock trading online, or follow digital investment advice. In rural areas, the situation is slowly improving. Many people still depend on cash and traditional banking. But thanks to schemes like Jan Dhan Yojana, rural people now have bank accounts. With affordable smartphones and cheaper internet, many are using basic AI-powered tools—like Kisan Suvidha app (for farmers), PM-Kisan app (for subsidy tracking). Voice-enabled tools in regional languages are also helping rural users understand financial options better.

Still, digital illiteracy, fear of fraud, and language barriers are challenges in rural areas. More awareness programs and trust-building efforts are needed to bring rural citizens fully into the AI economy.

Gender and AI in Economic Decision-Making

Women in India often play an important role in managing household budgets, savings, and small businesses. However, many women still face restrictions in using technology due to social or economic reasons. AI tools, if designed properly, can support women in taking more control of their financial lives.

For instance :

- Women SHGs (Self-Help Groups) in states like Bihar and Odisha are using AI-based fintech apps to manage group savings and loans.
- Women entrepreneurs are using online platforms like Meesho and WhatsApp Business, powered by AI, to sell products and track earnings.
- AI chatbots and voice assistants in regional languages help women understand insurance, pension schemes (like Atal Pension Yojana), and government benefits.
- The growing use of smartphones by women— especially after COVID-19— has opened up new opportunities for digital financial literacy. However, more gender-inclusive AI tools are needed. Women should be part of the AI design process so that tools meet their needs.

Benefits of AI in Economic Decision Making

AI has many advantages for Indian citizens when it comes to making economic decisions –

- **Personalization:** AI gives customized advice based on your income, goals, and risk level.
- **Speed :** It helps make quick financial decisions like bill payments, investing, or loan approvals.
- **Data Analysis :** AI reviews a lot of information and shows only what is useful to the user.
- **Reduced Human Error :** AI tools help avoid calculation mistakes or forgetting payments.
- **24/7 Availability:** Unlike banks, AI-based services work at any time of the day.

For example, a gig worker who works late hours can use an AI app to manage his earnings at night without needing a bank visit. A college student can use an AI-powered budget app to manage pocket money and savings for future studies.

Challenges Faced by Indian Citizens in Using AI

Despite many benefits, there are also challenges –

- **Digital Illiteracy :** Many people, especially elderly and rural populations, are not confident in using digital tools.
- Language Barriers : Most AI tools are in English or Hindi. Regional language support is still limited.
- **Trust Issues :** Some people fear online frauds, data misuse, or losing money due to AI errors.
- **Connectivity Problems :** Poor internet in remote areas makes it hard to use AI-based apps smoothly.
- **Cost and Device Access :** Some AI tools need smart phones or internet packs, which may not be affordable for everyone.

Solving these problems will require better education, infrastructure, and policies that promote inclusive technology.

Future of AI in Economic Decision Making in India

The future of AI in India looks bright. As more people get digital access, AI will play a bigger role in shaping how they manage their money. Some future trends include:

- **AI in Regional Languages :** Tools will soon work fluently in Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, etc.
- **Voice-Activated Services :** AI bots will help users with low literacy interact through simple voice commands.
- **AI for Credit Scoring :** People without formal credit history will still get loans based on digital behavior.
- **Smart Government Services :** Subsidies, pensions, and tax refunds will be handled faster and more accurately with AI.

Desk Research

- **Digital India Programme :** Launched in 2015, the Digital India programme created the foundation for a connected India. Its goal was to deliver government services digitally and empower every citizen with technology. As a result of this initiative, mobile-based apps like UMANG, BHIM, and DigiLocker were launched. These platforms use AI to guide users, offer reminders and help with bill payments and savings. Thanks to this effort, by 2024 over 1.3 billion Aadhaar cards have been linked with mobile phones and bank accounts, ensuring citizens have access to identity-based digital services (UIDAI, 2024). This has allowed people, even in small towns, to make faster and smarter financial decisions using AI-enabled apps.
- **The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) :** launched in 2014, made banking available to everyone, especially those without access before. These accounts are now used by AI-powered apps that help track expenses and recommend saving patterns. By April 2024, India had opened over 49 crore Jan Dhan accounts, and remarkably, 56% of these accounts are owned by women, while 67% belong to rural citizens (Ministry of Finance, 2024). With these accounts connected to mobile numbers, even villagers are now using AI-assisted digital tools for day-to-day financial planning.

- **Unified Payments Interface (UPI) :** is a digital payment system that changed how Indians handle money. Apps like PhonePe, Google Pay, and Paytm use AI to suggest payment dates, track spending, and prevent fraud. In May 2024 alone, India processed over 10.3 billion UPI transactions, valued at more than ₹15 lakh crore (NPCI, 2024). This system is used by vegetable vendors, students, shopkeepers, and families across India, proving how AI in UPI helps citizens make quick and confident financial decisions.
- **India AI Mission :** In 2023, the government launched the India AI Mission, with a focus on training people and building AI tools for public services. With a budget of 4,000 crore, this mission aims to support startups, create AI-based solutions, and train 10 lakh young Indians in AI by 2026 (Budget Document, 2023). Through this mission, AI is reaching the common citizen in areas like agriculture, health, and banking. This will deeply impact how people across different income levels make decisions about money, credit, and savings.
- **Bharat Net :** The BharatNet Project is a government plan to connect villages to high-speed internet using optical fiber. With internet access, people in rural India can use AI-powered mobile apps for banking, budgeting, and farming advice. By March 2024, over 2.1 lakh Gram Panchayats had been connected with high-speed broadband (Ministry of Communications, 2024). This helps citizens in remote areas make smarter financial choices, using the same technology as those in cities.
- **RBI's Digital Rupee and AI in Financial Systems :** In 2022, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced the Digital Rupee (CBDC) to modernize the country's currency system. This digital currency, powered by secure technology and AI systems, helps with instant money transfers, reduces banking costs, and supports economic planning. By early 2024, pilot testing had started in many cities with banks like SBI and ICICI, and thousands of users had begun using it for small daily transactions (RBI Reports, 2024). AI-backed platforms will soon guide users on where and how to use the digital rupee effectively, enhancing economic decisions.

Findings

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is slowly but strongly changing how Indian citizens make economic decisions. Many people are now using mobile apps, digital payment systems, and financial platforms that are powered by AI. These tools help users track spending, set saving goals, receive smart reminders, and compare financial options. Even people in rural areas are becoming comfortable with AI tools, mainly due to government schemes like Digital India, Jan Dhan Yojana, and Bharat Net.The study also finds that urban citizens, especially the younger generation, are making better use of AI for planning investments, buying insurance, and managing budgets. Women are increasingly participating in financial decision-making due to access to AI tools through smart phones.

Another important finding is that financial apps powered by AI are helping people avoid fraud, save more money, and make faster, smarter choices. While some people still lack awareness or digital skills, government training programs are helping bridge this gap.

Suggestion

1. Provide free AI and financial training in villages to help rural people make smart money decisions.
2. Develop mobile apps in local languages so everyone can use AI tools easily and safely.
3. Include AI and digital finance topics in school and college courses for better early understanding.
4. Set up help centers to guide people in using AI tools for saving, spending, and investing.
5. Government should promote awareness through TV, radio, and social media about safe AI-based money tools.
6. Encourage women and senior citizens to use AI apps by offering simple and friendly instructions.
7. Support small businesses with AI tools that help in daily budgeting, selling, and customer service.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not just a future idea it is already shaping how Indian citizens think about, plan and manage their money. From small shopkeepers in rural Bihar using mobile payment apps to young professionals in metro cities investing through AI-powered platforms, the change is real and growing. The study found that citizens are becoming more aware, more confident and more independent in their economic decisions, thanks to AI tools that offer real-time data, personalised suggestions and risk alerts.It is also evident that government programs like Digital India, Jan Dhan Yojana and the India AI Mission have created a strong base for this digital transformation. By improving internet access, financial inclusion and digital literacy, the government has helped citizens trust and use AI technologies. However, the journey is not complete. There are still gaps in digital knowledge, especially in rural areas and among older citizens. These challenges must be addressed to ensure equal access and usage. What makes this research important is its real-life relevance. It looks beyond theories and focuses on people's actual behaviour, choices and experiences. The conclusion is clear AI is not replacing human decision-making but improving it. When used wisely, it empowers people to make smarter, faster and safer financial decisions. This is not just a technological shift it is a social and economic evolution. The future of India's economy will depend not only on machines but on how well citizens learn to use them.

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