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**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION
PANJAB UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH**

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Editorial

The Indian Journal of Distance Education (IJDE), published by the Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE), Panjab University, has been at the forefront of scholarly inquiry in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) since 1987. As India's first peer-reviewed journal dedicated exclusively to distance education, IJDE has consistently championed academic excellence, interdisciplinary dialogue, and inclusive educational practices.

The journal serves as a vital platform for original research that critically examines the evolving landscape of ODL. Embracing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches, IJDE invites contributions that not only engage with core issues in distance education but also explore its intersections with disciplines across the humanities and social sciences.

Reflecting the interconnectedness of education and society, IJDE has gradually expanded its scope to include research from fields such as Sociology, History, Political Science, Law, Economics, Fine Arts, and Languages. This commitment to interdisciplinary engagement enriches the journal's mission to foster a more holistic understanding of education in contemporary contexts.

The current issue features fourteen well-curated articles by scholars both emerging and established offering critical insights into pedagogical theory, digital learning environments, and socio-educational change. Each contribution reflects the journal's dedication to publishing high-quality research that is relevant, accessible, and transformative.

I extend heartfelt thanks to the authors, peer reviewers, and editorial team for their rigorous scholarly efforts and ongoing support. I reaffirm our commitment to providing an academic forum that encourages reflective research and innovative thought in the field of distance and online education. We invite continued contributions that advance the frontiers of ODL and deepen our collective understanding of its role in shaping inclusive and equitable learning futures.

Professor Harsh Gandhar
Editor-in-Chief
Indian Journal of Distance Education

YouTube or MOOC: Teaching Postmodernism in the Age of Digital Media

Rahul Jain[1]

Abstract

The paper analyses a few video lectures on the YouTube and Coursera MOOC platforms to compare and contrast their teaching methodologies and platform affordances. The subject of these lectures is postmodernism. The postmodernist philosophy trains its guns at the media-saturated cultural sphere and makes critical claims on contemporary metaphysics. The paper studies as to how postmodernism, which is a substantial critique of the media-created hyper reality, is taught through the very same media. YouTube and Coursera are commercial New Media platforms that use Web 2.0 technology to entertain and engage student-consumers. As the conclusion of the paper suggests, the lines between education and entertainment have become blurred as the result of learner-centric cybergogy. MOOCs are just being used by learners as a 'YouTube for educational videos' especially because the course dropout rate can rise to 90 per cent. Digital education sponsored by a multinational corporation has come at the cost of losing human agency and the feeling of community. YouTube's lack of depth is the hallmark of the postmodern experience, and the anxiety with it quaintly modernistic. Meanwhile, the MOOC tries to translate the classroom dialectics of teacher-taught and scholar-student in the cyberspace.

Introduction

YouTube and massive open online courses (referred to by their acronym MOOCs heretofore) are essentially 21st-century technological affordances that build on the computational and network capabilities of the last century. They are the culmination of decades of efforts to compress the video form, and the recorded lecture by extension, to make it available anytime and anywhere. Both have seen an upswing in their usage in the wake of the COVID pandemic as alternative pedagogical resources (Shah,2020; Salvador, 2021). YouTube is a commercial advertisement-run enterprise with an optional ad-free subscription-based premium service whereas MOOCs are an educational academia-run service where the learner has the option to pay for access to certain graded assignments and the final course certificate. In this paper, an attempt has been made to do a comparative analysis of the pedagogical strategy employed by teachers on YouTube against the pedagogical strategy of MOOC teachers.

Technology in education is a forever-evolving paradigm that can make it hard to historicize. As in other fields, technology companies learn and adapt from each other's successes to offer similar educational experienc_es. On December 19, 2022, YouTube announced that it was launching 'Courses' as part of the YouTube Learning initiative held at the 'Google for India' event in New Delhi, India. The 'Courses' on You Tube aim to make the learning experience more structured alongside the availability of supplementary reading material (Mukherjee, 2022). Therefore, it makes it even more significant to attend to YouTube's inherent pedagogical potential.

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[1] Research Scholar, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,Chandigarh

The pedagogical significance of making the lectures available online includes: allowing flipped classroom[2] learning wherein the students watch the lectures at home and participate actively in the classroom; ease of access for the students; allowing self-paced learning; providing supplementary resources; and, providing a ready-reckoner for their exams (Woodet al.,2020, pp. 5-6). Moreover, as the newer generation grows up in a world saturated with new media, their digital nativity causes a strong pull factor towards learning from a source and language with which they are not just familiar but intimate. The present comparative analysis aims to give an insight to teachers and educational policymakers as to whether just uploading video lectures on YouTube are enough to ensure proper learning or whether these videos may have to be organised around a wholesome course that includes textual readings, assignments, assessments and a tangible outcome.

In the early years of the 21st century, Web 2.0[4] capabilities expanded the dimensions of possibilities it can offer to its users in contrast to the earlier Web 1.0 which provided only production-side uploading capabilities. The greatest facet of Web 2.0 is its participatory nature, i.e., rich consumer experiences and contributions are made possible. In its earlier avatar, the WWW did not offer any significant channel for the user-generated content to be shared amongst everybody in the network (Fuchs, 2014, p. 32). A participatory medium essentially delimits the propagation of sediment hierarchies. It ensures an egalitarian platform wherein the hitherto polar dialectics of learner and teacher cannot be maintained. The real potential of New Media lies not just in simple massification which the old media like radio and TV achieved with much success, but in its opening up the public sphere to polyphony, unlike a typical classroom with a one-to-many set-up.

However, this so-called participatory nature of Web 2.0 is questionable since less than 1% of its users upload any of their videos on YouTube (Lovink, 2008, p. 11). YouTube may, in effect, only serve as an erstwhile 'cinema of attractions' especially in its YouTube Shorts[1] format wherein it has encroached upon the commercial space of TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat. Still less than two decades old, this New Media invention was even created as a short-video format. "Jawed Karim, Chad Hurley and Steve Chen were discussing in 2004 how hard it was to find footage of TV items that they wanted to see again such as Janet Jackson's Superbowl breast flash or tourist shot tsunami footage from the recent South East Asian disaster. They decided to build a video-sharing site which launched as a venture capital start-up in November 2005. Its success was immediate, serving millions of short videos to viewers worldwide every day. Within a year, it was bought by Google for $1.6 billion" (Listeret al., 2009, p. 226).

Christian Fuchs (2014, p. 61)has written a staunch criticism against YouTube being considered a site for the growth of grassroots media when in fact the advertising revenues are swept up by Google shareholders rather than the producers and real owners of the content. He also says that "the most popular YouTube videos stem from global multimedia corporations like Universal, Sony and Walt Disney […] the predominant focus of users is on non-political entertainment". Such a highly commercialised space is a natural misfit for critical questioning or a progressive pedagogy to emerge where the marginalised students would feel connected and

empowered. Even though YouTube has a Long Tail[2] like other Web 2.0 properties, it remains hegemonized by neoliberal interests.

Where MOOCs can essentially score over YouTube is the active learning potential that it promotes over the passive consumption of the video feed that is the hallmark of a YouTube user. A typical MOOC involves participatory exercises, automatically-scored self-assessments, creative assignments, peer-graded essays, and peer-group discussions. Importantly, a MOOC tracks the learning progress of a student so that backstopping[3] and scaffolding[4], twin processes which are quintessential to the learning process, can take place effectively.

Comparing Lectures on Postmodernism on YouTube and MOOC Platforms

The video lecture chosen from YouTube is *Postmodernism Explained for Beginners! Jean Baudrillard Simulacra and Hyperreality Explained* taught by Simon Hunter (2022) of the channel The Media Insider. A close reading of this video has been carried out against the "Postmodern Identities I" video from *The Modern and the Postmodern (Part 2)* MOOC taught by Michael Roth (n.d.) on the Coursera MOOC platform. Both are approximately 11 minutes long. The most obvious difference has to be the difference in the context in which both videos appear. The former is generally intended for introductory learners as it is one of the top hits upon searching the YouTube database for the keyword 'postmodernism'. The latter is part of a lengthy and demanding structured programme on the transition from the modern to the postmodern which extends for 16 weeks divided into two parts of 7weeks and 9 weeks, respectively. The YouTube video presents an easily digestible summary of the concept to make the definition which has been given at the beginning of the video understandable and relatable to the everyday experience of the average viewer while the MOOC video has been designed for a dedicated and serious humanities student who wants to delve deep into each of the multifaceted aspects of postmodernist philosophy.
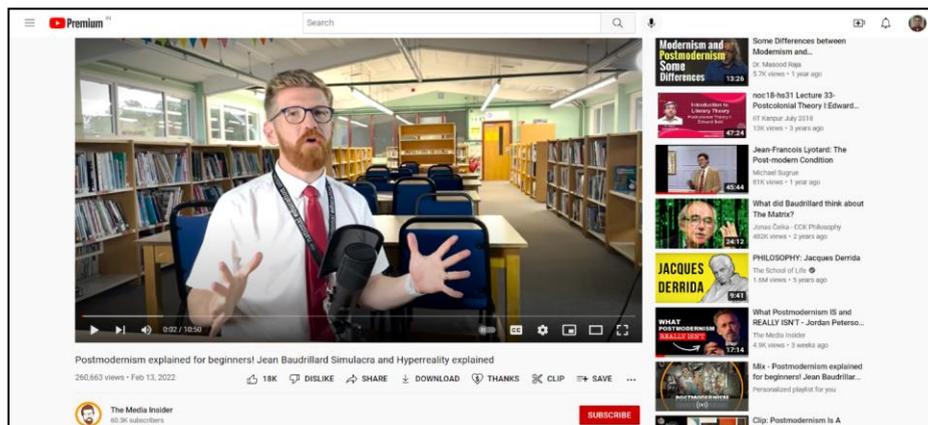
Simon Hunter's (2022, 0:02) lecture on postmodernism on YouTube.

Therefore, the intended audience of the two platforms in discussion is quite different although such a distinction can sometimes become simplistic as a simple

search in the YouTube database for 'lecture on postmodernism' can throw up lectures from Yale or those by Rick Roderick and Jordan Peterson[5]. However, these lectures are meant for a live audience and happen to have been recorded and uploaded online on YouTube. These are, in effect, 'lecture captures'[6] that have been attractive to the online viewership because they bring out the spontaneity of the live classroom and, give a sneak preview of the 'real and authentic' campus experience (Wood et al., 2020, p. 4). They are not explicitly meant to teach online; therefore, the question of their pedagogical influence does not arise in this context. They do not pay heed to the digital or medial turns that accompany the shift from traditional classroom lecturing to online video viewing. However, the plethora of opinions and worldviews points towards the open nature of YouTube that can absorb both hegemonic and counter-cultural currents, a veritable classroom without walls.

The teacher Simon Hunter has chosen the academic setting of a library to record the introductory video lecture on postmodernism on YouTube. He speaks into the condenser podcast microphone while the camera setup is fixed at what is known as the medium shot or the waist shot in film and television. It is a talking-head video as is expected of a lecture recorded for an online audience. By the looks of it, he wants to keep it professional as he wears a crisp white shirt with a red tie and a tag which points to his affiliation with the National Education Union. Such a setting and dressing confirms, at least in the first impression, that the speaker is an academician and the content will aspire towards depth and authenticity. It must be emphasised here that these small sartorial details matter as online video is essentially a visual medium that is consumed by the learner at a distance. Since YouTube is a competitive video marketplace, the first impression is sometimes the last. A learner wishing to find an introductory lecture on 'postmodernism' will probably not be watching more than a couple of videos, so grabbing the attention of the learner at the earliest becomes quite important.

As the name of the channel The Media Insider suggests, the final aim of Hunter is to use postmodernism as a tool to analyse and comment upon pop culture and media. Hunter begins by declaring that he has already watched hours of YouTube videos on the same topic before making his own. It justifies Juhasz's (2008, p. 138) statement that YouTube videos generally refer to other YouTube videos which mostly refer to popular culture. For a moment, his lecture turns into a hyper-real phenomenon wherein we see in the video itself the YouTube search results page of the keyword 'postmodernism' being scrolled down as Hunter makes the above-mentioned declaration. Another facet of the postmodern education economy instantiated here is that of 'self-marketing' or the 'self-as-entrepreneur' in which a person is forced to collect viewers, likes and comments as when Hunter says, "So, here's your challenge – if you can make it all the way to the end of this video leave yourself a like and perhaps leave me a like too."

Hunter begins by reciting Jean Baudrillard's one-sentence definition of postmodernism as the words are typed out in block letters on the whole screen. The definition given is: "Postmodernism refers to the state of a culture where media is produced in such staggering quantities that it has crossed the boundaries into reality itself and hyperreality prevails" (Hunter, 2022, 0:55). Proceeding from there, he then explains each part of the definition by taking examples from popular culture that in effect

support whatever is mentioned in the definition. Such a method of teaching is known as the deductive method which is more applicable to logic-oriented subjects wherein the proof follows the formula. What follows after the definition is more of an instantiation rather than an exploration. The cumulative effect of the video is ironic in the sense that postmodernism is reduced to yet another metanarrative, something that the movement itself stood against vehemently. There is also a generous use of random pop-culture images, computer graphics and animations.

In the attempt to make the YouTube lecture more audience-friendly by including graphics, images and videos from random sources without even a single citation or proper contextualisation, the lecture, in effect, creates yet another cinematic experience. Juhasz (2008, p. 134) calls just such a video a 'YouTube hack' as it fits into the standard YouTube vernacular form, i.e., of an advertisement for the postmodernist pastiche[7]. Being casual, superficial and dilettantish, it wreaks of oversimplification. It can be argued that this lack of depth is the hallmark of the postmodern experience, and the anxiety with it quaintly modernistic. Fredric Jameson (1991, p. x) has opined: "So, in postmodern culture, "culture" has become a product in its own right; the market has become a substitute for itself and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself: modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself. Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process". There is definite performance anxiety as the teacher attempts, as confessed by Hunter himself, to generate as much audience engagement with less focus on the philosophical content of postmodernism as much as on its sensational aspects. It is almost a postmodernist treatment of postmodern theory. That said, it has to be maintained that the ruthless market-based economics of the YouTube search algorithm itself demands that a video remain as short and visually appealing as possible.

In a follow-up video *What Postmodernism is and really isn't - Jordan Peterson Analysis*, Hunter (2022) uses the comments he received in the video discussed above to defend his limited definition of postmodernism and discuss Jordan Peterson's attack on postmodernists as it appears on YouTube itself. In the video, he includes many snippets of the lectures of Jordan Peterson, who has himself garnered the reputation of a pop psychologist through his classroom lectures, confrontational interviews and public speeches available on YouTube. The video can be seen as an illustrated summary of Peterson's diatribe against the political correctness and historical relativism of 'neo-Marxist' postmodernists, to defend the conservative values which he believes have been quintessential to all human progress. For example, in one of his speeches uploaded online, he calls Derrida the "head trickster for the postmodernist movement" and urges conservatives never to apologise as it is taken as an admission of guilt (Peterson, 2017, 1:55). It must be noted here that it was the YouTube community, and the Peterson fan base in particular, that revolted against Hunter's simplistic and politically neutral explanation of postmodernism which they felt was a heavily loaded and pernicious ideology that is destroying culture and undermining socio-economic development. YouTube hasbeen observed to create fan subcultures[8] that defend their ideals by leaving harsh comments or links to the videos of their idols.

To visually analyse the follow-up video, one notices the contrast with the earlier where the dressing style and the setting were professional. In this video, the look and the tone are casual. It looks as if Hunter has just woken up and is sitting in the kitchen to have his breakfast. Also, Hunter managed to casually slip in a marketing message for the website Skillshare which offers online courses for various kinds of skills like photography and digital marketing. In this way, one can observe how teachers on YouTube are (in)directly sponsored by other educational websites as YouTube itself is a very low-margin platform for content producers.

Since the YouTube platform is made for keeping eyeballs moving, the strategy of associated viewing is to create an endless chain of viewable videos from its tremendous relational database. For example, the viewer is motivated to skip to Peterson's full-length videos after watching the few snippets of his videos on Hunter's channel and then move on to the critique of Peterson himself by the likes of Slavoj Žižek and Sam Harris among others. YouTube archives even two-hour-long debates between eminent philosophers and authors like the ones mentioned above, whereby the audience gets a proper delineation of each of their theoretical positions in dialectical relation to each other. Sometimes, the debates are broken up into digestible bits and uploaded for the convenient consumption of audiences.

To elucidate the strength of YouTube in encouraging an open atmosphere of debate which is quintessential for a democratic pedagogy, a video of Zizek (2020) has been chosen as an example wherein he responds to a question on Peterson from a member of the audience. The title of the video *Slavoj Zizek — Is Jordan Peterson the real Postmodernist?* Seems to be clickbait which is meant to allure viewers to click on the video just based on its name or its thumbnail. The attendee eloquently asks whether the demise of symbolic efficiency or the crisis at the level of collective meaning does not leave a void that is filled by the likes of Peterson who provide coordinates of reality that individuals can make sense of. In true Žižekian style, Žižek (2020, 0:50) begins on a tangent by criticising Donald Trump who he portrays as an obscenely postmodern President for whom all truth claims are relative. Peterson's dependence on mythical narratives or the larger cause as a driver of human life is shown to be pre-modern as the modernist impulse demands reason even from narratives which are, in any case, products of ideology. Lastly, Žižek (2020, 8:45) directly condemns Peterson's naïve conservatism in which his harking back to the old, stable values turns him into a "postmodern clown". Such live and spontaneous performances of rhetoric and reasoning can inspire learners besides being a spectacle in themselves. Needless to say, such seminar speeches, which ideally formed part of academic courses, are becoming available to more and more audiences outside of academia at the tip of their fingers. This is the reason why David Berry (2011, p. 5) has argued that the public university is under tremendous pressure to justify its existence as the centre for the production of (print) knowledge and the flag-bearer of reason due to the rise of new knowledge access points and structures, democratically available without being a drain on the government resources or requiring the expertise of a professor.
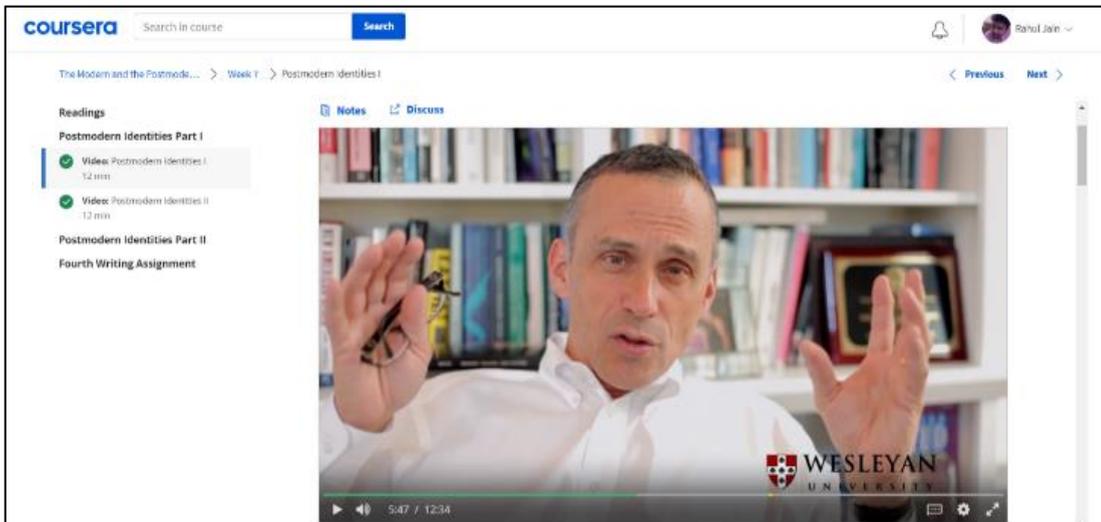
Michael Roth's (n.d., 5:47) lecture on postmodernism on the Coursera MOOC website.

The focus of Michael Roth (n.d.) in the video "Postmodern Identities I" is on the exposition and expansion of the ideas presented by Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek in the texts mentioned beforehand in the readings section of the MOOC. There is no anxiety to present a dumbed-down summarised version of their theories. When a topic is too complex, it is explained further through additional discourse rather than a convenient anecdote to serve in its place. The two writers are allowed to explain themselves through the various snippets of their longer interviews andlectures picked up from extant online sources like YouTube. Butler can be seen talking in a one-on-one interview with Roth which leaves a deep impact on the audience as one can get a greater understanding of the text from the author herself (Roth, n.d., 3:31). Another key functionality of the Coursera website is that as the learner scrolls down while following the text of the speech, the relevant sentence gets highlighted and the video moves to the smaller space alongside the text. These way slow learners can follow the speech which can often get too complex in its sentence structure and vocabulary. Furthermore, there are a revisionary quiz in the middle of the video so that the learner moves forward only when she gains confidence in the learning hitherto gained (Roth, n.d., 8:15). It just asks a single multiple-choice question but it plays a major role in keeping the students engaged with the subject matter of the video.

The MOOC video makes a sincere attempt to be as authentic to the philosophical core of postmodernism as possible by quoting generously from important texts, taking care of historicity and maintaining a non-frivolous academic tone. Not only is it less anecdotal but it demands more from the audience. The verbal element exceeds the visual element as the words of the teacher or the text gain prominence over the random videos and graphics interspersed between the YouTube lecture. *The Modern and the Postmodern (Part 2)* MOOC is not intended for the browser or the casual auditor but for an intensive learner who wants to get critically involved with the various readings on offer which can get quite lengthy and intellectually demanding.

YouTube has been called by Juhasz (2008, p. 138) a 'postmodern TV of distraction'where it is assumed that the viewer's attention is very limited and he will

inevitably keep scrolling or watching the other elements of the screen. If the viewer's attention is not captured on their website itself, then she may browse to other places on the WWW. It may be to the advantage of the viewer as she may browse through YouTube's humungous archive of moving imagery, the largest in the world, to finally find the kind of lecturer they understand the best. They can make it even simpler by slowing down the video or adding subtitles, if available.

There were many video lectures on postmodernism available in India's national language Hindi as well, like the one produced by the New Delhi-based Consortium for Educational Communication (Thakur, 2013). Although this Consortium produces studio-quality videos, they are not significantly different from a professor delivering the same hour-long lecture in the traditional classroom. The altruistic purpose behind this endeavour is rightly to reach the vast underserved and geographically displaced masses of students in India but the kind of multimedia affordances available on the web have not been incorporated into it. It just shows Prof. M.N. Thakur lecturing for almost an hour into the camera extemporaneously while delineating various aspects of postmodernist philosophy. It does not contain any graphical, visual or textual aids. Donald Bligh in his *what's the use of lectures?* Suggests that a lecture is more effective when its duration is half an hour or less rather than a full hour (Haber, 2014, p. 51). The videos on *The Modern and the Postmodern (Part 2)* MOOC are all around 10 minutes long. It is also marked by transitions into relevant videos and text slides at key points unlike the YouTube lecture mentioned above.

The wide variety of videos available on YouTube point toward its relatively democratic nature whereas MOOCs have a well-defined pattern that can appeal to a very small section of the already literate audience. Amateur efforts at grappling with complex theories, like the one by the YouTube channel Dana Multitasker, would not make it to a MOOC as it would have to be passed by institutional committees of an academic department but the non-hierarchical nature of the YouTube search algorithm ensures that amateur and professional videos have no hard political or aesthetic boundaries separating them (Kanwar, 2021). The postmodern distrust in expertise is once again in full display along with its belief that anybody can be a critic. Saurabh Kanwar, under the pseudonym of his YouTube channel's name Dana Multitasker, has created an informal lecture video with a whiteboard wherein he explains, as the title *Postmodernism || Evolution and Features|| Simplest Explanation in Hindi with Example!* Suggests, in everyday Hindi and quotidian terms the rise and features of postmodernism. YouTube lectures lag due to the non-contextualisation of the knowledge they present. The learner develops an interest in learning by knowing why that topic's knowledge is important or relevant to him in the first place. Historicity becomes an important aspect of the subject itself. *The Modern and the Postmodern* MOOC gently introduce the historical categories of the two movements in culture while also problematising such temporal definitions. Whereas YouTube can be said to echo Jameson's (1991, p. ix) view of the postmodernism "an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place". The traditional understanding of expertise gained through wide scholarship and teaching experience still works in MOOCs.

If we look at the comment sections/discussion forums of both platforms, it is easy to get lost in the wide variety and mundaneness of the feedback received. Whereas if this feedback was part of a linear and structured live classroom discussion, all the participants may have benefitted from it. To read it after months or years seems like consuming an information dump or eavesdropping. This has also given rise to the notion that commenting online is just talking to oneself, a form of mass self-communication (Haber, 2014, p. 66). These forums are quite primitive since they do not utilise their full multimedia or pedagogical potential. Another issue is proper closed-captioning which is not properly made available for all YouTube videos and the automatic subtitling feature of YouTube is faulty and, causes more confusion than clarity. Several MOOC platforms like Coursera, FutureLearn and edX diligently proofread their subtitles and are less error-prone.

There is a fertile cross-pollination between YouTube and MOOC platforms. The MOOC platform edX encourages teachers to upload video lectures through YouTube as its "video player defaults to, and is optimised for, YouTube videos" (Gilbert, 2015, p. 94). Several videos created originally for MOOCs or other educational websites have ended up on YouTube while snippets from larger YouTube videos have been used as copyright-free content for MOOC videos. YouTube created the general atmosphere for the routinisation of online video as not just a source of entertainment but also self-edification through the various kinds of lengthy audio and video lectures available on it. Khan Academy is an example of a MOOC platform that started as a YouTube channel by its founder Sal Khan. He used it to record and share videos of mathematics lessons with his cousins (Khan, 2011).

To give concrete examples of this cross-pollination, one can look at the online courses offered by the government of India's Swayam MOOC portal in which all the videos are embedded links from YouTube. They make separate YouTube playlists for each course on their YouTube channel or a separate YouTube channel for each course. For example, see the Swayam course and the YouTube channelof Merin Raj's course 'Postmodernism in Literature.' Their courses can be seen as rehashed YouTube playlists separated by weekly tasks alongside revisionary quizzes. The revisionary quizzes can be taken multiple times. The academic authenticity of a Swayam MOOC course, though, comes from the proctored examination that is conducted offline at various centres across India at regular intervals.

Education and entertainment have remained intertwined as genres that play on each other for depth and engagement, respectively. The demand for an entertaining education comes from its consumers. Juhasz (2008, p. 138) writes, "Today's students, schooled on YouTube, iPhones, and Wiis, want their information relayed with just such ease and fun: they want their learning pleasurable, simplified, and funny. They don't want to be bored; even as they are always distracted. They want school to speak to them in the language they like and know and deserve". While one can discern Juhasz's highly disparaging tone towards that populistic impulse in students, McLuhan (1960, p. 3) strikes a reconciliatory note between the twin concepts: "It's misleading to suppose there's any basic difference between education and entertainment. This distinction merely relieves people of the responsibility of looking into the matter. It's like setting up a

distinction between didactic and lyric poetry on the grounds that one teaches, the other pleases. However, it's always been true that whatever pleases teaches more effectively".

Juhasz (1994, p. 138) sees teaching on YouTube as nothing but the 're-performing of the dumping down of the culture'. We can see his bias clearly as he runs down the YouTube pedagogy for its non-authoritative stance and non-directional navigational space. He further adds: "We found that just what defined YouTube as good entertainment – its compelling lack of depth and expertise and its all but disappeared procedures of coherence, order and forced attention – made it poor for education" (Juhasz, 1994, p. 139). Here we see an insistence on the modernistic aim of education as involving diligent and purposeful action leading to social upliftment. Pop culture or the pop cultural ways of knowledge creation are summarily dismissed as non-academic and hence not worthy of the 'disciplined' and 'safe' space of the classroom. McLuhan (1960, p. 3), on the other hand, opines that the teacher does not have the choice anymore to ignore the vast cultural influx of new media. He says, "To be articulate and discriminating about ordinary affairs and information is the mark of an educated man". McLuhan was postmodern in his celebration of pop culture as an educational resource. YouTube can be seen as a Mc Luhanist pedagogy while the MOOCs hark back to the old modernist dialectics of critic-text, teacher-learner and, high culture-pop culture.

Conclusion

A particular focus has been given to the comparison of MOOC platforms with YouTube because the latter has, off-late, been widely used as a platform for uploading video lectures on a variety of literature. Video lectures have become more widely available as alternative educational resources with the development of cheaper computational and network technologies. The online video clip library YouTube has become one of the top ten most-visited websites in the world. The high number of views on its educational videos indicates that many learners use YouTube as a supplementary educational resource. On the other hand, massive open online courses (MOOCs) are a much-touted technological solution to an inefficient higher education system. These online courses also include video lectures from professors of high-profile universities. Thepaper aimed to give an insight to teachers and educational policymakers as to whether just uploading video lectures on YouTube is enough to ensure proper learning or whether these videos may have to be organised around a wholesome course that includes textual readings, assignments, assessments and a tangible outcome.

The paper gave a comparative analysis of a few video lectures on YouTube and a Coursera MOOC on postmodernism. Cultural theory, in general, and postmodernism in particular, demand intensive and extensive reading to understand its philosophical underpinnings and theoretical nuances. The chosen YouTube lecture needs a more sustained and in-depth exploration of postmodernism but focuses more on its sensational and pop-cultural aspects. The MOOC lecture is more word-centric than visual-centric compared to the YouTube lecture. Moreover, the MOOC lecture does not define or package postmodernism but historicises and explores its various cultural dimensions. The MOOCs trust scholarly expertise, while YouTube, in a typical

postmodern vein, provides a non-hierarchical platform for specialist and non-specialist opinions.

Sarah Grams and Roman Jurowetzki (2015, p. 83) have written extensively about the importance of social-emotional learning wherein the students subconsciously imbibe the emotional experience and process of learning alongside its novelty. In their own words: "It includes knowledge about how, for example, students are supposed to behave in class, as well as knowledge regarding physical actions… students also always build a memory of how they learn, for example, how classmates acted and reacted when someone made a mistake and whether or not they felt that English class was "fun". These processes of implicit learning are embedded in the concept that we call social-emotional learning". The lack of an affective feedback loop is an inherent disadvantage of the online mode of learning. However, taking a different line of argument, the message of the online lecture can be the medium of the internet itself whereby the learner is engineered to be a passive consumer of entertaining educational content. Even that content happens to be the previous media of TV, radio, newspaper and the book. As McLuhan (1994, p. 7) famously observed, "The medium is the message," and the content of any medium always consists of another medium. The question that then arises is whether online lectures have proved to be a paradigm shift in education or whether its message is the mere "change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7). In short, a MOOC may be a more flexible and faster classroom but it also a totally commodified one.Digital education sponsored by a multinational corporation has come at the cost of losing human agency and the feeling of community.

MOOCs are just being used by learners as a 'YouTube for educational videos' especially because the course dropout rate can rise to 90 per cent (Haber, 2014, p. 95). The supporters of MOOCs had triumphantly declared the demise of the brick-and-mortar classroom as they had claimed early successes in attracting a student body from across the globe (Haber, 2014, pp. 1-3). However, a MOOC has remained a traditional classroom delivered online. The greatest benefit for elite, highly-ranked institutions for running MOOCs is that they can reach an even wider audience and consumer base that is left out in the tough admission process or otherwise does not fit the profile of a college-going student. The final certificate that is the ultimate mark of achievement in a MOOC is the key differentiator between just watching YouTube videos for self-edification, and purposefully participating in a course for a useful and tangible outcome.

Endnotes

1. YouTube Shorts refers to a section on the YouTube platform that is meant for short-form videos i.e., video clips up to one minute in length. Additionally, it favours vertical videos i.e., mostly portrait-mode videos taken on smartphones. It was launched in July 2021 and garnered 5 trillion views in the first six months itself (Sprangler, 2022).

2. Long tail refers to the particular marketing strategy on the Internet where the sellers can become profitable by selling low-demand products since data-collection strategies and the searching practices of niche customers can reduce the competition for shelf space.

3. In pedagogy, backstopping means the strategy by which the academic regression of the learner is stopped, for example, by revisionary quizzes in MOOCs.

4. In pedagogy, scaffolding means the strategy by which the learning is supported or reinforced, for example, by giving critical thinking assignments.

5. There is a wide gamut of teachers, educators and professors who have recorded lectures on postmodernism which have been uploaded by them or others on YouTube. Rick Roderick's lectures on postmodernism are a part of the YouTube playlists of his lectures on 20th-century philosophy and Nietzsche. All of Paul H. Fry's lectures on literary theory, including the postmodern psyche, at the Yale University have been made available on YouTube. Jordan Peterson is a vocal and highly visible critic of postmodernism on YouTube. He frequently uploads his lectures, monologues and dialogues with his students through his own channel.

6. Lecture capture refers to the video recording a classroom lecture that is made available to the students online.

7. Pastiche- "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (Jameson, 1991, p. 17).

8. The term subculture refers to a group of people within a culture whose norms, values and lifestyles are at variance with the larger dominant culture.

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Distance Education and Usage of E-learning Applications: Establishing a Relationship

Reena Rani Chaudhary[1] and Vyany D Arora[2]

Abstract

In today's fast paced world, every individual recognizes the value of receiving education in order to advance in their lives.The most widely followed format of the teaching-learning process is classroom teaching wherein there is physical presence of students. However, alongside the traditional classroom format of education, there has recently been an introduction of distance education and open learning. Such newly emerged modes of education are flexible and self-directed. Parallel to the traditional classroom learning and distance learning, lies the realm of e-learning applications that have recently been developed and launched; are meant for studying at one's own convenience and make the process of learning enjoyable for the students. The present research paper aims at introducing the concept of distance education; and establishing a relationship between the usage of e-learning apps and students pursuing distance education. The primary goal of this research is to examine the opinions of students about distance education, their perspectives on e-learning applications and whether students pursuing distance education utilize e-learning applications during the course of their education.

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Introduction

Distance education can be understood as education of students who are not physically present at the educational institution (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2016). They are either unable to attend regular lectures or simply do not belong to the same geographical location in which the institution is located (Anderson &Vargas, 2020).

Earliest attempts of introducing the concept of distance education were made by Sir Isaac Pitman in the 1840s with his course on shorthand writing (Tait, 2003). The first distance education school was established in 1873 in the United States, known as 'Society to Encourage Studies at Home' founded by Anna Eliot Ticknor (Cole, 2012). Gradually, the concept of distance education spread to other countries and in 1858, University of London began to confer degrees in courses completed through distance learning.

In India, distance education courses are offered at Open Universities, Dual mode universities and standlone Institutes. The world's largest university, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is also an institute that provides students with the opportunity to pursue all kinds of courses at their own convenience and comfort.

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[1] Assistant Professor in Sociology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University Chandigarh.

[2] Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Panjab University Chandigarh.

Distance education separates the learner and teacher as they do not physically meet regularly. Lectures of such courses are either offered in a blended mode wherein a few lectures are conducted in the online mode and a few lectures require the physical presence of the students in the classroom; or there are no lectures at all and the students are on their own from the beginning of the course itself (Tabor, 2007).

Further, distance education calls for a self-directed, self-paced and self-regulated approach of study. Students have full autonomy and can choose when and how much to study at a particular time. The process of pursuing distance education is found to be economically reasonable, which is a reason why millions of students prefer such a system of study (Oblinger, 2000). Moreover, individuals who are working and are unable to attend regular classes have the choice of pursuing their education through the distance mode instead of having to suffer or dropping out. In other words, distance education allows people to balance their education along with other pursuits. Yet another advantage of distance education is the barrier of long-distance travel and commuting that it breaks. Students are able to study at the convenience of their homes and do not have to commute for classes, thus, saving their time and resources.

However, on the other hand, distance education brings with itself a few drawbacks as well. For instance, domestic distractions do not allow focused attention and concentration. Technology sometimes poses to be unreliable, which means glitches and network issues (Ostlund, 2005). Further, it is found that students lack motivation due to a lack of social interaction with peers and educators (Hellman, 2003). Students are lesser self-disciplined due to the flexibility the structure offers. Moreover, it is difficult to design a distance education program that is suited to students. All courses cannot be offered in distance mode because of the practical components of certain subjects, such as Psychology or even Geography. Nevertheless, the advantages of distance education outweigh the drawbacks because of the huge number of students it caters to and the numerous opportunities it provides.

In today's world where the internet has taken over, apart from the newly emerged structure of distance education, there has been an introduction of the concept of e-learning which refers to platforms that provide a successful learning experience to students on electronic devices such as laptops, tablets or even mobile phones. For this purpose, numerous e-learning applications have been developed in recent times. The primary goal of such applications is to make learning enjoyable as well as accessible to students across the globe.A few advantages of e-learning apps include flexibility and financial affordability (Gupta, 2021). The apps offer professional skill courses apart from full-fledged degree programs. A few extremely popular e-learning apps include the following—BYJU's (2011), Udemy (2010), Khan Academy (2008), Coursera (2012), Duolingo (2011), ALISON (2007) and Brainly (2007) (Mangi, 2022). Learning with the help of such applications may be synchronous, such as live-streaming of classes and video-conferencing (Bower, 2011); or asynchronous such as referring to e-books, listening to recordings and watching pre-recorded videos of the class. Further, these e-learning apps have come up with the concept of gamification. It refers to introducing elements of games in a non-gaming setup in order to make learning more enjoyable and fun for students. These elements may include points for correct answers, rewards,

medals and badges (Saleem et al., 2022). The underlying idea is to increase the motivation of students and make their learning experience more productive.

E-learning apps seem to play a crucial role in today's world especially for students who are in need of doubt clarifications or who find it more beneficial to learn through audio-visual systems. This research paper aims at analyzing the impact of e-learning apps on students, particularly those who are pursuing distance education as they are separated from their educators and peers; and are on their own throughout the duration of their course.

Review of Related Literature

For the purpose of the present research paper, the literature reviewed largely focused on the concepts of distance education, its benefits, and drawbacks as well as of e-learning applications. The literature studied provided numerous insights into the area of distance education as well as the development of e-learning apps.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2016) discussed the concept of distance education and how it could be supplemented with MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) as well as SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses) for the benefit of the students, thus encouraging their massive participation in these courses. They further highlighted the flexibility and reasonable costs of such online courses. Further,Anderson and Rivera Vargas (2020) critically analyzed the concept of distance education, highlighting the drawbacks of this approach of education. They discussed various challenges of distance education such as extremely optimistic outlooks, lack of transparency and low student support.Similarly, Tabor (2007) discussed the benefits as well as challenges of distance education, emphasizing on an alternative blended and hybrid mode of study.

Tait (2000) discussed the various factors that need to be looked into while developing and designing a distance education course. The relevance of this literature is that it directly addressed a criticism that distance education courses are difficult to design. For instance, extending support to students who suffer from disabilities, or creating the course in a manner that overcomes the barriers of language, cultural factors and communication. Likewise, Tait (2003) discussed the history of distance education and further talked about the benefits of open learning from the perspective of students pursuing courses through distance learning.Ostlund. (2005) discussed the obstacles faced by students pursuing distance education. For instance, she found that for students who do not have experience of distance education, the process of studying a course through the distance mode was difficult.Fidalgo et al. (2020) conducted a study in three countries to examine the perceptions of students towards distance education in UAE, Portugal and Ukraine. They found that distance education was positively rated by students in Ukraine and Portugal, the prime reason being their engagement with the new technologies and devices.

Gupta (2021) highlighted the impact of e-learning apps for a better learning experience among students. He discussed the advantages of e-learning apps and how they could prove to be a huge support for the education of students.Mangi (2022) listed out the 13 best e-learning apps in present day, thus, gives an insight into how these

apps function and why students rely on them for their studies.Vazquez-Cano (2014) carried out a study at the Spanish National University of Distance Education to examine the use of subject-specific apps and found that the students appreciated the subject-specific apps and that they enhanced their overall learning processes. Similarly, Karim et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine student satisfaction towards distance learning apps in Malaysia during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was found that such technology was effective and students were extremely satisfied with the support provided by these apps, particularly because they found the apps easily accessible, easy to operate and useful. Lastly, Saleem et al. (2022) discussed the very important concept of gamification and how it increased the motivation levels of students during the process of studying through e-learning apps. They found that various game elements such as points, badges and medals motivated the students and enhanced their learning process.

Research Objectives

The present research paper has the following objectives:

- To analyze why students pursue distance education

- To analyze the benefits and drawbacks of e-learning apps from the perspective of students

- To establish a relationship between distance education and the usage of e-learning applications

Research Methodology

For the purpose of the present research, an exploratory study was conducted in order to establish a relationship between the usage of e-learning applications and students pursuing distance education. Primary data was collected wherein a questionnaire was designed and distributed to 50 students pursuing their post-graduate education in Social Science subjects at a distance education centre in Chandigarh. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions that largely focused on the students' perspectives on distance education, e-learning applications as well as whether e-learning applications were able to fill the gaps created by distance education.

Results and Discussion

The major findings of the research paper have been discussed in the tables given below.

Table 1
Demographic profile of the respondents

Demographic Component	Frequency	Percentage %
Age group		
20-25	35	70
25-30	7	14
30-35	4	8

35-40	4	8
Sex		
Male	15	30
Female	35	70
Caste		
General	32	64
Reserved (SC/ST/OBC)	18	36
Marital status		
Single	40	80
Married	10	20
Economic background		
Upper class	7	14
Middle class	22	44
Lower class	8	16
Not disclosed	13	26

Briefly discussing the demographic findings, 70 per cent of the respondents belonged to the age group of 20-25, while 30 per cent of the respondents were above the age of 25 years. Approximately 70 per cent of the respondents were females and the remaining 30 per cent were males. Although 20 per cent of the respondents were married, 80 per cent of them were single. Further, although 64 per cent of the respondents belonged to general category, 36 per cent of them belonged to reserved category (SC/ST/OBC). The economic background of 44 per cent of the respondents was middle class while 30 per cent of them fell in the other categories of upper and lower class. 26 per cent of the respondents did not disclose their economic background.

Table 2
Reasons for pursuing Distance Education

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Job and work	22	44
Preparation for government exams and flexibility of schedule	16	32
Ability to pursue other courses	9	18
Financial convenience	3	6
Total	50	100

Analyzing the reasons of students for pursuing distance education, it was found that 44 per cent of the respondents cited job and work as their primary reason for choosing to pursue distance education. They also stated that since they had a strict eight-hour work schedule, they were unable to attend physical classes on a regular basis.32 per cent of the respondents mentioned that preferred a flexible study schedule as they were preparing for various competitive examinations. Some of the examinations mentioned by the respondents included UPSC (Union Public Service Commission), UGC-NET (University Grants Commission- National Eligibility Test) and Patwari examinations. It was also found that 18 per cent of the respondents mentioned the choice of pursuing other courses simultaneously as another advantage of pursuing distance education. 6 per cent of the respondents mentioned financial convenience and affordability to be an important reason for pursuing distance education. They stated that while regular courses were expensive, distance education was more affordable.

Table 3
Drawbacks of Distance Education

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Delay in receipt of study material	22	44
Language barrier	7	14
Lack of physical interaction with peers and educators	13	26
No problems with distance education	8	16
Total	50	100

Upon interpreting the findings with regard to the drawbacks of distance education, 44 per cent of the respondents cited delay in receipt of study material as the main drawback of distance education. They mentioned that they received their study material near to their final examinations due to which they had lesser time to prepare for their examinations. Further, 26 per cent of the respondents reported lack of physical interaction with peers and educators as another problem faced by them.14 per cent of the respondents also mentioned language barrier as another issue wherein they find the language of the study material difficult to understand. For instance, students who referred to their study material in the Hindi medium found the topics harder to understand. However, 16 per cent of the respondents cited no problems being faced by them while pursuing their distance learning.

Table 4
Usage of e-learning apps

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Use e-learning apps for education	46	92
Do not use e-learning apps for education	4	8
Total	50	100

Analyzing the results of the usage of e-learning applications, 92 per cent of the respondents mentioned that they made use of e-learning apps. The apps most cited by the respondents were Udemy, Coursera, BYJUs, and Khan Academy. On the other hand, 8 per cent of the respondents stated that they did not make use of e-learning apps for their education.

Table 5

Benefits of e-learning apps

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Availability of study material	18	36
Flexibility	16	32
Enhance the learning process	9	18
Financial affordability	7	14
Total	50	100

There were various reasons cited for students finding e-learning apps beneficial. 36 per cent of the respondents cited availability of the study material. They further elaborated on how easy it was to receive the study material from the app at one place instead of having to search for each topic separately either on the internet or scan through books. Similarly, 32 per cent of the respondents stated that the flexible learning schedule made their studies more productive. At times, they were unable to attend the live online class and the app provided recorded lectures which made it easier for the learners. 18 per cent of the respondents felt that e-learning applications enhance the learning process while 14 per cent of the respondents mentioned financial affordability as a benefitof using e-learning apps. Most of the e-learning apps had either a free-of-cost structure or a reasonable subscription fee which would last for at least three months, thus suiting the needs of the students.

Table 6

Drawbacks of e-learning apps

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Lack of physical interaction with peers and the educator	24	48
Question on the authenticity of knowledge being imparted	6	12
Distractions and network issues	8	16
Phone addiction and increased screen-time	10	20
No drawbacks	2	4
Total	50	100

Various disadvantages of e-learning apps were also highlighted by the respondents. 48 per cent of the respondents mentioned that e-learning apps, similar to distance education, lacked physical interaction with peers and educators. Further, approximately 36 per cent of the responses also revealed that studying through an e-learning app caused phone addiction, increased screen-time and other domestic distractions. Due to such issues, the respondents felt that sometimes learning through the e-learning app was not as effective as compared to attending physical classes. Further, 16 per cent of the respondents cited network issues and technology glitches as other drawbacks of e-learning apps. However, 4 per cent of the respondents did not find any demerits of e-learning apps.

Table 7
Do e-learning apps fill the gaps created by distance education?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	46	92
No	4	8
Total	50	100

The present study largely aimed to analyze whether students pursuing distance education were falling back on e-learning apps for help and support. As many as 92 per cent of the respondents stated that they did make use of e-learning apps while pursuing distance education and cited various reasons for the same. For instance, studying with the help of videos made the subject matter easier to understand and whenever required, students could clarify their doubts as well. The continuous online assignments and quizzes allowed the students to check their performance and progress. Further, the students also had an option of downloading the study material and studying at a later stage whereas an offline class once missed did not repeat. Moreover, language barriers of distance education were broken because the students had the option of choosing which language to study in. The learning processes on e-learning apps were interactive, engaging and provided enjoyable experiences. Finally, the availability of mock tests allowed students to prepare for their examinations in more detail and with more discipline. On the contrary, only 8 per cent of the respondents felt that e-learning apps did not fill the gaps created by distance education.

Conclusion

Nowadays, individuals recognize the importance of education and if they are not able to attend classes regularly, they opt for distance learning. Distance education fulfills the purpose of receiving a recognized degree with the help of which everyone can join the workforce and pursue a career of their choice. The available e-learning applications further enhance the learning process and attempt to fill the gaps of distance studies, thus making the overall learning experience enjoyable, productive and meaningful. It can thus be concluded that e-learning applications have proven to play a significant role in the academic growth and progress of students pursuing distance education and it is

probable that these applications will continue to offer support to such students in the future as well.

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Role of Technology in Facilitating Online Education for Distance Learners

Ram Mehar

Abstract

In contemporary educational frameworks, technological integration has become fundamental in facilitating effective online education for distance learners. Digital learning environments, commonly referred to as e-learning platforms, have transformed educational delivery methods and created unprecedented opportunities for individuals constrained by geographical barriers or professional commitments. Distance education participants benefit from numerous advantages including convenience, adaptability, and widespread accessibility. This mode of education enables studying from any location with internet connectivity, self-paced learning, and access to diverse educational resources. Additionally, online education fosters individualized and interactive learning experiences, enhances technological competencies, and encourages global connectivity. Nevertheless, several challenges persist, including limited face-to-face engagement, requirements for self-discipline and motivation, technical complications, restricted interaction with educators and peers, time management difficulties, constrained resource access, and assessment complexities. Despite these obstacles, online education continues to reshape learning paradigms by rendering quality education increasingly accessible, adaptable, and inclusive.

Introduction

Technology has transformed into an essential component of contemporary education, revolutionizing learning and instructional methodologies. The emergence of digital platforms and tools has established online education as a powerful learning modality that delivers unmatched flexibility, accessibility, and convenience to global learners. Distance education participants have derived significant benefits from technology-enhanced learning, as it enables them to access educational content and engage in instruction from remote locations. Educational delivery methods are evolving through technological integration, with online and mobile systems providing fundamentally different environments compared to conventional classrooms. Digital learning utilizes innovative instruments to establish borderless networks, facilitating dynamic learning opportunities through cutting-edge devices, hardware, and software. Sophisticated technologies provide access to expanded information resources, while internet-based communication enables educators to reach global audiences (King & South, 2017). The proliferation of mobile devices has empowered online educators to engage with students personally and provide them with the capability to interact with their learning environment from any location, resulting in fully dynamic educational experiences through digital channels (Cook & Sonnenberg, 2014).

The interrelationship between technology and online education has established a foundation for a novel learning era characterized by personalized, interactive, and engaging experiences. Technology has revolutionized educational practices by

equipping students with various software applications and tools Professor in Education, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University Chandigarh for creating presentations and projects, superseding traditional pen and paper methodologies (Gond &Gupta, 2017). The integration of digital devices such as tablets and e-readers has enhanced educational accessibility and convenience. These advancements have simultaneously intensified research interest in this domain. These technologies enable learners to engage with educational materials, interact with instructors and peers, collaborate on assignments, and receive performance feedback. They additionally provide opportunities for self-regulated and autonomous learning, allowing learners to customize their educational experiences according to individual requirements and preferences (Haleem, Javid, Qadri&Suman, 2022).

Key technologies facilitating online education for distance learners encompass learning management systems, video conferencing applications, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, mobile learning applications, and social media platforms. These diverse technologies offer multiple functionalities including content delivery, assessment and evaluation, communication, collaboration, and multimedia content development. Through technological integration, educators, students, and parents have access to numerous learning resources (Priyankar, 2016). The application of technologies in online education provides multiple benefits for distance learners. It promotes individualized learning experiences tailored to specific learner needs and preferences. It additionally fosters interactive and engaging learning experiences that enhance retention levels and comprehension. Implementing technology in higher distance education offers significant advantages to the overall student population, with particular benefits for students with special needs (Haleem et al., 2022).

Students enrolled in distance learning programs generally have access to tools that allow them to revisit lectures and communicate with peers and instructors. Students across all course modalities, including face-to-face and blended formats, benefit from similar technological resources (Turoff, Howard &Discenza, 2008). Furthermore, it enables learners to develop technological competencies increasingly essential in the contemporary digital environment. However, technology integration in online education presents several challenges requiring resolution to ensure optimal learning experiences for distance learners. These challenges include technical difficulties, requirements for self-discipline and motivation, limited interaction with instructors and peers, time management issues, restricted resource access, and assessment and evaluation complexities (Punie, Zinnbauer& Cabrera, 2006).

Overall, technology's role in supporting online education for distance learners is transformative and offers immense potential for expanding global access to quality education (Zhang, 1998). As the online education landscape continues evolving, exploring innovative approaches to leverage technology for enhancing learning experiences and addressing distance learner challenges remains crucial. Research indicates limited evidence of general social interactions among students; however, studies have identified unique interactions beyond coursework among students participating in specific groups (Haleem et al., 2022).

Several barriers exist regarding online learner needs, including awareness deficiencies and perceptions concerning online education requirements, concerns about impersonal learning experiences, and quality reservations. Educational institutions can address these challenges by promoting their online offerings, which are designed to ensure high-quality education and meaningful student-instructor interaction (Flowers, 2001).

Expert Opinion on Technology in Facilitating Online Education

Technology has fundamentally transformed educational accessibility for distance learners. Rapid technological advancement continues creating new opportunities for online education, establishing a learning environment characterized by enhanced efficiency, accessibility, and inclusivity. A principal technology benefit in online education involves addressing distance learner challenges. For instance, technology streamlines administrative functions, reduces workload demands, and increases efficiency. This enables educators to concentrate on teaching and student engagement rather than administrative responsibilities. Beyond efficiency improvements, technology is also transforming instructional methodologies in numerous ways (Paine, 2022). Digital tools and platforms empower educators to create more interactive and engaging learning experiences for distance students. Online learning platforms additionally increase educational accessibility for individuals who might otherwise lack educational opportunities, such as those residing in remote areas or experiencing disabilities (Haleem et al., 2022).

Technological integration is clearly revolutionizing online education in multiple positive dimensions. As exploration of possibilities and innovations in this field continues, we anticipate a future where learning becomes increasingly accessible, engaging, and inclusive for distance learners (Li &Lalani, 2020).

Significance of Using Technology in Online Education

Technological implementation in online education enables learners to access educational resources without temporal or spatial limitations, providing flexibility and convenience advantages. Key terminology employed includes technology, online education, electronic devices, software applications, digital tools, virtual environments, and remote learning (Paine, 2022).

- *Enhanced Inclusion and Personalization:* Educational opportunities have expanded through remote learning capabilities. Students experiencing difficulty in conventional educational settings can progress independently within secure environments, adults with health challenges or travel requirements can enhance their education, and full-time workers seeking knowledge advancement can learn remotely according to personal schedules. Educational institutions offering online courses have made qualification attainment exclusively through online channels possible while maintaining educational quality standards. As a result, individuals can benefit from online education no matter where they are located.

- *Advanced Accessibility:* Online educational technologies facilitate access to current, superior information. Traditional printed materials rapidly become outdated with lengthy update processes. Online resource utilization ensures

educational materials remain current and relevant with seamless learning integration. Modern students utilize technology to access a vast array of online resources and information. This enables independent research opportunities and encourages self-directed investigation. Technology simplifies complex concepts for diverse learning preferences through instructional videos and audio content. Technology maintains engagement levels, enhancing learning effectiveness.

- *Improved Efficiency:* Technology has simplified instructional tasks, including automated online assessment administration providing immediate feedback and results, eliminating manual grading requirements. Educators additionally utilize technology for scheduling group or individual sessions, creating personalized content, and student communication.

- *Increased Engagement:* The transition from traditional educational environments to online learning platforms enables educators to implement more interactive tools and approaches that enhance student engagement. Technology facilitates evolution from static learning materials toward more dynamic, interactive content. Students typically demonstrate accelerated learning and increased engagement when participating in interactive academic activities rather than exclusively listening to instructors and reading textbooks.

- *Adoption of Progressive Educational Technology:* Technological advancements provide educators with expanded instructional methodologies and resources. These innovations include mobile educational applications, collaborative platforms, learning analytics, virtual reality, and numerous cutting-edge tools and methodologies. These modern educational resources and techniques significantly enhance the learning process for both students and instructors. Technological influence on online education simultaneously transforms the educator's role. Subject matter expertise becomes less critical than guiding students through knowledge and technology landscapes. This innovative teaching approach fosters respect and trust among students regardless of whether they participate in online or conventional classroom environments.

- *Educational Quality Enhancement:* Technological developments aim to improve educational accessibility, engagement, and effectiveness across diverse student populations. Educational technology implementation enables productivity improvements and administrative cost reductions while providing more dynamic and individualized learning experiences. As remote learning's significance has increased recently, educational technology advancements additionally help bridge gaps between traditional classroom instruction and remote learning approaches.

- *Educator Collaboration for Online Resource Sharing:* Educators can collaborate and exchange ideas and resources through online platforms. They can communicate instantaneously with global colleagues, identify improvement areas, enhance methodologies, and ultimately provide students with optimal educational experiences. This collaborative approach significantly enhances teaching practices. Numerous online collaboration tools support educator

teamwork on projects, lesson plans, and documentation. Popular collaboration platforms include Google Docs, Microsoft Office 365, and Dropbox.

- *Online Discussion Forums:* Educators can participate in or establish online discussion forums for idea sharing, question posing, and feedback collection from colleagues. Various discussion forums exist, encompassing both general and subject-specific topics.

- *Social Media:* Educators can utilize social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to connect with colleagues, share resources, and participate in educational discussions.

- *Early Research Skill Development:* Technology provides immediate access to extensive quality information, enabling accelerated student learning compared to previous capabilities. This facilitates valuable research skill development among younger students.

- *Quality Resource Abundance:* The internet offers extensive credible and resourceful websites benefiting both educators and students. This enables access to diverse knowledge perspectives rather than limitation to individual viewpoints.

- *Online Learning Credibility:* While face-to-face interaction remains important, particularly during early educational stages, some students perform better with self-paced learning opportunities. Online education has achieved accreditation status and transformed educational perspectives. As a result, online learning has become a valid and trustworthy alternative for students who prefer self-directed learning methods.

Technology represents a powerful educational enhancement tool benefiting both educators and students. Its implementation has transformed learning processes and established fundamental educational components. Educators should adopt technology according to their specific requirements and student needs.

Tools for Online Education

Technology plays an essential role in facilitating resource and material access for distance learners in online education. Without technological support, distance learners would find it impossible to access equivalent educational resources and materials compared to campus-based students. Key technological supports for distance learner resource access include (Garlinska, Osial, Proniewska&Pregowska, 2023):

- *Online Learning Platforms:* These systems provide distance learners with centralized access to comprehensive course materials, including lectures, readings, assignments, and assessments.

- *Learning Management Systems:* LMS represents software facilitating online course creation and delivery. These systems typically include discussion forums, assignment submission systems, assessment tools, and grade tracking capabilities. LMS platforms additionally enable learner interaction with instructors

and fellow students, establishing community and collaboration essential for online educational success.

- *Multimedia Resources:* Technology enables creation and distribution of multimedia resources including videos, podcasts, and interactive simulations enhancing distance learner educational experiences. These resources remain accessible from any location with internet connectivity, providing flexibility and convenience benefits.

- *Cloud-Based Storage:* Services including Google Drive and Dropbox enable distance learners to store and access course materials from any internet-connected location.

- *Video Conferencing Tools:* Applications such as Zoom and Google Meet facilitate real-time interaction between distance learners, instructors, and classmates.

- *Online Libraries and Databases:* These resources provide distance learners with access to extensive collections of books, articles, and additional materials. Many online education programs offer virtual library access, providing vast digital resource repositories including e-books, journals, and research databases. These resources typically remain available continuously, enabling distance learners to access them according to personal convenience.

- *Mobile Learning:* Technologies including smartphones and tablets enable distance learners to access course materials and resources. This flexibility allows study according to individual's scheduling preferences and locations.

Beyond these specific tools and technologies, technology facilitates resource and material access for distance learners through additional mechanisms. For instance, internet connectivity enables distance learner access to diverse educational resources including websites, blogs, and videos. Technology additionally enables distance learner collaboration with peers and instructors on assignments and projects. Technology plays a critical role in helping distance learners access resources and materials essential for online educational success.

Strategies and Solutions to Overcome Technological Challenges in Online Education

The following approaches address difficulties and obstacles encountered when integrating technology into online education (TheCodeWork Team, 2023):

- *Establish clear expectations and guidelines:* Educators should communicate explicit guidelines and expectations for online learners, including course schedules, submission deadlines, and communication protocols. This clarifies student requirements and provides structural frameworks.

- *Foster community development:* Create opportunities for online learner interaction with instructors and fellow students through discussion forums, virtual group projects, or synchronous video sessions. This establishes community connections, encourages collaboration, and reduces isolation perceptions.

- *Provide comprehensive orientation and support:* Offer orientation sessions or tutorials familiarizing online learners with learning management systems (LMS), communication tools, and additional course technologies. Provide ongoing technical support addressing emergent issues.

- *Incorporate diverse instructional strategies:* Implement varied instructional approaches including videos, interactive modules, assessments, and virtual simulations engaging online learners. This variety maintains motivation, enhances understanding, and accommodates diverse learning preferences.

- *Promote critical thinking and problem-solving abilities:* Online educators can enhance critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities by designing activities requiring application of learning concepts to real-world situations. They can additionally provide collaborative problem-solving opportunities and learning process reflection.

- *Encourage effective time management:* Provide guidance regarding time management techniques and encourage schedule creation and realistic goal establishment. Emphasize coursework prioritization and dedicated study time allocation.

- *Offer consistent feedback and support:* Provide timely and constructive assignment and assessment feedback helping online learners evaluate progress and implement improvements. Additionally, offer virtual office hours or individual sessions addressing specific questions or concerns.

- *Enhance resource accessibility:* Ensure course materials, resources, and multimedia content remain accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities. Provide alternative formats or captions for videos, utilize screen-reader-compatible documents, and ensure website compatibility with assistive technologies.

- *Promote self-reflection and self-assessment:* Encourage online learners to evaluate learning progress and establish personal objectives. Provide self-assessment opportunities through self-paced assessments or reflective assignments, enabling independent understanding monitoring and learning ownership.

- *Facilitate peer collaboration:* Encourage online learner collaboration through group projects, discussion boards, or virtual study groups. This promotes active learning, knowledge sharing, and peer support.

- *Continuous improvement through feedback:* Regularly collect online learner feedback regarding educational experiences. Apply this feedback for necessary improvements to course structure, content delivery, or technological aspects enhancing overall online learning experiences.

- *Develop Digital Literacy Skills:* Digital literacy capabilities are essential for online education success and beyond. Online educators can enhance learner digital literacy through instruction regarding Learning Management System (LMS)

utilization, communication tools, and additional course technologies. They can additionally encourage technology utilization for learning creation and dissemination.

Implementation of these strategies and solutions enables educators to address technology-related challenges in online education for distance learners and establish engaging, supportive learning environments promoting student success.

Advanced Technologies that can be used for making Online Education best

Technology continues rapidly transforming educational roles, particularly regarding distance learner online education. Future technological integration in online learning will likely introduce increasingly innovative and impactful methodologies (King & South, 2017). Specific examples of future implications and opportunities regarding technology's role in facilitating online education for distance learners include:

- *Artificial Intelligence:* This technology can revolutionize online education through personalized learning experience delivery, task automation, and real-time feedback provision. AI-powered tutoring systems can deliver individualized instruction and homework assistance. AI can additionally generate adaptive learning materials accommodating specific learner requirements and personalize learning strategies. AI-powered learning platforms can analyze student data and behavior patterns to provide information, feedback, and assessments specifically tailored to individual needs and preferences (Siemens, 2021).

- *Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality:* These technologies provide immersive and interactive learning experiences. VR can simulate historical events or facilitate virtual field trips. AR can overlay digital information on physical environments, offering novel approaches to complex concept exploration (Liu et al., 2022).

- *Blockchain:* This technology enables establishment of secure, immutable documentation regarding student academic achievement. This facilitates development of digital diplomas and transcripts enabling seamless sharing and verification. Blockchain technology additionally supports development of novel frameworks for online education financing and facilitation.

- *Adaptive Learning Systems:* These platforms leverage data analytics and cognitive science principles for delivering personalized instruction tailored to individual student learning requirements and pacing. Through continuous assessment of learner knowledge and capabilities, adaptive systems dynamically adjust difficulty levels and learning activity content, maximizing learning efficiency and effectiveness. These systems provide immediate feedback, remediation, and scaffolding, enabling mastery achievement regarding challenging concepts (VanLehn, 2011).

- *Gamification:* This approach applies game design elements to non-game contexts including education. It establishes engaging and dynamic learning

environments encouraging student achievement of learning objectives (Deterding, Khaled, Nacke& Dixon, 2011).

- *Social Learning:* Social media platforms offer distance learners opportunities for instructor and peer connections, collaborative learning activity engagement, resource sharing, and performance feedback collection.

- *Big Data Analytics:* Big data analytics application in online education provides valuable insights regarding learner behavior, preferences, and performance. This information enhances instructional design, personalizes learning experiences, and improves assessment and evaluation practices.

Beyond these specific technologies, increased utilization of current technologies can be anticipated, including video conferencing, online collaboration tools, and cloud-based learning platforms. These technologies enhance remote learning accessibility, affordability, and effectiveness. Technology's future role in online education for distance learners appears promising. As technology continues evolving, we can anticipate increasingly creative and effective approaches for enhancing learning and improving student outcomes.

How can Technology be used to Improve Education and access to Quality Learning for Distance Learners

This represents technological utilization for enhancing quality and accessibility of online education for remote learners. This encompasses various tools and methodologies, including online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, educational applications, and additional resources. Through strategic technological implementation, educators can develop engaging and interactive learning experiences tailored to distance learner requirements (Gond & Gupta, 2017; Li &Lalani, 2020).

- *Create personalized learning experiences:* Technology enables development of individualized learning experiences. AI-powered tutoring systems assist students with assignments and provide personalized instruction. AI additionally supports creation of personalized learning plans and adaptive learning content adjusting to individual student requirements.

- *Enhance online education accessibility and affordability:* Technology improves online education accessibility and affordability for distance learners. Cloud-based learning platforms enable course material access from any internet-connected location. This particularly benefits students in rural areas or with limited financial resources.

- *Provide expanded interaction and collaboration opportunities:* Technology facilitates increased student interaction and collaboration. Video conferencing tools enable real-time connections with instructors and classmates. Online collaboration tools support joint project work regardless of geographic separation.

- *Utilize data for teaching and learning improvement:* Technology enables student learning data collection and analysis. This information enhances teaching and

learning through identification of additional support requirements and student progress feedback.

Leveraging technology for online education enhancement for distance learners potentially transforms learning methodologies and improves educational accessibility and inclusivity. Technology can transform online education for distance learners, increasing personalization, accessibility, affordability, interactivity, and effectiveness.

Conclusion

Technology has fundamentally reshaped online education, offering unprecedented flexibility, accessibility, and convenience to global learners, particularly distance education participants. Implementation of innovative tools including learning management systems, video conferencing applications, virtual and augmented reality technologies, mobile learning platforms, and social media creates dynamic learning opportunities. These technologies foster personalized learning experiences, improved retention rates, and enhanced understanding for students with special requirements. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including technical difficulties, self-discipline requirements, and resource limitations. Educational technology advancements, including online platforms, instructional applications, virtual and augmented reality systems, and artificial intelligence, aim to enhance accessibility, engagement, and effectiveness across diverse student populations. Addressing these challenges requires educators to establish clear expectations, develop community connections, provide comprehensive support, incorporate diverse instructional strategies, promote critical thinking and time management skills, and develop digital literacy capabilities.

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Role of Open and Distance Learning Mode in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 under New Education Policy: A Study of USOL, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Kamla[1] and Shayama Devi[2]

Abstract

Education is a key to the development of human capability and progress. It is also indispensable for achieving a sustainable and equitable world. United Nations, an international Organisation, works for the peace, prosperity and development of the individuals and the planet Earth. It adopted 17 World Sustainable Goals with the aim to create sustainable, Prosperous and Equitable world. United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs-4) focuses on the inclusive and equitable quality education to all irrespective of gender, social and economic status. In spite of its setting higher goals, higher education is still far from the reach of Poor and marginalised section of the society. In the present dismal scenario, Open Learning Institutions came forward to make the education reachable to the unreachable. It is possible through these institutions to provide an inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The objective of the present research paper is to evaluate therole ofOpen and Distance Learning institutions in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 under New Education Policy. To achieve this objective a humble attempt was made to analyse admission data of last five years of University School of Open Learning, Panjab University, Chandigarh. The descriptive and analytical methods have been used. The descriptive method has been used to describe the concept of open and distance learning and sustainable development goals and targets of new education policy to achieve SDGs-4. The analytical method has been used to analyse the admission data of USOL.

Keywords: Inclusivity, Education, Sustainable Development, ODL.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right. It is a powerful and central wheel for the overall development of individuals and society. It is the foundation of the society which brings sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, social prosperity and sustainable development. It is the strongest instrument for establishing equality, peace and stability. Education is central to the overall development of human society and to the improvement of the lives of people globally. It is an important means of eradicating poverty and hunger. It is known to be a stepping-stone for promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. The United Nations Decade (2005- 2014) of Education for Sustainable Development highlights the significance of education for improving the quality of life and a better future.

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[1] Assistant Professor, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University Chandigarh

[2] Guest Faculty in ISSER, Panjab University, Chandigarh

UNESCO's Director-General *Koichiro Matsuura* described the importance of education for sustainable development by stating that *"Education– in all its forms and at all levels – is not only an end in itself but is also one of the most powerful instruments we have for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development."* (https://unesdoc.unesco.org). Sustainable Development Goal- 4 states 'e*nsuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'*.

The scenario in India is not much better as compared to other countries. There is a huge backlog of adult illiteracy, the issue of educated unemployment and seeking new professional skills and degrees for gaining better job opportunities. From this point of view, open and distance learning centres are very significant in providing opportunities of education to the deprived sections of society in our country. Open Distance Education models make education accessible to the traditionally disadvantaged segments of the country's population. To provide the best education to the socially, economically marginalised and disadvantaged sections of society, the Government of India formulated New Education Policy in 2020. The New Education Policy has given great importance to open and distance learning. The policy comprehensively focuses on achieving the global standard of quality education offline and online modes.

Concept of Open and Distance Learning

The concept of distance and open learning came from the idea that learners and teachers may not be in a classroom at the same time. They may also be separated by geographical distances for various reasons. But it is possible through online and short-term personal contact programme for the learner. It affords a cheap and convenient mode of education for the marginalized and disadvantaged sections of society. It provides uniform standards of education to different sections of society regardless of caste, class, creed and religion. It emerged as an alternative and important innovation to reach the unreached and mitigate the problem of illiteracy among the masses.

Open and distance learning (ODL) is considered a significant medium for sustainable development in the age of information technology of advanced learning. Distance learning means learning distantly, without direct connects with the teacher in the regular classroom. Here the term 'distance' refers to the mode. It not only covers the geographical distance between the education-delivering institution and the students but also includes time, economic, social, educational and communication distances. The term 'openness' highlights the flexibility or lack of restrictions, in terms of the number of seats, as well as attendance, class timing, subject combinations etc. The distance teaching institutions which impart education based on these principles are usually known as open universities. In other words, distance education is a system of learning and teaching that is based on the principles of open and resource-based learning. This mode of learning is beneficial for geographically scattered rural areas which are far from urban infrastructure (Vyas-Doorgapersad, S., 2011)

Review of Literature

Various research studies have been conducted to recognize the potential of open and distance learning to enhance the inclusiveness and access to quality education to each and every one. Fozdar and Kumar (2007) in their research article revealed that Open and Distance Learning offers access to quality education in a cost-effective way, irrespective of students' location. A study conducted on increasing strength of students at Bachelor of Science programmes at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India, highlights that optimal use of mobile learning has improved the students' retention in this stream. They suggest that there is a great need to improve the technological interventions in the higher education system. Adoption mobile learning systems has improved the communication and enriching students' learning experiences in Online and Distance education institutions.

Maile (2016) in his book 'Assuring Institutional Quality in Open Distance Learning (ODL) in the developing context' stated that Quality assurance and its management are crucial in higher education. It has increasingly gained importance in open and distance learning (ODL), particularly in developing countries. South Africa has recognized ODL as a vital strategy for improving access to higher education. The country has recently updated its policy on ODL program. However, the existence of a policy alone does not ensure quality; effective arrangement of practices with the policy is essential. ODL must actively integrate quality into its management and operations. Although there have been international efforts to address quality management through research publications but the research literature remains limited, especially regarding the implementation of ODL in achieving sustainable development goals. The author suggests that assuring institutional quality in Open Distance Learning (ODL) can bridge the gap between policy and practice in this area.

In his research article, Osikomaiya (2020) highlights the role of Open and Distance Learning in disseminating educational content and making it accessible to diverse students across the world. It provides the opportunities to the students who could not avail the access to higher education due to various reasons.

Shava et al. (2021) in their research paper titled '*Towards Achieving Innovation Through Mainstream Sustainable Development Goals 4 On Quality Higher Education The Southern African Perspective*' emphasise that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is an effective tool for achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG 4), which focuses on promoting inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education for everyone. It enhances access to education, reduces inequality, improves teacher training, and supports lifelong learning and skill development. Authors highlight that higher education curriculum and pedagogy needs to be modified to address issues of quality and lifelong learning.

Olajire et al. (2021) in their descriptive survey on the contribution of ODL to sustainable development found that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) promotes the globalization of education in several ways. It opens up access to students for taking education at university level. It helps break down geographical barriers, enabling

students from diverse backgrounds to access quality last five years education, regardless of their location.

Various research studies have been conducted to recognize the potential of Open and Distance Learning. But very few studies have been focused upon the role of open and distance learning for achieving the sustainable development goals in India. The present studytries to explore the role of Role of Open and Distance Learning Mode in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 under New Education policy with the help of data analysis based on the admissionof last five year (2018-2023) ofUSOL, Panjab University Chandigarh.

Relationship between NEP 2020 and SDG 2030

In terms of size, India has the third largest higher education system in the world followed by USA and China. Since 1980, open and distance learning mode has been used widely in our country as it is more suitable for ensuring inclusive and equitable education for lifelong learning (SDG-4). India adopted this goal in 2015. Under this sustainable goal the Government of India launched a New Education policy 2020. The holistic aim of this policy is to transform the nation to a "*more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative community and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive and prosperous nation*" (NEP, 2020). The New Education Policy has given great importance to open and distance learning. The policy states that all programmes, courses, curricula and pedagogy across subjects, including those in-classes, online, and in ODL modes as well as student support will aim to achieve global standards of quality. New Education Policy is the first education policy of the 21st century which comprehensively focuses on achieving the global standard of quality education including that in-class, online, and in ODL modes under the sixth fundamental principle of new education policy. In view of the recommendation of National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035 and to further promote Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online education, the UGC has constituted an Expert Committee to review existing ODL and Online regulatory framework while ensuring quality, driven by simplified recognition system and processes.

Role of ODL in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal-4 under New Education Policy

The New National Education Policy 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 share the goals of universal quality education and lifelong learning. The target of SDG 4 is to eliminate gender inequalities in education and guarantee equal access to all levels of education. Target 4.5 of SDG-4 gives the highest priority on gender equality and inclusion in education. It states that "by *2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*" (https://en.unesco.org/). To achieve this target the new education policy emphasizes the importance of equity and inclusion, with commitment to providing education to all including disadvantaged and marginalized groups. The NEP 2020 says:

"*This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG 4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems*" (https://www.education.gov.in). The goals of universal quality education and lifelong learning can be achieved through the mode of open and distance learning.

In India, there are many problems in getting quality education for all sections of society such as exclusion of rural communitiesdue to a lack of educational resources, demand of more qualifications for getting better jobs in urban and metro cities. So ODL is unique for providing access to education for the traditionally disadvantaged and less accessible segments of the society for fulfilling their desires. Distance learning for higher education was initiated in India in the form of correspondence course in 1962. The first national education policy emphasised on its development on a large scale. The education commission also recommended the expansion of correspondence education for the various purposes. In 1985, the Government of India established Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The establishment of IGNOU was the milestone in the promotion of distance learning education. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the distance and open learning institutions were established on a large scale. In 1991, the distance education council was established for the promotion and coordination of the open and distance learning system in the country.For the promotion of distance and open learning education system, the Ministry of Education directed to the University Grant Commission to act as a regulator for higher education system in ODL mode including for technical education in universities/affiliated colleges in 2014 (Mandal, 2022).According to the annual report of All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020-21, there are 16 open universities consisting of one Central Open University, 14 State Open Universities and 1 State Private Open University. There are 110 Dual mode Universities.

The NEP (2020) envisages the extensive use of educational technology at all levels in its education system. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has directed all the Indian higher education institutions to implement the enhanced technological interventions in the educational transactions.All programmes including teacher training program, professional and vocational programme, adult education & lifelong learning programmes will be made available in new instructional online modules. Open and distance learning institutions offers new programmes/ courses in blended learning format (Aisha &Ratra, 2020).

This policy envisions a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system to deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion. The policy emphasises on increasing access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education; scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students; online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL). Researchers tried to analyse the contribution of ODL in achieving SDG goal by analysing the data of the last five-year of USOL, Panjab University Chandigarh.

Table No.1

Enrolments in Universities and its Constitute Units through Regular and Distance Mode

Sr. No.	Level of Higher Education	Regular	Distance
	Post-Graduate	1058838	1265347
	Under-Graduate	2808206	2959947
	PG Diploma	47828	120810
	Diploma	158954	153677
	Certificate Course	27910	56328
Total		**4,101,736**	**4,556,109**

Source-AISHE Report 2020-21.pdf (education.gov.in) Page no.28

The data presents in Table no. 1 shows that more students are enrolled in distance mode of learning in comparison to the regular mode of learning in various Universities and it's Constitute Units in India.The negligible decline in enrolment in regular mode has been seen in diploma only. Data shows that distant mode is providing the opportunities of Higher Educations to the aspirants who are not able to get it through regular mode.

Table No. 2

Enrolment Data of USOL at Panjab University Chandigarh

Sr. No.	Academic Years	Panjab University (USOL)	Percentage
1.	2018-19	14137	-
2.	2019-20	14302	1.167
3.	2020-21	16314	14.06
4.	2021-22	16306	-0.04
5.	2022-23	14866	-8.83

Source: official data of USOL

Table No.2 shows that the enrolment ratio in University School of Open learning at Panjab University Chandigarh had been continuously increasing but with decline in 2022-2023. But if we see the decline in the light of table no 3, enrolment was still betterin comparison with the admission in the colleges of Punjab.

Table No.3

Enrolment Data of the Total Colleges of Punjab

Year	Total College	Total Seat	Total Enrolment	Percentage
2014-15	383	1.44 Lakh	70830	-
2016-17	376	1.34 Lakh	58324	-17.65
2018-19	393	1.12 Lakh	45446	-22.08
2019-20	386	1.00 Lakh	43670	-3.09
2020-21	309	84,691	34,943	-19.98
2021-22	276	77,966	34,844	-0.28
2022-23	255	71,762	Data not available	-

Source-17 January 2023, Punjabi Tribune

Table No.3 shows that the numbers of college in the State of Punjab state has been continuously on decline since academic session 2014-15 to 202-23. As a result total seats and enrolment ratio of students also decreased. Due to the shortage of students in the college, some of the colleges could not survive and compelled to shut down. Main reason behind the decline in number of students in the colleges is their migration to the developed countries with the aim of better future. A decline of 8.83% was observed in 2022-23 in USOL, Panjab University, Chandigarh. The remaining years show either stability or an increase in enrolment. On the other hand, decline of 22.8 was noticed on the regular mode.

Table No.4

Enrolment of Students Under-Graduate classes in USOL Panjab University, Chandigarh

Sr. No.	Academic Years	Number of Students in UG Classes
1.	2018-19	8348
2.	2019-20	8234
3.	2020-21	9469
4.	2021-22	10630
5.	2022-23	10193

Source- USOL, Data

Table no. 4 shows that enrolment of students in the Under Graduate Classes in USOL at Panjab University, Chandigarh has continuously increased since the academic year 2018 to 2023. In the academic session 2019-20 and 2022-23, the strength of students has marginally decline as compared to the previous year's academic session 2018-19 and 2021-22 respectively**.**

Table No. 5

Opportunities of Education for Women (Marginalized Section) in the ODL System (Equitable Growth)

UG (USOL) Panjab University, Chandigarh

Sr. No.	Years	SC	ST	BC	EM.
1.	2018-19	404	31	159	-
2.	2019-20	432	51	202	-
3.	2020-21	568	61	294	494
4.	2021-22	639	72	382	536
5.	2022-23	646	55	396	551

Source: -(USOL -Data), Panjab University, Chandigarh.

(SC-Scheduled Caste, ST- Scheduled Tribes, BC-Backward Classes & EM-Employees)

Table no. 5 indicates that during the academic session 2018-19 to 2022-23, the enrolment of female from Scheduled Caste category and backward classes has been increasing. The number of female students of scheduled tribes also increased from 2018-19 to 2021-22. Though, enrolment number in 2023-23wa on nominal decline. Overall, data mentioned in table indicates that OLD system provides a better and equal opportunity to women belong to the marginalized section of society.

Table No. 6

Inclusive growth of deprived section (Male) of Society

Years	SC	ST	BC	EM
2018-19	611	107	679	-
2019-20	654	137	725	-
2020-21	772	164	400	705
2021-22	870	195	848	536
2022-23	835	146	757	551

Source: - (USOL -Data), Panjab University, Chandigarh.

(SC-Scheduled Caste, ST- Scheduled Tribes, BC-Backward Classes & EM-Employees)

Table No. 6 depicts the inclusive growth of Male students belonging to scheduled caste, Scheduled Tribes and Backward classes. It shows the positive result. The data indicated the consistent increase in enrolment number of male students from SC and ST categories. The enrolment numbers of male students from backward classes has fluctuated. In the academic session 2020-21, it dropped to 400 from 725. But in the academic year 2021-22, it become more than double (848).   In 2022-23, it also decreased 848 to 757.

Comparative analysis of Table No. 5 & 6 shows a huge gender gap in enrolment during academic session 2018-2023. The strength of male students from the marginalized sections is more as compare to female students. SDG4 and New Education Policy targeted to achieve inclusive growth for all sections of society. In underdeveloped countries like India not only the women deprived of education but most of the time male members of underprivileged sections of society are also not able to get higher education on regular mode. This happens due to their poor economic status as a result, they are compelled to go for employment at an early age to earn their livelihood in spite of their having the desire to get higher education. The ODL mode helps them to fulfil their desire of higher education and achieve respectable status in society.

Women who are not get higher education in regular mode due to various socio-economic reasons they get opportunities to pursue their education through ODL mode. Researchers have taken the data of five years to show the increasing trends of education of women through ODL mode. Though ODL mode is quiet helpful in achieving SDG goal 4 but Distance Education Centres are facing the following challenges

Challenges

Objective of ODL is to reach the unreachable. SDG4 Goal is "to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." New education policy also committed to attaining the goal by making education inclusive and equitable. But the recent DEB guidelines have instructed the Centres for mandatory 75 percent attendance for all the distance learners. This move of DEB is discouraging for the distance learner.

1.   ODL aims tofulfils the dream of the aspirants of higher educational needs of the employees, women, SC, ST, BC, retired and old age people. For the employee, it may be difficult to get leave for the specific days of PCP. Women retired and old age people find it difficult to arrange accommodation outside their city. For SC/ST, BC and also for the students belonging to the economically weaker sections of society, it may fall hard on their pockets to manage food and shelter in a big city. If they don't fulfil the condition of 75% attendance, they will be deprived of appearing in the examination, It may be a great setback in achieving SDG-4   the "inclusive, equal & equitable opportunity for learning" under NEP in the field of higher education. This will also adversely impact the enrolment of the students in ODL mode which will further shrink the financial resources of the ODL institutions.

2. Second challenge is online classes. This is the most effective way to reach the unreached. We need a very sound network of technology to implement this system. Poor network connectivity is a great hurdle. Distance learners in remote areas face difficulty in connecting themselves to the online mode of classes and submitting online assignments on time. Otherwise, Online mode is very effective in cost-cutting and managing the faculty crunch.

3. Third challenge is the adaptability of shifting from a classroom system to a distance learner. Students don't deal directly with administrative activities during the classroom system (Regular Mode). They always get the assistance of their teachers and administrative staff for all the administrative work like filling the admission and examination form, payment of fees, exams & result etc. All these activities are looked after by the concerned institution. But in the distance mode students have to accomplish all these tasks on their own. Moreover, they are not habitual of checking the online notice -board, or online prospectus for general instructions and guidelines and check their e-mails regularly. Sometimes they missed important deadlines and face financial losses in the form of late fees.

4. The major challenge which is faced by the institution is the shortage of faculty members. Institutions are used to run the courses with the support of guest faculty that too available only during the PCP (Personal Contractual Programme). They are not available physically in the department throughout the year. So, when distance learners come to the department to clear their doubts related to the curriculum, non-availability of faculty disappointment them. So, the major challenge for the institution is to cope with the shortage of faculty.

Suggestions

1. Decision of mandatory 75% compulsory attendance (except for practical classes) needs to be reassessed.

2. To make the online mode more effective and reachable to the countryside people, the government should vigorously work on network connectivity so that people belonging to the remote area should make optimum use of it.

3. An exclusive E-platform should be created for the distance learner to reply to their queries related to administrative work, and to make them comfortable with ODL system.

4. To implement the SDG-4 goal in letter & spirit government should approximately grant funds to the ODL institution so that institutions can appoint the required faculty to cater the needs of the learners.

5. Faculty of E-Library must be provided to thedistance learners.

6. NEP emphasizes skill development and value-added courses. Every profession /industry apart from skill development needs professional ethics, communication skills and leadership qualities. ODL mode may be helpful in inculcating these qualities through value-added and traditional courses.

7. Tutorial groups should be created for the online counselling of ODL learners.

8. A slot of fixed time may be created for a physical meeting of the ODL learner with the faculty members to answer their queries if any, (not mandatory) at least once a week.

Conclusion

Education is fundamental human right.It is seen as an empowering right not only to everyone (especially the economically and socially deprived children and adults) but also for the sustainable development of every country. Education system in India is the third largest education system of the world. It plays a significant role in promoting an inclusive education for all. But there is still a huge backlog of adult illiteracy because a significant section of Indian society is still living at the bottom of economic ladder. They have to get employment at early age to earn their livelihood. Though they have strong desire to achieve higher education, the ODL has been constantly playing a significant role to fulfil their desires. The data analysis of the present paper exhibit the significant number of enrolment of SC,ST, Women and working students who were deprived and unable to pursue their education through regular mode. An inclusive growth for all sections of society through equitable education are the target under SDGs-4 . ODL institutions aims at providing an inclusive and equitable education to all ,especially to the underprivileged sections of society without any discrimination since long. The last five years data analysis of USOL shows higher enrolment ratio in USOL in comparison with regular mode of learning institution in the state of Punjab. For making education more inclusive and equitable, there is need of improving infrastructure, financial support, generating an exclusive E-platform - E-Library and appointing more faculty members etc. to address needs of the open and distance learners.

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Understanding the Dimensions of Education: Challenges and Future Pathways

Madhurima Verma

Abstract

Education has a significant impact on how societies and individuals are shaped, and there are several aspects that are central to it. Geographical location, cultural background, and socio-economic level all continue to be major determinants of educational prospects. These differences have a significant impact on social mobility, thus maintaining social stratification and bolstering already-existing inequities. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has made these issues worse, exposing the weaknesses in educational systems and emphasizing the necessity of creative solutions to guarantee inclusive and equal education for all. This paper emphasizes the importance of distance education. Further, it is argued that despite the multiple challenges, NEP offers encouraging avenues for progress.

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Introduction

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines ''*Education* as a process of teaching, training and learning, to improve knowledge and develop skills. Education is a dynamic instrument of change and is expected to affect or condition the social behaviour of the person being educated. It is a life-long process which is always used to imply a positive state of mind''. According to Bamisaiye (1989), education is "a cumulative process of development of intellectual abilities, skills and attitudes, all of which form our various outlooks and dispositions to action in life generally" (p. 9). Education, is thus seen as a true tool for imparting in a person the knowledge, skills, values, and interests required to contribute positively to society.

According to Abulencia, (2021) World Vision defines "education as the process by which people acquire or impart basic knowledge. It is also where people develop vital life skills, understand social norms, develop sound judgment and reasoning, and learn to discern right from wrong."

According to Niedlich et al. (2021), education plays a unique role in society because it socializes future generations into society while also influencing the values, norms, and objectives of education because teaching and learning occur in specific socioeconomic, cultural, and political contexts. According to Bourdieu (1984)"educational systems can serve as mechanisms for both maintaining existing social structures and fostering societal transformation".

People view educational goals differently. Religious leaders often emphasize the moral development of children through education, whereas parents tend to see education as a pathway to future career success. Politicians, on the other hand, are generally concerned with educational reforms that serve Professor of Sociology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University Chandigarh national interests.

Meanwhile, students and teachers those most directly engaged in the educational processmay pursue goals that differ entirely from those of other stakeholders. Education is therefore important to society as its ultimate goal is to help people navigate life and to contribute to society.

Similar to this, the purpose and significance of education differ between nations. A developing country that has gone through colonialism ought to view education differently from one that hasn't. In an Indian setup, to be educated means you are gainfully employed. Today, job opportunities and careers have become dependent on the degrees and educational qualifications. Schools, colleges and universities not only broaden people's minds or perspective but are expected to prepare new generations citizens for participation in economic life. There is a strong linkage between education and employment hence the higher incentive to invest in education. When education does not result in employment, underprivileged families do not primarily get motivated to educate their children. Public Report on Basic Education in India (PROBE) (De,A. et al.1999) exposes the myth regarding free school education. The report points out that education is a major financial burden on poor families with several school going children. So, it is but natural for families who invest on children education to expect return on the same. It is therefore necessary to understand and decide on the exact purpose of education. Is it mere employability or much more than that? An educated society facilitates development and tends to be more equitable. It can be argued that 'employability', which forms the primary objective of education, particularly higher education is more individualistic.

In India, the overall enrolment rate in higher education is abysmally low. Because of low enrolment, quite expectedly, the skill level of labour force in India is also poor. India has one of the youngest populations globally, with a significant share in the productive age group. The skills possessed by this demographic play a crucial role in the nation's development, making it essential to equip them with the appropriate competencies.

India's Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in higher education remains significantly lower than that of many developed nations and even some developing countries surpass India in this regard. India's GER in higher education rose from 24.1percent in 2016–17 to 27.3percent in 2020–21. Among all states and Union Territories, Kerala recorded the highest GER at 46.5percent in 2020–21, while Bihar reported the lowest at just 15.9percent. Indian Society is plural and heterogeneous with an underlying thread of togetherness. The imposition of a homogeneous and uniform methodology (management, curriculum, evaluation) on any of the processes has resulted in a low GER. Several factors contributing to the lower GER in the India, include a limited number of accessible higher education institutions, scarcity of diverse courses that enhance employability and career prospects, inadequate research resources, and a lack of global recognition for Indian educational programs.

It is therefore necessary to understand and decide on the exact purpose of education. Being educated is no longer an option but a necessity. Before discussing the challenges, let's take a few steps back in time.

Ancient universities in India and their destruction: India, one of the world's oldest civilizations, was a center of higher learning in antiquity. It has long been a nation of intellectuals, was globally known for its wisdom and the universities including Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila. Students from all over the world traveled to these esteemed educational institutions to study under the highly distinguished professors. Sanskrit scholar Panini, the renowned grammarian was at Takshashila. He produced his best work called Ashtadhyayi (eight chapters) there. It was an intricate, rule-based Sanskrit grammar text that survives in its entirety to this day. Nalanda was a Buddhist center where students often spent as many as twelve years studying the Vedas and the Upanishads, the works of Mahayana Buddhism and Jainism as well as the systems of philosophy and logic. But these epic centers of learning were destroyed during Mughal invasions.

The British introduced the modern education system in India, which continues to be followed today. They replaced the traditional indigenous education systems with English methods. In 1857, they established universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. Initially, these universities functioned mainly as examining bodies for existing colleges that offered courses in various disciplines such as arts, law, medicine, engineering, and science. The establishment of the universities in 1857 led to a rapid rise in demand for higher education. The number of students passing the university entrance examination grew from 162 in 1857 to 2,778 by 1882. To accommodate this surge, the number of government colleges increased from 27 in 1857 to 75 in 1882. Over the following two decades, 51 additional colleges were established, bringing the total to 126 by 1901–02. Further expansion continued with the founding of Banaras Hindu University and Patna University in 1916 and 1917, respectively.

At the time of independence, India had only 20 universities and around 500 colleges, with a total student enrollment of approximately 2,30,000 (Ganai, 2019).Promoting access to quality higher education and establishing premier institutions was a key focus in the early years following India's independence, as reflected in the creation of IITs, IIMs, and other centers of academic excellence. Since then, the country has made remarkable strides in expanding its higher education system. By December 2011–12, the number of universities had risen to 659, with 33,023 affiliated colleges. Despite this rapid growth over the past six decades, higher education in India remains unevenly accessible across different segments of the population.

Current scenario

As per report of AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) 2020-21, there are more than 1000 (1,113 Universities) and more than 43,000 (43,796 to be precise) Colleges in India. The Indian Central government finances public universities to upgrade their infrastructure and make them more affordable for students from all backgrounds. On the one hand, India's higher education system is expanding quickly, with several universities and colleges providing a vast array of programs. This has made it possible for students to pursue further education and gain the information and abilities needed to prosper in the global economy.

There are two broad observations in light of this.

Global Ranking

Global University Rankings are used to evaluate the performance of a country's higher education institutions. It is generally believed that institutions with higher rankings are better equipped to foster an environment that supports the development of knowledge-based economies.There are two most reputed surveys for higher education which we know as THE (Times Higher Education survey) and QS (Quacquarelli Symonds). According to the World University Ranking (2023), India holds the sixth position in the list of countries which have been successful in making their place in THE ranking (2021). There are 6 such universities of India which have opened their account under World University Ranking 2023 this year i.e. these colleges have got rank between 351 to 400 and only one IIT from India in rank from 1 to 300. Forty-one Indian universities have featured in this highly regarded university ranking system this year. QS-India's higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. An examination of QS and THE rankings over the past decade reveals that China is the only country to have notably expanded its presence among the world's top 500 universities.

Brain drain

In 2022, approximately 650,000 Indian students pursued education overseas, surpassing pre-pandemic figures, according to data from the Bureau of Immigration (BoI). Each year, students enroll in international universities in pursuit of high-quality education and entrepreneurial skill development, contributing to a substantial financial outflow—estimated at $3 billion—to support their studies. Beyond academic aspirations, many students are also driven by the desire for a better standard of living and the perception that studying abroad opens doors to a more prosperous future.

One major factor motivating Indian students to leave the country is the poor state of domestic higher education institutions, marked by inadequate infrastructure, a lack of qualified faculty, outdated curricula, and weak links between academia and industry. In contrast, several countries that send large numbers of students abroad also attract international students, helping to offset the outflow. For instance, China had over 800,000 students studying overseas in 2016, while its universities hosted around half that number of foreign students. Malaysia maintains a balance, with inbound student numbers roughly equal to those going abroad. Singapore, notably, attracts more than twice as many international students as it sends overseas. However, India experiences a stark imbalance—outbound student numbers are over four times greater than those coming into the country (Datta, 2018).Highly skilled emigrants often find more lucrative job opportunities in developed countries, which means they are contributing to the economy of those countries instead of India. This slows down the economic growth and development in the country. A shortage of skilled workers in critical sectors can lead to a competitive disadvantage for Indian industries and reduce their capacity to innovate and grow. Additionally, several researchers and scientists emigrate to countries with better research facilities and funding opportunities. This leads to a decrease in research and

innovation activities in India, which can hamper scientific and technological advancements in the country.

Challenges

Indian higher education is faced with four broad challenges.

1. **The supply is not congruent with the demand**: India's higher education enrolment rate remains relatively low at just 18%, in contrast to 26% in China and 36% in Brazil. This reflects a significant unmet demand for access to higher education across the country. The interface between higher education and job market, the mismatch is in terms of low demand by the job givers and high supply of job providers. Since universities and higher education institutions keep their quota of seats fixed, the passing out students are differently skilled as compared to what is needed by the employers. The HEIs fail to conduct market demand surveys and accordingly align their courses and seats. This leads to a lose-lose scenario for the pass-outs and employers as the former is not able to match the requirements of jobs, and the later has to invest on on-the-job training to orient/upgrade the skills of the employee.

2. **The low quality of teaching and learning**: The system is beset by issues of quality in many of its institutions, a chronic shortage of faculty, poor quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and pedagogy, lack of accountability and quality assurance and separation of research and teaching. In HEIs, in the area of research it is majorly **re-search** rather than active **research**. The quality of PhDs we produce is poor and deteriorating with time. It is fast becoming more like an ornamental degree rather than an expertise or area of excellence.

Who all take up to teaching and join as a teacher?

There is no nobler profession than teaching. However, it is no longer the preferred profession. In countries like Finland, teachers are more trusted than the army. Finland's strong democratic values, low levels of corruption, and commitment to equality have fostered a high level of trust in its education system. However, in India, teaching is one of the least preferred professions. The respect and gratitude that teachers used to get and so rightfully deserve are rarely seen now. They stand ignored and not well acknowledged. Additionally, it is lowly paid.

According to a government report, India's ratio stands at 24:1, compared to 19:1 in both Brazil and China. Among the eight nations analyzed, India recorded the most unfavorable ratio, falling behind Sweden (12:1), the UK (16:1), Russia (10:1), and Canada (9:1).A significant number of higher education institutions in India operate with less than half the faculty they actually require. Estimates suggest that the sector—which includes central, state, and private universities—is facing a shortage of over 500,000 teachers. The report highlights that central universities alone have 6,600 vacant faculty positions, amounting to a 33% deficit. Vacancy rates are even higher in IITs and state universities, where 35% and 38% of posts, respectively, remain unfilled (www.onmanorama.com, 2019).The report attributes the poor student-teacher ratio not only to the failure to fill sanctioned posts but also to the reluctance of institutions to

create new faculty positions to meet growing demand.The posts remain vacant for years. Several students complete their graduation without permanent faculty for their subjects. Current trend is drifting towards adhocism where financial implications are minimized. How does one expect students to excel both academically and later professionally?

Involvement of teachers in work other than teaching?

It has been reported by Ghai, (2022) the faculty in HEIs is overburdened with duties all year long, such as counseling, admissions, fee collection, result publication, and cultural activities, leaving them with little time for their classes. Faculty members are part of various administrative committees within the institution, such as curriculum development, accreditation, or faculty governance. Additionally, they organize and supervise cultural events, clubs, and extracurricular activities etc. Teaching is, of course, a core responsibility of faculty members. However, it often competes for time with the other duties. As a consequence, it is most of the time compromised.

1. **Constraints on research capacity and innovation:** India lacks high caliber researchers due to its extremely low PhD enrollment rate & its quality, limited chances for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work, a dearth of early-stage research experience, a poor innovation ecosystem, and low levels of industry-academia engagement. However, centrally financed "top tier" institutes like the IITs, IIMs, and Institutes of National Importance seem to have an endless supply of funds. However, serious researchers run into problems with government nepotism and bureaucratic red tapism. Budgets are frequently left unused at the same time because there aren't enough genuine, high-quality research ideas. There is a general lack of international collaboration in the humanities, social sciences, and arts, and concerns have been raised about the recent neglect of these fields in India. Departments have shrunk as fewer students have chosen research jobs in these fields, creating a vicious cycle of less job prospects for researchers. Very poor industry-academia partnership is another example. One case see this happening with IITs that too on a small scale. According to the Indian Skills Report that resulted from a recent poll conducted by Wheelbox, Taggd, and the Confederation of Indian Industry, respondents gave graduates of higher education institutions a less than 50% employability rating.

2. **Uneven growth and access to opportunity**: India's social structure is still very fragmented, and there are multiple ways in which different demographic groups and geographical areas are enrolled in higher education in unequal ways. Gender disparities in access to higher education continue to be a significant concern in India. In addition to this, the higher education system faces multiple layers of inequality tied to caste, region, religion, and economic status. Despite policy initiatives aimed at increasing access, marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have largely remained underserved in terms of higher education opportunities.

There is also considerable regional disparity in the distribution of quality institutions. For example, data from the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)

2021 reveals that top-ranked colleges are predominantly located in just 9 of India's 28 states—namely Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal. All the institutions from these states feature in the top 100 rankings, according to Eldho Mathews, Deputy Advisor at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. In contrast, states with limited resources struggle more to provide high-quality education."

Here are a few potential solutions to address the issues faced by higher educational institutions.

Teacher - As was already mentioned, the majority of Indians do not view teaching as their ideal career. Taking a cue from the preceding discussion, the fundamental query is How can one draw in a creamy, educated layer for this line of work? Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland are a few examples of EU countries that have been successful in doing so by first a well paid profession that has tapped on the cream/serious intellectuals into it. Secondly, they have made teaching more interesting by making it interactive and the students looks forward to it rather than one way traffic (lecturing and almost zero interaction). Students challenge their teachers with their viewpoints and it actually becomes an enriching experience for both students and teachers. A strong sense of achievement comes in delighting both. You would relate this to the movie `3 idiots' which aptly picked on our stale education system. This can be extended to active research as well where both student and teacher work together. This would not only challenge the students but teachers as well. It would bring novelty in research and nudge both to explore the unexplored.

Student - The extensive education system remains largely focused on teaching and the role of the teacher. There is an urgent need to transform it so that students are encouraged to challenge and critically examine answers, rather than simply respond to questions. The abundance of freely available information on the internet has seeded the thinking (among students) that Why learn in HEIs when they can do so sitting anywhere. However, they fail to pick that it only provides information, not the full understanding and application of it. Too much information also, at times, leads them into a situation of analysis-paralysis and therefore the focus gets lost - meaning that they are well informed but not well educated.

Further, we also see that the students are or as a matter of fact have almost lost the habit of reading. Staying glued to internet or cell phones has taken a big dent. We have also witnessed deterioration of attentiveness of students and the urge to learn, during COVID times (almost 2 years). On-line classes, under the guise of safety and convenience, did take a heavy toll on these aspects. Has it also somehow embedded a `Chalta Hai' attitude amongst both, is a question to ponder upon.

Curriculum - What is the curriculum problem in Indian HEIs?

In recent years, the speed of both technological advancements and societal shifts has accelerated. Consequently, knowledge and competencies that were once valuable may have lost their relevance. Furthermore, higher education institutions face challenges in promptly adapting to these rapid changes, potentially resulting in outdated

curricula..Additionally, curricula are typically designed by committees or academic departments, which can slow down the process of implementing changes. The development of curricula usually requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, and subject experts. While this collaborative approach is valuable for producing well-rounded curricula, it can slow down the decision-making process and make it difficult to implement changes quickly. Several institutions have established processes and procedures for curriculum development and approval. These structures, while important for maintaining academic quality and consistency, can also be rigid and resistant to change. Furthermore, because these committees fail to keep abreast of developments, they may become disconnected from employers' demands or the employability perspective and may continue with little modification to the more traditional curricula. This can make it challenging to introduce new courses, teaching methods, or interdisciplinary approaches. Lastly, updating curricula can be hindered by institutional or financial obstacles, including the costs of acquiring new resources and resistance to altering long-established programs. Updating curricula often requires investment in new materials, technologies, or training for educators. Institutions may face financial constraints or be hesitant to allocate resources to support curriculum changes.

Lack of diversity in higher education curriculum

A vast array of students in India comes from incredibly diverse backgrounds in terms of culture, language, socio-economic status, and more. India is renowned for being a pluralistic society, where people from various regions, religions, and traditions coexist. By incorporating this diversity into the curriculum, educational institutions can cater to the unique needs and experiences of each student. This inclusive approach not only respects the individuality of each student but also fosters an environment of mutual respect, understanding, and unity, which are fundamental principles of a harmonious and equitable society. Furthermore, a diverse curriculum has the potential to offer students a more well-rounded and comprehensive education. It goes beyond simply imparting knowledge and instead aims to provide a holistic learning experience. When students are exposed to a wide range of subjects, disciplines, and perspectives, it can significantly enhance their intellectual horizons. Such exposure allows students to develop a broader skill-set and knowledge base that goes beyond traditional academic boundaries. They learn to think critically and creatively, solve complex problems, and adapt effectively to ever-evolving workplace situations. In essence, a diverse curriculum equips students with the tools they need to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and interconnected world.

Multidisciplinary courses are a prime example of how diversity can be integrated into the curriculum. These courses draw from various fields of study and blend different academic perspectives to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of a topic. By embracing such multidisciplinary approaches, students not only gain expertise in specific areas but also learn to connect ideas across disciplines, thereby fostering creativity and innovation. For instance, a global health course that integrates fields like public health, medicine, sociology, anthropology, and political science offers a broader and more in-depth perspective on global health challenges. The National Education

Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes this approach and emphasizes multidisciplinary education as a key objective.

Vocational courses are sparse

In contrast to the United States and the United Kingdom, where the government takes a hands-off approach in shaping educational curricula, the situation in India differs significantly. In India, regulatory bodies such as AICTE and UGC play a prominent role in overseeing the operations of universities. This involvement has often been criticized for introducing bureaucratic hurdles and maintaining traditional educational approaches that struggle to adapt to the evolving global requirements.

Vocational courses, on the other hand, serve the crucial purpose of equipping individuals with practical skills and knowledge tailored for specific trades, crafts, or professions. These courses emphasize on imparting hands-on expertise that can be readily applied in various workplaces, encompassing a broad spectrum of fields such as welding, carpentry, automotive repair, cosmetology, nursing, and computer programming, among others.

The Indian government unveiled the (NEP) 2020 alongside the Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme (EQUIP), a comprehensive five-year plan announced in 2019. Along with initiatives to improve teacher education, the policy introduces four-year degree programs and more adaptable academic pathways. The new NEP is being developed to address the evolving needs of the population concerning quality education, innovation, and research. Its goal is to transform India into a knowledge superpower by equipping students with essential skills and expertise while addressing the shortage of talent across science, technology, academia, and industry.There is emphasis on vocational courses in order to boost employability under NEP.

It is in this context NEP (2020) underlines the necessity for universal, holistic, equitable and multidisciplinary education. Since some of the Universities have to yet implement NEP therefore it is too early to comment how successful it is going to be in the long run. One thing is certain that collaborative efforts are required to develop a better teaching and learning environment that is sensitive to the needs of individuals as well as the collective demands of a prosperous, inclusive and developed future.

Distance Education-A Game Changer

Distance education, one answer for a portion of India's ability challenges, proceeds to develop and might be quite possibly of the most brilliant spot in the country's advanced education area now that the public authority permits higher-positioned organizations to offer web-based degree programs. What's more, as organizations all over the world saw with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning is setting down deep roots.

Distance education in India began with the introduction of correspondence courses as early as 1962, providing learners with an alternative mode of study outside traditional classroom settings. Two decades later, the country witnessed a significant

milestone with the establishment of its first Open University, designed to further expand educational access. The creation of the National Open University (later known as the Indira Gandhi National Open University) in 1985 marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of distance learning. This institution played a crucial role in promoting open and distance education as a credible and effective means to enhance educational opportunities. By offering flexible learning options, the Open University system has helped to democratize higher education, making it more accessible to a diverse population, including working professionals, rural learners, and those unable to attend conventional universities.

Distance education has become a powerful catalyst in higher education, providing effective solutions to many of the limitations encountered by conventional educational models.It makes higher education accessible to a wider and more diverse range of students. It eliminates geographical constraints, allowing individuals in remote or underserved regions to gain access to quality educational opportunities.Further, it allows for greater flexibility in terms of scheduling, allowing students to study at their own pace and on their own terms, making education more manageable. However, it's important to note that while distance education offers numerous benefits, it also comes with its own set of challenges, such as issues related to internet access, digital literacy, and a potential lack of in-person social interaction. Institutions need to address these challenges to maximize the value of distance education in improving the higher education system.

The future of higher education in India should be focused on creating a dynamic, adaptable, and inclusive system that addresses the changing requirements of students, the job market, and society. These pathways can help India overcome its challenges and build a stronger higher education sector.

India has the capacity to effectively tap into the remaining pockets of untapped potential throughout the nation if it can achieve the ambitious goals set forth in the NEP and related initiatives. India can better serve the needs of its own students and draw talent from around the globe by enhancing the aspects of its higher education system that work well and addressing the ones that require improvement.

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India's Ageing Population: Challenges and Solutions

Reena Rani Chaudhary[1] and StanzinAngmo[2]

Abstract

The exponential growth of the ageing population has become a major concern in recent decades. The increasing growth of the ageing population is due to the combination of declining fertility and mortality rates, along with increasing life expectancy. On one hand, increasing life expectancies signify human development, but on the other hand, it poses great challenges to the economy due to the increasing needs for social and health security. As a result of modernization, westernization, and urbanization, the traditional values that give honorary positions to the elderly have undergone tremendous change, which has adversely affected the elderly population. In addition, migration, changing role expectations of women, and an individualistic approach have also resulted in older people becoming more vulnerable, isolated, and neglected. This paper attempts to explore the key challenges faced by the elderly population in India and provide suggestions to mitigate these problems.

Keywords: *Population, Ageing, Challenges, Solutions*

Introduction

Ageing is a universal, progressive, irrecoverable, degenerative, and inevitable process. In demographic studies, the age of 60 is commonly recognized as the threshold for transitioning into the elderly segment of the population. In many developed countries, age 65 is used as the cut-off point for categorizing individuals as aged. People are often labelled as old not solely based on their chronological age, but also due to certain changes in social roles and status. Therefore, the term 'old age' cannot be precisely defined, as its definition varies across different societies. The United Nations (1980), defines older person as an individual who is 60 years and above. Similarly, the Census of India, 2011 characterizes 60 years and above as the age of transition to old age or an individual become a senior citizen.

In recent decades, there has been an exponential growth of the ageing population due to the combination of declining fertility and mortality rates, along with increasing life expectancy. This demographic shift has become a global trend. According to the World Population Prospects for 2022, the number of population aged 65 years and above nearly tripled from 258 million in 1980to 773 million in 2022. This proportion is expected to continue in the coming decades. The percentage of individuals aged 65 years and above accounted for 10% in 2022, projected to reach nearly 12% by 2030, and rise further to 16% by 2050.

Demographic trends indicate that developing nations are experiencing population ageing at a faster rate than their developed counterparts. This increasing trend is particularly

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[1] Assistant Professor in Sociology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh
[2] Senior Research Fellow, Department of Sociology, Panjab University Chandigarh.

prominent in Asia, notably in India and China. According to the Census of India (2011), India is home to nearly 104 million people aged 60 years and above and the proportion of elderly males and females are 53 million and 51 million respectively. India Ageing Report 2023, projected that the share of population aged 60 years and above will increase significantly from 10.5 percent in 2022 to 20.8 percent in 2050. According to National Statistical Office (NSO) 2021, the significant features of ageing in India include interstate variations which reveals that in 2021, Kerala record the highest percentage of aged population in its total population (16.5%), followed by Tamil Naidu (13.6%), Himachal Pradesh (13.1%), Punjab (12.6%) and Andhra Pradesh (12.4%). In contrast, the state with higher fertility rates, such as Bihar (7.7%), Uttar Pradesh (8.1%) and Assam (8.2%), reported the lowest proportion of aged populations. This uneven population projection across different states in India is because of differential level of economic development, different political context, cultural norms and geographical variations.

Unlike many developed nations, the rising share and proportion of elderly individuals in India present a significant threat to their social, financial, health, and emotional security. In addition, human behaviours in modern societies are badly affected by consumer culture and hedonism, which adversely affect the position of elder persons (Danu & Bisht, 2018). Modernisation theory of ageing also states that the force of industrialisation and modernisation are the primary causes of elderly losing power and influence in the society (Cowgirl and Holmes, 1972[3]). Ageing has never been a problem in the past, partly due to the smaller number of elderly survivors and partly due to the rich value system which considered them as repositories of knowledge, wisdom, and experience (Yadav, 2018; Rabindranath, 2006). They were once respected and given honorary positions in traditional families and society. Inculcating values and traditions in the young were the responsibility of older persons in traditional societies. However, with the advent of modernization, westernization, and urbanization these traditional support systems have been eroded. As a result, many, including the aged are increasing at a risk of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion (Inductivo, 2005). Migrations, changing role expectations of women, and an individualistic approach have also resulted in elder persons becoming more vulnerable, isolated, and neglected. Increasing trends towards childlessness or having fewer children reduce the number of primary caregivers, which often results in increasing conflicts within families (Rabindranathan, 2006). While developed nations generally have robust institutional support systems for elder care, India still lacks sufficient institutional infrastructure and policy driven mechanisms to adequately supports its ageing population (Singh, 2021).

The Government of India has implemented a range of measures to support the welfare of senior citizens, guided by constitutional provisions and specific legislative acts and schemes. Constitutional articles 21, 41, 46, and 47 stress protecting life, work, education, public assistance, and nutrition, among others. The Hindu Adoptions and

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[3]https://guides.hostos.cuny.edu/Psychology_of_Aging/theories1#:~:text=Modernization%20theory%20(Cowgill%20and%20Holmes,likely%20to%20experience%20social%20exclusion

Maintenance Act of 1956 require children to support their aging or infirm parents. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act of 2007 ensure maintenance, protection, and property rights for senior citizens. Moreover, states like Himachal Pradesh have their own acts for senior citizens.A number of national policies and schemes have also been introduced to enhance the quality of life for older adults including National Policy for Older Persons (NPOP), which focuses on their overall well-being, the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) providing various benefits, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) offering subsidized food grains, the National Programme for the Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) ensuring accessible healthcare, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) providing health coverage to vulnerable families, the RashtriyaVavoshri Yojana (RVY) offering aids for age-related disabilities, and the Senior Citizens Welfare Fund (SCWF) utilizing unclaimed savings for their welfare.Some states have their own schemes, like the Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS) in Jammu and Kashmir, providing financial assistance to elderly, widows, and physically handicapped persons.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain, including limited awareness among the elderly about these schemes. Efforts to improve awareness and accessibility are crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of these welfare measures. The present paper sheds light on the challenges faced by elderly people and suggests ways to overcome those challenges.

Review of Related Literature

Increasing life expectancy signifies the success of human development, yet it is accompanied by various social, psychological, health, and income insecurities. Vos, Ocampo and Cortez (2008), highlighted that, on one hand, the growing number of elderly people provides ample opportunities to utilize the increasing human resources for economic development. On the other hand, it also poses great challenges to the economy, with rising costs for social and health security. Saxena (2008), opined that one of the biggest challenges for the developing countries with limited resources is to meet the growing needs of social, income and health security of increasing older adults.

In the traditional societies, older individuals were esteemed for their wealth of knowledge, wisdom and life experiences. However, the onset of modernization, urbanization and industrialization has rendered traditional wisdom obsolete, leading to a decline in the status of the elderly (Yadav, 2018; Rabindranath, 2006). The shift from Joint family system to the modern nuclear family structure significantly impacted the role of older adults. According to Bali 2001, several factors contributed to the growing challenges of elder care, such as increasing participation of women in paid work, rural-urban migrations, longer life expectancy, changing family size and structure, work pressure, and limited availability of time for potential caregivers. These changes have made it increasingly difficult for families to provide long-term care for their elder members.

Subrahmanya (2005) mentioned that chronic illness is increasing along with the increase in life expectancy. The percentage share of elderly persons in rural areas is increasing more rapidly than in urban areas, and a vast majority of them belong to lower

income groups. A vicious cycle of hard work, poor health, and nutrition characterizes these lower income groups, and aged persons within them suffer from major chronic illnesses (Devi, 2018). Locomotor and visual impairment are the most common disabilities among the elderly (Shah& Kumar, 2018). Similarly, Kaulagekar (2007) revealed that musculoskeletal problems (arthritis, joint pain, etc), gastrointestinal problems (diarrhoea, dysentery, colitis, etc), respiratory problems (Asthma, acute respiratory infections, etc), urinary tract infections, insomnia, diabetes, dental problems etc are common among aged persons.

Ageing is often associated with decreasing income along with increasing health expenditure. According to Rajan (2006) inadequate financial resources remain one of the major challenges faced by the elderly in India, particularly among elderly women. 58% of the elderly women in rural areas and 64% in urban areas were entirely dependent on others for essentials such as food, clothing and healthcare. Ironically, all states except Himachal Pradesh reported that over half of their female elderly relies on others for their means of substances. Their economic dependence ranged from 39.3% in Himachal Pradesh to 68.8% in Punjab. Lloyd-Sherlock (2000) also mentioned that reduced income generation with increasing age increases the risk of elderly individuals falling into poverty. A large section of the aged population continues to work even after the age of retirement. As highlighted in the India Ageing Report 2023, the work participation among men aged 60 years and above stands at 50.9 %, while for elderly women it was 22 %.

According to the World Health Organisation (2017), approximately 20% of the people aged 60 years and above suffer from mental or neurological disorder. Additionally, these conditions account for approximately 6.6% of the total disability among this age group. According to the HelpAge India Report 2022, 43.1% of the elders in India felt that they are being neglected by the younger generation and feel left out or lonely. Ibrahim (2017) found that lower income level, dependency on others and neglect by others was the strong determinants of mental disorders among elderly living with family. In contrast, chorionic illness, deteriorating health and economic status were the major determinants of mental illness among elderly living in nursing homes. The growing empty-nest syndrome and social loss are major contributors to loneliness and social isolation among the elderly (Kumar & Saini, 2018; Visaria, 2001). According to HelpAge Annual Report (2022), dementia and mood disorders, drugs and alcohol abuse, delirium and psychosis are the most common psychological disorders among older adults in India. Prakash(2018) opined that reducing social contact, nuclear family setup, economic dependence, deteriorating health, sense of helplessness, unproductive, worthless, etc. are the various factors which cause not only loneliness and depression among older adults but also increase the suicide rate among elders.

The United Nations designated 2021-2030 as the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, aiming to reduce health disparities and enhance the quality of life for aged persons, their families and communities through coordinated global action. This initiatives focuses on four key areas i.e., transforming societal attitudes and behaviour towards ageing and ageism; developing age friendly communities that support the abilities of older people; delivering person-centred, integrated primary healthcare system that address the

specific needs of the older person; and ensuring access to high-quality long-term care for those who required it (WHO, 2022). The Constitution of India also ensures equal rights for every citizen, and the rights of senior citizens are further safeguarded by the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act of 2007. Despite these legal and policy efforts at both the national and international level, support for the elderly remain inadequate and fail to reach the entire aged population. Lloyd-Sherlock (2000) highlighted that policy schemes are typically absent in most of the developing countries. It covers only a small segment of the population, with particularly low coverage for women and individuals from rural or informal sectors.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the present paper are as follows:

1. To highlight the various challenges faced by elderly people in India and

2. To provide suggestions to mitigate the problems of elderly people in India.

Findings

The demographic shift towards an ageing population posed a major threat towards the social, income, and health security of the elderly. This necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics, encompassing changes in family structures, societal values, health vulnerabilities and the economic plight of the aged. Following are the major key findings shedding light on the multifaceted challenges faced by the elderly populations.

1. Social Challenges

As India is facing an escalating ageing population, a consequential challenge emerges in the form of social insecurities for aged population. Traditionally, family and kinship system served as the backbone of social security for older individuals. However, modernization, urbanization and industrialization have ushered in a paradigm shift. The traditional joint family system was the primary source of support, which has given way to the prevalence of nuclear families in contemporary societies leaving little room for the elderly. The migrations of younger generations to urban areas have accelerated this transformation, resulting in breakdown of the traditional familial support structure.

In the contemporary societies, the demands for dual-career households exacerbate the situation. The time constraints imposed by professional commitments often leave these couples with insufficient time to provide care for their aged parents. As a last option many couples reluctantly take their aged parents to Old Age Homes. Currently, there are 728 Old Age Homes in India and this mushrooming growth of Old Age Homes revealed that the position of elderly has been degraded.

2. Economic Challenges

Ageing is associated with reducing income and retirement from productive work. Traditionally Family has been themain provider of financial support for the elderly. HelpAge India 2022 reported that 47% of the elderly still depends on family for their

economic needs. However, reduced income level among the retired elderly proves insufficient to cover escalating medical expenses and they are hesitant to seek financial help from their children. This financial strain often leaves them unable to meet basic needs, emphasising the vulnerability of elders to poverty. Elderly women represent the most vulnerable segment of the ageing population with studies indicating that 58% in rural areas and 64% in urban areas are entirely dependent on others for their livelihood.

A significant portion of elderly engage in unorganized sector, where income security during later stages of life is lacking. Despite reaching the retirement age, many seniors continue to engage in productive work, with 21% reported to be still working according to HelpAge India's 2022 findings.

3.   Physical Challenges (Health Problems)

Elderly persons are more susceptible to infections and chronic illnesses due to the decline in inflammatory and immune response that come with ageing. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2015, global life expectancy at birth rose to 68.5 years for males and 73.3 years for females (India LASI Report, 2020), contributing to the increase in chronic diseases among the elder population. Deteriorating health also leads to increased dependency, and seniors often feel like burdens to their families.

A significant majority, i.e., 71% of the older population resides in rural areas, facing the dual challenges of ageing and inadequate healthcare facilities, compounded by issues such as lack of transportation and poor infrastructure. Their difficulties are exacerbated by prevailing a social value that tends to view physical ailments and diseases as natural consequences of old age, resulting in neglect of their physical health.

4.   Psychological Challenges

Reducing income and poor health conditions are associated with loneliness and depression among older persons. The emergence of new technologies has altered the nature and frequency of intergenerational interactions, contributing to differences which often alienate the aged persons. Participation of women in productive work, nuclear family setup, reducing social contact, widening gap in intergenerational interactions often leads to feelings of loneliness and isolation among aged persons. Studies have revealed that positive social adjustment and religiosity play a significant role in alleviating loneliness and depression among aged individuals.

Suggestions

In light of the changing demographic transitions and the increasing vulnerability of the elderly, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that combines familial support, institutional care provisions and robust regulatory framework. The following recommendations are proposed to effectively address the challenges confronting the ageing population.

● There is a need to protect and strengthen the family institution to provide care and protection for elderly members. Strengthening familial bonds and community

engagement is the best way forward to alleviate social isolation and loneliness among the elderly.

● Although familial care is undoubtedly an optimal form of geriatric care, but with increasing vulnerability of older persons, institutional care facilities are likely to become the last resort for many elderlies in near future. Unfortunately, societal taboos surrounding Old Age Homes persist in various parts of the country, hindering their acceptance. In light of this, there is an urgent need for awareness programs to foster understanding and acceptance of Old Age Homes. Additionally, provisions for institutional care facilities should be made for the economically disadvantaged and destitute elderly to ensure a dignified and inclusive ageing for all.

● Emphasis should be given for comprehensive support system, as the combination of diminishing income and increasing the medical expenses heighten the risk of elders fallen into poverty.

● Despite the various initiatives and provisions by the Government of India for the welfare of senior citizens, many poor elderly individuals do not receive the benefits. Therefore, schemes and policies should be properly regulated.

● Awareness programs should be launched to ensure the participation and benefits of schemes for the targeted populations.

● Geriatric wards should be established in all public and private healthcare facilities to provide medical aid to the geriatric population.

● It is time for civil society, the government, and the elderly themselves to protect their rights and recognize their valuable contributions to the society.

Discussions and Conclusion

Unlike many developed countries, India is facing a significant threat to social and health security due to the increasing percentage of elderly population. In traditional societies, the elderly held honorary positions and were respected within the family and society. The traditional joint family system has largely been replaced by the modern nuclear family, which often lacks provisions for older members and consequently leads to a lack of social security for the elderly. Moreover, factors such as migration, evolving roles of women, and an increasingly individualistic approach have rendered older people more susceptible to vulnerability, isolation, and neglect. Additionally, modern societies are adversely impacted by consumer culture and hedonism, which further erode the status of elder individuals. Although scientific and technological advancements have enabled the treatment of many communicable diseases, the increasing life expectancy also corresponds to a rise in chronic illnesses. Consequently, the growing elderly population is more prone to chronic diseases and disabilities. Deteriorating health, encompassing respiratory, gastrointestinal, musculoskeletal issues, weakened eyesight, hearing impairment, diabetes, and more, is prevalent among the aged. Studies have indicated that elderly individuals residing in rural areas of hilly regions face a twofold

challenge, being exposed to inadequate infrastructure and transportation facilities in addition to the challenges of ageing.

Reduced income is a pervasive issue among the aged population. Despite the rising percentage of the aged, there has been little adjustment in retirement age. Furthermore, a significant portion of the aged population engaged in the unorganized sector, which does not provide any income security in old age. Research has shown that the vast majority of elderly individuals reside in rural areas, and many of them remain active in productive pursuits even after the age of retirement. There exists a direct correlation between mental health and deteriorating physical health. Technological advancement also isolates older adults, as it diminishes the inter-generational and inter-familial interactions between the younger and older generations. Studies demonstrate that poor health, economic dependency, reduced social interaction, as well as feelings of unproductiveness, worthlessness, and helplessness, are significant factors influencing mental health among the elderly population. Although initiatives have been taken at both national and internal level but they remain inadequate and do not cover the entire elderly population.

It can be concluded that, to address the various issues, recommendations for tackling the challenges faced by the aged population in India include promoting social and economic development, addressing interstate variations in ageing, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for elderly individuals.

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Claiming Blindness: Reviewing through Disability Lens the Film *Rabb Di Awaaz*

Rajesh Kumar Jaiswal[1]

Abstract

The intersectional and diverse Hindi film Rabb Di Awaaz directed by Ojaswwee Sharma, destabilises complex binaries between dynamics of gazing vis-à-vis blindness and sight, offering a transmutational view of visual disability. This paper examines how the film contests ableist ideologies within the paradigm of re-evaluating blindness as a socio-cultural and political overhaul rather than just a medical affliction. Rejecting the trope of "narrative prosthesis," where disability merely advances the plot, the film establishes blindness as framed within the cultural, ethical, and epistemic force ratios. Drawing on David Bolt's critique of ocularcentrism, the film Rabb Di Awaaz deconstructs the hegemony of sight and prescribes alternative ways for individuals to discern and interconnect with the world. Through its linear and progressive narrative, the film stimulates "visual activism," thereby empowering visually impaired individuals to demand acceptance and not compromise with the assertion of their identity and agency. The film critiques neoliberal connotations that fuel the psycho-social implications of disability, exposing the impacts on mental health due to relentless economic pursuits. It cross-examines the cultural meanings of blindness, connecting them to broader social identity and justice, simultaneously questioning the narratives of pity, fear, and dependency while also repudiating them. By puncturing metanarratives that equate blindness with limitation, Rabb Di Awaaz renders other modes of perception equally valid, destabilizing the primacy of visual necessity. This paper argues that the film transcends essentialist and positivist disability paradigms, using cinema as a counter-exemplary platform to reshape public perceptions. It highlights how Rabb Di Awaaz advocates for a cultural understanding that prioritizes the agency dignity, and self-definition of visually impaired individuals, promoting socio-political mobilization and justice.

***Keywords:** ocularcentrism, ableism, narrative prosthesis, alternative perception, visual activism.*

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Introduction

"Cultural representations are inextricable from political struggles." (Benjamin Fraser, *Cultures of Representations: Disability in World Cinema Context*, 2016) "

...disability is beginning to provide a new lens through which perceptions can be refracted in a different light" (Lennard J. Davis, *Bending over Backwords: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*, 2002).

A Preliminary Discussion

The film *Rabb Di Awaaz* challenges the perceptions of society about blindness by offering an emancipatory narrative which dismantles ablest stereotypes. It redefines blindness as a site of strength, creativity, and resistance. The central theme of the film is

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[1] Assistant Professor in English, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh

that it critiques the assumption that blindness is inherently a burden and exposes this view as a monolithic construct of society. The film foregrounds Rod Michalko's concept of "many blindnesses " and presents blindness from a political angle. It emphasizes that sight is not the sole way to perceive and experience the world. The film presents blindness as an alternative epistemology and thus destabilizes the ocularcentric hierarchy, which views the sighted as the privileged ones.

The narrative is seen unfolding in the world of FM radio, which is a medium where sound and voice transcend visual hierarchies. The journey of the blind protagonist, Shiva, symbolizes resistance against the dehumanizing portrayal of blindness. How the blind protagonist captivates audiences with his voice and thoughts during the *Rabb Di Awaaz* contest highlights that being blind does not pose a hindrance to thought, to being educated, or to cultivating one's talent. This triumph of Shiva presents a powerful counter-narrative to the medical view and definitions of disability. Medical definitions and viewpoints of disability portray the ability as a preferred normative state. The film questions society's broader tendency to conflate physical blindness with incapacity, ignorance, or inferiority through Shiva's success.

The Radio Station Director is an incarnation of the "blindness of the sighted" which is juxtaposed with Shiva's resilience. The station director's views are dominated by capitalistic pursuits. He rejects the moral imperatives of equity and dignity. He refuses to shake hands with Shiva, which is a reflection of his internalized ableism and moral distortions. This positions him as a representative of wilful social blindness. This act of exclusion thus becomes a symbol of prejudice and contempt, showcasing the world that actively dehumanizes people with physical disabilities. Meanwhile, Karan the Radio Jockey who is sighted becomes a tragic figure who is caught in the director's exploitative and oppressive world. Karan's loss of self, his struggles with stress and alienation, and his mental health issues expose how vulnerable the sighted are within an ableist structure that gives utmost importance to profit and not to human dignity.

The film portrays FM radio as a cultural station that not only represents but also celebrates blindness, and through this disrupts the normative sighted vs sightless binary. It creates a visceral and affective atmosphere through sound and challenges the optic-centric dominance of mainstream media through it. The victory of Shiva in the competition reclaims the narrative for the blind. It offers a vision of inclusivity and equity. This vision presents blindness as an alternative approach to interacting with the world, rather than a limitation. This systematic redefining actively resonates with Rod Michalko's assertion that blindness is not limited to just physical bodily manifestations but permeates via the whole of human existence.

Rabb Di Awaaz reengages the audience to revisit their slanted predispositions and beliefs about blindness. It draws a compelling binary, collocating Shiva's quiet but powerful tenacity alongside the moral and poignant failures of sighted characters. The film actively protests against the dehumanizing gaze, dismantling the hegemony of sight. It provides a cultural criticism that is transformational via locating blindness as a venue of agency and empowerment, thus in turn exposing the in-depth blindness embedded within the ableist social structures.

Unmasking the Language of Blindness

Blindness is often relegated to the realm of pathology, tragedy, or deficit. This reflects the dominance of the "normate" perspective in which sight is privileged as a universal standard. This ableist ocularcentrism underscores how a society that is obsessed with visuals fixates on appearances and the spectacle. It perpetuates stereotypes that position blindness as a condition of loss. The myth of the blind seer, which is so deeply entrenched in cultural history, both romanticizes and stigmatizes blindness by reducing it to metaphorical insight or mystical foresight. Tropes like these obscure the lived realities of blind individuals. They reinforce the binary of blindness as either deficit or exceptionalism and ignore its social construction.

Blindness exists on the spectrum with sight, yet its distinctive understanding is overridden by the hegemony of normalcy. The sighted majority provides meaning to blindness through their gaze and reinforces psycho-social distancing. The "stare" thus dispenses and reinforcer "othering" which positions blindness as a problem to be scrutinised and an object of curiosity. This ideology of normalcy is deeply embedded in ableism. It obliterates the distinction and discourse of blindness as an experience and refuses to acknowledge the barriers created by society. When impairments are located within hostile and rigid environments, they are regarded as disabilities, which in turn emphasises the role of structural exclusion over individual deficit.

Disability studies challenge this dominant narrative and offer a new and alternative model to refurbish blindness within its many contexts. They question the cultural construction of disability and dismantle the binaries of normalcy and abnormality. This field seeks to reclaim blindness as a site of agency and knowledge production. As Lennard J. Davis asserts, disability studies provide new ways of perceiving and reframing societal norms. They recognize that blindness is both socially mediated and is potentially generative which disrupts the ableist fixation on sight and allows a more inclusive and equitable understanding of human diversity. Thus, the film underscores that blindness is not simply a lack. It is an alternative mode of engaging with the world.

Blindness of the Sighted: The Radio Station Director, a Neoliberal Normate

The film *Rabb Di Awaaz* provides a critique of ableism and neoliberal attitudes through the figure of the Radio Station Director, in whose problematic actions we see the reflection of the broader societal stigmatization of disability. His role as a sighted authority figure reveals a failure to empathize with marginalized individuals like Karan and Shiva. It also reveals deep socio-cultural forms of discrimination and ideological biases which perpetuate exclusion. The dehumanising and subverted gaze of the director is showcased in his refusal to shake hands with Shiva, the blind protagonist. He reduces Shiva to his blindness, thus re-enacting the prevalent ableist script that views blindness as evidence of deficiency and not as an alternative mode of existence. This act of debasement becomes a metaphor of socio-cultural refusal to engage humanely with disabled individuals ultimately resulting in their objectification while strengthening the act of "othering"; leading to their dehumanisation.

This critique is further fuelled by the director's mistreatment of Karan who is an altruistic radio jockey with socialist leanings. Karan embodies the ethics of inclusivity and empowerment which stand in contrast with the director's Machiavellian and capitalist-driven outlook. The director's disregard for Karan's integrity and ideals reiterates wider neoliberal dismissals of compassion and social responsibility, positioning these values as symbols of impracticality and naivety. His behaviour lays bare a prevailing system that values forms of profit above human dignity, isolating those who resist conformity. This hyper-rigid capitalist ideology devalues the importance of marginalized voices. Additionally, it turns the radio station into a spatial-temporal site of exclusion that reinforces hierarchical structures, effectively suppressing dissent and larger humanism.

The director represents the "normate subject," personifying the able-bodied, sighted majority. His authority is located in an ableist view of normalcy, one that gives preference to its conception of an ideal physical appearance and functionality while excluding those who differ as inferior. This cultural privilege enables him to expunge power dynamics that marginalize and oppress others. His contempt for Shiva, evident in his refusal to treat him as an equal, highlights the ideological basis of his behaviour. This attitude cannot be dismissed simply as a personal bias but is a reflection of a broader systemic inability within the sighted world to recognize the value of blindness. The director's misconduct showcases deeply held eugenic beliefs that disabled lives are of less to no value, fostering resentment and isolation among those who resist this skewed value system.

The film constructs parallels between the director's moral and ethical blindness and the ideological and intellectual clarity embodied by Shiva and Karan. Shiva's physical blindness serves as a powerful symbol of assertion and resilience, while the director's sight becomes a metaphor for the value of short-sightedness. His failure to acknowledge Shiva's dignity or Karan's social gravitas highlights the limitations of a society preoccupied with appearances and commercial exploitation. In contrast, Shiva's resilience and Karan's dedication to socialist principles challenge these dominant norms and present an alternative vision rooted in inclusivity and fairness.

Ultimately, *Rabb Di Awaaz* dissects the social annihilation of disabled individuals and the commodification of human relationships within neoliberal models of existence. The director's behaviour indicates the wider cultural and institutional challenges that uphold ableist bourgeois ideologies. By juxtaposing the sighted director's moral insensitivity with the evocative perspectives of Shiva and Karan, the film demands a reassessment of dominant societal principles. It encourages audiences to look beyond bodily judgments and adopt a more inclusive and astute understanding of humanity.

Karan: A Progressive Radio Jockey

Karan, a passionate progressive radio jockey in *Rabb Di Awaaz*, embodies the spirit of resistance against profit-driven materialism and hegemonic belief systems as demonstrated by the radio station director. Karan's journey during the film deconstructs the myth of neoliberal ethics, which also dominates the director's overall social and marketplace vision for the radio station. Karan emerges with many dissenting perspectives. He becomes an active voice for the marginalized and disenfranchised; he

stands firmly against the director's relentless drive for economic gains at the cost of ethical principles and artistic dignity. These constant contestations between Karan and the director encapsulate the larger cultural battle between overly commodified and community-oriented value spaces.

The director embodies an anti-welfare, market-driven mindset, which is blind to the liberatory potential of the radio station as a medium for social change. His focus is mainly on profit and mass reception. He reduces the station to a tool for commercially driven ventures. He infantilizes and disregards Karan's input and potential, dismissing him as a failure. He rejects Karan's humanist approach as far-fetched and out of touch with his neoliberal concept of reality. This deliberate and egregious error highlights the director's incapacity to see beyond his market-driven assessments, a flaw that Karan frequently recognizes and confronts. Karan's opposition to this maligned interpretive lens is not merely personal but political. He refuses to let the station's airwaves become mere carriers for commercial and ableist propaganda. For Karan, being a radio jockey is not merely a business (or *dhandha*) but a public enterprise. For him, it is a platform to elevate the voices of the marginalized and point out the prevailing wealth and wage gaps between different sections of society.

The disconnect felt by Karan due to the culturally sanctioned beliefs becomes his source of strength but also a root cause of his alienation. Karan rejects the dominant belief that success is measured solely in terms of monetary value. Instead, he promotes a vision grounded in affective resonance, distributive equity, and creative authenticity. He stands in collective resistance with the class-oppressed communities, including the footpath dwellers and labourers of the tri-city, positioning himself as a strong advocate for the marginalized, challenging the oppressive structures. His friendship with Raju, an attendant at the office, along with his persistent adherence to maintaining his self-respect, further emphasizes his rejection of the hierarchical norms. Such behaviour stands as a sharp contrast against the director's repressive authority. Karan thus, uses his platform to reveal and challenge social injustices, viewing the radio station not as a means for personal gain but as a tool for communal self-determination.

Karan's actions in the movie are nonconformist and rooted within robust ethical frameworks. His critical responses reveal the director's flawed assumptions and gradually undermine his authority. A key turning point in the film unfolds during a question-and-answer session with Shiva when a blind contestant earns the title of "Rabb Di Awaaz." This moment proves transformative, as it breaks down the director's skewed and biased perspectives and superficial comprehension of what constitutes real ability. Through Shiva's accomplishment, Karan points out that vision is not limited to the purview of physical sight but is rather defined by reflective and committed engagement with society.

Together, Karan and Shiva form a powerful symbolic partnership, one that confronts the director's social myopia and rigid control. The film thus presents Karan as an artist with viewpoints capable of influencing the masses. His unwavering efforts expose the dangers of the director's distorted worldviews and failed leadership. Karan's struggle is not just against a managerial authority but against an entire system that

prioritizes extractive gains over ethics and creativity. By transforming the radio station into a site of active resistance, Karan reclaims cultural capital for the marginalized, offering an uplifting story of resilience, justice, and hope.

Shiva: A Challenge to Ocular Normativity

In *Rabb Di Awaaz*, Shiva, the blind protagonist, stands out as a character who challenges conventional, sight-based norms. He reflects resistance against deeply rooted stereotypes and socially constructed fallacies about blindness. Shiva's character confronts dominant narratives and offers a disruptive and liberating perspective on blindness. The film situates itself away from portraying blindness as a tragedy, illness, or deficiency. It replaces these limited views with a nuanced depiction of sightedness and perception, intellect, and resilience. Through Shiva, the narrative of the film delivers a powerful critique of ocular-centric ideologies, highlighting the ongoing struggle for self-representation within the paradigm of disability discourses.

A central viewpoint of the film is its destabilizing narrative, which equates blindness with helplessness. Shiva is depicted as a vibrant and independent individual whose blindness neither limits his abilities nor diminishes his humanity. He actively resists socio-cultural biases that label visually impaired people as wretched or burdens. For example, in the movie, when Shiva visits different offices to advocate for himself and others, he is frequently mistaken for a beggar, exposing the widespread forms of discrimination against blind individuals. By refusing to accept these implicit beliefs, Shiva reclaims his agency and challenges the stereotype of the "helpless blind beggar." Through his actions, he powerfully demonstrates that blindness is not a barrier to living a meaningful life or making valuable contributions to society.

The film critiques the moralistic meta-narrative that blindness is a punishment for sins from the past life. Shiva denounces these narratives during his interactions with others. He dismisses the claim about his blindness being a marker of divine retribution and inferiority. Shiva unravels and interrogates deeply ingrained stigmas, shifting the focus from pity to empowerment and emphasizing that blindness is not a defect per se but an "altered capacity," or rather a "specialty." This viewpoint is in sync with disability studies' critique of the "medical model" of disability, which pathologies impairments and constructed limitations, advocating for a "social model" that recognizes disability as an imposed narrative shaped by society's power-laden perceptions and cultural barriers.

Shiva's portrayal in the film sets blindness as a site of new and emancipatory discourse. *Rabb Di Awaaz* shifts the lens on blindness as a source of wisdom, insight, and heightened perception via the portrayal of his character. Shiva's participation in the radio contest, his winning the title of "Rabb Di Awaaz," his role as a bridge between the sighted and non-sighted communities, and his interactions with Karan, the radio jockey, create a transformative moment that fosters mutual camaraderie while challenging ableist viewpoints.

The film's narrative highlights the crucial role of representation within disability politics. Shiva emerges as a politically engaged and self-aware disabled individual who actively challenges stereotypes, advocating for a more humane and nuanced perception

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of blindness. He emphasizes that love, joy, and beauty originate in the approach emphasizes the mind over the body, directly confronting society's fixation on physical appearance. This critique of the "society of the spectacle" echoes the broader struggles of disabled people to assert their dignity and redefine societal norms. By portraying blindness as a source of new perspectives and deeper intellect, the film challenges the internalized ableism that many visually impaired individuals deal with. It offers a new vision of disability, promoting new discursive positions that recognize the capabilities and strengths of the disabled individuals rather than focusing on their bodily limitations.

Shiva's journey closely aligns with the aims of disability activism while advocating along the lines of civil rights movements, which strive to break down systemic barriers and encourage equitable participation. His character embodies a shift toward self-authorized narratives of disability, where individuals reclaim their stories and confront socio-political erasure. Shiva refuses to accept societal tendencies to associate blindness with ignorance or incapacity and instead asserts his identity as an empowered individual who actively contributes to the broader fight for disability justice. This reclamation of agency reflects the core principles of disability studies, which more than often call for the deconstruction of ableist ideologies and the upliftment of disabled voices.

The film presents blindness as a lived experience rich with its complexities and cognitive frameworks, serving a critical political function. It shapes how blindness is understood, experienced, and positioned, offering audiences a retelling that challenges dominant assumptions. Shiva's defiance of societal norms and his stepping up in a more independent, socially aware role illustrate the epistemic contribution of disabled individuals toward a radical change. *Rabb Di Awaaz* portrays blindness as a source of strength and catalyst for endurance and artistic expression, widening the conversation around disability and promoting a more inclusive and just society.

Rabb Di Awaaz dismantles several prevailing myths about blindness, offering an empowering and liberating depiction of disability. Through Shiva, the film challenges the binaries of seeing and knowing, critiques ableist worldviews, and promotes a vision of blindness grounded in agency, dignity, and resilience. By emphasizing the significance of representation in disability politics, the film deepens our understanding of blindness as a multifaceted and enriching aspect of human experience. By centering Shiva's journey, it invites viewers to reconsider their biases and to participate in the ongoing pursuit of disability justice and inclusion.

All in all, *Rabb Di Awaaz* offers a fresh perspective on blindness, moving away from familiar stereotypes to portray it as part of a full and meaningful life. Through Shiva's character, the film questions the usual link between vision and understanding, gently introducing the idea that seeing is the only way of knowing. It presents a life shaped not by limitation but by independence, self-worth, and resilience. By drawing attention to how stories frame public attitudes, the film invites viewers to rethink what they believe about blindness. Shiva's experiences become a mirror, reflecting the everyday challenges and quiet victories of living non-normatively. In doing so, *Rabb Di*

Awaaz opens space for reflection, encouraging deeper awareness and empathy rather than pity or distance.

A Critical Appraisal: Blindness as Allegory

Rabb Di Awaaz approaches blindness not just as a condition but as a powerful metaphor. It prioritizes moral, spiritual, and intellectual clarity, but in doing so, it often overlooks the everyday, material realities faced by blind individuals. This emphasis on transcendental insight creates a noticeable gap: the film struggles to bridge its theological framing with the practical, socio-political aspects that are essential to contemporary disability discourse. The title, meaning "The Voice of God," immediately signals a divine interpretive frame, which ends up essentializing blindness. It casts the condition as something sacred and elevated, detaching it from the lived, structural, and economic challenges faced by disabled people. Although the narrative simultaneously questions traditional religious beliefs, such as the idea that blindness is *karmic* punishment for sins like greed or lust, this dual stance creates a tension that the film never fully resolves. There is an internal contradiction between its spiritual symbolism and its critique of religious fatalism.

The spiritual weight of the title frames blindness as something ordained, which unintentionally distances it from the kind of social and political awareness central to disability studies. By defining blindness as a divine experience, the film inadvertently reinforces another familiar narrative: that what is lost physically is compensated for through divine or extraordinary inner abilities. While such an approach may seem uplifting, it ends up undermining more grounded perspectives that call for systemic reform, equal access, and material support. Though the film challenges the idea of disability as a curse or karmic debt an important intervention it does so inconsistently. The larger framing, driven by notions of holiness and divine destiny, continues to obscure the activist and lived dimensions of disability, making it harder for the film to align with approaches grounded in real-world advocacy.

Shiva, the film's protagonist, embodies another problematic narrative, albeit a more modern one. His blindness is portrayed as an exceptional trait, lifting him to the level of a seer or visionary. Yet, this depiction falls into a familiar trope that romanticizes blindness instead of treating it as an everyday lived experience. Scenes like his rapid-fire answers at the radio station carry a tone of spectacle that is more symbolic than realistic. Shiva's role as a spiritual and intellectual beacon overshadows what could have been a deeper exploration of how disabled people navigate economic hardship, infrastructural barriers, and social exclusion. As a result, the film distances itself from more grounded, justice-oriented disability perspectives.

Further complicating its message, the film leans toward an individualistic view of disability. Though it critiques charitable acts, such as donations to blind institutions that are often rooted in guilt or public performance it nonetheless upholds a patronising perspective. The focus remains on personal resilience rather than collective responsibility or structural injustice. In doing so, the film misses an opportunity to confront the broader systems that produce and maintain disability as both a marginalized identity and a social disadvantage.

By the end, *Rabb Di Awaaz* remains trapped in an unresolved contradiction. It pushes against some harmful traditional views (like the idea of divine punishment) but ends up reinforcing others, including the glorification of disability and the idea of spiritual compensation. These conflicting messages, along with its overly polished portrayal of Shiva, weaken the film's ability to present a more layered, politically aware take on blindness. What we're left with is a narrative caught between spiritual idealism and a more activist, grounded approach to disability, one that ultimately needs more clarity to deliver lasting impact.

Conclusion

The film *Rabb Di Awaaz*, while not devoid of flaws, somehow succeeds in offering a portrayal of blindness that challenges dominant narratives. It moves beyond conventional representations that are often overly simplistic, and it pushes back against reductive stereotypes. In doing so, the film contributes to a more layered and critical understanding of disability. Despite its limitations, it carves out space for an alternative viewing through which blindness can be seen and interpreted. The film challenges the entrenched biases and stigmatizing ideologies that have historically sequestered and marginalized the visually impaired. This narrative intervention holds the potential to disrupt the dominant social order that diminishes the agency and personhood of disabled individuals, particularly the blind.

The film reframes the experience of disability by employing blindness as a narrative device. It counters pervasive tropes of pity and self-loathing that have long disempowered blind individuals in cinematic and cultural representations. The film posits blindness not as an isolated state of being but as a site of relational and contested meanings. The blind protagonist's subjectivity is juxtaposed against the sighted world's ocular-centric assumptions; through this, the film reveals how the myth of "seeing knows," a concept critiqued by David Bolt's notion of ocularnormativism, upholds an epistemological paradigm.

Shiva's figure, which is portrayed as a blind visionary, however, complicates the narrative. Jacques Derrida ruminates that blindness is a site of paradox, where loss and insight coexist. The portrayal of Shiva is evocative of the tradition of blind cultural figures that bear the dual burden of loss and prophetic vision. It offers a critical lens on how being blind has been historically coded with an almost mystical aura. This characterization, while it is poignant, risks the perpetuation of the stereotype of the blind as inherently gifted, a trope that may inadvertently essentialize their experiences.

Nonetheless, the film's liberatory stance aligns closely with the core concerns of disability studies, particularly its rejection of medicalized readings of blindness that treat it as an individual dysfunction. Rather than reducing disability to pathology, the narrative challenges the dominant norm of sighted superiority that pervades cultural imagination. It unsettles the constructed binary between sighted and blind individuals. The protagonist's refusal to embody either the passive victim or the glorified hero marks an important shift in how disability is represented, one that refuses easy categorization and resists being absorbed into dominant ideological frameworks.

Taken as a whole, *Rabb Di Awaaz* opens up space to reconceive blindness not as a setback, but as a powerful site of autonomy and defiance. The film prompts the audience to confront ingrained assumptions about normalcy and difference. It pushes toward more detailed and vivid ways of seeing, ones that enable complete collective freedom for not only disabled individuals but also numerous ways of imagining disability. In doing so, it disrupts normative thinking and invites critical dialogues. The film offers a poignant and compelling critique of the cultural narratives that have long shaped how blindness is understood and portrayed.

Endnotes

Ojaswwee Sharma is a celebrated and renowned filmmaker. He is an alumnus of CDOE, Panjab University, Chandigarh. His films are known for their impactful, realistic and provocative portrayals which often celebrate marginalized communities. His critically acclaimed film, Rabb Di Awaaz, has been featured at the university on many occasions. The film reflects his commitment to social equity and inclusivity. His storytelling is multi-faceted and nuanced, inspiring profound dialogues on societal issues.

Ableism: Developed by F.K. Campbell. It refers to the ideology that views disability as inherently negative. This cultural attitude which is known as ableism, considers non-disabled individuals as superior. It treating their abilities as the natural norm.

Narrative Prosthesis: Introduced by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, this concept describes the use of disability in narratives as a device to evoke pity or fear. Disability is employed not for its own sake but to reinforce ideas of normalcy through stereotypical narrative structures.

David Bolt has elaborated on the term ocularcentricism. It refers to the societal emphasis on vision as the primary means of perception. This focus often marginalizes other senses. It leads to the supremacy of the sighted. It shows a diminished appreciation for non-visual forms of understanding

Meta-narrative of Blindness: This concept has been explored by David Bolt. It refers to overarching cultural stories that define and often limit the understanding of blindness. These narratives are typically constructed by the sighted. They impose assumptions about blindness without genuine insight into the lived experiences of blind individuals.

Rod Michalko: Is a disability studies scholar. He reframes blindness as an existential and environmental condition that is pervasive in the sighted world. This perspective moves beyond its medicalization by ophthalmologists. It unveils a symbolic blindness within The concept of human existence challenges perceptions of society. A key concern of the film is to expose and address this deeper blindness, urging a re-evaluation of how we understand and traverse the world.

The normate: This term has been coined by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson. It denotes the socially constructed idea of the 'normal' human being within a society. It is someone obsessed with the idea of normalcy. It encompasses attributes such as heterosexuality, whiteness, and non-disabled status, which suggest both bodily configurations and cultural capital. Literary and cultural texts often serve to reinforce these ideals.

Normalcy: This term has been introduced by Lennard Davis. It refers to standards that are culturally specific. These standards define what it means to be a 'normal' human being. Those who are considered not normal are often devalued and discriminated against. These norms are reinforced through various cultural practices in art, literature, cinema, and other mediums

Disability studies: This study critiques reductive representations. It advocates for disability as identity and knowledge. It celebrates human variation and empowers the disabled as active voices rather than passive subjects. This framework fosters self-worth. It activates imagination. It expands societal awareness and urges a shift from stigmatization to recognition of disability as a vital and transformative dimension of human experience.

Progressivism is a political philosophy and reform movement that aims to achieve greater economic and social equality. Progressive philosophy advocates for policies and practices that promote social justice, inclusivity, and the dismantling of systemic inequalities.

Ocular Normativity: This concept highlights the privileging of visual perception as the standard, which often leads to the marginalization of other sensory experiences. It underscores the society's bias that favors sighted individuals over those with visual impairments.

Social Model: This model of disability emphasizes how society's barriers restrict disabled individuals from participating in mainstream activities. It frames disability as a social, political, and culturally constructed phenomenon rather than solely a personal or medical condition.

Allegory: Allegory abstracts a cultural phenomenon. It strips them of historical context and grounding and idealizes them as timeless and universal. This approach often moves the phenomenon away from its real-world complexities and reduces its social, cultural, and historical significance.

Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher best known for developing the concept of deconstruction, a critical approach that questions fixed meanings, binary oppositions, and hierarchical thinking in texts and ideologies. In the context of *Rabb Di Awaaz*, Derrida's ideas help unpack how blindness is constructed through opposing frameworks, such as divine gift vs. karmic punishment or visionary insight vs. physical lack. His concept allows us to expose the contradictions within these narratives and challenge the assumptions that structure dominant discourses around disability.

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Redefining Hindu Identity: Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma and Pandit Shiv Narayan Agnihotri

Sheena Pall[1] and Parampreet Kaur[2]

Abstract

The scope of this paper is to examine, compare and analyse the ideology and activities of two leaders, Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma, a Sanatanist and Pandit Shiv Narayan Agnihotri, a Dev Samajist in the colonial Punjab. A brief survey of their lives too will help in understanding them better. Both were the products of a process of cultural interaction with a politically dominant, technologically superior, and culturally different society represented by the British. They redefined socio religious ideas in an effort to adjust to the new environment. This work employs a historical-analytical as well as comparative methodology. It is based on primary sources such as writings and speeches of both the protagonists as well as contemporary periodicals and official colonial records. The reports of institutions have also been used.

Introduction

Socio-religious reform movements like the Sanatan Dharm movement and the Dev Samaj were born in the Punjab after it was annexed in 1849. A new administrative structure, western education and science and technology were introduced bringing about changes in all spheres of life. The Christian missionaries were the first to introduce new forms of religious organization and action in India as 'structured societies' with formal membership, written rules, and weekly meetings. They were strengthened by the British Indian Government through 'laws granting legal recognition'. All religious communities, the Hindu, the Muslims and the Sikhs founded Sabhas, Anjumans, and Samajes, each with its own constitution and byelaws, publishing annual reports. These bodies purchased property, built places of worship, schools, orphanages, widow' homes, reading rooms, homes for aged cows, dispensaries and hospitals. They also made use of the printing press to issue their own newspapers, journals, tracts and books.[1]Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma, a well-known Sanatanist and Pandit Shiv Narayan Agnihotri, founder of Dev Samaj redefined social and religious ideas in search of a distinct identity in this new environment. Each claimed to represent the Hindus. The first section of the paper examines the ideas and the institutions founded by Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma. The next section takes up the role of Pandit Shiv Narayan Agnihotri in founding the Dev Samaj movement and throws light on his ideas. The last section would bring out the similarities and differences between an orthodox leader and a radical reformer [1].

Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma (1863-1937) was born in an orthodox Brahman family in 1863 at Jhajjar which is now a sub-division in the district of Rohtak in Haryana. His father's name was Pandit Ganga Sahai. Din Dayalustarted his education

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[1] Professor of History, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh

[2] Assistant Professor of History, School of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala.

at the age of five at a *maktab* where he studied Urdu and Persian from a Maulvi. He passed the middle examination from a government school in Jhajjar and by then he had knowledge of elementary English but was well versed in Urdu and Persian. At the age of 18, Din Dayalu was married to Anar Devi, the daughter of a Gaur Brahmin of Nanu village near Rewari. He took up a job in Hoshiarpur as a superintendent in the census of 1881 for a year. In 1883 he again joined government service in the revenue office in the *pargana* of Kosli but left it within a year [2].

Between these two jobs, Din Dayalu founded his first Hindu association in 1882, the *Panchayat-i-Taraqqi-i-Hanud* (Council for the Advancement of Hindus). Next year the name of the society was changed to *Society Rifah-i-Am* to include the Muslims for the overall progress of the nation. This society published a monthly paper *Hariyana* which was edited by Din Dayalu. He wrote essays and poems for the *Hariyana* along with other Urdu periodicals like *AwadhAkhbar* from Lucknow and *AkhbarChunar* from Chunargarh [3]. In 1883 Din Dayalu went to Mathura to study Sanskrit Grammar from PanditUday Prakash Dev Sharma. Within two years he had gained proficiency in Sanskrit, Hindi, Grammar, Advait Vedanta and Vaishnava principles of Bhakti [4].

In 1885 Din Dayalu started an Urdu weekly, *Mathura Akhbar* in Mathura that defended the Hindu religious beliefs. This weekly lasted less than a year. The same year he went to Gurdaspur to prevent a converted Christian youth from marrying a Christian girl. He delivered lectures and held debates with missionaries at Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Lahore. On his tours Din Dayalu met elites and members of royalty and discussed with them his dream of creating an all India religious body. He also toured and lectured in the United Provinces and Awadh [5].

Din Dayalu established the GauVarnashramaHitaishini Ganga Dharma Sabha (The Religious Association for the benefit of the Cow, Varna Order and the Holy Ganges) at Kankhal near Hardwar in 1886. Presiding over a meeting of this Sabha, Din Dayalu emphasized the need for protection of the Cow and promotion and defence of Sanatan Dharm. He also underscored the need for a greater unity among Hindus. A year later Din Dayalu was appointed as the editor of the Urdu periodical, *Kohinoor* of Lahore when he attended the second session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta. It was at this session that he met Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya for the first time and a lasting friendship between the two was formed. Din Dayalu wrote an Urdu pamphlet titled, 'Adalat-va-Azadi', (Court and Independence) appreciating the Indian National Congress for attempting to politically unite Indians, but denounced it for ignoring 'Indian culture' [6].

The next year Din Dayalu fulfilled his dream of establishing an all India religious organization with the founding of the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal in Hardwar. On the eve of the first meeting of the Mahamandal in 1887, Din Dayalu issued a signed circular in Urdu stating that the main object of this body was to unite all the Sanatan Dharm Sabhas of India. A questionnaire reflecting his comprehensive concerns, embracing religion, society and culture of contemporary times was attached to this circular. Din Dayalu believed that the scriptural authority of the Sanatan Darma rested with the *Vedas*, the *Smriti*and the *Puranas*. The Vedas were revealed by God and the

Brahmanas and *Upanishads* were a part of the *Vedas*. He pointed out that God did take human form as incarnations. Expectedly, he upheld the practice of idol worship in temples by all four Varnasand pilgrimages and fasts. For Din Dayalu, the caste system was important along with the Brahmans who would perform rites like the Shradha. He regarded the Varnashrama Dharma as important. Cows were sacred and alongwith Sanyasis were to be venerated. The authority of the sacred scriptures was upheld with regard to the position of women (child marriage and widow remarriage). The government was opposed for introducing the bill on the Age of Consent. The custom of giving dowry to the daughter at the time of marriage was rejected. Education for women according to Din Dayalu, should be such that enables her to perform her duties better within the parameters of her household activities and to deal with the outside world whenever necessary. For Din Dayalu, Sanskrit was to be promoted and for this he underlined the need for setting up colleges of Sanskrit. Hindi in the Devnagari script was to be adopted as the language of education and administration. Din Dayalu stood for the unity of Hindus and opposed the false propaganda of contemporary sects like the BrahmoSamaj, the Arya Samaj and the Dev Samaj [7].

The Tribune, a contemporary newspaper published from Lahore took notice of the Mahamandal and observed in 1890 that the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal had been 'conspicuously successful' in its efforts at Hindu revival in the Punjab, and other places. Hundreds of branch societies had been founded in cities and towns for the 'protection of the ancient Hindu religion, the preservation of the religious rites in their integrity and the diffusion of sacred learning'. Sanskrit schools had been opened under the auspices of the Chief Branch Societies, where 'instruction of high standard' in the *Vedas* and *Shastras*was imparted. Libraries had also been attached to the schools, where every-one could read and examine the *Vedas, Shastras, Puranas* and other religious books. Many new books were written 'in a masterly style' by the Pandits of the Society to refute arguments advanced against the ancient religious systems [8].

Propagation (Prachar) of SanatanDharm was a major concern of the Mahamandal. Its learned preachers held discussions with others on the subjects of *Puranas*, incarnations, idol worship, pilgrimage, Varnashrama dharma, Shradha, Tarpan, widow-remarriage, and consumption of meat and alcohol. The Sanatanist position on these issues was upheld on the authority of the *Vedas* and the *Shastras*. Numerous temples (Dev Mandirs) were set up under the control of the representatives of the local community. To encourage and appreciate the work of the preachers who had been instrumental in bringing this about, titles and medals were instituted. Books were published and distributed for spreading the Sanatanist message. Separate teachers for religious instruction were preferred. The Mahamandal organized examinations in Sanskrit and rewarded the deserving students. Schools and libraries were set up for the preservation and propagation of Sanskrit texts. The Nagri Pracharini Sabha of Kashi was appreciated for promoting the cause of Devnagri [9].

As with other socio-religious reformers of Punjab, education was important for Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma. He stated that knowledge released man from the fear of all enemies, including death. False knowledge on the other hand was responsible for the destruction of man, society and nation. The aim of knowledge was to recognize one self.

Self-knowledge was therefore the goal of all knowledge. It could be acquired only through religion (Dharm). Religion helped us to understand the purpose and meaning of life in this world. Instruction in religion was therefore the very essence of education. Secular education according to him was merely a semblance of knowledge and failed to produce human beings of high quality [10]. It was due to Din Dayalu's efforts that the Hindu College was set up at Delhi in 1899 [11] and the SanatanDharm College was founded at Lahore in 1916 [12]. He actively helped Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in the founding of the Hindu University in Benares [13].

An important Sanatanist institution,Sanatan DharmPratinidhi Sabha Punjab was rejuvenated under Din Dayalu's Presidentshipin 1923 at Sargodha. He handed over the reins of the Pratinidhi Sabha to Goswami Ganesh Dutt [14] whom he appointed as its General Secretary. Din Dayalu continued to be associated with the Pratinidhi Sabha and the Sanatan Dharm College Managing Committee till his death in 1937 [15]. The work of the departments of the Pratinidhi Sabha related to administration (Karyalaya), propaganda (Prachar), education, (Shiksha), temple reform (MandirSudhar), Dalit (Anthyojodhar), publicity (Samachar), religious learning (Vidhat), the youth (Yuvak) and the Mahabir Dal [16].

II

Shiv Narayan Agnihotri (1850-1929) was born in a family of Kanauji Brahmins on 20 December 1850, at Akbarpur in the district of Kanpur in the United Provinces. His father,RameshwarAgnihotri was a businessman with a religious temperament. At the age of seven, he was admitted to a school where he studied Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Mathematics, History and Geography. At the age of twelve, he was married to Lilawati who was eleven years. In 1863, his first job was as an apprentice in the Munsiff's court at Akbarpur [17].

At the age of sixteen, Shiv Narayan Agnihotri got enrolled in the Thomson College of Engineering at Roorkee. As a student, he was introduced to Vedanta through the teachings of Shiv Dayal Singh who was his Guru. Shiv Narayan and his wife underwent an initiation ceremony in 1870 and became disciples of Shiv Dayal Singh. Under his guidance, Agnihotri rejected idol worship and set his wife free from the restrictions of the *zenana.* He gave up the worship of numerous Gods and Goddesses as well as rites and rituals. At Roorkee, he learnt English and passed the Overseer's examination and this qualification subsequently got him the government job of Head Surveying Master in 1872. Later on, the Government posted him in the railway service at Bahawalpur [18].

At the age of 23, Agnihotri started working as a drawing master in the Government School in Lahore that was the centre of socio religious reform in the colonial Punjab [19]. He got acquainted with MunshiKanhyalalAlakhdhari [20] and also met Navin Chandra Rai, [21] the well-known BrahmoSamajist. Under his influence, Agnihotri joined the BrahmoSamaj in 1873 and accepted the rational, eclectic and reformist ideology of the BrahmoSamaj. Two years later, he became an honorary missionary of the BrahmoSamaj. As a minister, he held prayer meetings and delivered sermons in the BrahmoMandir as well as delivered lectures from other platforms and in other stations on

various social, moral and religious themes.[22] In 1876, Agnihotri was elected as a member of the Managing Committee of the Lahore BrahmoSamaj and was also appointed as Secretary of the Samaj [23].

Shiv Narayan Agnihotri met Swami Dayanand Saraswati[24] in 1877 and Initially, many of their ideas were compatible and Dayanand's articles were published in Brahmo journal,*Bradir-i-Hind* in 1877. But later differences arose between the two and Agnihotri repeatedly attacked Swami Dayanand and the Arya Samaj. Rejecting Dayanand's interpretation of the Vedas, Shiv Narayan Agnihotri wrote a long article on *'Swami DayanandSaraswati and Vedas'* [25].

In 1879, the BrahmoSamaj split because of the marriage of Keshav Chander Sen's minor daughter to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. Shiv Narayan Agnihotri joined Shivnath Shastri's Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in 1880. In the same year, Agnihotri set up a new society named Central Punjab BrahmoSamaj in Lahore allied to Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. He had the support of well-known BrahmoSamajists like Navin Chandra Rai, Sitala Kant Chatterjee and Girdhar Lal. He soon established several branches under the names of '*Bhartri Sammelani Sabha*', '*Sadhak Mandali*'; '*Samdarshi Sabha*' and *'Students Club'*. He travelled to Multan and Amritsar as a Brahmo missionary. In the same year, he lost his wife and a year later, he married Savitri, a Brahmin widow of 20 years [26].

At the age of 32, Agnihotri became a Sanyasi in 1882 and changed his name to Satyananda Agnihotri. The next year, he was appointed as the Secretary of the Lahore Temperance Society that aimed at stopping the consumption of alcohol. In 1885, Agnihotri was invited to participate in the convention to form the Indian National Congress along with Mr. A.O. Hume and Dadabhai Naroji as a representative from Punjab. In the same year, his second wife died and he married Devki Devi who was eighteen years of age [27].

Shiv Narayan Agnihotri was a prolific writer and was associated with many journals and newspapers. He edited the *Hari Hakikat,* a Brahmo journal that was later renamed, *Dharma Jiwan.* It was published from 1883 to 1887. [28]Agnihotri also edited*, Hindi Bhandio*that focused on propagating the ideal of female education and advocating the abolition of child marriage and enforced widowhood. It was published from Lahore in Urdu and Hindi. [29] Another Brahmo journal *Bradir-i-Hind* too was edited by him and was published in Urdu from Lahore. He authored books namely, *Brahma Dharma Samhita*, and *Brahma Dharma KeByakhyan* in Hindi in 1878. In the same year, Agnihotri translated *The Sermons of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore* from Hindi to Bengali [30].

Agnihotri broke away from the Brahmo Samaj and founded a new organization named the Dev Samaj (Divine Society) in Lahore in 1887. *The Science Grounded Religion*, the organ of the Dev Samaj reported that Agnihotri in a ceremony on 16th February 1887, 'proclaimed his *Dev Dharma* mission, the mission of imparting his own life of Devat,........ and hoisted a flag as an emblem of his Dev Dharma mission.[31] Rejecting Brahmo rationalism, he asserted that only the Guru, in the person of Agnihotri, could provide a path of eternal bliss. The guidance of an enlightened soul led to Complete Higher Life. In this world, the only guide was he, Shiv Narayan Agnihotri.[32] In

1892, he initiated dual worship of himself and God. [33] A year later, he declared himself to be *Dev Guru Bhagwan*. He was abused and attacked by opponents several times. Two years later, Agnihotri read a paper at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago highlighting the cardinal principles of the Dev Samaj.[34] In 1895, Agnihotri denied the existence of God and proclaimed himself to be *Devatma*, the first and the only true worshipful being. A regular course of *Dev Guru Pujan* (worship) was introduced in the Dev Samaj [35].

The religious and social ideals of Shiv Narayan Agnihotri as founder of Dev Samaj could be noticed in his writings. He criticized the idea of belief in God. Agnihotri had no faith in Hindu scriptures and rejected belief in incarnations. Idol worship of Gods and Goddesses was rejected, however idol worship (Murti Pooja) of the idol of Shiv Narayan Agnihotri was introduced. He rejected the practice of temple worship and the practice of going on pilgrimages and participating in religious fairs and festivals. The caste system based on the ideal of social division by birth was denounced along with the dominance of Brahmans as temple priests. The sacred thread too was rejected. Child marriage, *purdah* system, expensive marriages, dowry, polygamy, *Sati* and widow exploitation were opposed. Agnihotri stood for educating women and promoting widow remarriage.The slaughter of cows was opposed and Hindi language in Devnagri script was promoted. Agnihotri emphasized leading a moral life. Consumption of liquor, drugs and non-vegetarian diet was forbidden.[36]He wrote several books on religion and society in Urdu as well as Hindi [37].

In 1891, Shiv Narayan Agnihotri established two organizations, Dev Samaj Managing Council and Dev Samaj Representative Assembly (*Dev Samaj Pratindhi Sabha*) in the Punjab.The Dev Samaj Managing Council was to manage and co-ordinate activities of the Dev Samaj in the colonial Punjab. Shiv Narayan Agnihotri was the President of the Managing Council. The Dev Samaj Pratinidhi Sabha was responsible for various departments like Heart Changing, Literary, Finance, Education and Social Service. Preachers (Pracharaks) toured towns of Punjab and India to propagate the ideals of the Dev Samaj, distributed literature and collected funds [38].

Education was an important concern of Shiv Narayan Agnihotri. Significantly, in 1899, he set up a coeducational school, the Anglo Vernacular Dev Samaj High School for Boys along with a boarding house at Moga with seventeen boys and four girls and two teachers. Later, it was shifted to Ferozepore. Along with English, Hindi, Punjabi, Science and Mathematics, skill-based education was too imparted to students as they were taught carpentry. Music both vocal and instrumental was part of the curriculum. Students also participated in several extracurricular activities.He believed that education imparted to women should be rational and independent of religious dogmas, and should inculcate qualities like obedience, reverence, gratitude, loyalty to government, sympathy, charity, self-help, self-respect, social service and cleanliness. Agnihotri also established educational institutions for women in the Punjab. In 1901, he started a high school for girls, Dev Samaj Balika Vidhyalay at Ferozepore. The subjects taught were Hindi, Arithmetic, English and general knowledge up to middle and entrance standards. Religious education was also imparted to the girls. Physical training was also a part of the curriculum. Nursing, first aid, cooking, music (both vocal and instrumental), sewing,

embroidery, dressmaking and dress cutting were taught to girls from the age of 5 to 12. Knowledge of personal hygiene and domestic economy was also imparted to girls [39].

III

Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma shared with Shiv Narayan Agnihotri the common framework of the British government in the Punjab with its socio-cultural milieu along with its political and economic domination. Like Agnihotri, Din Dayalu met the challenge posed by the aggressive proselytizing activity of the Christian missionaries in the colonial Punjab as well as other reform bodies like the Arya Samaj.

There were issues on which Din Dayalu agreed with Shiv Narayan and Dev Samaj: protection of the cow along with vegetarianism, promotion of Hindi in the Devnagri script as the language of education and administration and rejection of the social evil of giving dowry to daughters at the time of marriage. Significantly, both established institutions for the promotion of their ideals in 1887, the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal and the Dev Samaj.

Understandably the radical ideas of Shiv Narayan and the Dev Samaj were denounced by the Sanatanist protagonist Din Dayalu and the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal. The Dev Samaj was placed in the category of 'new sects' and was criticized for misguiding Hindus by writing and distributing false texts full of untruths. As a result Hindus had started to abandon Hindu Dharm.[40] In contrast with Shiv Narayan, Pandit Din Dayalu upheld the sanctity of the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and associated texts; had belief in incarnations; upheld the practices of idol worship in temples, and rituals like the pilgrimages, and fasts; supported the caste system and the dominance of the Brahman; and stood for early marriage and opposed widow remarriage. Unlike Agnihotri, the education prescribed by Din Dayalu for women was elementary which could prepare them for the role of a wife and a mother and served domestic economy.

In this period of growing distinctive Hindu consciousness, Din Dayalu,a Sanatanist and Shiv Narayan, founder of Dev Samaj stood at opposing ends of a spectrum, one radical and the other traditional. However, both represented modernity and change.

Endnotes

1. Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India: Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*, India: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

2. Harihar Swaroop Sharma, *VyakhyanWachaspatiPandit Din Dayalu Sharma: Smarak Granth*, New Delhi: Dev Publishing House, 1985, pp. 4-7. (Henceforth cited as *SmarakGranth*)

3. *SmarakGranth*, 1985, pp. 9,10.

4. Ibid, pp. 11, 12.

5. Ibid, pp. 15-18.

6. Ibid, pp. 19-23.

7. Ibid, pp. 24-25, 29;*Report of the Bharat DharmMahamandal*, 1889, Mathura: Lala Hari Prasad Press, 1889, pp. 2-7. (Henceforth cited as *Report of the Bharat DharmMahamandal*, 1889). In March 1891, both the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code were amended to raise the age of consent to 12 for married and unmarried girls; sexual intercourse with girls below that age was punishable with upto ten years in prison and or transportation for life. Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996, p. 75.

8. *Foreign Department Proceedings*, Internal B, file nos. 112/ 114, 1902, Subject: Proposed deputation of the Bharat DharamMahamandal Society to the King's coronation, extracts from a newspaper, p. 14.

9. *SmarakGranth*, 1985, pp. 32, 33, 41, 42, 59, 144,145, 151, 159.

10. Ibid, pp. 316, 317.

11. Ibid, pp. 88, 122-25.

12. Din Dayalu Papers, *The SanatanaDharm College, Lahore: Its Aims and Objects and an appeal to Hindus*, pp .3,4

13. *Smarak Granth*,1985, pp. 290-93.

14. Goswami Ganesh Dutt (1889-1959) was an important Punjabi Sanatanist leader of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He was the General Secretary of the SanatanDharmPratinidhi Sabha of Punjab and was also closely associated with Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Sheena Pall, 'The SanatanDharm Movement in the Colonial Punjab: Religious, Social and Political Dimensions', Ph.D. Thesis, Chandigarh: Panjab University, 2008, pp.302-304,

15. *Annual Report of Shri SanatanDharmPratinidhi Sabha Punjab*, Lahore: Goswami Ganesh Dutt, 1928, pp. 2,3.

16. Ibid, p. 18.

17. S.P. Kanal, 'The Dev Samaj', *The Singh Sabha and other Socio-Religious Movements in the Punjab 1850-1925*, (ed.), Ganda Singh, Patiala: Punjabi University,1997,pp. 241-43; S.P. Kanal, *An Introduction To Dev Dharma*, Delhi: Panchal Press, 1965,p.13; S.P.Kanal, *The Ethics of Devatma*,Moga: Dev Samaj,1974, pp.1-2; Agnese Dhillon, *Dev Dharam: Educational Epistemology and Evolution of Society*, Chandigarh: New MohindraPublishing House, 2014, p.1.

18. Agnese Dhillon, *Dev Dharam: Educational Epistemology and Evolution of Society*, 2014, pp.8-9.; S.P. Kanal, *The Ethics of Devatma*, 1974, p.3.

19. *The Times of India,* February 18, 1905, p.8.; P.V. Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma*, New Delhi: Panchal Press,1929,p.123.

20. MunshiKanhyalalAlakhdhari was well-known in his own time as a distinguished Vedantist. He was a scholar of Persian and a man of independent views. He stood against Brahmanic teachings and superstitions and renounced all other religious

faiths other thanVedantism. Alakhdhari founded a reform society, the *Niti Prakash Sabha* (Society for Moral Enlightenment) in Ludhiana in March 1873. He translated *Gita* into Urdu. He founded the Gyan Press, at Agra and published writings on religion, physics, household and political economy, social customs and morals. SatyanandAgnihotri*, Mujh Mei Dev Jeevan KaVikas,* Lahore: Jiwan Press*,1909, p.* 25; P.V. Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma*,1929,pp.83-84.; Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th- Century Punjab*, New Delhi: Manohar,1989, pp.22-23, 332.

21. Navin Chandra Rai (1830-90) laid the foundation of BrahmoSamaj in the colonial Punjab in 1863. He along with six other Bengalis and a small group of Punjabi Hindus founded the first BrahmoSamaj of Punjab in Lahore. He was a visionary, influential speaker, prolific author and a well-known spokesperson of the BrahmoSamaj in the Punjab. In 1873, the Lahore BrahmoSamaj opened its first Mandir*,* and Rai became its minister. For details see: Ulrike Stark, 'Educating Women, Educating A Daughter: BabuNavin Chandra Rai, Lakshmi SaraswatiSamvad (1869), and Hemant KumariChaudhurani', *Gurus and their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India*, (ed.), Antony Copley, India: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.34.

22. The social themes he spoke on were: 'The present condition of the women of India and the ways and means of raising their status' and 'Caste'. The moral themes were: 'The Higher and Lower Life'; 'The Purity of Life'; 'The New Life'; 'Self Sacrifice'; 'The Living Religion'; 'Soul-Light'; 'Soul Power'; 'Sin and Its Fruits', 'The New Life of Soul'; 'Our real weakness', 'BrahmJiwan', and 'Universal Law of Salvation'. The religious themes were: 'Faith in God'; 'BrahmJiwan'; 'Contemplation of God', 'The Religion of Nineteenth Century', 'Faith in God', 'One universal and spiritual religion of the world'.*The Theistic Annual,* 1877,p.68; *Brahmo Public Opinion,* 4 July 1878,p.166.; *The Tribune,* 20 October 1883,p.7;20 October 1886,p.6.;20 October 1883,p.7; 17 May 1884,p.8; 17 October 1885,p.7; *The Times of India,* February 18, 1905,p.8.; P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma*,1929,pp.192-194,198,296.

23. *The Times of India,* February 18, 1905, p.8; Pooja Prashar, 'Philosophy of Dev Samaj: A Socio- Religious Reform Movement', *International Journal of Academic Research and Development,*Vol.2, Issue 4,2017,p.610.

24. Swami DayanandSaraswati (1824-1883) was the founder of the Arya Samaj Movement. He had acquired proficiency in Sanskrit language. He held public meetings, and private discussions and entered several public debates with orthodox Pandits and Christian missionaries. He established the Arya Samaj at Lahore in 1877, which was followed by ten more Samajes during his visit of fifteen months in the Punjab. For Details: Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab,*1989*,* p.328.

25. Shiv Narayan Agnihotri wrote tracts like: *DayanandSaraswatiKe Veda Bash par Review* (Lahore: Victoria Press, 1882); *Mazhabaur 'Aql*(Religion and Reason) (Lahore: Victoria Press, 1882);*Asrar-i-Diniyah*(The Mysteries of Religion) (Lahore: New Imperial Press, 1884) and *DayanandiKalyugiMazhab*(The Iron Age Religion of

DayanandSaraswati) (Lahore: BrahmPrachar Press, 1887).Kenneth W.Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th–Century Punjab,* 1989, pp.109-111.

26. *The Times of India,* February 18, 1905, p.8.;SatyanandAgnihotri*, Mujh Mei Dev Jeevan Ka Vikas,*1909,p.55.

27. 'The Dev Samaj: A Modern Indian Ethico-Religious Movement',*The Indian Philosophical Review,*Widgery and Rama Chandra Ranade, Baroda: Alban G Widgery the College, Vol. III, Oxford University Press, 1920, p. 389. Author unknown.

28. *The Tribune,* 11 August 1883, p.10; 1 September 1883, p.10; P.V. Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma*, 1929, p.38.

29. *The Theistic Annual,*1877, p.66; *The Tribune,* 29 August 1885, p.9; SatyanandAgnihotri, *Mujh Mei Dev JiwanKa Vikas,*1909, p.38.

30. *The Theistic Annual,* 1879, pp.79,90; *The Tribune,* 11 August 1883, p.10; 1 September 1883,p.10; 29 August 1885, p.9;SatyanandAgnihotri,*Mujh Mei Dev JiwanKa Vikas,*1909, p.38.

31. SatyanandAgnihotri*, Mujh Mei Dev Jeevan Ka Vikas,1909,* p.94;P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma,*1929,pp. 319-320.

32. Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India: Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*, 1994, pp.104-105.

33. Ruchi Ram Sahni, a Brahmo mentions that 'in 1892 he announced himself as the Deva Guru Bhagwan. He lost complete faith in God and called his religion, Science Grounded – his own words – he became an avowed and even an aggressive atheist. He adopted all the symbols of orthodox Hinduism that he had so enthusiastically discarded on his joining the BrahmoSamaj'.Neera Burra, (ed.),*A Memoir of Pre–Partition Punjab Ruchi Ram Sahni (1863-1948*), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 226.

34. P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma,*1929, p.402;S.P.Kanal, *An Introduction To Dev Dharma,*1965, p.32.

35. P.V.Kanal, (tr.),*Atma-Katha: An Autobiographical Sketch of the Founder of the Dev Samaj,*1960, p. 64.

36. P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma,*1929, pp.63-69.; Kenneth W. Jones, *The Cambridge History of India, Socio Religious Reform Movements in British India,*1994,p.104.

37. He wrote more than thirty books. Important among them were: *Satya MahmaPradarshak*;*DevatavParchar*; *Dev SamajAnusthanVidhi*; *Mujh Men Dev JiwanKaVikas*;*Atma Katha; AtmaParichay; ApneDevjiwanKeVikasAurJiwanBrata Ki Siddhi KeLiyeMeraAdvityTyag; MeraVanshAurVanshiyaPoorvaj; Dev Shashtra* and *Vigyan – mulakTattwaShiksha; AdvitiyaTyag; MeraVanshaurVanshiyaPoorvaj*and *Dev Shastra*. *The Tribune,* 22 May 1910, p.6;P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma,*1929,pp.149,533;SatyanandAgnihotri*, Mujh Mei Dev Jeevan Ka Vikas,*1909,pp.103, 121, 124, 132, 143-144.

38. P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma,* 1929,p.325; SattayanadAgnihotri, *Mujh Mei Dev JiwanKaVikash*, Moga: Dev Samaj, 1965, Reprint,p.1; 'Annual Report of Dev Samaj 1950', *Jiwan Path,* (ed.), Girwar Prasad,Vol.2, No.1, January 1951,p.9.

39. *The Tribune,* 8 January 1921,p.6;9 January 1924,p.9;*Report on Public Instruction in the Punjab and its Dependencies for 1909-10*, Lahore, 1910,pp.5,18;P.V.Kanal, *Bhagwan Dev Atma*,1929,pp.345-6, 457, *Report on the Progress of Education in the Punjab,* Lahore, 1912,p.22.

40. *Report of the Bharat DharmMahamandal*, 1889,p.4.

Mapping Memory, Resisting Empire: Landscape and Cultural Memory in Mamang Dai's *the Black Hill*

Yashveer[1]

Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between land, memory, and resistance in Mamang Dai's The Black Hill through the lens of Memory Studies and the Spatial Turn. It argues that the landscape in the novel functions not merely as setting, but as a mnemonic and political space where cultural memory is preserved and subaltern voices are recuperated. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Jan Assmann, Pierre Nora, and Yi-Fu Tuan, this study situates the forested terrain of Arunachal Pradesh as a site of indigenous remembrance and embodied resistance, particularly through the experiences of Gimur, the novel's central female figure. While existing scholarship often foregrounds the colonial encounter in The Black Hill, this paper identifies a research gap in examining how memory and spatiality interact to resist both colonial historiography and patriarchal marginalization. Using close textual analysis, it demonstrates how Dai's narrative inscribes the land with layered memories personal, communal, and spiritual that subverts official histories and reimaging the forest as an archive of indigenous presence. By treating land as both witness and agent, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions in postcolonial ecologies, indigenous literatures, and memory politics, ultimately arguing that the act of remembering through land becomes a form of subaltern resistance.

Keywords: *memory studies, spatial turn, indigenous resistance, postcolonial landscape, gender and space*

Introduction

In *The Black Hill*, Mamang Dai resurrects a forgotten landscape nineteenth-century Arunachal Pradesh and animates it with voices silenced by colonial history. The forested hills, rivers, and valleys of this borderland are not merely scenic backdrops; they are charged with memory, myth, and resistance. Set during the expansion of British colonial rule into the tribal highlands of Northeast India, the novel follows the entangled lives of Gimur, an indigenous woman, and Reverend Nicholas Gregor, a Scottish missionary. Dai's narrative does not merely recount historical events; it unsettles the authority of colonial historiography by making the land itself a repository of indigenous cultural memory. In doing so, *The Black Hill* exemplifies the convergence of literary geography, memory studies, and postcolonial critique an intersection where landscape becomes an archive, and memory becomes resistance.

For the purpose of analysis, the theoretical frameworks of Memory Studies, especially the works of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, alongside concepts from the Spatial Turn, particularly the insights of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja are used in the paper. Through this lens, the novel is examined not just as a work of historical fiction but as a cultural counter-memory, one that re-inscribes indigenous

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[1]Assistant Professor in English, Smt. Aruna Asaf Ali Govterment Post Graduate College, Kalka (Haryana)

presence into a landscape overwritten by colonial cartographies. The objective of this study is to explore how Dai reclaims spatial memory through literary form, constructing a geography that speaks back to imperial narratives and recovers the lived, remembered, and sacred meanings of land.

Maurice Halbwachs, in *On Collective Memory*, asserts that "we preserve memories of events that we have not directly experienced… by situating them within the frameworks of the social groups to which we belong" (Halbwachs 38). In *The Black Hill*, tribal characters such as Gimur and Kajinsha embody such frameworks of collective memory, where the land is deeply entangled with myths, rituals, and oral traditions passed down through generations. For these communities, memory is not only stored in human consciousness but also embedded in Space Rivers that hold origin myths, forests that echo ancestral footsteps, and hills that are marked by sacredness. Dai captures this when she writes, "The land was full of stories. Even the stones could speak" (*The Black Hill* 25). This animistic belief, far from being folkloric, functions as a mode of remembering a resistance to the historical amnesia imposed by colonial archives.

The concept of cultural memory, as defined by Jan Assmann, is equally central to this study. The term cultural memory refers to a society's "objectivized culture," those texts, rituals, landscapes, and symbols through which communities remember their past (128). Dai's narrative can be read as a literary enactment of such memory, re-inscribing tribal voices into the very landscape that colonial authorities sought to chart, name, and tame. Reverend Gregor's missionary journal methodical, rational, and reductive stands in stark contrast to the fluid, storied world inhabited by Gimur. This juxtaposition illuminates what Edward Said has called the "textual attitude" the imperial tendency to replace lived geographies with scripted ones (93). Dai reverses this logic by privileging oral memory and embodied experience over written record, thereby resisting the textual colonization of space.

As mentioned earlier, the spatial turn in literary studies, pioneered by scholars like Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, also informs this analysis. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* posits that space is not neutral or fixed but socially produced and ideologically charged. In the context of *The Black Hill*, colonial space is produced through mapping, surveying, and naming, but indigenous space resists this fixity through ritual, myth, and embodied presence. "We have no kings," says Kajinsha, "the hills are our home and our fortress" (42). This declaration resists the colonial urge to centralize, legislate, and control space through hierarchy and ownership. Instead, it affirms a decentralized spatial identity rooted in communal memory and ecological intimacy.

The study also considers how memory and landscape intersect through gender, particularly in the character of Gimur. Her flight through the forest is both literal and symbolic a journey back into a remembering landscape that shelters and reclaims her. The forest, feminized and fecund, becomes a site of refuge and resilience. In doing so, Dai extends the metaphor of the land as mother and protector, echoing indigenous epistemologies where nature is not passive but sentient. Gimur's journey thus signifies

more than personal escape; it reflects a return to a landscape of memory that resists patriarchal and colonial containment. Therefore, in placing *The Black Hill* within the overlapping frames of Memory Studies and the Spatial Turn, this paper seeks to underscore Mamang Dai's literary intervention as both political and poetic. Her narrative challenges the dominance of imperial archives not by direct confrontation but by retrieving the silenced textures of memory inscribed in the land. Ultimately, the hills of Arunachal Pradesh do not simply frame the action—they carry it, speak it, and, in moments of crisis, resist forgetting. As such, they become agents in the struggle to remember a past that empire tried to erase.

Colonial Mapping and the Erasure of Indigenous Memory

In *The Black Hill*, Mamang Dai foregrounds the tension between colonial mapping and indigenous memory to expose the mechanisms through which empire attempts to overwrite native spatial consciousness. The maps, for colonial administrators and missionaries, are instruments of control—tools that render unfamiliar geographies knowable, fixed, and governable. Yet for the indigenous communities portrayed in Dai's novel, space is not an object to be measured or possessed; it is a living continuum of memory, ritual, and relational meaning. The novel stages this clash between epistemologies by juxtaposing colonial cartography with tribal oral traditions, illustrating how the act of mapping becomes a symbolic violence against indigenous landscapes of memory.

Edward Said famously argued that "[i]mperialism... made lands into geographical texts" (*Culture and Imperialism* 273). In *The Black Hill*, Reverend Gregor's journals and the surveying efforts of colonial officers are emblematic of this textualization. Gregor approaches the region with the ambition not only to evangelize but also to document and categorize it. His travel is accompanied by writing naming rivers, describing topographies, and recording tribal customs through the lens of Christian and European rationality. His journal entries seek to convert both souls and spaces into comprehensible, disciplined forms. Yet his words consistently fall short of capturing the complexity of the land he moves through. As Dai writes, "The forest gave no directions. It opened and closed behind him like a dream" (*The Black Hill* 87). This dreamlike, elusive quality of the landscape resists his attempts at inscription, offering instead geography of memory that cannot be flattened into lines or grids.

Colonial mapping operates under the logic of legibility it strives to transform the opaque into the transparent, to bring the 'unknown' under the dominion of the known. James C. Scott, in *Seeing Like a State*, explains that "the central problem of statecraft is making society legible" (2). This drive for legibility is apparent in the imperial obsession with surveys, maps, and censuses all tools that convert the fluid and local into abstract data. In *The Black Hill*, however, such efforts encounter the resistance of a terrain that holds other stories, other logics. The land is not simply unmapped it is unmappable, not because of geographical difficulty alone, but because of the ethical and epistemic disjunction between the colonizer and the colonized. Further, indigenous spatiality, as depicted in the novel, is rooted in relationality rather than ownership. For the Adi and Mishmi peoples, place is not a neutral location but a nexus of memory, myth, and

kinship. The river that flows through the village is not just a waterway; it is a site of origin, a witness to ancestral deeds, and a carrier of ritual meaning. To map such a place from an external vantage point is to risk erasing its inner life. As Paul Carter observes in *The Road to Botany Bay*, colonial mapping often "obliterates" indigenous meanings by "replacing memory with measurement" (324). Dai's novel reverses this erasure by centering spatial memory through indigenous voices and experiences.

One of the most striking contrasts in *The Black Hill* lies in how colonial and indigenous characters inhabit space differently. For Reverend Gregor, movement through the landscape is linear and goal-oriented he seeks destinations, converts, conclusions. For Gimur and Kajinsha, space is circular, intimate, and recursive. Their knowledge of the forest is intuitive, accumulated through generations of storytelling, movement, and ritual. When Gimur escapes into the forest after Gregor's death, she does not flee into anonymity; she returns to a space of safety and memory. The forest becomes her shield not because it is wild or impassable, but because it remembers her. This contrast between imperial alienation and indigenous intimacy with land speaks to what Michel de Certeau describes as the difference between "space" and "place" where the former is abstract and strategic, the latter is practiced, lived, and remembered (117).

Furthermore, Dai uses silence and absence as narrative strategies to critique the colonial archive. The official records that frame the novel mention a foreign missionary's death and a woman's disappearance but offer no further details. These lacunae in the historical record become narrative opportunities for Dai to re-inscribe indigenous perspectives. Through fiction, she fills the gaps left by colonial documentation, showing that what the map omits, memory retains. This act of literary reclamation transforms the novel into a counter-map a spatial narrative that privileges memory over measurement, presence over absence. Dai, therefore, challenges the assumption that maps can tell the whole story of a place. By restoring the voices, myths, and memories of Arunachal Pradesh's tribal peoples, she reclaims the land from the abstract violence of imperial cartography. In *The Black Hill*, the forested hills do not merely resist British expeditions they resist the forgetting that follows conquest. They remain sites of remembrance, saturated with meanings that no map can contain.

Landscape as Witness and Vessel of Cultural Memory

In *The Black Hill*, Mamang Dai imbues the landscape with a mnemonic consciousness that extends beyond metaphor. The hills, rivers, and forests are not inert backdrops but animate presences that witness, preserve, and transmit the memory of a people. This vision of land as a living archive aligns closely with Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory, which refers to the "outer dimension of human memory... crystallized in symbolic figures" such as landscapes, monuments, or rituals that encode and transmit collective identity across generations (129). Dai's narrative transforms the land into such a figure, a mnemonic space where stories dwell and through which history is preserved. The narrative structure of *The Black Hill* itself reinforces this idea. While the novel opens with a colonial record a fragment from the archives referencing a missionary's death and a woman's disappearance the bulk of the story unfolds through voices tied to the land: villagers, tribal leaders, and Gimur herself. In shifting the focus away from imperial

documentation and toward lived, spatial memory, Dai contests the authority of the colonial archive. "Sometimes the hills spoke in the night," she writes, "and old tales came back like voices in the dark" (34). Here, the land is not just a silent witness but an active participant in the narration of history.

Landscape, in Dai's vision, is embodied memory it holds the traces of violence, exile, love, and resistance. When Kajinsha, the tribal priest and resistance leader, reflects on the hills, he experiences them not as fixed geography but as a palimpsest of emotional and historical layers. His memory of battles, of ancestral rituals, and of lost kin is not held in written form but etched into the physical features of the land. This resonates with Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), which he defines as places where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" in response to the erosion of lived tradition (7). The forest, for Kajinsha, becomes such a site a spiritual and political landscape that preserves what history neglects. Moreover, Dai intertwines personal memory with ecological rhythms. Gimur's relationship to the land is deeply intimate; she draws strength and direction from it as she navigates loss and trauma. After Gregor's death, it is the forest that receives her not merely as a place of hiding but as one of healing and belonging. "The trees had always been kind," the narrator observes, "they had watched her grow, they knew her dreams" (*The Black Hill* 112). This personification of the forest is not romantic escapism but a reflection of indigenous epistemologies, in which the land is a sentient, remembering being. It echoes the ideas of scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who argues that indigenous relationships with land are "deeply historical, storied, and spiritual" and cannot be separated from questions of identity and survival (54).

The novel also portrays ritual and myth as essential modes of activating cultural memory through space. The oral transmission of stories about the origins of rivers, the migration of tribes, the spirits that inhabit certain mountains creates a map that is narrative rather than topographical. These myths are not detached fantasies but repositories of ethical knowledge and historical continuity. As Jan Assmann notes, cultural memory often operates through "repetition and re-embodiment" in rituals that connect the past to the present (132). In *The Black Hill*, rituals enacted in the landscape such as sacrificial rites, mourning songs, or seasonal observances become acts of remembrance that inscribe the past onto space. This mnemonic quality of landscape also functions as a form of resistance. While colonial forces attempt to inscribe their power onto the land through roads, churches, and administrative divisions, Dai's characters resist through remembrance. By walking ancestral paths, invoking ancestral spirits, and telling ancestral stories, they assert a different kind of claim to space one not based on ownership but on continuity and care. Gimur's final return to the hills is not simply an escape from violence; it is a reclaiming of place through memory. The forest becomes her final interlocutor, her home, and her grave a witness to her story when no one else will tell it.

In this way, *The Black Hill* constructs the landscape as a counter-archive a site where memory survives empire. Unlike the colonial record, which is fragmented and impersonal, the landscape holds memory in relational, affective, and embodied ways. Dai's vision challenges the dominant historiographical model by suggesting that land,

too, can remember that it carries the weight of forgotten voices and the quiet persistence of those who refuse to be erased. As such, the land becomes not only the setting of history but its most faithful custodian.

Gendered Landscape: Gimur's Journey as Memory and Resistance

In *The Black Hill*, Mamang Dai constructs the landscape not only as a site of cultural memory but also as a space where gendered experiences unfold and resist containment. Through the character of Gimur, the novel explores how the forested terrain of Arunachal Pradesh becomes a space of female agency, memory, and survival. Gimur's movement through and eventual return to the forest reflects a gendered re-inscription of space one that challenges both patriarchal control and colonial power. Her relationship to the land is intimate, embodied, and shaped by memory, and it ultimately becomes a mode of resistance against forgetting. As the story indicates, Gimur's life is marked by rupture. Her marriage to Kajinsha is forbidden, her love for Gregor is fraught with cultural and spiritual conflict, and her existence is constantly negotiated across spaces of exile, displacement, and judgment. Yet throughout these shifts, the land remains a constant presence a silent witness to her suffering and resilience. Early in the novel, as she stands alone on the hill where Kajinsha once waited, Dai writes, "She stood still and looked around, feeling the familiar pull of the hills. She had known them all her life. They had watched her grow" (*The Black Hill* 32). This moment establishes the land as a sentient, almost maternal presence one that remembers her even when human relationships fail to do so.

Gimur's gendered alienation is often expressed spatially. When she elopes with Gregor, she finds herself doubly exiled from her people and from her spiritual orientation. In the village, she is shunned as a transgressor; in the missionary household, she becomes a passive convert, unable to claim full belonging. The forest, by contrast, offers a space of ambiguous safety. As the narrative unfolds, it is the wilderness not the village or the church that recognizes her pain. After Gregor's execution and her escape, Dai describes her return to the forest with a striking image: "The sky was clear. The leaves sparkled with rain. Somewhere in the hills, a bird called out sad and sharp, as though it knew her sorrow" (113). Here, nature does not merely reflect emotion; it shares it. This symbiosis between Gimur and the land portrays nature as an affective space where suppressed female grief finds recognition.

Dai further expands on this intimacy through metaphors of memory. As Gimur journeys deeper into the forest, she recalls childhood stories of mountain spirits, sacred groves, and ancestral protectors. The forest becomes both literal and symbolic a mnemonic space where stories are remembered not through books but through sensory experience. "Every bend in the river, every outcrop of stone, reminded her of tales told long ago," the narrator observes (*The Black Hill* 116). The land is thus a feminine archive, layered with oral histories that she re-inhabits in a moment of crisis. This contrasts sharply with Gregor's world of written scripture and rational mapping. For Gimur, remembering is not about reconstruction it is about return.

Gimur's gender also intersects with indigenous spirituality, which Dai portrays as deeply connected to the rhythms of nature. Unlike Gregor's Christian view of the natural

world as fallen or subordinate, Gimur's sensibility is shaped by a worldview in which land is sacred, cyclical, and alive. After her final withdrawal into the forest, Dai writes, "The spirits of the hills, once feared, now welcomed her. The silence was no longer lonely; it was full of voices" (127). This spiritual communion signifies more than inner peace; it is a form of resistance to the alienation imposed by both patriarchy and colonialism. Gimur does not disappear; she re-merges with a land that remembers her not as a sinner or exile, but as kin. This intimate connection between woman and land can be read as a form of gendered memory-making. While colonial records reduce Gimur to a line "a woman disappeared into the forest" (3) the novel recuperates her story through spatial and emotional memory. Her journey inscribes the forest with meaning that is personal and collective, feminine and political. As such, Gimur becomes a figure of embodied resistance, her movements across and within the landscape challenging imposed borders of race, of gender, of narrative authority.

In portraying the forest as Gimur's ultimate refuge and final interlocutor, Dai emphasizes the radical potential of nature to remember what the world forgets. The land bears witness to her suffering, absorbs her memories, and in doing so, asserts a counter-history. In this way, Dai feminizes the landscape not as a passive earth-mother trope, but as a remembering, resisting entity that holds space for the marginalized and the lost. The forest, alive with spirits and stories, becomes the only place where Gimur's fragmented life achieves coherence not through assimilation, but through re-membering.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* through the interpretive frameworks of Memory Studies and the Spatial Turn, foregrounding how land functions as both a site of cultural memory and a space of resistance. By drawing on Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory, Pierre Nora's concept of lieux de mémoire, and indigenous epistemologies of space, this study has analyzed how the landscape in Dai's novel becomes a living archive—preserving voices, emotions, and histories often excluded from dominant colonial narratives. Through the character of Gimur, the novel reveals how memory is gendered, embodied, and spatially inscribed. Her intimate relationship with the forest challenges the imperial and patriarchal impulse to erase or contain indigenous women's experiences. The forest becomes more than a refuge; it emerges as a witness, a sanctuary, and ultimately a mnemonic space where personal and collective histories intersect. Her journey back into the hills is not simply a retreat into silence, but a symbolic return to the only space that remembers her on her own terms.

This study has argued that *The Black Hill* can be read as a counter-archive—not through the preservation of official records, but through the evocation of oral histories, ritual practices, and affective geographies that reside in the landscape. In this sense, the novel participates in a broader postcolonial project of resisting the epistemic violence of imperial historiography by reclaiming land as a vessel of indigenous memory. By interpreting the novel through spatial and memory-oriented lenses, this research has illuminated how place and memory are intertwined in the construction of identity and in the subaltern struggle to resist erasure. Therefore, through the dual lens of memory and

spatiality, this study contributes to ongoing conversations in postcolonial and indigenous literary criticism. It highlights how literature can illuminate the ways in which land itself remembers, and how that memory can become a powerful resource for marginalized voices. The landscape in the novel thus emerges not merely as setting, but as a dynamic agent of history, identity, and resistance, inviting us to reconsider the relationship between territory, storytelling, and survival.

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Service Delivery System in Punjab State: An Analysis

Harmanpreet Singh[1]

Abstract

The present paper is introducing the framework of Right to Service by discussing its meaning, history and existence in present scenario. The objective of the study is to trace the legislative and other initiatives of Punjab Government for the delivery of public services. The study primarily explains the initiatives taken by the Punjab state government regarding the provisions of 'The Punjab Right to Service Act 2011' and 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act 2018'.This paper an attempt to trace the status of these Acts with the analysis ofthe working and shortcomings of SewaKendras,SaanjhKendras, Punjab Right to Service Commission and Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Commission.It is found that most of the SewaKendras were closed by the previous government as well astheseKendraswere worked with overburdened, qualified but contractual staff. Sewa and SaanjhKendrasnot get financially assistanceregularly too. The study mainly focused on the effectiveness of public service delivery mechanism in Punjab and examined the role of Punjab State Government in implementing the Right to Service in Punjab State.

Keywords: *Right to Service, Public Service Delivery, Sewa Kendra, Saanjh Kendra.*

Introduction

As primary requirement citizens in modern times of development are entitled to hassle-free public services and redressal of their grievances. Right to Service Act represents the commitment of a particular state towards quality, standard, time frame of service deliveryand grievance redressal mechanism. This Act enables to service seekers to avail the services from the government departments with minimum inconvenience and maximum speed.

The Right to Service is veritable platform providing clear, precise and enforceable laws in the form of Public Service Guarantee. Right to Service is aimed at ensuring time-bound delivery of public services to the citizens by providing them necessary arrangement which they can ensure the timely delivery of services.

Right to Service has been operational in the Punjab State since 2011 but many dimensions of this right have remained unexplored, that's why the present study carries significance. There are many challenges in the way of Right to Service such as unawareness, illiteracy, poverty, lack of involvement and participation of citizens, corruption, and improper implementation etc. for the effective and optimum realization of the act. It has affected a number of lives of citizens in this state. This kind of situation creates the need of the active involvement of government for the proper implementation of Right to Service. There is a dire need to protect the citizens from exploitation and to make them aware about their Right to Service.

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[1]Assistant Professor in Public Administration, Government Mohindra College, Patiala

The study examined the role of Punjab State Government in implementing the Right to Service in Punjab State in general and S.A.S (SahibzadaAjit Singh) Nagar District in particular. The S.A.S Nagar District was selected for the study because this District is nearest to Chandigarh the Capital of Punjab and furthermore the literacy rate of S.A.S Nagar District is 83.80% which is greater than the average literacy rate of Punjab State i.e. 75.84%.It is quite possible and expected that the awareness among citizens may be high as compared to the other Districts of Punjab. It is assumed that the more people use the Right to Service, the more is its effectiveness and also it provides an ample chance to find out the loopholes and gaps. The present work also makes attempts to find out various issues and challenges in the implementation of delivery of public services. This study describes the status of service delivery as a right since October 2011 to 2020.

Objectives

(i)   To examine the role of Right to Service.

(ii)   To trace the legislative initiatives and other initiative of Punjab government for delivery of public services.

(iii) To analyze the service delivery system under 'The Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011' and 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018'.

(iv)   To explore the shortcomings, obstructions and challenges to service delivery system in Punjab State.

Research Methodology

The present study is mainly based on primary and secondary sources of information. Interview Schedule method has been applied to collect the primary data. Detailed schedules comprising both close ended and open ended questions have been prepared, keeping the objectives of research in mind. Observation method has also been used to arrive at the final conclusion which sometimes respondents may hesitate to share, not co-operate or unaware of the actual position. Secondary data has mainly been collected from the Acts, Government reports, books, journals, dissertations, magazines, newspapers and websites related to the topic of study.

Sewa Kendra and *Saanjh Kendra* have been selected to collect the primary data of the study because *Sewa* and *Saanjh Kendra* are the main service providers under Right to Service and these *Kendras* have been established or expanded by state government especially for proper implementation of 'The Punjab Right to Service Act 2011'. The study has been conducted in all the Tehsils (Kharar, S.A.S Nagar and DeraBassi) of S.A.S Nagar District to make the sample most represent in the nature. For present study 75 employees/officials of *Sewa* and *SaanjhKendras* were selected by random sampling technique.The sample of *Saanjh Kendra* is 1/4 of the sample of *Sewa Kendra* giving a right proportion of their members because the number of *Saanjh Kendra* is 1/4 of *Sewa Kendra* in S.A.S Nagar District i.e. 80 *Sewa Kendra* and 20 *Saanjh Kendra*. The study has been conducted into both rural and urban areas. The study has

been conducted during 2019-2020.

Genesis and Growth of Right to Service in India

The first Administrative Reform Commission in India was constituted under the chairmanship of Morarji Desai in 1966 with the overall aim to improve the quality of administration and for bringing about citizen friendly governance. This commission submitted twenty reports related to various aspects including public services and redress of citizen's grievances etc., in 1970.

Assurance of Right to Service became a reality for the first time in 1994 when consumer rights activists drafted a charter for health service providers at a meeting of the Central Consumer Protection Council in Delhi (India's Citizen's Charter a Decade of Experience, 2007).

After that, in 1996 the Government of India called a Chief Secretaries conference for the aim of formulating an agenda for 'Effective and Responsive Administration'. The conference recommended that accountability should be interpreted in a larger and holistic sense in relation to public satisfaction and responsive delivery of services, and a phased introduction of Citizen's Charter for as many service institutions as possible by way of citizens' entitlement to public services, collaboration of consumer organizations and citizen groups, the wide publicity to standards of performance, quality, timelines, cost, etc., for public services (Jain, 2004).

Recommendations of the Conference acted as an encouragement for the prime minister of India I. K Gujral when he called a conference of Chief Ministers in 1997. The three main areas of action plan that were discussed in the conference on 24th May 1997 were; making administration accountable and citizen friendly, ensuring transparency and the right to information, and taking measures to cleanse and motivate civil services. The overall aim of these was to make the government citizen friendly and accountable. As a consequence of these resolutions, 43 Citizen's Charter was finalized by various central departments and agencies on the end of the financial year 1997-98, and 14 by the governments of NCT Delhi, Haryana and Tamil Nadu (Baghel, 2006).

One of the major decisions at that Conference was that the Central and State Governments would formulate Citizen's Charters, starting with those sectors that have the largest public interface (e.g., Railways, Telecom, Posts, and Public Distribution Systems). These Charters were required to include standards of service and time limits that the public can reasonably expect avenues of grievance redress and a provision for independent scrutiny with the involvement of citizen and consumer groups (Thulaseedharan, 2013).

After that, in 2002 a website was launched by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) towards creating a formal site on the progresses and improvements resulting out of Citizen's Charter. In 2005, the 'Service Delivery Excellence Model' named "Sevottam" was initiated to give a fresh impetus to implementation of the Citizen's Charter both at Central and State levels, and provide an assessment improvement framework to bring about excellence in public service delivery (Singh, 2015).

The Second Administrative Reform Commission was constituted in 2005 to prepare a detailed outline for revamping the public administration system. In general, it was mandated to suggest measures for achievement of an accountable, efficient, proactive, responsive, transparent and sustainable administration for the country at all levels of government. In 2007, the Second ARC recommended that Citizen's Charters should specify penalties for non-compliance. After that in 2008, the standing committee on Personnel and Public Grievances recommended giving statutory status to grievance redressal mechanisms. In 2009, The President in her address declared that the government would focus on ensuring effective delivery of public services. Till 2010 there were 131 Citizen's Charters of the central government and 729 of the state governments and union territory administration.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended hassle-free delivery of public services in 12th Report (Citizen Centric Administration: The Heart of Governance, 2009) which was accepted by the Government of India. Accordingly, since June 2009 the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) is in the process of getting the Citizen's Charters reviewed both at the Centre and the States/Union Territories. In addition, the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee has also proposed similar recommendations. Government of India has also placed noticeable emphasis on Public Service Delivery. Consequently, UPA Government proposed '*The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011*'in LokSabha on December 2011. But, the Bill lapsed due to dissolution of the LokSabha (Agarwal, 2014).

The Bill proposed tomakes it mandatory for every public authority to publish a Citizen's Charter withinsix months of the commencement of the Act. The Bill provided that Every Citizen's Charter shall enumerate the commitments of the respective public authority to the citizens, officer responsible for meeting each such commitment and the time limit within which the commitment shall be met (The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011).

Each public authority shall designate an official called Public Grievance Redressal Officer, whom a complainant may approach for any violation of the Citizen's Charter. The Bill proposed to make itincumbent on government officials to address citizen's complaints within aspecified time, failing which the official concerned would face action, including afine of up to Rs.50,000 from his salary in addition to disciplinary proceedings. It wasconceived to give people right to compensation if they do not receive theirentitlements, promised under the law within a specified time (The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011).

Also the Bill provided that every public authority shall review and revise its Citizen's Charter at least once every year through a process of public consultation. Lokpal may direct any public authority to make such changes in their Citizen's Charter as are mentioned in that order. It was expected to address graft and lack of delivery on entitled goods and services at thegrassroots level. Since the proposed Bill was part of the concurrent list, it was tobe applicable on the states also (Sharma, 2015). So, the

Right to Service Act is yet to be included in Legislations by the Union Government of India. However, majority of the States have enacted and implemented of this Act in one or the other way.

Legislative Initiative Regarding Delivery of Public Service in Punjab

Punjab Governance Reforms Commission (PGRC) was constituted to study the existing system and recommend the citizen friendly practices to the government. According to the recommendations of the PGRC, the government promulgated an ordinance on 12th July, 2011called 'The Punjab Right to Services Ordinance, 2011'. The Ordinance came into force from 28th July, 2011. The ordinance later on took the shape of Punjab Act No. 24 of 2011 named 'The Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011' (PRTS Act, 2011) which was notified vide notification No. 37-Leg/2011 Legislature of the State of Punjab after receiving the assent of the Governor of Punjab on the 19th October, 2011. PRTS Act, 2011 was published for general information on 20th October, 2011 under Punjab Government Gazette and came into effect from 20th October, 2011 (Singh, 2016).

It is considered a major administrative reform aimed at providing citizens services to the people as a right. The Act defines 'Right to Service' as the right to obtain service within the stipulated time limit. Initially it covered 67 services rendered by 11 departments. However, at present the number of services has gone up to 351. These services are rendered by 23 departments under the nodal department 'Department of Governance Reforms and Public Grievances' (Department of Governance Reforms, Punjab, 2016).

Act has 23 Sections and one Schedule. The Act also lists the incumbents who are responsible to provide the required services to the needy persons. As per this Act the officer designated by the government in this regard shall provide the service to the eligible person within the given time limit. Also the Act provides the procedure for obtaining the services and also mentions the provisions of first and second appeal if the service is not delivered in stipulated time. This Act states that the designated officer responsible for any delay could face penalty from Rs 500 to Rs. 5000. The Act also provides a Commission, which would look after the task of effective implementation of the PRTS Act, 2011.

The section 5 of the Act, provides the procedure for obtaining the services.An eligible person shall make an application to the Designated for obtaining any service under the provisions of this Act. The Designated Officer on receiving an application, may provide the service or reject the application within the given time limit and in case of rejection of application, keep the written record of the reasons and intimate the same record to the applicant (PRTS Act, 2011, s. 5). The following diagram depicts the procedure of service delivery under 'The Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011'.
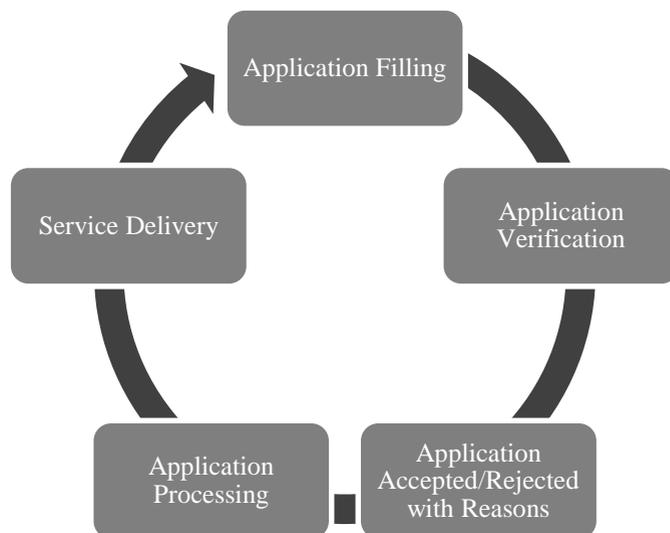
For the better implementation of the PRTS Act, 2011, the Punjab government has framed 'The Punjab Right to Service Rules, 2012', 'The Punjab Right to Service Commission (Management) Regulations, 2012' and The Punjab Right to Service Act amended in the year 2014. But the 'Electronic Mode' of Public Services has not been covered by these Initiatives.

Legislative Initiative Regarding Electronic Delivery of Public Service in Punjab

In a major initiative to ensure delivery of public services to the citizens in a more transparent and accountable manner, the Punjab Cabinet on 20/12/2017 gave its nod to the 'Punjab Transparency and Accountability in delivery of Public Services, Ordinance 2017'. With this, the Punjab Right to Service Act 2011, which did not provide for mandatory provision for online/digital system to receive citizen's requests for various services and delivery thereof in a time bound manner, will cease to exist (http://diprpunjab.gov.in/?q=content/punjab-transparency-accountability-delivery-public-services-ordinance-2017-gets-cabinet-go).

After that, the Punjab Cabinet on 13/03/2018 approved the draft 'Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Services Bill, 2018', while also deciding to set up a Sub-committee on Governance Reforms. It was passed by the Legislature on 28/03/2018 and it received Punjab Governor's approval on 12/07/2018. The new legislation repeals the earlier Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011. It brings transparency and accountability to ensure delivery of public services through electronic

mode to the citizens in a time-bound manner(http://punjab.gov.in/key-initiative).

The key features of the legislation, prepared by the Department of Governance Reforms and Public Grievances to overcome the shortcomings and weaknesses in the existing Right to Service Act 2011, include back-end computerization of all public services within three to five years, online receipt of service requests as a mandatory provision and electronic delivery of public services to citizens in a time bound manner (https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/pb-transparency-accountability-indelivery-of-public-services-bill-gets-cabinet-nod-118031400812 _1.html). The following diagram shows the elements of public service delivery under the provisions of 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018'(PTAAIDOPS, Act, 2018).

Figure 2: Public Service Delivery under the provisions of 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018'
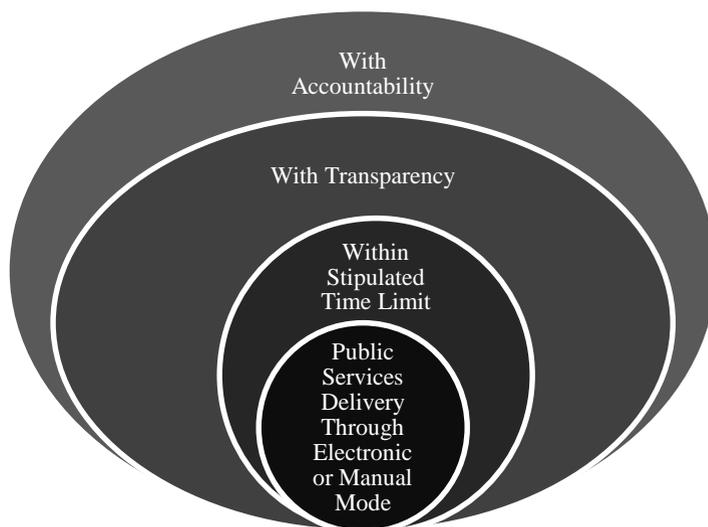
(Source: *The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018)*

Section 5 of this Act provides that the public authority shall deliver all services by electronic mode within a period of three to five years from the date of commencement (17 July 2018) of this Act. Except, the services which cannot be delivered electronically in case of the services that can be delivered electronically the public authority may notify non delivery of some services electronically for the reasons to be specified in such notification. Every public authority shall publish the list of public services to be delivered by it in electronic mode within one hundred and eighty days from the commencement of this Act and the public authority shall review the same and notify it on the 1st January of every year (PTAAIDOPS, Act, 2018: s. 5).

Section 8 of 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018' provides that, any eligible person whose application for obtaining service is rejected or who is not provided the public service within the stipulated time

limit, may file an appeal before the Appellate Authority in prescribed manner within thirty days from the date of rejection or the expiry of the stipulated time limit. But, Appellate Authority may in exceptional cases admit the appeal even after thirty days till the maximum period of ninety days, if it is satisfied that the appellant was prevented by sufficient reason from filing the appeal in time. (PTAAIDOPS, Act, 2018: s. 8).

Any eligible person or Designated Officer, if aggrieved by any order of the Appellate Authority, may make an application for revision of the said order to the Commission in this respect within a period of sixty days from the date of such order, which shall be disposed of in manner as may be prescribed. The Commission may entertain the application after the expiry of the period of sixty days, if it is satisfied that the application could not be submitted in time for a reasonable cause (PTAAIDOPS, Act, 2018: s. 16).

Other Initiatives Regarding Delivery of Public Service in Punjab

Government of Punjab, has also attempted various initiatives not as a right before enacting 'The Punjab Right to Service Act 2011', to improve the delivery of public services such as Community Policing Resource Centers (CPRC), Multi Service Card, Computerization of Old Age Pensions, Computerization of Value Added Tax Information System Project, Computerization of Land Records Project, Computerization of Markfed, Computerization of the Transport Department, Computerization of Municipal Corporations (Sohail, 2011), Agriculture Produce Marketing Information Network, E-Procurement, Common Service Centre, E-District, Local Government Counter, *Suwidha* Center (2002), Transport Centre (2003) and *Fard Kendra* 'land record center' (2004) etc. Most prominent was among these, *Suwidha* Center.

In August 2016, the state government brings advancement, integration and uniformity in service delivery structure has asked the closure of *Suwidha* Centres after the opening of *Sewa Kendras* in the state. The employees of *Suwidha* Centres have been on tenterhooks. Already seeking regularisation, the employees were upped in arms against the government. Government has been asked to join *SewaKendras*. The employees of SuwidhaCentres said they would not join *Sewa Kendras* (Singh, 2016). The nomenclature of Suwidha Centre has been changed and replaced by *Sewa Kendra* since August 2016. Unfortunately, Employees of *Suwidha Centres* were terminated by Government and replaced by the staff of *Sewa Kendra*.

Now, *Sewa Kendra*, *Saanjh Kendra*, *Fard Kendra* and Transport Centre are working in Punjab State. These Centres/*Kendras* provide services as a 'Right' under 'The Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011' later named 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery ofPublic Service Act, 2018' to the general public through Single Window System. Number of *Sewa* and *SaanjhKendras* is very high compared to other Centres/Kendras and most of the services are provided by *Sewa* and *SaanjhKendras* under the principle of Right to Service. It means *Sewa Kendra* and *Saanjh Kendra* are the main service providers under Right to Service. *SewaKendras* are providing general services and *SaanjhKendras* are providing police related services (Singh, 2019).

Three types of *Sewa Kendra* and *Saanjh Kendra* are in existence at the present time. Type I *SewaKendras* are working in District Head Quarter, Type II are working in semi-urban areas and Type III are working in rural areas (villages). Type I *SaanjhKendras* are working at District Head Quarter level, Type II at Sub-division level and Type III at Police Station level. There are some variations in the number of services provided by Type I, Type II, Type III *Sewa Kendra* and *Saanjh Kendra* because depending on the bifurcation of the area. Most of the services are being provided by Type I *Sewa Kendra* and *Saanjh Kendra* because Type I *Sewa Kendra* and *Saanjh Kendra* are situated at District Head Quarters (Singh, 2019). 514 *Sewa Kendra* have been working in Punjab State, of which 15 *Sewa Kendra* in S.A.S. Nagrar District. On the other side *Saanjh* project is an institutionalized set up the management of total 504 *SaanjhKendras* in Punjab State, of which 20 in S.A.S Nagar District (http://115.112.58.49/ppSaanjh/about-Saanjh.php, 2021).

Findings of the Study

In Punjab State, 351 services were being provided under Right to Service which delivered by 23 departments under the nodal department 'Department of Governance Reforms and Public Grievances'. *SewaKendras* were provided 250 services. *SewaKendras* were working with the assistance of other departments. Other departments also provided services to citizens through the *SewaKendras*. On the other side *SaanjhKendras* were provided 41 services. Some services were applied at *Saanjh Kendra* and some services were applied at other offices but verified by the *Saanjh Kendras* for example Passport verification and arms license verification.

Employees of the *Kendras* possess good level of education which is likely to contribute for greater efficiency. However, even after being sufficiently qualified all employees of *Sewa Kendra* have to work on contractual basis without any holiday of Saturday/Sunday, but get only rotation basis holiday. Contractual staff is overburdened, poorly paid and facedjob insecurity. According to the employees of *SewaKendras*, the employees work on very nominal wages. In August 2016 employees of *Suwidha*Centres agitated against the State Government to regularize their services. Unfortunately, the employees of *Suwidha*Centres were replaced by the employees of *SewaKendras* and *Suwidha*Centres were also replaced by *Sewa Kendra* in August 2016. It has been found that an uncertainty among the employees of *SewaKendras* about the continuation of their job, salary and perks. On the other side, the employees of *Saanjh Kendra* are working on the permanent basis under the Punjab Police. It has been found that *SewaKendras* are running by authorized private companies. *SaanjhKendras* are running by various societies through the Punjab police. It means there is big difference between terms and conditions of job pattern and working conditions etc.

'The Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011' has been replaced by the 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018', on 17th July 2018 with some changes. Decided by Punjab government, this act will bring transparency and accountability to ensure time-bound delivery of public services through electronic mode in three to five years from the commencement of this Act to the citizens.

The working of 'The Punjab Right to Service Commission' was being hampered after approval the draft of 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Bill, 2018', on 14 March 2018 by the Punjab Cabinet. 'The Punjab Right to Service commission' has been replaced since 12th July 2018, after the assent of Governor to the 'Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018'. This Act provided aCommission named the 'Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Commission'. Chief Minister of Punjab administered the oath to Mr. Mandeep Singh Sandhu as the Chief Commissioner of the 'Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Commission' on 23 August 2018. But no adequate and specific office had been allotted to this Commission by the Government of Punjab in those days.

The State Government runs these *Kendras* with the help of partners BLS for zone I & III, and Dr. IT for zone II in Punjab. So, companies are responsible to operate, maintain, and manage complete infrastructure at *SewaKendras* whether supplied by service operator or Punjab State E-Governance Society (PSeGS). One-time construction and infrastructure provided by the State Government. Thereafter, Service Operator Company is responsible to operate, maintain, and manage the working of *Sewa Kendra* on profit sharing basis. BLS gives 60% amount of profit to the government and Dr IT gives 81% amount of profit to government. *SewaKendras* are working under Public Private Partnership mode and audits by government (Singh, 2019).

Table 1: Amount of Grant provided by Government to *Suwidha Centre* and *Sewa Kendra*

Financial Year	Punjab State	S.A.S Nagar District
2011-2012	No grant was received	Data not provided
2012-2013		
2013-2014		
2014-2015		
2015-2016		
2016-2017		
2017-2018	60,00,00,000/-	
2018-2019	1,99,95,04,168/-	

Source: Directorate of Governance Reforms Punjab, Plot No D-241, Phase 8-B, S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, received on 09/05/2020.

Table 1 shows the information given by the Directorate of Governance Reforms, Punjab, through RTI, *Suwidha* Centers and *Sewa Kendra* of Punjab did not receive any grant from government for financial year 2011-2012 to 2016-2017. These *Kendras* had received Rs 60,00,00,000/- as grant in financial year 2017-2018 and Rs 1,99,95,04,168/- as grant in financial year 2018-2019.At District level, according to Directorate of

Governance Reforms data of grants distribution to S.A.S. Nagar District is not available.

Table 2: Number of Registered, Successfully Closed and Pending Applications at *Suwidha* Centre and *Sewa Kendra*

Year	Number of Applications Registered (per year)		Number of Applications Successfully Closed (per year)		Number of Applications Pending (per year)		Number of Registered Appeals/ complaints (per year)	
	Punjab State	S.A.S Nagar District	Punjab State	S.A.S Nagar District	Punjab State	S.A.S Nagar District	Punjab State	S.A.S Nagar District
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014	34,32,666	-	34,26,929	-	5,737	-	-	-
2015	36,57,603	-	34,68,966	-	1,88,637	-	-	-
2016	36,34,208	44,023	35,19,292	44,023	1,14,916	0	482	-
2017	6,47,7201	3,25,858	63,04,466	32,5,858	1,72,735	0	317	-
2018	9,58,494	3,14,814	9,39,531	3,14,814	18,963	0	2,728	-

Source: Directorate of Governance Reforms Punjab, Plot No D-241, Phase 8-B, S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, received on 09/05/2020.

Table 2 indicates that, at State level, according to the information given by the Directorate of Governance Reforms, Punjab, through RTI data for years 2011, 2012 and 2013 pertaining to number of registered, successfully closed, pending applications and number of complaints has not been found. There were 3432666 applications in year 2014, 3657603 applications in year 2015, 3634208 applications in year 2016, 6477201 applications in year 2017 and 958494 applications in year 2018 which were registered with the service provider. Apart from this 3426929 application in the year 2014, 3468966 in the year 2015, 3519292 in the year 2016, 6304466 in the year 2017 and 939531 in the year 2018 were successfully closed. In other words, the services were delivered. The rate at which the applications were disposed of was 99.83% of 2014, 94.84% of 2015, 96.84% of 2016, 97.33% of 2017and 98.02% of 2018.On the other side number of pending applications was 5737 in the year 2014, 188637 in 2015, 114916 in 2016, 172735 in 2017 and 18963 in 2018. Finally, the number of appeals/complaints registered against SewaKendras of State of Punjabwas 482 in 2016, 317 in 2017 and 2728 in 2018.

At the District level the data from years 2011 to 2015 related to number of

applications registered, successfully closed, pending applications and number of complaints have not been found. 44023 applications in the year 2016, 325858 in the year 2017 and 314814 in the year 2018 were registered to provide services and all applications were successfully closed. Any data of appeals/complaints for the years 2011 to 2018 was not found according to Directorate of Governance Reforms Punjab.

Table 3: Amount of Grant provided by Government to *Saanjh Kendra*

Financial Year	Punjab State*	S.A.S Nagar District**
2010-2011	27,86,70,228/-	Data not provided
2011-2012	1,29,95,709/-	
2012-2013	4,30,91,310/-	
2013-2014	8,50,00,000/-	
2014-2015	No grant was received	
2015-2016		
2016-2017		
2017-2018		
2018-2019		

Sources:

*A D G P, Community Policing, Punjab, Community Policing Wing, Police Complex, Phase 7, S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, received on 05/04/2020.

**Incharge, District Saanjh Kendra, District Administrative Complex, Phase 1, S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, received on07/05/2020.

Table 3 shows information regarding grants given by government to *SaanjhKendras*. Data of State were taken by Additional Director General of Police (ADGP), Community Policing, Punjab trough RTI. At the State level, according to the information givenby the ADGP, Community Policing, Punjab through RTI, these *Kendras* received Rs.27,86,70,228/- in 2010-2011 financial year, Rs.1,29,95,709/- in 2011-2012 financial year, Rs.4,30,91,310/- in 2012-2013 financial year and Rs.8,50,00,000/- in financial year 2013-2014, as grant by government. These *Kendras* did not receive any grant from government for financial year 2014-2015 to 2018-2019.Data of District were taken by Incharge District Saanjh Kendra S.A.S. Nagar trough RTI. At the District level, according to Incharge of District Saanjh Kendra data of grants provided to S.A.S. Nagar District is not available.These *SaanjhKendras* are submitting 50% share of profit (from fee collection) in government treasury.

Table 4: Number of Received, disposedoff and Pending Application at _Saanjh Kendra_

Year	Number of Applications Registered (per year)		Number of Applications Successfully Closed (per year)		Number of Applications Pending (per year)		Number of Registered Appeals/ complaints (per year)	
	Punjab* State	S.A.S** Nagar District	Punjab* State	S.A.S** Nagar District	Punjab* State	S.A.S** Nagar District	Punjab* State	S.A.S** Nagar District
2011	1,68,229	-	1,47,589	-	20,640	-	-	-
2012	9,47,460	-	9,21,594	-	25,866	-	-	-
2013	12,54,464	-	12,45,147	-	9,317	-	-	-
2014	16,69,969	64,934	16,55,462	64,934	14,507	0	-	0
2015	18,74,840	90,663	18,50,625	90,663	24,215	0	-	0
2016	18,07,690	96,733	18,01,354	96,733	6,336	0	-	0
2017	22,67,141	1,07,150	22,24,766	1,07,150	42,375	0	-	2
2018	22,88,832	1,10,867	22,65,514	1,10,867	23,318	0	-	0

Sources:

* A D G P, Community Policing, Punjab, Community Policing Wing, Police Complex, Phase 7, S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, receivedon 05/04/2020.

**Incharge, District Saanjh Kendra, District Administrative Complex, Phase 1, S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, received on07/05/2020.

Table 4 shows at the State level, according to the ADGP, Community Policing, Punjab, the applications that were registered for delivery of services was 168229 in 2011, 947460 in 2012, 1254464 in 2013, 1669969 in 2014, 1874840 in 2015, 1807690 in 2016, 2267141 in 2017 and 2288832 in 2018. Among these applications, 147589 in 2011, 921594 in 2012, 1245147 in 2013, 1655462 in 2014, 1850625 in 2015, 1801354 in 2016, 2224766 in year 2017, and 2265514 in 2018 were successfully closed / disposed of. The rate at which applications were disposed of was 87.73%, of 2011, 97.26% of 2012, 99.25% of 2013, 99.13% of 2014, 98.70% of 2015, 99.64% of 2016, 98.13% of 2017 and 98.98% of 2018. On the other side number of pending applications was 20640 in 2011, 25866 in 2012, 9317 in 2013, 14507 in 2014, 24215 in 2015, 6336 in 2016, 42375 in 2017, and 23318 in 2018. Any data of appeals/complaints for the years 2011 to 2018 was not found according to Community Policing Punjab.At the District level, no data has been found for the years 2011 to 2013 according to Incharge District Saanjh

Kendra. Number of applications registered for service delivery was 64934 in 2014, 90663 in 2015, 96733 in 2016, 107150 in 2017 and 110867 in 2018. All the applications were successfully closed which means services were delivered. Only 2 appeals/complaints were registered against SaanjhKendras in 2017.

Previous state government reviewed the working of *SewaKendras*and *SaanjhKendras*in the beginning of 2018. 700 *SewaKendras* have been closed since 26 May 2018 and another 930 *Sewa Kendra* have been closed since 18 July 2018. After the notifications regarding the closure of *SewaKendras*, only 514 *Sewa Kendra* are retained in Punjab State out of 2144. Some closed *SewaKendras*converted in Health Centers (*Mohalla* Clinics) by present government.It has been observed that the closure of *SewaKendras* have created confusion and inconvenience for service users. Most of the rural *SewaKendras* have closed, which were rather more important for the rural citizens who are unable to commute to the cities due to unawareness and illiteracy.

It is worth mentioning here that most of the welfare schemes are revoked by the governments to let down the previous government and to gain the political benefits. Most of the *SewaKendras* have also been closed down due to petty politics. Unfortunately, public money has been wasted and millions of rupees have been dumped.

Shortcomings and Suggestions

- The working of 'The Punjab Right to Service Commission' was being hampered after approval the draft of 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Bill, 2018, on 14 March 2018. Chief Commissioner of the 'Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Commission' was appointed on 23 August 2018. But there is no adequate and specific office allotted to this Commission by the Government of Punjab in those days. It is suggested that the law enforcing machinery should be more effective and there should be efficient monitoring and vigilance for the proper execution of Right to Service in the State.The legal system should be more transparent, more accountable and strengthened to eliminate all types of discrimination against service users.

- At present *SewaKendras* are entirely working under Private Company. *Sewa Kendra* should be under the District Commissioner for check at District level just like *Suwidha Centers*.

- Sufficiently qualified employees of *Sewa Kendra* have to work on contract basis. Contractual staff is poorly paid and suffers from insecurity of their job, salary and perks. There should be regular, trained, skillful, experienced and committed staff at *SewaKendras* for the effective and efficient service delivery. The pay of the *SewaKendras* staff should be same as the government employees.

- In the case of Type, I *SewaKendra* and some Type II *Sewa Kendra*the rush of service users is quite high. It is suggested that more staff and more working service counters should be made there at type one and other high rush *Kendras*for bringing efficiency in the delivery of public service within stipulated time period so that workload of officials as well as rush of citizens at the counters is decreased.

- According to the information given by the Directorate of Governance Reforms, Punjab, and ADGP Community Policing, Punjab, these *Kendras* are not financially assisted by government regularly per year. It is suggested that proper funds should be granted by government on the basis of per year for update of these Kendras.

- Government has made some arrangements to check the working of *Sewa* and *SaanjhKendras* such as surprise visit of upper authorities and yearly Audit etc. Like these provisions there must be Social Audit and check by the representatives of civil society to protect the interests of citizens.

- Most of the rural (Type III) *SewaKendras* were closed in 2018. These *Kendras* were rather more important for the rural citizens who are unable to commute to the cities due to unawareness and illiteracy.*SaanjhKendras* are located at urban areas and semi urban areas. More *Sewa* and *SaanjhKendras* are required in rural areas. It is suggested that closed *Sewa Kendra* reopened and *Saanjh Kendra* must be opened at rural areas.

- Closure of rural *Sewa Kendra*, replacement of 'The Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011' and 'The Punjab Right to Service Commission' proved that most of the governmental decisions and welfare schemes are revoked by the governments to let down the previous governments and to gain the political benefits. It is suggested that governmental decisions should always be dictated to the welfare of people.

Conclusion

It is observed that on the basis of the study, 'The Punjab Right to Service Act 2011' and 'The Punjab Transparency and Accountability in Delivery of Public Service Act, 2018' are very helpful in achieving the aim of Right to Service can be realized through the *Suwidha Center, Sewa Kendra* and *Saanjh Kendra.*It can be assumed that within a few years of their setting up these *Kendras* are not sites of chaos.But still there are many obstacles like lack of awareness, illiteracy, poverty, lack of participation of the citizens, persisting corruption, persisting role of agents, political interference, infrequent delay in delivery of services,lack of public facilities at Kendras, lack of financial grants and lack of accountability of governmental departments in way of the actualization of Right to Service.

It can be concluded that, the goal of right to servicecould not be achieved yet. More efforts are required to improve the service delivery through the awareness, cyber literacy, proper implementation of the Acts/Laws, efficient monitoring, sound human resource management, participation of the citizens, social audit, feedback of the service users and service providers etc.

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Gurbilas Patshahi 10: A Comparative View

Karamjit K. Malhotra[1]

Abstract

Two *major works giving a comprehensive account of the eventful life of Guru Gobind Singh were produced by Koer Singh and Sukha Singh during the latter half of the eighteenth century under the title of Gurbilas. Of special interest in both of them were the invocation of the Goddess, removal of the masands, and the institution of the Khalsa order.*

Keywords: *Gurbilas, Guru Gobind Singh, Koer Singh, Sukha Singh, Khalsa, rahit, Goddess, Guru Granth, Guru Panth, Zafarnama*

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Introduction

The *Gurbilās* as a literary form emerged during the eighteenth century. Written in adoration of Guru Gobind Singh, it narrates his life in verse, in a broad chronological sequence. Sainapat's *GurSobhā* as the first work of this genre, was inspired by the autobiographical *BachittarNātak*. The *GurSobhā* became a model for the narratives produced in the second half of the eighteenth century by Koer Singh and Sukha Singh.

KOER SINGH'S *GURBILAS PATSHAHI 10*

The date of Koer Singh's *GurbilasPatshahi 10* has been debated by scholars. Fauja Singh places this work in 1751 in accordance with the date recorded by the author (Fauja Singh, 1968, 2). Surjit Hans places it in the early nineteenth century primarily on the basis of its contents (Hans, 2005, 247-50). MadanjitKaur has argued that Koer Singh's work can be placed safely between 1751 and 1762, the two possible interpretations of the statement made by the author himself. She goes on to refute one by one all the arguments put forth by Hans (MadanjitKaur, 1992, 161-72). Gurtej Singh says that Koer Singh's *Gurbilās* makes more sense when placed in the 1750s (Gurtej Singh, 2004:51-55). J.S. Grewal places Koer Singh's work sometime before the inception of Sikh rule in 1765 (Grewal, 2019:28-29). Since the contents of Koer Singh's work make better sense in a context earlier than the declaration of Sikh rule in 1765, it may be better to place it in 1751.

It is possible to get some idea of Koer Singh's sources. He says that he had heard much about Guru Gobind Singh from Bhai Mani Singh. He used some written sources also, like the *BachittarNātak*, the *Zafarnāma*, Sainapat's *Gursobhā,* and some compositions included in the *Dasam Granth* and the *SarablohGranth.* There are echoes of Sewa Das Udasi's *Parchiān* too in this work.

Koer Singh's *Gurbilā*s consists of 21 chapters. The first six chapters relate to the life of Guru Gobind. Chapter 7 largely, and chapters 8 and 9 mainly, relate to the Goddess, removal of the *masand*s (representatives appointed by the Guru to look after

the affairs of local congregations of Sikhs), and the institution of the Khalsa. Chapters 10 to 13 are devoted to the battles of Guru Gobind against the hill chiefs and the Mughal *faujdār*s (administrators). All these battles are given after the institution of the Khalsa though the contents of chapters 12 and 13 are placed before the institution of the Khalsa in the *BachittarNātak* and the *Gursobhā*. Chapter 14 relates to the struggle which resulted eventually in the evacuation of Anandpur by Guru Gobind Singh. The last seven chapters dwell on Guru Gobind Singh's activities after leaving Anandpur.

At the outset, Koer Singh invokes ĀdPurkhKartār and seeks the aid of Ādi Shakti Mata. He places the birth of Guru Gobind Singh at Patna in 1666. Named Gobind Rai, he was a precocious child loved by the *sangat* (local congregation). The gifts he received included toy weapons. His cradle was left at Patna as a holy relic when he left for Makhowal. Koer Singh looks upon the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 as the means of taking over rulership from the 'Turks'. Guru Gobind refuses to wear a sacred thread at the time of his installation in 1676, telling the Brahman that he had received the sacred thread of the sword from God. Koer Singh mentions Guru Gobind's participation in hunting. His 'drum of victory' (*ranjītnagārā*) was a symbol of his independent status. He was not scared of any Raja. The Kahlur Chief, Bhim Chand, came and asked the Guru for his elephant. The Guru told him to ask for anything else. Bhim Chand resented the refusal. To avoid trouble, Mata Gujri insisted that Guru Gobind should leave Anandpur. The Raja of Nahan welcomed him and, as suggested by the Raja, he built a fort at Paonta on the right bank of the river Jamuna.

While going to Garhwal for the marriage his son, Bhim Chand thought of crossing the river at Paonta. The Guru allowed Bhim Chand's son alone to cross the river. Instigated by Bhim Chand, Raja Fateh Shah of Garhwal marched against the Guru. The army of Guru Gobind consisted of Jatts, Baniās, Aroṛās, Shudrās, Labānās, Bhatts, Chamārs, Chhīpās, Tarkhāns, Kalāls, and Sunārs, among others. Mahri Chand and Kirpal Ram (Kirpal Chand) are mentioned as brave warriors on the side of Guru Gobind. Sango Shah is mentioned as ShāhSangrām (king of the battle) after his death. Guru Gobind returned to Anandpur after his victory at Bhangani.

Koer Singh places the battle of Nadaun some years after the battle of Bhangani, but does not give any date. Bhim Chand visited the Guru after the battle of Bhangani, apologized to him, and requested him for support in a time of trouble. Mian Khan had sent Alif Khan to collect tribute from the hill Rajas. Guru Gobind agreed to help Bhim Chand. The Guru's participation in the battle at Nadaun turned the tables against the Mughal commander who was obliged to retreat.

Koer Singh places the episode of the Goddess after the battle of Nadaun. The Guru himself decided to invoke the Goddess for creating the Panth. Brahmans were invited from a number of places. They suggested that Datt Ram could possibly invoke the Goddess. But Chandika (also called Bhavani, Ambika, Kali, or Sharda Bhavani) did not appear for three years. The Brahmans explained that in the Kaliyuga she took four years to appear. They asked for a secluded place for worship. The Naina Devi was chosen for this purpose. Guru Gobind participated in the worship now. The gods were afraid that the Guru might be empowered by the Goddess at their cost. They did not

know that he was doing all this for the sake of others (*par-upkār*). Millions of paradises and thousands of thrones were at his feet. Only for the welfare of others did the Guru use the agency of the Goddess to institute the Khalsa.

When the time of her appearance was coming close, the officiant Brahman informed the Guru that the Goddess required sacrifice of a brave person. Five Sikhs offered themselves to be sacrificed. The Guru told them that he would call them if and when needed. The eight-armed Goddess appeared with weapons and other articles in her hands. The Guru offered to make sacrifice of 125,000 Sikhs. When the Goddess said, 'ask for the boon', he asked for the creation of the Khalsa to destroy the *mlechh* (unclean, foreigners). The Goddess gave him the *khanda* (a double-edged sword) with which she had killed the demons Sumbh and Nisumbh. Guru Gobind was praised by the gods. Vishnu gave *kes* (hair of the head), Hanuwant gave *kachhehra* (short breeches), and the Goddess herself gave weapons. The Guru gave gifts to the Brahmans and they sang his praises. He was distinguished from everyone else in the world to have made the Goddess appear.

Guru Gobind now resolved to set his own house in order (*greh-sodh*) by removing the *masand*s. Koer Singh states that he took this decision because the *masand*s were dishonest; they oppressed the Sikhs, indulged in sexual pleasures, defied the Guru, and thought that the Guru was dependent on them. The other charges against the *masand*s were that they did not pay due respect to the *Granth* and regarded themselves as the Guru's equal. With one exception, they were all burnt alive.

Koer Singh gives a graphic description of the dramatic call for five heads and of the way in which *pahul* (water used for initiating a Sikh)was prepared. Kirpa Ram informed Mata Ji (the Guru's mother) that the Guru was preparing *pahul* for initiation. She came and put *patāshā*s (sugar puffs) in the bowl. After a prayer (*ardās*), he administered *amrit* to Daya Singh, a Sobti Khatri of Lahore; Nihchal Singh (Mohkam Chand), a Chhīpa (calico printer) of Dwarka; Sahib Singh, a Nāi (barber) of Bidar; Dharam Singh, a Jatt of Hastinapur; and Himmat Singh, a Jhīvar (water carrier) of Jagannath. The first instruction given to the five was not to associate with the *mīṇā*s (Prithi Chand's successors and their followers), the *masand*s, and the 'Turks', and those who cut their hair, or killed their infant daughters. They should take refuge in the Wielder of the Sword, and discard every other form of worship. They should bear arms, keep their *kes* unshorn, wear *kachh*, and keep a dagger (*kard*). They should keep a *kanghā* to comb the *kes* twice a day. They should feed the hungry. They should never gamble, go to a prostitute, or entertain any kind of greed. Koer Singh refers to the practice of inter-dining among the Khalsa, irrespective of their caste background. It is emphasized that the Vaish and Shudar were blessed with *rāj*. The sparrows were empowered to kill the hawks, and the lambs were empowered to kill the lions. Koer Singh quotes the *Savvayyā* of Guru Gobind Singh in praise of the Khalsa.

After this 'event of 1689', Guru Gobind Singh wrote to all the Sikh *sangat*s to come to Anandpur. With the increasing number of Sikhs at Anandpur the problem of food and fodder became critical and the Guru allowed them to make collections from the territories of the hill chiefs. Raja Bhim Chand represented to the Mughal emperor that

Guru Gobind Singh had created the Khalsa Panth with the blessings of the Goddess to destroy the Mughal power. Emperor Aurangzeb sent a large army against the Guru. The first attack of the allied forces was repulsed. The hill chiefs thought of using an intoxicated elephant to break open the gate of a fortress at Anandpur. Guru Gobind Singh encouraged Bachittar Singh (son of Bhai Mani Singh) to strike the elephant on its forehead. The elephant ran back in panic. Thousands of 'Turks' were killed in the battle. The hill chiefs fled like the deer before a lion.

A long siege of Anandpur by the forces of the hill chiefs and the Mughal *faujdār*s ended in the evacuation of Anandpur by Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa. The incident of a Sikh (BhaiKanhiya), who provided water to combatants on both sides is mentioned in this connection. Eventually, the Sikhs insisted that it was better to leave Anandpur than to die of hunger and thirst. Guru Gobind Singh told them that they would be responsible for what would happen later. The treasury was distributed among the Singhs, and the property which could not be carried away was destroyed.

Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa were attacked by the hill chiefs after evacuation. The Guru reached Chamkaur and occupied the *gaṛhī*(fortress) of its *zamīndār* who betrayed him to the Mughal *faujdār* of Sarhind. The Guru's sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh (actually Zorawar Singh), died fighting in the battle of Chamkaur. When only a few of the 40 Singhs were left in the fortress the Guru told Sangat Singh to sit there attired as the Guru. The Guru went to Machhiwara. With the help of Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan, he left Machhiwara in the garb of a *pīr* (Muslim mystic and guide).He gave Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan a *hukamnāma*(letter of the Guru) for the Panth, telling them that Khalsa Raj would be established and their services would be rewarded. Meanwhile, Mata Gujri with the two younger grandsons came out of Chamkaur in search of Guru Gobind Singh. Some 'Turks' took them to Sarhind. The sons of the Guru refused to accept Islam and they were bricked alive. Mata Gujri wounded herself with a dagger and she was swallowed by the earth.

Guru Gobind Singh reached Kangar, and wrote a letter to Aurangzeb well known as the *Zafarnāma*. Among its contents Koer Singh refers to Aurangzeb's oath on the Qu'rān for safe passage which was not honoured. Aurangzeb would be accountable for it to God on the Day of Judgement. The Prophet of Islam had made it clear that he would intercede only on behalf of those Muslims who had done good deeds. According to Koer Singh, Guru Gobind Singh told Aurangzeb that if he had any sincerity in his heart he should come to see the Guru; there was no risk involved because all the Brars were under the Guru's influence. There were other similar things written in the *Zafarnāma*, according to Koer Singh.

The *Zafarnāma* was taken to Aurangzeb by Daya Singh. He was welcomed by the Sikhs of Ahmadabad (Ahmadnagar), and served well, but they could not help him meet Aurangzeb. Daya Singh sent message to Guru Gobind Singh, urging him for help. Aurangzeb dreamt that a Sikh of the Guru had come to Ahmadnagar with a letter for him and was staying with a Sikh named Jetha Singh. On the day following, Aurangzeb sent his servants to bring Daya Singh to his presence. Daya Singh delivered the *Zafarnāma* to the emperor who died on reading it.

Meanwhile, Guru Gobind Singh reached KotKapura. On information given by its *zamīndār,*Kapura, Mughal troops from Sarhind came to attack the Guru who had moved towards Muktsar. After fighting for three hours, the Mughal troops retreated towards KotKapura. Of all the Khalsa who had disowned the Guru at Anandpur, only five had survived the battle. On their earnest request the Guru tore up the paper which they had signed. The corpses of those who had died in battle were cremated and a *shahīdganj* (a structure built in commemoration of Sikh martyrs) was built over the spot near the pool. The place came to be called *muktsar* (the pool of liberation). To bathe in this pool in the month of Magh was as meritorious as bathing in the tank (*sarovar*) at Ramdaspur (Amritsar).

Guru Gobind Singh came to the fort of Bathinda and met BhaiBhagtu and BhaiBahlo. He then went to Talwandi Sabo and stayed there for a considerable time. He was welcomed by the local *zamīndār,* Dalla, and Sikhs began to flock to the place. It developed into a flourishing township. A spot close to the pool was chosen by the Guru for literary activity. Talwandi Sabo, called Damdana, was declared to be the Kasi (Kashi, Benaras) of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh told Dalla several times to ask for a boon but he asked for nothing else but rain, millets, and a good harvest. The Guru left Talwandi to go to Dakhan. On the way he met Bhai Rupa and instructed Batha Ram of Pattan Farid to build a *dharamsal* (Sikh sacred space) and dig a well there to counter the influence of the *pīr*s(Chishti mystics) of Pattan. A Khatri Sikh of a flourishing town in Rajasthan offered his daughter for marriage to the Guru, and he married her.

Daya Singh met Guru Gobind Singh and informed him how Aurangzeb had died on reading the *Zafarnāma*. Prince Azam had claimed the throne, but the Guru was in favour of Bahadur Shah (Prince Muazzam) who had served the Guru sincerely. He assured Bahadur Shah through a letter that he would be successful. Before leaving Rajasthan for Delhi he had to fight a battle at Baghaur in which the Khalsa were victorious.

In the battle fought for the throne, Azam was about to strike Bahadur Shah with his sword when an arrow stuck Azam and he died on the spot. The courtiers of Bahadur Shah praised him for his success in battle. He remarked that he knew whose arrow had killed Azam. This was an allusion to Guru Gobind Singh. After seeing various places in Delhi, the Guru went to Agra through Mathura and Gokul. At Agra he was invited by Bahadur Shah to his palace. The Guru went fully armed and Bahadur Shah offered costly presents to him. The Guru had discussions with the *pīr*, the *qāzī* (administrator of justice) and the *divān*(the finance minister) of Bahadur Shah on religious matters. In a hunting expedition with the emperor, a lion killed a few of the emperor's men and Bahadur Shah requested Guru Gobind Singh to send one of his followers to face the lion. On a hint from the Guru, a follower named Roshan Singh killed the lion. After the rainy season, Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa went to Rajasthan with Bahadur Shah, and saw many places in Rajasthan. The Guru is then said to have gone to Patna and stayed there for 4 years and 4 months before he moved towards Dakhan. Passing through Burhanpur, he reached Nander.

In a detailed account of the circumstances leading to Guru Gobind Singh's death,

the grandson of Painde Khan figures prominently. He thought of avenging the death of his grandfather at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh, and managed to get close to him in order to find an opportunity to attack him. The Guru was wounded deeply but he killed the Pathan. Bahadur Shah sent an English surgeon to dress Guru Gobind Singh's wound. It appeared to have healed in 11 days. He was tempted to stretch a bow, and the wound reopened. It took 16 days to heal. Guru Gobind Singh announced that he was ready for his final departure from the world. Then he ordered Banda, to take revenge for the death of the Guru's sons. As a Sikh of the Guru, Banda was given weapons. He fought several battles in the Punjab to destroy the 'Turks'. Proud of his success, he infringed the Khalsa*rahit*(way of life). The Guru withdrew his support. Consequently, Banda met his death.

Guru Gobind Singh had told the Khalsa that their rule would be established after the number of Sikh martyrs in their fight against the 'Turks' reached 1,25,000. The Guru would remain present in them so long as they followed the *rahit*. They should regard the *Granth* as the Guru. To see the *Granth* was to see the Guru. Furthermore, collectively or the Khalsa were his form (*rūp*). The Singhs submitted to the Guru that Mata Sahib Devi would not be able to bear separation from him. The implication was that she wished to be burnt with him on the funeral pyre. Guru Gobind Singh told them categorically that this would not be proper. She should live after the Guru's death. Consequently, Mata Sahib Devi left for Delhi.

A funeral pyre enclosed by a *kanāt*(tent-wall) had been prepared for Guru Gobind Singh. He told a Singh to ensure that all the people left the enclosure. The funeral pyre was lit and the Guru was left alone. In the morning the Sikhs found no remnant of the Guru's body in the ashes, not even his weapons. An Udasi came at this juncture and told them that he had seen Guru Gobind Singh sitting in a *pālkī* (palanquin), dressed in his usual attire. This carried the implication that Guru Gobind Singh had bodily gone to the other world.

SUKHA SINGH'S *GURBILĀS PĀTSĀHĪ 10*

Sukha Singh completed his *Gurbilās* in 1797. Edited by Gursharan KaurJaggi, his *Gurbilās* has been published by the Punjab Languages Department. The text is based on a lithograph edition published by Lala Ram Chand Manaktala in 1912, but corrected by comparison with manuscripts in the Punjab Languages Department and the Punjab State Archives (Jaggi, 1987, xxxvi).

The editor points out that Sukha Singh's *Gurbilās* was written on the basis of three categories of sources: historical, Puranic and oral. Among the written sources she mentions the *BachittarNātak (ApniKathā),*Sainapat's *Gursobhā*, AniRai's*Jangnāma Guru Gobind Singh*, and Sarup Das Bhalla's*MahimāPrakāsh*. Sukha Singh himself says that he read *granths* and heard *granths* being read before he wrote his *Gurbilās*. (Jaggi, 1987, xvi-xviii). We know that Sukha Singh was familiar with the *Gurbilās* of Koer Singh.

Sukha Singh covers the events of Guru Gobind Singh's life before the institution of the Khalsa in seven chapters. There are variations in the account of events given by Koer Singh and Sukha Singh but only a few of them are really significant. For Sukha

Singh the purpose of Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit to centres of pilgrimage in his travels towards the East was not to earn merit but to redeem the world. When a Sikh asked Guru Tegh Bahadur at Patna about his past, the Guru narrated at some length the story of Raja Hari Chand (Harish Chandra) who was a *sūrajvanshī*, like Guru Tegh Bahadur. In fact, the Guru is stated to be a descendant of Raja Hari Chand. According to Sukha Singh, Guru Tegh Bahadur was already in the East when Raja Man Singh (Ram Singh of Jaipur) went on his campaign in Assam. On his journey back to the Punjab, the Brahmans of Kasi (Benaras) were so impressed by Guru Tegh Bahadur that they requested him to admit them to the Sikh faith. Guru Tegh Bahadur told the Sikhs present to prepare *charanpakhal (charanamrit)*. Significantly, the feet of the *sangat*, and not of the Guru, are mentioned in connection with the preparation of *amrit*.

Sukha Singh's account of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom is shorter than that of Koer Singh. Both of them agree on the point that Guru Tegh Bahadur had asked one of the Sikhs to use the sword to remove the Guru's head. They also agree that Guru Gobind refused to put on the sacred thread at the time of his accession and insisted that it was to be replaced by the sword. However, in Sukha Singh's account Mata Gujri intercedes to suggest that the sacred thread might be replaced by the sword at the time of creating the Khalsa.

Both Koer Singh and Sukha Singh lay stress on two aspects of Guru Gobind's activity from his accession to his departure from Makhowal: his martial activity and adoption of symbols of royalty, and mounting tension between him and Raja Bhim Chand of Kahlur (Bilaspur). Bhim Chand used all kinds of diplomatic methods and threats to get an elephant but the Guru yielded to none. He insisted in fact that his purpose in life was to use force for protection of the good and destruction of the evil. In Sukha Singh's account, Guru Gobind agreed to accept the invitation of the Raja of Sirmaur (Nahan) on the intercession of Mata Gujri. Guru Gobind Singh was well received by the Raja of Sirmaur and, on his suggestion the Guru built a fort at Paonta on the right bank of the Jamuna. Sukha Singh's account is more detailed than that of Koer Singh.

In the *BachittarNātak* there is no reference to Bhim Chand in connection with the battle of Bhangani but both Koer Singh and Sukha Singh state that Bhim Chand played a crucial role in this situation. Bhim Chand wanted to cross the river near Paonta with his army to get his son married to the daughter of Fateh Shah, the Raja of Garhwal. Guru Gobind allowed only the bridegroom to cross the river. Bhim Chand subsequently instigated Fateh Shah and other Rajas to attack Paonta. The account of the battle at Bhangani remains close in both the works to the account given in the *BachittarNātak*. Sukha Singh ends his account of the battle with a great elation among the victorious Sikhs who were prepared to conquer the world on the Guru's orders. Guru Gobind told them to wait patiently for the time when they would become rulers. For the battle of Nadaun, Koer Singh's account is much shorter than that of Sukha Singh, though both appear to be based primarily on the account given in the *BachittarNātak*. As in the *BachittarNātak* so in Sukha Singh's *Gurbilās*, the last incident mentioned in connection with the battle is the plundering of the village Alsun by the Sikhs. But Koer Singh makes no mention of this incident which signified a sort of disapproval by the Guru of Bhim

Chand's readiness to pay tribute despite his success in the battle.

The episodes of the Goddess, removal of the *masand*s, and institution of the Khalsa in the works of Koer Singh and Sukha Singh differ only in detail. It may be noted that, unlike Sainapat in his *Gursobhā*, Koer Singh does not talk of the removal of the *masand*s but their destruction with only one exception. Sukha Singh states that some of the *masand*s were killed, and the others submitted to the Guru or left the Punjab. Sukha Singh also gives the incident of an Udasi*sādh* which has the implication of unpleasant relations between Dhir Mal and Guru Gobind Singh.

For events of the post-Khalsa phase of Guru Gobind Singh's life, Koer Singh gives 12 chapters and Sukha Singh gives 19. In Koer Singh's work there are only 10 chapters which relate to the post-Khalsa phase. Sukha Singh's chapter 16 relates to the arrival of Prince Muazzam and the *ahadī*s (officials directly under the emperor) in the Punjab. Thus there are 18 chapters on the post-Khalsa phase.

Out of these 18, chapters 13, 17, 19 and 31 do not relate to any significant historical event in the life of Guru Gobind Singh. In chapter 13, those who were hostile to the Sikhs were punished by the *ahadī*s, and their villages were plundered. In chapter 17, stealing is disapproved; Ram Kuir, son of Baba Ramdas Buddha, was given *pahul*, and responsible duties were entrusted to him; Asa Singh, a *mutsaddī*(official), was forgiven when he admitted that he had cheated a Sikh who needed financial help to get his daughter married; Guru Gobind Singh did not listen to the complaint of a Jatt because he knew that it was false; the well known story of Joga Singh carries the import that going to a prostitute was regarded as a grave default by the Guru; and, finally, an incident depicts Guru Gobind Singh's appreciation for the *bāzīgar*s (jugglers) who could perform better *kīrtan* (singing of hymns) than the professional *rāgī*s (singers of hymns). In chapter 19, four incidents are mentioned as Guru Gobind Singh's wondrous acts, involving supernatural power, and there is another incident in which a Brahman's wife forcibly taken away by a Pathan was brought back by Guru Gobind Singh's son Ajit Singh to be entrusted to the Brahman. In chapter 31, after his death, Guru Gobind Singh comes to the rescue of Bal Rai and his brother Rustam Rai of village Janwara in the Bidar country who had been imprisoned by the Marathas in the fort of Satara. Guru Gobind Singh told Bal Rai that his resting place was at Abchalnagar (Nander) where he remained present in the Sikh *sangat* and helped his devotees in distress.

Of the remaining 14 chapters, four relate to the battles of Guru Gobind Singh till he left Anandpur; four others cover events before the war of succession after Aurangzeb, and the remaining six chapters relate to the war of succession itself, Guru Gobind Singh's travels from Delhi to Nander through Agra, and his final days at Nander.

The account of the early battles of Anandpur given by Sukha Singh has several variations from the account given by Koer Singh but the outline of the battles remains similar. The account of the later battles of Anandpur is similar in both the works but Sukha Singh adds what he calls *amritsarovarsākhi*, underlining Guru Gobind Singh's indifference to riches. The most important difference is that, whereas Koer Singh makes no mention of the battle of Nirmoh, Sukha Singh gives a whole chapter to it.

Sukha Singh's account of the events from the evacuation of Anandpur to the death of Aurangzeb on the whole remains rather close to that of Koer Singh, with some differences in detail and emphasis. In all, there are nine points of difference. In Sukha Singh's account of the battle of Chamkaur, the *zamīndār* of Chamkaur does not betray the Guru to the Mughals. The two who became martyrs in the battle of Chamkaur are Ajit Singh and Zorawar Singh (and not Jujhar Singh as in Koer Singh's account). The Sikh who is left behind in Chamkaur is a Bengali Sikh named Sant Singh (and not Sangat Singh as in Koer Singh's account). Sukha Singh's version of the martyrdom of the younger sons of the Guru is substantially different from that of Koer Singh. In Sukha Singh's account Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan are given a *hukamnāma*by Guru Gobind Singh for the Sikhs but there is no mention of Sikh rule in the future. In Sukha Singh's narration of the situation in which Daya Singh presents the *Zafarnāma* to Aurangzeb there is no reference to Aurangzeb's dream in which Guru Gobind Singh tells him how to get his *Zafarnāma*. Sukha Singh does not mention BhaiBhagtu or BhaiBahlo meeting the Guru in Bathinda. On his way from Talwandi Sabo to Dakhan the Guru does meet Bhai Rupa or Bhai Batha. Whereas in Koer Singh's account there is no reference to Guru Gobind Singh's visit to DaduDwar in Rajasthan, in Sukha Singh's account he has conversations with Dadu's successor to clarify why the use of force was necessary.

The accounts of events given by Koer Singh and Sukha Singh with regard to the battle between Azam and Bahadur Shah, and Guru Gobind Singh's meeting with Bahadur Shah at Agra, are similar in some ways but different in others. Sukha Singh alone ascribes an important role to Bhai Nand Lal in encouraging Bahadur Shah to approach Guru Gobind Singh for help. Similarly, Sukha Singh alone talks of *jogī*s (the followers of GorakhNath) from Balgundai with the Khān-i-Khānān (Munim Khan); they offer gifts of the philosopher's stone, supernatural powers, and sexual potency but the Khan rejects these offers with disdain. It is important to note that Sukha Singh does not talk of any meeting of Guru Gobind Singh with Bahadur Shah in which the latter offers costly presents to the Guru. Furthermore, Guru Gobind Singh has conversations with Bahadur Shah's *pīr* and his *qāzī*, but there is no reference to the *divān*.

After Guru Gobind Singh joins the camp of Bahadur Shah in Rajasthan, Guru's son Zorawar Singh arrives with the intention of joining his father. Mata Sundari talks to Guru Gobind Singh about her son Ajit Singh whom she was missing. These incidents figure only in Sukha Singh's account. Zorawar Singh's presence in Rajasthan is mentioned by Sainapat in his *Gursobhā* but the incident narrated by Sukha Singh is quite different. Furthermore, in Sukha Singh's account Guru Gobind Singh does not go to Patna at all and goes directly to Nander through Burhanpur. He stays in Burhanpur for some time where Bahadur Shah comes to meet him and a *sādh* (pious person) talks to Guru Gobind Singh about Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Sukha Singh's account of Guru Gobind Singh's stay at Nander is less detailed than that of Koer Singh. However, Sukha Singh alone talks about a graveyard taken over by the Khalsa and, on protest from Muslims, Guru Gobind Singh demonstrated that the place did not belong to Muslims before it was turned into a graveyard. Sukha Singh does not mention Sahib Devi in connection with Guru Gobind Singh's stay in Nander. Sukha Singh is emphatic that Guru Gobind Singh deliberately incited two descendants of

Painde Khan to attack him. Sukha Singh does refer to Banda being sent to the Punjab but he says nothing more.

In Retrospect

On the whole, both Koer Singh and Sukha Singh emphasize that Guruship was vested in the Panth. Koer Singh alone talks emphatically of *Guru Granth*. Sukha Singh does not say explicitly that Guruship was vested in the *Granth*. Both bring in the Goddess in their descriptions of the institution of the Khalsa. Sukha Singh gives more dates in his work and most of his dates are acceptable than is the case of Koer Singh. It is difficult to say categorically as to which of the two works is better. Each has its strong points and limitations. Koer Singh's primary concern was to inspire the Sikhs in their struggle for Khalsa Raj. However, Sukha Singh's primary concern was to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh's wondrous acts which ultimately led to the establishment of Khalsa Raj.

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Role of Education in Rural Non-Farm Employment: Evidence from Punjab and Haryana

Nitish Khurrana[1], Harsh Gandhar[2] and Sumit Kumar[3]

Abstract

This study examines the role of education, both general and technical, in facilitating rural non-farm employment (RNFE) in Punjab and Haryana, using unit-level data from the 50th (1993–94) and 68th (2011–12) rounds of the NSSO. Findings indicate a strong positive association between educational attainment and participation in RNFE, particularly in regular salaried employment. Workers with higher levels of general and technical education were significantly more likely to be employed in non-farm sectors, while the illiterate and less educated remained largely dependent on agriculture. However, the analysis also reveals a decline in RNFE's absorptive capacity over the time, even for educated individuals. Technical diploma holders be low graduation level exhibited limited entrepreneurial engagement, whereas those with advanced non-technical qualifications often pursued self-employment. The study underscores the importance of strengthening rural education and vocational training systems to enhance RNFE participation. Policy recommendations include improving skill alignment, infrastructure, and implementation of rural employment schemes for inclusive development.

Introduction

Economic development is intricately linked with structural transformation a shift in the sectoral composition of GDP, typically from agriculture to industry and services (FAO, 2018). As nations progress, agriculture's contribution to national output and employment declines, paving the way for a diversified economy where rural populations increasingly engage in non-agricultural activities. For many developing countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, this transformation is crucial not only for productivity gains but also for generating employment and reducing poverty (Asian Productivity Organisation, 2004). India's rural economy exemplifies this transition. While has long been the dominant source of rural employment, its share of GDP and employment has declined over time. Concurrently, Rural Non-Farm Employment (RNFE) encompassing manufacturing, trade, transport, construction, services, and more has emerged as a critical source of supplemental income and employment for rural households, especially small and marginal farmers (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2008; Dev, 2002). The RNFE is no longer viewed merely as a stopgap during lean agricultural seasons but increasingly as a key pillar of sustainable rural livelihoods.

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[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, D.A.V.College, Chandigarh

[2]Professor of Economics, Centre for Distance and Online Education, Panjab University

[3]AssociateProfessor, Department of Economics, Central University of Haryana

However, declining farm profitability, small landholdings, increasing input costs, and climatic uncertainties have driven many to seek alternative livelihoods. As Chand (2017) and the Agriculture Census (2015-16) highlight, farming is increasingly viewed as non-remunerative, with nearly half of Indian farm households burdened by debt and economic insecurity.

The pressures of unplanned urban migration, degrading agricultural resources, and poor farm incomes further underscore the need to bolster RNFE. Urban centres, strained by infrastructure limitations, are unable to absorb the surging rural-to-urban migrant workforce, often leading to informal, low-paying, and unsanitary livelihoods (Chand et al., 2017). A strong rural non-farm sector, therefore, is not only a source of diversified income but also a strategy to ensure balanced regional development, reduce migration, and improve rural quality of life.

Moreover, the RNFE holds particular promise in addressing the aspirations of India's growing youth population. With the so-called "youth bulge" and a large proportion of educated young individuals uninterested in agriculture, RNFE becomes a natural avenue for productive engagement (United Nations, 2021; Mueller, Rosenbach, and Thurlow, 2019). Educated youth, equipped with new skills and ideas, are more inclined towards entrepreneurship, service sector jobs, and informal non-farm opportunities, provided the enabling environment exists.

However, despite its potential, RNFE growth in India is constrained by multiple factors. One major barrier is the lack of adequate education and skill alignment with market needs. The rural education system, though expanded in reach, remains plagued by poor quality, inadequate vocational orientation, and weak linkages with employment (Singh, 2018). Thus, even as education levels rise nominally, employability remains low.

The RNFE offers three broad employment types: regular salaried, self-employment, and casual labour. Studies indicate that returns to education are highest in regular salaried jobs, which are often concentrated in non-farm sectors (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2008). Regular workers in RNFE earn approximately 2.4 times more than their counterparts in agriculture, suggesting a significant incentive for skill acquisition and educational investment. This makes the role of education, both general and technical, a critical determinant of access to RNFE. Higher educational levels correspond with greater participation in non-farm work. Education facilitates access to information, improves decision-making, enhances managerial skills, and fosters entrepreneurial capacity (Reardon et al., 1999; Ravallion and Datt, 2001; and Vatta and Garg, 2008).

The structural transformation from agriculture to RNFE is particularly relevant for the states of Punjab and Haryana. Historically, these states were at the forefront of the Green Revolution, witnessing rapid agricultural growth and rural prosperity during the 1970s and 1980s. However, in recent decades, signs of agrarian distress have emerged. Soil degradation, falling water tables, climate variability, and declining profitability have eroded agriculture's economic viability (Yadav, 2021; Kang and Pangli, 2021).

In Punjab, agriculture's contribution to GSDP has sharply declined. Once among India's top three states in per capita income, Punjab has slipped to tenth position (India Today, 2020). With agriculture no longer able to absorb the growing rural workforce, especially the educated youth, the RNFS has assumed greater importance. The same holds for Haryana, where the agriculture sector's share in GSDP has fallen from 60% in 1969–70 to less than 19% in 2020–21 (Government of Haryana, 2021).

Farm households in both states are increasingly dependent on non-farm income sources. According to the 77th round of the NSSO, average monthly income in agricultural households includes a significant portion from wages, salaries, and RNFE. Still, large-scale rural unemployment persists, particularly among educated youth, compelling many to migrate abroad or seek low-wage work in urban centres (Bharti, 2021; Singh, 2021).

Empirical studies have long supported the idea that RNFE can be a solution to rural poverty, unemployment, and migration (Dev, 2002; Saith, 1992; Vyas & Mathai, 1978). But whether this transition is driven by "distress"—as Vaidyanathan (1986) posits—or represents a structural shift is still debated. Regardless, for RNFE to serve as a vehicle of inclusive development, education must be harnessed effectively.

Keeping in view the socioeconomic backdrop of Punjab and Haryana, this study sets out to explore how varying levels of educational attainment influence participation in RNFE in Punjab and Haryana. This investigation aims to contribute to the understanding of whether and how education can catalyse inclusive rural transformation.

Data and Methodology

This study relies on secondary data obtained from the unit-level records of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), specifically the 50th Round (1993–94) and the 68th Round (2011–12) on Employment and Unemployment. These rounds offer a comprehensive view of the structural transformation in the rural economy and provide disaggregated information by gender, educational status, employment type, and sector. For analysis, rural workers in Punjab and Haryana are classified into three main employment categories: self-employment, regular salaried employment, and casual labour. Further, the sectors are divided into farm and non-farm categories. Educational attainment is classified into levels: illiterate, primary, middle, secondary, higher secondary, diploma/certificate, graduate, and postgraduate. Both general and technical education dimensions are considered. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation methods are used to study patterns of employment across gender and educational levels.

Analysis and Discussion

1.1 Economic Activity of the Rural Workforce and General Level of Education

1. Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Haryana, during 1993-94

To assess the employability of educated individuals in Haryana's non-farm sector during 1993–94, the educational profiles of workers across both farm and non-farm activities were analysed in Table 1. The data suggests that employment conditions in 1993–94 were relatively more favourable compared to 2011–12.

Notably, during this period, all individuals holding Diploma or Certificate qualifications, as well as graduates, were successfully absorbed into non-farm employment. Interestingly, every Diploma or Certificate holder secured a regular job within the non-farm sector. Similarly, all graduate degree holders found employment in the RNFS, with 75.58% engaged in regular salaried positions and 25.42% working in self-employment roles.

In the case of postgraduates, approximately 63% were employed in the non-farm sector, while the remaining 37% were still involved in agricultural work. A closer look at the nature of non-farm employment reveals that 59% of these jobs provided regular wages or salaries, while only 3% involved self-employment. Importantly, no worker with education ranging from the middle school level up to post-graduation was employed as casual labour in the non-farm sector, indicating a clear link between educational attainment and job quality.

A significant observation from the NSSO 50th Round data is the low representation of illiterate workers in the non-farm sector only 20.40% were engaged in such employment. The data strongly indicates that highly educated individuals in 1993–94 were predominantly absorbed into regular, salaried roles in non-farming activities.

Conversely, a large proportion of illiterate individuals (79.60%), those with basic literacy (31.91%), and those with education up to the middle school level (66%) were employed in agriculture-related occupations. This underlines the reality that the agricultural workforce in Haryana during 1993–94 largely consisted of individuals with minimal formal education.

Table 1: Proportion of rural population engaged in farm and non-farm activities across the general level of education in Haryana, during 1993-94

Economic Activities in Haryana	General Education NSSO 50th Round (1993-1994)									
	Up to Primary				VI to XII			XII onwards Graduate & Above		
	Illiterate	Literate without formal	literate: below	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Diploma/ certificate course	Graduate	Post-Graduation and above

Self-Employed in Non Agriculture	13.02	68.10	26.68	20.00	21.60	20.36	17.61	0.00	25.42	3.14
Regular Salary Non-Agriculture	6.70	0.00	11.78	11.33	10.94	35.66	47.98	100.00	74.58	59.10
Casual Labou in Non-Agriculture	0.68	0.00	1.04	2.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Non-Farm)	**20.40**	**68.10**	**39.50**	**33.37**	**32.54**	**56.02**	**65.59**	**100**	**100**	**62.24**
Self-Employed Agriculture	38.96	2.97	32.59	35.61	41.04	34.69	27.08	0.00	0.00	37.76
Regular Salary Agriculture	1.59	0.00	0.84	0.17	0.97	0.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Casual Labour in Agriculture	39.05	28.94	27.08	30.86	25.44	8.69	7.32	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Farm)	**79.60**	**31.91**	**60.51**	**66.64**	**67.45**	**43.98**	**34.40**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**37.76**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 50th Round (1993-94).

2. Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Haryana, during 2011–12 (NSSO 68th Round)

Table 2 presents the distribution of the rural workforce in Haryana (2011–12) by education level and employment type. It shows a strong positive relationship between education and participation in non-farm employment. While only 19.39% of illiterate individuals were in RNFE, the share rose sharply among the better educated, reaching 94.26% for diploma holders and 97.28% for postgraduates. Most of these educated individuals held regular salaried jobs, with none in casual labour. Conversely, the majority of illiterate and low- educated workers remained concentrated in agriculture. The findings reaffirm that education significantly enhances access to non-farm, higher-quality employment opportunities.

Compared to 1993–94, where nearly all educated individuals were absorbed

into RNFE—especially in salaried roles the 2011–12 data shows a continuation of this trend, though with slightly broader access across more education levels. However, the distinction between farm and non-farm employment by education level remains consistent over time, highlighting the enduring role of education in shaping rural employment outcomes.

Table 2: Employment of Rural workforce and their Education level in Haryana, during 2011-12

Economic Activities in Haryana	General Education 68th Round (2011-2012)									
			School Education					College/Vocational Education		
	Illiterate	Literate without formal school-in g	Literate: below	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Diploma /Certificate course	Graduate	Post-Graduation
Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture	9.69	0.00	18.39	17.20	26.56	17.86	21.91	9.44	10.12	8.32
Regular Salary Non-Agriculture	7.46	5.57	12.33	8.46	13.85	24.29	30.03	84.82	60.64	88.96
Casual Labour in Non-Agriculture	2.24	0.00	0.43	1.53	0.31	1.04	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Non-Farm)	**19.39**	**5.57**	**31.15**	**27.19**	**40.72**	**43.19**	**52.03**	**94.26**	**70.76**	**97.28**
Self-Employed Agriculture	37.70	94.43	36.53	30.16	32.31	38.24	24.97	0.06	25.00	2.72
Regular Salary Agriculture	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.97	0.89	0.00	0.93	0.00	0.00	0.00
Casual Labour in Agriculture	42.75	0.00	32.33	41.68	26.09	18.57	22.07	5.68	4.23	0.00
Sub-total (Farm)	**80.60**	**94.43**	**68.86**	**72.81**	**59.29**	**56.81**	**47.97**	**5.74**	**29.23**	**2.72**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 68th Round (2011-12).

3. Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Punjab, during 1993-94 (NSSO 50th Round)

To assess the role of education in rural non-farm employment (RNFE) in Punjab during 1993–94, data from the NSSO 50th Round indicate a strong positive relationship between educational attainment and participation in RNFE. All diploma or certificate holders and nearly 90% of graduates were employed in non-farm sectors, predominantly in regular salaried positions. Among postgraduates, 82.75% found employment in RNFE, with most working in stable wage-earning jobs.

In contrast, only 12.60% of illiterate individuals were engaged in RNFE, with the majority working in agriculture. Workers with lower education levels (such as those literate without formal schooling or educated up to primary level) were largely employed in farming, particularly as casual labourers or self-employed agriculturists. While moderately educated individuals (middle to secondary level) often pursued self- employment in agriculture, highly educated individuals were more likely to access secure, regular jobs in the non-farm sector. Compared to Haryana in 1993–94, Punjab showed a similarly strong link between higher education and non-farm employment, particularly in regular salaried roles. However, Punjab had slightly lower RNFE participation among postgraduates and a larger proportion of moderately educated workers (secondary and higher secondary) engaged in non-farm work, suggesting a broader base of educational access to RNFE.

Table 3: Proportion of the rural population engaged in farm and non-farm activities across the general levels of education in Punjab during 1993-94

Economic Activities in Punjab	General Education NSSO 50th Round (1993-1994)									
	Up to Primary				VI to XII			XII onwards Graduate & Above		
	Illiterate	Literate without formal	literate: below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate	Post-Graduation and above	Diploma/Certificate course
Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture	8.81	0.00	19.35	22.05	18.30	21.65	20.25	36.93	4.71	0.00
Regular Salary Non- Agriculture	3.45	10.32	9.19	11.54	16.74	32.19	51.23	52.97	78.04	100

Casual Labour in non-agriculture	0.34	0.00	0.46	0.00	0.37	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Non-Farm)	12.60	10.32	29.00	33.59	35.41	53.84	71.48	89.90	82.75	100
Self-Employed Agriculture	30.40	0.00	28.97	28.39	37.88	32.07	22.40	10.10	17.25	0.00
Regular Salary Agriculture	4.43	0.00	0.95	1.29	2.08	0.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Casual Labour in Agriculture	52.56	89.68	41.08	36.72	24.63	13.46	6.13	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Farm)	**87.39**	**89.68**	**71.00**	**66.40**	**64.59**	**46.16**	**28.53**	**10.10**	**17.25**	**0.00**
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 50th Round (1993-94)

4. Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Punjab, during 2011-12 (NSSO 68th Round)

The educational profile of Punjab's rural workforce in 2011–12 shows a strong link between higher education and non-farm employment, similar to Haryana. Among postgraduates and graduates, 87.76% and 81.23% respectively were employed in non-farm activities, while only 50% of Diploma holders worked in this sector.

Workers with middle (47.08%), secondary (55.78%), and higher secondary education (64.76%) also had significant involvement in non-farm jobs. Conversely, 79.37% of illiterate workers remained in agriculture, with only 20.63% in non-farm roles. Likewise, 84.66% of those literates without formal schooling were dependent on farming. Among primary and below-primary educated workers, around 65-70% worked in agriculture, and even 52.92% with middle-level education were in farm activities. Higher-educated workers showed much lower participation in farming—only 18.77% of graduates and 12.24% of postgraduates worked in agriculture, confirming a positive relationship between education and non-farm employment, consistent with earlier studies (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2008).

Within non-farm work, most highly educated workers earned regular salaries. Diploma holders also mainly held salaried jobs, with none of the graduates or postgraduates working as casual labourers. A small share of graduates (11.70%) and postgraduates (3.1%) were self-employed. However, underemployment persists: nearly half (49.26%) of Diploma holders remained in agriculture, and 18% worked as casual farm labourers despite their qualifications. Additionally, 16% of graduates and 12% of postgraduates were self-employed in farming, and 2.54% of graduates worked as casual agricultural labourers.

Table 4: Employment in Farm & Non-Farm Sector and educational level in Punjab, during 2011-12

Economic Activities in Punjab	General Education NSSO 68th Round (2011-2012)									
		Literate without formal schooling	School Education					College/vocational Education		
	Illiterate		literate: below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Diploma/Certificate course	Graduate	Post-Graduation and above
Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture	10.79	0.00	11.98	16.27	27.08	26.52	22.32	0.00	11.70	3.11
Regular Salary Non-Agriculture	9.84	15.34	17.55	19.08	19.69	29.26	42.44	50.74	69.53	84.65
Casual Labour in non-agriculture	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.31	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Non-Farm)	**20.63**	**15.34**	**29.53**	**35.35**	**47.08**	**55.78**	**64.76**	**50.74**	**81.23**	**87.76**
Self-Employed Agriculture	22.10	0.00	18.37	16.46	22.96	22.69	25.47	30.82	16.23	12.24
Regular Salary Agriculture	4.29	0.00	2.75	1.48	0.23	0.12	1.12	0.00	0.00	0.00
Casual Labour in Agriculture	52.98	84.66	49.35	46.72	29.73	21.41	8.65	18.44	2.54	0.00
Sub total (Farm)	**79.37**	**84.66**	**70.47**	**64.66**	**52.92**	**44.22**	**35.24**	**49.26**	**18.77**	**12.24**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 68th Round (2011-12).

Economic Activity of the Rural Workforce and Technical Education

1. Technical Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Haryana during 1993-94 (50th Round of NSSO)

This section examines the relationship between the level of technical education attained by the rural workforce and their participation in rural non-farm employment (RNFE) in Haryana during 1993–94. Table 3.9, based on data from the 50th Round of the NSSO, highlights how different types of technical education influenced access

to non-agricultural employment. The data reveal that individuals holding Diplomas or Certificates in Engineering Technology, Medicine, and Crafts were predominantly employed in non-farm occupations, in contrast to those with qualifications in agriculture or other fields. Notably, all workers with engineering-related technical qualifications were engaged in the non-farm sector and received regular salaries. Similarly, among those with medical training, over half (53.97%) were salaried employees, and the rest (46.03%) were self- employed, entirely within non-agricultural activities. An interesting trend is observed among craft diploma holders 100% were self-employed in non-farm work, with none involved in agriculture. Likewise, a large majority (71.07%) of individuals with diplomas in miscellaneous fields was employed in non-farm sectors, and a significant share (70%) among them received regular salaries.

The data also reveal that a substantial share of workers without any formal technical education (68.30%) remained engaged in agriculture. Among them, the largest proportion was self-employed (37.40%), followed by casual labourers (29.87%) and a small segment of regular salaried workers (1.03%). In contrast, among non-technical workers in the non-farm sector (31.70%), 17.53% were self-employed and 13.42% were regular wage earners, while only 0.75% worked as casual labourers. Predictably, individuals with diplomas in agriculture primarily engaged in farm-related work, with 66.15% self-employed in agriculture and none in casual or regular salaried farm jobs.

These trends underscore a clear divide: while the majority of rural workers without technical education were employed in agriculture, technical education, particularly in engineering, medicine, and crafts, served as a strong pathway into non-farm employment. The findings suggest that during 1993–94 in Haryana, the RNF sector was largely composed of technically trained individuals, especially those qualified in specific fields like engineering and medicine, whereas those without such training remained heavily reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Table 5: Proportion of rural population engaged in farm and non-farm activities across a level of technical education in Haryana, during 1993-94

Economic activities in Haryana	Technical Education NSSO 50th Round (1993-1994)					
	No Technical education	Diploma or Certificate in Agriculture	Diploma or Certificate in Engineering Technology	Diploma or Certificate in Medicine	Diploma or Certificate in Crafts	Diploma or Certificate in Other subjects
Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture	17.53	0.00	0.00	46.03	100.00	1.41
Regular Salary Non-Agriculture	13.42	33.85	100.00	53.97	0.00	69.66

Casual Labour in Non-Agriculture	0.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subtotal (Non-Farm)	**31.70**	**33.85**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**71.07**
Self-Employed Agriculture	37.40	66.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	28.93
Regular Salary Agriculture	1.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Casual Labour in Agriculture	29.87	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub total (Farm)	**68.30**	**66.15**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**28.93**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 50th Round (1993-94).

2. Technical Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Haryana during 2011-12 (68th Round of NSSO)

Table 6 presents data from the NSSO 68th Round (2011–12) on the rural workforce in Haryana, highlighting the relationship between technical education levels and employment in farm versus non-farm activities. Significant shares 65.15% of individuals without technical education were engaged in agriculture, mainly through self-employment or casual labour. In contrast, the majority of technically educated workers, particularly those with degrees in engineering, technology, or medicine, were employed in the non-farm sector. Specifically, 77.9% of workers with technical degrees worked outside agriculture, although 22.1% were still employed as casual farm labourers, raising concerns about the relevance of their training and the lack of suitable job opportunities.

Diploma holders, especially in engineering and medicine, overwhelmingly participated in non-farm employment. For instance, 95% of those with engineering diplomas below graduation level worked in the RNFS, while all medical diploma holders (both below and above graduation level) were found in non-farm roles. Notably, even among those with diplomas in non-technical subjects, employment outcomes varied by education level: 52.13% of sub-graduate diploma holders still worked in agriculture, whereas all with graduate- level diplomas worked in the non-farm sector, with 61.31% being self-employed.

These findings point to a strong positive relationship between technical education and participation in non-farm employment. Higher levels of technical qualifications consistently led to greater involvement in the RNFS, while most of the workforce without such training remained dependent on agriculture. Additionally, the data suggest that while technically trained individuals, particularly in engineering, preferred salaried roles over entrepreneurship, those trained in other subjects showed greater interest in self-employment. This aligns with Binswanger-Mkhize's

(2013) observation that self-employment in India's RNFS is increasingly seen as an opportunity rather than a response to distress. They note that rural income sources are diversifying, non-farm wages are higher, and rural labour markets are becoming more integrated both internally and with urban markets, albeit to a lesser extent.

Table 6: Employment of Workers with Technical Education of Haryana in Farm and Non-Farm activities in NSSO 68th Round 2011-12

Level of Technical Education: NSSO 68th Round (2011-2012)			Non-Farming				Farm Sector				Total
			Self-Employed	Regular Salary	Casual Labour	Sub-total	Self-Employed	Regular Salary	Casual Labour	sub-total	
I	No Education	No technical education	16.95	16.75	1.15	**34.85**	33.61	0.41	31.13	65.15	**100**
II	Professional	Technical degree in agriculture/ engineering / technology / medicine,	17.65	60.25	0.00	**77.90**	0.00	0.00	22.10	22.10	**100**
III	Vocational (Diploma/ Certificate)	Diploma or Certificate Below graduate level in: Engineering/ technology	1.50	93.80	0.00	**95.30**	0.00	0.00	4.70	4.70	**100**
		Diploma or Certificate below graduate level in: medicine	0.00	100	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	**100**
		Diploma or Certificate Below graduate level in: other subjects	2.31	45.56	0.00	**47.87**	1.79	0.00	50.34	52.13	**100**
IV	Diploma in Engineering	Diploma or Certificate Graduate and above level in: engineering/ technology	5.15	94.85	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	**100**
V	Medical	Diploma or Certificate Graduate and above level in: medicine	50.00	50.00	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	**100**
VI	Others	Diploma or Certificate, Graduate and above level in other subjects	61.31	38.69	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	**100**

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 68th Round (2011-12). Note: Figures specify column-wise percentage share

3. Technical Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Punjab during 1993-94 (50th Round of NSSO)

The analysis in Table 7 highlights a clear contrast between Punjab and Haryana in 1993–94 regarding the role of technical education in rural employment. In Punjab, a large majority of technically educated rural workers were engaged in non-farm activities. For instance, over 86% of those holding diplomas in other subjects, and around 73% with engineering/technology diplomas, found employment in the rural non-farm sector. In contrast, the rural workforce without technical education was predominantly dependent on agriculture, with 73% engaged in farm-related work, most of them (about 50%) as casual labourers.

Diploma holders in agriculture showed high levels of self-employment in the non-farm sector (74.53%), while those in medicine were primarily self-employed (63.86%) or earned regular salaries (36.14%) in RNFS. Similarly, all workers with diplomas in crafts were employed in non-farm activities, with the vast majority (89.39%) in salaried roles. For engineering diploma holders, the largest share (58.21%) was employed in regular non-farm jobs. Notably, those with diplomas in other subjects were split between self-employment (35.20%) and regular employment (51.42%) in the RNFS.

The data underline that technical qualifications—regardless of the field—enabled strong access to non-farm employment in rural Punjab during 1993–94. On the other hand, those lacking technical training were primarily tied to agricultural work. Interestingly, despite the strong presence of technically educated individuals in RNFS during this period, their participation appeared to decline in later years a trend that warrants further investigation.

Table 7: Proportion of rural population engaged in Farm and non-farm activities across a level of technical education in Punjab, during 1993-94

Punjab	Technical Education NSSO 50th Round (1993-1994)					
	No Technical education	Diploma or Certificate in Agriculture	Diploma or Certificate in Engineering Technology	Diploma or Certificate in Medicine	Diploma or Certificate in Crafts	Diploma or Certificate in other subjects
Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture	14.07	74.53	14.54	63.86	10.61	35.20
Regular Salary Non-Agriculture	12.61	25.47	58.21	36.14	89.39	51.42
Casual Labour in NonAgriculture	0.29	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Sub total (Non-Farm)	**26.97**	**100.00**	**72.75**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**86.62**
Self-Employed Agriculture	30.86	0.00	27.24	0.00	0.00	5.89
Regular Salary Agriculture	2.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Casual Labour in Agriculture	39.37	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.50
Sub total (Farm)	**73.03**	**0.00**	**27.24**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**13.39**
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 50th Round (1993-94).

4. Technical Educational attainment by the rural workforce in Punjab during 2011-12 (68th Round of NSSO)

Table 8 reveals that in Punjab during 2011–12, technical education at lower levels did not guarantee full absorption into non-farm employment. Among those with diplomas or certificates in engineering/technology below graduation level, only 56.98% were in regular non-farm jobs, while 43.02% remained engaged in farm-related activities. In contrast, all individuals holding engineering/technology diplomas at graduation level or higher were employed in the non-farm sector—95.86% in regular jobs and 4.14% self-employed—highlighting the positive link between higher technical education and non-farm employment opportunities. Similarly, all diploma holders in medicine below the graduation level worked in non-farm activities. However, only 63% of those with medicine-related diplomas at graduation level or above were in RNFS, while 37% continued in self-employed agricultural roles.

Among those with diplomas in other subjects below graduation level, 62.22% were engaged in non-farm activities, and 37.78% remained in self-employed farm work. In contrast, all diploma holders in other subjects above graduation level were employed in the non-farm sector, with 92.35% in regular jobs and 7.65% self-employed. These patterns reinforce that higher levels of technical education significantly improve access to rural non-farm employment.

Table 8: Proportion of rural population engaged in farm and non-farm activities by employment status and technical education in Punjab, during 2011-12

Table 8: Level of Technical Education (Punjab)	Non-Farm Employment				Farm Employment				Total
	Self-Employed in Non-Agriculture	Regular Salary Non-Agriculture	Casual Labour in Non-	Sub total	Self-Employed Agriculture	Regular Salary Agriculture	Casual Labour in Agriculture	Sub total	

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No Education	No technical education	18.10	21.47	0.04	**39.61**	21.23	1.92	37.24	**60.39**	**100**
Professional/Technical	Technical degree in agriculture/engineering/ technology/ medicine, e	7.88	92.12	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	**0.00**	**100**
Diploma Below Graduation	Diploma or Certificate Below graduate level in: Engineering/ technology	0.00	56.98	0.00	**56.98**	20.67	0.00	22.35	**43.02**	**100**
	Diploma or Certificate below graduate level in: medicine	64.22	35.78	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	**0.00**	**100**
	Diploma or Certificate Below graduate levelin: other subjects	0.00	62.22	0.00	**62.22**	37.78	0.00	0.00	**37.78**	**100**
Diploma/Certificate above Graduation	Diploma or Certificate Graduate and above level in: engineering/ technology	4.14	95.86	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	**0.00**	**100**
	Diploma or Certificate Graduate and above level in: medicine	31.50	31.50	0.00	**63**	37.00	0.00	0.00	**37.00**	**100**
	Diploma or Certificate, Graduate and above level in other subjects	7.65	92.35	0.00	**100**	0.00	0.00	0.00	**0.00**	**100**

Source: Unit Level Data NSSO 68th Round (2011-12). Note: Figures specify column-wise percentage share

Conclusion

This study highlights the pivotal role of education, both general and technical, in shaping the employment outcomes of the rural workforce in Haryana and Punjab. The analysis confirms a strong positive correlation between educational attainment and engagement in rural non-farm employment (RNFE). Workers with higher qualifications, especially those holding diplomas or certificates at graduation level and above, were more likely to find employment in the non-farm sector, particularly in regular salaried jobs. Conversely, individuals with lower education levels or no technical training remained predominantly engaged in agriculture.

Over time, however, the employment prospects for even educated rural

workers in RNFE have declined. Compared to 1993–94, 2011–12 witnessed a drop in non-farm absorption, even among technically qualified individuals, indicating a slowdown in RNFE's capacity to generate employment. Furthermore, while technical education boosts employability, diploma holders, particularly in engineering or technology below the graduation level, showed limited entrepreneurial inclination. In contrast, those with advanced qualifications in non- technical fields were more likely to pursue self-employment, especially in Haryana.

To address rural underemployment and reduce dependence on agriculture, bridging the rural-urban education gap is essential. Strengthening technical and vocational education, alongside improving foundational rural schooling, is critical to unlocking the full potential of RNFE.

The government has introduced several schemes aimed at promoting rural employment, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for wage employment, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship, and earlier programmes like Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY).

However, the impact of these schemes has been limited due to poor implementation, lack of awareness, and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas. Going forward, greater policy emphasis is needed on expanding skill- based training, improving scheme delivery mechanisms, and encouraging rural enterprises. Without such measures, RNFE will struggle to absorb the growing rural workforce or contribute meaningfully to inclusive rural development.

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Gender Budgeting and Improvement in the Status of Indian Women: A State Level Analysis

Smita Sharma[1] and Priyanka Nain[2]

Abstract

Budget is an important tool of the government for allocation and distribution of resources and reflects a government's economic and social priorities. Applying a gender lens to the budgets can help in identifying gaps in access to public resources and their distribution. United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which included compliance of all forms of government activity with human rights standards. India became a signatory of the CEDAW on July 30, 1980 but ratified it only on July 9, 1993, after a long wait of thirteen years. Gender Budgeting is part of ratified CEDAW. On the basis of proxy variables, an attempt is made to find whether timely adoption of gender budgeting initiatives has helped Indian states in improving the status of women. Analysis of explicit implementation of gender budgeting in selected Indian states reveals that mere gendered data extraction is not enough rather explicit gender sensitive expenditure needs to be incurred if the objective of socio-economic parity among both genders is to be achieved.

Keywords: *Gender Budgeting, Fiscal Policy and Gender, CEDAW*

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Introduction

Gender equality being a welfare concept calls for an active role of the state and the achievement of economic as well as social development goals is considered one of the prime objectives of good governance. Budget is an important tool of the government for allocation and distribution of resources. Budgets at national, sub national or local level reflects a government's economic and social priorities. The standard formulations of the budget, using traditional macroeconomic practices remained gender neutral and there was no explicit reference of the different rights, responsibilities and capabilities of men and women. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) whichincluded compliance of all forms of government activity with human rights standards. Gender budgeting was a part of ratified convention.

A gender-sensitive budget aims at examining financial allocations through a gender lens. It does not seek to create a separate budget for women rather it demands dissection of the government budget to ascertain its gender-specific impact (Elson, 1999). In other words, Gender Budgeting calls for redefinition of priorities and reallocation of resources to cater to the requirements of the entire population while taking special care of women.

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[1] Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Panjab University, Chandigarh

[2] Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Panjab University, Chandigarh

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Are human rights relevant to budgets?

According to United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2008), by ratifying CEDAW and other human rights treaties, government commits that its activity would comply with the human rights standards of those treaties. Though it is accepted that the legal binding will vary from country to country and state to state depending on their domestic laws and how they respond to international law. Budget is a key government activity which also regulates other government activities like education, health, empowerment, employment and gender parity.

Gender Budgeting Initiatives in India in Historical Perspective

In India gender perspective on public expenditure started gaining ground after the publication of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in 1974. India became a signatory of the CEDAW on July 30, 1980 but ratified it only on July 9, 1993, after a long wait of thirteen years. In the same frame of time Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-97) for the first time highlighted the need of a stable and continuous flow of funds from the general developmental sectors to women.

The Ninth Five Year-Plan (1997-2002), adopted Women Component Plan as one of the major strategies and directed both the Central and the State Governments to ensure not less than thirty per cent of the funds/benefits are earmarked in all the women's related sectors. But in spite of all these special references things were not going in the desired direction. The budget 2000-01 clearly stated that there was an urgent need for improving the access of women to national resources and for ensuring their rightful place in the mainstream of economic development. This marked the dawn of gender- sensitive budgeting in India.

As a follow up measure, the Ministry of Women and Child Development adopted the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in 2001. It clearly mentioned that all the action plans of the Ministries should specifically include a gender perspective in the budgeting process. Accordingly, an expert group was constituted by the Ministry of Finance in 2003 to review the Classification System for Government Transactions. The Group in essence focused on identifying the Institutional framework that could aid the introduction of Gender Budgeting in the Government and also developed matrices that could capture financial data of budgetary allocations from the gender perspective (Ministry of Women and Child Development, GOI, (2015). The recommendations of the Expert Group were taken into consideration and the same were reflected in the Finance Minister's budget speech in 2004-05.

In 2004-05 the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) adopted Budgeting for Gender Equity as a mission statement. A Strategic Framework of Activities to implement this mission was also framed and disseminated to all Departments of Government of India. In Budget Speech 2005-06, the finance minister reaffirmed his commitment to Gender Budgeting and introduced a Gender Budget Statement. On 8th March 2007, the Ministry of Finance issued a Charter for Gender Budgeting Cells (GBCs) outlining the composition of GBCs and their functions. In 2012 a Working Group for Developing Guidelines for Gender Audit of Policies, Programs and Schemes of

Government of India was formed. The Secretary, Planning Commission, Government of India, on 18th October, 2012 wrote to Chief Secretaries of all States/UTs that, "To accelerate the process (of GB), State Finance Departments could set up Gender Budget Cells on the lines of the Charter for Gender Budget cells issued by the Ministry of Finance. The State Planning Departments may also be instructed to include the need for gender budgeting as a part of their annual plan circular." Further the Secretary, MWCD on 18th February, 2013, issued guidelines to states to provide a road map towards institutionalizing Gender Budgeting at state level. It is important to not here that while the Ministry of Finance has been instrumental in institutionalizing the gender budgeting process in central Ministries/Departments, it is the Ministry of Women and Child Development that has been supporting the process as the nodal agency for women.

Gender Budgeting Initiatives at the Sub- National Level

This section summarizes gender budgeting initiatives in Indian States for which some specifics on their gender budgeting efforts could be obtained. In conventional budgets, the states in their gender budgets focused on social services sectors such as Women and Child Development, Education, Health, Nutrition, Welfare, and Infrastructure. Gender budgeting efforts across these states include development of a state policy for gender equality and adoption of gender budgeting statements in budget documents; identifying nodal departments for gender budgeting and formation of gender budgeting cells.

Gujarat: The state adoptedgender budgeting in 2006. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, setting up of a gender budget cell, adoption of a gender budget statement, creation of gender data bank, creation of state policy for gender equality, creation of gender budgeting manual for government officials, and training workshops. State policy for gender equality puts a special emphasis on developing an effective strategy to incorporate gender budgeting in various state government departments.

Karnataka: Gender budgeting was adopted in 2006 in Karnataka. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included adopting a gender budgeting statement, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, running capacity building activities on gender budgeting for government officers, developing monitoring and evaluation schemes intended to track and analyse the progress on gender equality, and auditing gender budgeting activities to measure their impact.

Kerala: Gender budgeting was adopted in 2008 in Karnataka. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included creating a gender advisory committee, adopting a gender budget statement, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, creating flagship schemes targeted towards education, women safety and protection, skill training, gender increasing funding for flagship schemes, audit of selected flagship schemes, promoting data collection of gender disaggregated data, and studying ways to develop a policy for gender-related goals.

Madhya Pradesh: Gender budgeting was adopted in 2007 in Madhya Pradesh. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included adoption of gender budget statement, designating

a nodal department for gender budgeting, creation of 'Directorate of Women Empowerment' to oversee successful implementation of women's empowerment schemes, including women's group and civil society in budget consultations, and mandating the inclusion of gender-related objectives in all project reports. Madhya Pradesh also collected micro-level gender-disaggregated data and performed gender analysis to study the impact of several schemes and programs.

Nagaland: Gender budgeting was adopted in 2009 in Nagaland. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included creating a gender core committee in charge of broadening gender policy and engaging non-government institutions, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, creating a gender budgeting task force in charge of integrating gender in state and district plans and producing a gender budgeting manual, and capacity building activities for gender awareness.

Odisha: Gender budgeting was adopted in 2004 in Odisha. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included creation of 'Women Component Plan' under which 30 percent of funds in the 'Annual Plan' are reserved for women, adoption of a gender budget statement, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, creating a budget document with a gender budgeting section, drawing up a gender budgeting handbook, capacity building workshops, and developing a state policy for girls and women with a focus on survival, education, livelihood, asset ownership, health and nutrition, decision making, participation and political representation, and safety, security, and protection.

Rajasthan: Gender budgeting was adopted in Rajasthan in the year 2011. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included the constitution of a high-level committee, setting up of a gender budget cell, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, capacity building workshops, adoption of a gender budget statement, and gender appraisal of budget proposals. These appraisals were carried out by government departments that focused on Women and Children's Development, Education, Health, Social Justice and Empowerment, Rural Development and Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. Gender desks were established across 71 government departments.

Tripura: Gender budgeting was adopted in Tripura in the year 2005. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included setting up of gender budget cells across 18 state government departments, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, adopting a gender budget statement in the budget, and adopting various schemes for women intended to empower women and girls. The schemes have mainly focused on education, social welfare, and job skills.

Uttarakhand: Gender budgeting was adopted in Uttarakhand in 2007. Gender budgeting efforts by the state included the adoption of a gender budget statement, setting up of a gender budget cell, designating a nodal department for gender budgeting, and capacity building workshops for gender awareness across different state government departments. Gender budget statements provided a platform to track the budget for women schemes resulting in a significant increase between 2007 and 2014 in the spending on women-related goals.

Gender Budgeting and Status of Women: An analysis

This section aims at analysing the position of different states with respect to adoption of Gender Budgeting i.e. to see if there has been any improvement in the status of women as a result of adopting Gender Budgeting. The analysis of Gender Budgets of the states shows that most of the schemes targeted at women, either completely or partially, are related to health, education and empowerment. Keeping this in mind, the indicators chosen are health, education and empowerment. For state wise analysis of effect of gender budgeting, states have been selected on the basis of the year of implementation of Gender Budgeting.

1. **Health –** to depict the changes in the health of women the present study has used the prevalence of Anaemia among women as proxy variable.

2. **Education-** with respect to education the analysis has been done using Gross Enrolment in Higher Education.

3. **Empowerment -** the schemes under this category aims at making women self-reliant in terms of finances by giving them equal employment opportunities, involving them in decision making and by giving ownership. In present study, Women's Mean age at Marriage has been taken as proxy for empowerment.

Health

Good health is an indicator of the care and facilities given to women. Thus, percent of anaemic women in a state is a reflection of the attention given to their health. Table 1 reveals that the early adopters of gender budgeting like Gujarat, Karnataka, and Odisha were able to reduce the percentage of anaemic women except Uttar Pradesh which actually saw an increase. For Gujarat,the improvement was very small from 55.3 in 2005-06 to 54.9 in 2015-16, even though it adopted gender budgeting in 2006 only.

Among the subsequent adopters Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand had good results and the percentage of anaemic women declined from 67.4, 57.5, and 55.2 to 60.3, 40 and 45.2 respectively. Himachal and Kerala rather faced an increase in number although with a very small margin. An important highlight is the huge increase in the percent of anaemic women in the late adopters Haryana and Punjab from 56.1 and 38 to 62.7 and 53.5 respectively. This reveals that at least in the short run, adoption of gender budgeting did not contribute much towards quantifiable health outcomes.

Table 2 shows the Gross Enrolment ratio in higher Education. Some of the states which did not adopt gender budgeting either outperformed or remains at approximately the same level as the states who has adopted gender budgeting.

For instance, Gujarat, an early adopter, in 2009-10 started with a GER (Female) of 13.2 and Andhra Pradesh, a non-adopter had a GER (Female) of 12.3. In 2018- 19 both the states stand at 18.1 and 21 respectively. In a similar comparison Uttar Pradesh at 9.5 and Punjab at 10.9 in 2009-10 came to 27.5 and 34.3 respectively.

Table 1 Prevalence of Anaemia among Women (in percent)

Category(On the basis of adopting Gender Budgeting)	States	2005-06*	2015-16**
Early Adopters	Gujarat (2006)	55.3	54.9
	Karnataka (2006)	51.5	44.8
	Odisha (2004)	61.2	51
	Uttar Pradesh (2005)	49.9	52.4
Subsequent Adopters	Bihar (2008)	67.4	60.3
	Chhattisgarh (2007)	57.5	47
	Himachal Pradesh (2008)	43.3	53.5
	Kerala (2008)	32.8	34.2
	Madhya Pradesh (2007)	56	52.5
	Uttarakhand (2007)	55.2	45.2
	Maharashtra (2013)	48.5	48
	Rajasthan (2011)	53.1	46.8
Recent Adopters	Andhra Pradesh	62.9	60
	Haryana	56.1	62.7
	Jharkhand	69.5	65.2
	Punjab	38	53.5
	Tamil Nadu	53.2	55
	West Bengal	63.2	62.5

Source: Women and Men, MOSPI, various editions, GOI.

*Based on NFHS – III   **Based on NFHS –IV

Table 2 Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education

Category(On the basis of adopting Gender Budgeting)	States	2009	2011	2013	2016
Early Adopters	Gujarat (2006)	20.9	21.3	21.6	22
	Karnataka (2006)	20.6	21	21.3	22.5

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	Odisha (2004)	21.4	21.4	21.4	
	Uttar Pradesh (2005)	20.2	20.8	21.6	
Subsequent Adopters	Bihar (2008)	20.1	20.7	21.1	21.5
	Chhattisgarh (2007)	-	-	20.3	21.6
	Himachal Pradesh (2008)	22.2	22.4	22.5	23.3
	Kerala (2008)	22.7	22.6	23.1	23.1
	Madhya Pradesh(2007)	21	20.7	20.6	21.6
	Maharashtra (2013)	20.5	21.7	21.1	22.4
	Rajasthan (2011)	19.8	20.5	20.7	21.5
Recent Adopters	Andhra Pradesh	19.9	21.6	20.7	21.9
	Haryana	20.6	21	21.1	22.3
	Jharkhand	-	-	20.5	21.5
	Punjab	22.1	22.4	22.7	23.3
	Tamil Nadu	22.4	22.4	22.4	23
	West Bengal	19.9	20.3	20.7	21.2

Source: Women and Men, MOSPI, various editions, GOI.

Table 3 Mean Age at Marriage

Category(On the basis of adopting Gender Budgeting)	States	2009	2011	2013	2016
Early Adopters	Gujarat (2006)	20.9	21.3	21.6	22
	Karnataka (2006)	20.6	21	21.3	22.5
	Odisha (2004)	21.4	21.4	21.4	
	Uttar Pradesh (2005)	20.2	20.8	21.6	
Subsequent Adopters	Bihar (2008)	20.1	20.7	21.1	21.5

	Chhattisgarh (2007)	-	-	20.3	21.6
	Himachal Pradesh (2008)	22.2	22.4	22.5	23.3
	Kerala (2008)	22.7	22.6	23.1	23.1
	Madhya Pradesh (2007)	21	20.7	20.6	21.6
	Maharashtra (2013)	20.5	21.7	21.1	22.4
	Rajasthan (2011)	19.8	20.5	20.7	21.5
Recent Adopters	Andhra Pradesh	19.9	21.6	20.7	21.9
	Haryana	20.6	21	21.1	22.3
	Jharkhand	-	-	20.5	21.5
	Punjab	22.1	22.4	22.7	23.3
	Tamil Nadu	22.4	22.4	22.4	23
	West Bengal	19.9	20.3	20.7	21.2

Source: Women and Men, MOSPI Various Editions, GOI.

Then among the subsequent adopters there is case of Uttarakhand which even with adoption of gender budgeting in 2007 could not maintain the GER rather the GER for females further declined from 45.2 in 2009-10 to 30 in 2018-19 implying no role of gender budgeting in enrolment ratio. Similarly, table 3 depictsMean Age at Marriage, which has increased but has no relationship with the adoption of gender budgeting.

Conclusion

Despite having convincing argument that by ratifying CEDAW and other human rights treaties government commits to comply with the human rights standards, in the domain of gender budgeting much work needs to be done. The assumption that application of gender lens to public budgets will make budgets gender sensitive may not be tangible unless actual gendered spending is not made. As the results of the paper revealed some early adopters of gender budgeting like Gujarat, Karnataka, and Odisha were able to reduce the percentage of anaemic women except Uttar Pradesh. Some of the states which did not adopt gender budgeting either outperformed or remains at approximately the same level as the states who has adopted gender budgeting.Then among the subsequent adopters there is case of Uttarakhand which even with adoption of gender budgeting in 2007 could not maintain its GER rather the GER for females further declined. Thus based on analysis of explicit implementation of gender budgeting in selected Indian states it can be concluded that mere gendered data extraction is not

enough rather explicit gender sensitive expenditure needs to be incurred if the objective of socio-economic parity among both genders is to be achieved.

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