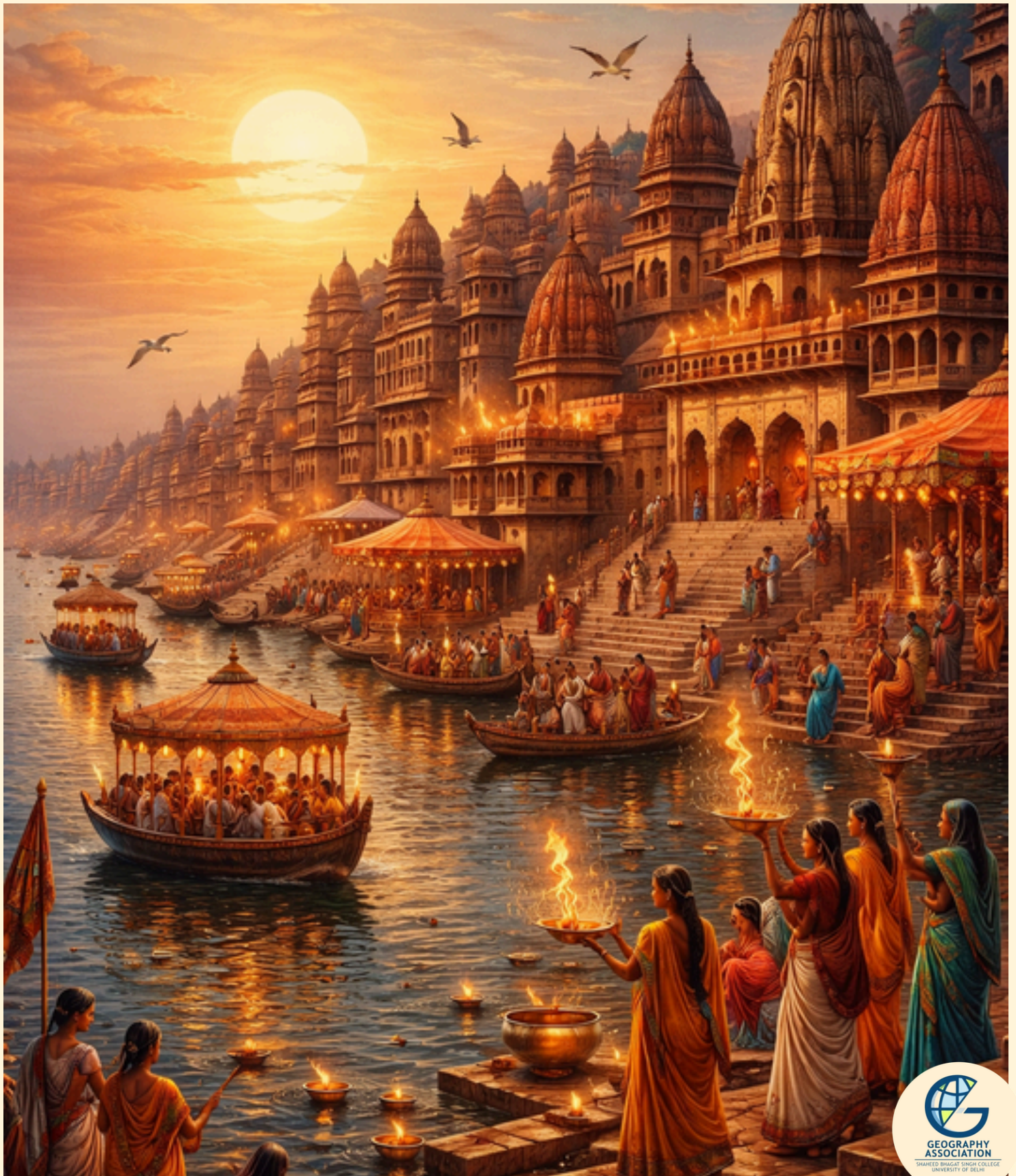


# LANDSCAPE

A Forum for Young Geographers VOLUME 19 | MARCH 2026



SOCIO-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

# PREFACE

Welcome to the latest edition of Landscape, the annual magazine of our department. Each year, this magazine serves as a platform for students and faculty to share ideas, research, and creative perspectives related to geography and the world around us. In this edition, we focus on the theme “Socio-Cultural Landscape,” a concept that highlights the deep relationship between society, culture, and the spaces in which we live.

Landscapes are not shaped only by natural forces such as rivers, mountains, and climate; they are also influenced by human activities, traditions, and cultural values. The socio-cultural landscape reflects how people interact with their surroundings and how their beliefs, customs, languages, and ways of life leave a lasting mark on the environment. From the design of settlements and architecture to local festivals, food habits, and everyday practices, culture plays an important role in shaping the identity of a place.

The theme “Socio-Cultural Landscape” encourages us to explore the dynamic relationship between people and their environment. Through the articles and contributions presented in this issue, we examine how cultural traditions develop within particular landscapes and how they continue to evolve with time. We also look at the impact of modern changes such as urbanization, migration, and globalization, which are gradually transforming cultural patterns and influencing the character of many regions around the world.

This magazine brings together thoughtful reflections, research insights, and creative expressions that showcase the diversity and richness of socio-cultural landscapes. By presenting different viewpoints and experiences, we hope to provide readers with a broader understanding of how societies shape their surroundings and how these surroundings, in turn, influence social and cultural life.

We invite you to explore this edition with curiosity and interest. May it inspire a deeper appreciation of the cultural connections that shape our landscapes and the communities that live within them.



**Prof. Arun Kumar Attree**  
*Principal*  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College  
(University of Delhi)

I am delighted to know that the Department of Geography, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College is bringing out its Annual Magazine, Landscape, centered on the theme “Socio-Cultural Landscape.” The concept of socio-cultural landscapes highlights the crucial relationship between human societies and geographical landscapes . It reflects how traditions, cultural practices, social structures, and human activities shape and transform landscapes with time. Understanding these landscapes allow us to admire the diversity of cultures and the dynamic interactions between people and their environment.

This magazine serves as a platform for students to explore, analyze, and creatively present various dimensions of social and cultural landscapes. It is also a reflection of the intellectual curiosity, creativity, and dedication of the students and faculty of the Geography Department.

I would like to appreciate Dr. P. Thongkhanthang, Teacher-in-Charge, Dr. Sandip Satpati, Magazine Advisor, and Prof. Kavita Arora and Dr. Suraj Kumar Mallick, Magazine Co-Advisors, for their guidance, encouragement, and belief in the spirit of this publication. I also appreciate the editorial team for their sincere efforts in bringing out this magazine and commend the students who have contributed their insightful articles and creative works. I extend my best wishes to the Department of Geography for the continued success of this “Landscape magazine”.

Best Wishes!



**Dr. P. Thongkhanthang**  
*Teacher-in-Charge*  
Department of Geography  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

Dear Students, Faculty, and Esteemed Readers,

Landscapes are more than stretches of land; they are living stories shaped by people, culture, memory, and time. It gives me great pleasure to present this year's edition of the Department of Geography's annual magazine, *Landscape*, centered on the theme "Socio-Cultural Landscape." Every street, village, city square, and cultural space around us carries traces of human life—our traditions, languages, celebrations, and everyday practices. These elements quietly shape the landscapes we inhabit, turning ordinary spaces into meaningful places. This edition of *Landscape* attempts to capture those stories, reflecting how human societies continuously interact with and transform the spaces around them.

The pages of this magazine bring together diverse voices and ideas from our students and faculty. Through thoughtful articles, reflections, and creative expressions, the contributors explore how geography goes beyond maps and terrains to reveal the deeper connections between people and their cultural environments. I sincerely appreciate the dedication and enthusiasm of the editorial team and all the students who have contributed to this publication. Their efforts demonstrate the vibrant academic spirit of the Department of Geography and its commitment to encouraging inquiry, creativity, and critical thinking.

I hope this edition of *Landscape* inspires readers to look at the world around them with greater curiosity—to notice the cultural imprints within everyday spaces and to recognize how each of us plays a role in shaping the landscapes of our society.



**Dr. Sandip Satpati**

*Magazine Advisor*

Department of Geography  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

It gives me immense pleasure and a deep sense of academic pride to present this year's edition of Landscape magazine, dedicated to the theme "Socio-Cultural Landscape." This theme thoughtfully captures the essence of Bharat, where culture and space are inseparably intertwined, shaping identities, traditions, and everyday life.

The socio-cultural landscape of Bharat reflects a civilizational continuum enriched by its diverse traditions, knowledge systems, and lived experiences. From the sacred spatial organization of temples that embody philosophical and cosmological insights, to the rich culinary traditions rooted in local ecology and seasonal cycles, every dimension of life represents a unique geographical expression. Similarly, traditional clothing practices illustrate an adaptive relationship with climate, resources, and cultural values, while daily life practices reveal deep-seated indigenous knowledge systems that promote balance and sustainability.

These cultural expressions are not isolated phenomena; rather, they form a dynamic and evolving landscape shaped by history, belief systems, and human-environment interactions. In the contemporary context of rapid transformation and globalization, there is a pressing need to document, analyze, and preserve these invaluable traditions and practices. Their contributions reflect a nuanced understanding of socio-cultural processes, supported by geographical perspectives and methodological approaches. Such efforts reaffirm the significance of geography as a discipline that not only studies space but also interprets the cultural meanings embedded within it.

I extend my sincere congratulations to all contributors for their dedication and scholarly engagement. I also appreciate the collective efforts of the editorial team in bringing out this thoughtful compilation. May this edition of Landscape inspire greater awareness, critical reflection, and a renewed commitment to preserving and understanding the rich socio-cultural heritage of Bharat.

Wishing all students continued success in their academic and research journeys.



**Prof. Kavita Arora**  
*Magazine Co-Advisor*  
Department of Geography  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

I am very glad to share that the Department of Geography, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi, has published its annual Magazine 'Landscape' for 2026, which provides an excellent description of the socio-cultural landscape of India.

This publication is packed with brilliant information compiled through the tireless work of students and the excellent guidance of faculty members, which illustrates how societies, with their cultural characteristics, function, and patterns of behavior, evolve in a geographical landscape that continues to change.

This is why this excellent magazine is essential reading.

I would like to express my gratitude to the teacher-in-charge, Dr. P. Thongkhanthang, journal advisor, Dr. Sandeep Satpati, and journal co-advisor, Dr. Suraj Kumar Mallick, and a very enthusiastic student team for their belief in the spirit of this publication. As a Co-advisor It has been a privilege for me to be part of such a dedicated team this year.

My heartiest wishes to the Department of Geography for the continued success of this annual magazine “Landscape”.



**Dr. Suraj Kumar Mallick**

*Magazine Co-Advisor*

Department of Geography  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

I am extremely delighted to have the opportunity to present the 19th volume of our Departmental Magazine “Landscape” 2025–26. At the outset, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the editorial team for their dedication, creativity, and tireless efforts. Their commitment and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in shaping this volume into a meaningful academic contribution. I also express my sincere appreciation to all contributors whose thoughtful articles and concept notes have enriched the magazine around the theme “Socio-cultural Landscape.”

The socio-cultural landscape represents the dynamic interplay between human societies and their environments, shaped by traditions, values, beliefs, and everyday practices. In an era of rapid globalization, urbanization, and technological advancement, socio-cultural landscapes are undergoing profound transformations. These changes often challenge the preservation of cultural identity, heritage, and social cohesion, while also creating opportunities for innovation and intercultural exchange.

India, with its vast diversity of cultures, languages, traditions, and lifestyles, provides a rich and complex socio-cultural landscape. From rural settlements rooted in age-old customs to rapidly expanding urban centers, the country exemplifies how cultural and social factors interact with spatial and environmental processes. Understanding these patterns is crucial for inclusive development, sustainable planning, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the study and documentation of socio-cultural landscapes to ensure that development processes remain sensitive to cultural contexts. A deeper understanding of social structures, cultural expressions, and human-environment relationships can help in designing policies and practices that promote harmony, resilience, and sustainability.

We are fortunate to bring together a diverse range of perspectives in this volume, reflecting multidisciplinary approaches and fresh insights into the socio-cultural dimensions of landscapes. It is hoped that this compilation will inspire readers, scholars, and students at various levels to explore, appreciate, and critically engage with the evolving socio-cultural fabric of our world. I sincerely hope that this edition of “Landscape” will not only inform but also encourage thoughtful reflection and meaningful discourse among its readers.



**Dr. Shashank Patel**  
*Staff Advisor*  
Department of Geography  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

The Annual Magazine “Landscape” by the Department of Geography is more than just a publication. It is a thoughtful reflection of how we see, interpret and live within our surroundings.

In today’s rapidly changing world marked by urban expansion, digital transformation, climate challenges and shifting cultural identities, the idea of a “Socio-Cultural Landscape” becomes even more relevant. It reminds us that landscapes are not merely physical spaces. They are living expressions of human experiences, traditions and evolving values. Every settlement, every practice and every cultural imprint tells a story of adaptation, resilience and continuity.

What makes this initiative truly meaningful is the way it brings students into this dialogue. By contributing to this magazine, students are not just documenting geography, they are engaging with it, questioning it and reimagining it in the context of contemporary realities.

I sincerely appreciate the dedication, creativity and collaborative spirit shown by the students who have worked tirelessly to shape this edition. Their efforts reflect not only academic engagement but also a deeper sensitivity towards the world we inhabit.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Department of Geography for providing such a vibrant academic culture and I wish the magazine “Landscape” continued success in inspiring thought, discussion, and awareness in the years to come.



**Dr. Ashwani Kumar Agnihotri**

*Co- Staff Advisor*

Department of Geography

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

It gives me great pleasure to present this year's edition of Landscape magazine, based on the theme "Socio-Cultural Landscape." This theme highlights the close relationship between people, culture, and the environment in which they live. A socio-cultural landscape is not just about physical landforms, but also about traditions, lifestyles, beliefs, and human activities that shape and give meaning to a place.

Across the world, every region reflects a unique identity created by its people. From rural settlements and urban spaces to festivals, languages, and architecture, all these elements together form the socio-cultural landscape. These landscapes are dynamic in nature and continuously evolve with time due to migration, globalization, technological changes, and economic development.

However, in the present era, socio-cultural landscapes are facing several challenges. Rapid urbanization, loss of traditional knowledge, cultural homogenization, and environmental degradation are affecting the uniqueness of many regions. It is important for us, especially as students of geography and social sciences, to understand these changes and work towards preserving cultural diversity while promoting sustainable development. I am proud to see that our students have actively engaged with this theme through their articles, research work, and creative contributions. Their efforts reflect a deep understanding of how human societies interact with their environment and how culture shapes spatial patterns.

I congratulate all contributors for their valuable work and thank the editorial team for their dedication in bringing out this edition. I hope this magazine will inspire readers to appreciate the richness of socio-cultural landscapes and encourage thoughtful action towards their preservation.

Wishing everyone success in their academic journey.



**Yash Sharma**

*Magazine Editor*

Department of Geography  
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

I am extremely delighted to have an opportunity to present the 19th volume of our Department Magazine “Landscape” 2025-26 on the theme of “socio - cultural landscape” As an editor of this Magazine I feel honoured to be a part of this - creativity, talent and spirit of our contributors.

Landscape magazine is not just the collection of research papers but it also presents the ideas and perspectives of the multiple writers. Each research paper represents the dedication, creativity and hard work of our contributors.

The world is continuously evolving with the focus on urbanization, globalization, and modernization. It brings development and new opportunities but it also raises concerns such as culture erosion. Through this magazine we aim to explore these dimensions by bringing it together with diverse perspectives, creative expressions, and thoughtful analyses. Each contribution reflects an effort to understand and appreciate the socio-cultural fabric that surrounds us.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all contributors and team members who made this edition possible. I hope this magazine encourages readers to observe, reflect, and engage more deeply with the socio-cultural landscapes around them.



**Jagriti Singh**  
*Magazine Co-Editor*  
Department of Geography  
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It gives me great happiness to present this edition of our college magazine based on the theme “Socio-Cultural Landscape.” This theme helps us to understand how people, their cultures, and their surroundings are closely connected. Every place we see, whether a busy city or a small village, has its own story shaped by the people who live there.

A socio-cultural landscape is not just about land or location, but about people and their way of life. It includes traditions, languages, festivals, and daily practices that make each place unique. Through this magazine, we have tried to show how society and culture influence the spaces around us, and how these spaces, in turn, shape our lives.

I would like to sincerely thank our editorial team and all the contributors who worked hard to make this magazine possible. Your creativity and efforts are clearly reflected in every page. I am also thankful to our readers; your interest and support encourage us to keep learning and sharing more.

I hope this edition helps you see the world around you in a new way—not just as places, but as living spaces full of culture, meaning, and human connection. Wishing you a pleasant and thoughtful reading experience!



## **Vishal Narware**

*Magazine Designer*

Department of Geography  
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Designing Landscape, the annual research magazine of the Geography Department, has been an enriching and insightful journey. This magazine is not just a collection of academic work, but a visual narrative that reflects the depth, diversity, and dynamism of geographical thought.

While working on the design, my aim was to create a layout that complements the intellectual richness of the content balancing clarity with creativity. Every element, from typography to color palette and imagery, has been thoughtfully curated to enhance readability while maintaining an engaging visual identity. The design draws inspiration from the very essence of geography patterns, layers, and interconnected spaces.

I have strived to ensure that each page not only informs but also invites the reader to explore, much like geography itself. This magazine stands as a collaborative effort, and I am grateful to the contributors, editors, and the department for their support and trust in my creative vision.

I hope Landscape offers you both knowledge and an enjoyable reading experience.

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## ANNUAL REPORT

### The Department of Geography Shaheed Bhagat Singh College University of Delhi

#### Event organised by Department of Geography

##### VASUNDHARA 2025

The Department of Geography, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College organised its annual fest “Vasundhara 2025”, bringing together a blend of academic, cultural, and creative activities for students. The fest provided a vibrant platform for participants to express their ideas, talents, and perspectives through a variety of engaging competitions.

The major events organised during Vasundhara 2025 were:

**Thought across the Meridian – Youth Parliament:** A platform where students discussed and debated important socio-political issues, reflecting parliamentary proceedings and encouraging critical thinking.

**Saptaswar – Music Competition:** A musical event that showcased the singing talents of participants, creating an energetic and entertaining atmosphere.

**Darpan-e-Dastaan – Reel-making Competition:** A creative competition where students expressed stories and ideas through short video reels, blending creativity with meaningful themes.

**Echoes of Eloquence – Extempore Competition:** An event that tested participants’ speaking skills, confidence, and ability to think and present ideas instantly on given topics.

Vasundhara 2025 turned out to be a lively and enriching experience, encouraging participation, creativity, and intellectual engagement among students.



##### FAREWELL 2025

The Department of Geography bid a heartfelt farewell to the final year students, celebrating their journey and achievements during their time in the department. The farewell event was filled with emotions, memories, and moments of appreciation as students and faculty gathered together to honour the graduating batch.

The program included speeches, cultural performances, and fun activities that reflected the strong bond shared within the department. Seniors shared their experiences and memories of college life, while juniors expressed their gratitude and best wishes for their future. The atmosphere was a mix of joy and nostalgia as everyone looked back at the wonderful moments spent together.

The farewell served as a reminder of the friendships, lessons, and experiences that shaped the students during their academic journey. As the final year students move forward to new opportunities and challenges, the department wishes them success, happiness, and a bright future ahead.



#### TARKASH – HINDI DEBATE COMPETITION

The **Geography Association of the Department of Geography, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College** organised a Hindi Debate Competition titled “**Tarkash**” on **23rd September 2025**. The competition was based on the thought-provoking topic “**क्या आपदाएँ प्राकृतिक होती हैं या मानवीय गलतियों से जन्म लेती हैं?**” which encouraged students to critically reflect on the causes and impacts of disasters.

Students enthusiastically participated in the debate and presented their views with confidence and clarity. Some speakers argued that disasters are largely natural events caused by forces of nature such as earthquakes, floods, and cyclones, while others highlighted how human activities like deforestation, unplanned urbanisation, and environmental degradation can intensify or even trigger such disasters. The discussion created a lively and intellectually engaging atmosphere, allowing participants to present diverse perspectives on the issue.

The competition not only strengthened the students’ ability to express their ideas effectively in Hindi but also encouraged them to think deeply about the relationship between human activities and environmental challenges. Overall, Tarkash proved to be a meaningful academic activity that promoted critical thinking, awareness, and active participation among students.



## TREE CENSUS CAMPAIGN

The Department of Geography of Shaheed Bhagat Singh College organised a Tree Census Campaign within the college campus as part of its commitment to environmental awareness and sustainable practices. The campaign aimed to document and understand the variety of trees present in the campus while encouraging students to engage closely with their natural surroundings.

Students from the Geography Department and the Geography Association actively participated in the activity by identifying and recording different trees found across the campus. They noted important details such as the name of the tree, its scientific classification, and other basic information related to it. As part of the initiative, QR codes containing these details were also prepared and placed on selected trees so that anyone on campus could easily access information about them by simply scanning the code.

This initiative not only helped students learn more about the plant diversity present in their surroundings but also promoted awareness about the importance of conserving green spaces. The Tree Census Campaign proved to be an informative and engaging activity, encouraging students to observe, learn, and appreciate the ecological richness of the college campus.



## FRESHERS' PARTY 2025

The Department of Geography warmly welcomed the new batch of students with a lively Freshers' Party held on 14th October 2025. The event was organised to create a friendly and comfortable environment for the newcomers and to help them feel a part of the department from the very beginning. It was an occasion filled with excitement, laughter, and enthusiasm as students gathered to celebrate the start of a new academic journey.

The program included a variety of fun activities, performances, and interactive sessions that allowed the freshers to introduce themselves and showcase their talents. Seniors also took part in the celebrations, making the atmosphere even more enjoyable and encouraging a sense of bonding between different batches. Music, games, and cultural performances added to the vibrant spirit of the event.

The Freshers' Party was not only a celebration but also an opportunity for the new students to connect with their seniors and faculty members. It marked the beginning of many friendships and memorable experiences that will stay with them throughout their college life.



### FIELD VISIT TO HIMACHAL PRADESH

The Department of Geography organised an academic field visit to Himachal Pradesh, providing students with an opportunity to explore and understand the physical and cultural landscape of the region. The trip was designed to give practical exposure beyond the classroom and to help students connect theoretical knowledge with real-world observations.

During the visit, students observed the diverse topography of the Himalayan region, including mountains, valleys, and river systems. They studied various geographical features such as slope patterns, vegetation, and settlement structures, gaining a deeper understanding of how natural conditions influence human life in hilly areas. The field visit also allowed students to interact with local communities and learn about their lifestyle, culture, and adaptation to the mountainous environment.

Apart from the academic learning, the trip was also filled with moments of enjoyment and bonding among students. The scenic beauty of Himachal Pradesh, along with shared experiences during travel and exploration, made the visit both memorable and enriching. The guidance of faculty members throughout the trip helped students better understand the significance of field-based learning in geography.

Overall, the field visit to Himachal Pradesh proved to be an insightful and engaging experience, combining education, exploration, and enjoyment, and leaving students with valuable knowledge and lasting memories.



## NO PLASTIC WEEK

The Department of Geography of Shaheed Bhagat Singh College organised a “No Plastic Week” within the college campus as part of its effort to promote environmental awareness and responsible practices among students. The initiative aimed to encourage everyone in the college community to reduce the use of single-use plastics and to adopt more sustainable alternatives in their daily lives.

During the week, students from the Geography Department actively participated in spreading awareness about the harmful effects of plastic on the environment. Through small discussions, interactions with fellow students, and simple awareness activities across the campus, they encouraged others to avoid plastic bags, bottles, and other disposable plastic items. The initiative also highlighted the importance of using eco-friendly alternatives such as cloth bags, reusable bottles, and sustainable materials.

The campaign received a positive response from students and members of the college community, who appreciated the efforts made by the department to address an important environmental issue. “No Plastic Week” not only helped in spreading awareness but also motivated students to think more consciously about their everyday choices and their impact on the environment. Overall, the initiative reflected the commitment of the Department of Geography towards promoting environmental responsibility and encouraging students to play an active role in protecting and preserving nature.



## FIELD VISIT TO SANJAY VAN AND JNU

On 22nd February 2026, the Department of Geography organised an educational field visit to Sanjay Van and the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). The visit was planned to give students an opportunity to explore the natural landscape of the Aravalli region while also experiencing the academic environment of one of the country’s leading universities. It turned out to be a memorable and enriching experience for everyone involved.

The day began with our visit to Sanjay Van, one of the green forest areas located within the Aravalli range in Delhi. As we walked through different parts of the forest, we observed the natural landscape, vegetation, and the rocky terrain that characterises the Aravalli hills. The visit helped us understand the ecological importance of such green spaces in an urban environment. Along with learning about the landscape and environment, the students also enjoyed spending time together in nature, making the experience both educational and enjoyable.

After exploring Sanjay Van, the group proceeded to the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Known for its vibrant academic atmosphere, the campus provided us with an opportunity to see the different departments and interact with scholars and researchers. During our visit, we explored the departments of Geography and History, where we met researchers and students who shared insights about their academic work and research areas. These interactions helped us gain a better understanding of higher studies and the research culture within the university.

The visit was made possible under the guidance of our respected faculty members, whose support and encouragement made the experience both informative and inspiring. Their explanations and discussions during the trip helped students connect classroom learning with real-world observations. Overall, the field visit was not only a learning experience but also a day filled with exploration, interaction, and memorable moments for all the students.



# SESSION 2025-2026



*First Year*



*Second Year*



*Third Year*

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# Disclaimer

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# Dark Tourism: An Ethical Perspective

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## Abstract

Dark tourism refers to the travel to places connected with death, suffering and tragic historical events. These help people learn about past events closely and remember those who suffered, but they also raise ethical concerns such as commercialization, misrepresentation, and lack of respect for those who were affected. This paper studies dark tourism from a geographical and ethical perspective by using examples like Auschwitz, Chernobyl, and Tuol Sleng. Based on a review of existing literature, it explores why people visit such places and ethical tensions. The paper highlights the need for respectful practices, authenticity, and community involvement in managing dark tourism sites.

**Keywords:** Dark Tourism, Ethics, Commemoration, Commercialization, Heritage Sites

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## 1. Introduction

Imagine standing in the remains of a city frozen in time—Chernobyl, where radiation still lingers in the air, or walking through the corridors of Auschwitz, where echoes of the past whisper tragic tales. What draws people to places of such sorrow and devastation? Is it curiosity, a sense of historical duty, or something more unsettling? This controversial phenomenon, known as dark tourism, raises important ethical questions about the fine line between education and exploitation. Dark tourism refers to visiting the sites associated with death, suffering and tragic historical events. Such sites include war memorials, concentration camps, disaster areas and former prisons. These places are visited by visitors who are interested in history, reflect on past events, or pay respect to the victims. But on the other hand, dark tourism also raises ethical concerns — it may lead to commercialization of human suffering. This paper examines dark tourism from an ethical geographical perspective.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and extensive review of secondary sources. Academic literature on dark tourism, heritage studies, ethics and tourism geography forms the foundation of the paper.

Scholarly works by Lennon and Foley, Seaton, and Stone are complemented by case-based examples from historically significant dark tourism sites.

## 3. Dark Tourism

Dark tourism refers to the act of travelling to sites that are associated with death, suffering, tragedy, or other dark aspects of human history. These locations often have historical significance due to events such as natural disasters, accidents, acts of violence, war, or genocide. Some sites, such as haunted locations or places linked to serial killers, attract visitors due to their macabre reputation. People engage in dark tourism for various reasons, including curiosity, a desire for understanding or reflection, a fascination with the macabre, or to pay respects to those who have suffered or died at these locations.

Moreover, media and social platforms have increased fascination. The increasing number of YouTube videos, documentaries, and Instagram posts featuring these destinations has fueled interest, sometimes blurring the lines between remembrance and spectacle. The question remains — does dark tourism foster genuine historical awareness, or is it simply disaster voyeurism?

### 3.1 Ethical Concerns: Commemoration or Commercialization?

The ethics of dark tourism are complex. While many argue that visiting these sites honors the victims and ensures that history is not forgotten, others say that such tourism risks turning suffering into a commercial enterprise.

#### Key Ethical Considerations

- **Respect for Victims and Survivors:** Visitors must approach these sites with reverence and acknowledge the experiences of those affected by the tragedies. For instance, the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin encourages quiet reflection rather than any other actions.
- **Balancing Education and Sensationalism:** Dark tourism should prioritize learning and reflection over entertainment. The controversy surrounding guided Jack the Ripper tours in London highlights how historical tragedies can sometimes be packaged as thrill-seeking experiences.
- **Preservation vs. Commercialization:** While funding is needed to maintain these sites, excessive commercialization can undermine their significance. For example, themed merchandise at former concentration camps has sparked debates on appropriateness.
- **Empowerment vs. Retraumatization:** For communities impacted by historical tragedies, constant tourist attention can either empower them through economic benefits or retraumatize them by forcing them to revisit painful memories. In Cambodia, survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime have expressed mixed feelings about tourists visiting sites like the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.
- **Authenticity and Representation:** The narratives presented at these sites must remain historically accurate and avoid distorting or glorifying events. The controversy over certain dramatized reenactments at Civil War battlefields in the U.S. exemplifies this dilemma.

- Community Involvement and Consent: Local communities should have a say in how these sites are managed and presented to visitors. In places like Rwanda, genocide memorials are run with strong local involvement to ensure narratives remain respectful and educational.

### 3.2 Types of Dark Tourism

1. Historical Sites of Tragedy: These are locations where tragedies have occurred in the past, including battlefields, genocide memorials, concentration camps, and sites of natural disasters. Example: Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland), Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Japan), Pompeii (Italy).



*Figure 1: The gatehouse at the former German Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz II (Birkenau) (Source: The Hindu)*

2. Prison Tourism: Some people visit former prisons like Alcatraz Island (USA) and Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (Cambodia) which offer insights into human suffering and historical injustices.



*Figure 2: Prison Tourism (AI Generated Image)*

3. Disaster Tourism: Some find it interesting to visit places associated with man-made or natural disasters. Places like Chernobyl, Ukraine, attract visitors interested in nuclear history and environmental consequences.



*Figure 3: Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (Source: The Hindu)*

4. Graveyard Tourism: Many people want to visit cemeteries of historical or cultural significance like Pere Lachaise Cemetery (France) and Arlington National Cemetery (USA) to understand cultural and historical significance of these sites.



*Figure 4: Arlington National Cemetery (Source: trolleytours.com)*

5. Dark Cultural Events: Traditions such as Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Mexico celebrate and honor the deceased.



*Figure 5: An altar as part of the preparations ahead the Day of the Dead in Mexico City on Sunday. (Source: Getty Images)*

6. Murder and Crime Tourism: Tours like Jack the Ripper Tours in London explore infamous crime scenes.



*Figure 6: Jack the Ripper Tour, London (Source: tripadvisor.com)*

These types of dark tourism show how closely they are connected to death and how sensitive they are ethically. Genocide memorials require serious and respectful behavior, while cultural death related festivals show how societies accept and remember death in different ways. From the point

of view of geography, dark tourism sites are also spaces where history and memory are shaped by tourists, authorities, and local communities.

#### **4. Responsible Dark Tourism Practices**

To ensure ethical engagement with dark tourism sites, travelers should observe the following practices:

- **Educate Oneself:** One should educate himself or herself before visiting such sites as they are often related to sensitive emotions of the victims. Scholars argue that responsible dark tourism should prioritize education, cultural sensitivity and emotional awareness.
- **Respect local customs and traditions:** When visiting dark tourism religious sites, one should dress appropriately and adhere to visitor guidelines.
- **Avoid disruptive behavior,** such as loud talking, joking, or inappropriate photography, as these actions can be deeply offensive.
- **Be mindful of personal boundaries,** refraining from intrusive questions or taking photos without consent.
- **Reflect and contemplate the historical significance and emotional weight of the place,** allowing space for empathy and understanding.
- **Support local communities by purchasing local vendors,** patronizing businesses run by survivors or descendants and donating to preservation efforts.
- **Engage responsibly on social media,** avoiding sensationalism or trivializing tragic events. One should avoid inappropriate selfies at such sites.
- **Continue learning and advocating for historical awareness and ethical tourism practices,** using visits as a starting point for broader education and engagement.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Dark tourism navigates a delicate path between commemoration and commercialization. When we approach this with care and reverence, it can preserve historical truth, deepen empathy, and serve as a reminder of humanity's darkest moments. But on the other hand, if this is sensationalized for entertainment or profit, it often trivializes the suffering of those who lived through these events.

The ongoing war in Ukraine has led to a surge in dark tourism with visitors wanting to witness the devastation first-hand. Some say that this is a way of recording history and aiding struggling communities, while some criticize it for turning war zones into tourist destinations. Some see it as a financial lifeline while others see it as 'blood money'.

At the end of the day, the morality of dark tourism is not solely determined by the destinations themselves, but rather by the way visitors engage with them. As a responsible visitor, it is our duty to approach these sites with empathy, educate ourselves on their significance, and ensure that our presence contributes to remembrance rather than exploitation.

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# Socio-Cultural Challenges and Transformation in Contemporary India

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## Abstract

The socio-cultural landscape of contemporary India is shaped by its deep-seated inequalities that manifest across economic, gender, and digital dimensions. Despite significant progress in economic growth, educational expansion, and technological advancement, disparities continue to delay the realization of inclusive development and social cohesion. This paper investigates the interconnectedness of socio-economic inequality, gender disparity, and draws conclusions from quantitative datasets such as the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), and qualitative insights obtained through literature review and semi structured interviews. The study examines how these structural inequalities reinforce each other, evaluates existing policy provisions, and proposes solution-oriented recommendations focusing on inclusive education, gender empowerment, and digital accessibility.

**Keywords:** Socio-Cultural Challenges, class disparities, gender inequality, government policies, education

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## 1. Introduction

India is a nation defined by its unparalleled plurality of languages, religions and social structures which is simultaneously experiencing rapid economic and technological advancement but also suffers from profound socio-cultural turbulence. As suggested by NFHS-5, there is a persistent and substantial digital gender gap in India, despite improvements in overall mobile ownership, highlighting the uneven distribution, particularly among women in rural areas. While celebrating democratic resilience and technological breakthrough, the country clashes with consistent contradictions arising from historical hierarchies and modern pressures which act as barriers in the country's development.

This paper argues that core socio-cultural challenges such as socio-economic inequality, education, pervasive gender disparity regarding technological means, and sustainable development of the citizens require renewed emphasis on policies, investment in education, and a renewed commitment to inclusive constitutional values.

## 2. Study Area

This study is situated in the Indian context, located north of the equator between 8°4' north to 37°6' north latitude and 68°7' east to 97°25' east longitude, with a total area of 32,87,263 sq. km.,

measuring 3,214 km (about 1997.09 mi) from north to south and 2,933 km (about 1822.48 mi) from east to west. The sheer size and diversity across this expanse necessitate this study, as the identified socio-cultural challenges are deeply ingrained with the country's heterogeneous religious, linguistic, and socio-economic landscape. The study area encompasses educational access and participation; gender disparity in the context of technological advancement; and socio-economic inequality.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

#### ***3.1 Core Objectives***

- To analyze the interconnectedness of socio-economic inequality and gender disparity in contemporary India, identifying how one reinforces another.
- To examine the barriers created by gender, caste, class, and economic disparities in access to education and technological advancement.
- To assess the implication of these disparities on educational outcomes, technological participation, and inclusive development in India.

#### ***3.2 Policy and Solution-Oriented Objectives***

- To examine the effectiveness of existing government policies and constitutional provisions in mitigating socio-cultural turbulence.
- To propose practical and evidence-based policy recommendations focused on improving gender equity in education and technological advancement.

### **4. Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach which integrates both qualitative and quantitative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender disparity, technological access, and socio-economic inequality in the Indian context.

#### ***4.1 Research Design***

The research is an empirical and descriptive study which relies primarily on secondary data sources. Quantitative data is used to identify patterns. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of structural factors influencing gender outcomes.

#### ***4.2 Data Collection***

Secondary data has been sourced from nationally recognized databases, including the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) to analyze income, employment, and consumption disparities; the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019–21 to assess key gender indicators such as education, health and autonomy; and Census 2011 to provide demographic and educational background data. Primary qualitative data includes structured interviews with social scientists, policy makers and NGO workers; literature review including works by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and contemporary policy studies; and statements of various social workers and activists.

## 5. Literature Review

The theoretical foundation for this research rests on the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen (1999) and further expanded by Martha Nussbaum (2000), which views inequality as the deprivation of capabilities and freedom to lead the lives people value rather than merely the absence of resources. In India's context, this perspective emphasizes that development must go beyond economic growth to ensure equitable access to education, healthcare, technological resources, and opportunities for social participation.

Studies by Deshpande (2019) and Kabeer (2021) emphasize that gender in India persists due to structural patriarchy embedded in labour markets and household norms. The UNDP Human Development Report (2023) ranks India 108th out of 193 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII). Contemporary research also highlights the digital divide as a new dimension of inequality. According to TRAI (2025), while over 110% penetration of urban households has been achieved, only 45% of rural households have internet access. This divide is even more pronounced among women, marginalized castes, and low-income groups.

## 6. Quantitative Analysis

### 6.1 Socio-Economic Inequality

The NSSO data underscores persistent income disparities across social groups. The average monthly per capita expenditure for the top 10% of urban households is nearly 12 times that of the bottom 10%. Caste-based disparities continue, with Scheduled Castes and Tribes reporting lower literacy and employment rates. Despite the rise in overall literacy from 64% in 2001 to 77% in 2021, the education gap between upper and lower castes remains above 20 percentage points (NSSO, 2022).

### 6.2 Gender Disparities

Key gender disparity indicators show significant gaps across multiple dimensions. Literacy rate stands at 84.7% for men versus 70.3% for women (NSSO, 2022). Workforce participation is 76.3% for men versus 23.3% for women (PLFS, 2023). Internet usage is 85% for men versus 64% for women (NFHS-5). Access to bank accounts is 86% for men versus 78.6% for women (NFHS-5). These figures demonstrate that gender disparities remain pervasive across education, employment, and digital access.

## 7. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative component provides a greater insight into how individuals experience inequality in daily life. Rural women in Rajasthan reported that although government schemes promote digital literacy, patriarchal control over technology restricts participation. Urban youth in Delhi NCR expressed frustration over structural job inequalities, noting that access to technology does not guarantee employment due to systematic bias. Educators and social workers highlighted that digital initiatives often fail because they ignore local cultural realities and gender norms. Recurring themes included lack of awareness of welfare schemes, infrastructural limitations, and social hierarchies that inhibit equal participation.

## **8. Discussion**

### ***8.1 The Interconnected Web of Inequality***

The combined evidence confirms that inequality in India is multi-dimensional and intersectional. Socio-economic disparities amplify gender gaps, while the digital divide reproduces existing stratification. Economic deprivation in India has a direct impact on education and employment. Data from NSSO (2021) reveals that rural households spend nearly 3–4 times less on education than their urban counterparts. The NFHS-5 (2019–21) data shows that only 25.4% of women in rural India have 10 or more years of schooling compared to 43.7% of men. Limited education leads to low-income opportunities, which again restricts access to better resources, digital tools, and healthcare, further reinforcing multi-dimensional poverty.

### ***8.2 Impact on Social Cohesion***

Social cohesion — the sense of belonging, mutual trust, and participation in community life — largely depends on equality and inclusion. When sections of society are systematically excluded from economic and educational spaces, it weakens their trust in the system and fosters alienation. The NFHS-5 data indicates that only 33.3% of women have ever used the internet compared to 57.1% of men. This exclusion from digital spaces means limited access to E-learning, E-Governance, Online jobs, and even basic awareness about health or financial services.

### ***8.3 Policy Gaps***

Despite the presence of many progressive policies and constitutional guarantees, there remains a gap between policy design and ground implementation. Policies often follow a top-down welfare approach where initiatives are launched centrally but fail to adapt to local realities. Digital literacy programs under the Digital India campaign may install computer centres in villages but without regular electricity, trained instructors, or awareness drives, their impact remains limited. Schemes addressing gender, education, digital literacy, or health often work in isolation rather than in coordination.

## **9. Policy Recommendations**

### ***9.1 Educational and Digital Literacy***

- Integrate ICT-based education in schools with a focus on gender parity.
- Establish rural digital training centers targeting women and youth.
- Promote digital safety and financial literacy modules in schools.

### ***9.2 Economic and Social Empowerment***

- Expand women's access to microfinance and entrepreneurship programmes.
- Encourage companies to hire people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Implement flexible and remote work policies.

### ***9.3 Governance and Accountability***

- Conduct gender and social audits of welfare schemes.
- Strengthen data transparency and local monitoring.

- Reinforce constitutional equality through public campaigns.

## 10. Conclusion

India's path toward inclusive development is hindered by intertwined challenges of inequality, gender disparity, and digital exclusion. Economic and technological progress has improved lives but also deepened social divisions. Bridging these gaps requires an integrated strategy that combines education, empowerment, and technological inclusion. True progress lies not only in economic growth but in ensuring every citizen — regardless of gender, caste, or class — has equal opportunity to participate in the country's social and digital future.

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# Socio-Cultural Marginality and Resilience among the Musahars of Bihar

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## Abstract

This study examines the socio-cultural landscape of the Musahar community in Bihar through an empirical analysis of historical exclusion, contemporary deprivation, and adaptive resilience. Using data from the Census of India (2011), National Family Health Survey-5, and the Bihar Caste Survey (2023), alongside qualitative insights from ethnographic and socio-legal studies, the paper analyses patterns of landlessness, livelihood insecurity, health and education outcomes, cultural practices, religious change, and political exclusion. The findings reveal that extreme marginality among Musahars is structurally produced through caste hierarchy, historical denial of land, and uneven policy implementation. At the same time, cultural traditions, subsistence strategies, and emerging religious and political assertions reflect forms of resilience. The paper argues that meaningful social inclusion requires integrated policy interventions linking land security, education, health access, and cultural recognition, rather than isolated welfare measures.

**Keywords:** Musahar, Bihar, socio-cultural landscape, caste, marginality, social inclusion

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## 1. Introduction

The Musahar community represents one of the most marginalized social groups in Bihar and in India more broadly. Classified as a Scheduled Caste, Musahars have historically occupied the lowest position within the caste hierarchy and have remained excluded from land ownership, stable livelihoods, and social dignity. The term "Musahar" is commonly associated with the consumption of rats, a subsistence practice adopted during periods of famine and agrarian scarcity. Over time, this survival strategy was transformed into a marker of stigma, reinforcing social exclusion and caste-based humiliation (Mukul, 1999).

Despite constitutional safeguards and targeted welfare schemes, Musahars continues to experience extreme deprivation. According to the Census of India (2011), Bihar is home to approximately 2.7 million Musahars. The Bihar Caste Survey (2023) further demonstrates that the community remains overwhelmingly landless, poorly educated, and economically insecure. These conditions are not residual but actively reproduced through historical processes, social relations, and policy structures.

This paper seeks to analyze the socio-cultural landscape of the Musahar community by integrating historical analysis with contemporary empirical data. It addresses three core research objectives.

First, it examines how historical processes of caste-based exclusion shape present-day social and economic conditions. Second, it documents cultural practices, livelihood strategies, and religious transformations as responses to structural marginality. Third, it evaluates policy outcomes and identifies pathways for inclusive planning.

The study is guided by the following research questions: How do caste, landlessness, and social exclusion intersect to shape Musahar livelihoods and life chances? In what ways do cultural practices and religious change reflect both constraint and resilience? How effectively do existing policies address the structural nature of Musahar marginality?

## **2. Methodology**

The study adopts a mixed-method approach based on secondary quantitative data and qualitative interpretive analysis. Quantitative data are drawn from the Census of India (2011), National Family Health Survey-5 (2019–21), and the Bihar Caste Survey (2023). These sources provide information on population size, literacy, land ownership, housing, health indicators, and access to basic services.

Qualitative insights are derived from published ethnographic research, socio-legal reviews, and field-based journalistic studies conducted between 2018 and 2025 in districts such as Gaya, Nalanda, Khagaria, and Araria. These studies include village-level observations and interviews with Musahar men and women, local activists, and social workers. While the author did not conduct primary fieldwork, triangulation of multiple field-based sources enhances analytical credibility.

The analytical framework combines socio-cultural analysis with political perspectives. Quantitative data identify structural patterns, while qualitative material contextualizes lived experience and institutional interaction.

## **3. Historical Background and the Production of Marginality**

The primary reasons for the Musahar community's exclusion are closely tied to agricultural systems and traditional landlord practices that have shaped Bihar's social and economic landscape over the years. During British rule, officials and writers often viewed Musahars negatively, labeling them "primitive" wanderers or even "criminal" groups whose lifestyles were seen as incompatible with the empire's notion of order (Mukul, 1999). These perspectives were not merely academic but served to reinforce unjust systems, such as land dispossession and forced labor, embedding social stigma that persisted after independence. The community's origins trace back to the forests of the Chota Nagpur hills, where migrations forced them onto the fertile plains of the Ganges in search of food. Once there, they became trapped in bonded labor under landlords, where high-caste landlords exploited them for low wages, relegating Musahars to the most degrading jobs, including trapping rats in fields, scavenging leftovers, and basic agricultural work.

British land revenue policies, such as the Permanent Settlement of 1793, exacerbated this cycle, codifying caste hierarchies into law and relegating Musahars to the margins of agricultural wealth. After independence, there were hopes for reform with initiatives such as the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1950, which aimed to dismantle existing landholding structures and grant ownership to workers. However, for Musahars, these promises delivered limited benefits, as the implementation

was riddled with corruption, land grabs by the affluent, and bureaucratic delays. The Socio Economic and Caste Census (2011) reveals the lasting impact of these failures; 97 percent of Musahar households still reside in fragile mud and straw homes, vulnerable to the elements and cut off from modern housing conditions. Additionally, 92 percent of these households lack basic sanitation facilities like toilets, perpetuating cycles of illness and shame that further degrade their quality of life.

Supporting these observations, the Bihar Caste Survey (2023) reinforces the dire situation of land ownership, showing that 88.5 percent of Musahars still do not own any land, with only 3 percent having even small plots for basic cultivation.

#### **4. Social Structure, Gender Relations, and Everyday Life**

Musahar settlements are typically located at the margins of villages, physically separated from dominant caste habitations. Access to common resources such as wells, temples, and community spaces remains restricted (Sahay, 2019). Social interaction with upper castes continues to be shaped by practices of untouchability, particularly in rural areas.

Gender relations within the community reflect layered vulnerability. Musahar women engage extensively in agricultural labour, brick kilns, and domestic work, often under insecure and exploitative conditions. NFHS-5 indicates that anaemia among Scheduled Caste women in Bihar exceeds 57 percent, with Musahar women facing even higher nutritional stress (IIPS, 2021). At the same time, women play a central role in household survival, childcare, and cultural transmission.

Alcohol consumption among men, often highlighted in external narratives, must be understood within the context of poverty, stress, and disrupted livelihoods. The prohibition policy in Bihar criminalized traditional brewing practices that once supplemented household incomes, further intensifying economic distress (Pokhrel, 2020).

#### **5. Cultural Practices and Subsistence Strategies**

Musahar cultural life is shaped by subsistence, memory, and adaptation. Ritual practices include the worship of local deities associated with fertility, protection, and survival. Seasonal festivals and oral traditions narrate experiences of migration, exploitation, and endurance.

Rat consumption, often sensationalized, historically functioned as a famine coping strategy rather than a cultural preference. Mukul (1999) argues that its symbolic association with backwardness reflects caste prejudice rather than internal cultural valuation. The persistence of this stigma illustrates how survival practices are transformed into tools of social exclusion.

#### **6. Religion and Religious Change**

The majority of Musahars identify as Hindu, practicing a syncretic form of popular Hinduism combined with animistic traditions. Access to mainstream religious spaces, however, has historically been limited by caste barriers.

In recent years, conversion to Christianity has emerged among some Musahar households. Sociolegal studies note that conversion is motivated by the search for dignity, social equality, and access to education and health support (Socio Legal Review of Marginalised Sections, n.d.). Converts often describe Christianity as offering an inclusive moral community.

This shift has also generated social tensions, including ostracism and pressure to reconvert.

Religious change thus reflects both aspiration and contestation within an unequal social order.

## 7. Education, Health, and Social Infrastructure

Educational deprivation remains acute. Census 2011 recorded Musahar literacy below 10 percent. The Bihar Caste Survey (2023) shows improvement to approximately 20 percent, still far below the state average. Dropout rates remain high due to poverty, discrimination, and seasonal migration.

Health indicators reveal severe deprivation. NFHS-5 reports high levels of child stunting, maternal anaemia, and limited access to institutional healthcare. Housing conditions are predominantly kutcha, with poor access to drinking water and sanitation.

Indicator	Musahars	Bihar Average	Source
Literacy rate	19.7%	70.9%	Bihar Caste Survey 2023
Landless households	94%	42%	Census of India 2011
Kutcha housing	93%	56%	NFHS-5
Female anaemia	65%	57%	NFHS-5

*Table 1: Comparative Socio-Economic Indicators*

## 8. Inequality and Social Inclusion

Social inequality in Bihar remains deeply entrenched, with Musahars at the center of this issue. Poverty metrics starkly illustrate the uneven development; the Bihar Caste Survey (2023) shows that 98 percent of Musahars live below the poverty line, compared to only 28 percent among high castes. This gap stems from landlessness, which undermines self-reliance in farming, and educational deficiencies that restrict access to skilled jobs (Government of Bihar, 2023). These intersecting challenges create a vicious cycle where financial constraints lead to school abandonment, which in turn leads to job instability.

State-run initiatives like the Mahadalit Vikas Mission, launched in 2007 to uplift the most marginalized Dalit sub-groups, have seen mixed results. For instance, land title distribution has reached only 27 percent of Musahar households, and women's participation in group activities is limited to 18 percent, impacted by knowledge gaps and elite interference (Government of Bihar, 2021). Political representation has seen some improvement, notably during Jitan Ram Manjhi's tenure as Chief Minister in 2014 — being a Musahar himself — but actual influence remains limited. Singh (2020) highlights the enduring dominance of entrenched elites in local governance, which marginalizes Dalit voices through token representation and electoral manipulation. Genuine inclusion, therefore, requires more than superficial actions; it necessitates dismantling power

imbalances through transparency in development schemes, capacity-building for grassroots leaders, and creating avenues for Musahar voices to resonate within political spheres.

### **9. Way Forward: Linking Evidence to Policy**

Findings from this study suggest the need for integrated interventions. Landlessness remains the central axis of deprivation, indicating the importance of secure homestead rights. Educational exclusion calls for residential schooling, scholarships, and community-based teachers. Health vulnerabilities require mobile clinics and nutrition-focused outreach.

Simplified documentation procedures are essential to prevent political exclusion. Cultural recognition and participation must accompany economic reforms to ensure dignity and inclusion.

### **10. Limitations of the Study**

The study relies on secondary data and published field-based research. While this allows broad coverage, it limits real-time local specificity. The absence of primary fieldwork is a constraint, mitigated by triangulating multiple credible sources.

### **11. Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates that Musahar marginality is structurally produced through historical land exclusion, caste hierarchy, and uneven policy implementation. At the same time, cultural practices, subsistence strategies, and religious change reflect resilience and agency. Addressing Musahar exclusion requires moving beyond welfare toward structural justice rooted in land security, education, health, and cultural recognition. The study contributes to Dalit studies by foregrounding the socio-cultural dimensions of marginality and offering policy insights relevant to inclusive planning in Bihar.

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# Understanding Bihar: Socio-Economic Inequality, Gender Dimensions and Challenges of Social Inclusion and Cultural Preservation

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## Abstract

This research paper examines the challenges and prospects of social inclusion and cultural preservation in Bihar within the context of persistent socio-economic inequality, gender disparities, and institutional constraints. Drawing on secondary data from Census reports, NFHS5, government publications, scholarly literature, and reported interviews, the study analyses caste-based marginalization, gender inequality in education and health, and institutional limitations affecting inclusive development. The findings indicate that despite policy initiatives such as RKSK, ARSH, and educational scholarship schemes, Bihar continues to experience high rates of early marriage, low female literacy, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and restricted agency of adolescent girls. The study highlights the need for integrated, gender-sensitive, and community-driven policy interventions to ensure sustainable social inclusion and effective cultural preservation.

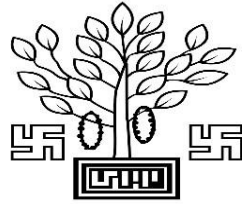
**Keywords:** Social Inclusion, Cultural Preservation, RKSKRashtriya Kishor and Swasthya Karyakram

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## 1. Introduction

Bihar has a strong historical significance. It is portrayed as a cradle of ancient civilization, home to the world's first residential university, "Nalanda" and the ancient city of Patliputra. The name "Bihar" is derived from "Vihara" (monastery), reflecting its deep Buddhist roots and spiritual importance. Bihar has a great cultural richness that includes traditional art forms, festivals, and architectural marvels that define Bihar's unique identity. Bihar's official symbols are the Peepal tree (state tree), Marigold (state flower), House Sparrow (state bird), and Gaur (Indian Bison) as the state animal, which features on the state emblem alongside the sacred Bodhi Tree.

Bihar has historically been a center of learning, culture, and spirituality, yet it remains one of India's socio-economically lagging states. While its cultural heritage is represented by sites such as Nalanda and Bodh Gaya and traditions like Mithila art which is globally recognized, large sections of the population continue to face marginalization. This paper addresses the central research problem of how socio-economic inequality and gendered social structures constrain social inclusion and cultural preservation in contemporary Bihar. The objectives are to examine disparities in health and education, assess gender norms and institutional challenges, and evaluate existing policy frameworks.



*Fig. 1 Symbol of Bihar*



*Fig. 2 Symbols of Bihar*



*Fig. 3: Bodh Gaya*

## **2. Study Area**

This research focuses on the state of Bihar, located in eastern India between latitude 24°20'10" N and 27°31'15" E. It is an entirely landlocked state sharing its borders with West Bengal in the east, Uttar Pradesh in the west, Jharkhand in the south, and Nepal in the north, covering approximately 94,163 square kilometres (about the area of Ohio).

Bihar is one of India's most populous states, with a projected population of 127 million in 2023, representing 9.1% of India's total, and a high population density of 1,106 people per square kilometer, making it the third most highly populated state. The state is predominantly rural, with a

rural population of 95,717,712 (88.7%), making it one of India's highest rural populations. Bihar experiences a humid sub-tropical climate with significant monsoon rainfall. Major rivers like the Ganges traverse its landscape, contributing to fertile plains that support agriculture.

The population of Bihar is diverse, with Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) at 36.01%, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) at 27.12%, Scheduled Castes (SCs) at 19.65%, Scheduled Tribes (STs) at 1.68%, and General Category at 15.38%. Hindi and Urdu are official languages, but people also speak Angika, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Maithili, and Bajjika. Bihar is honoured to be the birthplace of key leaders such as Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavir, Guru Gobind Singh, and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, India's first President.



Fig.4 District of Bihar

### 3. Materials and Methods

The methodology of this research is primarily qualitative, drawing upon secondary data sources including government reports (such as Bihar Economic Survey), academic journals, books, and recent media coverage. Statistical data on social indicators, such as literacy rates, gender parity, and caste distribution, were sourced from the Census of India (2011) and National Sample Survey reports. Inputs from experts and practitioners were gathered through interviews published in credible news outlets and journals. For cultural preservation, data on festivals, crafts, and institutional efforts were compiled from government cultural departments, UNESCO reports, and NGO documentation. All references adhere to the APA format for clarity and reproducibility.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Bihar is the third most populous state in India, and it ranks low on many key health indices and high on gender and social inequalities (Census of India, n.d.). There are notable shortages of health facilities (MOHFW, 2019) and senior secondary and secondary schools (MOSPI, n.d.). Bihar has the lowest literacy rate of women of all states (MOHFW, 2021). In 2017, Engender Health

launched the TARUNYA project in the Sitamarhi district of Bihar with support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

#### ***4.1 Access to Healthcare Services and Facilities***

The proportion of women aged 15 to 24 who use hygienic methods of menstrual protection is lowest in Bihar, at 59% (MOHFW, 2021). Girls across all age groups mentioned problems faced during menstruation, weakness, fatigue, and an inability to focus on studies. Girls from marginalized villages reported that they cannot use sanitary pads regularly due to the cost and procure them at subsidized rates from local public health centers when available.

Bihar has the second highest proportion of underweight children under the age of five and similarly ranks high in anaemia cases, with 66% of girls and 35% of boys aged 15 to 19 being anaemic (MOHFW, 2021). There is an overall shortage of 11,388 (53%) sub-centers, 1,649 (46%) primary health centers, and 737 (83%) community health centers in Bihar (MOHFW, 2019). In Sitamarhi, there are only 91 sub-centers and 18 primary health centers for a rural population of 3,233,076 (about the population of Arkansas), and residents must travel more than 10 kilometres to access care with no transportation amenities available.

#### ***4.2 Access to Education Facilities, Resources, and Opportunities for Growth***

Bihar has the lowest literacy rate of women (58% overall and 30% among scheduled caste women) and the highest proportion of women aged 20 to 24 who were married before the age of 18 (41%) (MOHFW, 2021). The gender gap for completion of secondary school is similarly concerning, with only 29% of women in Bihar having completed 10 or more years of education compared to 43% of men.

Adolescent girls face a variety of challenges in pursuing their educational goals. Parents typically do not allow girls to pursue studies outside their village due to fears of harassment. Private tuition and coaching centres are only accessible to boys due to cost and parents' reluctance to invest in girls' education. Girls are burdened with household chores that prevent them from studying. Bihar has a massive shortage of senior secondary and secondary schools; data from the 2015–16 school year showed a total 84,236 schools, including only approximately 3,900 senior secondary and 3,700 secondary schools (MOSPI, n.d.).

The government of Bihar introduced an initiative in 2006 to support girls in continuing their studies by providing bicycles to grade nine girls. However, adolescent girls noted that bicycles are usually shared among siblings, and boys tend to use them more as they can attend schools outside the village.

#### ***4.3 Practices, Roles, and Participation***

Most girls reported engaging in household chores and caring for younger siblings. Adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 also reported engaging in livelihood activities at home such as sewing, embroidery, and making floral strands and bouquets. In contrast, boys reported studying at home, playing outside with peers, and engaging in outdoor livelihood activities such as farming and livestock work. In poor households, daughters carry the entire burden of household chores as both parents work outside the home. School closures related to COVID-19 further reinforced this gender differentiated burdens.

#### ***4.4 Knowledge, Beliefs, and Perceptions***

In Bihar, 11% of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have a baby or are pregnant, highlighting an unmet need for SRHR information and services (MOHFW, 2021). Lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of SRHR-related information among adolescents and their parents hinders uptake of ARSH services. Parents noted that SRHR is a taboo topic and should not be discussed with adolescents. Teachers stated that they do not discuss these topics as they are not trained in this area.

#### ***4.5 Legal Rights and Status***

The legal age for marriage in India is 18 for girls and 21 for boys. Yet, Bihar has the highest proportion of women (41%) aged 20 to 24 who were married before the age of 18 (MOHFW, 2021). More than half of married persons (64% of boys and 68% of girls) met their spouses for the first time on their wedding day (IIPS and Population Council, 2010). Adolescent girls reported that those with many siblings are often married earlier. Despite being illegal, the dowry system remains prevalent in rural areas of Bihar. Despite laws to prevent early marriages, societal pressures still lead to early marriage.

### **5. Conclusion**

Based on the findings detailed in this paper, several key constraints to uptake of adolescent reproductive and sexual health in Bihar have been identified, including: limited access to and control over available services, skewed expectations and biased divisions of labor and responsibilities, social norms related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and prevalence of early and forced marriage. Recommendations for improving health and development outcomes include improving agency among adolescent girls, preparing gender-inclusive and gender sensitive strategies, engaging with parents, and strengthening the peer education approach.

### **6. Limitations of the Study**

The present study is primarily based on secondary data sources, including government reports, surveys, and published academic literature. The absence of primary fieldwork and direct interviews limits the scope for micro-level and district-specific analysis. Variations in data quality, reporting periods, and availability of recent statistics pose challenges for uniform comparison.

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# Socio-Cultural Landscape of the Koch Tribe in North Bengal: Transformations and Continuities

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## Abstract

This research paper explores the socio-cultural life of the Koch Tribe in North Bengal, focusing on their traditions, festivals, language, and everyday practices that shape their identity. The Koch community has a long historical background, and many of their customs continue to play an important role in their social life. At the same time, the paper also looks at how education, migration, and modern economic changes are influencing their traditional ways of living. The study highlights both continuity and transformation within the community, showing how some practices are preserved, while others are slowly changing or being revived through cultural efforts. The study finds that while modernization and language shift have transformed everyday practices, core elements such as clan identity, folk traditions, and ritual life continue to sustain Koch cultural resilience.

**Keywords:** Rajbanshi language, Kamtapuri, North Bengal, Assam, geographic location, climate, linguistic features, transformation, continuity, cultural identity, declining number of speakers, language shift, modernization, preservation

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## 1. Introduction

In the green foothills of the Himalayas, where the Teesta River flows quietly through small villages and open fields, the Koch or Koch-Rajbanshi community has carried its traditions for generations. Their festivals, songs, and rituals — like the lively Kushan Gaan or the soft rhythm of madol drums — reflect a way of life deeply connected to nature and memory. Even today, these cultural practices form an important part of North Bengal's identity, especially in districts like Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. The Koch traces their origins to the 16th-century Koch kingdom founded by Biswa Singha. With roots in Tibeto-Burman and Dravidian groups, they were once nature-worshippers who lived close to forests, rivers, and shifting farmlands. Over time, interactions with different rulers and colonial forces shaped their social structure and led to the formation of several subgroups.

Understanding the Koch community today matters because their experiences reflect the broader struggles of many indigenous groups trying to protect their identity in a fast-changing world. Their language, oral stories, and folk performances face challenges, yet they continue to endure resilience. This study explores the socio-cultural landscape of the Koch people in North Bengal — how their history, traditions, and everyday experiences come together to shape who they are today.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the traditional socio-cultural practices of the Koch tribe in North Bengal.
- To analyze the impact of modernization, migration, and education on Koch cultural identity.
- To understand the processes of transformation, continuity, and cultural preservation within the community.

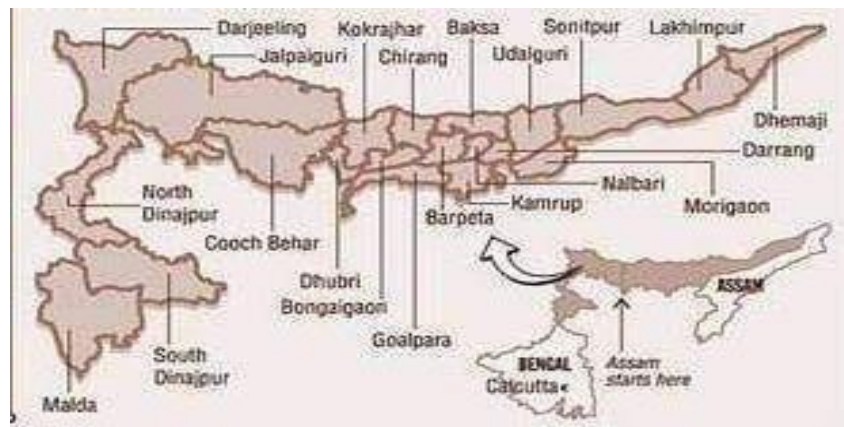
## 3. Methodology

The nature of this study is descriptive and analytical. Data sources include secondary data from books, journals, census reports, and regional studies, as well as limited qualitative observations from regional studies. Methods employed include literature review, map analysis, and thematic interpretation.

## 4. Study Area

### 4.1 Location

The study area lies in the northern part of West Bengal, mainly covering the districts of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, positioned in the Teesta–Brahmaputra valley. The area is bordered by the Tista and Karatoya rivers to the west, the Brahmaputra and Barnadi to the east, the Bhutan Duars to the north, and the southern extent reaches the plains around the Brahmaputra–Karatoya confluence.

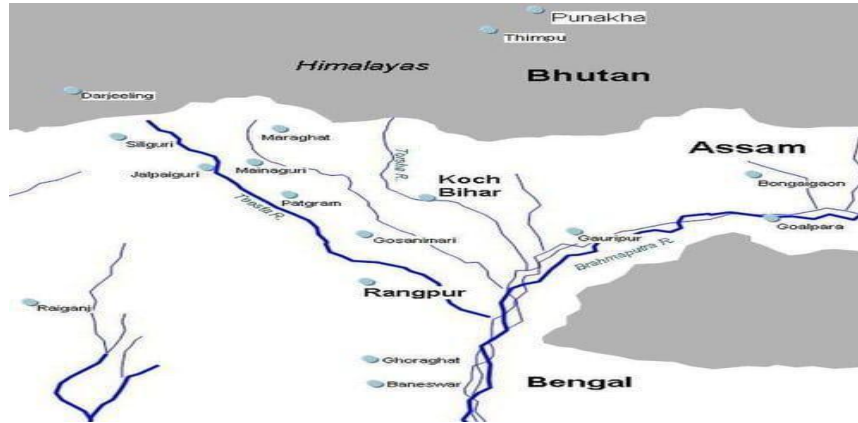


*Fig 1: Map of the region where the Koch tribe live {source: Wikipedia}*

In the present political map, this broader landscape spans across Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, parts of Darjeeling, as well as regions adjoining Assam (such as Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Goalpara, and Barpeta) and areas in Bangladesh (like Dinajpur and Rangpur). The terrain includes alluvial plains, foothills, river basins, and forest patches, shaped by continuous sediment deposition from Himalayan rivers.

## 4.2 Demographic Profile

The Koch (Rajbanshi) population primarily resides in rural and semi-urban areas of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Literacy levels have improved in recent decades, though economic dependence on agriculture and tea plantations remains high.



*Fig 2: overall map of the kamtapura kingdom {source: Wikipedia}*

Climatically, the region falls under the humid subtropical monsoon zone, receiving heavy rainfall during June–September due to its proximity to the Himalayas. This combination of fertile alluvial soil and monsoon-driven hydrology has made the region one of the most agriculturally productive parts of North Bengal.

## 4.3 Historical Background

The Koch are one of the oldest recorded communities of North Bengal and Eastern India. Their presence in the region goes back centuries, long before modern borders were formed. Early research suggests that the Koch belonged to a Tibeto-Burman group living around the Brahmaputra–Teesta–Karotoya region. They shifted from forest-based living to settled farming life between the 10th and 13th centuries. Clan-based organisation, ancestor worship, and spirit rituals were central to their early culture.

A major turning point in Koch history was the rise of the Kamata Kingdom in the 13th century, centered around present-day Cooch Behar. The kingdom grew strongest under Maharaja Nara Narayan (1555-1584) and his brother Chila Rai, whose rule expanded across North Bengal, Western Assam, parts of Meghalaya, and northern Bangladesh. The Koch rulers blended their indigenous traditions with emerging Hindu influences, leading to a mix of animistic beliefs with Vaishnavite practices, growth of the Kamtapuri/Rajbanshi language, development of agriculture and irrigation, and support for local art forms, festivals, and weaving traditions.



*Fig 3: Naranaryan seating on the throne, from the manuscript painting of Darrang Raj Vamsavali c.18th century.*

After the decline of the kingdom, the region became the Cooch Behar princely state under the British. Colonial policies brought major changes including the expansion of jute and rice trade, tea plantations bringing migrant workers, new land revenue systems affecting traditional land rights, and colonial writings that reshaped community identity and caste categories. Post-1947, Cooch Behar joined the Indian Union, and modern political boundaries influenced Koch society through the rise of caste-based politics, a shift from Kamtapuri/Rajbanshi to Bengali and Assamese due to schooling, growth of roads, markets, and small industries, and migration to cities and the Northeast for work.

#### ***4.4 Lifestyle and Culture***

The Koch Rajbongshi community has an oral tradition of agriculture, dance, music, medical practices, song, house construction, culture, and language. The tribe transfers knowledge from one generation to another. Music forms are an integral part of Koch-Rajbongshi culture. The Masan God (Masan Devta) is a deity worshipped by the Koch Rajbanshi community, seen as the guardian of cremation grounds and a protector against evil.



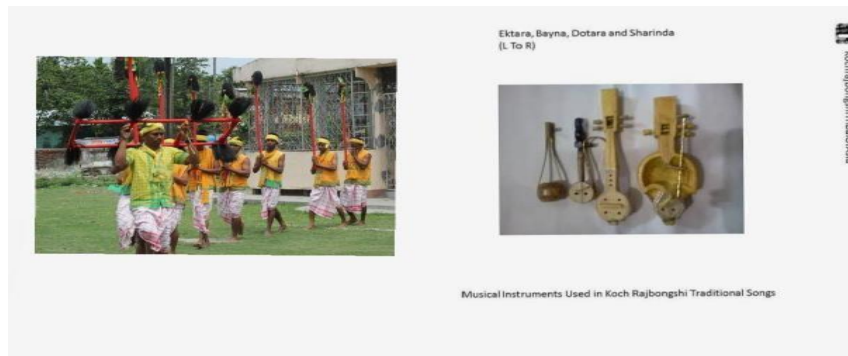
*Fig 4: Masan Devta*

Masan god" most commonly refers to Masan Devta, a deity worshipped by the Koch Rajbanshi community in North Bengal, India, who is seen as the guardian of cremation grounds and a protector against evil. The name is derived from the Bengali word for crematorium (smashan).

Worship of Masan is sometimes associated with healing, and ancient paintings of the deity were used for this purpose.

#### ***4.5 Dance forms and musical forms***

The primary dance form of the Koch tribe is **Kushan Gaan**, a folk drama based on Ramayana. Other Koch and Koch rajbongshi dances include **Goalini Nritya**, considered a popular folk dance and various other dances tied to agricultural and ritualistic purposes like preventing drought or warding off evil spirits, such as the Kolos **Noitto** or **Kolsa Nritya** and Hoko Dance



*Fig 5: Musical Instruments used in Koch Rajbongshi songs*

The main musical forms of Koch-Rajbongshi culture are **Bhawaiyya**, **Chatka**, **Chorchunni**, **Palatia**, **Lahankari**, **Tukkhya**, **Bishohora Pala** among many others. Various instruments are used for such performances, string instruments like **Dotora**, **Sarindra** and **Bena**, double-membrane instruments like Tasi, Dhak, Khol, Desi **Dhol** and **Mridanga**, gongs and bells like **Kansi**, **Khartal** and wind instruments like **Sanai**, **Mukha bansi** and **Kupa bansi**.

The cultural descriptions presented here are based on secondary ethnographic studies, historical records, and region-specific sociological research.

The primary dance form of the Koch tribe is Kushan Gaan, a folk drama based on the Ramayana. Other Koch and Koch Rajbongshi dances include Goalini Nritya, considered a popular folk dance, and various other dances tied to agricultural and ritualistic purposes such as the Kolos Noitto or Kolsa Nritya and Hoko Dance. The main musical forms of Koch-Rajbongshi culture are Bhawaiyya, Chatka, Chorchunni, Palatia, Lahankari, Tukkhya, and Bishohora Pala, among many others. Various instruments are used including string instruments like Dotora, Sarindra and Bena; double-membrane instruments like Tasi, Dhak, Khol, Desi Dhol and Mridanga; gongs and bells like Kansi and Khartal; and wind instruments like Sanai, Mukha bansi and Kupa bansi.

#### ***4.6 Economy of North Bengal and the Koch Tribe Region***

The economy of North Bengal is mainly agrarian, and this strongly shapes the livelihoods of the Koch community. Most families depend on farming, growing crops such as rice, jute, mustard, maize, potatoes and seasonal vegetables. Small landholdings and share-cropping systems are still common, especially among low-income households. Tea plantations in the Dooars and Terai also provide important employment. Border proximity with Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal creates

additional livelihoods through small trade, transport, tourism and market-based work. Many youths also migrate to cities like Siliguri, Kolkata, Delhi, and Kerala for service jobs.

## 5. Transformation, Continuity and Preservation of Koch Tribe

### 5.1 Transformation

Modern education, migration, media, and economic changes have transformed everyday Koch life. One of the biggest shifts is in language use — the number of Kamtapuri/Rajbanshi speakers is steadily decreasing, as many families now use Bengali or Assamese in schools, workplaces, and official settings. Other changes include movement from traditional farming and weaving to teagarden work, government jobs, small businesses, and migration-based income; increasing construction of concrete houses and urban clothing styles; and growing preference for nuclear families and rising inter-caste marriages in semi-urban areas.

Proxy: Rajbhongshi (mother-tongue) speakers by district — North Bengal (Census 2011 proxies)

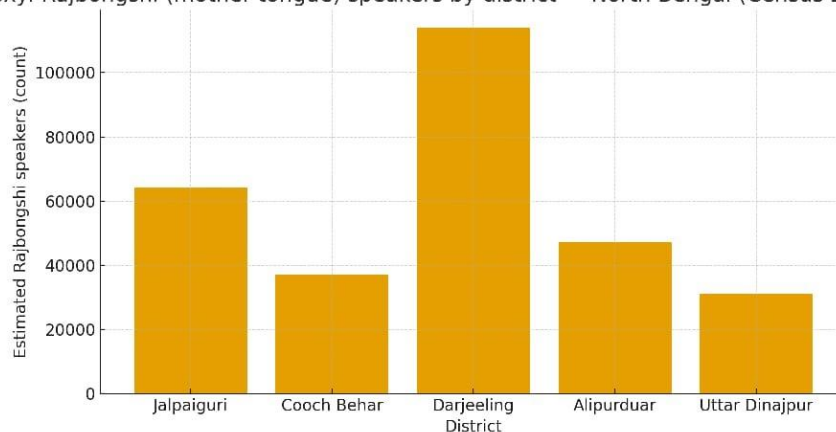


Fig 6: Rajbhongshi (Mother tongue) speakers by district – North Bengal (census 2011 proxies)

*This chart shows that the number of Rajbanshi (Kamtapuri) speakers varies across North Bengal, with the highest concentration in Darjeeling district and noticeably lower numbers in districts like Cooch Behar and Uttar Dinajpur, reflecting the overall decline and uneven distribution of mother tongue speakers in the region.*

*Other changes include:*

- Movement from traditional farming and weaving to tea-garden work, government jobs, small businesses, and migration-based income.
- Increasing construction of concrete houses, urban clothing styles, and digital technology shaping communication.
- Growing preference for nuclear families and rising inter-caste marriages in semi-urban areas.

These changes vary from village to town and from family to family.

### 5.2 Continuity

Despite change, several cultural elements remain strong. Clan identity (goshti/bangsha) still guides relationships, rituals, and social belonging. Agricultural festivals like Bhaichhar and Magh

Bihu/Uran continue to mark seasonal cycles. Food traditions — rice, dried fish, meat, bamboo shoots, homemade liquor — remain central to daily life. Folk music and dance forms such as Bhawaiya, Khirai, and Koch dance are still performed during festivals and family events. Rituals around birth, marriage, and death preserve a blend of indigenous and folk-Hindu practices.

### **5.3 Preservation**

Preservation reflects conscious efforts to keep Koch cultural identity alive. With language decline becoming more visible, many community groups are now promoting Kamtapuri/Rajbanshi literature, children's books, and digital content. Cultural festivals showcasing Koch dance, songs, weaving patterns, and food traditions help keep the heritage visible. Scholars and community organizations are documenting oral stories, clan histories, and folklore to prevent cultural erosion. Even urban youth now proudly wear traditional Koch attire and silver ornaments during weddings and festivals.

## **6. Limitations of the Study**

The present study is primarily based on secondary sources such as books, research articles, journals, census reports, and previously published studies. Due to time and resource constraints, extensive fieldwork and first-hand ethnographic surveys could not be conducted. The study also relies on available regional and district-level data, which may not fully capture local variations within different Koch settlements. In addition, certain cultural practices discussed in the study are dynamic in nature and may continue to evolve beyond the scope of this research.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Koch community of North Bengal represents a culture shaped by geography, history, and everyday life along the Teesta–Brahmaputra plains. While modernisation, migration, and education have reshaped language practices — leading to a noticeable decline in Kamtapuri/Rajbanshi speakers — the cultural core of the Koch people continues to survive. Their economy has expanded from agriculture to tea-plantation labour, small trade, services, and government employment, reflecting both adaptation and aspiration. At the same time, conscious community-led efforts, festivals, and documentation work are helping preserve traditional dances, rituals, and oral narratives. The Koch socio-cultural landscape stands as a blend of transformation and resilience.

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# Urban Issues in the Megacities of India

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## Abstract

This paper aims to understand the challenges and issues being faced in the urban areas, giving special attention to the megacities of India, especially due to infrastructural issues. The objective of this research paper is to look at the diverse issues which come along with the gift of urbanization and try to understand whether these challenges are natural — that is, would they have taken place by any means — or have they happened because of mismanagement of resources, wrong administration, or failed urban planning. The paper examines how these challenges have impacted and continue to impact urban populations. The major urban issues examined include pollution, traffic and mobility, heat islands in expanding cities, urban flooding in coastal cities, and waste management systems in mega-cities.

**Keywords:** Pollution, Traffic Mobility, Sewage, Urban Flooding, Urban Heat Islands, Extensive Green Roofs, Illegal Settlements

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## 1. Introduction

The world in the status quo is moving towards modernity and technology, but each step towards our perceived notion of development takes us away from the simplicity of nature and village community — the borough life — and introduces problems which are novice in time span but the magnitude of which cannot be looked down upon or ignored. India's megacities — Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai — are at the forefront of this rapid urbanization and its associated challenges. Understanding these urban issues is critical for planning more sustainable and equitable cities.

## 2. Objectives

- To understand the major problems being faced by the Indian megacities in relation to their infrastructural faults.
- To identify probable solutions to mitigate these issues.
- To evaluate the practicality of these solutions and how to leverage global help.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### ***3.1 Urban Pollution as the Base for All Issues***

Pollution is the phenomenon in which contaminants enter the environment and create adverse effects on the life and property of flora and fauna. An urban area is identified by factors like power consumption, overpopulation, high-rise buildings, and waste generation. All of which, when happening on an explicitly high and overwhelming scale, leads to various types of pollution. Along with this, the phenomenon of gentrification occurs, where poorly migrated people settle in or are forced to settle in slums and swamps such as the JJ Colony. The simple cause of this is the concentration of large-scale population in urban places (Pandey, B. W.).

As Central Business Districts (CBDs) have higher temperatures than surrounding areas, these areas become Urban Heat Islands, which is directly proportional to Urban Heat Stress and Urban Pressure Stress (Islam, S.). Patna, Lucknow, Kanpur and Delhi are worst affected by this issue. Delhi faces dual issues: it experiences the continental effect, being surrounded by land from all sides, and being close to agricultural land worsens the situation because of prevalent stubble burning still being practised in nearby regions. Greenhouse gas emissions from municipal solid waste (MSW) management present a serious additional challenge. Almost 70–90% of landfills in Indian cities are open dumpsites. In Chennai, methane emissions from landfills contribute to India's greenhouse gas inventory, with estimated annual emissions of 7–18 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> (WHO Report).

#### ***3.2 Traffic and Mobility***

In the status quo, 60 out of 100 cities come under the bracket of Less Motorised Countries (Mobility in Cities Database). The issue becomes incompetent infrastructure along with zero maintenance and inspection, lack of fuel efficiency, a dangerous environment for pedestrians and cyclists, no regulation on car ownership, plus ineffective land use management. Delhi has mixed land use patterns with a huge proportion of pedestrians and walking population, yet there is high air pollution. Most Indian cities were formed with the directions of the Master Plan, 1960, based on demographic considerations and allocation of population to zones, but this formal planning has been ineffective, as non-residential areas have been taken over for residential purposes and nonmotorised vehicles have moved onto intercity highways meant for motorised high-speed vehicles.

#### ***3.3 Urban Flooding***

Floods are a natural phenomenon which occur due to heavy rainfall, cyclones, and various manmade problems which complement the issue of urban flooding. These occurrences have been much more common in the last 2–3 decades as weather is becoming more unpredictable. In 2005, the worst urban floods for Mumbai and Chennai affected 5 lakh people. In 2006, 22 cities were affected; in 2007, 35 cities were affected, with Kolkata hit hardest. Delhi gets 670 mm (about 2.2 ft) of rainfall every year in the month of July. The three most vulnerable areas are the Yamuna flood plain, the Ridge, and the Gangetic plains.

Mumbai has 60% temporary houses and a high population density. The season of floods from June to September causes streets to flood, shutting railways and airways during excessive rain. Mumbai also has a high number of slums where sewerage lines cannot be built, and 30–40% of the total sewage is generated from these squatter settlements and flows directly through open drains not

connected to sewer lines. Chennai, being a coastal plain, has rivers that meander along with several lakes, causing heavy silting and floods that take over 73% of the city.

#### **4. Data, Sources, and Methodology**

This study is primarily based on secondary data collected from a range of academic and professional sources. Scholarly research papers were accessed through Google Scholar, along with reports, policy documents, and expert discussions in the form of lectures and interviews by urban planners, environmental scholars, and policy professionals. The selection of literature was guided by specific keywords related to urbanization, megacities, environmental degradation, urban flooding, urban heat islands, air pollution, and sustainable urban planning. The analytical approach adopted is qualitative and interpretative in nature. The collected data were thematically analyzed to identify major patterns, causes, and consequences of environmental problems in megacities. Due to time and resource constraints, primary data collection such as field surveys or interviews was not undertaken.

#### **5. Results and Discussion**

The analysis of existing literature reveals that urbanization in India's megacities functions as a double-edged process, generating economic growth while simultaneously intensifying environmental degradation and planning challenges. Rapid and often unregulated urban expansion has placed immense pressure on natural ecosystems, resulting in resource depletion, increased waste generation, and deteriorating urban living conditions. Weak enforcement of environmental regulations, combined with the prioritization of short-term economic gains, has further aggravated these issues.

One major outcome observed is the disruption of urban ecological systems due to improper land use planning. Encroachment on natural drainage channels and floodplains has reduced the effectiveness of both natural and engineered drainage infrastructure, contributing significantly to the rising incidence of urban flooding in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai. The study also highlights the growing phenomenon of Urban Heat Islands (UHI), driven by dense built-up surfaces, reduced green cover, and energy-intensive architectural practices. Air pollution emerges as one of the most severe urban challenges, particularly in Delhi, which has consistently ranked among the most polluted cities globally.

#### **6. Mitigation Strategies**

##### ***6.1 Traffic and Mobility Solutions***

To reduce traffic congestion, the heterogeneous traffic pattern — different sizes of vehicles, which leads to differing speeds — needs to be shifted. One solution can be to introduce buses on a mass level, but this requires providing safe and affordable transport alternatives to those living away from their jobs. Future directions require stricter emission norms, pollution testing every three months, easy availability of lead-free petrol, and some control on private car and motor vehicle ownership. While constructing metro lines generates employment and makes the government look progressive, they fail to remove both congestion and pollution once empty space is created on

roads. In Curitiba, Brazil, a high-capacity bus system was installed, bringing good transport at a fraction of the cost of metro lines (5–10% only).

### **6.2 Solutions for Urban Flooding**

One very effective approach is to install extensive green roofs which hold up to 56% of rainwater, are 50–60% more effective than traditional roofs and work particularly well when there are light storms and rains of short duration. Water-retaining pavements made of hydrophilic substances that accumulate water and empty it through evaporation can also be a good alternative for small rainfall events. Trees provide several advantages including reducing urban heat islands, improving air quality, and reducing rainwater runoff by intercepting rainfall in the canopy, evaporating water from leaves, improving infiltration around roots, and storing water in trunks.

## **7. Way Forward**

Addressing urban environmental challenges requires a balanced approach that supports economic growth while ensuring ecological sustainability. Stronger legislative enforcement is needed at the very first level, with regulatory bodies such as the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) ensuring strict compliance by industries. Urban planning must prioritize ecological infrastructure — restoration and protection of natural drainage systems; wetlands, and floodplains should be incorporated into city master plans. Climate-resilient urban design, including heat-reflective materials and energy-efficient construction practices, can help reduce the impacts of Urban Heat Islands. An expansion of urban green spaces should be treated as a core planning strategy.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study has identified the major urban environmental challenges faced by Indian megacities, examined their underlying causes, and evaluated the effectiveness of existing management approaches. Rapid urbanization, inadequate infrastructure, and weak policy implementation have significantly contributed to issues such as urban flooding, solid waste mismanagement, sewage challenges, and environmental degradation. The findings emphasize the need for integrated urban planning, sustainable waste management systems, improved drainage and wastewater treatment infrastructure, and stronger institutional frameworks. Policymakers must prioritize long-term, data-driven solutions and encourage collaboration between government agencies, private stakeholders, and local communities.

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# Spatial Inequality and Social Exclusion in Delhi

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## Abstract

Delhi, the national capital of India, is a city of sharp contrasts — of dreams and disparities. While it symbolizes progress, urban opportunity, and national power, it is also a space of marginalization, where large sections of the population are pushed to the periphery of both space and society. This paper examines spatial inequality in Delhi with a focus on economic disparities, the historical roots of urban segregation, and the social exclusion experienced by marginalized communities in political and institutional domains. Drawing on secondary sources such as government reports and critical urban scholarship, the study finds that state-led planning and governance practices systematically relocate the urban poor to peripheral spaces, reinforcing political invisibility and unequal access to urban resources. Using Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "Right to the City" and Pierre Bourdieu's framework of cultural capital, the paper critiques Delhi's spatial organization as a key driver of persistent inequality.

**Keywords:** Spatial inequality, Delhi, economic disparity, urban exclusion, informal settlements, cultural capital, resettlement colonies

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## 1. Introduction

Delhi is often seen as a city of endless possibilities, with a population of approximately 1.68 crore (Census, 2011). Yet for many of its residents, it is also a space for marginalization, exclusion, and invisibility. The city's urban landscape is marked by stark contrasts — luxurious neighbourhoods exist alongside neglected slums, and while central districts are equipped with high-quality infrastructure and services, peripheral zones continue to struggle with necessities. According to the Census of India (2011), nearly 95 per cent of Delhi's workforce is engaged in main employment, while 5 per cent depends on marginal work, reflecting the uneven and insecure nature of livelihoods within the city. These patterns of inequality are not random; spatial inequality in Delhi is historically constructed, institutionally maintained, and socially reinforced.

As Gautam Bhan and Arindam Jana (2015) argue, inequality in urban India is deeply rooted in spatial structures. In Delhi, the place of residence plays a decisive role in determining access to infrastructure, public services, and participation in civic and political life. Policies of slum clearance and resettlement have repeatedly relocated low-income populations to the urban periphery, distancing them from economic centres, public amenities, and institutional spaces.

## **2 Analytical Framework and Core Concepts**

### ***2.1 Economic Disparity***

Delhi's GDP and per capita income have risen steadily in recent years. According to the Economic Survey of Delhi 2023–24, per capita income stands at approximately ₹4.6 lakh, well above the national average. However, aggregate growth indicators obscure significant internal disparities. As documented by Nidhi Kaicker in *Behind the Glitz: The Living Wage Crisis in Delhi NCR*, while the statutory minimum wage for unskilled labour is ₹17,494, the estimated living wage in Delhi NCR is ₹22,494. This persistent gap highlights the structural disadvantage faced by informal and migrant workers.

Economic inequality in Delhi is closely intertwined with its spatial organization. Low-income populations are concentrated in unauthorized colonies and peripheral resettlement areas that lack adequate infrastructure, public services, and access to employment hubs. From the perspective of Henri Lefebvre's "Right to the City," these patterns reflect a systematic exclusion of marginalized workers from meaningful access to urban space and resources.

### ***2.2 Henri Lefebvre – The Right to the City***

Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "Right to the City" is central to understanding Delhi's spatial dynamics. This right is not simply the ability to reside in the city — it includes the right to shape urban space, participate in decisions, and access the benefits of urban life. In Delhi, this right is restricted. Slum demolitions and resettlements displace people from central locations to peripheral, often hazardous zones. Urban planning in Delhi has historically centered around elite and middleclass needs, while the urban poor are treated as encroachers rather than as citizens with a claim to the city. Displacement does not just mean loss of housing — it leads to exclusion from schools, hospitals, markets, and even social networks.

### ***2.3 Pierre Bourdieu – Cultural Capital and Institutional Exclusion***

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is especially relevant in Delhi's context. Cultural capital refers to non-economic resources — like education, language, and credentials — that provide access to social mobility. Institutionalized cultural capital, such as degrees or certificates, determines who can access higher-paying jobs and who is considered "skilled" in the urban economy. In many marginalized communities across Delhi, especially in informal settlements or resettlement of colonies, access to quality education is poor. This lack of institutionalized capital blocks upward mobility and limits access to formal spaces like government jobs, universities, and decision-making bodies.

## **3. Study Area: Marginalized Geographies in Delhi**

### ***3.1 Khora Colony***

Located between Delhi and Noida in the Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh, Khora has grown rapidly from a village into a densely populated settlement with a largely migrant workforce.

Despite its size and economic role, the area suffers from irregular water supply, over-reliance on private tankers, and inadequate sanitation, while many homes remain unauthorized or informally

constructed. The settlement's peripheral location and informal status place it largely beyond the reach of city planning and governance. (Khora, 2011; Times of India, 2023; IJRASET, 2023)

### ***3.2 Bawana Resettlement Colony***

Bawana, established in the early 2000s to accommodate slum dwellers displaced from central Delhi, is located approximately 30 kilometres from the city center. Today, it functions as a resettlement of colony housing over 9,000 families. Despite being part of a government-led rehabilitation program, Bawana continues to lack essential infrastructure, including proper drainage, healthcare facilities, schools, and local employment opportunities. Women, in particular, encounter gender-specific vulnerabilities: public toilets are often unsafe or inaccessible, and safety concerns significantly limit their mobility. (Gupta, 2023)

### ***3.3 Seemapuri***

Located on Delhi's periphery near the Uttar Pradesh border, Seemapuri occupies a marginal position within the city's spatial and administrative framework. Its boundary location results in weak institutional attention and limited access to public services, reinforcing social and infrastructural exclusion. A large proportion of residents are engaged in waste-picking and informal recycling, playing a crucial role in sustaining the city's waste management economy while remaining excluded from its benefits. (Aggarwal, 2017)

## **4. Materials and Methods**

### ***4.1 Research Design***

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine spatial inequality and social exclusion in Delhi. The study is structured as a thematic analysis, focusing on three major interrelated dimensions of urban inequality: economic disparities and access to urban services; historical planning and displacement policies; and political invisibility and institutional exclusion.

### ***4.2 Data Sources***

The research draws on government reports and statistics (e.g., Economic Survey of Delhi 2023–24, DDA Act 1957, Census of India 2011); academic books and peer-reviewed articles (e.g., works by Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu, Sanjeev Routray, Bobby Luthra Sinha, Lalit Batra, Gautam Bhan); historical texts and archival references related to Mughal and colonial planning in Delhi; and NGO and research centre publications (e.g., CNES Report by Nidhi Kaicker; Gupta 2023 primary survey of Bawana Resettlement Colony; Aggarwal 2017 survey of Seemapuri).

### ***4.3 Analytical Framework***

Henri Lefebvre's "Right to the City" provides the conceptual basis to examine how access to urban space and resources is structured and controlled. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of Cultural Capital is applied to understand institutional exclusion and reproduction of inequality. Spatial analysis is illustrated through case studies of marginalized localities (Khora, Bawana, Shahbad Dairy, Seemapuri).

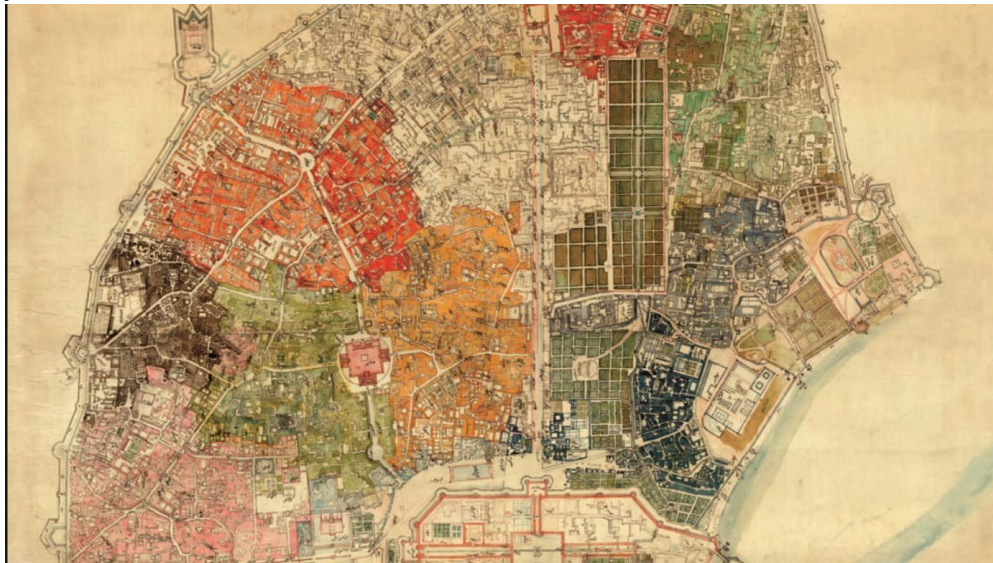
#### ***4.4 Methodological Scope and Limitations***

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the absence of primary fieldwork. The study also does not employ GIS-based spatial modeling or large-scale quantitative analysis. These limitations are acknowledged, and the findings should be interpreted as an analytical synthesis rather than a comprehensive empirical measurement.

### **5. Historical Planning and Displacement Policies**

#### ***5.1 Urban Form and Social Hierarchies in Mughal Delhi***

During the Mughal period, particularly under Emperor Shah Jahan, Delhi was carefully planned to reflect the power and grandeur of the empire. Despite this planning, most development focused on areas near the palace and central markets, leaving working-class residents in peripheral neighborhoods with limited access to water, open spaces, and clean roads. The rich and powerful lived near the center of the city, close to the Red Fort and big markets like Chandni Chowk, while poorer people lived in crowded neighborhoods called mohallas. These early patterns of uneven spatial distribution laid the foundation for the social and spatial inequalities that continue to shape Delhi today.



*Figure 1: Reconstructed map of Delhi during the Delhi Sultanate period (c. 15th century).*

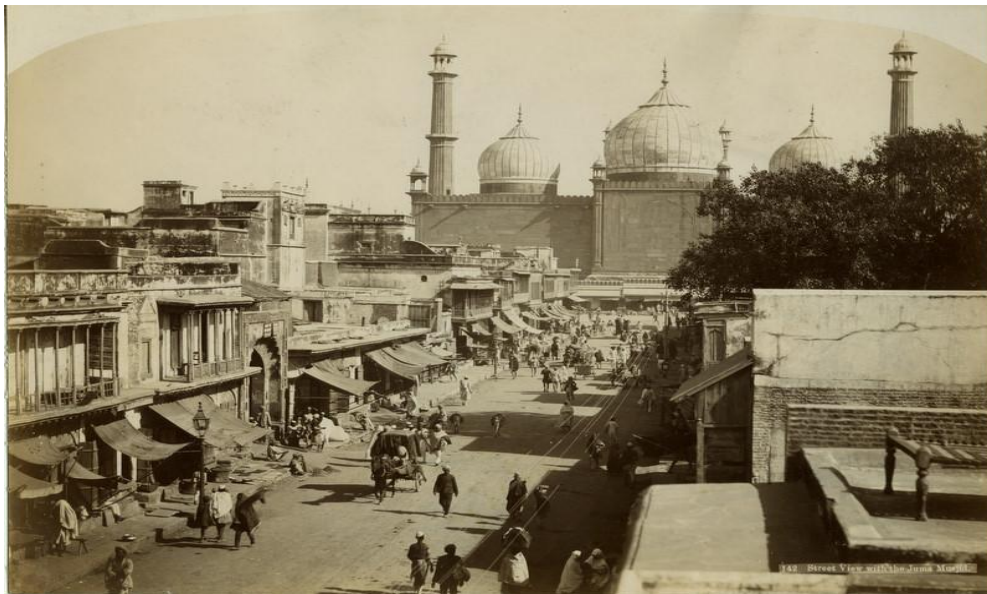
*Source: Reconstructed historical map, reproduced from [artpictures.club](https://artpictures.club) (<https://artpictures.club/autumn-2023.html>), 2023.*

#### ***5.2 Urban Transformation in Nineteenth-Century Delhi***

In Colonialism, Uprising and the Urban Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Delhi, Jyoti Pandey Sharma traces Delhi's transformation under British colonial rule. After 1857, the British reshaped Delhi through planning, road networks, and repurposing Mughal structures. Neighborhoods once associated with Mughal-era elites declined or were repurposed, while new colonial-era districts and administrative zones emerged as centers of power and prestige. Sharma argues that these nineteenth-century spatial transformations continue to resonate in present Delhi.

### ***5.3 Post-Independence Urbanization and Social Distinction***

As Lalit Batra (2009) notes, early post-independence policies inherited colonial patterns that treated informal settlements as illegal. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA), established in 1957, prioritized elite and middle-class housing while pushing lower-income populations into informal or peripheral zones. Between the 1990s and early 2000s, nearly a million people lost their homes, with only a small fraction resettled in peripheral colonies lacking essential infrastructure. Since the neoliberal turn in urban policy, development has emphasized market-driven strategies and public-private partnerships, which often promote gentrification and displacement rather than addressing equity concerns. "counted" — through official surveys, voter registration, or documentation of residence. Without this, people are not eligible for resettlement when evicted, nor for government welfare programs.



*Figure 2: Old Delhi in the 19th century.*

*Source: Vintage Every day (2013), [www.vintag.es/2013/03/photographs-of-old-delhi-fromhttp://www.vintag.es/2013/03/photographs-of-old-delhi-from-19th.html19th.html](http://www.vintag.es/2013/03/photographs-of-old-delhi-fromhttp://www.vintag.es/2013/03/photographs-of-old-delhi-from-19th.html19th.html)*

### ***5.4 Post Independence –Urbanization and social distinction***

Urbanization in Delhi highlights how city growth can reinforce existing social inequalities. The capital's spatial development reflects a legacy of exclusionary planning and uneven resource allocation, continuing to marginalize the urban poor. As Lalit Batra (2009) notes, early postindependence policies inherited colonial patterns that treated informal settlements as illegal. Institutions like the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), established in 1957, were tasked with implementing master plans to create a “modern” city, but these plans prioritized elite and middleclass housing while pushing lower-income populations into informal or peripheral zones (Batra, 2009, pp. 7–12).

Urban expansion disproportionately benefited those with capital, formal employment, and political influence. Land originally designated for economically weaker sections was often diverted to

higher-income groups, leading to the growth of informal settlements as survival strategies for low-income migrants. Rapid economic growth since the 1990s in finance, real estate, and IT-enabled services has not created large-scale employment for unskilled or semi-skilled workers, who remain concentrated in informal sectors such as construction, domestic work, and street vending without social protection (Batra, 2009, p. 6). Simultaneously, slum evictions intensified: between the 1990s and early 2000s, nearly a million people lost their homes, with only a small fraction resettled in peripheral colonies lacking essential infrastructure like drinking water, sanitation, public transport, and schools (Batra, 2009, p. 6).

The spatial marginalization of Delhi's poor is reinforced by planning policies that treat informal settlements as problems to be cleared rather than realities to be integrated. Residents of unauthorized colonies or slums lack formal land rights and access to urban services, restricting their education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This exclusion intersects with caste, gender, and migration status, further deepening social inequality.

Since the neoliberal turn in urban policy, especially through reforms and programs like the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), development has emphasized market-driven strategies and public-private partnerships. While these initiatives aim to modernize infrastructure, they often fail to address equity concerns, promoting gentrification and displacement instead. Delhi's experience shows that urban growth has not translated into inclusive development; economic opportunity and urban citizenship remain unevenly distributed. Addressing this divide requires reorienting planning toward inclusive land policies, participatory governance, and universal access to basic services.

## **6. Limited Representation and Political Exclusion in Delhi**

### ***6.1 How Politics Works in Delhi: Who Gets Left Out***

In Delhi, many people live and work in the city but are not treated as full political citizens. These include migrants, people living in slums or informal settlements, Dalits, religious minorities, and people without formal documents. Many marginalized residents don't have proper identification or proof of residence, which keeps them off voter lists or prevents them from accessing welfare schemes.

### ***6.2 Being Counted: The Struggle for Visibility***

In *The Right to Be Counted: The Urban Poor and the Politics of Resettlement in Delhi* (Stanford University Press, 2022), Sanjeev Routray describes how poor communities in Delhi try to gain recognition from the state. He explains that being politically visible often starts with being

### ***6.3 Everyday Exclusion: Who Belongs in the City?***

In her chapter "The Everyday Fault Lines of Inclusion and Exclusion in Delhi" (*Social Exclusion and Policies of Inclusion*, Springer, 2022), Bobby Luthra Sinha shows how migrants, especially those from Northeast India or other states, often face discrimination, police harassment, and public prejudice. This kind of exclusion goes beyond legal rights — it is about who is accepted as a "real" resident of the city.

### **6.4 A Broader System of Exclusion**

The book *The Politics of Social Exclusion in India: Democracy at the Crossroads*, edited by Harihar Bhattacharyya, Partha Sarkar, and Angshuman Kar (Routledge, 2010), helps us understand how Delhi's situation fits into a bigger national pattern. Political exclusion is not just about poverty — it is also about caste, religion, gender, and other social identities. In Delhi, as in much of India, the poor and marginalized are not just left behind — they are often actively pushed out of the spaces where political decisions are made.

### **7. Conclusion**

Delhi — India's political, cultural, and economic heart — embodies the contradictions of modern urban life. This paper has traced how spatial inequality, rooted in historical planning, economic disparity, and institutional exclusion, continues to define the contours of Delhi's urban experience. From the Mughal and colonial eras to the neoliberal present, urban planning and governance have persistently prioritized elite interests while marginalizing those who physically build and sustain the city. To move toward a more equitable future, Delhi must reimagine urban governance through an inclusive lens — where every resident, regardless of class, caste, or migration status, enjoys the right to space, representation, and dignity.

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# After Manipur: Understanding the Geography of Ethnic Tensions in North-East India

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## Abstract

The Manipur violence that broke out in May 2023 exposed something much deeper than just clashes between Meiteis, Kukis, and Nagas. It revealed a collision of land, law, identity, borders, and the way information spreads online. The valley–hill divide — rooted in colonial land mapping and later reinforced by post-Independence tribal land protections — has created a powerful spatial imbalance. The valley holds most of the people and administrative institutions, while the hills hold most of the land, which is protected under Scheduled Tribe rights. As a result, each region has developed its own idea of who truly "belongs" to Manipur.

In 2023, this already tense structure was set on fire by multiple interacting factors: Chin–Kuki refugee inflow from Myanmar, state messaging about "illegal migrants," the rise of the narcotics economy, selective and edited digital visuals, uneven internet shutdowns, and rapid countermobilization by ethnic groups. This paper uses geopolitical theory along with cultural landscape analysis to understand Manipur as a dual geography conflict — one that plays out both on physical land and in the digital space. It argues that real stability in the future must come from geo-specific peacebuilding strategies (Geo-DPB), rather than blunt, blanket-style bans.

**Keywords:** Manipur Conflicts, Ethnic Segregation, Hills-Valley Divide, Digital Geography, Internet Shutdown, Geospatial Peacebuilding, Geofencing, Disinformation

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## Executive Summary

This research paper argues that the 2023 Manipur crisis should not be viewed only as an outbreak of ethnic hatred. At its core, it is a spatial crisis. In Manipur, territory is not just land — it is power, identity, and political meaning. The valley is geographically small but heavily populated; the hills are wide and spacious but shielded by tribal land protections. This uneven geography — where the valley holds only around 10% of the land, but most of the population — creates a zero-sum mindset. Here, land turns into identity, identity turns into insecurity, and insecurity becomes fuel for political mobilization.

After 2023, a second battlefield intensified the conflict: digital space. Earlier phases of Northeast conflict were primarily physical — blockades, ambushes, and insurgent movements. But in 2023, manipulated visuals, rumors, viral WhatsApp broadcasts, and selective internet shutdowns created two kinds of separation at the same time: physical separation (hill vs valley) and digital separation

(which community could dominate the narrative online). In other words: contemporary violence is fought not only on land — but also on screens.

This paper weaves together colonial mapping history, modern land laws, refugee movement from Myanmar, the narcotics trade, and rising digital nationalism to show that the 2023 Manipur violence is not "sudden." It is the delayed result of long-term spatial structures that have been built for decades. Therefore, this paper argues for peacebuilding that is spatially sensitive. Land reforms must take identity fear seriously. Border control must also protect refugee dignity. And internet regulation should move away from blanket statewide shutdowns — toward targeted, geoverified channels that address misinformation without punishing entire populations.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *The Geographic Determinants of Conflicts in Northeast India*

The state of Manipur experienced a devastating outbreak of ethnic violence starting on May 3, 2023, primarily between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. The conflict began with a "Tribal Solidarity March" and quickly escalated into generalized ethnic clashes, rapidly achieving geographic segregation by targeting minority settlements in both Churachandpur town and Imphal City. The scope of the tragedy has been immense, with official figures (as of late 2024) tallying 258 deaths and over 60,000 displaced people. The destruction also included 4,786 houses burnt, and 386 religious structures vandalized.

At the highest level of abstraction, conflict is a political and cultural contestation over land, identity, and power. Yet, a deeper geographic perspective reveals that the socio-political economy of the state is structurally segregated. Manipur's 22,327 sq. km area is divided into two distinct zones: the small, central Imphal Valley (roughly 10% of the land area) and the surrounding Hill Districts (roughly 90% of the land area). This physical dichotomy has been rigidly institutionalized by constitutional provisions, creating a zero-sum game for resources, development, and political representation.

Population Distribution: Valley vs Hills (Approx.)

Source: Census 2011-derived estimates and Manipur socio-economic descriptions

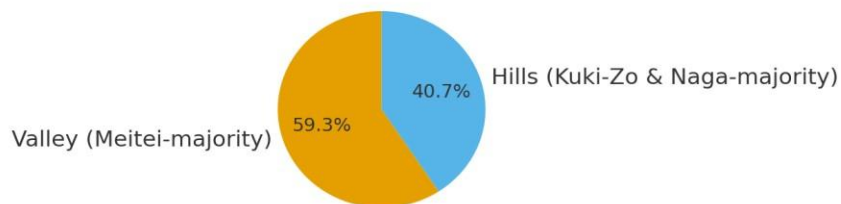
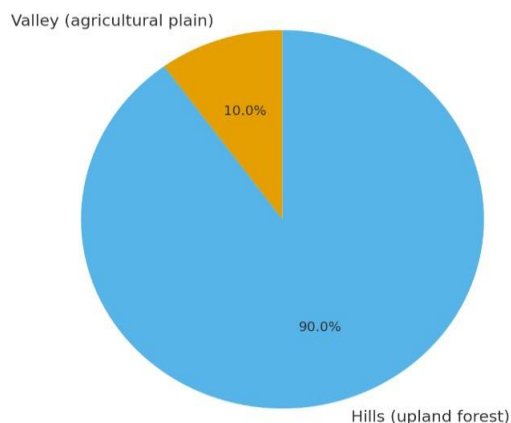


Fig. 1: population Distribution: valley vs Hills

Land Area Distribution: Valley vs Hills (Approx.)  
Source: Manipur total area ~13,000 sq km (valley ~10%)



*Fig. 2 Land area distribution: Valley vs Hills*

## ***2.2 The Unique Thesis: The Digital Geography of Segregation***

The most critical feature of the 2023 crisis is the way the conflict transcended the physical domain and became profoundly mediated by the digital space. This paper introduces the concept of the Digital Geography of Segregation, arguing that the state's response — the imposition of a nearly blanket, indefinite internet shutdown — did not resolve the crisis but compounded the existing structural disparities. The shutdown became a weapon of informational asymmetry. It reinforced the physical segregation by effectively silencing the geographically marginalized Hill populations, creating an environment where a "lopsided narration" of events could be disseminated from the Valley, further deepening ethnic mistrust and undermining democratic accountability.



*Fig. 3: Photo credit: Al Jazeera*

## 2. Study Area

### 2.1 Location and Physiography

The study area, Manipur, is a state located in the extreme Northeastern region of India, nestled within the folds of the Himalayan system. It is situated at approximately 23°50' N to 25°42' N latitude and 92°58' E to 94°45' E longitude. The state shares borders with Nagaland (North), Mizoram (South), Assam (West), and Myanmar (East and South). The total area is 22,327 sq km. The state is distinctly divided into two regions: the Central Valley (Imphal Valley, 10% of the area), which is a flat, oval-shaped plain, and the Surrounding Hills (90% of the area), characterized by rugged, forested terrain. The Imphal Valley is the economic and political center, housing the capital Imphal and the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, Loktak Lake.

Feature	Description
<b>Geographic Coordinates</b>	Approx. 23 °50' N to 25° 42' N latitude 92°58' E to 94°45' E longitude.
<b>Borders</b>	<b>Indian States:</b> Nagaland (North), Mizoram (South), Assam (West). <b>International Border:</b> Myanmar (East and South).
<b>Total Area</b>	\$22,327 sq km.
<b>Physiography</b>	The state is distinctly divided into two regions: the <b>Central Valley</b> (Imphal Valley, 10% of the area), which is a flat, oval-shaped plain, and the <b>Surrounding Hills</b> ( 90% of the area), characterized by rugged, forested terrain.
<b>Key Features</b>	The <b>Imphal Valley</b> is the economic and political center, housing the capital <b>Imphal</b> and the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, <b>Loktak Lake</b> (famous for its floating islands, known as <i>phumdis</i> ).

*Table 1 Features of North East India*

### 2.2 Economy

Manipur's economy is primarily rooted in its natural resources and traditional sectors. The backbone of the state's economy is agriculture and allied activities, employing over 52% of the workforce, with cultivation of rice, maize, and various horticultural crops. The Handloom and Handicrafts sector is the largest traditional cottage industry. The state has substantial, yet largely untapped, potential for hydroelectric power generation due to its hilly topography and multiple river basins.

### 2.3 Geology and Seismicity

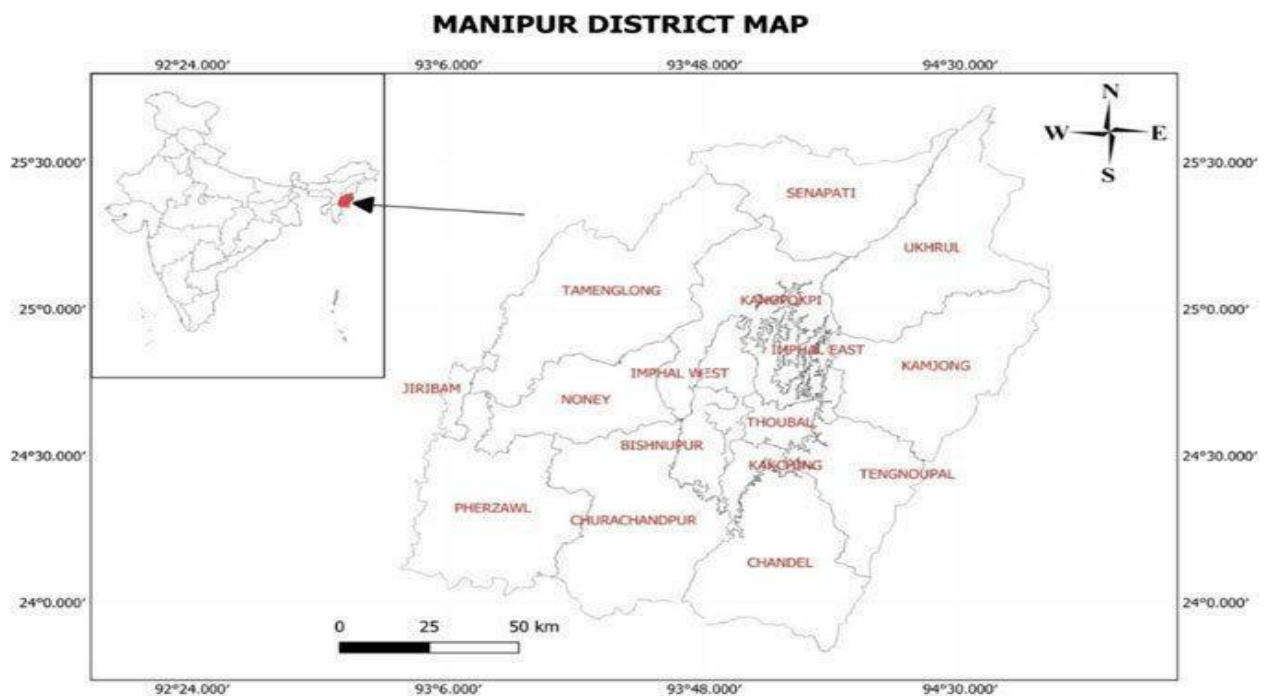
Geologically, Manipur is a young and highly active region, forming part of the extensive Indo-Myanmar range. The region belongs to the young folded mountains of the Himalayan system ( specifically the Burmese Arc), formed from the deposition and upliftment of sediments in the Tethys Sea during the Tertiary Orogeny. Manipur falls in one of the most seismically active zones

(Zone V) of the Trans-Asiatic Earthquake Belt, making the geological structure highly vulnerable to tectonic activity.

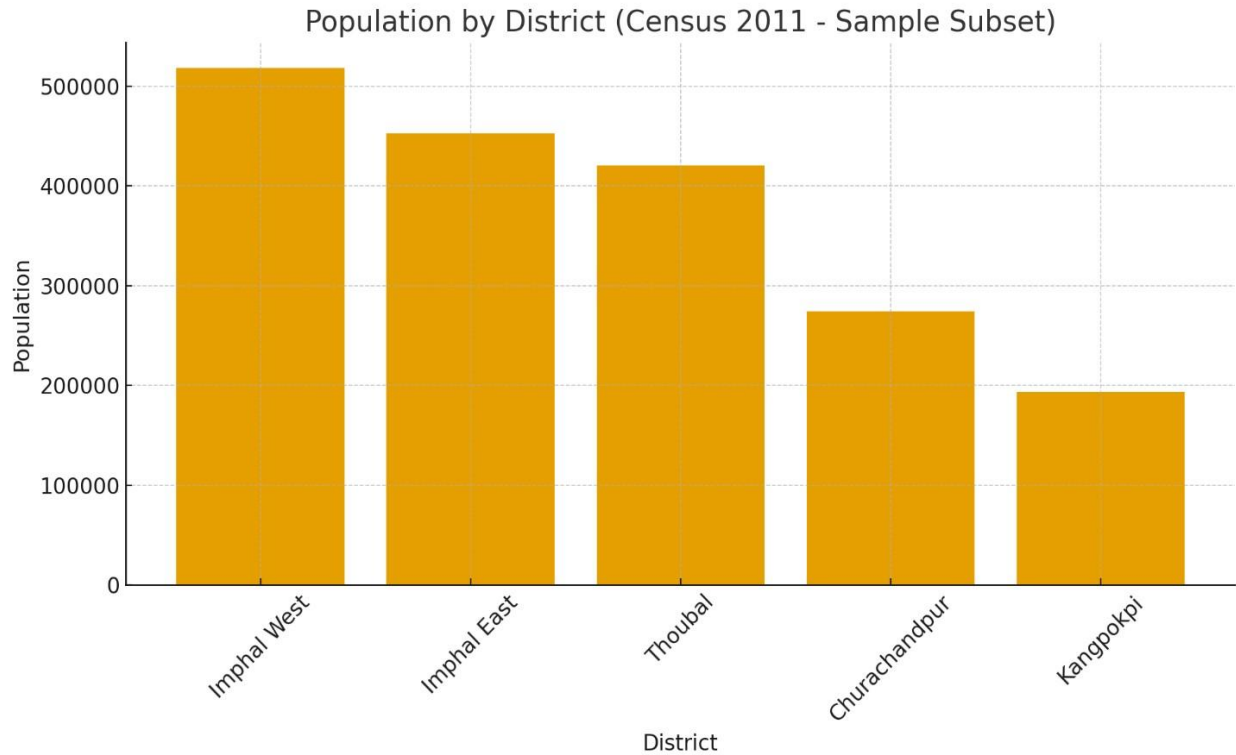
## 2.4 Climate

Manipur enjoys a generally Sub-tropical climate, which transitions to temperate conditions at higher elevations in the hill tracts.

1. **Climate Type:** Sub-tropical Temperate (Monsoonal climate).
2. **Seasons:**
  - a. Winter: December to February (coldest month is January).
  - b. Monsoon: May to September, driven by the Southwest Monsoon.
  - c. Pre-Monsoon (March-April) and Post-Monsoon (October-November) serve as transitional periods.
3. **Rainfall:** The climate is rain-fed, with average annual rainfall ranging from 1,500 mm (about 4.92 ft) to 1,970 mm (about 6.46 ft). Rainfall distribution is highly varied, with the hilly regions generally receiving heavier precipitation than the valley floor.
4. **Temperature:** The climate is moderate. Summer maximum temperature generally remains around in winter, temperatures often drop below zero in the high-altitude regions, sometimes bringing frost.



*Fig.4 Photo credit: Al Jazeera*



*Fig. 5: population by District*

### **3. Layered Roots of Ethno-Territorial Contestations**

#### ***3.1 Historical and Colonial Restructuring of Space***

While pre-colonial Manipur featured fluctuating socio-cultural exchanges between the Valley and the surrounding hills, British colonial administration systematically institutionalized the separation. By creating distinct politico-economic zones with separate administrative rules and land tenure laws, the colonial power transformed a fluid cultural frontier into a rigid political boundary. This restructuring established the precedent for differential resource access and governance, planting the seed for contemporary conflict.

#### ***3.2 The Legalization of Geographic Divide: Land and Constitutional Status***

The post-Independence constitutional framework cemented the spatial divide. The legal structure, specifically through the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960 (MLR&LR Act), restricts the majority Meitei community (not listed as an ST) from owning or acquiring land in the hill districts. This has led to the Meitei population, which constitutes approximately 53% of the state's population, being confined to just 10% of the state's total area.

This confinement generates immense demographic pressure in the Valley and creates a perception among the Meitei that they are under siege, fueling the demand for ST status. Conversely, the Kuki-Zo and Naga tribes (who are STs) view the Valley's demand as an existential threat to the constitutional safeguards of their ancestral lands in the hills. The resulting imbalance is a direct consequence of legal geography.

Further complicating the map are the geopolitical factors surrounding the porous 398 km (about 247.31 mi) border with Myanmar. The Kuki-Chin kinship ties across the international boundary ensure that political instability in Myanmar directly impacts ethnic dynamics in Manipur through refugee flows and the illicit drug trade. The trade, particularly opium, acts as a self-financing mechanism, arming militant groups and creating a "security-economy complex" that perpetuates cycles of violence independent of the immediate political catalysts.



Fig. 6: Manipur Location

#### 4. Methodology: A Geo-Digital and Qualitative Approach

This study employs a multi-methodological approach to analyze the conflict, focusing on the synthesis of qualitative political geography and quantitative digital security data. The mixed methods framework involves: Political Geography Analysis (examination of constitutional texts, land reform acts, and historical documents to establish the structural determinants of ethnic space); Digital Security and OSINT Review (quantitative analysis of internet shutdown duration, spatial application, and economic cost); and Conceptual Model Development (the proposal and detailed structuring of the Geo-DPB framework, integrating principles of Peace tech with GIS and Location-Based Services).

All quantitative data (area, population, density, shutdown duration) are meticulously sourced from Government of India Census data (2011) and corroborated reports from globally respected digital rights and legal think tanks (e.g., SFLC.in, Top10VPN), ensuring authenticity and academic rigor.

## 5. Results: The Anatomy of Spatial and Digital Segregation

### 5.1 Physical Segregation and De-Facto Partition

The violence enforced an immediate, rigid de-facto partition. Meitei minorities were forcibly evacuated from the hill districts (e.g., Churachandpur), and Kuki-Zo minorities were forced out of the Valley (e.g., Imphal City). This resulted in the creation of highly sensitive, ethnic buffer zones where movement is heavily militarized, and community interaction is virtually nil. This mass displacement, affecting over 60,000 individuals, is the most direct physical manifestation of the failure of the multi-ethnic space.

### 5.2 The Weaponization of Disinformation

Social media platforms (Facebook, X, WhatsApp) acted as both a medium for real-time coordination of attacks and, more critically, as an active accelerator of hostilities. False narratives, misattributed images, and provocative videos were deployed with clinical precision, often geotargeting specific ethnic groups to instill fear and justify violence. The circulation of the fake picture prior to the May 4th horrific assault on Kuki women stands as a definitive case study of the direct, spatial link between digital falsehoods and physical violence.

### 5.3 The Backfire of Blanket Internet Shutdown

The government's primary counter-measure — the blanket suspension of mobile and fixed-line internet services starting on May 3, 2023 — was a catastrophic policy failure from a digital rights and peacebuilding perspective. The shutdown became the world's longest cumulative internet shutdown in 2023, lasting over 5,000 hours (approximately seven months). The blanket ban failed to be a neutral intervention. Early in the crisis, partial broadband services (fixed-line connections) often remained functional in the Valley (predominantly Meitei), allowing for the dissemination of their narrative, while mobile data services (the primary source of internet for the geographically dispersed Kuki-Zo communities in the Hills) remained completely shut down. This created acute information about poverty in the Hill districts, cutting off access to verified safety information, humanitarian aid coordination, education, and essential financial services.

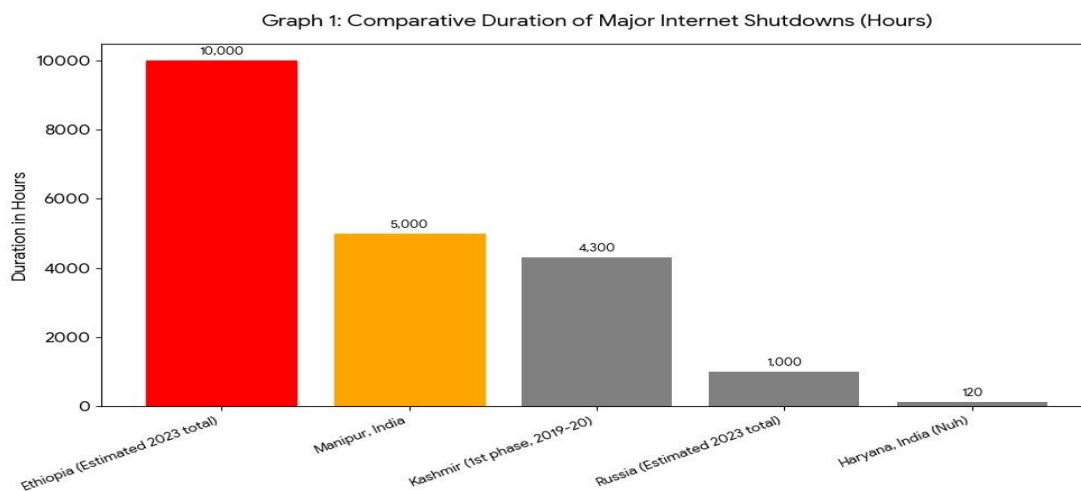


Fig. 7: Comparative Duration of Major Internet shutdown

## 6. Geospatially Targeted Digital Peacebuilding (Geo-DPB)

### 6.1 Conceptual Framework: Blending Peacetechnology and GIS

The core contribution of this paper is the proposal of the Geo-DPB framework — a spatially and ethically informed technological intervention to counter the Digital Geography of Segregation. Geo-DPB is founded on the principle that digital security measures must be proportional, targeted, and equitable. It uses the precision of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and Location Based Services (LBS) to create secure communication corridors in the highly contested buffer zones.

### 6.2 Implementation Model: Secure Dialogue and Alerts

The framework is implemented via two secure, geo-fenced channels. First, Verified Safety Alerts: neutral, vetted third-party organizations (like the Red Cross or a designated state peace committee) would use the LBM system to deliver immediate, multilingual, and context-sensitive warnings to smartphones entering or residing in designated buffer zones. Second, Geo-Fenced Dialogue Channels: these are temporary, secure digital spaces enabled only for the population residing in the immediate physical inter-ethnic buffer zones, aimed at facilitating limited, moderated, and supervised digital interaction between community representatives to rebuild trust from the ground up.

### 6.3 Capacity Building and Ethical Assurance

The technological intervention is coupled with two critical non-technological pillars. Digital Media Literacy (DML): massive, targeted DML campaigns are essential to equip all communities with the capacity to identify, report, and resist ethnically targeted fake news. Ethical Assurance: to mitigate profound privacy and security concerns associated with LBS, Geo-DPB requires mandatory protocols including data anonymization, mandatory opt-out mechanisms, and transparency with proportionality — every use of geofencing must be time-bound, publicly justified, and subject to regular judicial review.

Phase/Component	Objective	Technology/Tool	Conflict Resolution Benefit
Mapping & Analysis	Identify conflict fault lines, shared heritage sites	GIS mapping, Open-Source intelligence	Situational awareness, evidence-based
Localized Dialogue	Establish secured, verified communication channels for immediate de-escalation.	Geofencing/Location-Based Messaging (LBM)	Bypasses blanket internet bans, delivers critical, verified alerts to specific areas/groups, maintaining essential communications. <sup>2</sup>
Capacity Building	Equip vulnerable communities with tools to immediate essential	Digital Media Literacy (DML) training, rumor verification platforms	Increases resilience against targeted disinformation campaigns, addresses key NE challenges. <sup>19</sup>
Ethical Assurance	Maintain trust and prevent misuse of location data.	Data Anonymization, Mandatory Opt-Out, Features Protocols.	Mitigates privacy concerns and avoids the deployment of peace technology becoming another form of surveillance. <sup>27</sup>

Fig. 8: Table

## 7. Conclusion and Policy Imperatives

The Manipur conflict is a stark reminder that in the twenty-first century, structural inequalities rooted in physical geography are seamlessly mirrored and accelerated by the digital domain. The failure of the blanket internet shutdown to act as a proportional, just, or effective security tool highlights the deep challenge of governing conflict in the digital age. Achieving sustainable peace demands more than security patrols; it requires a spatially aware policy that recognizes the complexity of the geo-digital landscape.

Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Peace include: institutionalizing a spatially-Informed Digital Policy by ceasing blanket internet shutdowns and adopting the principles of Geo-DPB; convening a constitutional and territorial review to address the structural geographic fault line — the Hills-Valley land law disparity; investing in equitable digital infrastructure by closing the digital divide in the Hill Districts; and funding Geo-DPB pilot projects in partnership with a neutral, internationally recognised humanitarian or technology-for-peace organisation.

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# Impact of Globalization on Cultural Diversity and Heritage in Bihar: A Study

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## Abstract

Globalization has rapidly transformed the world's cultures. Economic ties between countries have expanded, technological tools are connecting people, and contacts between different societies have increased. This has led to increased opportunities for cultural exchange, new ideas, and the display of heritage to the world. However, it has also threatened local traditions, languages, and cultural identities. This paper examines this dual impact — both benefits and losses — in depth. India, specifically Bihar, is the main case study to understand how globalization affects cultural diversity and heritage. The study utilizes information from UNESCO, the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and various research studies. A mixed approach of policy analysis, statistical data, and case-study-based observation is employed.

The study discusses important aspects such as cultural homogenization, hybridization, and commodification of heritage. Positive aspects such as digital preservation, the development of creative industries, and the return of traditional knowledge are also highlighted. Examples from Bihar — such as the revival of Madhubani art, the development of a Buddhist tourist circuit, and community-led conservation efforts — show how local people are preserving their culture despite global pressures. The research suggests that maintaining cultural diversity requires good policies, local participation, and incorporating cultural heritage into sustainable development and landscape planning.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Cultural diversity and heritage, UNESCO, Cultural homogenization, Cultural hybridization, Cultural commodification, Digital preservation, Sustainable development

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization means that different countries around the world are now connecting faster than ever before — whether it's through money, people, new ideas, or technology. Today, this process is transforming our society and way of life on a massive scale. It is not limited to the economy or politics, but also affects our culture, identity, and thinking. The rapid movement of goods, information, and people around the world has reduced distances between countries, but it also puts pressure on our local customs, languages, and heritage.

Cultural diversity means that the world is home to a variety of cultures, languages, and lifestyles. UNESCO considers this diversity a common asset for all humanity, as this diversity gives rise to creativity and new ideas. Our heritage includes two types of things — one, tangible things like

historical buildings, works of art, and natural sites; and the other, intangible things like dance, music, traditions, and ancient knowledge. But today, digital media, rapid urbanization, and global markets are threatening many cultural traditions. India is a good example to understand this topic. It has 22 languages, hundreds of tribes, and numerous world-renowned heritage sites. States like Bihar show how local cultures endure change amid globalizations.

## 2. Study Area

### 2.1 Location

Bihar, a historic and landlocked state in eastern India, is the primary focus of this research. Bihar lies between latitudes 25°08'N and 27°31'N and longitudes 83°19'E and 88°17'E. It is situated in the fertile Gangetic plains and its capital is Patna. It shares borders with Nepal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.

Bihar's location makes it a natural gateway between the cultures of northern and eastern India. The Ganges River has always been the backbone of Bihar's culture and economy, connecting it to major networks such as the ancient Silk Route. Its culture is very rich — it has been a melting pot of many religious beliefs, including Hinduism, Buddhism (where it originated), Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity. Bihar is an interesting study area because globalisation has brought about significant changes in its ancient traditions, such as Madhubani and Mithila paintings and folk dances, while also creating challenges such as cultural homogenization and environmental degradation.

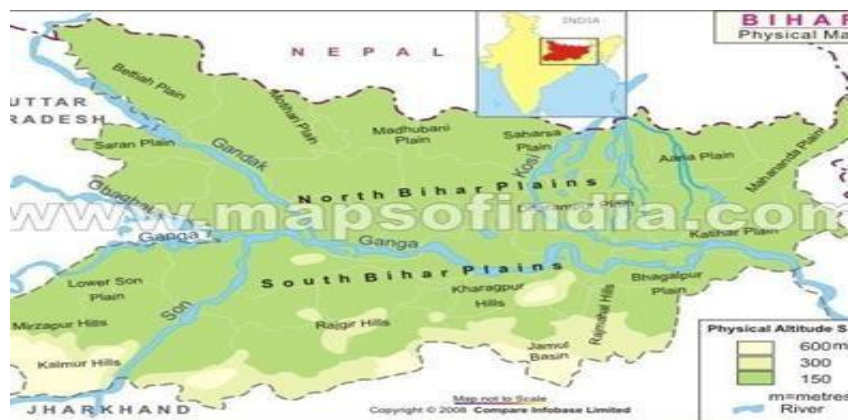


Fig 1: Study Area: Bihar

### 2.2 Bihar's Historical Foundation and Global Linkages

Bihar is one of India's regions with a very old and rich cultural and historical foundation. In ancient times, it was known as Magadha, Vajji, Mithila, and Anga. This region was a center of major empires, religions, and knowledge, connecting India to the rest of the world. Bihar was the birthplace of major ancient empires like Magadha, where kings like Bimbisara created one of the earliest armies and fostered cultural ties. Two major world religions — Buddhism and Jainism — were born here. After Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, the teachings of

Buddhism spread throughout the world, connecting Bihar to the religious paths of East Asia, Tibet, and Southeast Asia.

Bihar was also a center of learning and spirituality, with renowned universities like Nalanda and Vikramshila, which served as educational hubs from around the world from the 5th to the 12th centuries AD, attracting scholars from China, Korea, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. Ancient trade routes, such as the one connecting Pataliputra (Patna) and Tamralipta and the Silk Route, facilitated the movement of goods, new ideas, and art styles. Later, under the Mughals and the British, significant economic ties were established, particularly through the export of cotton, saltpetre, and textiles.

### ***2.3 Migration and Diaspora from Bihar***

Migration has always been a significant part of Bihar's socio-cultural identity. The state is one of the largest migration regions in India. The primary reasons are poverty, unemployment, and agrarian problems, which have driven millions of people to migrate to major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, as well as to foreign countries like the Gulf countries, Nepal, and Southeast Asia. Due to globalization, this migration now transcends borders, connecting Bihar with distant economies, cultures, and social networks.

Migrants from Bihar serve as a bridge between local culture and global modernity. They bring with them their local traditions, languages such as Bhojpuri and Maithili, and cultural elements such as songs, festivals (Chhath Puja), and folk arts. The global popularity of Bhojpuri films, music, and festivals today is largely due to these migrant communities. Arts like Madhubani painting have also found an international market through migrant networks and online platforms. However, those who return bring with them new shopping styles, fashion, technology, and elements of global culture, impacting the mindset of the local population and social norms. Many people live dual lives, creating a hybrid cultural identity.

## **3. Materials and Methods**

### ***3.1 Research Design***

This research combined two approaches: an in-depth study of existing secondary data, and field observations combined with case studies. A qualitative approach was adopted, which means the focus was more on understanding things rather than simply counting them. This design included reading existing papers and articles, analyzing books, reports, and policy documents by topic; conducting case studies by looking in-depth at selected cultural issues to understand larger trends; ground-based observations by visiting places informally and interacting with people; and examining government policies to identify their shortcomings.

### ***3.2 Data Sources***

Secondary data sources included scholarly books and research papers on globalization, its impact on culture (such as assimilation or commodification of culture), Bihar's history, and its art (such as Madhubani painting). Government reports were reviewed by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Government of Bihar. International reports were reviewed from organizations such as UNESCO, particularly those related to World Heritage Sites like the Mahabodhi Temple

and Nalanda. Online marketplaces and social media platforms were also explored to understand how Bihari cultural products are spreading globally.

For primary data, site visits were conducted at specific sites such as Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, and Rajgir to observe heritage preservation, the impact of tourism, and local community involvement. Informal conversations were held with local people, artisans, and community leaders to understand their economic challenges and views on globalization.

### ***3.3 Analytical Methods***

Thematic content analysis was used to sort and code all excerpts, notes, and reports according to themes such as cultural fusion, conservation, market influences, and migration. Three key case studies were examined: the revival of Madhubani art and its access to the global market; the management of Buddhist heritage sites (Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, Rajgir) and the impact of tourism; and migration and the spread of Bhojpuri culture abroad. Policy review and comparison of the situation before and after globalization were also employed.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### ***4.1 The Positive Effects of Globalization on Bihar's Culture***

The results of this research indicate that the influx of new ideas, money, technology, and people from around the world has brought about many positive changes in Bihar's culture.

Globalization has led to greater recognition of Bihar's ancient cultural heritage, especially sites associated with Buddhism, Jainism, and ancient civilizations such as Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, and Vikramshila. The Mahabodhi Temple and Nalanda Mahavihara have received UNESCO recognition, furthered global attention and encouraging proper preservation and responsible tourism. Globalization has also helped revive Bihar's traditional arts and crafts — Madhubani painting, Sikki craft, Sujni embroidery, Tikuli art, Manjusha art, and terracotta — and connect them to global markets. Online platforms, exhibitions, and cultural diplomacy have provided artisans, especially women, with new earning opportunities.

Cultural hybridization has also occurred, with the fusion of traditional Bhojpuri music with global genres like pop, rap, and EDM expanding its reach worldwide. Festivals like Chhath Puja have gained international recognition, strengthening the cultural identity of diaspora communities. Additionally, technological advances have greatly facilitated the documentation and preservation of local languages, traditions, and heritage through digital copying of heritage objects, virtual archiving, and GIS mapping.

### ***4.2 The Negative Effects of Globalization on Bihar's Culture***

While globalization has created new opportunities in Bihar, it has also posed serious challenges that threaten its ancient culture and social fabric. The increasing dominance of global languages, especially English, and the influence of Western culture have pushed Bihar's local languages, dialects, and oral traditions such as Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maithili, and Angika into the background. There is a growing trend among urban youth to speak a Hindi-English mix ("Hinglish"), which weakens local identity and disrupts the transmission of ancient knowledge across generations.

Artisans face fierce competition from cheap, mass-produced foreign goods, which deprives traditional silk spinners and weavers of their livelihoods. Cultural arts such as Madhubani paintings are becoming commercialized to meet global demand, leading to mass production, a diminishing

of symbolic significance, and erosion of ancient religious authenticity. Global tourism is causing problems such as overcrowding, commercialization of sacred sites, and severe environmental pressure at renowned sites like Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, and Rajgir. Globalization is also increasing the migration of educated youth from rural Bihar to cities or abroad, weakening cultural continuity of villages and breaking up joint families.

## 5. Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. It is mainly based on secondary sources such as government reports, research papers, and online materials, which may not fully capture the latest ground realities. The primary data collected through site visits and informal conversations was limited in scope and did not include large-scale surveys or structured interviews. The research focuses specifically on Bihar, so the findings may not be fully applicable to other regions with different cultural contexts. Additionally, globalization is an ongoing and dynamic process, and cultural changes over time may alter the patterns discussed in this study.

## 6. Conclusion

Globalization is impacting Bihar's culture in two ways. On the one hand, it has made Bihar's ancient heritage famous worldwide, greatly empowered local artisans — especially women — and with the help of digital technology, their art is reaching the market and preserving culture. On the other hand, there is a danger. Globalization could lead to the extinction of local dialects and ancient arts and a homogenization of culture. Furthermore, the pressure of congestion and pollution at famous heritage sites is increasing.

If Bihar's rich identity is to remain intact, a balance must be struck. This requires good government policies, public participation, and understanding to ensure that Bihar's culture remains alive and strong in this changing world.

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# Where Faith Shapes Space: A Geo-Cultural Analysis of Pilgrimage-Induced Landscape Transformation in Khatu Shyam

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## Abstract

Religious sites play a crucial role in shaping geo-cultural landscapes, influencing patterns of culture, economy, mobility, and identity. Among such sites, the Khatu Shyam Temple of Rajasthan holds significant importance in determining the socio-spatial dynamics of its surrounding region. Beyond its role as a pilgrimage destination, Khatu Shyam Ji functions as a cultural symbol, an economic nucleus, and a vital support system for local livelihoods. This study employs a mixedmethod approach, integrating primary and secondary data, real-time field observations, geo-tagged photography, and spatial documentation to examine the transformative impact of pilgrimage activity on the Khatu Shyam landscape. The findings reveal that while pilgrimage has strengthened the local economy and cultural identity, it has also led to spatial congestion, commercialization, and environmental stress. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for sustainable planning strategies to balance religious tourism, cultural preservation, and spatial management in sacred landscapes like Khatu Shyam.

**Keywords:** Sacred landscapes, pilgrimage geography, Khatu Shyam, cultural landscape transformation, religious economy, land use change, Rajasthan

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## 1. Introduction

Geography is not limited only to the study of the earth's surface but also covers the behaviour of humans living on the earth and their activities. One such important landscape is the Khatu Shyam Temple, which has made a secure place in the consciousness of mankind and has also achieved global recognition. Khatu Shyam is a temple located in the Sikar district of Rajasthan. Lord Barbarik — an important character in the Mahabharata — is worshipped here by the name Shyam Baba. In the last few years, this place evolved from a rural settlement to a grand pilgrim hub.

This research paper studies the socio-cultural landscape of the Khatu Shyam Temple with the aim of understanding: how sacred spaces shape the cultural identity of a region; how pilgrimage geography affects local economy and land use; how religion affects density and population composition; how spatial organisation evolves under the pressure of devotees; and how the physical environment supports or constrains cultural activity. This research paper also includes

primary photographs of the bazaars, the temple, and the management, including geo-tagged photos and opinions of locals.

## **2. Study Area**

Khatu is located in the Sikar district of Rajasthan, about 80 km (about 49.71 mi) from Jaipur. The landscape is semiarid, with sandy soils, sparse vegetation, scattered hills, and traditional Rajasthani architecture. The town surrounds the temple complex, which acts as the spatial and cultural core of the region. Key features of the study area include: the Khatu Shyam Temple with marble architecture, sanctum, entrance gates, and queuing system; Shyam Kund with its mythological importance and ritual practices; the Mela Ground as a seasonal cultural landscape; Bazaar Streets supporting religious economy and local livelihoods; Peripheral Roads for devotee movement and crowd management; and the surrounding rural landscape of agrarian fields and pastoral life.

## **3. History of Khatu Shyam Temple**

It is believed that the roots of this temple go back to the Mahabharata period. A prominent character named Barbarik — grandson of Bhima and son of Ghatotkacha — owned the power to end the battle in one go, but he was on a principle of supporting the side that was losing. Because of this, Lord Krishna asked him for a sacrifice and asked for his head, then placed it on a hill for a proper view of the entire battle. He thus became the second person to have seen the entire Mahabharata after Sanjay. Because of his unforgettable sacrifice, Lord Krishna blessed him to be worshipped in Kalyug with the name Khatu Shyam.

## **4. Spatial Classification and Land Use Change**

The temple has become a reason for the development of the area. Due to this, many big players in hospitality, food, and parking entered the market, resulting in the formation of grand hotels, dharmshalas, parking areas, restaurants, multilane roads and many infrastructural upgrades. The land use pattern in Khatu district (2022) shows residential area at 38%, circulation at 15%, agricultural land at 13%, semi-public land at 12%, commercial land at 9%, recreational land at 5%, and other uses at 2%.

## **5. Dynamics of Khatu Bazar on Landscape**

The market of the Khatu Shyam Temple is spread on the periphery of the main temple. Major stores include prasad stores, peacock feather stores, flower shops, saffron flag shops, and amenities for rituals. These stores are great symbols of the faith of locals towards the temple and the devotees. The stores are not only symbols of religion but also contributing to the economy of the area. Total donations received from devotees amount to approximately ₹250 crores annually, and the government invests ₹350 crores on area development. A special project of ₹87.5 crores to build an attractive corridor has been approved by the government.

The first day of the bright half of the Falgun month is considered an auspicious day when the grand Lakhi Mela begins and lasts for 12 days (about 1 week 10 days). This fair is called Lakhi Mela

because lakhs of devotees come to enjoy the holy vibes of the area. The mela is especially known for its colour games and the never-ending queues.

## **6. Government Management and Public Ethics**

Despite this place being known for its religious purity, the physical environment faces pollution due to careless behaviour of the public towards cleanliness and hygiene. The government is diverting a massive amount of funds towards this area, yet management is not up to the mark. The entry gate of Shyam temple is filled with empty plastic plates, abandoned slippers, and unwanted items. The markets are extremely clustered and don't have proper water drainage. Food stalls are dumping their waste on roads, and car parking areas are too far from the main temple, requiring devotees to travel through dirty and unhygienic roads.

## **7. Conclusion**

Khatu Shyam Temple is more than a religious structure — it is a living cultural landscape where faith redefines space, society, and economy. Its socio-cultural imprint extends far beyond the boundaries of the temple, shaping settlement patterns, livelihoods, mobility flows, and identity formation. This research shows that: sacred spaces anchor human geography; pilgrimage landscapes are dynamic and constantly evolving; cultural landscapes must be interpreted through both physical and emotional geographies; and Khatu serves as a model of how a small rural settlement becomes a national religious hub. Through geo-tagged photography and spatial interpretation, the intimate relationship between built environment, human behaviour, cultural symbolism, and sacred experience has been highlighted.

## **8. Limitations of the Study**

The study relies partly on primary field observations and interviews, which may involve respondent bias and subjective perceptions, especially during peak pilgrimage periods. Temporal limitations exist as data collection was conducted within a specific time frame. The analysis of economic indicators is based largely on secondary sources and observable trends rather than household-level quantitative surveys. Rapid and informal commercial activities around the temple area are difficult to document accurately due to the absence of official records for many small vendors. Environmental impacts such as waste generation are discussed qualitatively, as detailed environmental measurements were beyond the scope of this research.

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# **From Flames to Flow: Environmental Impacts of Cremation Practices Manikarnika Ghat, Varanasi**

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## **Abstract**

Manikarnika ghat in Varanasi is one of the most sacred cremation sites in the Hindu tradition, working continuously for many last centuries as ritual transition between life and death. However, the continuous cremation activities which are increasing urban pressure which turned the ghat into environmentally sensitive zones. This study examines the environmental impacts of cremation practices at Manikarnika Ghat with a specific focus on air, water, and land pollution. Using secondary data from government reports, and peer reviewed literature, this paper analyses the interaction between sacred ritual practices and environment degradation. The findings indicated severe bacteriological contamination of river water, emission of particulate matter and black carbon from wood of pyres, and local health, and how local communities and visitors are socially and culturally affected. This paper also highlights the increasing tensions between religious tradition and environmental sustainability, and it also focuses on the need for culturally sensitive solutions that respect faith traditions while promoting care for the environment.

Keywords: Sacred Geography, Cremation Practices, Environmental Pollution, Cultural Ecology, Manikarnika Ghat.

## **1. Introduction**

Religious places occupy an important position in Indian culture, where rivers, mountains, and ritual places are deeply intertwined with religious belief systems. Among these, the River Ganga is especially sacred, believed to cleanse not only the physical world (body) but also the spiritual realm (soul). Along its banks, the city of Varanasi has evolved as an important religious and cultural centre, with its ghats serving as centre's for ritual practices, social life, and everyday urban activity. Along its bank, many ghats have developed, serving as spaces for ritual bathing, worship, and cremation. Among these, Manikarnika Ghat and Harishchandra Ghat in Varanasi hold importance as cremation grounds where death is believed to lead directly to salvation.

Manikarnika Ghat, the most prominent cremation ghat in Varanasi, is believed to grant liberation (moksha) to the plate. The ghat works continuously throughout the year, accommodating a high volume of cremations daily.

Manikarnika Ghat holds deep spiritual meaning in Hindu tradition. According to legend, Goddess Parvati's earring (mani-karnika) fell at this very spot. It is also believed that Lord Vishnu dug a pit here, which later filled with Lord Shiva's sweat, forming a sacred pond. Over time, these beliefs shaped Manikarnika Ghat into a place of immense religious importance. Nowadays it is one of the busiest cremation grounds in the world, where funerals take place both day and night, throughout the year.

However, the increasing frequency of cremations, increased rapid urbanization and rising pilgrims, has put immense pressure on the local environment. Traditional cremation practices involve the burning of large amounts of wood, the immersion of ashes and ritual offerings, and in some cases, there is disposal of partially burnt remains into the river. These activities have significantly challenged the ecological balance of the aquatic environment. The longstanding beliefs that the Ganga can cleanse itself have made environmental protection more complicated, as it often discourages people from questioning ritual practices to the river.

## 2. Objective of the Study

- To identify the major sources of pollution related to cremation practices at Manikarnika Ghat.
- To find out the impact of these activities on water, air, and land environments.
- To examine the socio-cultural and economic implications of pollution for local communities and visitors.
- To suggest sustainable and culturally acceptable management strategies for pollution relief.

## 3. Methodology

This study is based on secondary sources of data and personal analysis. Information has been collected from academic research articles, government and institutional reports (CPCB, WHO, NGT, UNEP), policy documents related to the Namami Gange Programme. The methodology includes qualitative content analysis and core analysis of existing data to examine environmental impact and management strategies. Due to the absence of primary fieldwork, the study relies on previously published observed findings and personal assertion.

## 4. Study Area

Manikarnika Ghat is located on the western bank of the river Ganga in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, at approximately 25.3109° N latitude and 83.0107° E longitude. The ghat forms part of the dense urban settlement of Varanasi and is surrounded by narrow lanes, residential areas, temples, and commercial activities.

The ghat works around the clock (24\*7) and conducts hundreds of cremations daily. It attracts priests, members of the Dom community (native local community), pilgrims, vendors, and tourists, making it a focal point of socioeconomic activity. Environmentally, the area is highly sensitive due to constant ash deposition, smoke emissions, heavy human footfall, and direct discharge of waste into the river.



Fig. 1 Source: Google earth Date of access: 23 January 2026

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Impact on Water Environment

Cremation activities contribute significantly to water pollution at Manikarnika Ghat. The release of ashes, unburned organic matter (body parts), ritual offerings such as flowers, cloth, and plastic items increase the organic and chemical load in the river. Studies conducted near the ghats of Varanasi reveals extremely high levels of fecal coliform bacteria, far beyond the limits set by the World Health Organization. This reduces dissolved oxygen levels, threatens aquatic life, also this water creates problems for the people living downstream of the river especially in irrigation and interferes with the river's natural ability to heal itself. Contaminated water also enters the human food chain through the consumption of fish which eats the unburned part of human body which directly resealed into the river and using river water for bathing and domestic purposes, thereby increasing public health risks.



*Fig. 2 Credit: VWPics/robertharding*

### 5.2 Impact on Air Environment

Traditional wood-based cremation pyres releases in large quantities of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, dioxins, and black carbon. These pollutants degrade local air quality and contribute to respiratory illnesses among residents, workers, and priests which is ignored from over long period of time. Black carbon emissions also play a vital role in regional and global climate change by increasing atmospheric warming.

Each cremation consumes approximately 300–400 kg (about 881.85 lb) of wood, contributing to deforestation and placing pressure on forest resources in surrounding regions of wood.



*Fig. 3 Sources: Times of India*

### **5.3 Impact on Land and Soil**

Cremation activities at Manikarnika Ghat affect the land and soil mainly by chemical changes. Cremation ash contains calcium salts, phosphates, and small amounts of heavy metals. When this ash gathers on the riverbank, it increases soil alkalinity (high pH) and reduces natural soil fertility. During rainfall and monsoon periods, soluble chemicals from ash dissolve into water and leach deeper into soil layers and nearby groundwater. This chemical leaching pollutes soil and harms plants growing along the riverbank. Continuous human movement and cremation platforms also compact the soil, reducing air and water movement within it. As a result, soil microorganisms decline, slowing nutrient cycling, and weakening the natural recovery of the riverbank ecosystem.



*Fig. 4 Credit: Look / Leue, Holger*

## **6. Socio-Cultural and Economic Impacts**

### **6.1 Health Burden**

Local peoples, boatmen, and workers at the ghat faces increased risks of respiratory and skin related diseases polluted water and due to constant release of smoke. Rising medical expenses impose more economic stress on an already unprotected community.

### **6.2 Livelihood and Economy**

Pollution affects tourism negatively, a major economic activity in Varanasi. Negative image has been made among domestic and international visitors can reduce tourism, impacting the livelihoods of priests, vendors, boatmen, and guides.

### **6.3 Cultural Tensions**

There is generational divide among the youngsters and elders, younger know the future problems and elders or other illiterate people doesn't want change, where younger populations increasingly question environmentally harmful ritual practices, while elders defend them. This tension represents a conflict between faith-based beliefs and contemporary ecological awareness.

## **7. Future Environmental Concerns**

If current situation is ignored, Varanasi especially Manikarnika Ghat and its surrounding environment will face very difficult consequences, like the formation of ecological dead zones in the river, groundwater contamination, loss of Varanasi's status as a living heritage city, declining tourism also in Sarnath and loss of livelihoods.

## 8. Strategies for Management and Mitigation

### 8.1 Technological and Infrastructure Measures

- Expansion of electric and compressed gas cremations to reduce emissions and consumption of wood and reduce deforestation.
- There should be installation of ash collection and filtration systems to prevent direct discharge into the river
- There should be use of chimneys and smoke scrubbers to control air pollution. We can make an app for booking of pyres to reduce crowds.

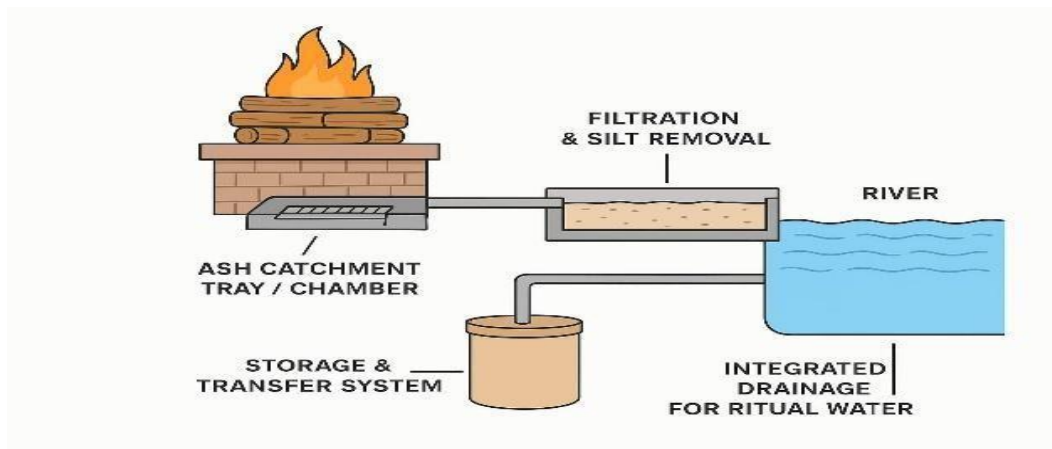


Fig. 5: Strategies for Management and Mitigation

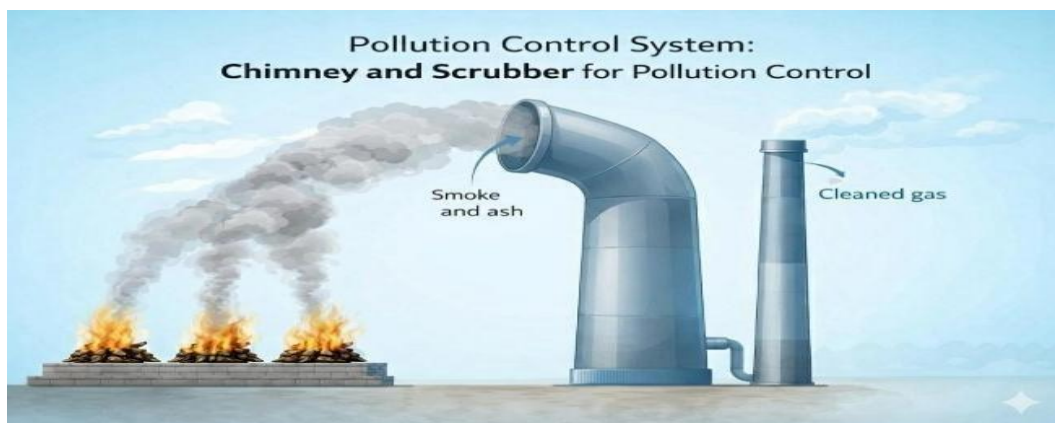


Fig. 6: Strategies for Management and Mitigation

### 8.2 Cultural and Community Based Measures

- Environmental awareness programs should be launched for priests, pilgrims, and local communities.
- There should strictly measures for biodegradable ritual materials and put high fines on companies which are manufacturing against it.

- Active involvement of the Dom community (local community) and religious leaders in sustainable cremation initiatives.
- There should be involvement of NGOs, students from BHU and other institutions, awareness among common people, and announcement rewards for them.

### 8.3 Governance and Policy Measures

- The government should strictly monitor illegal waste disposal and wood usage.
- Integrated ghat management plans combining sanitation, waste treatment, and urban planning.
- There should be regulation of crowd intensity during peak ritual periods or any festivals.
- There should be a time limit for visitors and put fine for crowd management.
- There should be use of ai in camera monitoring for face identification to adharcard and strict action against them.

### 8.4 Ecological Restoration

- There should be improvement in sewage infrastructure near the ghats.
- Afforestation initiatives should be taken to ensure sustainable wood supply.
- There should be establishment of biodiversity protection zones along sensitive river stretches.
- There should be plantation around rivers.

Source of pollution	Description
Cremation Ash	Disposal of ash and remains into the river
Wood Burning	Emissions from traditional pyres
Ritual Offerings	Flowers, clothes, plastic, oils, etc.
Human Footfall	Waste generation and bank erosion

*Table 1: Major Sources of Pollution at Manikarnika Ghat*

Environmental Components	Observed Impact
Water	High coliform levels, reduced dissolved oxygen
Air	Particulate matter, black carbon emissions
Land	Soil contamination and riverbank erosion

*Table 2: Environmental Impacts of Cremation Activities*

Sector	Impact
Health	Respiratory and skin diseases
Livelihood	Reduced tourism and income instability
Culture	Conflict between tradition and sustainability

*Table 3: Socio-economic Impacts on Local Communities*

## 9. Conclusion

Manikarnika Ghat is a religious place where spirituality meets environmental challenges. This ghat reminds us of that faith and nature always grow together but without care, nature silently pays. The same fire gives moksha (liberate) to soul simultaneously releases harmful gases which pollute air, water and land. The local people experience hidden health and economic burden. Now readers might interpret the study as the conflict between religion and science, but the actual conflict is between unchanged traditions and a changing world. The sustainable solutions are possible and also suggest above, but it works only when there is respect for ritual combined with modern knowledge not overlapping one another. Small changes like cleaner technologies, community participation, and awareness can bring big changes. If we are expecting Ganga to be self-healing then there should be our duty to support it and not be an obstacle in between nature and remember saving Manikarnika Ghat is not preserving just sacred place but also our culture and tradition and the importance of Ganga river and city Varanasi's importance as the place of Lord Shiva (Kashi). The true relevance of religious places lies not only in rituals, but in responsibility to protect the nature that sustains them.

## 10. Limitations of the study

Only published literature and secondary sources of data and personal experience are used in this study. The depth of the analysis is constrained by the lack of primary data, such as direct water sampling, air quality measurements, or interviews. Still, the results are trustworthy because they are based on reliable data from established institutions and personal experience. In the future, studies could include hands-on fieldwork and involve local people to get even deeper insights.

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# Women's Role in Shaping India's Socio-Cultural Landscape: From Historical to Contemporary

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## Abstract

Women have played a significant role throughout India's history and in the present day in shaping the country's socio-cultural landscape, from being the birth bearers in the agrarian society to becoming agents of social transformation. The paper explores the evolution of women's roles in Indian society, highlighting their significant contributions to culture, education, politics, and various reform movements. It explores how women have transitioned from being denied their rights to changing the norms through education. It also examines the contemporary situation of women and how their daily lives are consumed by struggles that require societal attention. Ultimately, this paper uses secondary data and literary analysis to argue that empowering women is not merely a matter of justice but a prerequisite for sustainable cultural and social development. The paper aims to critically examine the evolution of women's roles, status, rights and representation in Indian society from the traditional framework to contemporary socio-cultural realities.

**Keywords:** Women in India, Culture, Social change, Gender Equality, Empowerment, Contemporary women

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## 1. Introduction

Women have played a vital role in Indian history across culture, art, agriculture, textiles, and political reforms. Indian history has been heavily influenced by social factors, and even the modern world continues to change due to social involvement. Women, as part of these social factors, contribute both domestically and economically. They have also been central to shaping India's social fabric through their evolving roles as caregivers, educators, entrepreneurs, leaders, and activists. Their contributions are often overlooked in defining the country's moral fabric, cultural continuity, and modern development.

In the Indian context, societal change has rarely progressed without the involvement of women. From intellectual debates in the Vedic period, spiritual leadership during the Bhakti movement, grassroots mobilisation during freedom struggles, to current participation in policymaking and

nation-building, this paper highlights women's essential role in shaping a better human society, not only by tracing their past but also by fostering a more inclusive future.

## **2. Background**

To understand the positioning of women in India's socio-cultural landscape, there is a requirement of conceptual examination of patriarchy, gender norms, and intersectionality within historical and contemporary contexts. The Indian society is structured around kinship, caste hierarchies, religious doctrines, and customary practices that collectively shape gender relations. The socio-cultural landscape refers not merely to traditions and rituals, but to the network of institutions that regulate women's roles and identities.

In the early Vedic period, women were involved in the decision-making of the household and enjoyed a similar level of freedom as men. According to the Rigveda, there were various women scholars who flourished during the period and actively participated in philosophical and religious aspects of society. Arthashastra also mentions how women were involved in the armed forces. There was a decline in women's position in society during the later Vedic period with the emergence of patriarchal thoughts, which manifested in various forms such as the sati pratha and the pardah system. Yet even during such restrictive eras, women managed to consistently shape culture and social life. The emergence of women saints like Mirabai, Akka Mahadevi and Lal Ded in the Bhakti and Sufi era not only challenged orthodox beliefs but also redefined spiritual expression.

The 19th century brought a reform period with new momentum, with pioneers like Savitri Bai, Tarabai, and Pandita Rama Bai. Raja Ram Mohan Roy with the Abolition of Sati and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar with widow remarriages emerged as prominent feminist men during that era. Feminist historian Uma Chakravarti introduced the concept of Brahmanical patriarchy, arguing that caste purity and control over women's sexuality were central to maintaining upper-caste dominance. B.R. Ambedkar emphasized that caste survives through strict control over women's marriage and reproduction, and that endogamy is systematically restricted to preserve social order.

## **3. Materials and Methods**

This paper is based on secondary data, mainly relying on authentic sources to collect information and provide accurate results. The paper uses government reports, historical records, and newspaper features to analyze women's contribution to socio-cultural development. It is qualitative research based on historical-comparative research and a feminist analytical framework. The use of tools like census data, NFHS, NCRB criminal data, and Parliamentary data is used to support the analytical approach.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### ***4.1 Women in Ancient and Medieval India***

Since the beginning of the Vedic period, women were free from patriarchal restrictions and contributed actively as members of the community. They practiced their role of being a mother, along with running the economic status of the household. They worked as scholars, poets, and

saints. Notable examples of ancient Indian scholars include Gargi and Maithreyi. Women in prehistory believed that conception and generation of a foetus did not limit their actions. She continued to work within the commune and, according to cave art, even participated in hunts, fishing, and other activities.

Over time, while glorifying women, society started taking away all their rights and privileges. During the period of Smritis, women were bracketed with the shudras and denied the right to study the Vedas. Marriage or domestic life became compulsory for women. The Mughal era witnessed a sudden fall in the status of women in Indian society. Education was stopped for them, and they became victims of evil practices such as early child marriage, the pardah system, and sati. Hence, the Mughal era is also known as 'the dark age for women'.

#### ***4.2 Women in the Colonial Period and Freedom Struggle***

The image of Indian women during the colonial period was one of passivity. Women were burdened and confined by both colonial patriarchy and indigenous patriarchy. Due to ignorance, women were unaware of their basic rights. There were women activists in nationalist movements like Tarabai Shinde, Binodini Das, and Pandita Ramabai. These women reformers played a crucial role in advocating for social change, women's rights, and education. Sarojini Naidu became the first woman president of the Indian National Congress in 1925 and was a strong advocate for women's suffrage and education.

Women have also played a significant role in the making of India's art and culture. Madhubani paintings in Bihar are predominantly practised by women who illustrate themes from mythology and nature using vibrant colours and designs. Similarly, Warli art in Maharashtra was created by Maharashtrian Adivasi women to showcase their daily lifestyle and natural elements. Various dance forms like Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyatam, and Odissi also provide a platform for women to portray epic narratives by blending artistic expressions with cultural storytelling.

#### ***4.3 Women in Post-Colonial India***

Post-independent India guaranteed the empowerment of women through legal reforms and initiatives to bring about general equality socially, culturally, and economically. Women were provided with their basic human rights through Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution and various acts like the Dowry Prohibition Act and the POSH Act (2013). The Hindu Code Bill of 1955 granted women the right to property, divorce, and widow remarriage. Women began to strive harder in the world with more opportunities and greater acceptance, educating themselves and making space in places previously dominated by men, such as politics, technology, sports, and medicine.

In the political sphere, figures like Indira Gandhi, who became India's first female Prime Minister, and Pratibha Patil, the first female President of India, are early pioneers. Today, Droupadi Murmu has become India's first tribal president. In sports, Mary Kom, P.V. Sindhu, and Saina Nehwal are popular names. In 2024, women constitute 36% of the Indian IT Workforce. Women have also actively participated in social movements like the Chipko movement and the Telangana movement. The Stree Shakti scheme promotes women entrepreneurship with discounted loans.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has made significant strides through Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0.

#### **4.4 Contemporary Challenges**

While these data, schemes, and figures may seem progressive, there remains a large gender gap between men and women in Indian society. According to the UNDP Gender Equality Index of 2024, India ranks at 102nd position in the world with a GII of 0.403. According to the NFHS-5 report (2019–20), while women's participation in financial services improved, spousal sexual violence increased from 7% in NFHS-4 to 14% in NFHS-5. The NCRB Crime in India Report 2023 revealed an increase in crime against women by 0.7 percent (4.48 lakh cases), with 29.8% being domestic cruelty. Patriarchy has adapted to modern conditions rather than disappeared. Caste-based gender oppression has led to the need for intersectionality in the modern-day feminist ecosystem, as Dalit, Tribal, and minority women continue to face layered discrimination.

#### **5. Limitations**

This study has the following limitations: reliance on secondary data; limited regional case study representation; lack of primary interviews; possible urban bias in contemporary data; rapidly evolving socio-cultural conditions; and intersectional data gaps in official statistics.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Despite all the hardships, in this age and time, women refuse to stay quiet and have started demanding their rights. They want to work alongside men and work towards the social, political, and economic development of society. Compared to the 20th century, women today are educated, employed, and self-driven, and have marked a position in every sphere. It is important to first and foremost build a safe space for women for their personal development. Education should be provided to women in every corner of India.

Indian women have made a long journey from ancient times to the contemporary scenario in the Indian socio-cultural context. They have continued to prove themselves worthy of every opportunity. India, as a progressive society, should provide women with every aspect of self-growth opportunities and work towards their general career enhancement. There remains a demand to bridge the gap between urban and rural societies as well as castes and classes, as gender cannot be separated from them. The journey of Indian women from traditional socio-cultural confines to contemporary assertion reflects not a completed revolution, but an ongoing negotiation between history, law, and lived reality.

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# **The Living Rivers: Stories of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Narmada, and How They Shape the Land and Life**

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## **Abstract**

In India, rivers are more than just watercourses; they are the pulsing arteries of a nation, acting as dynamic socio-ecological systems that weave physical landscapes with human history, culture, and daily life. This paper takes a closer look at three iconic river systems — the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Narmada — exploring them through the lenses of geography, culture, and environmental health. Drawing on an analysis of existing geographical literature, official reports, and cultural histories, we examine each river's unique physical form, the nature of its basin, the extent of human reliance upon it, and the urgent ecological threats it faces. Our findings confirm that while these magnificent rivers have tirelessly supported vast populations, nurtured agricultural bounty, and safeguarded ancient cultural traditions for centuries, they are now under severe stress. Pollution, the unpredictable forces of climate change, massive infrastructure projects, and overextraction of resources are taking a heavy toll. We argue that the preservation of these vital river systems and the profound human–environment relationships they embody is dependent on adopting an integrated river basin management approach, one that is deeply rooted in ecological wisdom and empowered community participation.

**Keywords:** Ganga, Brahmaputra, Narmada, River Systems, Ecology, Cultural Geography, Environmental Stress

and massive water infrastructure projects. Unpredictable monsoon cycles, the shrinking of Himalayan glaciers, and exponentially increasing pollution levels are placing intense ecological pressure across all major river basins. Against this backdrop, it is vital that we begin to see and understand these rivers as integrated human environment systems. This paper intentionally focuses on three deeply contrasting river systems — the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, and the Narmada — to understand how natural processes interact with human cultural practices, economic necessities, and environmental dilemmas.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout history, rivers have been the cradles of human civilizations dictating where people settle, shaping farming methods, carving out trade routes, and forging cultural identities. In India, however, rivers hold an elevated, almost sacred status. They are not merely physical flows of water but sacred, living symbols deeply woven into the fabric of social existence. From the chanting of ancient verses to the rituals of modern life, rivers are seen as life-giving forces that sustain both material well-being and spiritual devotion.

Modern studies in geography and environment reveal that India's river systems are changing at an alarming pace, driven by a cocktail of climate change, booming populations, rapid urbanization, and massive water infrastructure projects. Unpredictable monsoon cycles, the shrinking of Himalayan glaciers, and exponentially increasing pollution levels are placing intense ecological pressure across all major river basins. Against this backdrop, it is vital that we begin to see and understand these rivers as integrated human environment systems. This paper intentionally focuses on three deeply contrasting river systems — the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, and the Narmada — to understand how natural processes interact with human cultural practices, economic necessities, and environmental dilemmas.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

Our exploration is guided by three main objectives:

- To paint a detailed picture of the physical journey and geological characteristics of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Narmada river systems.
- To understand the socio-cultural and economic heartbeat of these rivers for the human communities living within their embrace.
- To confront and assess the most pressing contemporary environmental challenges threatening the long-term health and sustainability of these river systems.

## 3. Study Area

Our research spans three major river basins in India, each representing a dramatically different physical and environmental region. The Ganga Basin stretches majestically from the high Himalayas down to the Bay of Bengal, supporting one of the highest concentrations of people on Earth. With its vast alluvial plains, rich, fertile soils, and a dense, sprawling network of tributaries, this basin forms the agricultural and historical heartland of northern India.

The Brahmaputra Basin begins its powerful journey on the Tibetan Plateau, storms through the gorges of Arunachal Pradesh and the plains of Assam, before meeting the sea in Bangladesh. It is infamous for its vast, braided channels, immense sediment load, relentless flooding, and spectacular biodiversity. It is home to vital wetlands, unique river islands like Majuli, and highly sensitive floodplain ecosystems.

The Narmada Basin flows west, cutting a path through the heart of India along a tectonic rift valley nestled between the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges, eventually emptying into the Arabian Sea. While less densely populated than the other two, it possesses extraordinary ecological and cultural value, holding a particularly deep significance for indigenous communities.

## 4. Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative research approach, carefully analyzing existing data. Our sources are varied and intentional:

- Scholarly books and peer-reviewed articles that delve into the physical shape of rivers (fluvial geomorphology), river ecology, and the complex interactions between humans and their environment.
- Official government reports, river basin management blueprints, and environmental assessment documents.
- Historical texts and cultural studies that illuminate the religious and social connections people have forged with their rivers.
- Census data and socio-economic reports that provide a picture of the populations who depend on these rivers for their sustenance.

Our method integrates the physical science of geography with the human experience of geography, synthesizing information on how rivers flow, how land is used, what cultural practices are upheld, and what environmental battles are being fought. A comparative analysis is used throughout to respectfully highlight the shared lessons and distinct challenges faced by the three river systems.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### *5.1 The Ganga: Faith, Fertility, and Environmental Stress*

The Ganga River system is a landscape architect, creating massive floodplains, gentle meandering channels, crescent-shaped oxbow lakes, and one of the planet's largest deltas. The annual, seasonal floods are a blessing, renewing the soil's fertility and supporting the intense agriculture and dense tapestry of villages and cities along its banks. Major urban centers like Haridwar, Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Kolkata have flourished along its course, proof of the river's unparalleled economic and spiritual power.

Culturally, the Ganga is deeply beloved and revered as Ganga Mata (Mother Ganga) — the ultimate symbol of purity, salvation, and the endless flow of life. Ritual bathing, the sacred practice of cremation, and immense religious gatherings like the Kumbh Mela cement the river's irreplaceable spiritual importance. Yet, this intense devotion has come at a cost. Unchecked urbanization, raw industrial waste, untreated city sewage, and the dwindling of the river's natural flow are severely undermining its water quality. While recent governmental pledges and initiatives aim for the river's rejuvenation, their true success will hinge on disciplined, long-term ecological planning and the heartfelt participation of the public.

### *5.2 The Brahmaputra: Dynamism, Livelihoods, and Resilience*

The Brahmaputra is arguably one of the most volatile and powerful river systems in the world, perpetually sculpted by colossal water discharge, torrential monsoon rains, and an enormous sediment load. Its iconic braided channels are constantly shifting, leading to widespread bank erosion and displacement, but simultaneously creating rich floodplains that are the lifeblood of agriculture and fisheries.

Though often destructive, the seasonal floods are crucial ecological events, essential for maintaining soil fertility and nourishing vital wetland ecosystems. The basin supports diverse ways of life, from rice cultivation and sprawling tea plantations to river-based fishing. The wetlands and grasslands along the river are critical homes for endangered species, notably in protected areas like Kaziranga National Park. The communities living alongside the Brahmaputra have developed profound, adaptive strategies to navigate this environmental uncertainty, demonstrating a powerful resilience forged by centuries of intimate interaction with the river's ever-changing rhythms.

### ***5.3 The Narmada: Tectonics, Culture, and Development Debates***

Flowing dramatically westward along a geological fault line, the Narmada boasts distinct and often dramatic features: steep slopes, rugged rocky gorges, and spectacular waterfalls like Dhuandhar. Landscapes such as the stunning marble cliffs of Bhedaghat are physical testaments to the river's deep geological history.

For the region's tribal and rural inhabitants, the Narmada is a source of profound spiritual sustenance. Practices like the Narmada Parikrama (a circumambulation of the river) illustrate an unbroken, powerful cultural covenant between the people and the river. However, in recent decades, colossal dam projects, most notably the Sardar Sarovar, have radically reshaped the basin. While providing much-needed irrigation and hydropower, these projects have ignited fierce debates over the mass displacement of people, irreversible ecological transformation, and fundamental questions of social justice.

The story of the Narmada powerfully encapsulates the wider, global tensions between managing a river for "development" and the urgent necessity of maintaining its ecological sustainability and ensuring social equity.

## **6. Limitations of the Study**

This study relies primarily on existing data, which inherently limits our ability to capture the finegrained, localized experiences of river conditions and community life in the present day. The absence of on-the-ground fieldwork and new, quantitative hydrological data prevents a minute assessment of the very latest environmental shifts. Future research endeavors would greatly benefit from incorporating direct field-based observations and personal interviews with stakeholders to strengthen the empirical narrative.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Narmada collectively demonstrate a fundamental truth: rivers function as seamlessly integrated natural and social systems, acting as primary sculptors of landscapes, providers of livelihoods, and definers of cultural identity. While each river possesses its own distinct personality — both physically and culturally — all three are experiencing escalating pressures from climate volatility, chronic pollution, and disruptive human interventions in the name of development.

To secure a sustainable future for these vital rivers, we must embrace holistic, integrated river basin management. This requires policy interventions grounded in scientific evidence, a deep respect for traditional ecological knowledge systems, and, most crucially, the active participation of the communities whose lives are intrinsically tied to the water. Protecting these rivers is not merely an

environmental task; it is a profound cultural, social, and economic imperative vital for India's long-term resilience and well-being.

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# **The Impact of Media Coverage of Gender-Based Violence on College Students in Delhi: A Focus Group Study**

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## **Abstract**

India sees a significant number of violent crimes against women and gender minorities every year. Media coverage, therefore, serves as an important way to unpack the social implications of gender-based violence. However, media coverage of gender-based violence in India leans heavily towards sensationalist headlines with an emphasis on more brutal crimes, victim-blaming and selective coverage of crimes based on the profile of those involved. This study aims to investigate how this news coverage of GBV impacts college students in Delhi NCR using the cultivation theory and the framing theory, which suggest that prolonged exposure to media cultivates an altered perception of reality and that media narratives influence audience interpretations and reactions, respectively.

We used focus group discussions as the qualitative research method for data collection for this study with students across 12 colleges in Delhi-NCR. It included four groups of six individuals, each of whom participated in semi-structured group interviews, of which two were conducted in online mode, and the other two were conducted in physical mode. By the end of our study, we have discovered that female students are constantly hypervigilant and anxious about their personal safety, while male students have an almost third-party view of this phenomenon, where they fear for women's safety instead of their own. We observed strong emotional reactions to GBV news in both female and male participants, but gendered cumulative psychological effects, with female students experiencing anxiety and being hyper aware and male students feeling frustrated and emotionally shutting out GBV news. All participants were of the consensus that media narratives are based on the marketability of cases and framed with different kinds of gender, regional, caste, and class bias.

**Keywords:** Media, Gender-Based Violence, Sensationalism, Anxiety, News Coverage

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## **1. Introduction**

According to the framing theory, people's decisions on how to digest information are influenced by the way it is presented to them, or "the frame." Abstractions called frames are used to shape or arrange the meaning of messages (Arowolo, 2017). According to framing theory, the media introduces news items with specific and limited contextualization in order to construct this frame. Frames are utilised as cognitive shortcuts to connect stories to the larger picture or can be created to improve comprehension (Arowolo, 2017). Using this theory, we can understand how news media constructs GBV narratives and their influence on college students' emotional and cognitive responses. An example of this harmful framing was shown in an analysis of 400 hours of Indian TV content that found women are portrayed as victims, caretakers, and sex objects while men are presented as masters, doers, and intellectuals — and this is among the early studies to provide empirical evidence of the gender stereotyping prevalent in the Indian news media (Behera, 1989; Sreedharan et al., 2021).

## **2. Research Problem**

In recent years, India has seen a rise in the coverage of gender-based violence. Media pundits ascribe this turn to the 2012 Delhi gang rape case that shook the nation and led to widespread public outcry on both the ground and digital media platforms. This was accompanied by ongoing scrutiny of how the media continues to present news pertaining to gender-based violence. Although there was a lot of praise for the media activism that followed that incident, analyses of the news coverage that followed and the subsequent spate of sexual assaults that caught the media's attention paint a disturbing picture of sensationalistic and stereotypical representation based on patriarchal values (Sreedharan et al., 2021). Delhi NCR, since called the "rape capital" in several sensational headlines, became central to the discourse. It is therefore imperative to understand how college students residing in Delhi interpret and respond to such narratives.

College students in Delhi NCR are an untouched, unique demographic in this regard. Several studies examining the role of media in spreading awareness about GBV and/or sensationalising narratives exist, but few explore the impact of this framing on college students who are consuming media at lightning speed every waking hour. These college students who are at a critical stage of their identity formation and social consciousness are constantly navigating spaces where they have to actively negotiate and contest gender notions and dynamics. However, very limited research exists on how college students interpret gendered narratives, form ideas of social justice and internalise safety concerns.

Moreover, most studies in India that have analysed media narratives have either overlooked youth perceptions or used quantitative methods. A qualitative focus group of college students would present nuanced perceptions and patterns in social interaction. This study essentially aims to fill a critical research gap by uncovering how college students in Delhi NCR — a region frequently highlighted and sensationalized in media narratives of GBV — perceive and respond to the coverage of such violence.

### 3. Research Questions

The research questions that the study aims to explore center around the research gap that it highlights. Three succinct questions that align with our research and form the backbone of the study are as follows:

- To analyse the cultivation theory and students' overall perception of GBV-related news coverage: Has the coverage of GBV news altered college students' perception of personal safety and resulted in any behavioural changes?
- To test the framing theory and understand how news media constructs GBV narratives that impact students: How do they engage with and understand narratives presented by the news around GBV?
- To learn about the emotional and psychological impact of media coverage of GBV: What kind of emotional and psychological impact does this have on the students?

### 4. Literature Review

#### *4.1 Media Representation of Gender-Based Violence in India*

Previous studies conducted for understanding patterns of gender-based violence reporting in Indian news media, particularly the works examining the content of news coverage dealing with the prioritization of sensationalism over responsible journalism, were reviewed for this study. Additionally, previously conducted studies on the impact of news coverage on public perception, analysing the psychological impacts of repeated exposure to GBV news, and its influence on societal attitudes and discourse were also included.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. This encompasses a wide range of violent acts from rape and sexual assault to sexual harassment, exploitation and forced exposure to sexual content.

The study also finds that media coverage varies in how it links incels to GBV. While Incels promote violent misogynistic ideologies, media coverage often downplays this aspect, and some reports even focus more on mental illness or social rejection rather than the role of male entitlement and toxic masculinity in violence against women. Stories of incel violence are often sensationalised and discussed within violent extremism, leaving everyday forms of GBV underreported. Lastly, Brown (2023) argues that news media are not neutral in their portrayal, and this can shape public perceptions.

### 5. Methodology

This study employed focus group discussion as the method for data collection for qualitative research. This study deals with experiences related to the perceptions of GBV coverage, the narratives surrounding that, and the emotional and psychological reactions that individuals might have. Given the subjectivity of the research questions and the data that would be required to satisfy

that, we decided to opt for focus groups. Since the data we were anticipating would be about perceptions, narratives, and shared experiences within a particular community of individuals, focus groups were the best option. These are particularly helpful in producing rich qualitative data that, in the case of our study, individual interviews or anonymous surveys could have been missed.

The study area was colleges in Delhi-NCR. Purposive sampling was used to select participants to ensure relevant data is collected. Participants were selected based on fulfilment of the age criteria of 18-21, currently enrolled in a higher educational institution in Delhi NCR and currently residing in Delhi NCR. Participants were recruited with the help of a Google form, enlisting the selection criteria, which was shared across WhatsApp group chats of college students in Delhi. Content warning regarding the sensitivity of the topic and maintenance of participant confidentiality was mentioned in the form itself, with an 'informed consent' checkbox option given to participants who agreed to sign up for the focus groups.

In total, we had 24 participants who signed up, who were then divided into four groups of six participants each. Of the four groups, two groups consisted only of female participants, and the other two consisted only of male participants. Focus group 1 (female participants) was conducted in a college campus, and focus group 2 (male participants) was conducted at a mutually agreed, private and comfortable setting. Focus groups 3 and 4 were conducted in online mode on Google Meet. A semi-structured discussion guide, developed based on relevant literature and preliminary research, was used to facilitate discussions. On average, the focus group discussions lasted between 45-60 minutes. All the discussions were recorded with the prior consent of the participants. The video recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the experiences of the participants.

## **6. Research Findings and Discussion**

This section presents the key findings of the study. Qualitative data collected through focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis, and recurring patterns were identified across the four focus groups. Three major themes appeared during the analysis: 1) perceptions of personal safety and ensuing behavioral changes, 2) perceptions of bias and sensationalism in news reporting and coverage and 3) emotional reactions and subsequent psychological impact of GBV news.

### ***6.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of Personal Safety and Ensuing Behavioral Changes***

This theme emerged because of a recurring pattern of insecurity felt by several participants across the focus groups after being exposed to GBV news daily. An important thing to note here is that across all the groups, there was a consensus that they encounter GBV news as frequently as every day. Several participants also noted that the advent of social media has led to an increase in the amount of news coverage of gender-based violence as well as their exposure to it.

We noted that only female participants felt that GBV news had altered their sense of personal safety and made them feel unsafe in everyday situations, especially in Delhi NCR. These were followed by behavioural changes adopted to tackle this fear, like reaching home at a designated time, covering themselves, taking different lanes, sharing their live locations, and being on phone calls with family members and friends. Female participants described avoiding late-night events like cultural fests and feeling anxious during everyday commutes. They also described Delhi as an "unsafe city" regardless of whether they had had unsafe experiences themselves, and attributed it partly to social conditioning and parental warnings.

This theme indicates the deep emotional and psychological impact of sensationalist reporting and overexposure of GBV news on college students in Delhi NCR. Nearly all participants described feelings ranging from shock and frustration to emotional shutdown and detachment, indicating emotional fatigue.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the impact of media coverage of gender-based violence on college students in Delhi NCR, using a qualitative approach and focus group discussions to collect data. Grounded mainly in Gerbner's cultivation theory, this study revealed the emotional, psychological and behavioural impact of sensationalization of violence against women on young adults in Delhi NCR. The research problem highlighted how college students in Delhi are an untouched demographic with regards to understanding the impact of sensationalistic media narratives about GBV as they are continuously battling gender norms and navigating the "rape capital." By the end of our study, we have discovered that female students are constantly hypervigilant and anxious about their personal safety while male students have an almost third-party view of this phenomenon where they fear for women's safety instead of their own. We observed strong emotional reactions to GBV news in both female and male participants, but gendered cumulative psychological effects with female students experiencing anxiety and being hyper aware and male students feeling frustrated and emotionally shutting out GBV news. All participants were of the consensus that media narratives are based on the marketability of cases and framed with different kinds of gender, regional, caste, and class bias.

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असतो मा सद्गमय।  
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मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ॥

विद्या ददाति विनयं विनयाद् याति पात्रताम्।  
पात्रत्वात् धनमाप्नोति धनात् धर्मं ततः सुखम् ॥



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