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CONFLICTS AND RESILIENCE: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Chief Editor's Note

Sociology, as a discipline that engages with contemporary social realities, continues to confront an existential crisis in all its domains in India. The discipline mirrors similar challenges in Kerala as well, despite more than six decades of its academic legacy in the state. Yet, considering its radical potential for sociological imagination and its capacity to challenge commonsensical knowledge, sociology holds critical significance in laying the foundation for a social order rooted in justice. It is increasingly recognized that what Satish Deshpande termed the 'abnormal gaze' of the sociologists must find expression through rigorous, reflective and socially relevant research. *Kerala Sociologist*, the official journal of the Kerala Sociological Society, aims to promote and disseminate new sociological knowledge through quality social research and thereby enhance the visibility and relevance of the discipline to a wider audience.

The June issue of this bi-annual journal is the annual Kerala Sociological Conference special issue and the December issue remains as an open one. The June issue, this year, compiles the works addressing the conference theme, *Conflicts and Resilience: Sociological Perspective*. The open issue brings together a wide range of sociologically relevant topics. Most contributions across both issues are grounded in empirical research. It is indeed a privilege that the conference special issue features the scholarly articles of Prof. K.M. Seethi, Prof. Shweta Prasad along with an enriching conversation with Prof. A.K. Ramakrishnan. Another distinctive feature of this volume is the reintroduction of book reviews after an interval. The journal looks forward to contributions that reflect impactful sociological inquiry, with a focus on relevant and emerging aspects of social structure in a changing world, rather than revisiting conventional themes characteristic of a particular period. The journal also seeks to encourage original research for its own sake, marked by methodological soundness and analytical rigour.

It is with great pleasure that I present the 52nd volume of the journal. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the whole hearted

efforts and dedication of the editorial team particularly Dr. Badhariya Beegum P. I also extend my sincere gratitude to the peer reviewers and members of the Executive Committee of the Kerala Sociological Society for their valuable support in realising this publication. I earnestly hope that the journal's legacy will continue to reach new heights in the coming years through the creative contributions and constructive critiques of the sociology fraternity and all our well-wishers.

Amrutha Rinu Abraham

Chief Editor

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Conflict and Resilience in Sociological Perspective

Bushra Beegom R. K.*

Welcome to this important conference on 'Conflict and Resilience in Sociological Perspective' organized by Kerala Sociological Society. The world is disturbed by diverse conflicts ranging from international wars to internal social disputes. When we look it from a sociological viewpoint, it is rooted in power imbalances, social inequalities, and cultural differences that shape the fabric of society. These disputes often disrupt social cohesion, displace communities, and intensify inequalities making societies fragile and vulnerable. It can emerge in families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and nations, taking forms as varied as everyday disagreements, political struggles, and violent confrontations. While conflict often causes pain and loss, it also reveals the ways people and communities find strength, adapt, and rebuild. On the other hand, resilience is the capacity to recover and to create new possibilities after disruption. Therefore, Conflict is important to study sociologically. The current conference entitiled 'Conflicts and Resilience in Sociological Perspective' intent to bring these two

* *President, Kerala Sociological Society & Associate Professor, Department of Sociology University of Kerala | bushrabeegom@keralauniversity.ac.in*

Presidential address delivered at the 50th Annual Conference of the Kerala Sociological Society on the theme 'Conflicts and Resilience: Sociological Perspective' held on 21st -22nd March 2024.

themes together, Conflict and Resilience. By looking closely at real experiences of individuals and societies, we ask how social structures, cultural practices, and human relationships shape both the outbreak of conflict and the paths toward recovery. This perspective reminds us that behind all statistics are people with stories of suffering, courage and hope. Understanding those stories can help scholars, practitioners, and policy makers imagine responses that are not only effective but also deeply humane.

According to the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the world experienced 36 active conflict situations, the highest number recorded since 2014, spread across 59 conflict zones in 34 different countries. Although the total number of deaths declined compared to the previous year falling from an estimated 310,000 in 2022 to about 154,000 in 2023. This decrease was largely the result of the end of the war in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Even with this reduction, 2023 still remains as one of the deadliest years since 1989, denoting the ongoing severity of global violence.Nine of these conflicts escalated into full-scale wars, defined as causing more than 1,000 battle-related deaths each. Among them, the war in Ukraine remained the most intense, claiming roughly 71,000 lives, while the Israel–Hamas conflict caused thousands of deaths in just a short period including women and children in Palestine. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) adds another dimension to this picture. Its Conflict Index recorded 167,800 deaths resulting from nearly 147,000 incidents of political violence, a reminder that conflict is not only limited to large-scale wars but also includes clashes, targeted attacks, and unrest. Conflict in some form touched 168 countries or territories, meaning it is not confined to a few hotspots but is truly global in scope. One in six people worldwide now lives in an area directly affected by conflict, and about 16% of the global population resides within just five kilometers of violent events.

In 2023, more than 3,000 non-state armed groups were active around the world, a dramatic rise compared with previous years. These groups range from organized militias and insurgent movements to gangs and transnational criminal organizations.

Their presence makes conflicts harder to track and to resolve, because they often operate outside the formal political system. According to ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project), 50 countries experienced extreme or high levels of conflict in 2023. The list spans different regions and types of violence: protracted civil wars in Myanmar and Syria, drug-related and criminal violence in Mexico, the ongoing interstate war in Ukraine, and complex insurgencies in Nigeria. Overall, the number of recorded conflict incidents increased by 12 percent between 2022 and 2023, and by 27 percent over the past two years. Much of this increase is linked to the continuing war in Ukraine, but it also reflects the broader pattern of conflicts multiplying and intensifying across the globe.

Armed conflicts are not just battles between armies or political factions; they are tragedies for millions of ordinary people, especially for women and children. For example, in Sudan, more than 12.3 million people have been displaced from their homes, including 8.8 million internally displaced within the country and 3.5 million refugees who have crossed borders in search of safety. Children account for 53 percent of these uprooted populations, meaning that more than half of those struggling to find shelter, food, and education are minors. Globally, the burden on women and girls is equally alarming. According to United Nations estimates, around 600 million women and girls are currently affected by war. In 2023 alone, the number of women who lost their lives in conflict doubled, and incidents of sexual violence in war zones increased by 50 percent. These numbers represent not only physical harm but also long-term psychological trauma and the breakdown of social networks that sustain families and communities. The Israel's war in Gaza is yet another example, thousands of people have been killed, nearly half of them were women and children. Survivors have been displaced many times, worsening their health and increasing poverty and basic necessities not available for civilians.

According to recent findings from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the number of people killed in war over the past three years is the highest level in three decades. Another study

by Verisk Maplecroft shows that conflict zones have increased by 65 percent over the last three years, now covering 4.6 percent of the world's land area.

While the statistics often focus on international wars, India itself continues to face serious internal conflicts that affect local communities, development, and national security. There is violence in neighboring countries has spilled across the border, adding pressure to long-standing ethnic tensions in states such as Mizoram and Manipur. Refugee flows and cross-border movement of armed groups have made the situation more volatile. Also Ethnic Conflict in Manipur 2023–24displaced thousands of people and exposed how fragile relations remain between different communities. Restoring trust and ensuring rehabilitation for those affected remain key challenges. The Maoist insurgency, continues despite years of counter-insurgency operations. Reports indicate that around 453 Maoists have been killed since December 2023, showing that the conflict is far from over and continues to claim lives on both sides.

This highlights the complex and widespread nature of armed conflicts globally and within India. Sociologically, this data reveals how violence and conflict are deeply embedded in social structures, affecting various groups differently based on gender, age, ethnicity, and social class. The increase in armed groups and conflict incidents signifies growing social instability, which disrupts community cohesionand causes long-term trauma among populations particularlyamong vulnerable groups like women, children, and displaced persons. These conflicts often perpetuate cycles of violence, povertyand social fragmentation, making reconciliation and peacebuilding challenging.

The discourses in this three-day conference emphasizes that conflicts are not only political or military issues but also social crises that threaten the fabric of societies and ultimate disruption of social cohesion and sustainability. The massive displacement due to conflict around the world and suffering of civilians, particularly minors and women, underscore how wars deepen social inequalities and cause broad societal dislocation and disorganisation. Moreover, the ongoing conflicts in regions mentioned earlier reflect broader

issues of ethnic tension and political instability, often driven by historical grievances and compounded by geopolitical factors.

This conference unequivocally condemns all forms of conflict, especially armed conflicts at the global and regional levels, which have devastating sociological consequences by destabilizing societies, displacing millions, and exacerbating social inequalities. In order to combat these injustices, we must adopt a robust approach that extends beyond military force to include comprehensive social interventions. Hence the Sociologists should focus on addressing the root causes of violence such as systemic inequality, discrimination and marginalizationby promoting social justice, fostering inclusive dialogue, and empowering marginalized communities. Rebuilding trust and social cohesion requires targeted efforts in education, economic development, and community reconciliation, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and dignity for all. Achieving sustainable peace mandates a resolute commitment to transforming social structures and eliminating the underlying social injustices that fuel violence, making social justice not just an ideal, but a practical necessity for lasting peace. In this conference, I urge all sociologists gathered here to join forces in transforming conflict prone social structures into the place of peace and resilience. We need to have a collective effort and deep commitment to address the underlying social inequalities that fuel conflicts. We can foster resilient communities capable of rebuildingand thriving despite adversity. Let us continue to work together with determination and compassion to create a more just, peaceful, and resilient world for generations to come.

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Conflict and Resilience: Sociological Perspectives on Climate Change

Shweta Prasad*

I. Introduction: Defining Conflict and Resilience in a Sociological Context

Conflict and resilience are inherent features of social life, shaping the dynamics of human interactions. From a sociological standpoint, conflict is understood as a dynamic struggle over power and agency within society, wherein individuals or groups exert power in pursuit of limited resources or mutually incompatible goals. All societies have "structural power divisions and resource inequalities" leading to conflicting group interests (Wells, 1979). According to Marxist theory, such conflict is primarily rooted in competition over economic resources, whereas Max Weber emphasized the role of power and status in shaping social conflict. Conflict manifests as a social process where one party attempts to eliminate or render powerless another, highlighting its potentially disruptive nature within social systems, at the same time, sociologists like Coser, Dahrendorf opine that conflict can

* *Secretary, Indian Sociological Society & Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh | @shweta1_bhu@yahoo.co.in*

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contribute to the maintenance of the social systems as well. The pursuit of interests, rather than adherence to norms and values, often underlies conflict, making it a normal aspect of social life arising from competition over resources (Prayogi, 2023).

Resilience, a term that was initially related to ecosystems and their sustainability, was defined as the 'ability of the system to return to equilibrium after a temporary disturbance' (Holling, 1973) and "still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity" … (Walker et. al., 2004). From a sociological perspective, it encompasses the capacity of individuals, groups, and societies to "withstand, absorb, adapt to, transform, and recover from the effects of hazards, stressors, and social isolation" (European Commission, 2012). It involves not only the ability to "bounce back" from adversity (Klein, 2003; Paton & Johnson, 2006) but also the potential for growth and the enhancement of capabilities in the face of challenges. Social resilience "defined at the level of community rather than being a phenomenon pertaining to individuals" (Adger, 2000), is a "multilevel construct, revealed through the capacities of individuals and groups to nurture positive social relationships and to endure and recover from stressors. It emphasizes the importance of social support, strong relationships, effective coping strategies, and coordinated social activity in navigating and overcoming difficulties" (John et. al., 2011).This presentation will first outline the core principles of each sociological perspective, then examine their views on conflict and resilience, and finally apply these perspectives to the complexities of climate change.

II. Sociological Perspectives: The Core Principles

Functionalism: Order, Stability, and Social Functions

Functionalism, as one of the dominant perspectives in sociology, conceptualizes society as a complex system composed of interrelated parts where each part contributes towards promoting stability and social equilibrium. Key to the functionalist perspective is the concept of social institutions, such as family, government, economy, education, and religion, each designed to fulfil specific functions that contribute to the well-being and continuity of society.

Functionalists analyse social phenomena by examining their functions, which can be either manifest or latent. The emphasis in functionalism is on social order, value consensus, and the harmonious operation of social institutions to meet the basic needs of individuals and the collective. From this perspective, social problems, including conflict, are seen as disruptions to the system's equilibrium, potentially leading to adjustments and adaptations aimed at restoring stability. Resilience, within a functionalist framework, would therefore involve the capacity of the social system to adapt to these disruptions and maintain its essential functions over time.

Conflict Theory: Power, Inequality, and Social Change

In contrast to functionalism, Conflict theory, on the other hand, asserts that society is fundamentally shaped by structural inequalities, power struggles, and competition over scarce resources. Rooted in the work of Karl Marx, this perspective highlights social class as a central axis of conflict, wherein the bourgeoisie systematically exploit the proletariat. Max Weber expanded this analysis by arguing that conflict is not confined to economic class alone but also encompasses disparities in status (social prestige) and power (political influence), thereby broadening the scope of social stratification.

Conflict theorists argue that social order is not maintained through consensus but through the dominance and coercion by those who control resources and power. According to this perspective, various groups in society engage in struggle over power, shaping social institutions and relationships to serve their own interests. Unlike functionalism's focus on stability, conflict theory sees conflict as a normal and even necessary phenomenon that drives social change. From this viewpoint, resilience might involve challenging existing power structures and advocating for a more equitable distribution of resources to mitigate the negative impacts of conflict and adversity.

Symbolic Interactionism: Meaning, Interaction, and Social Construction

Symbolic interactionists provide a micro-level analytical lens, concentrating on how individuals construct meaning through social interactions and the use of symbols. It posits that human behaviour is guided by the subjective meanings people assign to objects, events, and relationships—meanings that emerge and evolve through ongoing social engagement. Symbols, such as language, gestures, and objects, carry shared meanings that are essential for communication and social life.

A key concept in symbolic interactionism is the "self," which develops through interaction with others. Cooley's "looking-glass self" explains how our self-image is shaped by how we perceive others see us. Symbolic interactionism also highlights the social construction of reality, suggesting that what we consider real is jointly created and sustained through our interactions and shared understandings. From this perspective, conflict emerges from differing interpretations and meanings, while resilience might involve the ability to redefine challenging situations and draw on social support to navigate adversity, emphasizing the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals.

III. Sociological Perspectives on Conflict and Resilience

Functionalist Perspective on Conflict and Resilience

From a functionalist perspective, social conflict is often viewed as a disruption to the normal functioning of society, a form of social dysfunction that can threaten societal equilibrium. Functionalist theorists like Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons argue that each part of society has a function that contributes to the overall health and cohesion of the whole. When conflict arises, it indicates a failure of certain social structures to adequately perform their functions, potentially leading to instability. However, Merton introduced a more nuanced view, suggesting that conflict can also have positive functions, such as clarifying boundaries and promoting social change by highlighting areas where the social system needs to adapt. The existence of social dysfunction or social differences can eventually be resolved through adaptation and

institutionalization processes as the system strives towards a new equilibrium.

Resilience, within a functionalist framework, is seen as the ability of a social system to maintain its essential functions and adapt to disturbances without experiencing a significant and long-lasting decline. Social institutions play a crucial role in promoting resilience by providing individuals and communities with the necessary resources, support, and frameworks to cope with adversity. For instance, the family provides emotional grounding and stability, while government policies and social services can act as safety nets during times of crisis. The concept of societal resilience emphasizes the ability of society as a whole to move forward equally following a shock, highlighting the importance of 'collective'. Addressing the underlying causes of conflict and strengthening social institutions are seen as key to restoring balance and promoting social stability, thus enhancing the overall resilience of the social system.

Conflict Theory Perspective on Conflict and Resilience

Conflict theory offers a starkly different perspective, viewing social conflict not as an anomaly but as a normal and inherent aspect of social life. Grounded in the competition over scarce resources and the unequal allocation of power, conflict is regarded as a fundamental force that drives social dynamics and facilitates societal change. Society is characterized by a constant struggle between dominant and subordinate groups, where those in power seek to maintain their advantages, often leading to tensions and conflicts. This perspective emphasizes that social order is often maintained through dominance and coercion rather than genuine consensus. Conflict is not necessarily negative; it can be a fundamental impetus for personal, interpersonal, and social change, challenging existing power structures and leading to the reorganization of social exchange relationships.

Resilience, from a conflict theory standpoint, is viewed in the context of these power dynamics. The ability to withstand and recover from adversity is often unevenly distributed, influenced by an individual's or group's access to resources and their position

within the social hierarchy. Marginalized groups, facing systemic oppression and ongoing conflict, may develop unique resilience strategies as a means of survival and resistance. Conflict itself can be a catalyst for building resilience within these groups, resulting in solidarity and collective action in the face of shared challenges. True resilience, according to this perspective, often requires addressing the underlying social and economic inequalities that contribute to vulnerability in the first place.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Conflict and Resilience

Symbolic interactionism provides a micro-level understanding of conflict and resilience, focusing on the meanings and interpretations that individuals and groups attach to their social world. Social conflict, from this perspective, can arise from differing interpretations of symbols, situations, and interactions. Communication and symbolic exchange play a crucial role in both the escalation and resolution of conflicts, as individuals negotiate meanings and attempt to understand each other's perspectives. Labels and definitions assigned to individuals or groups in conflict can significantly shape perceptions and interactions, influencing the course and outcome of the conflict.

Resilience, within this framework, is understood as a socially constructed process through which individuals and communities cope with adversity. The ability to withstand and recover from challenges is heavily influenced by social interaction, the availability of social support networks, and the degree of community engagement. Shared narratives, cultural symbols, and collective sense-making help individuals and communities interpret and respond to difficult situations, promoting a sense of "we-feeling" and coordinated social responses. Resilience, therefore, involves the active participation of individuals and communities in creating shared understandings of their circumstances and developing collective strategies to navigate them. The quality of relationships and the meanings attached to those relationships are critical factors in fostering resilience.

IV. Case Study: Climate Change - A Sociological Analysis of Conflict and Resilience

Functionalist Analysis: Climate Change as a Disruption of Social Equilibrium

From a functionalist perspective, climate change represents a significant disruption to the social system, impacting various interconnected parts and challenging the overall equilibrium. Extreme weather events such as floods, heatwaves, and droughts, along with gradual environmental degradation like sea-level rise and desertification, strain social institutions like the economy, healthcare, and infrastructure. These disruptions can lead to resource scarcity, particularly of essential resources like water and food, which in turn can generate competition and tension, potentially disrupting social order and stability. For example, prolonged droughts can lead to crop failures and food insecurity, potentially causing social unrest and migration, thus hindering the smooth functioning of society.

Functionalist approaches to building resilience against climate change emphasize the need for the social system to adapt and maintain its essential functions in the face of these shocks. This includes technological innovation to develop cleaner energy sources and more efficient resource management, strengthening infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events, and implementing adaptation strategies at individual, community, and governmental levels. Government and other institutions play a crucial role in coordinating these resilience efforts, ensuring that the social system can continue to provide essential services and maintain a degree of stability despite the challenges posed by climate change. The focus is on restoring and maintaining equilibrium through systematic adaptation and by leveraging technology to address the strains on the environment and society.

Conflict Theory Analysis: Climate Change as a Catalyst for Social Inequality and Conflict

From a conflict theory perspective, climate change acts as a significant catalyst that exacerbates existing social inequalities and generates new forms of conflict, primarily driven by the unequal

distribution of its impacts and the resources needed for adaptation. Marginalized communities, often lacking political and economic power, disproportionately bear the brunt of climate change impacts such as extreme weather, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation. Competition for dwindling resources like water, arable land, and fisheries, intensified by climate change, can lead to conflicts between different social groups, including farmers and herders, or even between nations. The unequal distribution of wealth and power allows more affluent nations and individuals to contribute more to greenhouse gas emissions while often being better equipped to mitigate and adapt to the consequences, highlighting a fundamental inequality at the global level.

Climate change, therefore, becomes a context where existing power struggles are amplified. The dominant capitalist system, with its emphasis on continuous economic expansion and profit maximization, is often criticized for prioritizing economic growth over environmental protection, thus contributing to climate change and its associated conflicts. Resilience, from this viewpoint, requires addressing these root causes of vulnerability, which are often embedded in social and economic inequalities. Marginalized groups may develop resilience by resisting dominant structures, advocating for social justice, and building solidarity to demand a more equitable distribution of resources and adaptation efforts. Climate change adaptation efforts themselves can inadvertently exacerbate existing conflicts if they are not implemented in a way that is sensitive to power dynamics and ensures equitable benefits for all groups.

Symbolic Interactionist Analysis: Meaning-Making and Responses to Climate Change

Symbolic interactionism sheds light on how our understanding and responses to climate change-related conflict are shaped by symbols, language, and social interaction. Media representations, scientific reports, and everyday conversations play a significant role in constructing our perceptions of climate change risks, its impacts, and the conflicts that may arise from it. Different cultural values, beliefs, and social backgrounds can lead to varying

interpretations of the causes and consequences of climate change, influencing how individuals and communities perceive the severity of the threat and the appropriate actions to take. For instance, the way climate change is framed – as an environmental crisis, a security threat, or an issue of social justice – can shape public opinion and policy responses.

Understanding climate change conflict through a symbolic interactionist lens involves recognizing how different groups frame the issues of resource scarcity and displacement. For example, conflicts over water resources might be interpreted as a matter of survival by affected communities, while governments might frame them as issues of national security. The meanings attached to environmental changes and the actions taken to address them are constantly negotiated through social interaction. Building resilience to climate change, from this perspective, is a process of social construction where communities come together to develop shared understandings of the challenges they face and to create collective coping mechanisms. Community engagement, participatory approaches, and the incorporation of local knowledge and traditional practices are crucial for developing resilience strategies that are meaningful and effective for the people involved. The ability of communities to communicate effectively, share knowledge, and build social capital enhances their capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of climate-related challenges.

V. Conclusion: Synthesizing Sociological Perspectives on Conflict and Resilience in the Age of Climate Change

The sociological perspectives of functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism offer distinct yet complementary insights into the complex interplay between conflict and resilience, particularly in the context of climate change. Each perspective offers valuable tools for analysing the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. Functionalism provides a macro-level understanding of how societal systems respond to large-scale disruptions, while conflict theory illuminates the critical role of power and inequality in shaping vulnerability and driving conflict. Symbolic interactionism offers a micro-level lens,

revealing how individuals and communities interpret and navigate these challenges through their interactions and shared meanings.

A comprehensive understanding of conflict and resilience in the age of climate change necessitates a multi-perspective approach. By integrating the insights from functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism, we can gain a more nuanced appreciation of the systemic disruptions, power dynamics, and social processes that shape both the conflicts arising from climate change and the diverse strategies employed to build resilience at individual, community, and societal levels. Addressing the profound challenges of climate change requires not only technological and policy solutions but also a deep understanding of the underlying social forces that drive both conflict and the capacity for human resilience.

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Conflict and Resilience: Discourses, Power, and the Crisis of Social Sciences

K.M. Seethi*

In an era marked by burgeoning crises, such as climate breakdown, economic precarity, war, pandemics, and political authoritarianism, the concepts of conflict and resilience have gained renewed attention in academic and development discourses. Yet, their pervasiveness conceals a troubling shift - both terms are increasingly sketched out through a technocratic and neoliberal lens, dissociated from historical context and political depth. Conflict is treated as intermittent disruption rather than the product of structural violence. Resilience, once a signifier of collective strength and moral forte, has been transformed into a depoliticised imperative, demanding adaptation adaptation to injustice rather than its redress. This paper critically examines this transformation through the lens of social science, locating it within the larger crisis of neoliberal governance,

* *K.M. Seethi is Director, Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension (IUCSSRE), Mahatma Gandhi University Kerala, India* | kmseethimgu@gmail.com *Dr. Seethi also served as Senior Professor of International Relations, Dean of Social Sciences at MGU and ICSSR Senior Fellow.*

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declining institutional autonomy, and the marginalisation of critical knowledge systems. It begins by tracing the systematic weakening of the social sciences in higher education, where disciplines like sociology, philosophy, and political science are increasingly sidelined in favour of economically utilitarian fields. This shift is not merely academic. It represents a restructuring of epistemic priorities that devalues ethical reflection and democratic critique in favour of market logics. The paper then addresses how resilience has been appropriated in policy and governance frameworks. Praised as a virtue, resilience is now weaponised to shift responsibility from institutions to individuals, especially in contexts of war, displacement, or austerity. This discourse is particularly visible in the Indian context, where political interference, exemplified by the New Education Policy (NEP), threatens the foundations of critical inquiry under the guise of reform. To counter these trends, the paper draws on the frameworks of post-liberal governance and critical realism. These approaches recover the political and structural dimensions of both conflict and resilience, insisting on a vision of resilience rooted in justice, collective agency, and the capacity to transform rather than merely survive structural harm.

Keywords: resilience, neoliberalism, conflict, social sciences, critical realism, post-liberal governance.

In today's rapidly changing realm of higher education, the social sciences face mounting pressures that challenge their foundational purpose. Once central to the formation of critical thought, disciplines such as sociology, political science, philosophy, and history are now marginalised by a dominant logic that evaluates education primarily in terms of economic utility. This shift reflects not just disciplinary decline, but a major transformation in how knowledge itself is valued and circulated (Gill, 2014; Williams, 2016). The growing emphasis on job readiness, market outcomes, and quantifiable skills reduces education to a function of productivity. Fields that cannot promise immediate economic returns - especially those that examine power, ethics, and justice - are increasingly seen as dispensable

(Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Hall & Bowles, 2025). Yet, it is precisely these disciplines that foster critical reasoning, ethical reflection, and social understanding, capacities essential to democratic life (Gooptu & Osterman, 2024).

This marginalisation has produced what many describe as an existential crisis in the social sciences: shrinking support, curriculum downgrades, and growing ideological surveillance (Chattopadhyay, 2020). But the consequences go beyond the academy. These disciplines shape how societies interpret justice, identity, and governance. Their erosion weakens the public's ability to question dominant narratives, not only in politics but in science, law, and economics (Williams, 2016; Fenton et al., 2024). At the same time, the call for interdisciplinarity has gained considerable attention, but often without strengthening core disciplinary foundations. Addressing complex challenges like war, conflict, climate change or social inequality requires collaboration across fields, but such work can only thrive when each discipline retains its critical and epistemological integrity (Ahmed, 2005).

The current crisis is also rooted in the historical shaping of social science education in India. During the 1970s and 80s, disciplines such as Political Sociology and Comparative Politics were dominated by Western paradigms—Structural Functionalism, systems theory, modernisation models—all often interpreted as universal and objective but significantly shaped by Cold War ideologies (Ahmed, 2005). Behaviouralist methodologies sidelined critical epistemologies such as historicism, positivism, and post-positivism, leaving little space for reflective or context-specific inquiry (Goswami, 2012). Although global social science witnessed a turn toward radical critiques in the latter half of the 20th century—including political economy, postcolonial theory, and feminist analysis—these shifts entered Indian academia slowly and unevenly (Fenton et al., 2024; Williams, 2016). Much of the curriculum remained tied to outdated frameworks, limiting the ability of social science education to respond to India's complex realities (Subramanian,

2021). This inertia is now compounded by growing political interference. Governments and bureaucracies are asserting control over content, funding, and institutional autonomy. Academic freedom is being eroded, often through subtle pressures to move with dominant ideologies (Chattopadhyay, 2020; Gooptu & Osterman, 2024). India's New Education Policy (NEP), while claiming to encourage reform and interdisciplinarity, embodies contradictory impulses—centralisation, modularisation, and a growing tilt toward vocationalism that threatens critical knowledge systems (*The Economic Times*, 2025).

In this climate, defending the autonomy of the social sciences becomes not just an academic concern but a civic responsibility. These disciplines must remain spaces for dissent, imagination, and transformative thought. Without them, education risks becoming an instrument of conformity, rather than a catalyst for democratic renewal. Interdisciplinary work must be pursued, but only if rooted in strong disciplinary self-awareness. Sociology must continue to interrogate social structures; philosophy must engage with ethics and meaning; history must retrieve marginalised voices; political science must address governance and resistance. These traditions offer not only tools of analysis but frameworks for collective rethinking. The future of the social sciences depends on their ability to remain reflective, engaged, and structurally critical. In an era of political fragmentation and epistemic anxiety, they must assert their relevance, not as detached observers, but as active participants in the shaping of more just and democratic societies.

Conflict and Resilience: Critical Issues

In the contemporary world, conflict and resilience have become central to understanding how individuals, communities, and institutions respond to crisis. These are not just conceptual categories - they reflect lived experiences across diverse geographies. From war-torn regions like Gaza and Ukraine to areas grappling with caste, ethnic, and communal violence, as in India, conflict determines everyday life, disrupting livelihoods,

displacing populations, and inflicting lasting psychological and social harm (Barakat & Milton, 2020; Nussbaum, 2011). However, alongside this devastation, powerful expressions of resilience emerge. These reflect the capacity of people and institutions to sustain, adapt, and in some cases, recover from systemic shocks (Joseph, 2013; Chandler, 2014). Conflict, in this sense, has different dimensions. It includes interstate wars, insurgencies, civil violence, and structural oppression rooted in social hierarchies. In the Indian context, persistent caste-based violence and communal polarisation demonstrate how entrenched inequalities continue to provoke conflict (Guru, 2002; Pandey, 2006). Globally, the war in Ukraine and the long-standing occupation of Palestine show that conflict is often as much about sovereignty and recognition as about military confrontation (Said, 1993; Galtung, 1996).

Resilience is increasingly seen as a framework for understanding how societies cope with disruption. It is often associated with the ability to "bounce back" from adversity—be it war, disaster, economic collapse, or political repression. At first glance, this seems to celebrate human courage and adaptability. There is undeniable dignity in the everyday survival of people rebuilding lives in devastated regions or resisting the effects of exclusion (Walker & Cooper, 2011; Brown, 2016). However, the widespread appeal of resilience (its optimism, flexibility, and universality) has also led to critical analysis. While resilience can be empowering, it is also susceptible to ideological appropriation. Increasingly, in policy and development discourse, resilience has been reformatted to shift responsibility for survival away from states and institutions, and onto individuals and communities (Chandler & Reid, 2016; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). This goes with neoliberal logics that prioritize self-reliance and personal adaptation over collective rights or structural transformation. Nowhere is this clearer than in post-conflict societies and humanitarian interventions. In places like Gaza or Ukraine, resilience becomes not only a survival mechanism but a

moral obligation. People are expected to remain "resilient" even as structural violence continues unabated (Barakat & Milton, 2020). This expectation turns resilience into a form of pressure, to endure without complaint, to adapt without protest.

This appropriation of resilience by dominant ideologies has prompted growing criticism within the social sciences. Scholars ask: Who decides what counts as resilience? Who benefits from resilience narratives? Can resilience serve as a substitute for justice, and does it risk depoliticising suffering instead of enabling resistance? (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013; Neocleous, 2013).

The emergence of resilience as a major concept also corresponds with the crisis in global governance. After the collapse of development promises and the 2008 financial crisis, and amid deepening ecological and economic insecurity, resilience became a way to manage systemic uncertainty (Duffield, 2012; Fenton et al., 2024). But too often, this has meant adapting to injustice rather than confronting its causes. This transformation has significant implications. For example, when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is viewed only through the lens of Hamas's actions on October 7, it obscures the historical roots of occupation, displacement, and settler colonialism. Resilience in this case becomes a narrow concept of survival under siege, severed from broader demands for justice and self-determination (Said, 1993; Roy, 2011).

Therefore, understanding conflict and resilience today requires deeper level interpretation. Resilience must be recognised as a contested concept, one shaped by power, ideology, and inequality. It matters how resilience is charted, who is expected to display it, and under what conditions. Only then can we assess whether resilience merely enables survival within unjust systems, or contributes to meaningful transformation.

Resilience and the Neoliberal Turn

The concept of resilience has undergone a major change in contemporary governance and policy discourse. Within the

neoliberal framework, resilience no longer merely signifies strength amid adversity. It has rather become a strategic demand placed upon individuals and communities. Behind this shift is a political rationality that promotes deregulated markets, reduced state obligations, and privatized forms of risk management. The concept of resilience has shifted from communal adaptation to an individual duty, where coping with systemic disruptions is seen as a sign of personal strength rather than a collective concern (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Joseph, 2013). This reconceptualisation displaces the role of the state from guarantor of welfare to facilitator of individual adaptability. Citizenship is reformatted not around rights or entitlements, but around entrepreneurial agency and behavioural compliance. The emphasis is no longer on transforming social structures but on adapting to their failings. Individuals are expected to be "risk-aware," manage their vulnerabilities, and rethink expectations, often with minimal or conditional institutional support (Walker & Cooper, 2011; Duffield, 2012).

Global governance institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and UNDP have incorporated resilience into their core frameworks, often promoting it as a solution to economic, environmental, and political crises. However, their formulations routinely abstract crises from their structural roots, reducing systemic dispossession, militarisation, or austerity to vague "shocks" to be put up with (Chandler, 2014; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Rather than addressing the root causes of crises, resilience is often deployed as a strategy to contain and direct disruptions without fundamentally changing the conditions that created them (Chandler, 2014). The result is a profound depoliticisation. Disasters are treated as natural, recessions as cyclical, pandemics as exceptional. Contemporary governance often frames crises as unexpected interruptions, obscuring their roots in longstanding political and economic exploitation This thinking forecloses the space for questioning how such crises are produced in the first place (Duffield, 2012).

At the heart of this problem is the disconnection of resilience from justice. Neoliberal policies often emphasise adaptation strategies at the expense of confronting the underlying causes of crisis, thereby neutralising calls for structural change. It celebrates the capacity to withstand while sidelining the imperative to transform. David Chandler refers to this as the "governance of the governed," where individuals are encouraged to internalise responsibility for external harms, and adaptation becomes a moral norm (Chandler & Reid, 2016). This logic manifests clearly in post-crisis and conflict settings. After the 2008 financial crisis, for instance, state responses in many countries focused on stabilising financial markets through austerity, while asking working-class populations to retrain, relocate, and accept declining living standards (Brown, 2016; Hall & Bowles, 2025). Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments urged populations to isolate, adjust, and innovate, even as structural support systems crumbled. Informal workers, caregivers, and frontline communities bore the brunt, praised for their resilience, but denied meaningful institutional protection (Brown, 2016; Hall & Bowles, 2025).

Risk frameworks often deflect attention from structural reform, positioning resilience as a tool to maintain institutional continuity instead of addressing root causes. Societies are advised to adapt to climate change, economic instability, or displacement, without confronting the political economies that produce fossil fuel dependency, speculative finance, or militarised borders (Duffield, 2012). In this paradigm, resilience amounts to a politics of persistence, preferable to protest, more legible than resistance. The burden of this adaptation is not equally distributed. Women, informal workers, migrants, and marginalised communities are often expected to be the most flexible, resilient, and resourceful. They are asked to "build back better," often with few resources, while elites remain shielded from the consequences of crisis (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). What emerges is a romanticisation of survival that obscures entrenched inequalities.

To reclaim the radical potential of resilience, it must be decoupled from neoliberalism and reconnected to collective capacity, justice, and accountability. Resilience should not demand silence in the face of injustice. It must instead become a practice rooted in resistance and transformation (Chandler & Reid, 2016; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). This demands a shift in how vulnerability itself is understood. Mainstream resilience frameworks often treat vulnerability as a deficit to be managed. But vulnerability is not simply about exposure to hazards. It reflects histories of exploitation, exclusion, and systemic neglect (Brown, 2016; Duffield, 2012). Development actors such as the World Bank or UNDRR often rely on narrow, technocratic indicators, like recovery speed or service restoration, while ignoring deeper social fractures related to caste, class, race, or gender (Walker & Cooper, 2011). This misrecognition leads to policy responses that target community coping skills—microfinance, shelters, self-help groups, rather than redressing structural injustice. During the COVID-19 crisis, for instance, families were told to adapt through behavioural change, but public health systems remained underfunded and labour protections unenforced (Hall & Bowles, 2025; Brown, 2016).

Calling communities as reactive agents, instead of political actors, narrows the space for democratic agency. True resilience must involve bargaining, refusal, and structural critique, not passive compliance (Duffield, 2012; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). When resilience is imposed top-down, far from the lived realities of affected populations, it reproduces elite interests and renders injustice invisible (Chandler, 2014). Rethinking resilience and vulnerability as political, rather than technical, is therefore crucial. Vulnerability reflects power relations. Resilience, in its emancipatory form, must include collective action, oppositional agency, and the right to contest and transform the structures that produce harm. Only by reconnecting resilience with justice can it serve as a tool for solidarity and systemic change (Chandler & Reid, 2016; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013).

Post-Liberal Governance and Critical Realism

To move beyond the limitations of mainstream resilience discourse, alternative frameworks have emerged that seek to reintroduce the concepts of agency, structure, and transformation. Among the most forceful are post-liberal governance and critical realism, frameworks that critique neoliberalism not only as an economic model but as a mode of governance that depoliticises vulnerability, individualises responsibility, and suppresses collective agency (Chandler, 2014; Jessop, 2015; Bhaskar, 2008). Post-liberal governance arises in response to the erosion of legitimacy experienced by neoliberal states. While neoliberalism minimised the role of the state and valorised market mechanisms, post-liberal approaches attempt to reclaim governance as a participatory and solidaristic process. This does not mean a return to centralized welfare statism but a reconfiguration of governance based on collective agency, horizontal accountability, and inclusion (Swyngedouw, 2005; Fawcett & Marsh, 2014).

Rather than viewing citizens as consumers of services or individual actors facing risk, post-liberal governance reimagines them as co-producers of public value. The focus moves from top-down delivery to capacity building, enabling people to organise, deliberate, and shape their own futures. Governance in this model is not merely about policy implementation but about cultivating participatory structures that reinforce social justice in institutional practice (Gaventa, 2006). This model is exemplified in community-based peacebuilding efforts, which foreground grassroots reconciliation over elite negotiations. In post-conflict zones, these initiatives draw on local knowledge, prioritise relational healing, and challenge externally imposed "solutions" rooted in technocratic logic (Lederach, 2005; Richmond, 2011). Similarly, in disaster recovery contexts, post-liberal strategies reject market-led reconstruction and focus instead on equity, sustainability, and participatory design (Barakat & Milton, 2020).
However, such efforts require a deeper engagement with how power operates within and beyond communities. This is where Critical Realism offers a valuable philosophical foundation.

Developed by Roy Bhaskar and expanded by thinkers like Margaret Archer and Andrew Sayer, Critical Cealism provides a framework to understand the complex interaction between structure and agency. It insists that while individuals have the capacity to act, their choices are always shaped—and often constrained—by broader social, economic, and historical forces (Bhaskar, 2008; Archer, 2000). Critical Realism departs from both structural determinism and voluntaristic individualism. It postulates that social structures—norms, institutions, economic systems—exist independently of individual consciousness but are also open to transformation through collective action. Structures are not immutable. They are reproduced or altered through practice. This dual commitment to constraint and change allows for a richer understanding of how resilience can be political rather than passive (Sayer, 2000; Danermark et al., 2002).

Central to this framework is the notion of emergent causality. Social phenomena do not result from singular or linear causes but emerge from different levels of interactions across time and space. For instance, communal violence may appear spontaneous but is often embedded in deeper histories of marginalisation, political manipulation, and institutional failure. Critical Realism demands attention to these causal depths, what Bhaskar called the "real" and "deep" structures beneath observable events (Bhaskar, 2016). This perspective radically remodels resilience. Instead of seeing it as a personal trait or community resource, resilience becomes an ongoing struggle to transform the very structures that produce vulnerability. It is a form of agency that resists normalisation, refuses depoliticisation, and insists on justice. Marginalised communities, in this reading, are not merely surviving but actively remaking the worlds they inhabit (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Jessop, 2015). Moreover, Critical Realism places ethical responsibility on governance systems. If institutions acknowledge that suffering and inequality are structurally produced, they cannot retreat into neutrality. Effective governance should be guided by ethical commitments. It should

advocate for marginalised groups and actively promote institutions that foster dignity and social justice (Sayer, 2000).

Together, post-liberal governance and Critical Realism offer a major critique of resilience as it is currently deployed in global policy and development discourse. They insist that genuine resilience cannot be imposed from above or extracted through performance indicators. It must grow from below, through struggles over rights, recognition, and redistribution. It must be rooted in the lived realities of those who endure, and resist, structural harm. In a moment marked by growing crises, these frameworks compel a turn away from the managerial language of coping. They invite a renewed focus on social transformation, rooted in democratic participation, epistemic justice, and a collective reimagining of futures.

Neoliberal Crisis and Global Uncertainty

We live in a period swayed by surging global crises - financial crashes, war, pandemics, climate disasters, mass displacement, and authoritarian resurgence. These disruptions are not isolated events but symptoms of systemic failure. What binds them together is the framework through which they are managed, one rooted in neoliberal ideology. Over the last four decades, neoliberalism has reshaped governance by minimising the role of the state, dismantling public welfare, and placing the burden of crisis response onto individuals and communities (Harvey, 2005; Brown, 2015; Klein, 2007). In this context, resilience has become the dominant language of coping—not as resistance or transformation, but as adaptation to a world rendered volatile by design (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Joseph, 2013).

Neoliberal governance envisages citizens as self-regulating agents of responsibility. Social protections are replaced with performance-based entitlements, and collective claims are revised as private failures. Crises are naturalised (as inevitable, unpredictable, and external) while structural causes such as deregulated finance, ecological exploitation, and systemic inequality are rendered invisible (Davies, 2016; Duffield, 2012).

The result is a political economy of abandonment, where individuals are asked to survive without structural support and to see their survival as evidence of moral strength.

This pattern was evident during the 2008 global financial crisis. Governments prioritised the stability of financial institutions over social recovery. Austerity regimes imposed in Europe and the Global South cut health, education, and housing budgets, deepening precarity. Citizens were encouraged to retrain, relocate, or innovate. Few asked why banks were bailed out while public services collapsed (Blyth, 2013; Tooze, 2018). Recovery became a matter of personal adjustment rather than systemic reform. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed similar experience. Emergency responses varied, but many experienced inadequate support for those most at risk - informal workers, caregivers, migrant labourers, and the elderly. State messaging celebrated "resilient communities," while offering little beyond appeals to social distancing and self-reliance (Ghosh, 2020; Alston, 2020). The pandemic became a global narrative of unequal resilience, where some were told to stay home, while others had no home to stay in. In both crises, resilience functioned as more than just a signifier. It became a moral injunction. Citizens were praised for bearing suffering quietly, for adjusting expectations, for carrying on. Those who expressed anger or demanded justice were often dismissed as unrealistic, ungrateful, or irresponsible (Fisher, 2009; Davies, 2016) acts as a disciplinary mechanism. It encourages persistence over protest, normalisation over critique.

Moreover, resilience is not expected of all equally. The burdens of adaptation are unevenly distributed. In neoliberal societies, working-class people, informal labourers, racialised and caste-oppressed groups, and women are most often asked to "adjust." They are expected to absorb shocks, even as they are excluded from decision-making and denied substantive protection (Patel & Moore, 2017). Meanwhile, elites remain insulated from the crises they helped create, through capital mobility, legal immunity, or political access.

Policy frameworks reinforce this asymmetry. Development institutions and humanitarian agencies frequently use resilience metrics, measuring recovery through microfinance participation, school reopening, or household asset restoration. But these metrics rarely capture the root causes of harm - displacement from development projects, land grabs, privatised healthcare, or gender-based labour burdens (Duffield, 2012). They create an illusion of progress while leaving unjust systems untouched. This form of governance—what some have called resilience governance—relies on narratives of strength and pragmatism. It encourages populations to expect instability, prepare for disaster, and focus on coping rather than transformation. Protest is seen as counterproductive, while adaptation is valorised. This logic depoliticises suffering and forecloses the space for alternative visions of justice or equity (Chandler, 2014; Joseph, 2013).

Resilience discourse under neoliberalism, then, does more than respond to crisis. It naturalises it. It accepts structural precarity as inevitable and recasts systemic failures as personal challenges. This obviously undermines democratic accountability. If people are told to adapt to climate disasters without questioning fossil capitalism, or to endure austerity without challenging fiscal orthodoxy, then resilience becomes a tool of quiet governance rather than collective empowerment. Reclaiming resilience requires rejecting this individualised and moralised model. True resilience should not be a euphemism for survival without support. It must be linked to redistribution, recognition, and resistance. Resilience must be about transforming the conditions that make some lives disposable and others protected. In the current moment, there is also opportunity. The global crisis of neoliberalism has exposed its limits. Around the world, movements for climate justice, labour rights, and decolonial governance are reclaiming space. These movements remind us that resilience need not mean compliance, It can also mean courage, imagination, and transformation.

Power, Inequality, and the Political Strategy Behind Resilience Discourse

Resilience, once a descriptive term for strength amid adversity, has become rooted in contemporary systems of governance. No longer neutral, it now operates as a key ideological instrument, legitimising inequality, reinforcing hierarchies, and masking systemic harm. In its mainstream usage, resilience discourse is not simply about how societies recover from crises. It is about who is expected to recover, under what conditions, and in whose interest (McKeown et al., 2021; Chandler & Reid, 2016). This burden is distributed unequally. Resilience is often demanded most from those who bear the brunt of structural violence - informal workers, displaced communities, racial and caste minorities, and those living in zones of conflict or deprivation. These groups are expected to adapt, rebuild, and remain "strong," while those in positions of power are rarely held accountable for the crises they help generate or prolong (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013; Joseph, 2013).

Such asymmetry goes well with neoliberal logic. As resilience becomes individualised, vulnerability is seen as a personal trait to be corrected, while systemic injustice is obliterated from view. McKeown et al. (2021) call this the "ontologizing" of vulnerability - treating it as a natural condition of certain populations, rather than as a consequence of political and economic processes. In this sense, resilience is less a practice of empowerment and more a strategy for maintaining status quo.

Resilience also functions as a technology of rule. Drawing on Foucauldian notions of governmentality, scholars argue that resilience promotes internalised self-discipline, encouraging populations to govern themselves through behaviour, risk awareness, and moral conduct (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Joseph, 2013). People are told to be adaptable, responsible, and emotionally balanced, traits that serve institutional stability more than social justice. Resilience is increasingly projected as a moral ideal, where silence and endurance are praised while resistance or

critique is stigmatised. Dissent becomes deviance. The ability to "carry on" is rewarded, while those who challenge the conditions of their suffering are marginalized. This contracts political imagination and depoliticises dissent, making the act of suffering more acceptable than the act of resisting (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013; McKeown et al., 2021). These undercurrents are not accidental. They are politically useful. Institutions, from financial lenders to humanitarian agencies, can seize resilience rhetoric to appear responsive while evading responsibility. Celebrating community "resilience" after a disaster is easier than addressing why public infrastructure failed or why land use policies made some areas more vulnerable than others (Chandler, 2014; Duffield, 2012). Resilience becomes a façade for inaction, a way to change the focus from institutional failure to community strength. The result is a form of soft domination. Populations are not coerced through force but shaped through expectation. They are expected to adjust to crisis, to manage their suffering, and to internalise inequality as inevitable. Resilience, in this form, becomes a mechanism of depoliticisation and quiet governance, reinforcing neoliberal values under the guise of empowerment (Chandler & Reid, 2016; McKeown et al., 2021).

What emerges is a clear stratification. Those who suffer are praised, and those who resist are silenced or pathologised. Entire populations are judged not by the injustices they face, but by how well they cope with them. This produces an implicit hierarchy between the "resilient poor" and the "problematic dissenter," between those who conform and those who refuse. To challenge this, resilience must be reclaimed as a political concept. It must be reconnected to histories of struggle, structural critique, and collective action. Emancipatory resilience must centre not adaptation but agency, defined not by how individuals recover, but by how communities resist, organise, and transform the structures that reproduce harm (McKeown et al., 2021; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013).

Social science has a major role in this redefinition. It must expose the ideological uses of resilience and highlight its function

within systems of power. The goal is not to abandon resilience, but to remodel it as a site of political contestation, where refusal, dignity, and structural justice take precedence over silent endurance. Ultimately, resilience should not be reduced to coping. It should suggest collective capacity to transform, not survive in a broken world.

Conclusion

In confronting the crisis of the social sciences and the ideological restricting of resilience, this analysis highlights a pressing imperative - to reclaim the language, ethics, and politics of knowledge. The contemporary reading of resilience, as individual adaptation to systemic failure, risks transforming it into a tool of governance rather than empowerment. By depoliticising vulnerability and projecting crisis as inevitable, resilience becomes a strategy of persistence rather than a call for justice. This not only distorts the meaning of resilience but goes with neoliberal rationality that privileges silence, compliance, and self-management over dissent and transformation. Critically, this distortion occurs in tandem with the institutional weakening of the very disciplines equipped to critique it. The social sciences are under siege, subject to funding cuts, ideological policing, and relevance tests that prioritise market outcomes over intellectual rigour. In India, as elsewhere, the consequences are evident - outdated paradigms persist, critical pedagogies are marginalised, and academic freedom is increasingly curtailed. The New Education Policy, while outwardly embracing reform, advances modular and centralised frameworks that dilute disciplinary depth and promote employability over inquiry.

Against this backdrop, resilience must be radically redefined. Rather than a depoliticised virtue of individual endurance, it must be reconstituted as a practice of collective resistance. It must reflect the agency of communities that not only survive crises but actively challenge the conditions that produce them. This rethinking must foreground histories of inequality, state complicity, and the structural violence embedded in

development, governance, and crisis response. Post-liberal governance offers an alternative. It centres participatory institutions, horizontal accountability, and co-produced public value. Critical Realism complements this by revealing the dynamic, historical causality of social phenomena. Together, they offer a powerful theoretical and practical basis for rethinking resilience, not as coping with harm, but as transforming its roots. Social science must lead this transformation. It must resist the temptation to adapt to the demands of market logic and instead reassert its role in cultivating democratic consciousness. This means defending spaces for critical inquiry, dissent, and imagination. It also means engaging seriously with those at the margins, not simply as research subjects, but as producers of knowledge, meaning, and resistance. In reclaiming resilience, we must ask: Who defines it? Who benefits from its use? And under what conditions does it become a tool of liberation rather than discipline? These questions demand that resilience be tied to justice, not just the ability to recover, but the right to demand, to refuse, and to reimagine.

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Interview with A.K. Ramakrishnan

(Transcript of the interview held in May 2025)

Nedha Fazli M. K.*

Indhu Vijayan**

An introduction to A.K. Ramakrishnan

A.K. Ramakrishnan is currently Nelson Mandela Chair Professor at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala. He was Professor and former Chairperson of the Centre for West Asian Studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, India. He has been Director of the Human Rights Studies Programme at JNU. Earlier, he was Professor and Director of the Centre for West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and Director of the School of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University. He was also a distinguished International Scholar at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, USA. His publications include US Perceptions of Iran: Approaches and Policies and Society and Change in the Contemporary Gulf (co-edited). He has written extensively in English and Malayalam on Indian politics and foreign policy, conceptual aspects of International Relations, gender and postcolonialism. His articles and reviews have been published in journals such as International Studies.

* *Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, CMS College Kottayam (Autonomous), Kerala | nedhafazli1997@gmail.com*

** *Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, CMS College Kottayam (Autonomous), Kerala | indhuvijayan99@gmail.com*

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Introductory Note

Amrutha Rinu Abraham (*Editor, Kerala Sociologist*): *Sir, thank you for graciously agreeing to this interview. It is indeed a pleasure to reconnect with you following your insightful address at the 50th National Conference of the Kerala Sociological Society, where you spoke on* ***Conflict and Resilience in State and Civil Society Relations under Neoliberalism.*** *I would like to Introduce Ms. Nedha Fazli M. K. & Ms. Indhu Vijayan, Research scholars in the Department of Sociology, CMS College Kottayam who will be leading today's interaction. On behalf of the Kerala Sociological Society and the editorial team of* Kerala Sociologist, *we warmly welcome you and express our sincere gratitude for your valuable time.*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: Thank you for your good words. I am very happy to meet you again. It was a good session at BCM College. I hope this session will also be fruitful.

Nedha: *Sir, thank you once again for joining us for this conversation. Your previous session primarily focused on the conflicts arising from state domination in the current neoliberal period. In this context, a discussion on the idea of state across different historical periods would be highly significant. How did the conception of state evolve from pre-modern period to classical and modern liberal period?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: One of the major political developments has been the transformation in the nature of the state. Modern state systems are built on the notion of sovereignty and borders. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 was in a way consolidating this idea of a modern nation-state. So, the sovereignty of a state within a particular territory is recognised by other states. The recognition was also a major part of that. If it has to be a nation state centered international system, state actors have to recognize other states' sovereignty within their territories; that

is, the principle of sovereignty within a territory, the question of borders etc.

If you take the case of pre-modern empires., borders have not been that sacrosanct. An emperor did not necessarily know where his state's boundaries began, or where it ended nor where the domain of another empire started. These borders were not demarcated by artificial walls or fences unless there was a natural boundary. From modern times onward, what happened was that the borders became very significant. In this process, our immediate neighbours such as-West Asia and the Gulf regions, Sri Lanka or Singapore, now seem to have become far off place. Oman is much nearer to us than New Delhi but modern nation-state imagination, with its borders and sovereignties, in a way limited our view of the world. This is one of the main features of the modern nation-states.

Again, the idea of sovereignty in pre-modern times basically rested with God—the idea of a theocentric or God centred world. You know that, many empires and monarchies in different parts of the world ruled as a kind of image of the God on Earth; the church-state in Europe is one such example. The religious and the secular aspects of ruling a monarchy were coalesced into one person or into one institution. In fact, Modernity and Westphalian ordering of states have transformed this theocentric notion of politics and state into a much more human centric, anthropocentric idea of the state, where human beings themselves and the institutions created by them became more prominent and sovereign.

In a way, during the transformation into modernity, human beings who earlier served the idea of sovereignty from God established their own self-determination in matters of politics. During the treaty of Westphalia, the main differences between states were basically based on religion— such as Catholicism and Protestantism in Europe. But gradually, in modern times, the states began to define them as secular, so that differentiation between church and state became important. The human element was dominating in some manner or the other.

You know that, modernity's own characteristic features are based on human centeredness, human rationality, science, the idea of cosmopolitanism, universal notions about humanity, and so on. Through scientific revolutions and the contributions of new philosophers like Kant, Hegel and others, there emerged a growing self-confidence in human beings to take matters into their own hands—unlike the dependence on theocentric (God-centered) frameworks in the past. So, modern nation states organized around the concepts of borders and sovereignty derived legitimacy from its own people by monopolising the instruments of force.

The State assumed all the authority to use force, which was not the case in earlier times when there were militias fighting for different rulers and various sections of the society were themselves armed. But modern nation states monopolised that kind of coercive power. This also implied the idea of citizens of the state — the legitimacy gained by the state arose from its claim of protecting its own citizens through this monopolised force and the sovereignty it exercised over them. So, the main source of legitimacy for the state was this argument of protecting its own citizens through its force. So, national armies, new technologies of organizing the military etc. — all these things developed in modern times.

But citizens are now concerned that the states with the monopoly of force can turn against them. So, what security do citizens actually have? Even though the state claims that it will protect, that might not be the case all the time. That is why citizens wanted some kind of accountability from the state, some division of state powers and an argument for the democratic conduct in state affairs.

The core principle of the liberal democratic kind of idea was to protect individual rights —not only from their separation by others but also from their violation by the state. In that sense, the state had to derive its legitimacy not simply from the argument of protection but also through several processes of checks and balances in the system —such as elections and mechanisms— ensuring continuous interaction between the

state and the civil society. This served as a countervailing force against the state's monopoly on force.

Thus, the idea of rights became an integral part of modern politics and society. Later, particularly in the twentieth century, the discourse shifted towards human rights and their various dimensions. So, we see human rights have often been engaged in a tussle with the State. States are not always happy with human rights organizations, since the protection of rights demands accountability from the state. The arbitrary use of force by the state has to be controlled through rights -based arguments.

Nedha: *The contemporary state is often characterized as a neo-liberal state. What socio- economic factors have driven the transformation in the role and nature of the modern state to such a neo- liberal form?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: The core of your question concerns the several factors that have contributed to the transformation of modern states. To list a few,

First the rise of bigger powers. Larger states—not only in terms of territory, but in terms of military force, economic might and so on—have started intervening in the affairs of other states. This has broken the Westphalian principle of sovereignty of the state within a territory. As we have seen over the last several decades, powerful states such as the United States intervened in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. This simply means the sovereignty of Afghanistan and Iraq was violated by a powerful state like the United States. Thus, the problem of sovereignty and recognition arises, challenging the Westphalian principle underlying the arrangement of modern nation states. Today, much of the talk around wars and interventions, including those in South Asia, reflects this intrusion into the borders of other states. This is one of the key challenges confronting the modern nation-state system.

Secondly, major transformations have taken place in technology. While some of these significant transformations in the nature of technology are very recent, but are not entirely unprecedented. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, a kind of technological globalization was already taking place, with inventions such as telephone and telegraph. These enabled transfer of capital, the emergence of stock markets and the growth of banking systems etc. Thus, late nineteenth century and early twentieth century also witnessed technological transformation within modern capital systems.

But what we see in the twenty-first century, however, is the massive spread of technology—especially the internet and new forms of media. Modern capitalists can now transfer huge amounts of capital across borders within a fraction of a second. So, finance capital has become extremely significant with profound implications for production and organization of labour. Ordinary people are deeply affected by these transformations. While states can control certain technologies to an extent, there are clear limits to their sovereignty when it comes to regulating global technological flows. Technology may strengthen state power, but it can also undermine it, since digital networks and financial systems transcend national borders with ease.

The third factor is the spread of modern capital. With the new markets emerging, production is now scattered across the globe. Unlike earlier production systems, these newer ones are no longer nation-state centric in the production of goods and services. So, you could see that capitalism itself has transformed; it is becoming increasingly global, crossing nation-state borders. In many cases, nation-states do not have full sovereignty over capital. Some corporations are more powerful than governments, thereby weakening the sovereignty of the state. This is not entirely new. Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, already noted the global movement of capital. Marx and Engels metaphorically described capital, like a flock of birds, that must nest someplace where favourable conditions exist, without bothering about nation-state boundaries. Birds will nest where there is an abundance of food, water, and other resources necessary for their growth. Likewise, companies will invest in places where they can raise capital and make profit, unhindered by boundaries. Thus, crossing of state boundaries by

contemporary capital poses another instance of challenge to the sovereignty of modern states.

The fourth significant factor which reduces the capability of the states to control its own affairs within the defined borders is the emergence of major environmental questions and ecological crises. Many of these, such as climate change and rising sea levels transcend national boundaries. Environmental issues are global in nature, and therefore demonstrate the limits of the state in managing problems that extend beyond its borders.

Fifth is the emergence of newer ideas of human rights. As I have already mentioned, human rights arguments seek to limit the state's power to use force against its citizens or deny them their rights. These arguments rest on the belief that human beings possess inalienable rights wherever they are, regardless of their origin or the state in which they live. Thus, the idea of human rights carries a global dimension. Universal notions of rights, largely rooted in liberal democratic thought, place further constraints on the absolute sovereignty of the state.

In sum, these are some of the key factors that have contributed to the current crisis of the modern Westphalian nation-state.

Indhu: *The neo-liberal state has been widely critiqued for its market centric orientation and exercise of violence against its citizens. Sir, how does the neoliberal state exhibit inherent potential for conflict and the possibility of resilience?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: Certain states could assert enormous kinds of power in the international system. As I have already mentioned, the assertion of power also leads to the diminishing of sovereign powers, especially of smaller states. Many people thought that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of a modern nation state was also collapsing. However, the thought that the state system itself is under threat, is in a way, waning. Most liberals for that matter thought that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the European Union with other happenings would reduce the power of the state thereby

weakening the state system itself. It was also expected that a liberal kind of order such as individual rights, free market along with other things would be much easier if the state system in the traditional sense became weak; but that didn't happen, as we know. While some elements of the states' own authority and sovereignty have been in crisis due to certain factors such as markets, technology and others as we discussed, states have become stronger in many respects. So, there is a kind of dichotomous development. The liberals, particularly the neo-liberals supported the weakening of the state. As you know, the proponents of the idea of neo-liberalism by the economists such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and others wanted minimum government. In traditional liberalism, the argument for minimum government was put forward by Adams Smith. This minimum government was referred specifically to markets so that markets should be free with minimum state intervention. But the neoliberals took this idea to such an extent that in order to establish a neo-liberal condition; these states themselves became stronger, acting as enforcers of this new freedom for markets. However, people began to oppose these developments as they found their resources being taken away with the coming up of markets and companies, without getting any benefits in return. Therefore, diverse global movements and social movements began to emerge in response to the intrusion of markets which operated in an increasingly unregulated manner; yet were simultaneously regulated by the state.

The first example of implementation of neoliberal policy was in Chile in the early 1970s. In Chile, what happened was the elected government of Salvador Allende was removed by America, on the advice of the Chicago School of Economics. General Pinochet Ugarte was installed as the authority there. Thus, the minimum government is implemented by a maximum government which is the military. So, I always say and also write about it that, neoliberalism is not only an idea of minimum government, but simultaneously there is an inbuilt idea of maximum government, like the other side of the same coin. So states are becoming more powerful, more militarized and hence

they have more ability to control and suppress the rights of citizens and their movements in favour of global markets and corporations.

Further, new arrangements like the Special Economic Zones were coming up, where companies can come and invest, like export-oriented kinds of investment. But politically what does these Special Economic Zones mean? - it means that the sovereign state is restrained as sovereign laws are not applicable there; the workers do not have rights to organize and even their fundamental rights are constrained. So, we confront a situation where the state which is supposed to be sovereign is leaving its own certain territories where its own sovereign laws will not apply. Both the state and corporations are becoming stronger; who are losing out here are basically the ordinary people. Society has become unbalanced. This is why we have seen numerous people's movements across the world for matters ranging from protection of the environment from these market forces, to demand for democratization, labour rights and other forms of social justice in the last few decades.

So, neoliberal transformation, therefore, meant not simply the reduction of the powers of the state but also a strengthening of the state in its coercive capacity. New technologies helped them to do that in a much more efficient manner through surveillance of citizens and social groups. Now, the state has much more legal and military power with it. Thus, on the one hand, we see the reduction in state sovereignty within the territory; on the other hand, there is a countertrend towards the strengthening of the state power as well.

Indhu: *In the present context of strengthening the sovereign power of the state-particularly in terms of its coercive capacity, how does this affect ordinary people in society? Further, what role do major states such as the United States play as global power centres in this neoliberal order?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: There is another significant point to consider when we talk about the modern nation state and the idea of sovereignty. Two dimensions have become central to this

question: whether sovereignty belongs to the state or to the people. Today, it is widely accepted that the sovereignty of people is asserted through modern constitutions. When we have a constitution, there is assertion of sovereign authority by the people—it is sovereignty established through law. So, we say "*We the people of India, give to ourselves this constitution*". It means that the people are sovereign, not the state. The state is created by us, by the citizens. Yet increasingly, the state demands just the opposite—that people must obey, and that it alone decides who is 'national' and who is 'anti-national'.

So, the very act of giving law was once an integral part of the establishment of modern sovereignty. But in the case of Special Economic Zones as I already mentioned, the state now withholds constitutional and legal provisions that protect its citizens including fundamental rights. Here we see the emergence of conflict, as the state and civil society come into direct confrontation with each other. This reflects the changing nature of sovereignty as mentioned. While sovereignty was once defined by the law-giving function of constitutions, it is increasingly being redefined.

This was explained by the Nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt, who talked about sovereignty in the first half of the twentieth century. According to him, "sovereign is one who establishes the state of exception"—that is, the withdrawal of law. For example, the declaration of internal emergency in India was an instance of withdrawal of constitutional provisions from the society. The Special Economic Zone (SEZ) can also be seen as states of exception, where sovereign law is deliberately suspended. Another example is the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), under which many, especially young people, are detained without the protections guaranteed to them as citizens. Here we can see that, 'the state of exception' itself is becoming the law, though it is not the law. So, if you want to establish a law like UAPA or want to establish a SEZ, it is done through legal processes- by passing Acts in Parliament. So withdrawing law becomes new law. In effect, the denial of constitutional rights becomes institutionalized as the new law.

This raises troubling questions: How does state sovereignty transform into 'the creation state of exception'? What does this mean to citizens? It means that now anybody can be caught by the state, without due legal procedures enshrined in the constitution. The fundamental principle of law that 'you are innocent until proven guilty' doesn't apply. Now it is your turn to say that I am not a criminal and how can you do that in captivity?!

This total denial of justice to citizens reflects the normalization of states of exception as part of the very character of the modern state. That is why we see widespread public outcries over the protection of the Constitution. In the recent elections, the protection of the constitution itself has become a central issue. You can see a change from lawgiving nature of sovereignty to a law withdrawing the nature of sovereignty of the state. Many contemporary philosophers interpret this as a fundamental transformation in sovereignty under current conditions. With the power of advanced technologies and the coercive reach of the state, the withdrawal of legal protections for citizens has become a deeply precarious situation. This is a growing concern.

Consider the global dimension also. The sovereignty of powerful political actors such as the United States has manifested in direct interventions—wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example—that violated the sovereignty of other states. Both the United States— regarded as the 'oldest democracy' and Britain, another established democracy, intervened in Afghanistan and Iraq, killing thousands of people. This challenges the Kantian liberal idea that modern democracies foster a zone of peace and are inherently less prone to war or violence. The so-called 'democratic peace theory', which claims that democracies do not go to war with one another, is undermined when you look at the record of these established democracies, which have been among the greatest perpetrators of violence.

It is here that the neoliberal transformation of the state becomes apparent. These states no longer follow traditional

models of Westphalian sovereignty. Their power is maintained domestically, but they also create and exploit 'extra-legal zones'. Take the example of Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where prisoners from Afghanistan and elsewhere were held. This detention site has been often described as a 'legal void' or 'no man's land,' where national laws do not apply. These prisoners were taken there precisely because domestic legal frameworks couldn't protect them. Many of these innocent individuals were never formally charged or tried, yet they were subjected to torture. They were reduced to what Giorgio Agamben refers to as 'bare life'. They were stripped, beaten, and dehumanized, often by U.S. forces. Agamben calls it 'sovereignty markers'- scars and wounds created by torture as markers of sovereignty.

This shows how the sovereignty of powerful states, not only intrudes upon the sovereignty of the weaker states, but also exert control over the bodies of ordinary people. So ordinary individual lives become precarious. Citizens are becoming much more vulnerable to state intervention over their bodies. So, politics is not only about the conduct of macro-politics like the intersection between civil society and the state; sovereign power now operates also on individual bodies. This kind of *bio-politics of 'bare life'* is characteristic of the neo-liberal state.

We once believed that modern legal and political systems protected individuals, that rights over our bodies, enshrined in laws, could not be violated. Today, however, many of those protections are being dismantled, one after another. What remains is the vulnerable, exposed body, subjected to the maximum violence of the state. This is the paradox of sovereignty in our times: while certain powers of the state are eroded by global markets and technologies, the state simultaneously becomes more powerful—capable of surveillance, control, and coercion over its own citizens.

Indhu: *Sir, how does this conflict affect the relationship between state and civil society in the neo-liberal era?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: There are still movements by people, both against the state and against markets, as these forces control

their lives and take away their resources. These are livelihood issues, and they reflect the kind of precarity that human labor is subjected to. You know, capital can cross nation-state borders without much problems now, isn't it? But what about human bodies—able bodies that can work—trying to cross borders? It's not that there is no employment available elsewhere, but you can't move freely, with all the immigration laws and restrictions. So, human labor and its ability to move is what's being restricted, while capital, technology, and other things can move relatively freely across nation states.

Obviously, you can see movements of people from one country to another, for instance, from Syria and other places to Europe, a few years back because of the conflict and crisis within their country. But there is a continuous kind of attempt of migration by people, particularly from the global South, to countries where employment is available leading to restriction on movement. This means that internal troubles faced by citizens with the state increases in a much bigger manner. This is the one issue.

The other issue is about labor itself, what we call human labor— what we do with our bodies. An understanding of that is also significant. When Marx wrote about the mode of production—you know what it is, right—it's a kind of historical analysis of development of human societies through slavery, feudalism, capitalism, each with distinct characteristics, evolving over time. Because Marx talked about production, many people interpreted it as a kind of economic determinism. But Marx defines the German ideology of mode of production as a mode of expression of human life. I'm quoting from memory- *the way they express themselves, so they are*. So, what are we ultimately? We are what we express our life—through our expressions, performances, etc. This performativity of human bodies, make them flexible to change their own identities in different contexts. Marx focused on the contradiction between capital and labour. His idea of Marx about expressive human life is connected to labour—the way we express is about how we perform. Labour is about how human bodies perform—how we

engage in bodily acts, in factories, in agriculture, in daily survival. Therefore, labor is what is central to human existence and we survive because we do something.

It is this primary human existence that is under threat due to the state sovereignties which limit the movement of human bodies across national borders. Immigration laws, passports, visas all aimed at controlling people while the capital faces no such restriction. This contradiction is extremely significant. When people can't access jobs, and when jobs are increasingly displaced by automation, and when the state further restricts what people can do, a serious tussle emerges between citizens and the state. State–civil society relations become more contested.

As states today can't derive legitimacy from conventional modes, they rely on new forms of control. As I already said, new technologies, new ideologies, extreme nationalism—all of these create mechanisms for surveillance and control. In terms of state–civil society relations, this is where Antonio Gramsci's idea of *hegemony* becomes important, as it highlights how dominant ideas are circulated by the state and elite class through media, education, and propaganda. According to Gramsci, dominant values are internalized and accepted by ordinary people and are reproduced through everyday practices without even realizing it. This constitutes the hegemonic process. So, challenging these dominant ideas becomes crucial. People must be made aware that their everyday actions reproduce the state's ideology. Today, people internalise 'values' like hatred of 'other', extreme nationalism etc.—values that are far removed from the real issues such as the conflict between labour and capital, increasing vulnerability of citizens, and the state's growing power.

Islamophobia, for example, is normalized so that ordinary people internalize it and act on it as if it's their job to defend the state against the 'other.' This is where fundamental questions of human freedom and dignity arise. Our intellectual responsibility- especially that of us in academic spaces—is to show how society is reproducing dominance against the interests

of society. The state derives legitimacy from civil society through such mechanisms. Yet, the future of democracy lies in *counter-hegemonic struggles* that challenge the dominant ideas and build critical awareness.

Nedha: *Sir, you have highlighted the relevance of counter-hegemonic struggles as an intellectual responsibility. How do student protests across the globe reflect resistance against the neoliberal restructuring of education?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: There are significant movements of this kind, you know. Some of them even define education itself as a form of labour, arguing that the time spent on education has to be valued as labour, and hence compensated. Therefore, scholarships and similar things should be regarded as matters of right in that sense, rather than as acts of charity by universities or the state. The argument is that intellectual labour must be recognized.

The other thing is that universities have become centres for the promotion of geopolitical interests that already exist. Consider for example, the role of universities in the United States in developing technologies of warfare. Many universities in the United States and Israel are directly involved in the genocide in Palestinian territories. So, students are aware of these realities, and they protest and intervene in such situations, envisioning the possibility of an ethical labour field in the future. Further, the field of labour into which they can enter after education is shrinking, due to the dominance of corporations, the global flight of capital etc. In the current phase of global capitalism, finance capital—such as stock markets and banking—has nothing to do with actual production: where is the labour market being created? Where are educated people expected to work in order to fend for themselves?

Some of these concerns—such as conduct of war and the channeling of resources towards the military-industrial complex—are related to global developments. Students engage with these issues, often showing solidarity with the causes such as Palestinian struggle and the Black Lives Matter movement.

All these are linked to the kind of society we are entering today—a society that perpetuates dominance, racism and inequality. In our case, the question is whether we will continue to perpetuate the caste hierarchies, the marginalisation of minorities and denial of equal citizenship—even though equal citizenship is guaranteed by the definition of law? (I've already mentioned that the law itself discriminates since not all constitutional provisions apply equally).

Therefore, as a teacher, I can say that students are deeply worried about the future we are heading toward. All these conditions have long-term consequences and are intimately connected. That political and social awareness is something that must be nurtured. You can see, resistances across the world, where students and teachers are joining together, though these are mostly student-led movements. Students are coming out; they are talking and thinking about pressing political issues.

Nedha: *Sir, your concern about the perpetuation of caste-based inequality in India is indeed timely and contextual. How has neoliberalism influenced the nature of caste-based conflicts in India?*

A. K. Ramakrishnan: The neoliberal transformation means enhanced power and ability of the state to control the population. It is also a time in which the production of new dominant ideas-—including even fascist values—becomes more intense in various ways in society. It simply means that all diversities of people's own lives—their languages, cultures and belief systems—are no longer tolerated under these dominant values. This kind of 'making India strong', by annulling its diversities represents a form of power without any substantial human content.

What does this imply for already precarious communities? It means an even greater likelihood of being alienated from power and resources in a more intensified manner, isn' t it? Why tribal communities across India are struggling through various kinds of movements? It is because corporations arrive, destroy their forests and livelihood and mine

their areas. But when people protest, their movements are labelled as 'anti-national'; many are arrested, tortured, and killed in inhuman ways. Consequently, the situation remains very difficult for the marginalized communities. Environmental crises arising from state policies and corporate intrusion, raises questions about people's livelihood. You can see such moves in the agricultural sector as in big farmers' movements in India.

In a country like India, fascist notions can be easily internalized by ordinary people, particularly in the context of a hierarchical notion about society, shaped by the centuries-old caste system. Here, when a dominant ideology works, it works along with the caste system, so that the hierarchy becomes stronger. Those who are at the lower end of the hierarchy become even more vulnerable in this process.

But there are also counter movements- such as Dalit consciousness, social movements, intellectual activity and literature indicating that there is increasing awareness about the historical marginalization and at the very least, raise a kind of cultural opposition to the dominant ideas. In India, we cannot talk about dominant systems without tension, as hierarchies persist. There exist wide discrepancies with regard to employment, social security, social justice measures like reservations etc. The question is how we are going to challenge these discrepancies in the neoliberal era?

Even the new jobs created—especially in the service sector— are more tuned towards those who openly align with corporate values and the dominant idea of education. Since reservations do not exist in the private sector, it becomes even more difficult for those who are traditionally oppressed by the caste system to enter new domains of employment. But despite these structural constraints, there is growing consciousness and the people from marginalized communities are coming up; however, that doesn't encompass the majority of these communities and transform their lives. Therefore, in many ways, the opportunities available under the neoliberal condition are largely reserved for a minority who can speak English and who come from elite institutions. Thus, the market system reproduces

a structure of bias against Dalits and marginalised groups similar to the caste system.

Nedha: *Sir, the ideas you shared about the neoliberal world order are indeed disturbing; however, they remind us of the importance of looking beyond the 'hegemonic views' to understand the real picture of the contemporary world. This conversation greatly enabled us to see issues from new angles- just as you said, it really made us think. We deeply appreciate your openness and the knowledge you shared with us. On behalf of our entire team, I would like to extend our deep gratitude for taking the time to join us and share your valuable insights. Thank you once again for your time and generosity and we look forward to the privilege of welcoming you again in the future.*

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Bridging the Gender Gap: Corporate Labour Codes and Gender Sensitivity in Global Supply Chains

Archana Prasad*

Abstract

Corporate labour codes of conduct have emerged as a crucial tool in regulating labour practices within global supply chains. These voluntary codes are designed to set minimum standards for working conditions, wages, health and safety, and workers' rights, often filling the regulatory gaps left by national labour laws in countries where production is outsourced. However, the extent to which these codes are gender-sensitive—specifically, whether they adequately address the unique challenges faced by women workers—remains a significant concern. By focusing on the experiences of women workers, particularly in regions like the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi, India, this study explores the effectiveness of corporate labour codes in addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting gender equality. The study aims to reveal the complexities and challenges of implementing gender-sensitive labour codes in a socio-cultural context that is often marked by deeply entrenched gender norms.

* *Professor, Department of Sociology, Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi, New Delhi | aprasad@knc.du.ac.in*

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The global supply chain plays a crucial role in the modern economy, connecting producers and consumers across the world. However, the complex and often opaque nature of these supply chains raise significant concerns regarding labour practices, particularly from a gender perspective. The issue of gender discrimination in the global supply chain has garnered significant attention over the past few decades, leading to the establishment of various international labour standards and corporate codes of conduct. Corporate labour codes of conduct have increasingly become central to the governance of global supply chains, particularly in industries characterized by labour-intensive production processes such as textiles, electronics, and agriculture. These codes often developed and enforced by multinational corporations (MNCs), are designed to regulate labour practices by setting standards on wages, working conditions, health and safety, and the treatment of workers. These frameworks aim to ensure fair labour practices and promote gender equality in workplaces worldwide. However, from a feminist perspective, these corporate labour codes are often insufficient in addressing the specific challenges and inequalities faced by women workers, who constitute a significant portion of the global workforce in these supply chains (Hale & Wills, 2005). This paper aims to analyse labour codes within global supply chains and their impact on women workers. By examining existing literature, conducting qualitative and quantitative analyses, and presenting case studies, this research seeks to uncover gender disparities and propose actionable recommendations to improve labour standards. The objective is to examine the effectiveness of international labour standards and corporate codes of conduct in reducing gender discrimination in the global supply chain

The Context

Women workers often face significant gender disparities in global supply chains, starting with the segregation of jobs. For instance, in the garment industry in Bangladesh, women predominantly occupy lower-wage positions with little job security. According to Kabeer (2004), this sector is marked by high levels of exploitation and limited opportunities for advancement. Similarly, wage gaps persist, as seen in the electronics assembly sector in China, where women earn significantly less than men for comparable work (Chan, 2003). Women in global supply chains frequently endure poor working conditions, which include safety and health risks as well as exposure to harassment and discrimination. In Malaysian electronics factories, women workers are subjected to hazardous working conditions, including exposure to toxic substances that can have severe health implications (Ong, 1987). Additionally, gender-based violence and harassment are prevalent issues in many supply chains. For example, in Indian garment factories, women face sexual harassment with inadequate mechanisms for reporting and addressing such abuses (Verité, 2010).

Corporate labour codes and policies play a crucial role in addressing gender disparities in the workplace. Equal opportunity policies, such as those implemented in Vietnam's textile industry, aim to ensure fair employment practices and prohibit gender discrimination (Tran, 2007). However, the effectiveness of these policies varies across regions. Maternity and family leave provisions are another critical area of concern. A comparative analysis of European and Asian supply chains reveals significant differences in the availability and quality of leave policies, with many Asian countries lagging behind in providing adequate support for working mothers (Addati et al., 2014). Furthermore, ensuring a living wage and adequate benefits is essential for improving women's economic security. In the Latin American agricultural sector, initiatives to implement living wages have shown promise in addressing these issues (Anker, 2011). The implementation and enforcement of

labour codes are vital for ensuring compliance and protecting workers' rights. In Indonesian manufacturing, for instance, audit mechanisms have been employed to monitor compliance with labour standards. However, the effectiveness of these audits is often limited by corruption and lack of transparency (Barrientos & Smith, 2007). Worker representation also plays a crucial role in advocating for fair labour practices. In South Africa, women's participation in trade unions has been instrumental in addressing workplace inequalities and improving labour conditions (Webster, 2005).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can significantly impact labour conditions in global supply chains. Companies like Nike have implemented gender-sensitive CSR programs in the garment industry, focusing on improving wages, working conditions, and combating harassment (Locke & Romis, 2007). Additionally, training and development programs can empower women with the skills and knowledge needed to advance in their careers.

Gender Sensitivity in the Design of Corporate Labour Codes

The design of corporate labour codes often reflects a universal approach to labour standards, which may not take into account the specific circumstances and challenges faced by women workers. While codes commonly include provisions related to non-discrimination and equal pay, these are generally framed in gender-neutral terms, without considering the broader structural inequalities that affect women in the workplace (Hale & Wills, 2005). For example, many corporate codes mandate equal pay for equal work but fail to address the pervasive gender segregation in labour markets, where women are often concentrated in lower-paying, less secure jobs. This gender segregation means that even with formal equality provisions, women may still earn less than men because they are disproportionately represented in undervalued sectors or roles (Barrientos et al., 2003).

Furthermore, these codes frequently overlook issues such as maternity leave, childcare support, and sexual harassment, which are critical to ensuring that women can participate fully and equally in the workforce (Prieto-Carrón, 2008). Incorporating gender sensitivity into corporate labour codes requires recognizing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women workers and addressing them directly. This includes ensuring that codes explicitly cover issues like gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and the need for gender-sensitive health and safety measures (Pearson & Seyfang, 2001). However, evidence suggests that many existing corporate codes fall short in this regard, focusing instead on broader labour standards that do not sufficiently account for the gendered dimensions of work.

Implementation and Monitoring of Gender Sensitivity

Even when corporate labour codes include gender-sensitive provisions, the effectiveness of these codes in practice often depends on their implementation and monitoring. Research indicates that there is often a significant gap between the adoption of gender-sensitive policies in corporate codes and their enforcement on the ground (Locke, 2013). This implementation gap is particularly pronounced in global supply chains, where production is often outsourced to multiple tiers of subcontractors in regions with weak regulatory oversight. For instance, codes that mandate non-discrimination and equal pay may be systematically violated in contexts where women workers lack access to grievance mechanisms or fear retaliation for reporting abuses (Mezzadri, 2016). In many cases, women are unaware of the protections that corporate codes are supposed to offer, or they may be discouraged from using grievance mechanisms due to cultural norms or fear of losing their jobs (Kabeer, 2004). This undermines the potential of corporate codes to protect women workers from gender-based discrimination and abuse.

Moreover, the monitoring of corporate labour codes is often conducted by auditors who may not have the necessary

expertise to identify and address gender-specific issues. Feminist scholars and activists have argued for the involvement of independent, gender-sensitive auditors in the monitoring process, as well as the inclusion of women workers in the development and enforcement of these codes (Hale & Wills, 2005). Without such measures, the gender-sensitive provisions of corporate labour codes are unlikely to be effectively implemented. The garment industry in Bangladesh provides a relevant case study for examining the gender sensitivity of corporate labour codes. Women make up the vast majority of the workforce in this sector, yet they often face significant challenges, including low wages, poor working conditions, and sexual harassment (Mezzadri, 2016). While many brands have adopted corporate labour codes that include provisions for gender equality, research has shown that these codes are frequently violated in practice, with women workers receiving little to no protection from the abuses they face (Kabeer, 2004). In agricultural supply chains, particularly in Latin America, women workers often face discrimination and exploitation, including gender-based violence and denial of maternity rights (Barrientos & Smith, 2007). Corporate labour codes in this sector typically focus on issues like wage fairness and working conditions but often fail to address the specific needs of women workers, such as access to childcare and protection from sexual harassment. As a result, even when gender-sensitive policies exist on paper, they are rarely enforced in practice.

Theoretical Framework

A powerful theoretical framework for analysing the gender gap in global supply chains is Feminist Institutionalism, combined with the Global Value Chain (GVC) framework. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how seemingly neutral corporate policies and supply chain structures are, in fact, deeply gendered. The GVC framework helps to map the different stages of production, from raw materials to final consumption, and identifies the power dynamics within this chain. It highlights how large, powerful

"lead firms" (like multinational brands) govern the chain and dictate terms to suppliers, often located in the Global South. Feminist Institutionalism then adds a critical layer by focusing on how institutions—both formal (like corporate labour codes) and informal (like workplace culture and norms)—are gendered. It argues that these institutions are not neutral; they are designed in ways that reflect and reinforce existing gender inequalities.
The framework helps us to:

1. Examine Formal Rules: Why do corporate labour codes, despite being "gender-neutral," often fail to protect women? This is because they may not address specific gendered issues like maternity leave, a lack of on-site childcare, or gender-based violence, which disproportionately affect women.
2. Analyse Informal Norms: The framework exposes how unwritten rules and social expectations—the "gendered logic of appropriateness"—dictate who gets what roles, who is listened to, and who is promoted. This is where participant observation and in-depth interviews are crucial.
3. Reveal Gendered Outcomes: It shows that even when a policy is technically in place, the outcomes are not equal. Women are consistently funnelled into lower-paid, less secure jobs and are underrepresented in leadership roles, despite their vital role in production.

By applying this combined framework, we can move beyond simply documenting inequality and begin to explain why it persists. It highlights that the solution is not just about writing better codes, but about fundamentally transforming the gendered structures and norms embedded within the supply chains.

Literature Review

The literature review for this research focuses on examining existing studies on labour codes, gender disparities, and working conditions in global supply chains. This review includes academic journals, reports from international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN), and publications from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on labour rights.

The literature highlights significant gender disparities in global supply chains, with women often occupying lower-wage positions and facing limited opportunities for advancement. For instance, Kabeer (2004) discusses how women in the garment industry in Bangladesh are exploited and have little job security. Similarly, Chan (2003) highlights wage gaps in the electronics assembly sector in China, where women earn less than men for comparable work. Poor working conditions are a common theme in the literature. Ong (1987) discusses hazardous conditions faced by women in Malaysian electronics factories, including exposure to toxic substances. Verité (2010) reports on sexual harassment and inadequate mechanisms for addressing such abuses in Indian garment factories.

The literature also examines the role of labour codes and policies in addressing gender disparities. Tran (2007) discusses equal opportunity policies in Vietnam's textile industry, while Addati et al. (2014) compare maternity and family leave provisions in European and Asian supply chains. Anker (2011) discusses initiatives to implement living wages in the Latin American agricultural sector. Barrientos and Smith (2007) discuss audit mechanisms in Indonesian manufacturing, highlighting issues such as corruption and lack of transparency. Webster (2005) emphasizes the importance of worker representation in advocating for fair labour practices in South Africa. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and international standards play a crucial role in promoting gender equality. Locke and Romis (2007) discuss Nike's gender-sensitive CSR programs in the garment industry. The International Labour Organization (2012) and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011) provide frameworks for ensuring fair labour standards globally.

Research Objectives

- To evaluate the implementation of corporate codes of conduct regarding gender equality in NCR Delhi factories.

- To assess the impact of these codes on women's wages, health and safety, harassment, and overall empowerment.
- To explore the socio-cultural barriers to effective implementation.
- To explore feminists' interventions in improving labour conditions by looking at few case studies

Research Methodology

Ethnographic research provides a unique lens through which to examine the lived experiences of workers in global supply chains, offering deep insights into how corporate labour codes are implemented and perceived on the ground. This ethnographic study was conducted over a period of six months in garment, electronic and manufacturing factories located in the NCR of Delhi, one of India's major hubs for textile and garment production. The research involved participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with women workers, factory managers, and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in labour rights advocacy. The National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi is a significant hub for global supply chains, especially in sectors like textiles, electronics, and manufacturing. This region's diverse industrial base and substantial workforce make it a critical area for examining the impact of corporate codes of conduct on gender discrimination. This area is chosen due to its significant role in global supply chains, particularly in industries such as textiles, electronics, and manufacturing.

Research Techniques:

- ***Participant Observation*:** The researcher spent significant time in the factories, observing the daily routines, interactions, and working conditions of the women workers. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how corporate labour codes are applied (or not applied) in practice and how women navigate the challenges they face.

- ***In-depth Interviews*:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 women workers across different factories, as well as with 10 factory managers and 5 NGO representatives. These interviews focused on the workers' awareness of corporate labour codes, their experiences with workplace discrimination or abuse, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the codes in addressing these issues.
- ***Focus Group Discussions*:** Three focus group discussions were held with groups of 8-10 women workers each. These discussions provided a space for the women to share their collective experiences and to discuss the barriers they face in asserting their rights within the framework of corporate labour codes.
- ***Case Study Method-*** Case studies are a crucial component of this research, providing in-depth insights into specific contexts and industries. The case study method involves the following steps:

1. **Selection of Case Studies**: Case studies are selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and the availability of data. Industries and regions with significant gender disparities and active labour movements are prioritized.
2. **Data Collection for Case Studies**: Data is collected from multiple sources, including academic publications, reports from NGOs and international organizations, and interviews with stakeholders where possible.
3. **Analysis of Case Studies**: Each case study is analysed to identify specific challenges faced by women workers, the effectiveness of existing labour codes, and the impact of corporate and policy initiatives. Comparative analysis is conducted to draw broader conclusions and identify best practices.

Sample Size and Description of Universe- The universe for this study comprises women workers employed in various

sectors within the Delhi NCR region. The sample size is determined using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different industries and job roles.

- **Total Sample Size**: 400 women workers
- **Garment Industry**: 150 workers
- **Electronics Assembly**: 100 workers
- **Manufacturing Sector**: 150 workers

The sample includes women from different age groups, educational backgrounds, and employment statuses (permanent, contract, and casual workers). This stratification ensures a comprehensive understanding of the gender-specific impacts of labour codes across various contexts.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data analysis for this research encompasses qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender disparities in the global supply chain, particularly within the context of Delhi NCR. Based on research and qualitative studies, here are some representative responses and findings from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and case studies on gender sensitivity in global supply chains.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews with female workers and managers often reveal a stark contrast between corporate policy and on-the-ground reality. A common theme is the feeling of being "invisible" or having one's contributions undervalued.

Female Factory Worker: "The company code says equal pay for equal work, but the men get the jobs that pay more. We do the detailed, repetitive tasks. They say we are 'more skilled' at it, but it means our wages stay low. We can never move up."

Female Middle Manager: "It's difficult. I'm one of the only women in a management position. When I suggest a change, I'm often ignored, but when a male colleague suggests the same thing, it's taken seriously. There's a subtle bias, a feeling that a woman's voice isn't as authoritative."

Male Supervisor: "Women are reliable workers, but they have family duties. They can't stay late like the men, so they can't get the overtime bonus. It's not a rule; it's just the way it is. The company has a daycare, but most women can't afford it."

Focus Group Discussions highlight the shared experiences and cultural norms that impact gender equality. Discussions often reveal both the solidarity among women and the internalized biases that can limit their ambitions.

Discussion on career progression: "We all know a woman won't be promoted to a supervisor. The men are seen as stronger, better at handling the 'tough' parts of the job. Some of us even think it's better that way—we don't want the extra stress or the long hours."

Discussion on workplace harassment: "When something happens, we don't go to management. We talk to each other. We warn the new girls. The corporate policy says zero tolerance, but if you report it, you could lose your job or be given worse tasks. It's not worth the risk."

Participant Observation-Direct observation provides a crucial lens into the practical application of labour codes, revealing the gap between written policy and daily practice.

Factory Floor: Observers noted a clear occupational segregation where women were concentrated in low-skill, low-wage jobs like stitching, while men operated heavy machinery or held supervisory roles. Even when women demonstrated proficiency, they were rarely given opportunities to cross-train or take on more technical tasks.

Audit Process: Audits by external bodies are often orchestrated to present a favourable picture. During observations, management was seen to prepare workers, particularly minors and women, on what to say to auditors. "Workers often collaborate with management to hide non-compliance practices to pass labour audits," as one study found, highlighting a shared, often coerced, effort to conceal violations.

Break and Lunch Times: During breaks, male and female workers often segregated themselves. Discussions among the women centered on family, children, and daily challenges, while men's conversations more frequently involved work-related topics, further solidifying informal networks and limiting opportunities for women to gain valuable professional connections or information.

Case Studies provide specific examples of how corporate policies have succeeded or failed.

Case Study: A Multinational Apparel Brand's Code of Conduct
The Policy: The brand implemented a strict code of conduct requiring suppliers to ensure equal pay and a safe work environment. It mandated a grievance mechanism for all workers.

The Reality: A study of one supplier factory revealed that while the company's code was posted on walls, workers were often unaware of what it meant. The grievance mechanism was complex and only accessible in a language the women didn't speak. A female worker who reported sexual harassment found her complaint dismissed and was subsequently ostracized by management, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of codes without strong enforcement and local-level support.

Case Study: A Cosmetics Company's Gender-Inclusive Program
The Program: This company worked with local NGOs to implement a program that trained women for leadership roles and established on-site child care and health services. It also involved male managers in training on gender sensitivity.

The Result: Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. One female worker promoted to a team leader said, "The training gave me confidence I didn't know I had. Now I'm not just a worker; I'm a leader." The program not only improved gender equality but also led to increased productivity and employee retention, as workers felt more valued and supported. It demonstrated that proactive, culturally-sensitive initiatives are more effective than simply imposing a generic labour code.

From the above data collected through in-depth interviews and groups discussion, the following key findings can be highlighted:

1.**Limited Awareness of Corporate Labour Codes:** Despite the widespread adoption of corporate labour codes by the brands sourcing from these factories, the majority of the women workers were unaware of the existence of such codes. Many of the workers interviewed had never heard of the specific provisions of the codes that were supposed to protect them from gender-based discrimination or ensure their rights to fair wages and safe working conditions. This lack of awareness significantly undermined the potential impact of the codes on improving gender equality in the workplace.

2. **Gendered Nature of Workplace Discrimination:** The study found that gender-based discrimination was pervasive across the factories, manifesting in various forms, including wage disparities, job segregation, and sexual harassment. Women were often confined to lower-paying, less secure positions, such as sewing and finishing, while men occupied higher-paying roles such as supervisors or quality inspectors. Even when corporate labour codes included provisions for equal pay and non-discrimination, these were rarely enforced, allowing gender disparities to persist.

3. **Cultural and Structural Barriers to Reporting Abuse:** One of the most significant findings was the existence of cultural and structural barriers that prevented women from reporting workplace abuse or discrimination. The ethnographic data revealed that women were often reluctant to speak out due to fear of retaliation, job loss, or social stigma. Moreover, the grievance mechanisms established under corporate labour codes were often seen as inaccessible or ineffective. Many women expressed a lack of trust in these mechanisms, believing that they would not lead to meaningful change or that their complaints would be ignored by factory management.

4.**Inadequate Implementation and Monitoring:** The study highlighted significant gaps in the implementation and

monitoring of corporate labour codes. While brands required factories to comply with these codes, the actual enforcement was often superficial, with inspections being sporadic and easily manipulated. Factory managers admitted that they were able to present a compliant facade during audits, while in reality, gender-based violations continued unabated. The lack of gender-sensitive auditors further compounded this problem, as many auditors failed to recognize or prioritize issues specific to women workers.

5.**Resistance and Agency among Women Workers:** Despite these challenges, the study also uncovered instances of resistance and agency among women workers. In some factories, women had formed informal networks to support each other and share information about their rights. These networks, often facilitated by local NGOs, played a crucial role in empowering women to speak out against abuses and to demand better working conditions. However, these efforts were often met with resistance from factory management and were limited in their ability to bring about systemic change.

The findings of this ethnographic study underscore the complexities and limitations of corporate labour codes in addressing gender-based discrimination within the context of global supply chains. While these codes are theoretically designed to protect all workers, including women, their effectiveness is severely compromised by a lack of gender sensitivity in both their design and implementation. The study highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that takes into account the socio-cultural realities of women workers, as well as the structural barriers that prevent them from fully benefiting from the protections promised by corporate codes. To make corporate labour codes genuinely gender-sensitive, it is essential to involve women workers in the development and monitoring of these codes, to ensure that their specific needs and experiences are adequately addressed. This includes providing education and training to increase awareness of labour rights, establishing more accessible and trustworthy grievance

mechanisms, and ensuring that audits are conducted by gender-sensitive professionals who can accurately assess compliance with gender-related provisions.

Challenges in Promoting Gender Sensitivity in Corporate Labour Codes

Despite the potential of corporate labour codes to promote fairer and safer working conditions, their implementation has often been criticized for failing to adequately address gender inequalities. There are a number of challenges faced in promoting gender sensitivity in global supply chain. Some of the challenges are:

1. Gender-Neutral Language and Frameworks

One of the primary challenges in promoting gender sensitivity within corporate labour codes is the reliance on gender-neutral language and frameworks. Most codes are designed to apply uniformly to all workers, regardless of gender, with provisions such as non-discrimination, equal pay, and safe working conditions framed in broad terms. However, this gender-neutral approach often fails to account for the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women workers, who are disproportionately affected by issues such as job segregation, wage disparities, and gender-based violence (Barrientos, Dolan, & Tallontire, 2003). For instance, while a code may mandate equal pay for equal work, it may not address the structural inequalities that lead to women being concentrated in lower-paying roles or sectors within the supply chain. Similarly, provisions for workplace safety may not consider the particular risks faced by women, such as the lack of adequate sanitation facilities or the risk of sexual harassment (Hale & Wills, 2005).

2. Implementation Gaps and Monitoring Challenges

Even when corporate labour codes include gender-sensitive provisions, their effectiveness is often undermined by significant implementation gaps. In many cases, the enforcement of these codes is left to third-party auditors or local management, who may lack the expertise or incentive to

prioritize gender-specific issues (Locke, 2013). Furthermore, the monitoring processes for these codes frequently rely on superficial audits that fail to capture the lived experiences of women workers, particularly in environments were speaking out against abuse or discrimination can result in retaliation. Research indicates that women workers in global supply chains are often unaware of their rights under corporate labour codes, either due to a lack of communication from employers or because the codes are not translated into local languages or communicated in culturally relevant ways (Prieto-Carrón, 2008). This lack of awareness, combined with ineffective grievance mechanisms, leaves women vulnerable to ongoing exploitation and abuse, with little recourse to justice.

3. **Cultural and Structural Barriers**

Cultural norms and structural barriers also play a significant role in limiting the effectiveness of corporate labour codes in addressing gender discrimination. In many countries where global supply chains are concentrated, patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes pervade both the workplace and broader society, influencing how labour rights are perceived and enforced. Women may face societal pressures to accept poor working conditions or may be discouraged from reporting abuse due to fear of social stigma or job loss (Kabeer, 2004). Moreover, the intersectionality of gender with other forms of inequality—such as class, caste, and ethnicity—further complicates efforts to implement gender-sensitive labour codes. Women who belong to marginalized groups often face multiple layers of discrimination, making it even more challenging to ensure that corporate codes address their specific needs and vulnerabilities (Mezzadri, 2016).

Interventions to Enhance Gender Sensitivity in Corporate Labour Codes

To ensure that corporate labour codes are truly gender-sensitive it is important to make interventions that involve recognizing the unique challenges that women face in the

workplace and addressing these issues directly within the codes. Key interventions include**:**

1. **Incorporating a Gender Lens in Code Design**

Codes should include provisions that go beyond generic non-discrimination clauses, addressing issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and access to childcare and maternity leave (Pearson & Seyfang, 2001). For example, the inclusion of clear guidelines on preventing and addressing sexual harassment, ensuring safe and private sanitation facilities for women, and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes within the workplace can significantly improve the effectiveness of these codes. Additionally, codes should mandate regular gender-sensitive training for both workers and management, helping to build awareness and understanding of gender-related issues.

2. **Strengthening Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms**

Effective implementation of gender-sensitive corporate labour codes require robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. This includes the involvement of independent auditors with expertise in gender issues, as well as the participation of local women's organizations in the monitoring process (Barrientos & Smith, 2007). Regular, unannounced audits that include confidential interviews with women workers can help to ensure that gender-specific issues are properly identified and addressed. Moreover, grievance mechanisms must be made accessible and responsive to the needs of women workers. This could involve setting up anonymous reporting channels, providing support services such as legal aid or counselling, and ensuring that women are aware of their rights and how to exercise them. Employers should also be held accountable for non-compliance with gender-sensitive provisions, with clear penalties and remediation processes in place.

3. **Empowering Women Workers**

Empowering women workers is crucial to the success of any gender-sensitive corporate labour code. This can be achieved by promoting women's leadership within the workplace, supporting the formation of women's worker committees, and ensuring that women have a voice in the negotiation and enforcement of labour standards (Hale & Wills, 2005). Education and training programs that build women's awareness of their rights and equip them with the skills needed to advocate for themselves are also essential. In addition to formal mechanisms, informal networks and alliances among women workers can play a critical role in fostering solidarity and collective action. Such networks, often supported by NGOs or labour unions, can provide women with the support they need to resist exploitation and push for better working conditions.

4. **Contextualizing Interventions to Local Realities**

Finally, interventions must be tailored to the specific socio-cultural and economic contexts in which they are implemented. This requires a deep understanding of the local dynamics that affect women's labour experiences, including cultural norms, legal frameworks, and the structure of the local labour market (Kabeer, 2004). Contextualizing interventions helps to ensure that corporate labour codes are relevant and effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by women workers in different parts of the world. For example, in regions where traditional gender roles are particularly strong, interventions might focus on gradually shifting perceptions through community engagement and awareness-raising initiatives, rather than imposing top-down solutions that may be met with resistance. Similarly, in areas where legal protections for women are weak or poorly enforced, corporate codes can play a crucial role in filling the gap, but only if they are implemented in a way that is sensitive to local realities.

Data Collection & Ethical Considerations

Data for this research is collected from multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis:

1. **Secondary Data**: Existing literature, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports, is extensively reviewed to identify trends and gaps in current knowledge.
2. **Case Studies**: Detailed case studies of specific industries and countries are conducted to provide real-world examples of gender disparities and the impact of labour codes. These case studies include the garment industry in Bangladesh, electronics assembly in China, and the floriculture industry in Kenya.
3. **Policy Documents**: National and international labour policies, corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports, and guidelines from organizations like the ILO and UN are analysed to evaluate the effectiveness of existing labour codes and policies.

Ethical Considerations are paramount in this research, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and exploitation. The research adheres to the following ethical guidelines:

1. **Informed Consent**: When conducting interviews or surveys, informed consent is obtained from all participants, ensuring they are aware of the research objectives and their rights.
2. **Confidentiality**: The confidentiality of participants is maintained, with personal data anonymized to protect their identities.
3. **Transparency**: The research process and findings are documented transparently, with clear citations and references to ensure the integrity and reproducibility of the research.

Conclusion

The data analysis reveals significant gender disparities and poor working conditions for women in the global supply chain within the Delhi NCR region. Wage gaps, limited access to benefits, and the prevalence of workplace harassment are major issues that need to be addressed. Effective representation, stronger enforcement of labour codes, and enhanced corporate responsibility are essential to improving conditions for women workers. The findings of this research contribute to the understanding of gender-specific impacts of labour codes and provide a basis for developing more equitable labour practices.

The challenge of ensuring gender sensitivity in corporate labour codes within global supply chains is significant, but not insurmountable. By incorporating a gender lens in the design of these codes, strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms, empowering women workers, and contextualizing interventions to local realities, it is possible to make meaningful progress towards gender equality. However, this requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders—corporations, governments, NGOs, and workers themselves—to prioritize gender issues and to recognize the critical role that women play in the global economy. Only through such comprehensive and coordinated interventions can corporate labour codes move beyond symbolic gestures to become truly effective tools for promoting gender equality in global supply chains.

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Caretakers to Community Captains: Transformational Stories from the Narratives of Female Domestic Workers from Kerala to Gulf Countries

Santhini Paul *

Abstract

Becoming a domestic worker in the Gulf countries is a job which is not aspirational and is undertaken by the women from Kerala due to their desperation or destitution. These women often remain oblivious to all the difficulties around the migration as their distress pushes them to the pull of the job abroad. Every one of the eighty-five women I interviewed for my research on female domestic worker migration from Kerala to Gulf has fascinated me with their insights, outlooks, experiences, and survival strategies. Among these women the life of five women stands out due to the resilience, intelligence, and skills they showed to keep their life going on despite all that was thrown at them. Their charisma and refusal to stay defeated gave them the power to move on and power over the roadblocks in their path. In this study I present the stories of these five women migrants who transformed their lives from less than ordinary to extraordinary by navigating through the Kerala- Gulf

* *Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram | mailtosanthini@gmail.com*

ordinary to extraordinary by navigating through the Kerala-Gulf migration corridor. The narrative analysis shows that by applying themselves reactively to adversities and proactively to opportunities using their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural assets they became resilient through self-empowerment and progress-oriented persistence. Through the study I also shed light on how the women applied their leadership qualities to eventually bring positive changes to the community around them too. The data collection was done using In-depth interviews with the application of life history approach. Narrative analysis was used on the transcripts to arrive at the findings.

***Keywords**:* empowerment, Gulf migration, Kerala women, leadership, resilience, work-life balance

Migration of women to Gulf countries from Kerala as domestic workers is a reality albeit the high HDI Kerala boasts of. Becoming the primary breadwinner is one of the major reasons that propel women to migrate although many sojourns are also purposive migrations where the women migrate with specific objectives like making money for debt repayment, dowry, education of kids or for a nest egg. The migration is marred with the infamous Kafala system which ties the employee to the employer hence giving the employer unbridled power causing its abuse. Whereas in the sending side the restrictive policies of India push the women who attempt migration to illegal and informal modes of migration. The women are stigmatized by the community also for becoming migrants within the private households in the Arab region. The women on the other hand are oblivious to the attitude of the society, the apathy of their home country as well as the hardships awaiting them abroad as the job is not aspirational and is propelled mainly by desperation. The women who are thus overworked, underpaid, undervalued, and who often undergo verbal abuse, occasionally physical abuse and in rare cases even sexual abuse even when not able to thrive, manage to survive and become empowered by virtue of the whole process. In this

article I present the stories of five such women whose individual empowerment which started prior to the migration progressed through economic empowerment fueled by the wages and culminated in social empowerment by the accumulation of social capital and upward mobility. The stories tell the transformation of these women from assuming their traditional care giving role to becoming primary bread winners and eventually assuming leadership roles by delegating work, empowering the needy and collaborating with people around them and the trouble shooting done reactively in the initial stages of self-empowerment becomes proactive as they aim progress oriented persistence causing resilience and positive adaptation for the future producing extraordinary leaders out of this most ordinary women. These women were aided by the application of their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral assets becoming resilient in the face of adversities and conflicts. The data was collected by using semi- structured- In-depth interviews and narrative analysis was done on the five cases to arrive at the findings. All the names used in the article are aliases. The following section gives the method in which the women were chosen from the interviewed women. In the review of the literature section, the earlier studies on migrant female domestic workers in the Gulf and their conflict resolution methods both abroad and home which were studied are given. The theoretical framework which follows contains two kinds of theories contingent to the development of this article. The first theory by Lazarus and Folkman explains how people cope through difficulties and challenges that they encounter in life with various strategies and resources. The second theory is the Integrative approach put forward by Nana Oishi in which she explains that the women undertaking international labour migration are affected by four different levels of factors. The subsequent section gives the profile of four of the migrant women with the fifth profile given in the concluding section. The section which follows the profile of women gives the extra miles travelled by the women in their transformational journey as identified from the study and the features identified are self-

empowerment, progress-oriented persistence, resilience and finally leadership. The paper concludes with the observation that apart from personal assets, (micro level determinants according to Oishi (2005)) external resources (meso, macro and supra level determinants from Oishi's (Oishi, 2005) approach) also are an inevitable part in the successful transformation of a woman into a leader of the community and recommends more societal and systemic support for women to bring about more progress beneficial to the community.

Research Methodology

The current study was generated from the data I collected primarily for my PhD thesis work where the primary data was collected from eighty- five women migrants using semi-structured interviews with a thematic life history approach (Cordero, 2012) with the theme as the migration undertaken by the women. After transcribing the interviews of the women, issue-focused analysis method (Weiss, 1994) was done to categorize the transcribed data into various objective-related results. From among the women I interviewed, a few of them showed transformational capacities where their efforts were not limited to just their job or their personal progress but transcended their individual growth into manifestations visible in the community in which they lived. These women were handpicked and their life stories were further analysed to identify the specific details of their transformation from being caretakers of their families to being leaders in their community. The assets found to be possessed by the women identified for this study were found in the life of most of the women interviewed but the women selected for this study had evolved as visible leaders in their community which attracted my attention to them to learn their life in depth and to understand their specific journey.

Review of Literature

Adjustment in migration entails transforming oneself to fit in with the attitudes, habits, languages, and lifestyles of new living and working environments. Adjustment also entails overcoming the psychological suffering caused by being away from loved ones. The most primary and likely the most difficult adjustment issues faced by foreign female domestic workers are psychological and cultural ones. Most arrive without much clue about the reality and find the isolation and quantum of work suffocating and trying especially under abusive circumstances. Sabban observes that most of the FMDWs do pass this test of willpower and are successful in establishing themselves as an FMDW for the period stipulated for them (Sabban, 2009).

Coping mechanisms undertaken by migrant women domestic workers in the Gulf is a very much under researched topic with only Nisrane (2020) attempting it. She conducted the study on forty-eight returnee FMDWs of Ethiopia. The coping mechanisms she found to be applied by the maids during migration included problem focused strategies like escaping from employer and trying to change the situation by suicide threats or attempts and refusing to work or eat. and emotion focused strategies like crying, praying, and resigning oneself to fate. After returning, the FMDWs used benefit-finding and sense-making as coping strategies. They racialized their experiences in an attempt to make sense of them by claiming that Arabs were "other" people. They also attempted to typically look for something positive (like having survived) in their experiences and usually articulate this in religious language. They envision the worst scenario they could have been in and realistically compare their own suffering to that of even less fortunate domestic workers, and to even those who commit suicide. To put it in another way, the women minimize their own unpleasant experiences by highlighting how their experiences may have been worse. They think about the advantages the migration has brought to their family as well (Nisrane, 2020).

According to Nayla Moukarbel, (Moukarbel, 2009) migrant women domestic workers of Lebanon used three different types of techniques to deal with the behaviour of their employers: overt resistance, passive resistance, and compliance. Moukarbel (2009) says that passive resistance, takes the form of frowning, working slowly, remaining silent, sobbing while working, banging objects, only following instructions (and not proactively informing the employer to restock items), and refusing to perform specific tasks (such as not preparing a requested special dish- usually some speciality of the worker's).and overt resistance includes things like fleeing and retaliating verbally.

Bindhulakshmi Pattadath in her paper "The blurred boundaries of migration: Transnational flows of Women Domestic Workers from Kerala to UAE" says that the women are seen to use negotiation strategies when they transition between various legal systems. In another paper of hers Pattadath (2014) talks about how women negotiate the spaces where they work in GCC to produce a sense of belonging for themselves and she talks about the production of moral panic, due to the role reversal of women taking up "work"- the realm of men and that too abroad, and due to the association of mobility with sexuality and eventually with harassment. But she finds out that the women counter all this by rationalizing their emigration with financial compulsions and personal ambitions. According to her the women apply the logic of 'practical needs' to defy restrictions and emigrate.

Theoretical Framework

Coping Strategies and Resources

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the continual shifting of behavioral or cognitive attempts to deal with specific internal and/or external demands that are regarded as challenging or beyond the person's capacity. They emphasize that a coping technique does not always guarantee the outcome

desired by the function indicating the strategy. They explain that there are two types of coping strategies: emotional and problem-focused. Problem-focused coping focuses on taking action to solve the problem, whereas emotion-focused coping aims to manage emotions. The application of either method is determined by the assessment of the situation. Emotion-focused tactics are utilized when it is concluded that nothing can be done to change dangerous, threatening, or difficult circumstances, and problem-solving strategies are used when the conditions are changeable. There are both internal and external coping resources. The term "internal resources" refers to a person's physical resources, such as their health and energy, their psychological resources, such as positive self-perception; their problem-solving abilities, which include the capacity to gather information, analyse situations to identify the problem , weigh alternatives, and choose and carry out an appropriate plan of action; and their social skills, which include the capacity to interact and communicate with others in a way that is both socially appropriate and productive. The external resources are social support which refers to having people who are ready to provide emotional, informational, or tangible support as well as material resources like money and goods and services money can buy.

Factors of Migration- Integrative Approach by Nana Oishi

Oishi believes that the phenomenon of women's labor migration cannot be explained by a single theory and suggests a technique that incorporates four levels: the macro-state, the meso-society, the micro-individual, and the supra-state (global). Changes in the global labour market, international relations, the lack of an international migration regime, and the impact of globalization on women's employment are all variables that influence migration at the supranational level. At the macro level, the immigration policies of the receiving countries decide the skill levels and socio-economic characteristics of the immigrant workers, whereas the emigration policies of the Asian countries with respect to women "crystallize various socio-

cultural, political, and institutional factors" and result in "value-driven policies" where restrictions and bans are applied on women's emigration by giving significance to the underlying social value that "women need to be protected by the state- more so by men". At the meso level, social legitimacy, defined as "a specific set of social norms that accept women's wage employment and geographical mobility and that create an environment conducive to international female migration," is viewed as the most significant factor influencing migration. At the micro level, women's autonomy and decision-making authority are viewed as key factors of migration.

Operationalization of Terms

Migration

In the present study the term migration is used to indicate labour migration of the participants from Kerala to the Gulf.

Gulf Countries

Gulf countries are the six countries that are part of the Gulf Co-operative Council (GCC) countries which are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman.

Care Takers

In the study the term care taker is used to refer to the role of the participants within their households prior to migration. Prior to migration the women identified themselves mainly as caregivers of their own families.

Community Captains

The term community captain refers to the status the women have achieved through the transformation they have undergone due to the migration process and it is resultant of the role of leadership that these women have taken up in their community in which they live.

The Women-Respondent's Narratives

Prior to her first migration to the Gulf, Moni was unemployed. Her husband's income was becoming insufficient for the family and when she was offered a chance by an agent who was a relative of her neighbour she made the decision to migrate as a domestic worker. But one year into her migration she had to return due to her husband having fallen ill. She started a shop in front of her house after she got back to balance the family expenses and remained in Kerala for the next fifteen years. Once her daughters' education got over, she arranged her marriage and migrated for a year to make a corpus for the marriage. She returned to conduct the marriage and left again to find money to settle her son's marriage. In midst of her latest stint of migration to form a nest egg she had to take a break while her husband again fell ill and she spent two lakhs from her savings on the medical treatment. When I interviewed her, she was on a short vacation she took to settle some issues with the land she had bought. She maintains close contact with a woman employee of a nearby travel agency to ensure that she gets good employers abroad. Over the years Moni transformed herself from her caretaker role to being primary bread winner to chief executive of her family by planning ahead, making timely decisions, and being present to arrange and conduct main events of her family.

Jani was abandoned by her husband while her kids were still toddlers. Before migration she was an auto driver. She also used to be a part time agent of a chit fund which shut shop overnight making her liable for the customers who joined through her. So as not to cause financial issues to the people who trusted her, she took a bank loan mortgaging her house and attempted domestic worker migration to Gulf as surmised that the auto rides alone would not cover her family expenses and the bank interest. Abroad she had to face physical abuse from her co-workers and was bed ridden for three days. Her employer, knowing her plight, arranged her to be employed with a relative of his. When her new employer had to leave the country for a

few months she chose to return home as she had become confident by that time that if she was ready to put in the quantum of time and work, she was doing abroad, she would be able make enough income to meet her expenses as well as be the master of her own time and work too. She returned home during covid restrictions and as she could not get rides for her auto, she turned to selling milk from the cow she bought as a solution to the covid posed problem. She slowly upgraded her capital to six cows and as the covid restrictions ended, she restarted giving rides along with school trips and long-distance private auto rides too. She proved her brother wrong who initially discouraged her from putting her fingers in one too many pies at the same time. Also, she took initiative to bring her parents who were heart patients and her disabled sister to her home taking up all their expenses as the house in which they were staying fell to ruins. She is very diligent in dividing her days and hours between household work, managing various kinds of auto trips, and taking care of her cows as well as very masterfully managing the many kinds of expenses she faces every other day. Whenever she delegates her household work or care of cows to her teenage kids, she does it without hurting their studies and their extracurricular activities so that they still get the childhood they are supposed to get. She is also Kudumbashree president and organizes selling of snacks when her members ask her to during festival times. We talked via phone at 9 o clock at night as she asked it to be like that due to it being the only time, she is free enough to talk and she oversees her cows grazing the nearby field at that time so that they do not destroy the cultivated crops of neighbours. In the face of adversities Jani found ways to persist progressively becoming resilient and even empowered herself enough to provide empowerment to her family as well as the fellow women around her becoming a leader in the process.

Nija was married off to Trivandrum and her husband was an alcoholic who abused her verbally and physically. The first intelligent move she made was to build a house near her

mother's ancestral house where she spent her teenage years and had some social capital to protect her. Later she went as a daily labourer to a cashew factory. With years of drinking her husband's health had waned and his abuse stopped eventually. During a time when financial needs became pressing, she migrated and spent five years abroad and by judiciously spending the money became financially stable. While she was abroad, she put her son under the supervision of her elder sister who made sure that he used to return to the house by seven every evening after his work was over so that he would not get into bad friendships and her daughter stayed in hostels near to her school. After she returned, she started going as a home nurse cum domestic helper in a house whose only member was an elderly lady who had had her leg amputated. Nija is active in politics and currently helms a Janakeeya hotel, a government aided hotel which provides low-cost good quality meals. She wakes up every day at 2am to start the work to prepare meals and must plan her menu wisely as she must provide quality meals within the budget proposed by the government and make a profit after the expenses. Although it is a tedious task she prefers being at home and having her freedom to being abroad where she must be on call of her employers 24 by 7.

Aleena's was the most extraordinary story I came across in my research and her indomitable spirit and charisma truly intrigued me every time we talked. Aleena had a very impoverished childhood. She was married off to a drug addict and he made her life hell with physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. But not long after the birth of her daughter and son who were born just one year apart, she decided to call off her marriage after coming to know about her husband's extra marital affairs. Aleena tried her hand at many jobs like a textile shop assistant, cashew factory worker, beautician assistant, head load worker and so on. Meanwhile she harbored a desire to migrate to the Gulf as the needs of her children were growing day after day. The first time she migrated to the Gulf she got employed as a domestic worker in a very harsh and hazardous situation. She had only a kuboos and a glass of water per day and tried to

manage her hunger by eating wild berries in the garden and drinking from the garden hose during watering the plants in the evening. The work as well as the treatment by her employers including the children of her house was horrible and she was subjected to verbal as well as physical abuse. After a failed attempt to run away she succeeded in getting help by writing down a request not to reveal the contents of the letter to her employers in which she pleaded to get her rescued from the house by sending someone acting as her husband. She was rescued and her employers did not allow her to even change her dress and she returned with just her clothes on her back. Back at home, once she regained her health she migrated again to Saudi as a hospital helper. In Saudi as she was not ready to become part of the sex racket organized by her supervising woman in the hospital, she was denied the safety gadgets to use while cleaning and was repeatedly posted in the trauma care section. She started getting repeated skin infections and had to run away and was rescued by a Malayali family. After legal procedures where she used her presence of mind and acted as directed by her rescuers she got back home. During her stay back at home she learned beautician works and trained in post-delivery care. And she migrated a third time to Qatar. Only after reaching Qatar, she came to know that her visa was fake and that she was trafficked as the spouse of another man. As a result, she had to tag along with him to avoid deportation and eventually had to become his marital partner. Initially she worked as an assistant in a beauty parlour but received no money for her services. She started to offer her services as cleaner to the women who visited the parlour and started getting short term cleaning jobs. Eventually with her contacts and work ethics she managed to juggle cleaning four houses per day. Later she began taking up delivery care also. Meanwhile she brought her son, daughter in law and her daughter also to Qatar and got them jobs. Upon the request from her son, she returned to Kerala with her granddaughter to take care of her and it was decided that her son would pay their

monthly expenses. Later he began to complain that Aleena was being lavish with her spending and told her that his mother-in-law would take care of the child and he could not provide any more money to her. Thus, she returned to Qatar again and got herself a job as a cleaning supervisor in a school. And at that time Covid struck and she was out of job for almost two years. During that time, she became active in her church group and started to lead a WhatsApp prayer group and became a counsellor to others going through different hardships. After the covid restrictions ended, she restarted her job in the school. But as she was nearing sixty years old, she was not certain whether her visa will get renewed. So, as a precaution she planned for her return and made arrangements for starting a stitching centre from her home if she had to return for good. But her visa got renewed and she is currently continuing with her work at school.

The Extra Miles-Analysis and Discussion

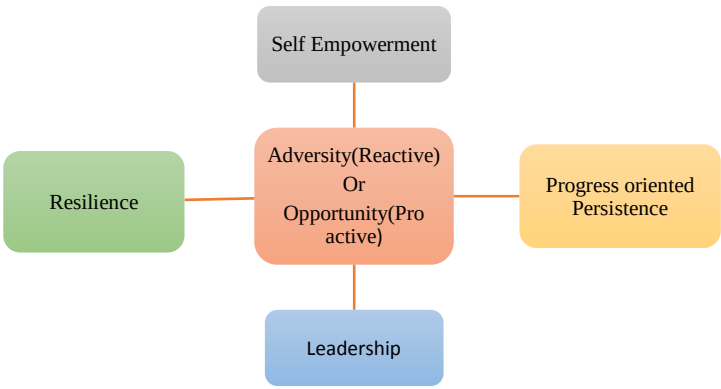

Figure 1: The Extra miles
Source: Self Compilation

I could find that all the women, whose stories I identified as promising and exemplary, carried in them, the elements of self-empowerment, progress-oriented persistence, resilience and leadership through which they effected empowerment to the disempowered.

Empowerment and Progress-oriented Persistence

"Empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such

an ability. In other words, empowerment entails change. Gender often operates through the unquestioned acceptance of power. Thus, women who, for example, internalise their lesser claim on household resources, or accept violence at the hands of their husbands, do so because to behave otherwise is considered outside the realm of possibility" (Kabeer, 2005). For all these extraordinary women their transformation started from self-empowerment. "A process of empowerment often begins from within and it is rooted in how people see themselves – their sense of self-worth" (Kabeer, 2005). The individual empowerment of these women started when they realised their worth and decided to make it worth their while by acknowledging their agency. The empowerment was either reactive (responding to problems) or proactive (responding to opportunities). Kabeer (2005) says "It is also far more likely to be empowering if it contributes to women's sense of independence, rather than simply meeting survival needs." And such a step of empowerment occurred to the women in the above stories after the initial individual empowerment and the consequential economic empowerment. As it was identified the women who underwent economic empowerment began to take proactive decisions which are meant for future progress as well. This kind of behaviour is what I have termed as progress-oriented persistence.

Table 1: Progress oriented persistence

Types	Instances identified
Persisting through personal discomforts for future progress.	All the women have persisted through the harsh physical realities and emotional issues during their stay abroad.
Persisting in lesser beneficial situations for benefits in the long run.	Moni taking breaks from migration to take care of her husband, Nija returning to ensure that her kids do not go astray Aleena accepting her son's proposal to return to Kerala and take care of his kid Jani deciding to turn to dairy farming during covid instead of remigration.

Persisting in negative situations for better tomorrow despite external resistances.	Jani mortgaging her house to pay the money of investors and later taking up multiple jobs despite the objections from her brother Remigrations of Aleena even when the prior migrations were disastrous. Nija starting hotel although it is easier to be a domestic worker.

Source: Primary data analysis by the author

According to Kabeer (2005) "There is a distinction between 'passive' forms of agency (action taken when there is little choice), and 'active' agency (purposeful behaviour). There is also a further important distinction between greater 'effectiveness' of agency, and agency that is 'transformative'. The former relates to women's greater efficiency in carrying out their given roles and responsibilities, the latter to their ability to act on the restrictive aspects of these roles and responsibilities in order to challenge them." For instance, when Moni decided to migrate the first time, she did it because she could not find any other choices. But the next time she migrated she did it proactively to make money for the marriage of her daughter. She had other means like taking a loan, borrowing from her relatives or friends, or trying her hand at some jobs near to home. But she weighed the options and chose the best one available. She did not turn to migration until then as she believed her presence is very relevant to her household. Although finances were lower at that time she preferred to persist in that state as it was essential for other dimensions of progress. On the other hand, as her care giving roles have ended, she continues being a migrant worker and persists in that role as she sees that financial progress has become more relevant to her life at this stage and she wants to bear being away from home and work as long as her health allows. Kabeer (2005) observes that "Changes in any one dimension can lead to changes in others. For instance, 'achievements' in one sphere of life can form the basis on which women seek improvements in other spheres in the future." It was very relevant in the case of the women whom I interviewed as the individual empowerment led to economic empowerment and further into social empowerment where the women succeeded in

acquiring and mobilizing social capital as well as achieved upward mobility in their family as well as their community.

Table 2: Examples to Types of empowerment observed in the participants

Participants	Individual Empowerment	Economic Empowerment	Social Empowerment
Moni	Making the decision to migrate or start a shop	Going abroad and making savings and investments like land.	Making and maintaining beneficial relations home and abroad
Jani	Deciding to learn driving	Multiple income from auto and milch cattle.	A very active Kudumbashree president.
Nija	Decision to build house near her relatives.	Proactive migration for five years.	Socially active through the conduct of hotel and active in politics.
Aleena	Decision to separate from her husband	Prolonged migration for economic security.	Maintaining social relations abroad.

Source: Primary data analysis of the author

Resilience

"Common definitions of resilience describe it as the ability to overcome stress sources, threats, and challenges. However, authors in resilience argue that not only is resilience associated with the bouncing back after experiencing a setback, but it more importantly leads to an increased capacity to cope with any future challenges and threats i.e., positive adaptation." (Naidoo & Nel, 2022) Assets possessed by resilient people according to Naidoo & Nel (2022) are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Assets leading to resilience

Assets	Components
Cognitive	1. **Mindfulness**: "State of actively paying attention to the present moment in a manner free of judgement."2. **Self-efficacy**: "A person's belief about his/her capabilities to cope with a range of experiences. "

Emotional	1. **Positive affect**:" Consistent mood state in which one experiences a range of positive emotions across varying situations." 2. **Self-regulation**: "One's ability to manage the duration, experience, release of emotions and other aspects of the self in such a manner as complementary to goal achievement."
Behavioral	1. **Authenticity**: The phenomenon of "acting in accordance with the reflection of one's true self. This true self is made up of personal experiences, cognitions, affect and ways of viewing the world." 2. **Problem Solving**: "Behaviour which induces change while the response it promotes is referred to as the solution."

Source: Compiled from Daphne Pillay-Naidoo & Petrus Nel (2022)

The women's belief in themselves to navigate whatever is going to happen every time they encounter a turning point (self-efficacy) was evident in our studies. The women who were sojourners could be categorized as 'global identifiers' according to Sussman's Cultural Identity Model' (Sussman, 2002) who easily adjusts with home as well as host country which is a direct indication of their mindfulness. Every one of the six women we talk about in this study are masters of self-regulation as they limit the energy that they spend on dwelling in negative emotions and buckle up and move on as fast as possible. They manage their loneliness and nostalgia while they are abroad as well as the stigma and jealousy they face from their own community while they are back with much stoicism. And all of them could be seen to look at the silver lining (positive affect) even at the bleakest hours of their life. These women were by default troubleshooters (problem-solving) of their self and own families and were seen to extend it to every group in which they were part of as is evident from their stories related above. Their activities had originality and a personal touch which made it authentic for instance like the charismatic Aleena administering a WhatsApp group with unique daily prayer activities for women and Jani volunteering to pay the defrauded investors by mortgaging her own house.

Leadership

"A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills. Women, inside the domestic context, are considered able to organize themselves, the ability to plan family activities, and facing adversity. All these abilities are fundamental characteristics of a manager." (Pierli et al., 2022). Every woman in our study was the leader of their family. Jani extends her leadership to her Kudumbashree unit whereas Nija is the owner of a hotel and an active political leader. Aleena assumes leadership wholly or partly of every group she is part of at home as well as abroad and proactively engages in empowering women around her. Apart from the women chosen for this study there were also a few others who led their peers like Omana who singlehandedly did the whole process to get NORKA membership for close to two hundred of domestic workers to Saudi. She is also actively involved in facilitating and ensuring that those known to her make use of the welfare projects by the Government like when a migrant is disabled or when a migrant face disaster or emergency in their family.
In the following table (Table 4) I present some features of female leadership which contrasts with male leadership as given in Pierli et al (2022).

Table 4: Female leadership features

Feature	Instance identified
Aim at being stakeholder with long term orientation in contrast to shareholder with short term orientation.	Jani is invested in the activities of the Kudumbashree by taking part in the manual labour too instead of just being only an organizer. Nija is part of every activity in her hotel starting from preparing vegetables to financial and planning activities.

Focus on conflict resolution	Instead of staying blind to skirmishes between the members of her prayer group Aleena intervenes to resolve the conflicts.
Facilitate collaboration	The women often make collaborations outside the groups inviting people they feel beneficial to the group and often involve their families and friends into their groups' activities.
Development and mentoring of followers	As related in the story of Vinitha in the conclusion women tend to rotate responsibilities enabling others to grow.

Source: Compiled by the author

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to present the stories of two women whose lives are at two extreme ends of existence due to the external factors in their life being in contrast even though both have similar sets of assets or agency.

***A suffering survivor (Scarce resources)*:** Myna can be called as a suffering survivor as she has gone through the worst in her life but still clings to it with utmost fervour and spirit. During her rest days after her first delivery her husband broke her back by bending her along the side of the bed. And he left her while her daughter and son were three and two years old respectively. She was employed as an Ayurvedic masseuse and also used to take up stitching to make ends meet. But her slipped disc gives her excruciating pain while sitting for a long time. She gave her kids a good education and married them off too. By that time the debts rose so much that she decided to migrate to stitching garments in Dubai. But she had to return after six months as her back pain worsened. She migrated again for Ayurvedic massage work but was trapped in a trafficking gang for one and a half months as she refused to do non-therapeutic massaging. She had to pay money for her return and is currently employed in a petrol pump. She does an overtime of 2 hours and was also taking up double shifts at the time I talked to her with her work time

totaling 18 hours from noon 12 am to early morning 6 am. When I talked with her it was only two months since her return and she had the past four months of her rent pending. But she was confident and hopeful of finishing off her debts and starting a stitching centre and was working very hard towards that aim.

A torch Bearer (Abundant resources): I came in touch with Vinitha while I was visiting Kudumbashree meetings to get in touch with women migrants. She invited me to her Kudumbashree meeting and I found that although she was the president and had every privilege to preside over every meeting, she was making each member take charge of the conduct of the meetings on a rotation basis. There they had to face the members, make a small speech and regulate the meeting. This was giving the women a taste of public speaking as well as giving them training in leading meetings and getting attention from a crowd. Vinitha is a daughter of a Gulf returnee woman and her mother was a migrant during all her growing years. But she grew up to be very confident, self-reliant and I could see that she was a very enterprising leader who can delegate the work as well as empower the people around her. She leads from the front but is not reluctant to take a step back to let others get the lime light too. Over the course of my field work I saw her contesting in elections, putting up Kudumbashree stalls at events, taking the women for tours, actively participating in social, religious as well as political events and all at the same time never failing to attend to her family needs too. She is a bundle of energy which is infectious to those around her and has over the years become the torch bearer for the women in her coastal community which is very supportive and appreciative of her.

Empowerment and resilience require two aspects- assets and resources. Assets are the inherent capacities of an individual whereas resources are the external aspects. In the above two cases both the women possess agency. Whereas the first woman lacked sufficient resources at every adverse situation she faced, the second woman was fortunate enough to have a supportive

system around her. In the stories of women related earlier in the article also the presence of resources did help the transformation of the women. Even when deprived of enough resources to sustain, Myna emerges as a survivor despite being a victim to her circumstances. Women act as the backbone which holds each family together and in turn the society which is the aggregate of the families. Acknowledging the contributions of the women to the development of the society is the first step in mobilizing more resources to the female gender. Ensuring more resources and support to women without regard to gender stereotypes so that the potential of the women can be realized to its fullest will be beneficial to the whole community.

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Enrolment does not Guarantee Quality of Education: A Sociological Study of Barriers of Tribal Education in Murum Village of Jharkhand

Jisu Ketan Pattanaik*

Asmita Priyam* *

Abstract

Education is a powerful tool for empowering tribal communities, giving them the power to raise their problems in the mainstream and ensuring that they are part of the national development programs. It does not merely lead to the upliftment of the child but the upliftment of the community as a whole. The present study tries to shift focus from access to meaningful educational outcomes and to identify the key barriers in tribal children's education in the Murum village. The empirical study was conducted in Murum, a tribal village situated in the Kanke block of Ranchi District, Jharkhand. The study utilises both quantitative and qualitative methodology to capture the experience of the children, their parents and school teachers on key areas of tribal education. The study was based on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Paulo Freire's Critical

* *Assistant Professor of Sociology, National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi | Jisuketan.pattanaik@nusrlranchi.ac.in*

** *3rd Year Student, National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi | asmita.priyam@nusrlranchi.ac.in*

Pedagogy and conflict perspective of Karl Marx. The findings of the field-based research reveal that while traditional cultural barriers such as language, lack of access or cultural beliefs have ceased to exist, there are still certain challenges like the poor infrastructure, lack of quality teaching, poor and imperfect pupil-teacher ratio, ineffective implementation of schemes like the Midday Meal Program. An interaction with the parents in the village revealed a strong dissatisfaction towards government schools and an inclined preference towards private institutions despite financial problems. There was a noticeable trend in education pertaining to progressive gender norms. This study found that the growing importance and preference of tribal communities towards seeing education as a necessary tool for empowerment. This study has been instrumental in discovering a paradigm shift in the nature of barriers faced by the tribals in education.

***Keywords*:** tribal education, gender, educational consciousness, tribal language, cultural capital, critical pedagogy.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), 2024 in its open house discussion on Tribal Education in India, emphasized that education will help in empowering tribal communities and advancing societal progress overcoming persistent barriers such as geographical isolation, language differences, poverty, and early marriage despite substantial progress and various government initiatives. The tribal communities in India have been constitutionally recognized as Scheduled Tribes under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. Other provisions such as Article 15(4), 29 and 46 ensure that the state retains the authority to enact special measures for such communities, that these communities possess the right to preserve their culture and that the state has a duty to diligently utilise its resources for the upliftment of such communities.

Although these communities have been historically marginalized from the mainstream making them devoid of any facilities, several government schemes have attempted to bring

them at par with the rest of the population. Through the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS**)**, the Indian government provides quality, CBSE- standard education to ST children in remote areas. As of 2024, 728 EMRS have been approved with a recurring grant of Rs. 1.09 lakh and an enrolment of over 1.33 lakh students. The Tribal Sub – Plan (TSP) and Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST) frameworks ensure that all central ministries allocate resources for tribal welfare. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs allocation for 2024- 25 stands at Rs. 13,000 crores, a 73.6% increase over the previous year. The Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) focuses on infrastructure, school hostels, Anganwadis, and electrification for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), with projects worth over Rs. 1,360 crores.

According to the (2011) census, tribes constitute 8.6% of the total population in India. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2019–20 reveals that the literacy rate for STs stands at 70.1%, compared to the national average of 77.7% for the same period. Furthermore, dropout rates among ST students continue to be high. The Tribal Development Report (2022) indicates that 48.2% of tribal children leave school before completing Class 8, and this number increases to 62.4% by the time they reach Class 10. These figures indicate that despite enrolment of tribal children on paper through government schemes, the deeper issues continue to hinder the educational advancement of these communities.

The story of tribal education is also linked to their long history of marginalization. For centuries, they have been living in forests, hills and remote areas that were often separate from the mainstream. While this helped them preserve their culture, it also excluded them from the mainstream social, political and educational developments. During British rule, the situation worsened as strict forest laws, mining projects and plantations displaced many tribal families from their own lands. These policies led to the destruction of their traditional livelihoods and

them becoming more vulnerable to poverty. Education for tribal society was never a priority for the state. Most tribals remained unexposed to modern education except a few missionary schools. This became a factor for their "delayed start" in the field of education compared to other groups in India. Even after the Indian Constitution recognized Scheduled Tribes as disadvantaged groups and promised to protect their rights, the change could not take place overnight. Several provisions of the Indian Constitution gave special rights and responsibilities to the state in order to promote tribal welfare. The state tried to do the same through reservations, scholarships and government schools. However, they were still behind the other social groups which was evident from the literacy rates, while other groups continued to improve much faster, tribal people still lagged behind. Education continued to be a battle for the tribals given their poverty, geographical isolation and lack of infrastructure.

Shivank Mishra (2023**)** points out that the marginalization of tribals has not always been about losing their lands or resources, it was also about how their culture and history were pushed to the margins. The brave stories of great tribal leaders like Birsa Munda, Sido and Kanhu are often missing from the mainstream history textbooks. This "invisibility" towards tribal culture also affects their education today. They rarely get to see their stories, languages, or traditions reflected in their school curriculum. This creates a disconnect between their learning at school and their cultural identity. The education that was supposed to empower them makes them feel alienated. Xaxa (2001) underscores that tribal marginalization in education is part of a broader exclusion from political and economic life, which education policy alone cannot resolve unless linked with wider reforms.

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach mentioned that education should not just mean enrolled in school or being present in the classroom, it is supposed to expand people's actual freedoms and capabilities. Education should give tribal children the skills to get decent jobs, the confidence to speak for their rights and the knowledge to preserve their culture. However, the

reality is that most tribal children are getting "access" without real learning outcomes. Their enrolment might have increased but poor infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, migration and language barriers limit their actual capabilities.

Tribal education is not merely a local concern; it is linked to the constitutional goals of the country and its wider international commitments towards progress. The framers of the Indian Constitution envisioned education as the key to equality and social justice, evident in provisions like Article 21A and Article 46, which places a special duty on the state to promote the educational interests of Scheduled Tribes. On the global stage, the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4, which promises inclusive and equitable quality education, reminds us that no community should be excluded from the state's march towards progress (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, when tribal children fail to gain real learning, these constitutional ideas and global commitments are not really fulfilled. The absence of quality education for tribal children not only denies them their rightful opportunities but also weakens India's democratic promise of equality. This is why the present study highlights why education for tribal children must go beyond numbers on paper and become a true instrument of empowerment and transformation.

Theoretical framework

Understanding the barriers to tribal children's education requires not just a descriptive account of empirical observations, but also a critical engagement with sociological theories that explain the deeper structures of inequality, exclusion, and disempowerment. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and symbolic violence provides a lens to understand how mainstream schooling often delegitimizes the cultural knowledge of tribal students, thereby reproducing structural inequality. Similarly, Conflict theory of education highlights how institutions of learning, instead of acting as neutral spaces, can perpetuate class and cultural hierarchies when quality is absent. Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy criticizes traditional

education for being authoritarian and alienating. In his famous "banking model" of education, teachers deposit knowledge into students without encouraging critical thinking or participation. These perspectives are critical for situating the findings of this research, as they emphasize that the educational exclusion of tribal children is not merely an administrative gap but also a reproduction of social inequality through institutional mechanisms.

Review of Literature

Ahmad, Shafi, and Ashraf (2022) emphasize on the persistent challenges faced by tribal populations, including socio- economic deprivation, linguistic disconnect and under – resourced institutions. Their work argues that while government initiatives such as mid-day meals and scholarships have managed to increase enrolment, meaningful learning is still missing due to a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy and poor school governance. Their work is particularly relevant to the present study which similarly critiques the access- quality gap by offering grounded, field- based evidence from Murum village.

Panda and Behera (2023) analyse demographic trends and government spending patterns on tribal education. Their work highlights systematic and lesser noticed issues such as teacher absenteeism, poor monitoring and psychological disconnection between tribal students and formal schooling environments. Their work acknowledges the growing preference towards private schools.

Upamanyu (2016) addresses long standing challenges such as language barriers, the disconnect between curriculum and culture, and lack of adequate infrastructure. Through his work, he advocates for community participation and a culturally sensitive teaching which is critical for improving educational outcomes among the tribal population.

Basu (2011) found that despite enrollment gains, tribal children face severe learning deficits due to linguistic barriers and poor school infrastructure. Boro and Deka (2020) stress the

need for mother-tongue instruction in early grades to prevent alienation of tribal students and to improve retention rates. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010) note that national averages in education often mask sharp inequalities, with Scheduled Tribes consistently at the bottom of most indicators. Mehta (2013**)** shows that government initiatives such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan improved access, yet monitoring and quality mechanisms have been weak in tribal areas. Jha and Jingran (2002) analyses barriers to enrolment, retention and learning among marginalized groups such as tribal children. It also focuses on systematic issues such as teacher absenteeism, lack of accountability, insufficient infrastructure and social exclusion. Mondal (2014) emphasizes that the socio-economic backwardness of tribals continues to directly influence their educational attainment, making targeted policies essential.

Singh (2012) documents that tribal communities face multiple barriers, including poverty, language, and seasonal migration, which significantly raise dropout rates. Tilak (2009) argues that without strong public investment in education, marginalized groups like Scheduled Tribes will continue to rely on private schooling, which deepens inequalities. Pradhan, Nityananda (2014) has provided a critical overview into the structural and socio- cultural barriers that hampers educational development among tribal communities in India. His work identifies key challenges such as geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of trained and committed teachers. Pradhan emphasizes on the cultural disconnect between tribal learners and the mainstream education system, which uses non- tribal languages and curricula that fail to reflect indigenous knowledge and lived realities.

The study by Pradhan and Pattanaik (2012**)** examines the education of SC and ST children in an Ashram school setting in Odisha, along with discussing how structural, socioeconomic and cultural barriers compromise the effectiveness of residential schooling for marginalized groups. Further, their study also highlights the acute challenges faced by Ashram and tribal

schools which are insufficient infrastructure, teaching materials, sanitation and high teacher absenteeism. The language barrier, particularly, has been identified as a critical factor causing alienation among tribal children, leading to grade repetition and school dropouts among them.

The existing literature focuses on access related and systematic issues but fails to project an actual picture of the lived realities of parents of tribal children who are victims of an available but ineffective education system. The present study fills this gap by presenting an empirical, ground level account of the growing expectations of tribals with respect to education. The tribal population no longer demands merely access; rather their needs and demands have now shifted from access to access paired with quality education. The present study calls for a more accountable and effective education system for the tribal population.

Significance of the Study

While primary efforts towards tribal education focusing on improving access such as mid- day meals, scholarships, free uniforms, bicycles, etc initiatives have been successful in increasing enrolment, they do not necessarily mean that tribal children are getting meaningful education. The present study identifies a critical shift in the nature of barriers faced by the tribal children – from the primary issue of access to the issue related to quality of education being delivered to them. The failure to address the quality of public education destroys the overall purpose of increasing enrolment rates and developing an inclusive education system. Giving the tribal population the access to education without effective outcomes is the same as not giving them the fruits of education and further deepening the existing inequalities. Even where financial allocations exist, their utilization is often ineffective. The Comptroller and Auditor General's (2019) audit of the Tribal Sub-Plan in Jharkhand revealed delays, leakages, and weak monitoring mechanisms, which dilute the actual benefits reaching tribal

communities. This raises serious concerns about the gap between policy design and ground-level implementation.

Research Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key socio- economic and cultural factors hindering tribal children's education in Jharkhand.
2. To examine the role of government initiatives in addressing these barriers.
3. To assess the impact of migration on tribal students' educational continuity
4. To explore gender disparities in access to education among tribal children.
5. To examine the role of cultural beliefs and practices in influencing enrolment, in comparison to economic and infrastructural barriers.
6. To provide policy- level recommendations for improving educational outcomes in tribal areas.

Methodology and Context of the Study

This research study was conducted to understand the evolving barriers faced by tribal children, with a specific focus on Murum, a village situated in the Kanke block of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. Murum is a semi- rural area, primarily inhabited by members of Scheduled Tribes and Schedules Castes. The local economy is dominated by subsistence agriculture, wage labour, and seasonal migration. The literacy rate remains low although there is a functioning government primary school in the village.

The population involved in this study comprises parents of children enrolled in the government primary school in Murum. These families represent low- income, marginalized groups with limited access to quality infrastructure and educational support outside school.

Sampling Procedure

The sample size selected for the study was 20 parents. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, to ensure that only those parents with direct and current experience with

the school were included. This sampling method helped in gathering focused and relevant data regarding perceptions of quality, infrastructure, and barriers to education.

Research design

The research design adopted was descriptive and exploratory, with a qualitative orientation. This design was chosen to allow an in- depth examination of the community's experiences, preferences and changing attitudes towards education.

Semi- structured interviews were conducted with all 20 parents and two case studies were conducted to understand the problem of education and experience of the parents. The interviews explored their satisfaction with the quality of teaching, school facilities, mid- day meals, and reasons for preferring private over government schooling in some cases. Field observation was also carried out during visits to the school premises. Observations included classroom conditions, sanitation, teacher availability, and meal distribution. Relevant government reports, policy documents and scholarly articles were reviewed to frame the broader policy context and compare local findings with state and national trends in tribal education. Together, these methods allowed for data triangulation, strengthening the credibility of findings by cross- verifying interview responses with on- ground observations and existing literature. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were taken. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and interviews were conducted with respect for their time, privacy, and cultural context. No personal identifiers were recorded to ensure confidentiality in the research process.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Cumulative Summary of Parental Interview Data in Murum Village (N = 20)

Sl. No.	Parameter	Category/ Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender of Child Enrolled	Girls	11	55%

Sl. No.	Parameter	Category/ Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
		Boys	9	45%
2	Parental Satisfaction with Govt. School	Satisfied	0	0%
		Dissatisfied	20	100%
3	Perception of Midday Meal	Good	0	0%
		Average	5	25%
		Poor	15	75%
4	Preferred School Type	Government	0	0%
		Private	20	100%
5	Support for Girls' Education	Yes	20	100%
		No	0	0%
6	Households Experiencing Migration	Yes	3	15%
		No	17	85%
7	Language Barrier Reported	Yes	2	10%
		No	18	90%

The responses from 20 parents along with assessing the official records from the school revealed that 55% of the enrolled children were girls. This majority reflects a progressive cultural shift. Contradicting the prior assumptions of gender-based exclusion in tribal education, this data reflects that parents in Murum actively support girls' schooling and are ready to invest in their education equally as boys. This trend challenges the outdated assumptions and aligns with recent studies documenting improved gender parity in tribal education in Jharkhand.

All respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of education given at the local government school. Respondents cited reasons like poor teaching quality, a single teacher managing all grades, a lack of individual attention, and stagnant academic progress. Despite the presence of state-sponsored schemes such as scholarships and mid- day meals and formal enrolment, parents reported that their children had not even acquired basic literacy or numeracy skills even after years of schooling. This reveals that the current government schooling system fails to meet the expectations or needs of the tribal community.

Regarding the Mid-Day Meal Scheme which was aimed at improving nutrition and attendance, 75% of the respondents rated the meals as poor, while the remaining 25% termed them average. None of the respondents considered the meals to be of a good quality. Through field observations, we confirmed that the meals lacked quality, variety, and regularity. While the scheme still continues to be a valuable incentive, in Murum it fails to fulfil its objectives and often becomes a factor for absenteeism.

When asked about school preference, all parents unanimously preferred private schools over the local government institution. Those with sufficient financial means were able to send their children to private schools. This inclination towards private education reveals a trend of declining trust in the public education system. This preference is based on a perception of greater accountability, better infrastructure and quality learning outcomes.

According to Census 2011, the literacy rate among STs in India was 58.96%, significantly below the national average of 72.99%. In contrast, Jharkhand reported a slightly better ST literacy rate of 57.1%, but still lagging behind the state's overall literacy rate of 66.4%. A gender-wise analysis reveals a wide disparity, with male literacy at 67.3% and female literacy at only 46.3% among STs in Jharkhand. This indicates that despite constitutional guarantees, literacy gaps persist, especially for

tribal women. While field data from Murum shows progressive attitudes towards girls' education, state-level figures reveal systemic gender gaps, indicating that such progress may still be localized and fragile.

The Tribal Development Report (2022) by the India Exclusion Report and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) found that 48.2% of ST children drop out before completing Class 8, and this figure rises to 62.4% before Class 10. Major contributing factors include poverty, poor infrastructure, migration, and lack of cultural integration in curriculum and language. The dropout trend nationally aligns with the dissatisfaction observed in Murum, where parents cited learning stagnation, poor quality teaching, and infrastructure as reasons for preferring private schools. According to the Ministry of Education's Performance Grading Index (2022), states with high tribal populations continue to perform below the national average in key learning indicators, reflecting persistent disparities.

Data from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+ 2021–22) highlights major infrastructural gaps in tribal schools across India: Only 59% of primary schools in tribal areas have functional toilets for girls, 50% lack electricity and around 38% do not have a library or learning materials.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2022 indicates a national trend of increasing tribal enrolment in private schools, particularly in states like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha. In Jharkhand, nearly 33% of rural tribal children are enrolled in private schools, despite financial hardships**.** Jayaraman and Simroth (2015**)** highlight that the expansion of rural schools in India has improved enrolment, but quality outcomes remain uneven, particularly for marginalized groups like STs.

Case study -I

The family under this case study belongs to a Scheduled Tribe community in Murum. The wife and the mother, named Poonam Minz, is 35 years old and is a housewife. The husband and the father, Avinash Minz who is a 38-year-old man works as a farmer. Apart from the couple, the household consists of three children. Despite their modest means, the family demonstrates a strong belief in the transformative power of education, reflecting the evolving aspirations of tribal households in Jharkhand.

Two of their daughters were enrolled in the government primary school at Murum for three years. In the beginning, the family has great expectations from this institution, believing it would provide their children with basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, over time, their hopes gave way to disappointment. The children, though attending school regularly, were unable to read fluently or perform simple subtractions. When probed further, the parents explained that the school suffered from chronic issues: it had only one regular teacher, classes often lacked structured learning, homework was rarely assigned, and students were not tested or corrected adequately. Even the mid-day meal scheme, meant to incentivize attendance, was irregular.

Eventually, the family decided to educate their children in a nearby low- cost private school which was a significant turning point for them. Despite the financial hardship, the family prioritized quality education over affordability. This choice reveals a broader shift in tribal communities, where the demand for effective learning outweighs the challenges of economic hardship.

This case challenges the common assumptions regarding education of tribals. Contrary to the narrative that cultural resistance, language barriers, or gender bias remain dominant barriers, this family exhibited none of these hesitations. The parents readily emphasized the importance of educating their daughters, indicating a progressive attitude toward gender

equality in schooling. Their dissatisfaction was not with the idea of education itself but with the inefficiency and lack of accountability within the public education system.

This case study is critical because it illustrates that the real challenge is no longer access or awareness, but the poor quality of government schooling. The family's decision underscores the growing impatience of tribal households with substandard teaching and their willingness to explore alternatives, even at a financial strain. The experience reflects an evolving mindset where education is no longer perceived as optional, but as a necessity that justifies sacrifice.

Ultimately, this case captures the essence of the core argument of the paper: enrollment alone does not guarantee education. Without systemic reforms, adequate teacher engagement, and institutional accountability, the public school system risks losing the trust of the very communities it is meant to serve.

Case Study-II

The Khalkho family provides a second example of the growing dissatisfaction with public schooling in Murum. The father, 40 years old, works as a daily-wage labourer, while the mother manages the household. Their son, aged nine, was initially enrolled in the village government school, motivated by the free mid-day meals and the Kalyan Vibhag scholarship.

However, after three years, the parents observed that their son still struggled with reading simple Hindi texts and performing basic arithmetic. The irregular presence of teachers, overcrowded classes handled by a single instructor, and the absence of regular assessments led them to question the purpose of keeping their child in the government system. The mother reported that while her son attended classes daily, "he returned home without learning anything new".

Determined to improve his prospects, the family made the difficult decision to transfer him to a nearby low-cost private school. This move placed a significant financial strain on their

limited income, but they prioritized education over immediate household comfort.

This case reinforces the shift in community attitudes: access to schooling is no longer seen as sufficient. Parents are demanding quality, accountability, and visible learning outcomes. The Khalkho family's decision, like that of the Minz household, reflects a broader pattern in which economic hardship does not deter tribal families from seeking quality education, even if it means turning away from free government provisions.

Findings of the Research Study

Shift from access to quality as the central barrier

Contrary to the pre-existing narratives, access no longer remains the primary obstacle to education in Murum. A government primary school with operational schemes like Kalyan Vibhag Scholarship and Midday Meal Program exists within the village. However, 90% of the parents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of education given in that school, citing that teaching was irregular, classrooms were poorly managed and no meaningful learning outcomes could be noticed even after years of enrolment.

Strong Parental Aspiration for Education

This research study revealed that there exists a strong aspiration among tribal parents for their children's education. Parents no longer have a passive approach towards schooling and education. In fact, many parents are actively involved and they are willing to make necessary sacrifices to ensure quality education for their children. Several families have started sending their children to nearby private schools, despite facing financial burdens. This is an indication of the fact that education is now seen as a necessary tool for social mobility and not just a formal benefit provided by the government.

Progressive Gender Norms in Education

An important finding of the study is the growing support for girls' education. Among the families interviewed, there was no significant gender- based discrimination in school enrolment.

In fact, the percentage of girls enrolled was slightly higher than that of boys. Parents said that they wanted both their sons and daughters to be educated and independent, suggesting a gradual shift in gender norms.

Diminishing trust in Government Institutions

There is a visible trend of declining trust in the public education system. Parents cited factors such as parent absenteeism and lack of standard of mid-day meals as reasons for their dissatisfaction. They believe that government schools operate more like a formality than an actual institution for real learning. The declining trust is driving families towards the private sector even due to financial burdens.

Overall, the study demonstrates that tribal families are not disinterested in education, in fact, they are actually interested in educating their child. The real problem is the failure of the public education system particularly in rural tribal areas. The focus of educational policies must shift from access to quality, accountability and trust- building.

The findings of this study in Murum village strongly corroborate earlier academic literature that emphasizes a shift in tribal education discourse from access to quality. Scholars such as Ahmad, Shafi, and Ashraf (2022) and Panda and Behera (2023) have underscored that while enrolment rates among tribal children have improved due to schemes like scholarships and midday meals, meaningful learning outcomes remain elusive due to infrastructural gaps, untrained teachers, and lack of accountability. This resonates with the field observations in Murum, where despite government schooling provisions, 100% of parents expressed dissatisfaction and showed a clear preference for private schools. Additionally, this study's finding that gender is no longer a significant barrier aligns with Jha and Jhingran's (2002) view that socio-cultural resistance is declining, while systemic issues now dominate the educational landscape. The parental willingness to incur financial burdens to ensure better education, as seen in Murum, reflects a rising aspiration among tribal communities, i.e., moving beyond

access to demanding educational quality, accountability, and results. Thus, this research not only supports earlier conclusions but adds empirical depth by presenting on-ground evidence of changing community attitudes and the evolving nature of educational barriers.

Policy Recommendations

The present study highlights that the central issue in tribal education is no longer that of access, but of quality, accountability and relevance. While government interventions have improved enrolment, there is an absence of meaningful learning outcomes which undermines parental trust and the long-term benefits of education. Based on empirical evidence collected and supported by existing literature, this study recommends the following policy recommendations:

Teacher Recruitment, Training and Accountability

The government must ensure that there is adequate staff in tribal schools and priority should be given to the multi- grade classrooms that are currently handled by a single teacher. The government must provide specialized training in multilingual pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching methods to enable teachers to connect classroom learning with the students' cultural background. There should be regular inspection mechanisms, supported by digital attendance tracking to reduce the problem of teacher absenteeism and enhance accountability.

Infrastructure Development

The government must guarantee basic infrastructure in all tribal schools, including safe classrooms, electricity, functional toilets and clean drinking water. The reach of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) must be expanded. The government should gradually integrate digital learning resources to bridge the digital divide and equip tribal students with contemporary relevant skills.

Curriculum and Cultural Relevance

There should be implementation of mother- tongue instruction at the primary level as recommended by the National

Education Policy (NEP) 2020, to improve cohesion and retention. Tribal history and folklore must be incorporated into the school curricula to foster cultural pride and reduce alienation. A report by the Support and Care Humanity Foundation (n.d.) also stresses community participation and culturally relevant teaching as critical strategies for improving tribal education outcomes.

Strengthening Welfare Schemes

There should be a strict quality control of the Mid- Day Meal Program through regular audits of nutrition and hygiene. The government should guarantee timely disbursement of scholarships.

Governance, Monitoring and Community Participation

The government should establish community- based monitoring committees comprising parents, local leaders and school management to improve oversight of government schools. There should be periodic social audits of tribal education schemes to enhance transparency and reduce leakage of funds. The government should encourage collaborations with NGOs and grassroot organizations to provide supplementary learning programs and bridge educational gaps.

Aligning with Constitutional and Global Commitments

The government should reorient policies to move beyond enrolment statistics and prioritize actual learning outcomes. Policy goals should be integrated with Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach should be adopted as a guiding framework for future policies.

The proposed policy recommendations emphasize that tribal education requires a shift from symbolic inclusion to meaningful empowerment. Unless such reforms are implemented, the constitutional promise of equality and the global visions of inclusive development will remain unfulfilled for tribal communities.

Challenges and limitations of the Study

While this study does provide some valuable insights into the shifting educational landscape in the village of Murum, it is extremely important to acknowledge its limitations as well. These limitations might have played a role in the scope, depth and generalizability of the findings of this study.

Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, with only 20 parents interviewed. While purposive sampling ensured that the respondents had direct experience with the local school system, a larger sample across multiple households could have provided a broader understanding of the patterns observed. The findings, therefore, might reflect the specific realities of the specific household and cannot be statistically generalized.

Secondly, the study was limited to a single location; the village of Murum. While the village is representative of many rural tribal communities, conditions may vary significantly across regions. Other areas may have different educational infrastructures, cultural practices, or administrative support systems which could lead to diverse outcomes.

Thirdly, the study was conducted over a short duration, which restricted opportunities for longitudinal observation. Regular school visits, long- term tracking of student progress could not be captured in full detail.

There might be an element of social desirability bias in the responses of some parents. Considering the researchers outside status and the sensitive nature of some questions, certain answers may have been influenced by the desire to present oneself or the school in a particular way.

Lastly, there was limited access to institutional data such as teacher attendance records, performance reports, or official evaluations of the school. This made it difficult to verify some claims without formal documentation.

Despite these limitations, the study remains valuable for its grounded, qualitative insights into parental perceptions and the urgent need to address quality issues in tribal education.

Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the contemporary barriers to tribal children's education in Murum village, Ranchi. Through primary data collection from 20 parents and direct field observations, it revealed that pre-existing challenges of cultural resistance, gender discrimination, and lack of access are no longer the dominant barriers. Instead, the most significant issue lies in the institutional failure of the public education system to deliver quality, meaningful, consistent and accountable education.

The findings highlight a trend of diminishing trust in public education among tribal families. Despite the presence of government schools, scholarships and mid- day meals, they do not prove to be sufficient without committed and qualified teachers, engaging pedagogy and basic infrastructural standards. Several families in the village are now shifting their children to private schools despite facing financial burdens reflecting the growing aspirations and increasing awareness among tribal families. This research is a contribution to the broader discourse on tribal education by pointing out that tribal education is not merely concerned with enrolment, contemporarily, it is about the outcomes. Parents of tribal children no longer view schooling and education as a formal privilege but expect results, accountability and improvement out of it. When their expectations are not met, they shift to better options.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital explains how educational systems favour the norms, language, and values of dominant social classes, which are often alien to marginalized groups like tribal communities. According to Bourdieu, students from privileged backgrounds inherently possess the "capital" valued by schools such as language fluency, confidence, and familiarity with formal institutions giving them an unfair advantage.

In Murum village, most students come from Scheduled Tribe (ST) or Scheduled Caste (SC) backgrounds and are first-generation learners. Their home environment, language, and

cultural practices are starkly different from what the school system expects. This disconnect makes it difficult for them to engage meaningfully with the curriculum. Even though they are enrolled, they struggle to succeed not due to a lack of ability, but because the system is not designed to accommodate their cultural background

Conflict theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx, views education as a tool used by dominant groups to maintain social hierarchy and reproduce class-based inequalities. marginalized groups. In Murum, while tribal children technically have access to free government education and scholarships, the quality of education is significantly inferior to what is offered in nearby private schools. Only families who lack alternatives send their children to the government school not by choice, but by compulsion. Thus, the education system in practice perpetuates inequality, aligning with the conflict theory's view that institutions serve the interests of the dominant classes.

Critiquing the "banking model" of education, in which teachers unilaterally deposit knowledge into students without encouraging critical thinking or participation, Freire advocates for an education that empowers learners to question, reflect, and act, especially those from oppressed communities. In Murum's government school, teaching is often passive, non-interactive, and exam-focused. Many parents expressed frustration that even after attending school for years, their children had not learned basic reading or arithmetic. This indicates a failure in pedagogy. There is little to no contextualization of the learning process to the children's lives, violating the principles of critical pedagogy and turning education into a rote activity devoid of meaning.

With respect to these findings, this study strongly recommends a shift in policy making from access to quality. It is urgently important for the government to invest in teacher training, regular monitoring, and infrastructural development to ensure that apart from mere enrolment, tribal children are actually learning something.

The insights from this study have broader implications for India's educational policies, especially for tribal and rural areas. The existing educational framework begins to become a hollow structure by offering access without actual outcomes.

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Gender Inequality in Marriage and Family in Keralam: Implications of Colonial Modernity and Socio-Legal Reforms

Nancy Liza Thomas*

Rajesh Komath**

Abstract

This paper critically examines the historical and socio-economic processes through which two major social institutions—marriage and family—have been reconstituted under conditions of modernity within the specific context of Kerala. It interrogates the gendered implications of transformations in agrarian relations and consequent reorganisation of occupational structures, along with the shifts in legal and cultural frameworks within the family. These changes have not only reshaped the material conditions of everyday life but have also disrupted normative ideologies as well as practices surrounding gender roles. The paper based on secondary sources such as books, journals and online sources adopts an explanatory approach to gain significant insights into the topic. The study highlights the

* *ICDS Supervisor of Women and Child Development Department, Kerala, India|nancymadhu1053@gmail.com*

** *Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, India | komathrajesh@gmail.com*

institutionalization of a patriarchal order sustaining asymmetrical power relations between men and women both in private and public institutions. Within the private domain, women are often relegated to domestic and reproductive labour, while the public domain remains largely inaccessible or unwelcoming due to entrenched gender biases. The persistence of traditional gender stereotypes—such as the idealization of women as caregivers and men as breadwinners—contributes to the historical and systemic marginalization of women limiting their access to societal resources, decision-making spaces, and economic opportunities. The lack of representation in decision-making roles is not simply a matter of individual exclusion but reflects broader structural inequalities of a transformative agenda that recognizes the intersectional nature of gender oppression. The study reveals that, only by reimagining the foundations of marriage and family through a gender-sensitive lens can rectify historical injustices and promote a more egalitarian society.

Keywords: gender equality, socio-legal reforms, restructuring gender relations, domesticity

Law holds a paradoxical position in the lives of women—it can simultaneously serve as a tool of emancipation or as a mechanism of patriarchal control (Parashar, 1992). Although legal reform has often been presented as a progressive move toward gender justice, a growing body of feminist scholarship has revealed that legal-juridical structures have frequently played a role in entrenching patriarchal norms under the guise of neutrality and modernity (Kapoor & Cossman, 1996). This paper critically examines the implications of family law on the lived realities of women, particularly in the context of Kerala. The paper follows an explanatory approach and is based on secondary sources such as books, journals and online sources. Given women's structurally disadvantaged position in the labour market and in broader socio-economic hierarchies, many women historically

entered marriage and family life seeking stability, economic security, and social legitimacy. However, legal reforms pertaining to marriage and family often failed to address—or in some cases actively undermined— some kind of autonomy and rights that women possessed within these institutions.

Historically, women in Kerala, particularly within matrilineal communities such as the Nairs and certain lower-caste groups, enjoyed considerable control over property, sexuality, and reproductive choices. These rights were embedded in local customs and kinship systems that offered a degree of agency and social security to women, which were not merely symbolic but materially significant. Yet, through a succession of judicial interventions and legal codifications, women's entitlements were systematically curtailed. The erosion of these rights remains an underexplored facet of legal and gender historiography in Kerala Colonial and postcolonial legal reforms—especially those targeting so-called "barbaric" native customs—were framed within a civilizational discourse that portrayed such interventions as beneficial to women. This reformist agenda, however, was shaped by Victorian morality, colonial modernity, and the aspirations of an emerging Hindu middle class. It privileged patriarchal interpretations of Hindu law, often at the expense of local diversities and women-centric customs.

Recent feminist legal scholarship questions the celebratory narrative of modern legal reform as inherently progressive. Scholars such as Nivedita Menon (2004) and Flavia Agnes (1999) argue that codified personal laws in India, especially Hindu law, homogenized diverse customary practices under a Brahmanical-patriarchal framework. In the process, various women-friendly customs—especially those prevalent among matrilineal and lower-caste communities—were delegitimized or erased. The drive for legal uniformity not only made the law more consistent; it also entailed the loss of significant socio-legal protections for women. The case of Kerala exemplifies how modern legal regimes, often assumed to be neutral and progressive, can marginalize subaltern

epistemologies and customary practices that once afforded women a degree of power and self-determination. The substitution of local norms with codified patriarchal laws reveals how legal modernity can reinforce existing gender hierarchies under the pretext of reform. As Sally Merry (1988) notes, legal systems are not merely regulatory frameworks but sites where power is produced, negotiated, and naturalized. This paper thus seeks to interrogate the gendered implications of legal transformations in marriage and family laws in Kerala. It calls for a re-examination of legal history from a feminist perspective that foregrounds the voices and experiences of marginalized women and the erasures that accompanied the transition to modern legal systems

In the nineteenth century, the consolidation of British colonial power and the expansion of Christian missionary activity in Kerala led to the imposition of a cultural framework that fundamentally disrupted indigenous life ways. Prior to the political unification of Kerala in 1956, the region was composed of three distinct administrative territories—Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar—where a significant segment of the population belonged to matrilineal communities. Among these, kinship, inheritance, and familial residence were structured through the female line, creating forms of social organization markedly different from the patriarchal nuclear family model valorised by colonial and missionary discourses. Colonial governance, along with missionary educational projects and reformist discourses, created a pervasive sense among the native elites that their customs were signs of backwardness or moral deficiency. The internalization of this colonial gaze—what Frantz Fanon (1967) might term "epidermalization of inferiority"—led many indigenous communities to voluntarily abandon their matrilineal traditions in favour of more 'civilized' and recognizably patriarchal structures. This process, as G. Arunima (2003) argues, marked a significant reconstitution of the domestic sphere and gender relations in Kerala, wherein

matriliny was gradually displaced by the model of monogamous, patrilineal, and conjugal family life.

The transformation was not solely a product of ideological change but was also intertwined with shifts in the agrarian economy and occupational structures. The decline of feudal systems and the rise of new occupations and property arrangements changed the economic basis of kinship. As argued by Bina Agarwal (1994), the erosion of women's access to land and property rights often accompanies the rise of patriarchal family systems. In Kerala, matrilineal inheritance systems that previously provided women with a degree of economic security and autonomy have been systematically dismantled through legal interventions and reformist movements. Missionary efforts, socio-religious reform initiatives, and state legislation have collectively contributed to the normalization of patriarchal authority as both natural and desirable.

The very discourse of reform—while ostensibly aimed at "uplifting" women—often served to legitimize male dominance by reconfiguring the private sphere as a site of female subordination. Drawing on Louis Althusser's (1971) notion of ideological state apparatuses, one can see how institutions such as the church, school, and family were mobilized to inculcate patriarchal norms and gendered subjectivities.

This paper contends that state intervention alone is insufficient to realize gender equity within familial institutions. Formal legal equality may conceal the erosion of customary rights and at the same time re-create the patriarchal norms through modern juridical frameworks. As feminist legal scholars such as Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman (1996) have demonstrated, the law often functions as a terrain of contestation where women's autonomy is negotiated, compromised, and frequently denied. The focus of this study is on the historical reconstitution of two major social institutions—marriage and family—within the specific context

of Kerala. It seeks to trace the social, economic, and ideological processes through which monogamous, patriarchal marriage came to replace previously diverse practices, including polyandry and polygamy. The acceptance of this new family model must be understood as part of a broader hegemonic project that linked domestic reform to ideas of civilization, progress, and national identity. Finally, the paper seeks to foreground how transformations in agrarian relations and occupational structures produced shifts in the ideology and practice of gender within the family, leading to the institutionalization of a patriarchal order. This historical trajectory underscores the need to critically examine the intersections of kinship, gender, and legal modernity in the production of contemporary familial norms.

Domesticity, Legal Structures, and Gendered Division of Labour

This section examines the dominant familial ideology—particularly the ideology of domesticity—and its pervasive influence on the regulation of women through legal and institutional mechanisms. At the heart of this ideology lies the *male breadwinner model*, which served as the institutionalized norm for family organization in most industrialized societies throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Under this model, the man is cast as the economic provider and protector, while the woman assumes the role of caregiver and nurturer within the domestic sphere. This model not only structures familial responsibilities but also informs legal and policy frameworks that reinforce patriarchal norms. In contrast, the *gender equity model* of the family posits a non-hierarchical distribution of roles and responsibilities. In this model, income generation, domestic labour, and caregiving are not predetermined by gender. Rather than demanding strict equality in heterosexual relationships, the gender equity model rejects essentialist role assignments and is founded on principles of equal respect, equitable distribution of resources and capabilities, parity in participation across socially valued domains, and a departure

from male-centric standards of social value (Fraser, 1994). This conceptual shift challenges the ideological foundations of the male breadwinner family and aims to restructure the domestic sphere in a more egalitarian direction.

Despite advances in education and labour market participation, the idealized family morality embedded in legal systems continues to reflect patriarchal assumptions. Even in contexts where equal employment opportunity laws exist and girls are encouraged to pursue education and careers; the law continues to uphold a normative family model that positions women primarily as wives and mothers. The persistence of patriarchal ideology within the legal and familial realms results in a structural contradiction. Women are increasingly integrated into the public sphere of work and education; however, they remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid domestic labour and care giving. Empirical studies indicate that men profess gender equality but at the same time they adhere to patriarchal norms. Many men support their wives' involvement in paid labour, yet simultaneously expect them to assume primary responsibility for household maintenance and care giving—what Arlie Hochschild (1989) famously described as the *second shift*.

This gendered expectation contributes to a bifurcated experience for women, who are often forced to choose between professional advancement and familial obligations. Care work—whether for children, the elderly, or the ill—continues to be framed as a familial duty, with women as its primary agents. As a result, state-provided or market-based care services are often underutilized; reinforcing the cultural expectation that care giving is an extension of women's domestic role.

While flexible working arrangements—such as part-time work, flexi-time, and lenient leave policies—have been promoted as strategies to balance work and family responsibilities, these accommodations are disproportionately utilized by women. This reinforces their status as secondary

earners and further embeds the ideology of domesticity. As Peter McDonald (2000) argues, if the gender equity model is to be genuinely realized, such flexible work conditions must be universally accessible to both parents, regardless of gender. Nonetheless, the over-reliance on women to manage both paid and unpaid labour risks re-inscribing the very domestic ideology that the gender equity model seeks to transcend. Unless care responsibilities are socially redistributed—through both policy interventions and normative shifts—the familial institution will continue to reproduce gendered inequalities despite surface-level gains in education and employment.

The association of men as natural breadwinners and women as dependents and caregivers is a relatively modern construction that gained traction with the onset of industrialization. In pre-industrial and subsistence-based societies, women made significant contributions to the household economy—often serving as the primary food providers in many communities. Until the industrial phase of capitalism, most production—agricultural, artisanal, or domestic—was organized within households and relied on family labour. However, with industrialization, production shifted from the household to the factory, effectively transforming family members into wage labourers and creating a structural separation between paid labour and domestic life. This transformation was accompanied by the emergence of a new *domestic ideology* that designated the home as the "natural" domain of women. It redefined femininity around domesticity, morality, and care, while positioning masculinity within the realm of public work and economic provision. Consequently, the *breadwinner-homemaker* family form became institutionalized as the normative model, wherein the husband earned wages and the wife assumed responsibility for the home and children. This ideological construction framed such arrangements as “natural,” obscuring their historical specificity and material foundations.

Despite women's increasing participation in wage labour, numerous studies have shown that their economic contributions are often devalued. Even when women contribute substantially to household income, the male is frequently still regarded as the primary breadwinner. This symbolic privileging of men's economic role reaffirms their authority within the family and simultaneously naturalizes women's domestic responsibilities (Jackson, 1997). Today, although many women engage in full-time paid employment, prevailing social norms continue to cast the care of the home, husband, and children as their primary responsibility.

The gendered inequality embedded in family life cannot be understood in isolation; rather, it must be situated within broader social, economic, and legal structures. Feminist scholars have long argued that women's marginal position in the labour market is structurally linked to their domestic burdens. As gender segregation persists in waged work, women are pushed into lower-paying and more precarious employment sectors. Consequently, many women enter marriage not solely as a personal choice but as a strategy for securing economic and social stability. However, laws governing marriage and maintenance often reinforce women's economic dependency, granting them entitlements only if they perform the idealized roles of dutiful wives and caregivers—a formulation that is both conditional and discriminatory. Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1973), in their seminal work *The Symmetrical Family*, proposed that the emergence of the "companionate marriage" and the increasing participation of women in the workforce during the mid-twentieth century led to a more egalitarian distribution of domestic roles. They argued that shared responsibilities and emotional intimacy were replacing rigidly defined gender roles. However, subsequent research challenges this optimistic assessment. Empirical studies continue to show that women disproportionately shoulder the burden of domestic labour and childcare, even when employed full-time. Importantly, they are not only performing the tasks but are held responsible for organizing and managing the

home. As Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield (1991:15) argue, modern women are expected to be not only wage earners but also more comradely wives, attentive mothers, satisfying sexual partners, and professional homemakers—roles that cumulatively amount to more than a mere "double burden." This contradiction has significant implications for gender equity. While men may not oppose their wives working, there is often an implicit expectation that paid employment should not interfere with women's domestic duties. The ability of men to enjoy leisure or remain disengaged from domestic work—even during periods of unemployment—is underwritten by the unpaid labour of women. Women's domestic contributions create the conditions for men's autonomy, mobility, and asset accumulation (Jackson, 1997). When domestic help is employed, it often reflects not a relief from responsibility but an acknowledgment of the volume of unpaid labour required to maintain the household—labour which still falls under the woman's purview. In this sense, women's labour is not only essential to household maintenance but also instrumental in enabling men's leisure and economic advancement.

Furthermore, the domestic sphere continues to operate as a site of ideological reproduction, closely linked to constructions of femininity, morality, and the privatization of care. The unpaid labour of women remains largely invisible in economic metrics, and their waged labour is commonly viewed as supplementary, reinforcing the notion of women as secondary earners. Susan Moller Okin (1989) argues that the gendered division of labour within the family imposes long-term structural disadvantages on women—not only economically but also psychologically—limiting their aspirations and reinforcing internalized barriers. Despite incremental shifts, the sexual division of labour within households remains largely intact. The domestic interior continues to function as a gendered space where resistance is limited and often absorbed into the very structures it seeks to challenge. Women may engage in paid work, but their

domestic responsibilities persist, making their labour doubly burdensome and their contributions persistently undervalued.

With the advent of industrialization, a powerful *ideology of domesticity* emerged that redefined the home as the natural domain of women. This ideology not only restructured gender roles within the family but also transformed the very spatial and cultural meanings of the domestic interior. The home became a key site for articulating dominant cultural values—such as moral propriety, social hierarchy, gender stability, and bourgeois respectability. These values were expressed not only through textual and social practices associated with homemaking but also through the architecture, spatial organization, and material culture of the household. In this space, the modern female subject was constituted, both ideologically and materially. Women's role within the domestic sphere extended beyond utilitarian household labour to include a range of non-economic, gendered activities such as embroidery, painting, sewing, gardening, and interior decoration. These practices were not merely functional but served as cultural rituals aimed at reproducing and naturalizing the domestic ideal. As Stevi Jackson (1997) has argued, such practices reinforced women's alignment with moral virtue, aesthetic refinement, and care—characteristics culturally marked as "feminine." Rather than conspicuous consumption, practices like mending and recycling represented thrift, morality, and self-discipline—values that were central for creating the middle-class home and its ideal image of femininity.

From the late nineteenth century onward, popular women's magazines became vehicles for disseminating the ideology of domesticity among middle-class women. These publications constructed normative femininity around domestic virtue and heterosexual conjugality, socializing women into culturally approved roles. Media representations—especially advertisements—have historically reinforced sexual and gender norms, romanticizing middle-class marital life and embedding the image of the ideal woman as both modern and

domesticated. Since the 1990s, advertisements increasingly deployed hybrid images that blend tradition and modernity, thereby appealing to upwardly mobile audiences aspiring to middle-class respectability These visual narratives position heterosexual conjugality as natural and inevitable, while simultaneously reaffirming domesticity as a woman's inherent role. The domestication of women is often perceived as a marker of caste and class elevation. Even among women employed in the public sphere, there remains a powerful imperative to perform as ideal homemakers. As Eva-Maria Hardtmann (2009) notes, the celebration of domesticated middle-class womanhood is prioritized over the valorisation of subaltern women's resistance. The project of domestication is often masked as reform. Schooling and education of women became key platforms for social reform, especially among the emerging Hindu middle classes. However, as Uma Chakravarti (1998) argues, the aim of female education was not emancipation but regulation—it served to produce governable female subjects suited to the new patriarchal family form. Women were redefined within the context of the aspirations of the emerging nationalist and bourgeois order. They were positioned as both custodians of tradition and vehicles of modernity, thus becoming central to the reproduction of a restructured domestic patriarchy. The oppressive dimensions of traditional gender relations were rendered invisible, reframed as symbols of *custom*, *honour*, or *religion*. These patriarchal practices were often seen as markers of upper-caste identity and therefore remained largely immune to critique or reform. As a result, male authority came to be viewed as natural and legitimate—internalized by both men and women as the proper social order. While modern marriage is often described as companionate rather than authoritarian, in practice, family structures remain deeply androcentric. As Harriet Bradley (1994:157) contends, most social institutions are structured around male-defined norms, preferences, and priorities—society continues to revolve around men, both symbolically

and materially. Despite superficial reforms that appear to support women's empowerment, the reality is that women are increasingly burdened with multiple, and often contradictory, expectations.

The ideological construction of femininity in the domestic sphere remains central to the reproduction of gender inequality. Women's labour—both paid and unpaid—is persistently undervalued, and their contributions within the household continue to be naturalized and rendered invisible. The romanticisation of companionate marriage and middle-class conjugality serves ideologically to obscure the presence of ongoing patriarchal power within structures that appear to be egalitarian.

The dominant familial ideology plays a critical role in shaping legal frameworks that construct women as inherently vulnerable and naturalize their roles as wives and mothers. This essentialist view legitimizes a *protectionist* legal approach, wherein women are positioned as subjects in need of paternalistic safeguarding rather than as autonomous rights-bearing individuals. Such a framework not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also sustains unequal power relations within both the family and the state. This protectionist logic is frequently evident in judicial reasoning on issues concerning women, where laws designed to "protect" women often become mechanisms that restrict their autonomy and agency. As Carole Pateman (1988) argues in *The Sexual Contract*, the social contract underlying liberal democratic societies is itself gendered, embedding patriarchal assumptions that institutionalize women's subordination under the guise of equality. Rather than dismantling patriarchal structures, law often functions as a regulatory apparatus that enforces normative femininity and consolidates male authority.

Thus, far from being a neutral arbiter of justice, the law operates as a site for the reproduction of gendered hierarchies. As Catharine MacKinnon (1987) contends, the very definition of equality under the law is shaped by male norms, rendering

women's experiences and interests peripheral or invisible. Legal discourses that frame women as dependents in need of protection obscure the structural conditions of inequality and instead reproduce the patriarchal status quo. In this sense, the law not only reflects but actively constitutes the subordination of women.

Reforming Women and Colonial Modernity in India

Colonial governance was not limited to political domination; it extended to the moral and cultural reconstitution of Indian society, including the family and marriage. The colonial encounter in India profoundly disrupted indigenous life ways, particularly the intimate realms of domesticity, kinship, and gendered subjectivity. As Flavia Agnes (1999) has argued, modern Indian marriage laws embody a Brahmanical orientation underpinned by an Anglo-Saxon legal framework—an imposed synthesis that displaced plural customary norms and institutionalized patriarchal control under the guise of legal rationality and reform.

Through a series of legislative and judicial interventions, women's customary rights—particularly those belonging to non-Brahmanical communities—were systematically eroded. Legal codification privileged written, caste-based norms over orally transmitted and flexible customary practices. Many women lost rights not because they did not exist, but because they could not be codified or "proven" as legitimate customs in court. The hybridization of Brahmanical patriarchy and British jurisprudence produced what scholars like Uma Chakravarti (2003) and Partha Chatterjee (1993) describe as a *reformist patriarchy*—a system that appeared progressive by endorsing women's education and moral refinement, yet rearticulated patriarchal control in modern terms.

Under British rule, the feudal Brahmanism of pre-colonial India evolved into a modernized, "nationalist" Brahmanism, constructing an idealized image of the "Hindu

woman" that transcended caste boundaries but was fundamentally rooted in upper-caste, patriarchal values. Concepts such as *pativrata* (devoted wife), the sanctity of marriage, and male authority in the household were naturalized and diffused across caste and class. This was not merely cultural diffusion but a hegemonic project, where the state, law, and social reform movements collaborated to impose a singular moral code onto a diverse society.

Women—particularly from middle-class households—were constructed as bearers of national and moral purity. They were expected to be simultaneously virtuous and sexually regulated, preserving the respectability of the emergent Indian middle class and marking its cultural superiority over the West. As Chatterjee (1993) noted in his formulation of the "new patriarchy", the nationalist elite embraced women's education and literacy not as a route to emancipation but as a tool to cultivate the reformed, domesticated woman—governable, respectable, and confined to the restructured interiority of the home. In urban spaces, especially during the early 20th century, Western ideas of domestic management were integrated with indigenous patriarchal codes to produce the ideal dyadic conjugal unit—a nuclear family model centered on emotional intimacy between husband and wife. The dominant familial ideology and the ideology of domesticity led educated husbands, influenced by colonial modernity, encouraged their wives to adopt modern domestic practices while maintaining their subordination within a newly imagined private sphere.

Gendered Relations under Colonial Modernity and Socio-Legal Reforms in Kerala

In Kerala, the transformation of family and gender roles was deeply tied to colonial legal interventions, particularly the dismantling of *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal) inheritance and the enforcement of patrilineal norms. The legislative reforms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries redefined family structures—promoting patrilocal residence, paternal authority, and nuclear households. These reforms were legitimized as

progressive and rational, cloaked in the language of modernity and development, and were often welcomed by reformist intellectuals and a rising native elite. The collapse of the *taravad* system had material and symbolic consequences. It dislodged women's birthright to reside and be maintained in their natal kin groups, replacing it with dependence on husbands within nuclear families. The Travancore Legislative Council justified this by claiming that what women lost from brothers and uncles they gained from husbands. Yet, this overlooked the fact that such entitlements were not *gifts*, but *rights* rooted in matrilineal traditions. The silence of *ordinary Marumakkathayam women* in response to these reforms may reflect the ideological effectiveness of modernity—many believed they were progressing, even as their customary rights were being extinguished.

Colonial commissions, such as the Malabar Marriage Commission, depicted indigenous practices as "barbaric" and obsolete, demanding replacement by codified, monogamous, patriarchal institutions aligned with British norms. Influenced by colonial education and reformist discourse, the native elite internalized these evaluations and became active agents in the transformation of marriage and inheritance. English education became a key site of colonial subject formation, socializing women into roles aligned with modern patriarchy and encouraging men to assume the moral authority of colonial modernity. As Dinesan V. (1993) aptly notes, British administrators sought not only to regulate marriage among matrilineal communities but to *redefine womanhood*—to convert Malayali women from kin-based actors into wives and dependent members of nuclear households. This legal and ideological transformation facilitated the emergence of a new male consciousness and a new womanhood, both of which were stabilized by law, education, and media, and ultimately remained unquestioned by the majority.

The transition from matrilineal to patrilineal family structures in Malabar and Travancore marks a decisive turning

point in the reconfiguration of gender, kinship, and female sexuality under colonial modernity. The erosion of *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal inheritance) was not simply a legal reform but a reordering of intimate social relations, one that aligned with the ideological imperatives of both colonial governance and nationalist patriarchy. As Janaki Nair (1996) argues, the legislative shift in favor of patrilineality not only supplanted existing kinship structures but also redefined the sexual and familial subjectivities of women, particularly by instituting the patrilineal nuclear family as the normative model of domestic life (p. 37). The colonial state's intervention in codifying family laws—framed as progressive reforms—was deeply embedded in a larger nationalist project that sought to homogenize the plurality of customary practices across caste and region. These reforms, ostensibly designed to uplift women, often functioned to discipline the non-conforming sexualities and kinship models prevalent among lower castes and matrilineal communities. Thus, what appeared as *progressive legislation* for upper-caste women simultaneously worked to marginalize the relatively autonomous positions historically occupied by women from non-Brahmanical households.

Among the worst affected were the Nambuthiri Antharjanams, confined within the patriarchal structure of *illams* (ancestral homes). The Nambuthiri inheritance customs allowed only the eldest male to marry and inherit property, leaving many women either unmarried or married off as junior wives to much older men, often facing widowhood at an early age. While Nambuthiri women began to organize themselves in the early twentieth century, their concerns were gradually absorbed into a broader male-dominated reform movement that prioritized endogamous and monogamous marriages. The new nationalist patriarchy, as Chatterjee (1993) terms it, advanced reforms selectively—endorsing women's literacy and minor freedoms while reaffirming patriarchal dominance through control over their sexuality and reproductive labor. Similarly, Nayar reformers, inspired by Brahmanical texts like

Manusmriti and colonial Victorian morality, began to view their matrilineal traditions as symbols of immorality. Practices such as *sambandham* (ritualised non-conjugal unions) were cast as polyandrous and promiscuous, leading to a growing demand for codified, patrilineal household structures. Reformist discourse reimagined Nayar womanhood as monogamous, chaste, and domestic—echoing the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house. As G. Arunima (2003) notes, this transformation involved a systematic delegitimization of female agency, especially within kinship networks that previously allowed women considerable autonomy (pp. 173–175).

The Ezhava community, considered socially inferior to the Nairs, also underwent a parallel transformation. With internal divisions between those following matrilineal (*marumakkathayam*), patrilineal (*makkathayam*), and mixed (*misradayam*) systems, the Ezhava Law Committee of 1919 aimed to standardize inheritance and marital practices across the community. However, this "unification" project reinforced patriarchal family norms by presenting male authority as aligned with "natural law" and the teleology of civilization. The reforms thus naturalized a gendered hierarchy, in which men were constructed as heads of households and women as dependent, reproductive subjects. The broader sociological impact of these shifts was the production of a new domestic femininity, tailored to serve the ideological needs of colonial governance, nationalist reform, and capitalist transformation. Janaki Nair (1996) identifies three critical processes that reshaped female sexuality in Malabar such as the transformation of the agrarian economy, the emergence of an English-educated middle class with aspirations for bureaucratic employment, and the diffusion of Victorian moral codes via missionary activity and state schooling.

Missionary influence, in particular, played a pivotal role in reshaping women's bodies and behaviors. Their educational and reform programs, often couched in civilizational language,

aimed to domesticate women by reorienting their labor and morality toward the nuclear family ideal. As Stevi Jackson (1997) argues, the construction of women as moral custodians and home-makers served to legitimize both male authority and capitalist rationality, ensuring the privatization of care work and the symbolic containment of female sexuality within conjugal, heterosexual marriage. Thus, in the name of modernity and reform, patriarchal institutions reasserted their control through new legal, educational, and ideological strategies. The matrilineal household—once a site of relative female autonomy—was dismantled and replaced by a normative conjugal unit in which women's sexuality, labour, and social mobility were closely regulated. The transition to patriliny was not merely a change in property rights but a profound reconfiguration of gendered subjectivity and social order.

Through the implementation of marriage laws targeting the matrilineal Hindu castes of Kerala, colonial and nationalist reformers sought to institutionalize a particular form of conjugality, effectively delegitimizing pre-existing practices such as *sambandham*. These legal interventions were framed as *progressive*, yet they were deeply implicated in a larger ideological project aimed at reconstituting the family in line with patrilineal, monogamous, and heteronormative ideals. The conjugal nuclear family was posited as the normative household unit, and its formation necessitated a radical restructuring of the "inner domain"—a term Partha Chatterjee (1993) uses to describe the domestic sphere as a key site of nationalist reform. At the center of this transformation was the reconfiguration of female subjectivity. Women were constructed as the terrain upon which the new order of kinship and domesticity would be established. In this reformist discourse, women had to be reimagined as monogamous, sexually chaste, and economically dependent on husbands or fathers. This gendered reconstitution of the family required a new sexual order in which women's sexuality was rendered governable within the boundaries of conjugal marriage, thereby

enabling the privatization of property and inheritance within the nuclear family structure.

The ideological core of these reforms lay in the regulation and containment of female sexuality. Two interrelated objectives underpinned this project: first, to secure male sexual control over women within the patriarchal conjugal family; and second, to construct the family as a legal and economic unit**,** wherein property relations could be clearly defined and inherited through patrilineal lines. As Janaki Nair (1996) argues, this restructuring of familial norms marginalized women within the legal-juridical frameworks of reform. The law, far from being gender-neutral, was actively implicated in the production of gendered inequalities, embedding the patriarchal logic of dependency and subordination within the emerging socio-legal structure (pp. 381–382). This process of reordering kinship and law, therefore, did not simply reflect changing social realities but was a normative intervention, rooted in both colonial legal rationality and nationalist aspirations for a "modern" domestic order. As feminist legal scholars such as Flavia Agnes (1999) and Ratna Kapur & Brenda Cossman (1996) have pointed out, such reforms often institutionalized patriarchal norms under the guise of modernization and equality, sidelining the diverse customary rights and relational autonomy women had historically exercised in matrilineal contexts. Thus, modernity and socio-legal reforms made the patriarchal family norm as dominant familial ideology which appeared to be normal to people of all classes and castes.

Summary and Conclusion

The democratization of personal life represents one of the most profound challenges to entrenched systems of patriarchal power, requiring a fundamental transformation in the organization of gender relations. At the heart of this transformation lies the need for women to assert agency and claim subjectivity, even though the benefits of such restructuring ultimately extend to all members of society. A

crucial domain of this reconstitution is sexuality, which must be approached not as a private or moral issue alone, but as a deeply political and relational phenomenon. As Carole Pateman (1988) and Catherine MacKinnon (1989) have argued, the personal is deeply political, and gender relations are not natural arrangements but constructed hierarchies maintained through law, culture, and institutional power. To achieve substantive gender equality, change must begin from the bottom up, with the family as the first site of intervention. The family, often idealized as a natural and moral unit, is in fact a deeply gendered institution resistant to change. Idealized familial morality, rooted in patriarchal norms, continues to structure cultural expectations and behavioural scripts in ways that sustain male dominance. As Peter McDonald (2000) has noted, cultural transformations in gender roles are often generational; while it may be difficult to disrupt established couple dynamics, a different socialization of children, especially through education, can yield long-term shifts toward equity.

Human relations education, grounded in gender justice and mutual respect, must therefore be embedded in school curricula to challenge essentialist gender norms from an early age. The younger generation—particularly young women—have been at the forefront of the movement for gender equality, demonstrating greater receptivity to values of parity, autonomy, and respect. These efforts require institutional support from both the state and the media, which must act not as guardians of patriarchal morality, but as facilitators of social justice. However, the role of the state itself must be critically interrogated**.** As MacKinnon (1989) forcefully contends, the state does not stand above social divisions but reflects and reinforces the dominant male perspective. It actively constitutes the family through its legislation, regulatory policies, and normative frameworks—be it through marriage laws, family planning programs, or maintenance regulations.

The formal legal equality is rendered ineffective where material and symbolic inequalities persist across the domains

of sexuality, labour, and property. In such a context, feminist legal scholars emphasize the need to go beyond formal rights to substantive equality—which recognizes and remedies the systemic disadvantage faced by women.

Women must have inalienable rights over their own bodies and sexuality, free from state intervention or moral policing. The state should not exercise dominion over private sexual arrangements; rather, it must ensure that women's bodily autonomy, reproductive freedom, and self-ownership are protected as fundamental human rights. Only when the structures of power within the family and personal life are transformed can the broader vision of gender justice be realized.

Endnotes

1. In the nineteenth century, approximately fifty percent of the Malayali population across various castes and communities practiced matriliny. This form of kinship, which structured descent, inheritance, and residence through the female line, underwent profound transformations during the early phases of colonial intervention. Matrilineal kinship in Kerala holds the distinction of being the only such system in the world to be legally dismantled through state intervention. This process unfolded through a series of legislative measures initiated by the colonial administration and later consolidated by the postcolonial Kerala state, culminating in its formal abolition through legislative enactments in 1976 (Arunima, 2003:1). The dismantling of matriliny was not a neutral or organic shift but a deliberate restructuring of kinship and gender relations under the influence of modern legal rationality, colonial governance, and emergent patriarchal norms. As G. Arunima (2003) argues, the transformation of matrilineal systems in Kerala must be understood as part of a broader socio-legal project that sought to replace indigenous practices with normative

heterosexual, patrilineal family structures aligned with dominant caste-Hindu and colonial moral codes. This legal and cultural shift redefined familial authority, inheritance rights, and gender roles, displacing women from positions of centrality in kin networks and codifying male dominance within the restructured patriarchal household.

2. Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: the Politics of Women's Rights in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 79-80
3. It refers to a set of ideologies that have been naturalized and universalized to such an extent that they constitute the dominant *doxa*—or taken-for-granted assumptions—governing commonsense understandings of the family.
4. The ideology of domesticity refers to a historically constructed set of discourses that emerged in the late eighteenth century, promoting the notion that women's primary role was to serve as virtuous moral guardians of societal values, particularly within the private sphere of the home.
5. Kevin Hetherington, *Capitalism's Eye: Cultural Spaces of the Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 136–137.
6. Shilpa Phadke, "Some Notes Towards Understanding the Construction of Middle-Class Urban Women's Sexuality in India," in *Sexuality, Gender and Rights: Exploring Theory and Practice in South and Southeast Asia*, eds. Geetanjali Misra and Radhika Chandiramani (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 71.
7. Chitra Sinha, Images of Motherhood: The Hindu Code Bill Discourse, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 43 (Oct. 27 - Nov. 2, 2007), pp. 49-57, http://www.jstor.org

8. Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.
9. Lotika Sarkar and Sivaramayya (Eds.), *Women and Law: Contemporary Problems* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1994), 158–163.
10. Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), 162–163.
11. G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar c. 1850–1940* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003), 158–163.
12. Praveena Kodoth, "Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, Sambandham and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Malabar," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (May 2001): 349–384.

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Resistance to Resilience: Grassroots Strategies for the Protection of the Meenachil River Basin

Vinumol Devassy *

Andrew Michael **

Pushpam M. ***

Abstract

Resistance has long been an inherent element in the discourse of development and environmental management, often manifesting in conflicts between marginalized communities and dominant forces. Kerala is no exception, where environmental struggles have highlighted tensions between state-led development projects and local ecological concerns. This paper examines the story of resistance in the Meenachil River Basin, Kottayam district, Kerala, where over three decades of grassroots interventions gradually transformed into a sustained community-led initiative. What began as opposition to an ecologically harmful dam project evolved into a broader process

* *Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Loyola College of Social Sciences | vinumolpanjikkaran24@gmail.com*

** *Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Loyola College of Social Sciences | andrewmichael@loyolacollegekerala.edu.in*

*** *Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala | pushpasocio@gmail.com*

of conscientization, political and legal interventions, and collective confrontation. The study highlights how strategies of resistance employed by the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC) catalysed active citizen engagement through initiatives such as river vigilance groups, school-based climate action alliances, community science networks, and green auditing practices. These actions illustrate how participation itself became a form of resilience, enabling communities not only to protect their ecological commons but also to strengthen long-term stewardship of the river. Drawing on qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key pioneers and activists, the paper argues that resistance, when sustained through participatory practices, transforms ecological vulnerability into resilience and redefines community-based environmental management.

Keywords: resistance, resilience, conscientization, Meenachil river basin, community participation, grassroot initiative

Over the decades, communities across the state have repeatedly resisted initiatives that prioritize short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term environmental sustainability. Kerala's robust civic engagement and deep-rooted environmental awareness have made it a focal point for grassroots activism, particularly when state-driven development projects threaten ecological and social well-being. The Silent Valley Movement (1970s–1980s) stands as a hallmark of Kerala's environmental activism, where a proposed hydroelectric dam threatened a unique rainforest ecosystem and the endangered lion-tailed macaque. Spearheaded by civil society organizations like Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad, scientists, and local citizens, the movement combined legal hurdles, media outreach, and cultural mobilization to halt the project—eventually leading to the establishment of Silent Valley National Park in 1985 (Bharucha, 2000). The first case pertaining to environmental issues to be filed

in Indian courts was the one filed in the Kerala High Court in 1979 to halt the construction activities initiated in the Silent Valley. This case became a topic of intense debate. The presence of Green Communities and Green Networks at the global level inspired activists at the national and local levels.

Kerala has been witnessing frequent large-scale demonstrations against a variety of concerns since the 1980s. In addition, the claim of being a state with complete land reform was shattered through struggles like Chengara, Aripa and Tovarimala. However, it was the Plachimada struggle that convinced Kerala about the bio-politics of water. Nobody realised that it was unethical to take water from natural sources, bottle it, and then sell it for a high price and the politics of waste are no different (Neelakandan, 2022). Empirical research underscores how such resistance has been a recurring feature of Kerala's environmental landscape, with grassroots campaigns emerging in response to initiatives such as sand mining, deforestation, and river pollution (Kumar & Bhattacharya, 2011).

Resistance has long been an inherent element in the discourse of development and environmental management, often manifesting in conflicts between marginalized communities and dominant forces. Kerala is no exception, where environmental struggles have highlighted tensions between state-led development projects and local ecological concerns. This paper examines the story of resistance in the Meenachil River Basin, Kottayam district, Kerala, where over three decades of grassroots interventions gradually transformed into a sustained community-led initiative.

Statement of the Problem

Rivers in Kerala have long been central to the ecological, economic, and cultural life of its people. The Meenachil River, flowing through the Kottayam district, is not merely a water body but an integral part of the region's agrarian systems, local livelihoods, religious practices, and collective identity. Historically, it has nurtured agricultural productivity, provided

drinking water, sustained fisheries, and shaped the cultural landscape of Central Kerala (Latha, 2018). However, like many rivers in the state, the Meenachil has been subjected to mounting ecological stress over the past few decades. Unregulated sand mining, industrial effluents, urban encroachments, and unsustainable developmental activities have accelerated environmental degradation, threatening both the ecological balance of the river basin and the well-being of the communities that depend on it (Anantha, 2015).

In response to these ecological pressures, local communities have engaged in diverse forms of resistance (Murali, 2022). These have ranged from organized protests, petitions, and public demonstrations and to the formation of local committees. The Meenachil River Basin thus became a site of grassroots struggle, where resistance was not merely an act of opposition but a mode of asserting ecological rights and reclaiming stewardship over natural resources (Neelakandan, 2022).

Yet, resistance did not remain static. Over time, it transformed into participation, as communities evolved from protesting degradation to actively engaging in the conservation and management of the river. Initiatives such as people's forums, volunteer networks, and local environmental organizations emerged, reflecting a shift from confrontation to collaboration. This poses the question of what were the forms of resistances that emerged in response to ecological degradation and developmental pressures on the Meenachil River Basin? How were these grassroot resistance strategies contributing to community resilience, an agency of environmental governance in the region? While scholarship on environmental movements in India often highlights large-scale struggles like the Chipko or Narmada Bachao Andolan, the micro-level strategies and transformations of resistance into resilience in smaller river basins like the Meenachil remain underexplored. This study, therefore, examines the forms of resistance in the Meenachil River Basin and their

participatory practices that embody resilience in the face of ecological and developmental challenges**.**

Theoretical Framework

The resistance led by the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC) can be theoretically understood through Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of conscientisation, wherein marginalized groups cultivate critical awareness of their socio-political and ecological contexts. The opposition to the proposed dam marked a shift from a passive compliance with state-driven development to an active critique of environmental injustices, thereby enabling community agency. This trajectory also resonates with Charles Tilly's (1978, 2008) concept of repertoires of contention, as MRPC mobilized diverse strategies reflecting adaptive and context-specific forms of resistance. Together, these frameworks highlight how localized environmental struggles evolve into participatory and resilient practices where collective knowledge production and sustained mobilization transform resistance into long-term stewardship of natural resources.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative design to examine the ways in which community resistance within the Meenachil River Basin has gradually transformed into participatory conservation practices and strategies of resilience. Adopting an exploratory case study approach, the investigation centres on the Meenachil River Basin located in Kottayam district, Kerala. A purposive sampling strategy was initially employed to identify individuals directly engaged in river protection activities. To complement this, snowball sampling was utilized to access activists and volunteers with long-term involvement in the movement. Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were generated through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation, enabling an insider perspective on community dynamics. Twelve in-depth interviews and four FGDs were conducted to collect the data. Secondary data were drawn from published and unpublished

reports, newspaper articles, and petitions, which provided contextual and historical insights.

Results and Analysis

The Story of Resistance in the Meenachil River Basin

People's resistance towards the governmental intervention in the Meenachil River Basin in the Kottayam district of Kerala has a history of over three decades. The story can be traces back to the late 1980s when a task force (by the people) emerged in response to the proposed Adukkam Dam at the Teekoy Grama Panchayat in the Kottayam district by the Government of Kerala. It was said that the government proposed the construction of the dam as a solution to address water scarcity in the region. This proposal emerged during a period when public opposition in Kerala had successfully thwarted the construction of a dam in the Silent Valley region of Palakkad. Drawing inspiration from this significant victory of community resistance, a widespread sentiment against dam construction over rivers gained momentum even in the Kottayam region. The environmentally conscious individuals, motivated by these developments, formed a small group intending to raise awareness among the public about the adverse environmental and social impacts associated with dam construction in the area. The local population also expressed scepticism regarding the relatively obscure real estate activities in the region, particularly concerning land acquisition processes associated with the dam project. Concerns about the potential ecological harm prompted community opposition to the dam. This resistance is rooted in a deep commitment to safeguard the Meenachil River in the following years, resulting in the formation of the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC).

A 72-year-old green activist from Aruvithura, shared his insights and experiences regarding his participation during the initial phase.

> There was nothing like social media during those days. To gather people, we used mouth-to-mouth sources. We went to different houses and asked them to inform the neighbourhoods. 'The technology like 'Positive Film Slides' was used. Using a German Reflect Projector the photographs from various parts of the world were shown and convinced the people that their fight against the dam and their understanding of the conditions of Meenachil River is genuine and it is being carried out for their existence.

Using various effective and efficient methods, the community members were conscientized. These collective efforts enhanced awareness within the community regarding both the ecological consequences of the proposed dam and the broader environmental degradation affecting the Meenachil River. Thus, the government halted their decision to build the dam in the region. But the responsibility of water scarcity remained as a challenge to be addressed.

Small gatherings, discussions, cycle rallies, mass fasting, and petitions to offices, were the strategies adopted by the Meenachil River Protection Council during the initial phases. Later a hunger strike was initiated, and a committee was appointed to study the general issues concerning the Meenachil River. The committee, chaired by Professor KM Hameed, received complaints and suggestions from people and organizations. This was the first time in Kerala that a joint committee of people's representatives and environmental activists was appointed to conduct a river study. The Meenachil River Protection Council had already proposed solutions to illegal sand mining, river pollution, quarrying, landfilling, monoculture, and chemical fertilizer use. The district council accepted the Hameed Committee report in 1992. The council formed conservation committees at the panchayat level to implement the recommendations and create awareness among the people. In December 1992, an NSS special camp was organized at

Erattupetta with the slogan '*Water conservation through public participation*' and '*Save Water, Save Life*'. The camp aimed to correct misconceptions about water shortage, pollution, and waterborne diseases, and included awareness songs and discussions on ensuring people's participation in construction and disease prevention. The camp was held in different locations, allowing people to interact with each other and learn about water-borne diseases. The camp was a remarkable achievement in the history of the Meenachil River Protection Council, resulting in increased water availability during the summer.

The evolution of the resistance around the Meenachil River reflects a gradual yet significant transformation—from opposing a single development project to embracing a holistic vision of river conservation. What began as a localized struggle against the proposed dam expanded into a broader community-driven movement that recognized water scarcity, seasonal droughts, and ecological well-being as interconnected issues. The Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC) not only galvanized public consciousness but also demonstrated that resilience emerges when communities link immediate concerns with long-term sustainability. This trajectory illustrates how grassroots resistance, rooted in local experiences, can evolve into participatory environmental governance**.**

Building upon this collective consciousness, the MRPC devised a range of strategies that moved beyond protest to proactive participation. These strategies became intervention methods that not only challenged ecological degradation but also enhanced people's involvement in managing the Meenachil River Basin. It is within this transition—from resistance to participation—that the various strategies of MRPC acquire significance, as they represent resilience in action.

The Forms of Resistance

During the initial phase of the MRPC, the focus was on implementing social action strategies aimed at opposing projects and ideas perceived as detrimental to the well-being of the region. Diverse strategies were employed as a means of resistance and to garner more support for their cause, encouraging people's participation. It further broadened the social foundation of the council within the region. In her thesis, Umadevi (2019) delineates four strategic approaches employed by river-related movements in Kerala, all of which are discernible in the context of the Meenachil River Basin. The four strategic approaches include

a) Conscientisation
b) Confrontation
c) Legal
d) Political

Thus, making the public more aware of the Meenachil River and its associated issues from time to time was the priority of the Council.

a) Conscientisation

Campaigning is one of the significant conscientization strategies adopted. This strategy would take the message to a vast number of people. "Puzha Parayum Katha Ariyaan" (To know the story the river will tell) was one of the significant campaigns done under the leadership of MRPC, where many people, NGOs, schools, and colleges situated on the banks of the Meenachil River became a part of the campaign. They have organized a walkathon from the origin of the river to the mouth of the river to reclaim the earlier route the people used before the established road network. This was a new experience for the people on the banks of the river and also for the people involved, as the routes they explored for the walkathon were unknown to many people living in the region.

After this campaign, the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC), who were seriously presenting the problems

faced by the river, felt that more stories related to the river and the cultural history of the river would convey the spirit of the river to the people. A collective named 'Kottayam Nattukoottam', (a native group of Kottayam) was identified which aims to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Kottayam district. The program 'Puzhayarivu' (Knowledge Regarding River) was a huge success in which Contributor, a historian in the Kottayam region, shared various stories and information regarding the Meenachil River and its basin, which he gathered from various sources and it was so enriching. Contributors were called to different places and to different programs organized by the various people's collectives with these stories and the local history of the river. Thus, the knowledge about the history of the river, the importance of the river in people's lives, and the role it played in the development of the region inspired others to know and love the river more. Thus, the conscientization of the community regarding the Meenachil River Basin and its management had created a significant impact on the people in a way that they started to involved in the discussions regarding the Meenachil River Basin, shared their experiences with the Meenachil River and thus widened the social base of MRPC on the region. An increase in the presence of people in the group gatherings was a noticeable change. Different individuals, local groups, and supporters have emerged in the region to work for the efficient management of the Meenachil River Basin. It was noted from an FGD that,

> The various campaigns in the region made the younger generation closer to the Meenachil river, which was the need of the hour

The growing knowledge of the river basin ecology empowered community members, instilled a sense of ownership that translated into more enthusiastic and sustained participation in conservation activities.

b) Confrontation

Strategies like Satyagraha, sit-ins, dharna, marches, and hunger strikes were also employed at various stages of the protest by the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC). The first activity of the MRPC was a protest against a dam at Adukkam. According to a Contributor (65 years old),

> The active members of those times in the MRPC had the background experience of working in 'Gandhi Yuvamandal' (a group of youth volunteers interested in social engagements). Therefore, their confrontation strategies are non-violent, like satyagraha, hunger strikes, and marches to office.

According to a Volunteer (76 years old) and a Biodiversity Management Committee member of Thalappalam Panchayat,

> The relay satyagraha, which the MRPC organized during the earlier phase of MRPC, was a memorable event still in my mind. It was an event in which, one after the other, the members of the MRPC followed fasting in front of the office of the authorities. I used to participate in all the activities of the council. Though the leadership has changed, the ideology they still possess is similar to that of the pioneers of the council. So, whenever necessary, I will ensure my presence in the program.

All these confrontation strategies enabled them to spread awareness regarding the malfunctioning of the practices in the Meenachil River Basin in managing the Meenachil River. in the different areas of the district. Though the activities were concentrated in the highlands of the Kottayam district, later, people from the mid and low regions of the Meenachil River Basin started to work together with the leaders of the MRPC.

c) Legal

Legal Strategies were employed to obtain court rulings in favour of the Meenachil River management in various causes. The members of the MRPC have raised various issues in the

Kerala High Court with respect to quarrying, mining, brickmaking (ill effects), pollution of rivers, and river encroachment. According to the Green Activist (68 years old) of MRPC,

> Earlier, being part of the Kidangoor Environment Protection Council (a group engaged in the environmental issues in the region), I had filed various cases with respect to the brick-making activity, pointing out its negative effects on the Meenachil River Basin and upon the people who reside in the region. Brickmaking is widespread in Kidangoor, where the Meenachil river flows. Residents of the area are suffering due to the smoke and odour from the brick kilns and the disturbance and diseases caused by it like cancer. When the High Court stayed the burning of furnaces without flues, the government changed the rule and made the court order irrelevant. Now the smoke emitted by the furnaces is becoming more harmful. The seeds of cancer are being sown along with the destruction of the Meenachil river bed. When the faces of evil multiply by the hundreds, I am unable to run into the defensive faces. Though court rulings are in favour of the needs that arose by the Council, none of them are implemented because of the apathy of the officials and the mafia behind.

Though Kerala Minor Mineral Concession Rules were passed in 1967, none of the mining agents took permits for mining clay for the brick from the river banks. When the issue of drinking water and other environmental problems arose, the person approached the court and gained a ruling in favour of the cause.' Later, various issues were raised in the High Court of Kerala as Writ Petitions like WP(C)No: 1534/2015, WP(C)No: 10480/2015, WP(C)No: 34711/2014.

It is found that the pioneers of the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC) have fought legally for the effective management of the Meenachil River Basin. These legal fights enabled the pioneers to focus on the legal aspects of the environmental law prevailing in the state. The knowledge has strengthened them in moving forward with the vision of effective management of the Meenachil River Basin.

d) Political

The core team members tried to inform and influence the political leadership of the region by submitting petitions inviting them to discussions concerning Meenachil River Basin management. Continuous efforts by the MRPC were able to make the leaders aware that an increased consciousness has been arousing in the region.

The social action measures have created knowledge and have cultivated a consciousness among the people in the region regarding the conditions of the Meenachil River Basin. Thus, it has resulted in the gradual increase in the participation of people in the activities of MRPC. The spirit of activism that has guided the core team spread throughout the region through the dissemination process. This has enabled an element of change in the region with respect to the number of activists and volunteers. The river protection collective, MRPC, received the Bhagirath Prayas Samman in recognition of its outstanding grassroots efforts. (Bhaduri, 2017b). Their commendable work involved identifying the challenges faced by the river basin, rallying the local community, and engaging political and state authorities to address the crucial issue of Meenachil river protection.

The in-depth examination of the resistance strategies employed in the region has enabled scholars to trace the trajectory through which the movement evolved and to identify the specific activities that enhanced public participation for a cause directly impacting the community. The way in which a community has disrupted the top-down approaches and the social alternatives they brought in through different strategies through non-violent

means is a new insight to study the local movements in different parts of Kerala. This analysis contributes significantly to documenting the history of a successful, localized struggle that might otherwise have remained overlooked, highlighting its broader sociological relevance and implications.

Participation as Resilience

The efforts of resistance initiated by the Meenachil River Protection Council (MRPC) have been sustained over the past three decades, with members and volunteers responding proactively whenever new challenges emerge. Throughout this period, the Council has consistently organized a range of programmes and mobilizations, collectively opposing state policies and development agendas perceived to be detrimental to the ecological well-being of the Meenachil River Basin. The resistance observed in the Meenachil River Protection Council can be situated within Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of conscientisation, which emphasizes the process through which marginalized communities develop a critical awareness of their socio-political and ecological realities. The initial mobilization against the dam served as a catalyst for conscientisation, enabling community members to move from passive acceptance of state-led developmental projects toward an active and critical engagement with issues of environmental justice and river conservation. This growing awareness transformed resistance into a participatory, learning-oriented process where knowledge of the river basin empowered collective action.

Concurrently, the strategies adopted by MRPC—ranging from awareness campaigns and mass mobilizations to legal interventions and writ petitions—resonate with Charles Tilly's (1978, 2008) notion of repertoires of contention. These strategies represent historically and culturally available modes of collective action through which communities articulate dissent and negotiate with institutional power. In the Kerala context, the

Council's shift from protest demonstrations to sustained legal advocacy illustrates the adaptive deployment of such repertoires in a democratic setting.

The leadership is hopeful as the Meenachil River Protection Council continues its journey. They have widened their engagement area from the Meenachil River management to the Citizen Science Network to address Climate Change issues, which is the need of the hour. The Council's work combines education, advocacy, and local action uniquely and creatively. It encourages local ownership, cooperation, and collaboration.

Conclusion

Small- and large-scale initiatives have brought together the natives of the Meenachil River Basin across multiple platforms of collective engagement. The Citizen Science Network of the MRPC, for instance, involves volunteers in systematically measuring and recording daily rainfall, thus democratizing scientific knowledge production. Similarly, initiatives such as CLAP (Climate Action Programme) for the Future—an alliance among schools and colleges for climate resilience—foster intergenerational awareness and preparedness. The Meenachil River Watch Groups (Kavalmadangal) serve as vigilance units monitoring the river basin, while campaigns such as the Meenachil River Rejuvenation movement and community-driven green auditing practices highlight the diverse forms of participatory engagement.

Together, these decentralized platforms illustrate how grassroots involvement is not merely a mode of protest but also a form of resilience-building, where communities strengthen their adaptive capacities through knowledge sharing, monitoring, and action. In the case of the Meenachil River, participation itself emerged as a form of resilience. What began as collective resistance to the proposed dam gradually evolved into sustained community engagement with broader ecological concerns such as drought, sand mining, and pollution. By sharing local knowledge, mobilizing collective action, and pursuing legal interventions, the

Meenachil River Protection Council transformed participation into an adaptive strategy that enabled the community to withstand ecological threats and institutional apathy. Thus, participation was not merely a means of resistance but a resilience-building process that embedded ecological stewardship within the social fabric of the region.

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Sikh Diaspora in Canada: Diasporic Nationalism, Transnational Identity and Politics of Conflict

Olivia Tresa A.A. *

Lekshmi S. Kaimal **

Abstract

Diasporas are the product of migration and being a universal phenomenon, their presence and importance cannot be ignored while analysing migration. This paper analyses the multifaceted dynamics of Sikh diaspora in Canada, by exploring the intricate relationship between migration, identity formation and conflicts. The historical context of the Sikh migration to Canada, along with repercussions of Khalistan movement in creating a collective sense of identity is analysed. The rise of increased diasporic nationalism over the years is analysed using the diasporic theory along with integrating Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined nations. The process of integration, assimilation, and accommodation of the immigrant ethnic community like Sikhs shed light into the complex nuances on how diasporic communities construct their identities in a host land. Incorporating historical, sociological, and political perspectives this paper offers insights on how transnational

* *Junior Research Fellow, Department of Sociology, CMS College Kottayam, Kerala, India | tresaolivia@gmail.com*

** *Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, CMS College Kottayam, Kerala, India | lekshmi@cmscollege.ac.in*

movements create diasporic identity along with shaping the relationship between host and home country.

Keywords: Sikh, identity, culture, diasporic nationalism, conflict

International migration is a global phenomenon fostering the development of diasporas, communities of individuals with a shared origin and living outside their ancestral homeland. These diasporas often maintain varying degrees of connection and engagement with their homeland, influencing it in both beneficial and challenging ways while also contributing significantly to international relations. Among the many diasporic groups across the globe, the Jewish and Sikh communities are unique as they are the only diasporas defined primarily by their religious identity. The migratory movement of Sikhs to Canada which started from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century resulted in formation of one of the largest migrant diasporas outside India, constituting around 2.1 percent of the country's population, with 770,000 people. It may also be noted that the percentage of Sikhs in Canada is equal to their proportion in India. As per the 2021 census 771,790 individuals in Canada identified as Sikhs, positioning Canada as home to the second-largest Sikh population globally, following India (Statistics Canada, 2021).

The Sikh migration to Canada can be examined under two phases. The colonial and post-colonial; in the earlier colonial phase Sikh migrants faced racial discrimination and issues in the foreign land since they were migrating from a country which was under colonial rule, but the trajectory changed since the independence as the identity of the migrants changed to citizens of an independent country (Judge, n.d.). Both the colonial and post-colonial migration resulted in the formation of migrants and diaspora respectively. The Canadian citizenship Act of 1947 and Immigration Act of 1952 relaxed racial barriers to immigration. Further the introduction of the point-based immigration system in 1967 marked another milestone in Sikh migration. The immigration policy of Canada

became more inclusive by prioritising skills, education and language proficiency over race and nationality. The political unrest during the partition in India during the same period also acted as a major push factor of migration. This collective social, economic and political scenario prompted a significant number of Sikhs to migrate to Canada. The period also witnessed the establishment of *Gurudwaras* (place of worship), cultural organisations, and increased political participation by the Sikh diaspora in Canadian society.

However, their integration into Canadian society was not easy during the earlier migration. As social exclusion of Sikhs was evident during the initial phases of migration, Sikhs were not allowed to vote, hold public office, or serve as elected representatives (Rajan et al., 2015). Even though Sikhs are an ethnic minority, over the last century they have evolved as one of the strongest diasporic groups which have significant influence in Canadian society with their immense economic and political participation. The diverse cultural traits of Sikh community in terms of traditions, religious practices, attires, food etc. makes them not only distinct but also confront challenges in preserving and maintaining their identity while living in a host society.

The migratory history of Canada reveals it as a multicultural society as the country hosted indigenous, French, British and other racial and ethnic groups. The concept of multiculturalism can be analysed and interpreted as an idea that multiple cultures arising out of various ethnic and racial groups can co-exist within a society. Canada was also hailed as the first country to pass national Multiculturalism Act in the year 1988 by recognising the differences in culture as one of the fundamental characteristics of Canadian society with the aim of reducing the racial and ethnic discrimination (Fleras, 2021). However as mentioned previously the creation and maintenance of cultural identity as a distinct group by the Sikh diaspora often creates issues with the native Canadians and other groups. The issue is further fuelled and escalated in the recent years when there has been an increasing solidarity and demand regarding

their own sovereign nation *Khalistan* (the land of the pure) in India.

The interplay between cultural and religious identity as well as increasing diasporic nationalism creates conflicts in a multicultural society like Canada further leading to tension between international relations with India. The Multicultural Act of Canada which aims to integrate all the citizens of the country by recognising their potential thereby actively taking part in social, cultural and political affairs often fails when confronted with these issues like diasporic nationalism (Shahed, 2019). The study is divided primarily into two sections; the first section deals with key elements of Sikh religion and cultural identity and the challenges they face in identity preservation. The second section deals with cultural tensions and conflict arising due to diasporic nationalism.

Significance of the Study

This study examines the experiences of the Sikh diaspora in Canada by analysing how their cultural, religious, and political expressions interact with the norms of a multicultural host society. Rather than focusing on the construction of identity, the research investigates how an already well-established Sikh identity is sustained, negotiated, and reinterpreted within the Canadian context. It explores the role of visible religious markers, collective memory, and transnational political movements such as the Khalistan advocacy in shaping the everyday experiences and public presence of the Sikh community.

The significance of this study lies in its timely exploration of how diasporic assertion can lead to both community solidarity and social tension. Through concepts like imagined communities and multicultural citizenship, the study offers a grounded sociological analysis of how the Sikh diaspora balances cultural preservation with civic integration. It highlights how expressions of ethnic and religious identity can, at times, challenge the boundaries of multicultural accommodation, especially when diasporic political activism

impacts bilateral relations between the home and host countries. In a global context where migration is reshaping social landscapes and diaspora groups are becoming increasingly vocal in both domestic and international spheres, this study contributes to understanding the complex dynamics of cultural assertion, integration, and policy implications in diverse societies like Canada.

Research Methodology

The study follows qualitative research methodology and uses descriptive research design to fulfil the objectives. Data was collected using secondary resources such as Journal articles, online databases like J store, Scopus, Taylor and Francis along with Census reports, Newspaper reports and academic books. Comprehensive and detailed analysis was carried out through literature review. The descriptive research design enabled detailed and nuanced understanding of the Sikh migration, identity, and conflict issues by giving an in-depth analysis of this social phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

The study makes use of diasporic theory as well as theory of imagined nation by Benedict Anderson. The Diaspora theory which developed in the twentieth century focuses on how people living away from their homeland maintain cultural, emotional, and political ties with their place of origin (Ali et al., 2024). These people are united by the common feeling of displacement due to migration that may have occurred due to a number of reasons. Reasons like economic issues, political instability, conflicts arising in homeland, environmental and refugee crisis encompasses or act as a push factor for diaspora formation across the world. The diaspora theory also focuses on how people away from their places settle and undergo cultural adaptation or integration in places of host land.

The theory of imagined community as given by Benedict Anderson also provides valuable insights for understanding the study. In his theory, he argues that nation is imagined as a community since it includes ‘deep and horizontal comradeship’

(Anderson, 1991) but the nature of this community is limited as they are externally bounded by other nations, at the same time, it is sovereign since it is historically based on the notion of acquiring internal and external freedom. Both the diasporic theory and the theory of imagined community provide theoretical frameworks for the analysis of evolution of Sikh diaspora in the society of Canada.

Objectives

- To examine the challenges faced by the Sikh diaspora in maintaining cultural and religious identity within the Canadian multicultural context.
- To understand the rise of diasporic nationalism within the Sikh community in Canada.

Findings of the Study

- **Contested Multiculturalism: Challenges of Cultural and Religious Identity in the Sikh Diaspora**

The Sikh diaspora in Canada offers a compelling case to examine Robin Cohen's framework of diasporic characteristics. He identified nine key elements that can be attributed to a diaspora beginning with the initial *dispersal* of Sikhs to Canada in the early 20th century and intensifying post-1947 shaped by colonial labour demands and later by political unrest, particularly the violence of 1984 in India, which prompted a wave of asylum-seeking migration under traumatic circumstances. *Expansion* followed as Sikh migration shifted from isolated labour migration to broader family reunification and professional mobility, firmly embedding the community in both urban and suburban Canadian landscapes. Despite integration, there remains a strong element of *retention*, with the memory of Punjab, its spiritual, cultural, and political heritage actively maintained through religious institutions, festivals, and transnational media. This is reinforced by an *idealization* of the homeland, often imagined not just as a geographic place but as a site of political justice and cultural purity, exemplified by the continued resonance of the Khalistan movement among sections of the diaspora. Although few seek *return* in a literal sense, the

homeland remains central to identity formation, with periodic visits and material investments maintaining symbolic ties.

The community's *distinctiveness* is visible in its sustained language use, religious adherence, and intergenerational solidarity, which have fostered a strong ethnic identity in a multicultural Canadian context. However, *apprehension* also marks this experience, as many Canadian Sikhs navigate racial profiling, due to visible markers like the turban, and political scrutiny, especially surrounding homeland politics. Yet, the diaspora also embodies *creativity*, with Sikhs achieving prominence in politics, business, and academia producing a model of diasporic success that simultaneously resists and reshapes dominant narratives. Underpinning all these is a strong sense of *solidarity*, as Canadian Sikhs have often mobilized resources and advocacy for co-ethnics globally, particularly in moments of crisis, reinforcing their place within a transnational Sikh imaginary.

The diasporic integration to a multicultural host society where different cultural and ethnic group coexists often results in challenges and conflicts. The existing native or indigenous communities may not be open to accept or accommodate immigrant cultures to their mainstream society. The international migration has led to the intercultural contact between the Sikh diaspora and the mainstream Canadian society resulting in transformative changes of culture at societal and community levels. Cultural assimilation and cultural integration is used interchangeably by contemporary Sociologists and Anthropologists to define and describe the process of acculturation (Grebosz-Haring & Gaul, 2023). Nancy Foner (1999), an Anthropologist has argued that the traditional concept of assimilation is not sufficient to analyse the immigrant experiences of cultural learning. She has given the idea of segmented assimilation, a type of adaptation of a minority culture with increased ethnic awareness amongst themselves without fully internalizing the new values and behaviours of host culture (Grebosz-Haring & Gaul, 2023). However, diasporic identity is not static. The Sikh community's religious

distinctiveness embodied through symbols such as the turban and the five K's continues to shape both their internal cohesion and external interactions. The five K's symbolises the Sikh ideals such as *Kesh, Kangha, Kachhera, Kara* and *Kirpan*. The importance of these religious symbols is manifested through their daily social life as it is highly important for identity maintenance of an ethnic minority community like Sikhs in a foreign land. Yet, this identity often results in tensions, particularly around religious visibility.

The turban and *Kirpan* (a ceremonial dagger worn by Sikhs), both central to Sikh religious identity, have frequently become flashpoints in Canada's multicultural framework, particularly in the context of legal and institutional accommodations. While the turban holds varied cultural significance within Indian traditions including its ceremonial use in Hindu weddings and succession rituals, it takes on a distinct religious and political symbolism within Sikhism, where it denotes honour, spiritual commitment, and resistance to assimilation (Judge, n.d.). The case of Baltej Singh in 1991 marked a watershed moment in the negotiation of religious identity within state institutions. Singh's initial exclusion from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police due to refusal to remove turban and cut his hair challenged the inclusivity of Canadian multiculturalism, despite the country's formal commitment under the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. His eventual legal victory not only secured his right to religious expression but also signalled a broader institutional shift, encouraging greater Sikh representation within the force.

The conflict between multicultural ideals and secular governance resurfaced in the year 2019 when Quebec's bill prohibited public servants like teachers and police officers from wearing religious symbols, even though the bill aims to ensure secularism in public spaces. It has been widely critiqued for affecting the religious sentiments of ethnic minorities. In the same year in Ottawa, Jagmeet Singh, leader of the third largest political party of Canada was asked to remove his turban to look more like a Canadian. This incident sparked outrage among the

Sikh community (Deccan Chronicle, 2019). The *Kirpan* case of 2001 in Quebec, Canada shows how religious symbols can become a source of debate in public spaces. A Sikh student Gurbaj Singh Multani of Ste-Catherine Labouré school, accidentally dropped his *Kirpan* while playing. This incident worried other parents about their children's safety, leading to the student's expulsion from school and starting a legal battle. In 2006, the Supreme Court of Canada made an important decision to support the student's right to wear the *Kirpan*, stating everyone has freedom of religion. However, they also set some rules like the *Kirpan* had to be kept sealed and secure, and could not be taken out in public places.

Another incident related to *Kirpan* happened in 2011, when two members of the World Sikh Organization of Canada, Balpreet Singh and Harminder Kaur, were not allowed to enter Quebec's national assembly because they were wearing *Kirpans*. A Quebec politician, Louise Beaudoin, made a telling statement: "Multiculturalism might be a Canadian value, but it's not a Quebec one." This showed that even with the Supreme Court's decision allowing *Kirpans* in public spaces, Quebec's political leaders had different views on the matter. These incidents highlight how Canada struggles to balance religious freedoms with public concerns, especially when different regions have different views on multiculturalism. While Canada's multiculturalism policy officially promotes the accommodation of ethnic cultures rather than assimilation, enabling Sikhs to actively maintain their cultural and traditional practices, the reality presents a more complex picture

These institutional challenges are compounded by intergenerational shifts as well. Younger Sikh Canadians often express ambivalence towards traditional symbols, navigating between inherited religious obligations and a desire for social acceptance. The intergenerational differences arising among Sikhs has also resulted in inter-racial and inter-ethnic marriages, even though these kinds of associations help in reducing the social distance and prejudice with the host society these marriages are highly prohibited by the Sikh religious authorities

(Rait,2005; Sandhu, 2016). The assimilation process of younger Sikh generation to Canadian mainstream society often results in multigenerational conflicts between the members of their families, since the first-generation immigrants often show unwillingness to integrate or accept the Canadian culture and norms. The younger generation tends to challenge the norms of traditionalism imposed on them by the elders resulting in group conflicts (Sandhu,2016). But over these years their increase in group solidarity helped the community in retaining these practices as opposed to discarding them.

- **Sikh Diasporic Nationalism in Canada**

Diasporic nationalism is a form of long-distance nationalism built on collective ethnic memory and stems from the sense of belonging to one's native land. This often involves activities of occasional mobilisation arising out of sociopolitical and religious issues connecting the native land (Schiller, 2005; Shahed, 2019). Within the Sikh diaspora, this form of nationalism has historically been anchored in the unresolved grievances surrounding events in post-independence India, particularly the demand for a sovereign Sikh state, Khalistan. This nationalism is not uniform but varies across generations, shaped by personal and collective histories, migration trajectories, and experiences in the host society as well as increased connectivity among the diaspora communities facilitated by news outlets, social media, Sikh TV channels etc(Cohen, 2023).

The early emergence of diasporic nationalism among Sikhs in Canada can be traced to the political unrest of the 1980s in India. The Khalistan movement, which gained momentum in Punjab during this period, called for an independent theocratic Sikh state. The Indian state's response through Operation Bluestar in 1984 and the subsequent assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi triggered intense emotional and political reactions among diaspora communities. These events catalysed a sense of betrayal and alienation from the Indian state and led to a rise in political activism abroad. In Canada, these

developments ignited protests and expressions of solidarity, resulting in temporary closure of the Indian consulate in Vancouver (Shahed, 2019). During this period, several separatist organizations such as the International Sikh Youth Federation, Khalistan Commando Force, and Babbar Khalsa International emerged within the diaspora. Notably, Babbar Khalsa International, founded by Canadian resident Talwinder Singh Parmar, was implicated in the 1985 Air India bombing that killed 329 people. Although such incidents brought global attention to Sikh militancy, it is crucial to recognize that the vast majority of Sikh Canadians rejected violent extremism and sought to express their political identity through peaceful means (Mohanka, 2005; Desanjh, 2016; Shahed, 2019).

As Schiller and others have noted, diasporic nationalism is often maintained through symbolic practices, memorialization, mobilization around ethnic causes, and continued engagement with homeland politics. In the Sikh context it is maintained through political advocacy for Sikh rights in India, and symbolic support for Khalistan, even if not pursued as an immediate political goal. The younger generation of Sikh diaspora in Canada tends to have a dual identity, one being Sikh and another being a Canadian. The marginalisation of the Sikh community and occasional differential treatment arising in the host society makes them resort more to their Sikh origin identity creating a sense of belonging and honour. In the absence of Khalistan, these diasporic community members scattered across tends to develop solidarity through collective mobilisation. Such ethno-religious identity solidifies transnational communities like Sikh diaspora (O'Connell et al.1988; Dusenberry 1999; Kaur 2014; Shahed 2019).

Recent years have witnessed a resurgence of tensions linked to diasporic nationalism, highlighting its continued political relevance. In February 2022, six Hindu temples in Toronto reportedly faced attacks by extremists. These tensions continued into September 2022 when a Toronto temple was vandalized with pro-Khalistan graffiti reading '*Khalistan Zindabad, Hindustan Murdabad* 'translated as long live

Khalistan, death to India. The pattern of religious site vandalism persisted into 2023, with the Gauri Shankar Mandir in Brampton, Ontario, being defaced on January 31st, followed by similar anti-India graffiti at a Ram temple in Mississauga on February17th (Tribune,2023). These incidents highlighted the growing boldness of Khalistan activities on Canadian soil. The situation took a dramatic turn in June 2023 with the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent Sikh separatist leader, outside a temple in Surrey, Vancouver. The relatively contained socio-political tensions surrounding these issues erupted into a full-blown diplomatic crisis when Canada announced in September 2023 that it had "credible allegations" linking Indian government agents to Nijjar's murder. These series of events mark a significant deterioration in India-Canada relations, transforming what began as isolated incidents of vandalism into a major international diplomatic standoff (Aljazeera, 2024).

Sikhs are differentiated from other ethnic groups and they are close to satisfying the definition of a nationality or nation due to higher internal sociopolitical cohesion within them. They have achieved this political significance as a group not only in their homeland but across borders as well (Brass, 1974). Hence the need for a territorialised homeland creates transnational movements in the diasporic communities creating tensions across nations. The above-mentioned incidents can be read in parallel with this. The issues of long distance or diasporic nationalism which has its historic roots from the early post-independence period still continue to taunt and create conflicts in both community and international levels. Hence efforts on conflict resolution from the grassroot level needs to be formulated by identifying the underlying issues of the immigrant Sikh community. Peace and anti-violence pacts should be formed between governments to end these incidents by ensuring peaceful coexistence among communities.

Analysis and Discussion

The identity construction of the Sikh diaspora in Canada is a multidimensional and dynamic process, shaped by their

navigation between two distinct socio-cultural worlds: the traditional Sikh ethos and the liberal-democratic Canadian milieu. This duality in lived experience exemplifies what Berger and Luckmann (1966) describe as the dialectic between individual biography and social structure. The Sikh community's day-to-day life is informed by both their inherited cultural practices (or 'stock of knowledge') and the norms, values, and expectations of Canadian society. The act of wearing a turban, for instance—a customary and religiously mandated practice in Sikhism—takes on a deeper performative and political meaning in the Canadian context, transforming into a symbol of cultural assertion and identity preservation in the face of secular norms and mainstream cultural expectations.

The cultural practices and understandings of Sikh constitute their 'stock of knowledge' which they have inherited at the same time being a member of Canadian society they are also subjected to Canadian social norms. This ultimately leads to the blend of different stocks of knowledge to make sense of their daily life. Within their own community, they share a deep understanding based on common religious practices and cultural values. However, when interacting with the broader Canadian society, they encounter gaps in mutual understanding. Since Sikhs as a strong ethnic community maintains close ties with their history, their diasporic experience is shaped by both time and space as well. The establishment of *Gurudwaras* in host societies like Canada is the creation of physical spaces which act as familiar cultural territory within Canada. These places play a crucial role in maintaining and disseminating their cultural knowledge and helps them to pass it on to future generations. One of the important challenges faced by Sikh community is in creating meaningful cultural exchange while maintaining their distinct identity in a society like Canada as it involves intersection of religious and political identities for belonging in a multicultural host society.

Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined community' sheds light into the construction of national identity among groups. A nation can be considered as a group or imagined

community when they share common ancestry, common dislike towards out-groups and are confined to bordered delimitation of state (Anderson, 1991). The Sikhs share a common cultural set of values as well as common ancestry creating increased bonding among its members (Milne, 2022). The heightened solidarity and cohesion within the Sikh community—partly rooted in collective trauma, such as the events of 1984 and the subsequent anti-Sikh riots—has led to the emergence of diasporic nationalism. This form of long-distance nationalism (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2001) allows diaspora members to maintain an emotional and political attachment to the homeland, often more intensely than those residing within it. The Khalistan movement serves as an exemplar of such diasporic nationalism, wherein exiled or migrant populations take up the cause of a sovereign Sikh state, often independent of the ground realities in Punjab.

The historical involvement of figures such as Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, an ex-finance minister and an immigrant to the United Kingdom placed an advertisement in *The New York Times* in 1971 advocating for Khalistan demonstrates how diasporic actors use international platforms to project political claims. The political prominence and economic success that segments of the Sikh diaspora have attained in Canada further amplify these expressions (Bolan, 2007; Shahed, 2019). Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, as advocated by scholars such as Will Kymlicka (1995), provides a normative framework for accommodating cultural diversity. Kymlicka argues for the recognition of minority rights and cultural citizenship, wherein cultural groups are not only tolerated but actively supported in preserving their identities. However, the Sikh experience complicates this ideal. While the community engages actively in economic and civic life—reflecting integration in material terms—they often resist full cultural assimilation. This form of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993) illustrates how immigrant communities may integrate into certain spheres like education and business while maintaining cultural distinctiveness in others.

This duality presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it enables the retention of cultural identity; on the other, it can lead to social stigma, especially when cultural symbols become associated with political extremism. Episodes of violence or controversial political expression are sometimes seized upon by the media and policymakers to question the community's loyalty or integration, contributing to the othering of Sikhs in the broader Canadian society.

Conclusion

From this study it is evident to infer that over the course of years, the Sikh community in Canada has undergone tremendous change. They have evolved to become one of the strongest economic and political ethnic groups. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the practice of segmented acculturation over integration has created trans nationalistic issues straining the relation between the countries of India and Canada. Even though intergenerational differences are slowly growing in the context of affiliation to the preservation of cultural elements, it is interesting to note that the concept of a non-territorial or imagined homeland often mobilises them irrespective of differences. The perspectives in the diasporic theory implying the notion that members of distinct ethnic communities do not integrate to the host society in terms of politically, economically and culturally, is different in case of Sikh diaspora. To a certain extent we can say that they have successfully integrated in the economic and political sphere but when it comes to the cultural integration, they maintain segmented assimilation in the host society because the process of complete assimilation can mean the end of the diaspora or its unique ethnic and distinct character (Faist, 2010). Through this study this was very well evident after analysing the various incidences involving the Sikh diaspora in Canadian society.

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Revisiting Environmental Justice: Exploring the Tragedy of the Commons and Broken Window Theory in Managing Common Resources

Aruna U. G.*

Abstract

This paper examines how environmental justice can guide the fair use of shared resources, drawing on the Tragedy of the Commons. It looks at how social and economic gaps shape access to resources. It also explores ways to address these imbalances. The paper analyses the principles of environmental justice introduced by Robert D. Bullard and the trajectories of the concept. This concept of environmental justice is connected with the Tragedy of the Commons (Hardin, 1968) and the Broken Windows Theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). The study suggests the interconnections between the concept of environmental justice and people's resources and their protection. The paper emphasizes the importance of being just in sustainability initiatives. The study argues for policies that include all communities in decisions about environmental protection and fairness. By combining examples and theory, this study shows how resource management must balance environmental goals with social fairness.

* *Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Government College Karunagappally, Kollam| arunadathan88@gmail.com*

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***Keywords**:* Tragedy of the Commons, Broken Window Theory, environmental justice, natural resources, sustainability

Justice—legal, social, and environmental—plays a vital role in shaping equitable societies. Environmental Justice is also an important fundamental right but is often neglected. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, n.d.), environmental justice aims to provide fair treatment of all people in environmental decision-making. It applies across all sections of society, irrespective of identity or location (Bullard, n.d.). Robert D. Bullard, often regarded as the father of environmental justice, emphasizes that it involves achieving justice for minorities, low-income groups, and communities of colour. When environmental justice is upheld, it directly supports the well-being and basic rights of disadvantaged groups.

Ensuring environmental justice indirectly ensures the dignity and the right to life of people in the marginalized communities (American Public Health Association, n.d.). This is because all types of environmental injustices directly affect marginalized people in the forms of landfills, garbage, petrochemicals, lead exposure, etc. (Bullard & Borgmann, 2007). Globally, the environmental risks directly impact under privileged communities. In many cases, environmental and social injustices overlap, especially in how marginalized communities are impacted, as seen in the disproportionate siting of polluting industries near low-income communities.

One of the most important aspects of environmental justice is distributive justice (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2025). Just as access to resources should be fair, so should the burden of environmental risks. Environmental justice is not the same everywhere due to factors like politics, class differences, technology gaps, and cultural challenges. The distribution of environmental risks is also unequal. Marginalised communities or under privileged communities experience greater environmental risks, whether from natural catastrophes or from human-made causes. (Dilay, Diduck, & Patel, 2020).

Through this paper, the researcher addresses the important topic of environmental justice, particularly in the context of resource usage. The principles of environmental justice initiate a large-scale responsible utilisation of resources. The Tragedy of the Commons and Broken Window theories address the management of resources and emphasize the importance of ensuring environmental justice. These theories are used in this paper to explore the scope of environmental justice and its associated risks.

Bullard and Borgmann (2007) provided the foundational idea of environmental justices and principles of it. In this study, they drawn how disproportionately the load of environmental protection and justice affect marginalised people in the society. They emphasised inequality in society also impacts the implementation of environmental protection which, in turn, ensures environmental justice. It is important to incorporate the participation of such socially excluded people to make environmental policies and practices. The study reiterated that sustainable environment and society can be achieved by ensuring equality and inclusivity.

Dilay, Diduck and Patel (2020) examined environmental justice in India by analysing the elements such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), community participation and public interest litigation. They argued that the marginalised people were excluded from the process of decision making related to environment and its protection. The study underlined the need to fortify people's participation in the grass root level and encouraging legal activism for ensuring accountability and inclusivity in environmental governance.

Rose (2020) explained the idea of commons as shared resources built by rules, laws and cooperation. She analysed that the community can manage and use common resources wisely without exploitation. The article viewed the situation in a global scenario such as issues of global warming, deforestation, climate change etc. Rose highlighted that institutions and laws had a

significant role in the governance of commons. She underlined the idea that commons have opportunities to collaborate rather than conflict.

Pandey and Pathak (2021) examined the Broken Window Theory and its relevance to the different aspects of society including human behaviour, management etc. The article suggested that how signs of deviation leads to severe dysfunctioning of the society. Their analysis highlighted the fact that early interventions to achieve order in society can be more effective to maintain social harmony and discipline. This can be achieved through organisational management and public policy for maintaining safer social environment. This article confirmed the fact that social environment played a vital role in human behaviour and governance.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative and non-empirical research design using conceptual analysis of the concept of environmental justice in the background of environmental resilience. The paper mainly focuses on the concept of Robert D. Bullard's environmental justice and major principles of environmental justice and its intersection with Garrett Hardin's 'Tragedy of the Commons' and Wilson and Kelling's 'Broken Window' theories. Scholarly sources were selected from peer-reviewed journals and books published between 1990 and 2000s from JSTOR, Google scholar, physical materials etc. Relevance to the specific concept i.e environment justice, connection to the current global environmental scenario and citation were the selection criteria of the articles. The analysis proceeded in three stages: 1) identifying and explaining the core principles of environmental justice, 2) analyzing and juxtaposing the conceptual framework of Tragedy of the Commons and Broken Window theory in the context of resource sharing. 3) analyzing and synthesizing the theories to address the issue of environmental degradation and justice in the context of environmental resilience. While the study provides conceptual

analysis, its scope is limited to available literature not include empirical data.

Principles of Environmental Justice

Seventeen key principles of environmental justice were established at the First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit, held in the United States in 1991 (Environmental Justice Network, 1991). Four of these principles are particularly relevant to this study:

- Third Principle – Sustainable Resource Use: Deals with the need for ethical, balanced, and responsible use of renewable resources and land to ensure a sustainable planet for all living beings.
- Fifth Principle – Right to Self-Determination: Affirms the fundamental right of all peoples to political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination.
- Sixth Principle – Accountability for Environmental Hazards: Principle 6 highlights the need to eliminate harmful substances and hold industries accountable for managing waste safely and transparently.
- Seventeenth Principle – Principle 17 advocates for mindful consumption, urging individuals to reduce waste and prioritize environmentally conscious lifestyles.

These principles highlight how responsible resource use is essential for achieving distributive environmental justice.

In this paper, the researcher draws on two theoretical frameworks to explore issues related to environmental justice: the Tragedy of the Commons and the Broken Windows Theory.

Environmental Justice and Tragedy of Commons

The unwise consumption of resources by individuals will lead to rapid resource depletion. This will result in environmental injustice. As Flanagan et al. (2016) note, environmental issues are closely linked to social justice concerns. People tend to exploit natural resources for their

immediate needs. While doing so, they may not consider the conservation of resources and its responsible use. This dynamic is well illustrated by the Tragedy of the Commons (Photo-Mark, n.d.). Overuse of both renewable and non-renewable resources can cause serious harm to the environment. The growing trend of consumerism encourages individuals to buy and consume more. Often, there is little consideration for the long-term replenishment of those resources.

The resources are not equally distributed globally. The resources are exploited by individuals and groups who have special privileges. They do this without considering the long-term sustainability of these resources. This causes a serious societal concern because the marginalized and under privileged population will be affected as they don't get adequate access to these resources for even their necessities. The environmental injustice and social injustice are connected as one can lead to the other.

This pattern of overuse appears at individual, group, and societal levels, often starting with small acts of neglect. The trigger for this phenomenon is often the action of the individuals due to lack of awareness. Their actions disregard the collective well-being of the people as they prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. These individuals repeat their action multiple times. Several such actions within a community will get amplified and will lead to collective neglect of shared resources. This neglect at the community level can extend to the society resulting in resource depletion and environmental degradation. To prevent degradation, individuals, communities, and governments all need to play a part in managing resources responsibly. To safeguard both the environment and to ensure the well-being of all members of society, the Tragedy of Commons should be addressed at three levels: individual, community/group, and societal.

Environmental Justice and Theory of Broken Window

The idea of Broken Window was introduced by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in a 1982

article titled *'Broken Windows."*The theory suggests that when there are visible signs of disorder such as broken window, abandoned building, and littering, it may cause further neglect and may lead to serious social problems. The idea implies that when we overlook minor issues or there is a lack of control over a situation, it could lead to severe problems in future (Kelling & Wilson, 1982).

The Broken Window Theory highlights how a "no one cares" attitude can affect the lawful functioning of society. Since the functioning of the society is impacted, there is a need to cultivate collective conscience among individuals so that individuals are responsible to the society. The Broken Window Theory is very much valid in the case of environmental resources. Natural resources are frequently overused, and their use is poorly regulated. The survival of human being and the entire ecosystem depends on the wise use of natural resources. However, their protection is often overlooked and undervalued.

Seen through the lens of the Broken Windows Theory, natural resources are likely to be exploited by powerful individuals or groups. This exploitation will ultimately lead to widespread environmental degradation. Deforestation, the contamination of air, water, and soil are the aftereffects of unchecked exploitation of natural resources (Iberdrola, n.d.). If such activities continue over time unchecked, it may accelerate the depletion of essential natural resources. Our ecosystem will become unstable and its sustainability will be affected. Protecting the natural resources is very much important and active steps are required for this to ensure equitable access for both present and future generations.

We are part of the environment and must coexist with it. However, individuals often consider themselves separate from their environment. Individuals, society, and government disregard natural resources and their conservation. In doing so, they neglect the principles of environmental justice and exploit/misuse natural resources. The important aspect is that

this neglect impacts the marginalized and common people more than others.

The Broken Windows framework reveals that, there should be proactive efforts to conserve natural resources. Once individuals, groups or governments, start overusing the natural resources, it may lead to exploitation. As fixing "broken windows" might prevent further damage, any overuse of natural resources or any attempt to overuse natural resources must be identified and fixed in the beginning itself. Environmental injustice damages ecological balance and results in social inequalities. From households to lawmakers, every stakeholder must actively contribute to sustainable resource use.

Conclusion

Using natural resources wisely requires a thoughtful approach to how they are distributed and accessed by different communities. People—from individuals to policy-makers—need to reflect on their consumption habits and consider how those habits affect others and the environment. This includes creating practical systems that take into account the actual needs of diverse groups rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all solution. When access to resources is more balanced, the pressure on ecosystems is reduced. Ensuring that environmental decisions do not disproportionately advantage or disadvantage specific groups is essential if we are to treat people fairly and protect the environment for the long term.

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Book Review

Shooting the Sun: Why Manipur Was Engulfed by Violence and the Government Remained Silent

Haksar, N. (2023). *Shooting the sun: Why Manipur was engulfed by violence and the government remained silent.* New Delhi, India: Speaking Tiger.

Nandita Haksar's book, *Shooting the Sun: Why Manipur Was Engulfed by Violence and the Government Remained Silent*, published in 2023 is a compelling and insightful exploration of the socio-political turmoil in Manipur. The book delves into the socio-political and historical factors that have led to the continuous violence in the state and the apathy of the government towards these tensions. The book analyses the complexities that have overwhelmed this erstwhileprincely state from the time it merged with the Union of India in 1949, to the present turmoil which peaked in May 2023. The book provides an in-depth analysis of Manipur's ongoing violence, exploring identity politics, government complicity, gendered violence, human rights violations, and the links between poverty, unemployment, and narcotics.

Nandita Haksar, the untiring human rights lawyer, social activist, campaigner and writer, adopts an interdisciplinary approach, combining historical analysis, sociological insights, and political theory to construct a comprehensive narrative of the issues in the state. The book is primarily based on the personal experiences of the author who

has worked on North-East India for over three decades. Besides, the author integrates personal observations, journalistic reports, government documents, archival records, and interviews with key stakeholders. Through meticulous research, she presents a compelling narrative of violence in Manipur and the government's alleged apathy. Her blend of legal rigour, ethnographic insights, and empathy, along with first-person testimonies and official sources, enhances both authenticity and credibility.

The book is organised in to six chapters. These chapters uncover the history of the state, different ethnic identities in the state, the issues of refugees, the reasons behind the recent conflicts, the politics of apathy, narco-politics and other issues. The book starts with a historical overview of Manipur, tracing its political trajectory from a princely state to its integration in to the Indian Union in 1949. The author highlights the resistance to this integration by different groups and the emergence of insurgency movements. This narrative establishes a context for the present-day violence, which is rooted in ethnic tensions, social inequalities, political marginalisation, and economic disparity.

The state of Manipur borders with the states of Nagaland to its north, Mizoram to its south, Assam to its west, and shares an international border with Myanmar to its east. Manipur is inhabited by three major ethnic groups, the Meiteis in the valley, the Nagas and the Kuki-chin tribes in the hills. Besides these, other communities from the other states of India have also settled in the state. The Meiteis are the largest ethnic group in the state, but they are not a homogenous group. There are some groups within the Meiteis who include among the Scheduled Castes, there are Meitei Muslims (Meitei Pangals), as well the Meiteis who did not convert to Hinduism who follow the ancient S*anamahi* religion. The Nagas are the second largest ethnic group in the state. The Kukis are a tribal community that has enjoyed the Scheduled Tribe status from the time of the British. Meiteis are non-tribals who are

demanding to be included in the list of Schedule Tribes for a long time. This demand of Meiteis is the key issue which led to the conflicts in the state.

The Meiteis argue that before the merger agreement of the Union of India in 1949, the British had designated the Meiteis as a 'tribe amongst tribes'. According to them, they were merely asking for a restoration of that status. On the other side, the tribals say that it was the Meiteis themselves who had refused to be included in the Scheduled Tribes post-Independence since they considered themselves superior to the tribals. However, the Meiteis point out that only some Hindu Meiteis refused ST status and that those practicing the '*Sanamahi*', the ancestral religion of Meiteis, were not asked.

The Meitei identity movements have led to the counter mobilization by the tribals, who have felt threatened by the dominant community's actions over the years. Meiteis argues that Kukis are infiltrators from Myanmar. However, the author argues that there is the objective fact which is undeniable, that the Kuki-Zo people living in Manipur are not foreigners, nor are they outsiders or infiltrators or encroachers- they are citizens of India. The growing identity mobilization of the Meiteis has brought fear in the minds of the minority tribals who are numerically insignificant and politically less dominant.

Identity movements have flourished in Northeast India, including Manipur, for decades. There has been violent clashes and conflicts too. The present violence broke out in May 2023. The book highlights identity politics as central to the conflict, rooted in the Indo-Myanmar borderland's history. Colonial policies, militarization, post-colonial assimilation, ethnic and religious movements, and nationalist claims have fuelled these struggles. Today, governments, the military, insurgents, corporations, drug cartels, and extremist groups vie for power, resulting in mass displacement, deepened distrust, and an escalating arms race among ethnic groups.

The author tries to understand various forces behind the conflicts and different narratives that the state, media and civil

society have put forth. The book makes an attempt to dissect these narratives. One of the widely propagated narratives was that the events were communal in nature, especially it was an attack over Christians. The book reiterates that, even though there are communal elements, many churches and Christian homes were destroyed, and there were conscious efforts to polarise the conflict on religious lines, issues of ethnicity seemed to have precedence over religion.

The conflicts over identity have a long history and are very complicated. Tribal identities in Manipur have tended to be fluid. There has been conflict within the Kuki-Zo group. There has been attempts to break away from the dominant tribe and claim a separate homeland. Similar processes were there among the Nagas too. The demand for a Kuki homeland is one of the most contentious issues in Manipur.

Narcoterrorism is considered as another reason for the violence. Being a state bordering Myanmar, which is considered as part of the Golden Triangle of drug trade, Manipur is a fertile land for poppy cultivation and trade. After the violence which began in May 2023, the Kukis were the target of the attacks as they were blamed for encouraging poppy cultivation. However, it is a fact that other groups in the state are also engaged in drug cultivation and trade. The ‘war on drugs’ by the government didn’t bring hopeful results, because of the alleged nexus between the mafia, politicians, officials and security forces.

The author argues that while identity politics and narcoterrorism have been widely discussed, the link between poverty and poppy cultivation is not properly analysed. Manipur is ranked the third poorest state in the country. There is the lack of effective policies and programs for the development of the state. Quoting various reports and studies, the author highlights the disparity between the hill and valley. Increasing poverty and lack of employment opportunities have led to thousands of youths from Manipur, especially from the

hill areas, to leave their villages and move to cities and towns in search of work.

The book analyses the apathy of the state and central governments in addressing the violence in the state. The major step taken by the government to curb the violence was imposing an internet ban. The centre had reportedly invoked Article 355 of the constitution but declined to act on the call for imposition of President's Rule. However, neither the state nor the centre officially confirmed the imposition of the Article in the state. On August 1, 2023, a bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, observed that the state machinery had completely failed.

The author quotes the allegation of several people that the violence was allowed to continue because the state government was complicit in the violences. The army and police were utter failure in controlling the situation. The police in fact, had fractured along ethnic lines. There were instances of clashes between the police and the central forces, especially the Assam Rifles. The Meiteis have resentment against Assam Rifles for historical reasons. Also, there were many incidents of human rights violation by the Assam Rifles in the past, allegedly been committed with relative impunity under AFSPA. Throughout the violence in Manipur in 2023, the *Meira Paibis*, a Meitei women's collective, have tried to block Assam Rifles and armed forces from carrying out their operation.

The author analyses various theories about the reason behind the conflict. While some argue that it is to consolidate the Meitei votes by the ruling BJP, others argue that the drug is the actual reason. Some believe that the violence against Kuki-Zo was really a means to get hold of the prime land in the valley and outside. Insurgents have played a significant role in fuelling unrest and contributing to the state's turmoil. In fact, there is no conflict in the state which is not related to insurgency. The demand for a Kuki homeland is a very contentious issue in Manipur and many believe, the root cause of the violence in 2023. The author critically analyses the

silence of mainstream Indian media on the plight of Manipur. The author contends that the media's neglect has contributed to the lack of national awareness and accountability. The book also sheds light on the role of civil society organizations, women's groups, and grassroots movements in resisting violence and advocating for justice. It also analyses the origin and development of various organisations like *Arambai Tenggol, Meitei Leepun,* and *Meira Paibis.*

The author reveals her anxiety over the fate of the people in Manipur and their future. She believes that justice is the only solution, and the first step to justice is to bring those who are guilty to account. The author reiterates that "unless every home destroyed is rebuilt, every vandalised church or other religious structures restored, livelihoods given back, and until the children can safely go back to school, the youth can return to colleges, doctors can work again without fear, there can be no peace. Borders can be safe only people across them can be friends and allies". The centre should enforce a legal regime to discriminate refugees and illegal migrants, and humanitarian approach should be adopted to the refugees. Strict action should be taken against the drug mafia. The Meiteis should realize the discrimination faced by the people in the hills. After all, effective policies and programmes should be implemented for the welfare of the downtrodden people in the state.

To conclude, Nandita Haksar's book, *Shooting the Sun: Why Manipur Was Engulfed by Violence and the Government Remained Silent* gives a detailed account of the ethnic issues existing in Manipur. The book uncovers various historical, political, social and economic issues behind the tension in the state. By focusing on the experiences and narratives of the Manipuri people, the book challenges dominant narratives and calls for a reimagining of democracy and justice in the country. By highlighting the intersection of ethnic identity, political marginalisation, and state violence, the book offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities

of the region. Its interdisciplinary approach and empathetic storytelling make it a valuable resource for sociologists, political scientists, and human rights scholars. It contributes to sociological literature by offering valuable insights in to the dynamics of power, resistance, and identity in a marginalised region. Haksar's analysis aligns with subaltern studies, as she foregrounds the voices of those excluded from mainstream narratives, like Manipuri women, activists, and ordinary citizens who bear the brunt of state violence. It also analyses various social movements in the state on various issues.

Abduraheem M. P.
Assistant Professor of Sociology,
Government KNM Arts & Science College
Kanjiramkulam, Thiruvananthapuram |
raheemponnad@gmail.com

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Book Review

Reflections on Resilience and Extremism: A Review of Michel Grossman's Chapter

Grossman, M. (2021). Resilience to violent extremism and terrorism: A multisystemic analysis. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *Multisystemic resilience: Adaptation and transformation in contexts of change* (pp. 293–317). Oxford University Press

Michele Grossman's chapter, "Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism: A Multisystemic Analysis", based on multisystemic resilience, a framework that explain the interaction between individual, social, and systemic factors that enable individuals and communities to adapt and transform in the face of threats. This chapter is included in Michael Unger's edited volume, "Multisystemic Resilience: Adaptation and Transformation in Contact of Change". It provides a subtle view of resilience by psychological, cultural, and structural dimensions. This reviewoffers an overview of the key concepts of the chapter within a sociological perspective.

Grossman mention the concept of multisystemic resilience as a dynamic process that includes individuals, communities, and broader systems (e.g., social, cultural political, economic). She critiques reductionist approaches that view resilience as entirely individual in nature, instead emphasizing the interconnections of influences at multiple levels. Grossman establishes a framework for radicalization that coordinates micro-level (individual), meso-level (community), and macro-level (institutional) systems. This

approach reflects the complexity of violent extremism which itself operates across interconnected systems. The evolution of counter-terrorism strategies from securitized and law enforcement centred to community focused approaches is illustrated in this chapter. She argues that stimulate social cohesion, inclusion and equality is crucial in preventing radicalization. Global case studies illustrate how to operationalise resilience in regions affected by Islamic radicalism and right-wing extremism. The importance of context-sensitive interventions is underscored by these examples. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the challenges in translating resilience frameworks into effective policies. Even so she critiques the tendency of some governments to conflate resilience with securitization which alienates the communities and impede efforts to build trust.

This chapter significantly enriches the sociological discourse surrounding violent extremism by framing resilience as a multisystemic phenomenon. The author argues that resilience is not just an individual trait, but a complex interconnection of different social systems. Her work agrees with Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, which extends to the field of combating violent extremism (CVE). She used the concept of social capital to explain how trust, identity, and civic participation contribute to community resilience. This framework has shaped analyses of resilience that include preparedness for crises, opposition to factors that undermine resilience, adjustment to meet challenges, and restoration from barriers to systemic actions. This perspective is associated with classical sociological theories, which emphasize the importance of social networks and the certainty in maintaining social order.

While I find Grossman’s chapter as valuable and comprehensive, the concept of resilience is extended broadly that is losing analytical focus. I also feel that when resilience is linked too closely with CVE agendas, there is a jeopardy of changing responsibility away from governments and institutions and placing it instead on communities. Which can obscure the structural inequalities that sustain extremism. Furthermore, the chapter’s

emphasis on community initiatives is important and it marginalize the broader political and economic forces that shape people's vulnerability to extremism.

Moreover, Grossman's critique of safe revival strategies contributes to sociological critiques regarding power and control. She demonstrates how overly protective approaches can increase marginalization which is the main driving force behind terrorism. Disciplinary boundaries are adhered to in Grossman's work based on public health, disaster recovery and educational models. This interdisciplinary approach enriches sociological discussions on resilience by incorporating diverse methodological frameworks.

Grossman's methodology reflects a synthesis of theoretical analysis and empirical case studies. This chapter integrates insights from various fields such as sociology, psychology, and political science to provide a comprehensive understanding of resilience in the context of violent extremism. She conducts a comprehensive review of the resilience literature is particularly focusing on the Norris et.al report on resilience and disaster readiness and others. This critical intervention allows for a subtle understanding of how resilience has been conceptualized and applied in different contexts, particularly in relation to community resilience and disaster recovery. The inclusion of case studies such as an examination of resilience to militant Islamist violent extremism in Denmark are included and theoretical discussions are given empirical depth. Based on her arguments on real-world examples, Grossman enhances the relevance and applicability of the chapter which in practice makes it easier for readers to grasp the complexities of recovery.

While the methodological discussion is well-articulated but the chapter is largely based on qualitative examples, which limits its empirical grounding. The analysis would have been strengthened by the inclusion of quantitative data or comparative statistics to lend much weight to the arguments. Furthermore, although the community and systemic perspectives are developed in detail, but the psychological dimensions of individual resilience

are only briefly addressed. Consequently, the methodology provides considerable breadth but lacks depth in certain areas.

This chapter is timely and relevant in the growing global focus on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). The insights presented have significant implications for policy and practice, especially in the areas of community engagement and resilience-building. This chapter emphasizes the importance of promoting community resilience and social cohesion as crucial for preventing extremism. Through suggesting foundational approaches that mention the social capital and active community participation. She critiques the limitations of top-down solutions, and her recommendations aligns with the current discussions about CVE strategies. Furthermore, her exploration of social capital and community resilience significantly resonate with contemporary challenges of social integration and cohesion. She provides a valuable framework for understanding how strengthening social ties while promoting unity within societies can reduce the risk of extremism in today's socio-political environment.

Moreover, this chapter acknowledges the inherent complexities and uncertainties addressing the capacity to confront violent extremism. This recognition reflects the shift of sociological scholarship to adaptive and flexible approaches to addressing social issues by moving beyond traditional paradigms. She emphasizes the dynamic and complex nature of resilience provide a thoughtful perspective on the issues related to violent extremism and make their contributions to enhance both theoretical and practical understandings in the field. This chapter used comprehensive approaches for understanding and addressing violent extremism with an emphasis on equality. Her study is highly recommended for those interested in resilience, social justice, and counterterrorism.

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Nedha Fazli M. K.
Research Scholar,
Dept of Sociology,
CMS College Kottayam (Autonomous) Kerala, |
nedhafazli@gmail.com

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Correspondence shall be made to:

Editor
Dr. Amrutha Rinu Abraham
E Mail: amrutharinu@cmscollege.ac.in
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