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Editorial

Prof Gitanjali Chawla & Dr Saumya Shukla

The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) was founded in 1948 as a global trade organisation with the objective to give a fair chance in trading prospects and international exchange to all member nations. GATT made way for the setting up of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 with an initial membership of 123 nations. The WTO lay down general rules pertaining to bilateral and multilateral trade in goods and services between members. The basic premise was that by eliminating all barriers (tariff and non-tariff) to trade, utilisation of world resources could be maximised while also protecting the environment. The intention was to provide greater market access to all member countries while safeguarding the interests of developing countries. Though trade in commodities and services was promoted, international mobility of labour was left completely outside the ambit of WTO. There was no general rule about where, how and if labour could migrate. Each country was allowed to have its own rules for immigration and emigration; no need for uniformity was felt here.

WTO has been working well for the last three decades, seen as the golden period of globalisation and growth. However, major economic and financial occurrences in big international economies like the USA overflowed into the rest of the world, greatly impacting the economies of all their trading partners. India has managed to limit the adverse impacts of such major international down-cycles mostly because of the large size of its domestic market and small size of its exports as a proportion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The latest international shock that the world was subjected to was when the United States, under President Donald Trump, announced unilateral tariff action effecting new, high tariff rates impacting nearly 90 countries, starting April 2025. The White House imposed 'Reciprocal Tariffs' on 60 countries that it designated as the 'worst offenders' in the sense that they were having high tariffs and non-tariff barriers like currency manipulation, subsidies, theft of intellectual property and dumping. The USA used the International

Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose reciprocal tariffs. This was said to have been aimed at promoting domestic manufacturing, to protect national security, and to substitute for Federal Income Taxes. Though the tariffs announced initially were very high, after a few rounds of negotiations separately with different countries, the levels were lowered.

Taxes on India were levied at the rate of 50%. However, the pharmaceutical industry, semiconductors, energy resources like crude oil and natural gas and critical minerals were exempted to safeguard US supply chains. The generic drugs sold by India, which constitute 50% of the US market, therefore escaped this tariff. The industries that were affected are gems and jewellery, leather and footwear, marine products, chemicals and auto components. The overall decline in GDP was expected to be around 0.2% to 0.5%, that is, a decline from an estimated 6.5% to 6%. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the textile and leather industry have become less competitive against rivals Bangladesh and Vietnam. The high tariffs also resulted in volatility in the stock market in general, except in the pharmaceutical and IT sectors.

The objective of the 'Make in India' initiative launched by the Government of India in September 2014 was to make India a global manufacturing hub by attracting investment, boosting skill development, fostering innovation, building world-class infrastructure and increasing the share of manufacturing in GDP. Jobs were to be created through supportive policies and infrastructure development programmes like 'Startup India' and 'Skill India', making India self-reliant and enhancing its economic growth. An attempt was made to attract domestic and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), support design, research and Intellectual Property Rights, develop a skilled workforce in accordance with industry needs, develop industrial corridors and smart cities, and upgrade existing infrastructure to facilitate a conducive environment for ease of doing business. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was expected to incentivise manufacturing in key sectors in the country, like the automotive and electronics sectors, to make India a competitive global player in manufacturing and boost our exports.

When the world was going through the COVID-19 pandemic, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, announced the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' on May 12, 2020. The objective of this campaign was to help India recover from the economic shock imposed by the pandemic by adopting the technique of 'self-reliance'. The idea was to rely on India's internal capabilities and resources to promote employment and bring about economic development by encouraging local industries and businesses.

It was intended to strengthen the country's infrastructure, build technology-driven systems and leverage India's demographic dividend to boost the economy by stimulating domestic demand and protecting it from external shocks. The government announced a package of Rupees 20 lakh crore, about 10% of GDP, to provide support to MSMEs, labourers, fishermen, animal herders, farmers and other vulnerable sections. The government also announced reforms and privatisation in sectors like space and atomic energy, mining and defence, and initiated amendments in the Companies Act in order to make compliance easier for Startups and small companies. This campaign was expected to make India a stronger player in global supply chains.

The successful implementation of the 'Make in India' and 'Skill India' initiatives for almost a decade, and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' for almost 5 years, has acted as an economic shield, enabling India to be prepared to endure the impacts of historical turning points and economic events of a global nature. India could withstand the far-reaching impacts of the high tariffs imposed by the USA in April 2025 as domestic manufacturing had already been strengthened and India was, to a large extent, on the path to self-reliance in key sectors like electronics, steel and pharmaceuticals.

By encouraging multinational corporations to set up production units in India, 'Make in India' played a crucial role in diversifying the supply chain and reducing dependence on imports of foreign goods. The PLI schemes encouraged domestic manufacturers to increase local production, especially in the key sectors. The 'Vocal for Local' campaign lowered dependence on imports, thus helping minimise the impact of international trade tensions. Support provided by the government to MSMEs helped them to tide over the hardships imposed by tariff wars. Sustained domestic demand and a growing local manufacturing sector helped arrest rising levels of unemployment. Market diversification and expanding trade with the UAE, Europe and other countries also contributed to lowering the negative impact of high US tariffs on our export sector. The right policy mix promoting economic self-reliance has been the biggest factor that has helped India to turn a potential threat (imposed by the USA tariff actions) into an opportunity for growth.

This issue of *Indian Journal of Social Enquiry* raises several pertinent issues which look back into the learnings from the past that help the society and economy develop within a sustainable framework. The opening article by Navendu Shekhar & Anannya Bohidar titled 'Pilgrimage and Temple Economy in Early Medieval Kashmir (c. 625-1012 CE)' examines the impact of pilgrimages and temples in the socioeconomic development of Jammu and Kashmir which has hitherto not been paid attention to as historiography has

focused its lens on temples as centrifugal forces largely in southern India. Deepak Raj too in his insightful article titled 'Time-expired Labourers in Indenture Labour Regime' offers a neo historical perspective on the identity and role of time-expired indenture labourers by looking into the hegemonic dynamics of coercion and autonomy within the indenture system.

Akankshya Pani & Sangit K. Ragi offer a comparative study of the policy frameworks and governance of healthcare and its effects in Kerala and Gujarat. Their research examines the diverging approaches adopted by the two states i.e the community led approach in Kerala vis-à-vis the market-driven, privatised healthcare regime in Gujarat. It argues for stronger regulatory frameworks and increased public-private partnerships for a more effective outcome. The next two articles are our offering for those interested in literature and popular culture. 'Performing Subjective Motherhood: An Analysis of Pop-Culture TV Series' by Deepanshi Gupta used the performative theory by Judith Butler to posit that designated roles in society are products of discourses, the focus here being on motherhood as it is inscribed and also challenged by an examination of select popular TV dramas. Tanishka, on the other hand, in 'Love in Strange Lands: Fetishising the Foreign Subject in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*' looks at interracial desire within the post-colonial discourse as rooted in fetish disguised as quest for love. This is highlighted through an indepth analysis of relationships in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*.

Akansha Rai & Nibedita Khuntia in a very pertinent article, 'Unravelling the Particulate Matter & Air Quality Index at Anand Vihar, Delhi: Trends, Exceedances and Meteorological Influences' undertake a quantitative analysis of particulate matters and AQI, along with meteorological parameters, over 6 years (2019-2024) at Anand Vihar, Delhi. Their findings are extremely relevant and pertinent given the increasing health hazards on account of rising AQI. The concluding article by Dilip Kumar titled, 'Nitish Kumar's Leadership in Bihar: Balancing Social Justice with Development-oriented Governance' offers a detailed analysis of Nitish Kumar's political trajectory and the impact it has had on the state of Bihar.

This issue like the previous ones covers a wide spectrum from the converging fields of economy, history, political science as well as literature. We acknowledge the efforts of our reviewers which has enhanced the quality of our publications and hope our readers continue to benefit from the wide array of articles published here and find food for thought for further research.

Pilgrimage and Temple Economy in Early Medieval Kashmir (c. 625-1012 CE)

Navendu Shekhar & Anannya Bohidar

Abstract

This paper looks into the significant role played by pilgrimages in the temple economy of Jammu and Kashmir. There have been many scholarly writings on the subject, but most of them deal with the temples in the southern part of India. The temples, pilgrimage of Jammu and Kashmir and their economic significance were never examined in the historiography. The reason cited for this may be the paucity of sources; the epigraphic records which are available for temples in southern India are not available for temples in Jammu and Kashmir. This study is an attempt to add to existing literature and the study relies on the Kalhana's *Rājataranginī*, regional histories and colonial records.

Keywords: *Temple Economy, Pilgrimage, Jammu and Kashmir, Kalhana's Rājataranginī*

Introduction

The recent effort by the Government of India to open up the Sharda Peeth Corridor is a step to revive the ancient pilgrimage which was long obstructed by cross-border terrorism. The important temples of Jammu and Kashmir such as Martanda Temple dedicated to Lord Sun, Avanatiswami Temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Avantishwara temple dedicated to Lord Shankara indicate the robust economic system of the empires that ruled Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India over a period of time.ⁱ

This system not only facilitated the accumulation of immense wealth but also

enabled the sustained patronage required for the conception, construction, and embellishment of such architecturally and iconographically significant religious structures. It stands as a testament to a bygone era when the temple economy would have yielded wealth for the expansion and maintenance of these temples and other public structures (Kalhana, trans. Stein, 1989, Book V, pp. 80–112), ultimately playing a crucial role in the lives of Kashmiris and pilgrims who travelled from distant regions. Temple economy refers to the role that religious institutions and practices play in the economic activities of a region. Unlike the temple economy of medieval South India, which has long been a focal point for scholars seeking to understand the intersection of religion, economy, and society, medieval temples in Kashmir have seldom received as much attention. Temples in Southern India have been extensively studied as pivotal institutions for the redistribution of economic resources, with scholars like Burton Stein and G. W. Spencer underscoring their role as agents of economic integration and resource management (Spencer, 1968; Stein, 1960; Stein, 1978). Donations and endowments to temples, as Anthropologists Arvind Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge have shown, facilitate the incorporation of corporate units such as families, castes, and sects into the broader temple networks, creating intricate systems of social and economic interdependence (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1976; Appadurai, 1981). The donations that were given to the temples also served as an instrument for socio-political empowerment. Scholars like Cynthia Talbot and Carol Breckenridge argue that the purpose of these donations were to negotiate power not only with the local communities but also with powerful polity and their areas of influence (Breckenridge, 1986; Talbot, 1991). Scholars like Hetitzman, Ludden and Nicholas Dirks emphasize how temple's role are important in economic and political integration and thus bringing cohesion and stability in the region (Dirks, 1976; Hietzman, 1987; Hietzman, 1991; Ludden, 1979). Fuller and Inden, on the other hand, have highlighted the cultural role played by the temples, arguing that it is a place where hierarchies and identities are expressed and negotiated (Fuller, 1988; Inden, 1985). Equally important contribution is made by Branfoot who investigates on the cultural aspect of the temples (Branfoot, 2008). In line with the above studies that highlight the multiple functions of temples in South India, this article underscores the economic significance of temples in Kashmir alongside their religious roles.

Situating the Study

At the outset, it is essential to acknowledge that, unlike the extensively documented temple economy of South India, the study of Kashmir's temple economy faces two significant challenges. First, unlike South India, which possesses a rich corpus of well-preserved epigraphic material, Kashmir suffers from a dearth of historical sources, such as copper plate inscriptions and other inscriptions critical for reconstructing temple economy history. This lack of material evidence complicates efforts to reconstruct the economic dimensions of pilgrimage and temple patronage in Kashmir. Therefore, writing the history of pilgrimage and its role in the temple economy of Kashmir necessitates a reliance on alternative sources, such as literary texts like Kalhana's *Rājataranginī*, archaeological findings, and the critical analysis of material culture, all of which require careful interpretation to fill these evidentiary gaps. Second, unlike the numerous well-preserved temples found elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent, Kashmiri temples are primarily known for stone structures dating to the eighth to tenth centuries, located within and around the Kashmir Valley. These stone edifices likely had timber predecessors, which have not survived due to the region's climatic conditions and the perishable nature of wood (Fergusson, 1910). The most prominent example of this architectural heritage is the Mārtanda Sun Temple at Martand, attributed to King Lalitāditya of the Kārkota dynasty (r. 724–761). This temple stands as a testament to the grandeur of early medieval Kashmiri temple architecture and the significance of royal patronage in shaping the region's sacred geography.

To understand a region's temple economy, we need to understand the interplay between religious activities, agriculture, and trade. Why does the temple economy become important? How does it inform us about other aspects of Kashmir's premodern socio-economic and cultural practices? Historians have established that the promotion of pilgrimage by the rulers and the priestly community emerges as a significant strategy to sustain the local economy amidst declining trade. This promotion can be seen as a strategic move to generate income and sustain the local economy. Pilgrimages attracted visitors from various regions, which in turn stimulated local businesses and supported the maintenance of religious institutions. Kalhana's *Rājataranginī* provides critical historical evidence of these efforts, highlighting the economic importance of religious

institutions and the dense network of sacred sites.

Historical Background

The trade in early medieval period in Kashmir faced disruption primarily because of the invasions from the north-western part by the Hunas and also because of the decline in the authority of the Kushans (Jamwal, 1996). The commercial linkages of Kashmir especially with the Afghanistan and Central Asia was on the verge of decline. Rulers like Lalitaditya tried to start alternative trade routes to keep the economy in a stable position. This was the period when temples became the nerve centres that kept the economy going. Temples and pilgrimages were revived to sustain the economy. Sites associated with Naga, Sakta and Saiva traditions were focused to encourage tirthas. These tirthas were along the old routes and at the confluence of rivers. Encouraging tirthas was a deliberate attempt to support the declining economy (Jamwal, 1996).

The priestly community in Kashmir played a pivotal role in transforming the region's sacred geography into a network of interconnected pilgrimage circuits. These circuits were designed to maximize both religious devotion and economic gain, incorporating sites dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, and Buddhist deities. Prominent examples include the Sharada Peeth pilgrimage, which drew devotees from across North India, and the sacred springs associated with Naga worship. The strategic location of these sites along trade routes ensured a steady flow of pilgrims, even as long-distance commerce declined. "The revenue of the great villages which he gave as endowments for each linga, has through the lapse of time become lost now-a-days to the Purohita-corporations (*parṣad*) (Kalhana, trans. Stein, 1989, Book II, v. 132)".

Rājatarangini informs us of the existence of the *purohita*-corporations, or *parṣad*, which played an essential role in the management of temple and pilgrimage resources. The term *parṣad* is central to this analysis, as it denotes the organised groups of priests (*Purohitas*) responsible for managing temples and pilgrimage sites (*tirthas*). These corporations, which existed at major pilgrimage centres, functioned as collective religious bodies that pooled the fees and *daksinās* (offerings) received from pilgrims (Kalhana, trans. Stein, 1989). This collective system ensured the equitable distribution of resources, with each family receiving its share according to a predetermined structure. Such an arrangement demonstrates the existence of a regulated economic system within

religious institutions, one that maintained a level of economic stability for the families involved.

The mention of state benefices in kind, such as rice, further underscores the role of these corporations as both religious and economic entities. These benefices, distributed according to the same rules of partnership, highlight the continued interaction between the state and religious bodies, suggesting that religious institutions were integrated into the broader political and economic framework of the region. Despite the loss of certain endowments, the *parṣad* corporations seem to have maintained a comfortable status during Kalhana's time, as evidenced by their continued political influence. The frequent references to the *parṣads*' involvement in political affairs during later reigns suggest that these corporations held considerable sway in both religious and secular matters. Efforts to promote Kashmiri pilgrimage sites extended beyond the region, as the priestly class cultivated connections with temples and religious communities in the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Narratives emphasizing the sanctity of Kashmiri tirthas, such as the *Papasudana Tirtha* mentioned in Kalhana's *Rājataranginī*, were disseminated to attract pilgrims from afar (Kalhana, trans. Stein, 1989, Book VII, vv. 190–193). These efforts served as an early form of cultural diplomacy, enhancing Kashmir's reputation as a sacred and prosperous region.

Sources & Methods

The historical study of Kashmir has long grappled with the paucity of epigraphic sources, a limitation noted by both colonial scholars and early historians (Stein, 1899). Unlike other regions of South Asia, where inscriptions on stone and copper plates provide critical data for reconstructing local topographies, administrative practices, and historical events, Kashmir's epigraphic record is sparse and fragmentary. Existing inscriptions, typically dated to relatively late periods, lack the depth and comprehensiveness seen elsewhere and offer little insight into the region's early historical geography.

In medieval Kashmir, temples and *matha*-s were not only central to religious and social life but also integral to the local economy, serving as nodes of resource distribution, labour organisation, and cultural production. Despite their importance, the study of temple economy in the region has received limited

scholarly attention, largely due to the paucity of source materials, particularly the absence of extensive epigraphic records, such as stone and copper plate inscriptions, which are abundant in other parts of South Asia. However, the textual tradition of Kashmir, especially the *śloka kathā* (narrative verse), provides a valuable resource for reconstructing the socio-economic dynamics of these religious institutions (Malhan, 2023).

The *śloka kathā*, exemplified by Kalhana's *Rājataranginī* and related texts, is a distinctive literary form within the broader Sanskrit cosmopolitan tradition (Malhan, 2023). This genre, deeply embedded in the cultural milieu of Kashmir, offers insights into the interplay between political authority, religious patronage, and economic practices. Composed in the royal courts of eleventh-century CE Kashmir, such texts reflect the period when temples had become firmly established as centres of worship and regional architectural styles evolved, characterised by the Kashmir school's unique sculptural and architectural forms.

The *Rājataranginī* underscores the abundant donative activities of monarchs, court elites, queens, and concubines, documenting their contributions to temple-building, endowments, and religious institutions. By situating these activities within the literary framework of *śloka kathā*, historians can decode the symbolic and practical dimensions of the temple economy. For instance, the portrayal of temples as both divine sanctuaries and royal palaces reveals the interdependence of political and religious authority. Kings were often depicted as stewards of the divine, their legitimacy reinforced through temple patronage, while temple deities were envisioned as sovereigns residing in opulent sanctuaries, complete with hierarchies and courtly rituals. This interconnectedness between political and religious spheres is further illuminated by the *kāvya* tradition, which offers a nuanced lens for understanding the spatial and social dynamics of temples (Malhan, 2023). As Daud Ali argues, the overlap between notions of religious and political lordship within *kāvya* reflects a homologous chain linking cosmic, political, and spiritual hierarchies. Such texts underscore how temples operated as spaces where political authority, devotional practices, and economic exchanges converged, actively shaping the socio-political realities of the region (Ali, 2006).

Moreover, the *śloka kathā* contextualises the integration of the temple economy

into broader cultural and economic networks. Through its poetic and often folkloric imagination, it situates the actions of Kashmiri patrons and institutions within both local and transregional contexts, linking the temples of Kashmir to the larger sacred landscape of the Indian subcontinent. This connection is particularly significant given the absence of conventional archival sources, as it allows for a reconstruction of how temple practices influenced and were influenced by the economic and cultural currents of the time.

By combining the *śloka-kathā* and the broader *kāvya* tradition with archaeological and material culture studies, scholars can gain a more holistic understanding of the temple economy in medieval Kashmir. This approach underscores the temples' roles not merely as places of worship but as dynamic centres of cultural, economic, and political activity, deeply enmeshed in the region's historical and social fabric. In this aspect Kalhana's *Rājataranginī* serves an important source which is not only important as it provides historical account of Kashmir but also helps us in understanding historical geography of the region (Stein, 1900). On the one hand we have scarcity of inscriptions and on the other hand we have enough literary evidence which makes historical enquiry quite distinctive. That is why it requires a multidisciplinary approach to deal with this region so that gaps in the sources can be addressed (Stein, 1899). While the paucity of inscriptions in Kashmir, particularly those predating Kalhana, limits the material evidence available to modern scholars, these categories underscore the varied nature of historical documentation that Kalhana had access to. The inscriptions he referenced likely offered insights into temple foundations and royal endowments, enriching his chronicle with a depth of detail absent in purely oral or literary traditions. This also reflects the broader historical practice in South Asia, where such records served not only administrative and commemorative purposes but also as instruments of political legitimacy and religious patronage.

George Bühler distinguishes four categories of records referenced by Kalhana in the *Rājataranginī*, providing a critical framework for understanding the historical documentation available in Kashmir during Kalhana's time (Stein, 1900). These categories are: *Pratisthāśāsana*, *Vastuśāsana*, *Praśastipatta*, and *Śāstra*. *Pratisthāśāsana*-s are inscriptions found on temples, monuments, and various buildings—both religious and secular—such as palaces, images, and funerary monuments (Stein, 1900). These inscriptions primarily commemorate

the dedication or establishment of temples and other structures. Although such inscriptions are common in other parts of South Asia, only a small number of examples have been discovered in Kashmir. Notable among these is a fragmentary inscription from the reign of Queen Diddā, housed in the Lahore Museum. Additional examples, albeit brief and undated, have been noted at sites like Khunmuh, Varāhamūla, Vijabrōr, and Mārtand. Kalhana likely utilised these records to gather details about the foundation and construction of temples, monasteries (*matha*-s), and Buddhist institutions (*vihāra*-s) referenced in his chronicle. *Vastuśāsana*-s are inscriptions often engraved on copper plates that document grants of land, allowances, or other resources. Such records were vital for preserving the details of royal and private endowments, particularly those made to temples or religious institutions. While no examples of this type of inscription have yet been definitively identified in Kashmir, textual evidence, including Kalhana's narrative, suggests their historical presence. For instance, the story of Ranga hints at the use of copper-plate inscriptions for recording land grants. *Praśastipatta*-s are laudatory inscriptions or tables celebrating the achievements of individuals or the significance of specific locations. Found occasionally in temples and public buildings, such inscriptions often served to elevate the social and religious status of the individuals or places they described. While this type of record is relatively rare in Kashmir, their existence elsewhere in South Asia provides a model for understanding how they might have been used to convey prestige and authority in Kalhana's historical context. And *śāstra*-s are manuscripts covering a wide range of scientific and literary disciplines. The colophons of these works often contain information about the authors, their patrons, and the period in which they were composed. In Kashmir, such colophons provide an invaluable source for reconstructing intellectual and cultural history, as they offer chronological and contextual data. Kalhana may have relied on such sources to supplement his historical narrative, particularly regarding the reigns of kings and their scholarly pursuits.

Bühler's classification provides a foundation for understanding the historiographical techniques employed by Kalhana and invites further exploration into the extent and nature of epigraphic and manuscript traditions in early medieval Kashmir.

Pilgrimage

“In that [country] which Keśava (*Viṣṇu*) and Īśāna (Śiva) adorn as Cakrabhṛt and Vijayeśa, as well as in other [forms], there is not a space as large as a grain of sesamum without a Tīrtha” (Kalhana, trans. Stein, 1989, Book I, v. 38). The above lines from Kalhana’s *Rājataranginī* provide critical historical evidence of the dense network of sacred sites in Kashmir. *Tīrtha-yātrā* or Pilgrimage is a deeply rooted practice in South Asian religious traditions, particularly within Hinduism, where it plays a central role in sustaining temple economies by establishing sacred sites as focal points of spiritual, social, and economic activity (Branfoot, 2008). Hindus often view specific locations as especially potent and accessible manifestations of divine power, forming a sacred geography that inspires journeys to mythologically significant sites. The multiplicity of deities, names, and forms in Hinduism creates an expansive network of pilgrimage destinations, which has evolved since the early centuries CE, shaped by mythic narratives from the *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata*, *Purānas*, and *Māhātmyas*. This network generates continuous pilgrim traffic, driving economic activity in temple towns and surrounding areas.

The study of Hindu pilgrimage is inherently multidisciplinary, combining textual analysis, ethnography, history, and religious studies. Texts in Sanskrit and regional languages like Hindi, Marathi, and Tamil detail the spiritual benefits of visiting sacred sites, such as the *punya* (merit) earned through specific rituals or offerings. Pilgrimage sustains a wide array of individuals and institutions, from pilgrims to religious specialists, including priests, gurus, and panda-s (pilgrim guides), who facilitate rituals, interpret texts, and mediate between pilgrims and deities.

Additionally, pilgrimage infrastructure, *dharmashalas* (guesthouses), *annadanas* (food distribution centres), and other charitable services further bolsters temple economies. Historical and contemporary studies of pilgrimage reveal how temples adapt to shifting social, religious, and political contexts. Large-scale festivals like the Kumbha Mela exemplify the symbiotic relationship between pilgrimage and governance, as political authorities manage infrastructure, derive revenue, and bolster legitimacy through their involvement. Ultimately, pilgrimage supports not only localised economic vitality but also broader socio-political structures within South Asia.

Several key themes illuminate the role of pilgrimage in the Hindu temple economy. First, landscapes of devotion underscore the sacred geography that guides Hindu pilgrimage, highlighting the transformative spiritual power of specific sites. Second, sacralized spaces emphasise the role of topography and temple architecture in shaping the pilgrim's experience, with spatial arrangements, sanctums, corridors, and ritual areas, designed to orchestrate movement and emotional engagement. Third, fruitful sites reveal how myths, rituals, and iconography imbue pilgrimage destinations with profound spiritual significance, encouraging offerings and donations that support temple economies. Finally, renovation and renewal reflect the ongoing processes of temple maintenance, expansion, and restoration, which preserve sanctity while adapting to contemporary demands, thereby sustaining the social and religious relevance of pilgrimage sites.

Temples, Tīrtha and Dana

The study of pilgrimage sites (*tīrthas*) provides a critical framework for reconstructing a region's historical geography. As both a spatial and cultural practice, pilgrimage inscribes landscapes with religious meaning, allowing scholars to trace historical continuities, shifts in sacred geographies, and the entanglements of myth, memory, and materiality. In Kashmir, Kalhana's *Rājataranginī* serves as an essential source for understanding the Valley's sacred landscapes and their historical transformations. Kalhana describes Kashmir as so densely mapped with *tīrthas* that "not a space as large as a grain of sesamum" remains without one.

The material remains found at the Avatiswami temple gives us an insight into the material, religious and the cultural practices of that period of time. Among these antiquities, the *mat*, a large earthen vessel used for grain storage, stands out due to its inscription in Śāradā script, an early alphabet used primarily in Kashmir.

Maha Śrī A(va)ntivarma ghata 1543, or the storage vessel (ghata)

(belonging to) the great and illustrious A(va)ntivarma.

Mahā śrī A(va)ntivarma ghata. 1546

The storage vessel of the great and illustrious A(va)ntivarma.

(serial number) 1546 (Kaul Deambi, 1977).

Such references to *ghata* in an inscriptional context suggest that these vessels were not merely utilitarian objects but were likely used in religious or ceremonial contexts, signaling their symbolic and ritual importance. The association of Avantivarma's name with a ritual object like a *ghata* suggests a specific act of religious endowment or donation. Such objects would not only have had a practical use within the ritual economy, possibly for storing consecrated water, grains, or oil used in ceremonies, but also, carried symbolic value, reinforcing the donor's spiritual merit and social prestige.

Temple Architecture

Kashmiri temples and pilgrimage sites were often located in clusters, forming significant religious landscapes (Ferguson, 1961). The Martand and Mambleshwar temples, along with the Ver Nag spring, each holding great importance in ancient Kashmir are situated within the Maraj division (Ferguson, 1961). According to Kalhana's *Rājataranginī*, King Lalitaditya built the Martand temple in the eighth century CE. He describes its towering stone walls and grand enclosure, noting that the nearby town was abundant with grapevines. However, recent excavations suggest that an even older temple existed at the site, with its foundation incorporated into Lalitaditya's structure. Scholars believe this earlier temple was constructed by King Ranaditya a few centuries prior.

Figure 1

Martanda / Sun temple, Kasmira; 700-750 CE



Source: AIIS Photo Archive

The Martand temple's location on the elevated *karewa* (alluvial plateau) above Anantnag offers breathtaking views of the Kashmir Valley and the distant Pir Panjal range. Just over a mile to the northwest, at Bhawan, sacred springs have served as a pilgrimage destination for centuries. These springs are linked to myths about the creation of the sun, reinforcing the temple's dedication to Vishnu in his solar incarnation as Martand (Ferguson, 1961).

The architectural remains at Mārtānda are generally attributed to the reign of Lalitāditya Muktāpīda, a celebrated ruler of the eighth century CE from the Kārkota dynasty of Kashmir. The Rājataranginī, the twelfth-century chronicle composed by Kalhana, provides explicit testimony regarding the temple's construction under Lalitāditya's patronage. In the section devoted to his reign, the text states: "That liberal [king] built the wonderful [shrine] of Mārtānda, with its massive walls of stone within a lofty enclosure (*prāsādāntar*)" (Kalhana, trans. Stein, 1989, Book IV). However, while Lalitāditya is credited with the construction of the grand structure that now stands in ruins, he was not the original founder of the sacred site. Rather, his temple was likely a reconstruction or an extensive renovation of an earlier sanctuary, possibly dating to the sixth century CE, which has since disappeared without a trace.

The Mārtānda temple was dedicated to Sūrya, the Sun god, who is specifically referred to as Mārtānda in the *Rājataranginī*. The temple complex is laid out in a rectangular plan, comprising a principal sanctum (*garbhagrha*) and a pillared hall or mandapa. Flanking the mandapa on its western end are two double shrines. The entire complex is enclosed within a vast courtyard, which is bordered by an impressive peristyle wall punctuated by eighty-four subsidiary shrines. These secondary shrines, originally housing images, most likely various manifestations of Sūrya—reinforce the temple's iconographic program, which emphasises Mārtānda as a cosmic and universal deity. Additional representations of the sun god were also placed around the temple's plinth, reinforcing the radiating presence of the central icon.

The peristyle columns, characterised by their distinctive fluted shafts, feature bases and capitals that evoke strong formal affinities with Syrio-Roman architectural traditions. The western side of the compound features the principal gateway, while significant secondary shrines are situated at the centre of each of the two lateral walls. The articulation of the architectural space, with

its axial symmetry and rhythmic colonnades, suggests a sophisticated interplay of spatial organisation and sculptural adornment, underscoring the temple's role as both a ritual space and a monumental expression of divine kingship.

Figure 2

Collonaded peristyle, Kasmira; Martanda / Sun temple; 700-750 CE



Source: AIIS Photo Archive

Figure 3

Main temple, Martand, Anantnag; Martand; Detail of exterior; 8th-14th century AD



Source: AIIS Photo Archive

Despite its grandeur, the Mārtānda temple was likely not a radical innovation in Kashmiri temple architecture. Rather, it appears to reflect and monumentalize an already established regional tradition, one that may have originally been rooted in wooden architecture. The persistence of specific architectural motifs and construction techniques across centuries suggests a deep-seated continuity in the architectural idiom of the region. Comparisons with the Parthian-period architectural forms at Taxila, particularly in terms of columnar orders, suggest that the underlying stylistic conventions had been present in the northwestern subcontinent since at least the first century CE. By the eighth century, these aesthetic and structural elements had become integral to Kashmir's built environment, shaping the visual language of its sacred spaces.

Cultural Patronage and the Confluence of Temple and Courtly Spaces in Pre-Modern Kashmir

Royal support for temple construction, literary production, and performance traditions facilitated a cultural milieu in which religious, aesthetic, and political concerns were inseparable. The *kāvya* tradition, far from being a passive record of these relationships, actively shaped how temples were perceived and experienced in pre-modern Kashmir (Malhan, 2023).

Cultural patronage in late eleventh-century Kashmir, as exemplified through *kāvya* literature and temple construction, reveals a sophisticated interplay between royal authority, religious devotion, and artistic expression. The patronage of temples by monarchs and elites, the representation of temples in *kāvya* narratives, and the performative and ritual dimensions of temple spaces all point to the deeply integrated nature of courtly and sacred life. By moving beyond rigid distinctions between the secular and the religious, scholars can better appreciate the ways in which *kāvya* literature functioned as both an artefact and an agent of cultural production in pre-modern South Asia.

Conclusion

To understand a region's temple economy, we need to understand the interplay between religious activities, agriculture, and trade. Why does the temple economy become important? How does it inform us about other aspects of Kashmir's socio-economic and cultural practices? Historians have established that the promotion of pilgrimage by the rulers and the priestly community

emerges as a significant strategy to sustain the local economy amidst declining trade. Existing research informs us that the rulers and the priestly community actively promoted pilgrimage in response to declining trade. This promotion can be seen as a strategic move to generate income and sustain the local economy. Pilgrimage in Kashmir played an important role in shaping cultural and economic dynamics. It was known for its multifaceted role; as economic centres, centres for bringing social change and instrument of political legitimacy. There was a clear interdependence between temporal authority and sacred authority. Temples as a centre and using pilgrimage as tool, it unified different sects with the Hinduism, i.e., shakta tradition, naga worship and shaiva traditions.

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i For dating of Kashmiri architecture, I am following Krishna Deva, Susan Huntington, and Adam Hardy. (Deva, 1988; Huntington, 1985; Brown, 1959).

B.K. Kaul Deambi notes that “It is also worthy of note that though Kalhana explicitly states in the *Rājataranginī* that he studied all types of inscriptions including the *Vastu-śāsanas* or the inscriptions recording grants of things chiefly of land for writing his chronicle, no copper-plate inscription recording the grant of land has come to light so far. The copper-plate inscriptions are regarded as mines of historical information which fact is amply demonstrated by the copper-plate inscriptions of Chamba which have provided a solid base for the reconstruction of the history of this ancient hill state from the 9th century to the last known ruler in an almost continuous strain. The absolute absence of copper-plate grants in Valley cannot but be severely felt by any student of Kashmir history.” (Kaul Deambi, 1977, p. 80)

Time-expired Labourers in Indenture Labour Regime

Deepak Raj

Abstract

This article examines the position of time-expired labourers within the indenture labour regime, challenging the tendency in existing scholarship to treat them either as indistinguishable from freshly indentured workers or as a simple transition towards free wage labour. Drawing on primary and secondary sources from Assam and overseas colonies, it argues that time-expired labourers constituted a distinct and unstable category whose relative mobility and bargaining power unsettled plantation regimes. The article shows how planters responded through legal extensions of contracts, land policy, indebtedness, surveillance, and recruitment strategies to reassert control. By foregrounding time-expired labourers as historical actors, the article rethinks the dynamics of coercion, autonomy, and control within the indenture system.

Keywords: *Time-expired labourers, Indenture, Plantation labour, Labour control, Colonial political economy*

Introduction

The indenture system emerged in the nineteenth century as a central mechanism through which colonial state organized and mobilized labour after the formal abolition of slavery (Northrup, 1995). Stretching across the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean, and the Pacific worlds, indenture supplied labour to plantations, mines, and infrastructure projects while simultaneously allowing the colonial state to claim moral distance from slavery through the language

of contract, consent, and freedom. As a result, indenture has generated a vast and sophisticated historiography that has debated its coercive character, its relationship to slavery, and the extent to which it represented a form of free or unfree labour. As research on indenture continues to evolve, scholars have increasingly pointed to the need to examine more closely how the system functioned in practice, particularly from the standpoint of labourers lived experiences (Varma, 2016).

One important yet underexplored aspect of this functioning concerns what happened after the expiry of the first indenture contract. In this study, time-expired labourers are defined as labourers who had completed their original indenture term but continued to live and work within plantation economies in various capacities. Much of the existing scholarship approaches contract expiry in one of two ways. Some studies implicitly treat the end of the first contract as the end point of analysis, folding time-expired labourers into the same analytical frame as freshly indentured workers and thereby producing a monolithic image of plantation labour operating under a uniform labour regime (Behal, 2014). Other studies treat contract expiry as a transitional moment, reading time-expired labourers as workers moving increasingly closer to ‘free’ wage labour. Problematizing both the strands, this article, using primary as well as secondary sources on Assam and various overseas colonies where the indentured migration happened, would attempt to understand whether there was any material difference between freshly indentured and time-expired labourers in plantation complex.

How distinct were time-expired labourers from freshly indentured ones?

Time-expired labourers constituted a qualitatively distinct category within plantation labour regimes. Unlike freshly indentured workers, in many instances they were no longer legally bound by penal contracts, possessed greater mobility, and had the potential to negotiate the terms of their labour. It was precisely this relative autonomy that made them both economically valuable and politically threatening to planters. While there was a continuous importation of freshly indentured labourers on plantation complex, the significance of time-expired labourers for plantation economy can be gauged from the fact that majority of labourers who went to Assam or to overseas colonies on indenture contract

were young. For instance, 86.6% of the emigrant who migrated from Calcutta to Fiji were in the age group of 10-30 and 68.7% between 20 and 30 (Gillion, 1962; Mohapatra, 1995). Hence, even after completing their original indenture, these labourers remained in their prime working age, making them an especially valuable labour force that planters sought to retain, re-bind, and discipline. In fact, planters, in overseas colonies, preferred the majority of Indians to undergo re-indenture, as the cost of replacing labourers whose contracts had expired with new arrivals from India was high (Gillion, 1962). For instance, in Fiji, the CSR Company, which was one of the largest employers of indentured labourers, provided employment to time-expired labourers only when they agreed to re-indenture themselves.

It was also understood that unindentured time-expired labourers, having greater mobility and control over their labour power, were a greater cause of instability on plantations and required to be brought under an indenture contract (Gillion, 1962). Labourers serving their first contract found it easy to desert the estate as they could easily find refuge among unindentured Indians in Fiji, who were often glad to have an extra hand to work on their fields (Gillion, 1962). The plantations were not 'self-contained units,' and despite the constant efforts of the planters to isolate the plantation from the neighboring regions, there were regular exchanges between the estate and the surrounding areas (Jayawardena, 1963). The permeability of plantation boundaries meant that time-expired labourers functioned as conduits through which alternative social relations, economic practices, and norms of autonomy entered the plantation space. This circulation profoundly unsettled planter strategies of isolation and discipline.

At times, individuals classified as 'free' (former indentured) labourers and residing outside the plantation complex faced entry restrictions onto the plantation. In Fiji, for instance, a sugar refining company went to the extent of prohibiting 'free' husbands from visiting their wives who were still under indenture and living on the plantation. In an effort to limit interactions with time-expired labourers residing outside the estate, the company discouraged marriages between indentured labourers and those who had completed their contracts. The company even required indentured labourers to seek permission before getting married (Lal, 1985). In Assam, tea labourers had to obtain the consent of the concerned managers before getting married, even after fifteen years of the abolition of the indenture system. Such regulations were not merely

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moral or administrative controls but were aimed at preventing the formation of social ties between indentured and time-expired labourers that could facilitate desertion, shelter, and alternative livelihood strategies. In mid-1940, Mr. Rege reported that outsiders were required to take permission before entering the premises of plantation and visiting labourer lines. The Royal Commission of Labour also noted that lines in which Assam tea labourers lived were not accessible to the public. Labourers living on the lines were also discouraged to go outside as chowkidars were posted on every possible outlet from the labourer-lines (Bose, 1954). These practices acquired renewed urgency with the growing presence of time-expired labourers in and around the plantations, whose mobility posed a constant challenge to managerial authority.

To counter the threat of time-expired labourers, planters relied on several provisions of the act, binding upon the contract, which provided windows to extend the time period of the original indenture contract. The period of absence from work as well as the term of imprisonment provided were added to the time period of the original contract. In 1877, the Government of India expressed objection over sections of laws providing such provision in case of Fiji (Gillion, 1962). The opposing voices from the state, even if it was occasional, implies that the practice of resorting back to these provisions to extend the original contract of labourers by planters were widespread.

There were several other mechanisms related to life and work conditions on plantation which helped planters tie down their labourers for a longer period. For instance, in Fiji, some larger plantations had “company stores” from where the labourers residing there could buy goods required for their survival. These stores were accused of over-charging which might have led to indebtedness among labourers and had deprived them of any savings whatsoever (Gillion, 1962). In Upper Assam, workers received their wages in the form of brass tokens, which they could either redeem weekly at the gardens or use to make purchases at a designated shop (Das, 1931). This practice helped planters in curbing the mobility of labourers, as they couldn’t spend money as they wished. They were obligated to buy basic necessities exclusively from a designated shop, which often charged them higher prices for goods.

In Assam, planters established a system of rice advance to trap labourers in a vicious cycle of indebtedness. Under the system rice was provided to labourers,

the cost of which was recorded on the garden register as an outstanding debt against them. However, since the system of payment was such that labourers received no cash wages; they were unable to settle these outstanding debts. Consequently, the debt burden on the labourers continued to grow with each provision of rice and other necessities. This tactic effectively bound the labourers to the estate, with many remaining in debt from the time they enter the garden until the end. In several instances, labourers faced challenges obtaining discharge certificates from planters due to outstanding debts owed to the estates (Das, 1931). Cotton noted:

Advances were often illegally debited against labourers on account of subsistence allowance or sick diet, as well as on account of reward paid for the arrest of deserters, and coolies were thus bound hand and foot to the garden service (1911, p. 266).

These mechanisms were especially significant in the case of time-expired labourers, as they compensated for the weakening of legal coercion by producing economic dependence and practical immobility. At the end of the original indenture contract, labourers often found themselves with no savings. They were too poor to afford to go back home on their own (Das, 1931). The absence of repatriation clause in Assam ensured that their probability of returning to their villages remained miniscule.

The provision of granting a plot of land to labourers upon the expiry of their original contract was also used to acquire a greater control over time-expired labourers. The proposal to allocate land to time-expired labourers for permanent settlement in the colonies was initially met with strong opposition from planters. They were concerned that providing land to these labourers would disrupt the supply of labour to the plantations (Mohapatra, 1995). However, the planters only reconsidered their position when the plantation economy faced a severe crisis. During this crisis, there was a significant movement of labour away from the plantations. In Trinidad, by 1901, 64,000 Indians were living outside the plantations, compared to 16,000 residents on the plantations. Similarly, in British Guiana, the Indian population outside plantations increased from 17,000 to 57,000 between 1881 and 1901 (Mohapatra, 1995). When land was granted, precautions were taken to ensure that the size of the plots was such that the quantity assigned to each man or family would not exclusively occupy their

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time (Mohapatra, 1995). This was done to strike a balance between providing settlers with the means to diversify their subsistence base and ensuring that they could still contribute to the labour force if needed, playing a role as a 'reserve labour force' at the same time. In this way, land grants operated not as a pathway to independence but as a technology of labour retention, producing a semi-autonomous peasantry that could be drawn back into plantation work when required. Mohapatra argues that despite stagnated cane acreage and sugar production in the phase of crisis (1884-1917) the number of new labourers who were brought on indenture remained almost equal to the number of labourers imported during the period of growth (1840s-1880). The 80,000 acres of sugar cane cultivation in British Guiana in 1890 reduced by one fourth to 67,000 acres in 1900 (Mohapatra, 2006). The period of crisis saw reduced wages and irregular jobs as unemployment was rampant. The problem intensified greatly because despite the presence of 'free' time-expired labourers in abundance, planters continued on importing new indentured labourers on the same pace. The continued importation of indentured labourers in this context functioned as a deliberate strategy to undercut the bargaining power of time-expired workers and to prevent the consolidation of a locally rooted, autonomous labour force. During the period of crisis, the nature of labour regime of plantation in Guiana underwent change as the focus shifted on using locally reproduced labour but in order to curb the prospective autonomy and bargaining power of time-expired labourers who were settling down in greater number in the Caribbean and to keep their control over labour market intact, planters felt the need to continue importing new indentured labourers on the same pace which could have acted as a cushion and could be used to counter the increased bargaining power of time-expired labourers.

However, the practice of providing land to time-expired labourers was dependent on the land availability in different colonies. In Trinidad, for example, the system of granting small parcels of land instead of return passages to industrial immigrants was successfully implemented because the island had a considerable expanse of unoccupied and unclaimed land suitable for such allocations. In contrast, Fiji faced challenges in implementing a similar system due to the Crown's lack of available land for settling Indians. Unlike Trinidad, Fiji was already a settled country with every acre of land having a known owner. Therefore, in Fiji, the Crown had to purchase or lease land, similar to private

individuals, as there was no unclaimed land readily available for the settlement of time-expired labourers (Gillion, 1962). In Assam, ex-indentured and time-expired labourers acquired land through various means. Lands obtained from planters often had the condition of providing labour to those planters. On the other hand, many times, labourers also received land from the government. This meant that they were no longer required to tie themselves down to any planter. As a result of this factor, Assam planters witnessed an approximate seven percent reduction in their overall workforce (Mukherjee, 1945).

The level of influence exerted by plantation owners over time-expired and ex-indentured labourers residing outside the plantations varied across different colonies. In the Caribbean Islands, these labourers often sought to distance themselves from the planters' authority by relocating away from the plantations, aiming to escape the restrictive control imposed by the planters. Despite this move, many continued to maintain ties with the plantations even after settling elsewhere, functioning as a reserve labour force (Mohapatra, 1995). However, the degree of control wielded by planters over such labourers notably diminished in the Caribbean. Conversely, in Mauritius, a peasant farmer, known as a *morcellement*, found themselves subject to a level of control similar to that experienced by labourers confined within the labourer lines on the estates. This was evident in the fact that the peasant farmer could only deliver their cane to the nearest factory, highlighting a significant limitation on their autonomy. Planters in Mauritius exercised monopolistic control, compelling small farmers to accept the rates determined by the nearest factory for their cane, thereby illustrating the extent of planters' dominance in this context (Tinker, 1974).

Planters' bid to tie down labourers faced challenges in all those destinations where the indenture contract also provided repatriation clause with right to free return passage after a certain number of years. Indians migrated to overseas colonies with the intention of returning back to India. And when they could not procure lands in the colonies, they invariably returned back to India (Gillion, 1962). They considered the provision for the return passage to be their primary, if not sole, effective safeguard against the mistreatment. This was because if the emigrants were dissatisfied with life in the colonies, they had the option to return to India. For many immigrants, the free return passage functioned almost like insurance. The right to repatriation thus became a crucial resource through which time-expired labourers could negotiate, resist, or exit oppressive

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plantation conditions. The flexibility of being able to use the return passage at any time discouraged immigrants from viewing Fiji as their permanent home (Gillion, 1962). However, as the plantation economy faced a downturn and planters increasingly depended on time-expired labourers, adjustments were made to the repatriation provisions, and the right to a return passage was curtailed. For instance, in the Caribbean, it was determined that immigrants should contribute a portion of the cost for their return passage. Similar deliberations arose in Fiji around 1900, reflecting the desire to settle time-expired labourers permanently and to prevent them from asserting autonomy through the repatriation clauses.

The time-expired labourers in several cases asserted their 'free' legal status and enjoyed certain autonomy and bargaining power over their labour. In Fiji, these labourers were not ready to give up their 'newly-acquired freedom' by re-engaging themselves under another indenture contract. In 1893, only 208 labourers decided to renew their contract after the expiry of their original contract. In 1912, this number was 515. Despite inducements such as bonus and a plot of land, time-expired labourers were reluctant to renew their contract in Fiji (Gillion, 1962). This reluctance underscores the extent to which time-expired labourers valued their hard-won legal and social autonomy, even in conditions of economic insecurity. Overall, persuading labourers whose indenture contracts had ended or were about to expire to renew their contracts was not an easy affair. It was particularly more difficult in the case of better-disposed labourers. Planters argued that a growing sense of indispensability of their services, along with their separation from native society and their longing to return to their own country, made the renewal of agreements a "time of suffering" for the planters. Upon re-engagement, time-expired labourers were given three to four days of holiday (Barker, 1884).

The opportunity of alternative employment for time-expired labourers differed in different colonies. For instance, such labourers in Fiji could either re-indenture (until 1912) or could work for a planter as a free labourer. S/he had the option to work under the Master & Servants Ordinance (Gillion, 1962). Similar to the Fijians, unindentured Indians typically engaged in shorter-term work arrangements. They commonly worked as casual labourers or cultivated their own land for most of the year. As free labourers, they had the potential to earn nearly double the amount compared to their earnings during the

indenture period. Such differential earnings further accentuated the distinction between indentured and time-expired labour and heightened planter anxieties regarding labour retention. However, during economic downturns, such as depressions, there could be significant unemployment among these labourers. After the expiration of their indenture terms, many Indian immigrants chose to remain on the land and became independent farmers. They lived alongside indigenous Fijians in communal villages (Gillion, 1962). In Mauritius, day labourers, considered “free” labourers, and peasant farmers residing in hamlets on the outskirts of plantations became prominent as the labour force living upon the estates diminished. During times of crisis, this arrangement became beneficial for sugar companies. With a declining workforce residing directly on the estates, sugar companies began leasing portions of their land to tenant farmers. These farmers, in turn, cultivated their own sugar cane and delivered it to the factory for processing (Tinker, 1974). Jayawardena highlights the inter-plantation mobility among time-expired labourers as these labourers migrated from one plantation to another ‘in search of work and more congenial conditions’ (Jayawardena, 1963).

In Fiji, indentured immigrants did not universally reside on the plantations where they were employed. Some opted to lease a parcel of land and lived in modest accommodations like tin sheds, or they shared living spaces with unindentured Indians. Conversely, the housing lines on plantations were occasionally occupied by unindentured labourers who took advantage of the rent-free accommodations or sought proximity to immigrant women (Gillion, 1962). The estate management exercised a general control over all labourers residing on the plantation, irrespective of whether they were employed on plantation or elsewhere. In his anthropological study of plantation of British Guiana, Jayawardena contends that every adult living on the plantation could be compelled to work for the plantation, given that the management retained the authority to deny accommodation to those who earned their livelihood elsewhere (Jayawardena, 1963). In the context of Assam tea plantations, Das argues that the question of employing labour also involved their residence on the premises. This ensured the availability of women and child labour and had an impact on wage rates and the mental attitudes of all workers. In 1928, 79 percent of the total labour force employed on plantations were residing on its premises (Das, 1931).

Time-expired Labourers in Indenture Labour Regime

Jayawardena's anthropological study explores division among plantation population on the line of 'occupational-cum-social' status hierarchy. He throws light on the existence of vertical divisions, even though limited, among working population on plantations in the British Guiana. There were European managerial groups at the top; clerk, foremen, drivers (foremen of field labour gangs) at the middle; and field workers, artisans and mechanics at the bottom of the status hierarchy. And since the number of individuals engaged in the middle strata were very few, the prospect of upward social mobility was very limited (Jayawardena, 1963). Within certain larger plantations, the intermediate social stratum also comprised individuals such as small business men, shopkeepers, contractors, junior civil servants, shop assistants, teachers, skilled artisans, and farmers with holdings of five acres or more (Jayawardena, 1963). Individuals whom the management deemed trustworthy were granted lucrative positions, privileges, and favours (Jayawardena, 1963). Foremen, overseers of the factory, and drivers, overseers of the fields, were selected from the ranks of the plantation labourers. Likewise, in Assam, garden-sirdars typically belonged to two main categories: they were either the most senior and reliable workers within the plantation, or they were individuals who had successfully recruited and brought up a group of labourers from their native region (Barker, 1884). Jayawardena argues that there was a 'precise sense of rank' on the plantation. Drivers and foremen wore a slouch hat which was a badge of status (Jayawardena, 1963). Clerks and other middle-class men on the plantation tried to keep a distance from labourers. Labourers accused them of 'betraying their origin' (Jayawardena, 1963). In Assam, sirdars enjoyed some authority over men and women working on the estate. He, in a way, became the part of the management. "A sirdar's mode of management was parading up and down between the rows of tea bushes, armed with a small stick and the dignity that his position of authority had given him" (Barker, 1884, p. 135). These positions of upward mobility were very important from planters' point of view to have a control over the estate particularly in the view of increasing number of time-expired labourers. Such positions of higher hierarchy provided them space to accommodate the enhanced autonomy of such time-expired labourers who were in position to assert their autonomy and bargaining power. It also kept large number of labourers interested who found sirdari-ship a potential avenue to get upward in the plantation hierarchy. That was why, planters in

Assam preferred direct management of labourers unlike in the tea districts in Bengal, Madras & Ceylon (Das, 1931).

Conclusion

This article has shown that time-expired labourers were neither simply an extension of freshly indentured workers nor a linear step towards free wage labour, but a distinct and unstable category that unsettled plantation regimes. Their greater mobility, bargaining power, and alternative livelihood options forced planters to devise new strategies of control through land policy, indebtedness, recruitment practices, and everyday surveillance. Yet, despite their structural significance, time-expired labourers have remained marginal in the historiography of indenture, either absorbed into a homogeneous labour category or treated as a transitional residue. Recognizing them as historical actors in their own right is essential to understanding how plantation labour regimes were continually reworked in response to labourers' assertions of autonomy.

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A Comparative Analysis of Healthcare Governance in Kerala and Gujarat: Public- Private Partnerships, Policy Frameworks, and Health Outcomes

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Abstract

This paper is a comparative study into the governance of healthcare in Kerala and Gujarat. The two Indian states vary in their economic and social aspects, which also reflects in the different public health systems they manage. The present research uses an interdisciplinary method to analyze the public-private partnerships (PPPs), policy frameworks, governance structures, and, last but not least, the effects of these partnerships on healthcare outcomes. The community-led health initiatives in Kerala stand in stark contrast with the market-driven, privatized healthcare expansion approach adopted in Gujarat. The research utilizes evidence from 2008 to 2025 to demonstrate the influence of governance quality, the regulation of public-private partnerships (PPPs), and participatory policy frameworks on maternal health, life expectancy, infant mortality, and equitable access. The proposed work exhibits that regulatory frameworks should be stronger, that public-private partnerships (PPPs) that focus on fairness should be better, and that Kerala's decentralized approaches should be added to Gujarat's policy framework.

Keywords: *Public-private partnerships, Healthcare governance, Policy frameworks, Governance structures, Regulatory frameworks*

Introduction: Ways to Manage Healthcare in India

India's healthcare governance has gone through a lot of changes over time. The colonial period saw the establishment of public health institutions which were mostly meant for the administrative and military needs rather than the health needs of the general population. The health care planning in the first few decades after independence was based on an ambitious state-led welfare vision, with the public sector holding nearly 92 per cent of all hospitals. But eventually, the public system got weakened because of chronic underfunding, administrative constraints, and what has been termed as "policy drift," thus creating an opening for the rapid emergence of private providers (Bali & Ramesh, 2015). This change led to the coming into being of a "mixed health economy," where private sector became dominant and controlled more than 90 per cent of healthcare delivery. Governance has made another change in recent years to a model in which the state plays the role of a "strategic purchaser" of services increasingly, the financing of care through private and public providers alike being done with the help of large-scale insurance schemes such as the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) (Bali & Ramesh, 2021).

These sweeping changes in healthcare governance on the state and federal levels have not led to the same consequences in all states. State administrations have very different policies regarding health care despite having the same policy framework, mainly because of the differences in the governing political ideologies, the prioritization of socio-economic development, and the manner of economic governance. Kerala and Gujarat, in fact, are two states in the same national system, yet they are perfect examples of this divergence. The healthcare paths of both states have been significantly influenced by diverse political cultures, different investment strategies, and varying degrees of interaction with the private sector, which, in turn, have led to considerably different institutional outcomes and modes of service delivery.

This study undertakes a detailed examination of the healthcare governance structures of both states, focusing on their public-private partnership arrangements, policy orientations, health outcomes, and the broader social and economic implications of their healthcare models. The Kerala model is defined by a human development approach that prioritizes social well-being through proactive state intervention and the successful integration of local

decentralization via the three-tiered Panchayat system (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). This participatory framework relies on community-led projects like Kudumbashree to mobilize volunteers and ensure inclusive social development, fostering what scholars call a “high energy” participatory democracy (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). This framework is reinforced by “Mission Aardram,” a policy launched in 2017 to transform Public Health Centers (PHCs) into Family Health Centers that prioritize patient dignity and high-quality “people-friendly” services (Sagara, 2024). In contrast, the Gujarat model centers on neoliberal economic policies, emphasizing rapid industrial expansion and business-friendly environments to drive high economic growth rates (Sagara, 2024). This strategy favors the privatization of key sectors and the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs), shifting the delivery of services toward the private sector based on the philosophy that the “government has no business being in business” (Aiyar, 2021).

With regard to Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Structures, Gujarat heavily utilizes PPPs like the Chiranjeevi Yojana, which provides financial incentives to private practitioners to manage deliveries, and the Mukhyamantri Amrutum (MA) Yojana, which uses an empanelled network of private providers for surgical care (Sagara, 2024). By 2014, the population relying on public healthcare dropped to 15%, as the state prioritized private capital over state provision (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). On the other hand, while privatization exists in Kerala, it currently aims to reinvigorate the public sector through Mission Aardram to force the private sector to lower its prices to remain competitive, thereby reducing out-of-pocket expenses. In terms of comparative health outcomes and infrastructure, Kerala has a significantly stronger medical workforce, with 300,988 nurses compared to Gujarat’s 160,192. Furthermore, vacancy rates for Medical Officers at PHCs are only 2.4% in Kerala, whereas they reach 30.2% in Gujarat (Central Bureau of Health Intelligence [CBHI], 2019). Also, Kerala achieved 100% immunization for infants aged 9–11 months, while Gujarat reached approximately 92%. The Neonatal Mortality Rate is nearly four times higher in Gujarat (21) than in Kerala (6) (CBHI, 2019).

Kerala and Gujarat are completely different when it comes to the structuring and governance of their healthcare systems, which in turn is determined by different political economies and development paths usually characterized as the “Kerala model” and the “Gujarat model.” Kerala has made a rights-based

and welfare-oriented choice that puts a lot of stress on public provision and social justice. On the other hand, Gujarat has a very much growth-driven and market-oriented approach that is heavily reliant on the private sector and public-private partnerships (PPPs). The “Gujarat model” has faced criticisms for putting economic growth first and not adequately addressing social development issues, whereas the “Kerala model” has been under a microscope too. For example, Shah (2010) argues that the impact of welfare policies in Kerala on social development has been more limited and they have had a more negative effect on economic growth than is usually assumed.

What Are PPPs in Health Care?

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) in healthcare are defined as durable, collaborative relationships between public and private actors aimed at achieving common goals through a structured cooperation (Singh & Prakash, 2010). Koppenjan (2005) characterizes a PPP as a type of managed collaboration involving public and private partners in the planning, construction, and/or operation of infrastructure facilities, where they share or redistribute the risks, costs, benefits, resources, and responsibilities among themselves. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) refer to arrangements in which private actors are involved in, or support, the delivery of infrastructure, with projects structured around contracts that assign responsibility for providing infrastructure-based public services to private entities (Torchia et al., 2015). Unlike traditional privatization, PPPs involve partners with different ownership structures—public and private—who share or reallocate risks, costs, resources, and responsibilities to provide public or quasi-public goods for society. From a governance perspective, this shift represents a “modernization narrative” where the role of the state evolves from being a direct provider to acting as a regulator and coordinator, relying on the market for service delivery and infrastructure to meet community health needs (Torchia et al., 2015).

The importance of PPPs stems from their ability to address “wicked problems,” such as aging populations and rapid disease transmission, which are considered too complex for governments to solve in isolation (Torchia et al., 2015). Healthcare infrastructure gaps and service quality enhancements are targeted by these partnerships that mix private sector management abilities, technology, and financial resources with the public sector’s regulatory oversight.

Economically, public-private partnerships are frequently regarded as a solution for governments to handle the challenges posed by the growth in healthcare costs along with the reduction in public budgets, particularly through the pursuit of Value for Money (VFM) by enhancing operational efficiency and innovation. (OECD, 2008).

However, PPPs are not a “panacea”, and their actual effectiveness and efficiency remain subjects of debate (Widdus, 2001). Because private partners prioritize profit while public partners focus on social and budgetary objectives, there is a constant risk of unbalanced partnerships or a “recommodification” of healthcare that could harm the public interest (Torchia et al., 2015). The primary argument in the debate about Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the health sector is whether they are more effective and efficient than traditional state provision. Supporters of PPPs see them as desperate measures to cope with complicated issues that exceed government capacity while opponents maintain that the private sector’s emphasis on the organization’s profit will always come at the cost of the public interest, thus, equity and service quality may eventually suffer in case of weak public control. Additionally, there are differing views on financial costs and operational flexibility; while some authors contend that public financing is always less costly than private financing and that the very detailed, long-term nature of PPP contracts creates inflexibilities that prevent easy adjustment to fast-moving medical or technological changes. Eventually, the evidence points to the fact that nothing, but an appropriate regulatory framework guarantees the success of a PPP where the private sector participates; that framework must be marked by state sincerity in its dual role as the coordinator and the protector of social welfare. (Torchia et al., 2015).

The Kerala Healthcare Governance Model: Rights, Justice, and Decentralization

The Kerala healthcare governance model is rooted in a social democratic system that prioritizes human development and views health as a fundamental human right. This approach measures progress through human well-being rather than just economic indicators, fostering a “vibrant” and “high energy” participatory democracy (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). The governance in the state takes the form of a government’s pro-activity which is aimed at an even distribution of services across the board. This is a principle that all political parties over time have

acknowledged and implemented. State has opened the doors to development by promoting health awareness through mass education and women empowerment—they have got 94% literacy and 76.15 years life expectancy which are the same levels as those in the case of the middle-developed countries (Nabae, 2003).

A cornerstone of this model is radical decentralization, which was formally operationalized in 1996 by transferring funds, functions, and institutions to Local Self-Governments (LSGs) (Nabae, 2003). Under this framework, the three-tiered Panchayat system manages primary and secondary health facilities, ensuring that healthcare is responsive to local needs and managed by the communities it serves (Sankar et al., 2023). This system utilizes a unique dual responsibility matrix where the state government maintains the medical care and pays salaries, while local bodies exercise managerial and disciplinary control over health personnel (John & Jacob, 2016). The integration of LSGs allows for a constant feedback loop between the government and citizens, fostering high levels of public trust and direct accountability in the delivery of healthcare.

Social justice is embedded in the model through inclusive policies that deliberately target historically overlooked groups, including women, Dalits, and religious minorities (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). Programs like Kudumbashree, a woman-focused anti-poverty project, provide a vital support network that mobilizes volunteers and ensures that vulnerable populations are not excluded from government responses. This commitment to justice is further evidenced by the state's historical land reforms and public distribution systems, which reduced poverty and provided poor people with the resources needed for health stability (Nabae, 2003). Consequently, Kerala exhibits minimal urban-rural disparities in child immunization, infant mortality, and maternal mortality rates (Cherian et al., 2023).

Modern governance has evolved through the Aardram Mission, which seeks to transform Public Health Centres into people-friendly Family Health Centres (FHCs) with expanded services and equipment (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). This transformation relies on collaborative governance, primarily through Hospital Management Committees (HMCs), which provide a platform for elected representatives, health officials, and civil society to work together (John &

Jacob, 2016). By focusing on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and reinforcing the public sector, the state aims to force the private sector to lower prices to remain competitive, thereby reducing out-of-pocket expenditures for the poor. This collaborative model proved its resilience during the Nipah virus and COVID-19 crises, where decentralized structures allowed for rapid mobilization and containment efforts (Cherian et al., 2023).

The model also addresses the economic paradox of sustaining high health indices despite historical economic backwardness and a stagnant domestic product (Nabae, 2003). While the state previously faced fiscal crises that led to an under-utilized public sector and a burgeoning private sector, recent initiatives leverage Gulf remittances and industrial restructuring to revitalize public systems. The “second generation” of health challenges, including an aging population and the rise of non-communicable diseases, are handled through innovative state-level insurance schemes like the Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhathi (KASP) and specialized FHC clinics for depression and respiratory care (Cherian et al., 2023). By maintaining public expenditure on health at nearly 6% of total state expenditure, Kerala ensures that health does not become a commodity purchased solely by “ability to pay” (Sankar et al., 2023).

Finally, the success of the model is rooted in coproduction between government machinery and civil society through resource mobilization. A prime example is the Malappuram Zilla Panchayat, which successfully implemented innovative projects like the Kidney Patient Welfare Society and Palliative Care units primarily through community donations and school-based philanthropy rather than relying solely on state grants (John & Jacob, 2016). This integration extends to medical pluralism, where Allopathy, Ayurveda, and Homeopathy are all accessible through the decentralized network, ensuring a holistic approach to patient well-being (Nabae, 2003). This participatory framework transforms citizens from passive beneficiaries into active stakeholders, ensuring the sustainability of health gains through direct community oversight (Israelsen & Malji, 2021).

The Healthcare Governance Model in Gujarat: Focus on Growth and Market Logic

The healthcare governance model in Gujarat is fundamentally driven by a neoliberal economic philosophy that prioritizes rapid industrial expansion

and business-friendly policies as the primary engines for social development (Mor, 2025; Sagara, 2024). This regulatory arrangement is based on the notion that “the government is not supposed to be in business,” thereby resulting in a government structure supportive of privatization of services and massive utilization of public-private partnerships (PPPs). (Israelsen & Malji, 2021). The administration is organized in a way that it has a three-tier rural healthcare network consisting of Sub-centres, Primary Health Centres (PHCs), and Community Health Centres (CHCs), where the PHC system is specifically managed through the Zilla Panchayat (Raut & Sekher, 2013). In this structure, the Chief District Health Officer (CDHO) reports directly to the District Development Officer (DDO), reflecting a centralized administrative oversight integrated within the local government machinery.

A defining feature of Gujarat’s model is its extensive reliance on PPP structures to expand access and improve service quality, particularly for underserved populations (Patel et al., 2007). Notable state-level initiatives include the Mukhyamantri Amrutum (MA) Yojana, which provides Below Poverty Line (BPL) families access to high-quality surgical care through an empanelled network of private providers, and the Chiranjeevi Yojana, which incentivizes private obstetricians to manage deliveries for poor women (Sagara, 2024). The state also utilizes a “Hospital-First” vertical integration strategy in its dense urban markets, where large tertiary systems and corporate chains like Apollo or Narayana dominate, often necessitating integration with owned insurance programs to stabilize revenues (Mor, 2025). This market-oriented approach has shifted the delivery of services toward the private sector, resulting in only 15% of the population relying on public healthcare by 2014.

Despite the state’s industrial wealth and a high hospital capacity of 4,300 (exceeding Kerala’s 3,450), the governance model faces significant challenges regarding the continuity and sustainability of its structures (Sagara, 2024). Research indicates that healthcare decision-making in Gujarat is often more dependent on individual actors and political leaders than on established, sustainable institutional processes (Sanneving et al., 2013). When leadership changes, long-term memory and lessons learned are frequently lost, leading to a cycle where new innovations are prioritized over the evaluation and monitoring of existing policies. This dependency on “heads” rather than “systems” hinders long-term planning and creates a lack of continuum of care within the

administrative framework.

The model's approach to decentralization is characterized by a "decision space" that, while legally operationalized early via the Gujarat Panchayat Act of 1963, shows mixed results in practice (Raut & Sekher, 2013). While Gujarat scores relatively high on the Index of Health System Decentralization (IHSD) due to its institutional readiness and the transfer of rural healthcare functions to Panchayats, actual decision-making authority is often constrained. For instance, Village Health and Sanitation Committees (VHSCs) frequently lack ownership and clear role clarity among members, while Panchayat leaders often feel powerless to voice grievances or hold the government accountable (Hamal et al., 2018). Furthermore, the management of healthcare manpower remains a supply-side challenge, with vacancy rates for Medical Officers at PHCs reaching as high as 30.2%. (Sagara, 2024).

Monitoring and data quality constitute another critical area of the governance framework, where the system is often burdened by parallel and fragmented reporting mechanisms (Sanneving et al., 2013). Health officials in Gujarat have reported being required to fill the same information into five to six different versions of software, leading to data duplication and a lack of reliance on official figures by both senior and junior staff. This "hotchpotch" of reporting makes it difficult to assess the actual needs of specific areas or to use data effectively for evaluating progress. To fill these gaps, social accountability mechanisms led by civil society organizations have become vital, using tools like "report cards" and social autopsies of maternal deaths to demand responsiveness from a sometimes-unreceptive district health bureaucracy (Hamal et al., 2018).

The socio-economic results of this model reveal a paradox: while Gujarat achieves high institutional delivery rates (91.6%) and notable industrial growth, it continues to face higher mortality rates and financial risks for its citizens compared to other models (Sagara, 2024). The neonatal mortality rate in Gujarat is nearly four times higher than in Kerala, and rural medical expenses for a hospital stay are significantly higher (Rs. 29,954 vs. Rs. 14,091 in Kerala). Additionally, the model has been criticized for exclusionary outcomes, where vulnerable groups like Dalits report high rates of discrimination in accessing medicine, and a significant portion of the population (nearly 43%) lacks basic on-premise latrine facilities (Israelsen &

Malji, 2021). Consequently, while the Gujarat model excels in industrial-linked healthcare infrastructure, it faces persistent challenges in ensuring that its growth translates into equitable and low-cost health outcomes for all social strata (Sagara, 2024).

Conclusion

The analytical comparison reveals that the distance between Kerala and Gujarat in health outcomes is not exclusively a difference but indicates different fundamentally health care governing ways. The model of Kerala, which is based on decentralization, social justice, and collaborative governance, is not only a demonstration of the above-mentioned factors but also the exception of the economic condition where the health system is made to be resilient and equitable. One of the states, Gujarat, has been relying on the public-private partnership model of governance which has not only increased the availability of infrastructure and services but also has had continuous problems with institutional continuity, accountability, and distributive equity. The proof shows that public-private partnerships do not have a problem at all but rather they are effective depending on the market and regulatory capacity, monitoring mechanisms, and the embedding of the public sector. The comparison ultimately brings out the fact that healthcare performance is less dependent on economic wealth and more on the quality of governance, political priorities, and the institutional design of state-society relations. Acknowledgment of this fact is necessary for India to move towards health reforms that are not limited by the narrow efficiency or growth-centric frameworks but are rather based on rethinking health reform in a more comprehensive and broader manner.

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Performing Subjective Motherhood: An Analysis of Pop-Culture TV Series

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Abstract

The performative theory by Judith Butler states that all of our designated roles are a product of discourses. This means we perform roles based on socio-cultural inscriptions. Butler argues that all human bodies are gendered from the moment they enter a society. Furthermore, an individual continues to perform these roles, considering them “natural”. However, Butler emphasises that inscribed performativity can be subverted through agency and subjectivity. In addition, they claim that agency over one’s role and identity is essential to practice who we are and how we want to be. This approach may also be applied to the performance of motherhood, which has been ruled by patriarchal notions for many years. Its subjective and liberating experiences can be brought forth if one studies the concept of mothering through the lens of female individual experience. Keeping in mind, this paper proposes to bring out the subjective experiences of mothering that challenge the institutional practices (Adrienne Rich’s idea) upheld by society. For this purpose, popular TV dramas such as *Friends* (1994), *Sex and the City* (1998), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007), and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017) are discussed to highlight that mothering can be done in one’s own way. This challenges traditional ideas about motherhood and shows that anyone, regardless of their relationship to the child, gender, or sexuality, can take on a mothering role.

Keywords: *Performing motherhood, Popular TV dramas, Mothering, Gendering, Agency, Subjectivity*

Introduction

Performance Studies aim to inquire into or analyse performances that partake daily, through any art form, cultural values, etc. This discipline of study was first articulated by Richard Schechner in 1965 in his article *Approaches*. The central idea of this work was to closely examine the performances that occur on stages, in rituals, and within cultural systems. From thereupon, the field of Performance Studies has expanded its range, bringing different schools of thought and issues under its analysis. By the late twentieth century, the theory of Performance Studies was not merely concerned with formal stage performances. Rather, everyday life became an integral part of a study conducted by some of the most prominent thinkers in this field. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) by Erving Goffman portrays a well-defined dramatic structure that is present in our daily lives. Goffman argues that we continually perform to achieve a certain kind of standing within the community. Goffman adds that we do so unconsciously; however, this performance is no less than an actor playing his part on a stage. Furthermore, our everyday performances get seeped into reality after being repeated every day.

Another significant change that occurred in Performance Studies is the introduction of speech into this realm. The linguist, J.L. Austin, demonstrated that certain words of our speech also induce performances. In his work *How To Do Things With Words* (1962), he cites an example of the phrase “I do.” Austin explains that the utterance of “I do” in a marriage ceremony is also performative in nature as it emphasises the commitment to a socially sanctioned relationship.

Such interventions in Performance Studies had a deep influence on the American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler. Butler is considered one of the pioneering figures in third-wave feminism. Besides having several best-known books in their oeuvre, Butler has played a conventional role in expounding the theory of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). This book takes the discourse of Performance Studies forward in understanding the making of a gender as performance. According to Butler, our gender is not a natural or real phenomenon; instead, it is a well-constructed discourse that establishes the performativity of our gender. They write,

The [gender] act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act

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that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (1988, p. 526)

Thus, Butler's breakthrough idea proves that gender is another performative act, just like how a stage play, school assembly, or a vow ceremony is designed, set, practiced, and presented. This means, bodies do or perform their gender according to the cultural inscriptions. It is not something intrinsically natural to us. Rather, it is a fully prescribed notion that we are expected to comply with. These notions are established through language and cultural practices. For example, the words "masculine" or "feminine" connote the gender performativity that is associated with them. Now, the question arises - how can a gender performer subvert these prescribed notions and perform their identity on their terms? In their next seminal work, *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler highlights the possibilities of subverting the performance and opens the door for individuality. Butler uses the term "agency" that can subvert cultural ends and allow the existence of liberation, freedom, and control. They add that through agency, a subject can challenge the existing order of conduct.

Motherhood entails the fulfilment of responsibilities such as feeding, caring, and providing, which require an individual's physical, intellectual, financial, and emotional efforts. Thus, it can be seen as a performative act. Additionally, it is a cultural expression of notions inherited from the patriarchal institution of motherhood. The concept of motherhood as an institution was first investigated by Adrienne Rich in her classic work *Of Woman Born*. In this work, Rich explains that the institution of motherhood is a historic and social construct that obstructs mothers in a predefined role. Moreover, the institution does not allow mothers to practice mothering on their own terms. Not just that, it glorifies intensive mothering, leaving little space for women to nurture themselves and their desires. In contrast, Rich initiates the narrative of mothering by sharing her autonomous experiences of mother work. For her, mothering becomes both a subjective and liberating act, allowing women an equal footing in society. Keeping this in mind, the following sections bring out the subversive narratives of mothers who perform mothering, which is away and beyond the regressive motherhood practices ascribed by a patriarchal society.

Friends

Friends is a widely popular sitcom based on a group of single, middle-class, white adults in New York City. The show portrays their interconnected lives and the strong bond they create, forming an unconventional family life together. Since its premiere in September 1994, *Friends* has garnered huge popularity among viewers (US and globally) and critics. This show diverges from the conventional notion of motherhood.

From Carol and Susan as lesbian mothers, Phoebe as a surrogate mother, and Rachel as a single mother, to Monica as an adoptive mother, *Friends* effectively explores a wide array of motherhood, commenting on the feminist agenda of its time. The show highlights how women characters are figures of maternal thinking on their journey to bearing and raising children. Maternal thinking is an idea proposed by Sara Ruddick in which she gives a powerful agency to mother figures who think and act on their terms for the collective benefit of their children and themselves.

Rachel's pregnancy, out of a fling with Ross, challenges the stigmas attached to single motherhood. In the final episode of Season 7, she decides to raise the baby, despite fearing the loneliness that may arise during pregnancy, childbirth, and the later stages of nurturing the baby. Even though her close ones believed that a pregnant woman should immediately marry, she gently rejects their views. She remains adamant on her decision and continues to balance her pregnancy with her dream job. Not for once, does she think of giving up her position as a fashion executive. Instead, Rachel manages to raise her child appropriately along with her work. Rachel's subjective idea of motherhood not only challenges the stereotypical views on marriage but also the importance of holding onto a successful career. Another significant point to consider here is that her mothering is not isolated. It is a collective work of care supported by her friends and sometimes family.

Furthermore, light can also be shed on Monica's and Phoebe's characters. Despite a history of chaotic familial space during her teens, Phoebe decides to become a surrogate mother for her cousin and his wife. Phoebe's decision to choose surrogacy as a mother is bold, as it comes with the emotional repercussions of giving away a child. Moreover, her pregnancy questions the strict views of the time that considered surrogacy as an unethical action. In the

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episode “The One With The Embryo,” the makers convinced viewers to accept surrogacy as an ethical choice or a personal choice for a woman. Monica is the most mature among all the female characters who has dreamt of having kids all her life. However, she struggles to conceive a baby with Chandler, which leads to another subversive way of motherhood i.e adoption. After the innumerable unsuccessful attempts to conceive, the couple decides to go for adoption. The episode, “The One With The Birth Mother,” challenges normative beliefs towards adoption. A mother giving away her baby to gain freedom, a couple adopting a baby to start their family. Thus, “The Last One” celebrates Monica’s deeply desired and long-awaited motherhood.

Sex and the City

In the late 1990s, the television content turned into a daring representation of a modern woman who challenges gender performativity and reinforces their identity. *Sex and the City* is one such popular sitcom that rejects stereotypical images of women on television. The characters are believed to be starting a crucial debate on a variety of topics. From raising the bar for sisterhood and reproductive choices of self-independent women to questioning patriarchal, prescribed norms, the show reclaims women’s position and role in society. The four distinct women characters build a bridge between traditional and modern ways in which women live their lives. Critics have tagged this show as being “bold,” “ahead of its time,” “women not afraid to be what they want to be,” and “shocking” in its content and description.

Additionally, the show portrays some alternative choices that women have beyond motherhood. Or even if they chose motherhood wilfully, it is practiced in a subjective way. The blogger Deepa Garwa writes, “The series seemed to have deliberately worked against the myths of motherhood where characters grow in this process of becoming or not becoming mothers” (2024, para. 2). This means that motherly love is not instinctive or natural; rather, one learns it through bitter-sweet experiences. Miranda’s narrative in the show suggests that even the most intelligent woman can lack motherly instincts of love and care. She remains cynical and unprepared to fit into the romanticised version of motherhood that is perpetuated through the media. She takes on a long journey of rejecting motherhood, being ambivalent about taking on the role, and ultimately embracing it. Carrie straightaway says no to motherhood, and

Charlotte boldly raises two daughters, one by adoption and the other by birth. Her mothering opens new ideas for raising children who do not abide by the fixed gender roles. In addition to that, Charlotte's mothering allows her a space to be with her friends, pursue her passions, and work. Similarly, the children also feel a sense of comfort knowing they can express who they are and what they want to be.

The Big Bang Theory

The Big Bang Theory (2007) unearths unconventional perspectives through its portrayal of female characters. The three female main characters — Amy, Bernadette, and Penny — exhibit nuanced feminine and masculine traits, with continuous growth in their identities. They challenge, reject, and evolve throughout their journeys as career-driven women, girlfriends, wives, and later on as mothers.

"The Spock Resonance," the seventh episode of season nine, brings out Bernadette's reason for reluctance towards motherhood. This episode reveals Bernadette's fear of motherhood, stemming from her own mother's tiresome experiences and her spoiled husband, Howard. Motherhood does not come naturally to her. Instead, she feels ambivalent about knowing the burden and responsibilities that would come with the childcare process. She agrees only after her husband assures her that he will also take an equal part in raising the child. This act of rejecting or being reluctant to become a mother can also be seen as debunking the myth of motherhood as a natural phenomenon. Bernadette practices her agency over her reproductive rights and indulges in a conversation to clear away her doubts loudly. Later on, after giving birth to two consecutive children, she ensures that she excels in her career and enjoys her success outside her familial space.

In the show, Penny also engages with the idea of agency. In the article "The Changing Language of Women on *The Big Bang Theory*," author Kimberly Dennin discusses Penny's character as embodying both traditional feminine and masculine identities. Dennin notes that Penny could fulfil the majority of tasks associated with masculinity as she has lived on farms. Penny's character breaks away from gendered prescribed performativity and claims agency over relationships, career, lifestyle, etc. Like Bernadette, she remains reluctant to conceive a child. Not just that, in the finale episode, Penny was shown to be

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adamant about not having a baby. This is another attribute of agency that can be seen in Penny's character. Her resisting voice against motherhood subverts the patriarchal norm that a woman must give birth to find purpose in her life. Thus, women characters are seen to yearn for freedom from family, and to attain it, they vocalise their idea of balancing married life with a successful career.

The Marvellous Mrs Maisel

The Marvellous Mrs Maisel premiered in 2017. The show is set in 1960s America with a variety of cultures and art forms like jazz, blues, nightclubs, and lavish lifestyles coming together. Amidst this, the protagonist, Mrs Mirriam Maisel, an affluent Jewish American, feels disillusioned with her much-contended role as a homemaker, mother, and daughter. In the very first two or three episodes, her romanticised life breaks apart, forcing her to return to her parents' home with two children. Afterward, due to her parents' unsupportive and questionable attitude, she juggles a full-time job as a saleswoman while pursuing her talent in stand-up comedy. It is commendable how Mrs Maisel works hard to succeed in the male-dominated comic industry. However, gig after gig, she reaches the top and starts to make a fortune with her extraordinary talent in stand-up comedy. Even though the show does not explicitly comment on Mirriam's mothering, it depicts how, as a single mother, she manages to earn a decent income to place her children in capable hands. Even though the show does not explicitly comment on Mirriam's mothering, it depicts how, as a single mother, she manages to earn a decent income to place her children in capable hands. She rejects the overwhelming idea of intensive mothering, a term coined by Sharon Hays,

Intensive mothering presumes that a woman's primary responsibility is to meet the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of her children regardless of employment or other obligations, or her own needs and interests. There is an unrealistic expectation that her parenting is child-centred, labour-intensive, emotionally absorbing, and guided by the advice of experts. (1996, p. 129)

The ideals of intensive mothering do not allow mothers to seek help through daycares or the community, as they are made to believe that they are the primary and most essential caretaker of their child. However, Mrs Maisel is an anomaly as she emphasises her individualism, self-interest, and independence.

The third episode of the first season is considered the most illuminating one in the series. It pictures Mirriam's earlier stand-up sets where she wonders,

What if I wasn't supposed to be a mother? What if I picked the wrong profession?... I can't change my mind and donate my kids to the library like I'm going to do with this book... Women are supposed to be mothers, it's supposed to be natural... What if someone was supposed to just travel a lot or run 24-hour diners in rural areas [instead of being a mum]? What if some of us were just supposed to talk to adults our entire lives? (Because You Left Me, 36:40)

Thus, it is natural to feel susceptible to motherhood. It is obvious to grapple with many emotions when you are burdened with doing something that you are not meant to do. Mrs Maisel's character challenges the discourse of a "supermom" who constantly remains on her toes while managing work with children. She practices mothering on her own terms and does not consider herself solely responsible for her children's well-being. Furthermore, the show uses the world of stand-up comedy wherein Mrs Maisel performs, or rather subverts her expected roles as a wife, daughter, and mother. She uses her life experiences to question deep-embedded rules that prevent women from being heard. She takes back her agency firstly, by performing in the world of stand-up comedy and secondly, by reinstating her terms in front of her family and friends. She chooses to practice motherhood, experience romantic relationships, and plan her career in a way that feels right to her.

Conclusion

Commonly, the normative motherhood represents heterosexual, married, apolitical, asexual, stay-at-home, and biologically related mother. Furthermore, these same ideals are used to distinguish between good and bad mothers. However, in reality, there exists a plethora of mothers coming from different races and classes. There are single mothers, adoptive mothers, full-time successful mothers, queer mothers, mothers who do not live with their children, communal mothers, etc. Notably, none of the mother roles prescribes or can prescribe to the notions of normative motherhood. Thus, it becomes imperative to highlight the shades of non-normative motherhood so that mothers feel empowered not only as women but also as human beings.

Adrienne Rich coined the term gynocentric to show that in the past, women

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had agency over their ability to reproduce and were equally venerated outside their roles as mothers. In other words, the mothers did not passively practice motherhood; rather, they consciously expressed their love and nurturance by asserting their bodily potentialities. Similarly, in the narratives discussed above, women either practice motherhood or completely deny it on their own terms. All four series analysed in this study are performative. They highlight the experience of mothering by individual women in different times and spaces. The mothers portrayed in the shows fulfil Rich's demands of courageous mothering instead of institutionalised and sacrificial motherhood that has been laid down upon us by patriarchy and popular media. Only after learning and practicing this can a woman expand the limits of her life and that of her children as well.

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Love in Strange Lands: Fetishising the Foreign Subject in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

Tanishka

Abstract

The idea of interracial desire and the conflict it tends to bring in the postcolonial discourse of looking at the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser remains a topic of debate. This idea is further problematised when the roots of an interracial sexual relation are rooted in the male desire that fantasises the foreign woman as a strange, exotic and mysterious subject. Here this desire is not limited to just a quest for love, but it tends to take the shape of a fetish that is often projected as a love quest. The aim of this paper is to explore the intricacies of interpersonal relationships in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, with the focus on the treatment and fetishisation of female characters by the male characters in the novel. This paper intends to explore the depiction of interpersonal relationships between people from different nations, cultures and races through a close reading and textual criticism to explore the issues that such relationships tend to bring in *The Shadow Lines* which indicates the possibility of a foreign fetish as its root. It also attempts to understand the orientalist connotations and the role of colonialism at its foundation. Apart from this, the paper explores the idea of lands and spaces and how they work as a drop back to the fantasy and desire for a foreign and strange subject in terms of spaces as well as people.

Keywords: *Foreign, Fetish, Desire, Interracial, Interpersonal relationships, Strangeness*

Introduction

With the emergence of cosmopolitanism, the arbitrary borders between nations seem to cease. The cosmopolitanism in the intermingling of nations beyond borders of culture, race and countries, is best exemplified through the interpersonal, especially romantic and sexual relationships between the people of two different nationalities. While on the surface, this seems to be a step towards creating the sense of harmony between the nations, the complexities of these relationships are far more critical and need to be scrutinised beyond its surface.

The Shadow Lines (1995) deals with the ideas of national identities, cultural differences and how the arbitrary frontiers affect individuals personally and politically as some of its major themes. The theme of personal relationships between the characters, especially the romantic and sexual ones is the focused area of this paper. It is interesting to note that “*The Shadow Lines* describes no sexual or romantic relationship between two people who share an obvious identity of nationality, race or cultural experience” (Kaul, 1995, p. 271). This fact indicates that these relationships origin from the sense of foreignness felt by the characters. This paper explains the term foreign as not limited to just nationalities but goes beyond it and includes the sense of strangeness and difference that are cultural and mark the difference between the characters’ ways of life.

When it comes to the critical work on the women characters of *The Shadow Lines* the major body of work limits its focus to the role of these women in the context of nationalism. The treatment of women as an object of desire of the male characters and the sexual politics played with the sexual relationships between the characters who are foreign to each other in multiple ways remains less explored. This paper ventures into this less traveled dimension by primarily using the tools of textual criticism and close reading in order to bring forth issues that are generated in sexual relationships between foreign people, and aims to explore the possibilities of a foreign fetish in such relationships, which is often dismissed as a mere quest for love.

To begin with the analysis of the relationship between the characters it is important at the outset to understand what each term in the title of the paper stands for. The use of the term ‘foreign’ stands for the sense of foreignness felt by the characters that emerges from their idea of others being ‘different’ and ‘strange’ from them. The term foreign does not only stand for a subject belonging

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to a different nation state, but it also stands for the characters belonging to the same nation, race and culture but being different from each other in multiple ways that define their identity as a 'foreign' subject in the eyes of the other characters. The 'foreign subject' that the title refers to are the women characters of the novel, and the paper expands the discussion on the same. Fetishising here stands for the desire that the characters feel towards the subject they consider foreign or strange. "Before being an erotic concept fetish was used to describe an object with powers over other" (Srivastava, 2022, pp. 338-339). Alfred Binet used it in the erotic sense and believed its roots to be in one's childhood, which was later expanded by Magnus Hirschfeld's theory of fetishism, that believed in the emergence of desire to be based on one aspect of the person not the person themselves." (Srivastava, 2022, p. 339). Such psychological foundations on the concept of fetish provide insights to understand the psychology of the characters and the formation of foreign fetish in them. Tridib's initial interest in his "love- across- the- seas" (Ghosh, 1995, p. 175) emerged from the Tristan story he had heard in his childhood. Similarly, the Narrator's idea of desire was a product of distant identity he felt with his cousin Ila which emerged from the particular aspect of her being different and strange to him. In contradiction to the usual ground of familiarity, desire here emerges from the sense of difference and centers around it. Desire takes the shape of fetish as it is generated from the sense of difference and strangeness between the characters that makes them pursue the mysterious foreign subject. Love in this context often works as a mask in the presence of fetish. The idea of lands works as a backdrop to fulfill the characters' fantasy of the foreign subject. It is crucial in order to understand the role of lands and spaces in the construction of cultural identities.

The *Shadow Lines* depicts multiple romantic relationships and interestingly as Suvir Kaul (1995) points out, none of them are between people belonging to the same nation, culture or racial identity- "desire originates and finds its object across borders" (p. 271). Such relationships are seen between Tridib and May, most apparently and between Ila and the unnamed narrator although it is never consummated and does not take the shape of a reciprocated relationship as such. Later such a relationship is also generated between May and the narrator, who is the alter ego of Tridib and inherits his role completely at the climax of the novel as he makes love with his love interest. The relationship between Ila and Nick stands in contrast to the fetish factor but the complexities of this

relationship draw upon the stereotypes and conflicts of the racial differences between the people of the colonised and coloniser nations.

One of the most brutal outcomes of imperialism is the mental imperialism that remained alive in the minds of colonised groups even after political freedom was achieved. What the novel portrayed as a desire which turns into fetish has its roots in the orientalist construction of the white-brown relationships. The concept of orientalism refers to how the West oriented India as an exotic land for their political and sensual desire. Orient was an “European invention”, “...a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said, 1978, p. 9). These characteristics of the East were a construction of the Western imagination, which established itself as superior by looking at the orient as a canvas, subjected to their political and sensual desires. Such an image of the orient can be seen being reversed in the novel. The way male characters project their desire of foreignness on women is closely related to the colonial encounter where desire for the western object and the fulfillment of the same brings a sense of achievement. This aspiration to achieve the beloved who inhibits the traits of the superior West reflects the construction of the orient as an exotic and strange entity which is constructed by the West as an outcome of their political and imaginative projection. The same projection is seen through the Narrator’s infatuation towards Ila as well as Ila’s desire to be with Nick, further reflecting her own aspiration to be accepted by the West – a culture she believes she belongs to but has never felt accepted. The construction of an identity which deems Indianness as inferior – a place to run away from and sees the West as the final aspiration – a place aimed to be belonged to. This construction exists in a flux. They cannot completely be constructed in the idealised image of the West, but they keep trying to mimic their ways with the hope to finally be accepted there.

The idea of mimicry is significantly used in the novel. This idea was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha as a tool of imperial control. The idea refers to the constant attempt to follow the ways of the coloniser West because of the inferior position of the orient, which generates the desire to imitate the superior West and be accepted by them. This leads to an ambivalent identity which is “not quite/not white” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 132). In this race of acceptance, the superior West stays like a parallel which can never be met. It is like a mirror quite similar but never the same. Ila exemplifies the “mimic men” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 128), since

her early teen years. As the Narrator recalls her dressed in “English clothes” (Ghosh, 1995, p. 43), “faded blue jeans and a T-shirt—like no girl I had ever seen before except in pictures in American Magazines” (Ghosh, 1995, p. 81). For Ila it is essential to completely discard her Indian identity in order to achieve freedom. Her sense of freedom lies in leaving behind a culture that constantly polices her sexuality and expression of the same. For her attempt of finding freedom, she is called a “greedy little slut” by her grandmother Thamma. But despite her attempts she is never fully accepted by the English culture. She faces racism as a child and later is forced to stay in an unhappy marriage with Nick, her ultimate tragedy which she saw as the final means of acceptance in a foreign culture. She functions as a “narrative scapegoat” (Kaul, 1995, p. 273) in the novel, cautioning against the disrobing of one’s authentic identity only to succumb to an ambivalent self which never truly belongs to a place. Apart from Ila, the Narrator as well desires acceptance in an image carved by his desire towards the attraction based on foreignness he feels for Ila. Growing up when Ila shares about Nick fondly, the Narrator realises his desire is unrequited. Subconsciously he starts to compare himself to Nick and exhibits a hidden urge to mimic him. He recalls this as “Nick Price, whom I had never seen...became a spectral presence beside me...always bigger and better, and in some way more desirable - I did not know what, except that it was so in Ila’s eyes and therefore true” (Ghosh, 1995, p. 50).

The role of mimicry further takes the shape of a caricatured identity which is reduced to a means of joke. This is portrayed by the character of Ila’s mother. She is constantly referred to as “Queen Victoria” (Ghosh, 1995, p. 25). She is a Bengali woman, but her mannerism reflects a typical Victorian woman. Her mannerism has taken the shape through the mimicry of English women she has been seeing in her foreign trips. The concept of mimicry finds its roots in colonised India where Macaulay declared Europe’s intention to form a different type of Indian class which follows European mannerism, by disrobing them of their ingenious identity. In his *Minutes on Indian education*, he refers to “a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay, 1958, p. 601). This was the initiation of an identity in flux, never authentic and never truly mirrored. Macaulay instilled a need of changing Indian identity as an attempt by the white men to civilise the savage tribes. The characters of the novel can be seen as the construction of

the macaulayan imagination whose desire finds its subject only in the people who are culturally, characteristically and constitutively other and different than them. It represents orient trying to mimic the Western culture in order to be accepted because they deem it as superior, which takes the shape of fetish for it being rooted in this particular aspect of foreignness.

“The politics based on ‘self’ vs ‘other’ or ‘us’ vs ‘them’ does not have to be confined to border areas. It gradually becomes a psychological phenomenon that goes beyond any race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on” (Sen, 2019, p. 58). Sen’s argument that the idea of self and other is not confined to the idea of nation, culture and ethnicity which are the broad markers of the difference between the identities, but the politics of self and other is rather a psychological phenomenon which is quite profoundly applicable to the context of *The Shadow Lines*. The feelings of desire that are seen on the part of the unnamed narrator for his cousin Ila are mostly based on this. The narrator and Ila share familial bonds but despite this Ila and the narrator are quite different from each other. The narrator develops a sense of attraction towards her which remains constant in their adulthood as well. This attraction is rooted in the ways the narrator finds Ila to be foreign, exotic and mysterious, as he meets her years after their adolescence, he says, “she looked improbably ‘exotic’ to me” (Ghosh, 1995, p. 81), and how “Ila baffled me yet again with the ‘mystery’ of differences” (Ghosh, 1995, p. 44). For the development of the psyche of the narrator Ila has played a significant role as the constant other since their childhood, it is through her, the narrator gets a glimpse of life abroad, the different culture and ways of life. This becomes a burden on Ila to represent the exotic and foreign to the narrator and she is prompted to act in foreign ways to serve the imagination of the narrator. “He learns from her a conflicted idiom of sexuality, particularly in so far as that language of desire is a central element in the complex of ideas that demarcate, for him, home from abroad, Indian’ from the foreign” (Kaul, 1995, p. 271), suggesting “in *The Shadow Lines* differentiated sexualities are a key element in the discourse of nationality and nationalism” (Kaul, 1995, p. 271).

Kaul’s argument of sexualities playing an important role in creating the idea of nationalities is a crucial topic in the discourse of postcolonial discourse with reference to interracial relationships. The attraction of the narrator towards Ila is a prime example of the same which is a result of fetishising her as a foreign subject. Ila, despite her race, ethnicity and nationality does not belong

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to India. She wants freedom from the very culture that constructs the identity of Indianness in general and Indian woman in particular. Ila is treated as a western influence for her western ways that not only fit the Indian identity but even corrupt it as it is depicted through her treatment at the hands of Thamma and Robi who pass a moral judgment on her. However, it is because of her western ways of life and cultural distinction the narrator develops attraction towards her which is further transformed in a sense of fetish that keeps him bound with her and becomes a burden for her. While on the other hand Ila and Nick stand as an antithesis of the idea of fetish and represent the conflicted relationship between people of different culture and race and carries the idea of racial discrimination.

The relationship of Tridib and May is crucial to the study of fetishising the foreign subject. "The seduction of 'foreignness' for the male imagination- the possibilities it makes available- characterizes the May- Tridib couple too" (Kaul, 1995, p. 275). The romantic relation between May- Tridib begins through Tridib's fourth letter that depicts a pornographic description of a sexual encounter between two strangers that he witnessed as a child in war time London. Tridib, who has spent his early years in wartime London is in true sense a cosmopolitan not only because of his experiences but also because of his intellectual capacities to invent and revisit places through the power of his imagination. But his desire for a stranger that takes the shape of a love quest can be seen as a result or at least the part of his cosmopolitan identity that manifests itself in his desire to meet his lover as a stranger.

Tridib's sexual awakening takes place from his experiences of witnessing two strangers indulging in a sexual encounter which is a crucial factor in his desire of his lover as a stranger, besides the above mentioned incident, the "Tristan story" that Mr. Snipe told him as a birthday present in wartime London about "a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman- across- the- seas"(Ghosh, 1995, p. 186) draws a parallel with Tridib's confession of his love to May saying "you're my love, my love-across-the-seas"(Ghosh, 1995, p. 175). May has been a subject of male desire that takes the shape of fetish in the multiple episodes of the novel. When Tridib mentions her name while telling a story to his acquaintances at the Gole Park the first question is asked is whether she is sexy. Suvir Kaul expands this argument as "the discourse of male sexuality is derived from its conflicted and romanticised sense of the 'foreign' female body" (Kaul,

1995, p. 271). This argument is applicable to both Tridib and the narrator. May is strange and foreign to Tridib not just in terms of nationality but culture and context as well. May's humanitarian is western in its approach that is most powerfully manifested when she is not able to understand the sensitivities of the communal riots in Indian context and out of her humanitarian spirit goes out of the car to save Jethamoshai in Dhaka, which results in Tridib's tragic death. Despite these differences of cultural and national identities Tridib's desire finds its way to May because she is the mysterious and stranger lover he desires which in the larger context is a manifestation of male desire for foreign female subjects rooted in the sense of fetish. May- Tridib can be seen as an example of "miscegenated coupling" (Brody, 1998, p. 12). It represents an interpersonal relationship between people from different classes, race and nationality. Such binaries exist in opposition to each other and can only exist in the presence of the other. The desire essentially emerging from these roots represents the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture" (hooks, 1992, p. 22), further highlighting the subconscious desire for acceptance in the Western culture.

The idea of lands, spaces and mapping also play a crucial role to understand the construction of foreign subjects and its fetish. "Cartography is a method of Othering. The distancing lines across the map symbolise a permanently transformed national identity" (Laskey & Prathim, p. 35). Tridib's identity is transcendental beyond the boundaries of nations and culture; this evokes the desire to meet May in a ruin, "a place free of history" (Ghosh, 1995, p. 170). Tridib's desire of meeting May as a stranger and at a place that is free of history hence brings a sense of being strange and foreign that can be seen as two sides of the same coin that is the desire of foreign subject in terms of female body as well as space and this further problematises the idea of foreign subject being fetishised.

The depiction of these interracial relationships bordering on fetish has the scope of being counter questioned as a quest for love and the cultural and nationality difference being a mere choice but as Robin Zheng (2016) says, "in an age when racial generalizations and stereotypes are widely recognized to be problematic" (p. 402), fetish cannot be dismissed as a mere preference or choice. The man-woman relationships in *The Shadow Lines* are generated from the sense of fetish that masks itself as a quest for love but the fact this love or desire emerged from the sense of exotic, strangeness and foreignness in terms of national, racial and cultural identities emphasises the fact that these desires are a result

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of fetishising the foreign subject. Apart from the argument of fetish that depicts a white woman in a marginalised position against the colonised brown man, the very incidents where the narrator molests May and violates Ila's boundaries depict the universal superiority of men across all nationalities, culture and racial identities. It becomes a means of fetishising the foreign female subject with the sense of strangeness and foreignness felt through cultural difference that includes but goes beyond the differences of racial and national identities.

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Unravelling the Particulate Matter & Air Quality Index at Anand Vihar, Delhi: Trends, Exceedances and Meteorological Influences

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Abstract

Air pollution is a significant environmental concern in Delhi, consistently jeopardizing human health due to high concentrations of pollutants that frequently exceed the WHO and NAAQS limits in India. Anand Vihar is a well-known hotspot for localized air pollution and is often at the most hazardous end of the pollution spectrum. In this study, a quantitative analysis of PM_{10} , $PM_{2.5}$, and AQI, along with meteorological parameters, was conducted over 6 years (2019-2024) at Anand Vihar, Delhi. The annual and daily concentrations of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ exceed the NAAQS by 3-4 times. The inter-annual average concentrations of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ were highest in 2022 and 2024, respectively, and lowest in 2020. The overall order of seasonal average concentrations of $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} ($\mu g\ m^{-3}$) was: post-monsoon \approx winter $>$ pre-monsoon $>$ monsoon. The annual $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios were highest in 2020 and lowest in 2022, suggesting a mixture of fine and coarse-mode combustion aerosols, which accounted for 39–55% of the total $PM_{2.5}$ load. A strong correlation (>0.6) between $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} was observed, indicating the prevalence of fine particulate emissions. The annual AQI values have consistently fallen into the Poor category, with only a slight improvement in 2020. According to the exceedance factor, 2024 was the most polluted year, while 2020 was the least polluted. This study underpins the limitations of current management strategies to achieve long-term outcomes for better air quality. It underlines the importance of enforcing strict curbs on

emissions from different sources, which assists in strengthening localized air-quality assessment to implement more effective strategies.

Key Words: $PM_{2.5}$, PM_{10} , *AQI*, *CPCB*, *Exceedance Factor*, $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$

Introduction

Air pollution is generally considered a contemporary phenomenon that is becoming worse day by day (Colbeck & Lazaridis, 2010). With the rapid increase in urbanization, atmospheric particles have become one of the most significant factors influencing urban air pollution (Ren-Jian et al., 2012). The term ‘Urban Air Quality’ is broad and encompasses social, economic, and health aspects across different parts of the world. An urban region refers to towns or cities where human settlement and its activities are very high. Therefore, the urban region exhibits high levels of pollution from human activities and development, which affect the environment and health. With increasing global economic growth, environmental pollution has become increasingly severe, especially inhalable particle pollution (Yan et al., 2022).

Air pollution has become a major global environmental and public health challenge — roughly 92% of the world’s population lives in areas where pollutant levels exceed the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines (Masood & Ahmad, 2021; Rautela & Goyal, 2024; WHO, 2017). One of the most prominent airborne pollutants, particulate matter (PM), has detrimental impacts on air quality and visibility, precipitation patterns, snow albedo, human health, and the global climate, as well as the Earth’s radiation spectrum (Rai et al., 2021). This extensive exposure contributes significantly to health problems such as respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, and premature death (Du et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Peter et al., 2005; Callén et al., 2011; Rai et al., 2020; Bhuyan et al., 2025). According to the WHO report (Data, 2023), air pollution is responsible for 1 in 10 premature deaths, causing approximately 7 million deaths annually worldwide, and is the fourth leading cause of mortality nationwide (Rautela & Goyal, 2024). Approximately 6.7 million people died worldwide in 2019 because of indoor and outdoor air pollution. About 12.5% of all deaths in India alone were caused by air pollution, with states like Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana enduring a significantly larger share of the illness burden (Sekar et al., 2025).

Atmospheric aerosols, notably black carbon, particulate matter (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$), dust, and sulphates, are key contributors to air quality, impacting human health and the environment (WHO, 2013), and play an important role in the global climate system (IPCC, 2013). These impacts, which have been widely investigated in South and Southeast Asia over the last two decades, are heavily influenced by the spatiotemporal variability and composition of these aerosols. The spatiotemporal variability and characteristics of these aerosols significantly impact these effects, which have been thoroughly investigated across South and Southeast Asia over the last two decades.

India, home to roughly 17.76% of the world's population, faces significant environmental challenges because many of its major cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, are frequently listed among the world's most polluted cities (Rautela & Goyal, 2024). Aerosols account for 30-70% of fine particulate ($PM_{2.5}$) pollution in urban areas of India, a problem exacerbated by rapid population growth, unplanned urbanization, and industrial development. According to successive editions of the World Air Quality Report (2020-2024), Delhi has repeatedly held the unwanted distinction of being the world's most polluted national capital. Therefore, this paper seeks to evaluate the spatial and temporal variations in particulate pollution and the Air Quality Index (AQI) in one of Delhi's major pollution hotspots. The primary objective of this quantitative study is to analyse the annual and seasonal fluctuations in PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations at Anand Vihar, Delhi, to identify the anthropogenic factors contributing to the city's declining air quality.

Materials & Methods

Study Area: Anand Vihar, Delhi

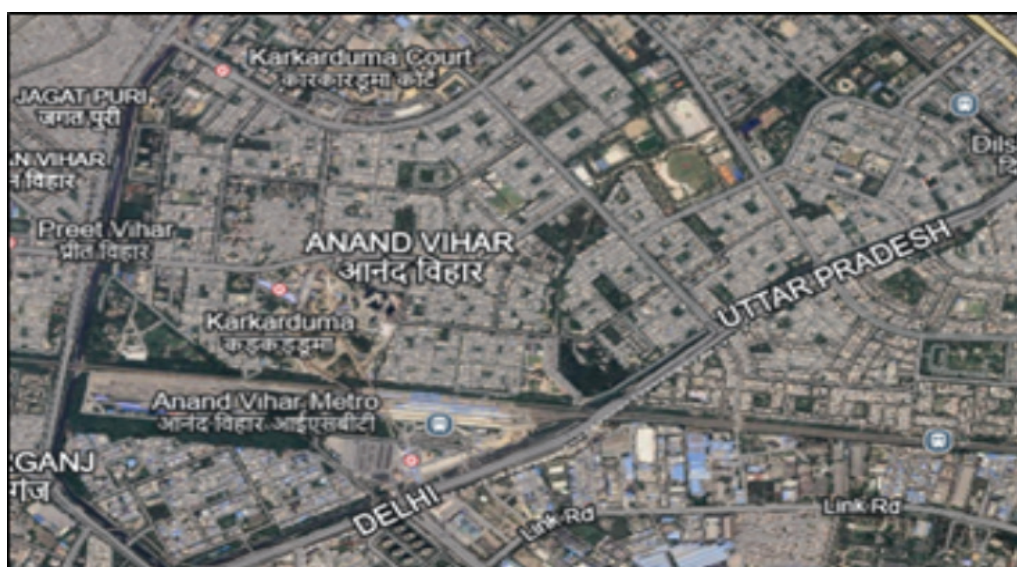
The National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT) has emerged as one of India's most densely populated and rapidly growing megacities, with a population of approximately 16.78 million in 2011 and an average density of 11,297 persons/km² (<https://www.census2011.co.in/>).

As a landlocked region, it attracts people and development from across the country. Geographically, Delhi lies at about 28.61 °N, 77.23 °E, south of the Himalayas, on the Indo-Gangetic Plain, north of the heated plains, and east of the Thar Desert (Shankar & Gadi, 2022). According to the Indian Meteorological

Department (IMD), Delhi experiences four different seasons: summer or pre-monsoon (March to May), monsoon (June to September), post-monsoon (October to November), and winter (December to February). Generally, the weather in Delhi in the summer (pre-monsoon) is hot and dry (47°C), whereas in winter it is frigid ($\sim 3^{\circ}\text{C}$).

Figure 1

Study Area of Anand Vihar, Delhi



Source: Google Map

Anand Vihar (28.6502°N , 77.3027°E), situated in eastern Delhi, is a significant pollution hotspot influenced by its proximity to highways, industrial zones, and dense residential areas. Formerly primarily residential, it has been transformed into an extensive industrial and commercial hub, with a growing population density and substantial traffic due to its proximity to the Yamuna River and major highways. High levels of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$, PM_{10} , NO_x , SO_2 , CO , and O_3 are caused by a variety of pollution sources, including garbage burning, small-scale industries, and automobile exhaust, all of which are influenced by the socio-economic disparity of the area (Jakhar et al., 2025).

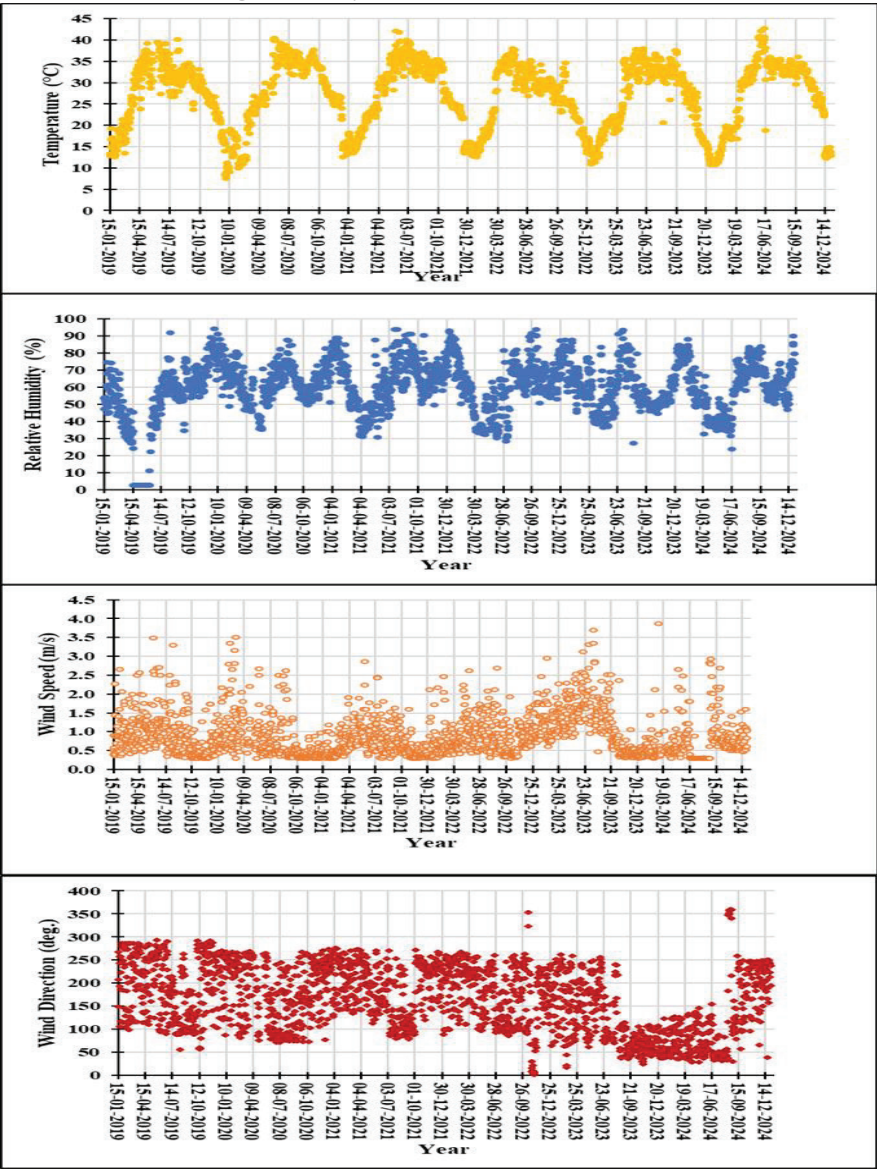
Table 1

Annual and Seasonal Meteorological Parameters (Temperature, Relative Humidity, Wind Speed, Wind Direction) During the Study Period From 2019 to 2024

Years	Meteorological Parameters	Annual	Seasons			
			Winter	Pre-Monsoon	Monsoon	Post-Monsoon
2019	Temperature (°C)	26.91 ± 7.37	16.70 ± 3.10	29.54 ± 5.93	32.53 ± 3.37	27.66 ± 2.33
	Relative humidity (%)	49.29 ± 22.95	64.21 ± 13.05	21.73 ± 19.72	52.00 ± 17.13	63.71 ± 5.52
	Wind Speed (ms ⁻¹)	0.92 ± 0.55	0.81 ± 0.48	1.05 ± 0.43	1.12 ± 0.64	0.49 ± 0.26
	Wind Direction (deg.)	193.68 ± 67.06	212.70 ± 60.53	224.33 ± 52.24	149.60 ± 55.99	207.88 ± 72.37
2020	Temperature (°C)	27.19 ± 8.70	15.70 ± 5.20	26.12 ± 5.45	35.36 ± 1.64	29.20 ± 3.34
	Relative humidity (%)	64.20 ± 10.37	71.58 ± 8.00	56.48 ± 11.92	65.83 ± 8.32	58.52 ± 5.58
	Wind Speed (ms ⁻¹)	0.81 ± 0.58	0.86 ± 0.62	1.16 ± 0.66	0.79 ± 0.51	0.40 ± 0.12
	Wind Direction (deg.)	180.55 ± 63.04	211.85 ± 56.21	191.22 ± 62.45	143.22 ± 56.05	196.60 ± 49.41
2021	Temperature (°C)	28.02 ± 7.51	17.82 ± 3.33	28.60 ± 5.20	35.06 ± 2.26	27.97 ± 4.04
	Relative humidity (%)	65.32 ± 13.98	72.34 ± 8.31	47.05 ± 10.27	68.09 ± 12.30	64.17 ± 7.23
	Wind Speed (ms ⁻¹)	0.72 ± 0.40	0.45 ± 0.17	0.91 ± 0.42	0.89 ± 0.40	0.52 ± 0.23
	Wind Direction (deg.)	187.08 ± 54.93	210.48 ± 40.93	200.16 ± 46.53	144.84 ± 51.70	217.95 ± 37.82
2022	Temperature (°C)	26.05 ± 7.03	16.08 ± 2.02	30.65 ± 5.90	30.27 ± 2.33	25.34 ± 3.28
	Relative humidity (%)	60.81 ± 15.51	73.29 ± 10.07	45.86 ± 9.94	60.51 ± 15.34	65.65 ± 9.03
	Wind Speed (ms ⁻¹)	0.86 ± 0.45	0.82 ± 0.48	0.87 ± 0.44	0.94 ± 0.46	0.71 ± 0.34
	Wind Direction (deg.)	175.68 ± 64.00	192.74 ± 50.64	193.00 ± 50.40	167.18 ± 57.36	140.80 ± 91.48
2023	Temperature (°C)	26.13 ± 7.78	15.69 ± 2.62	27.16 ± 6.20	33.46 ± 2.38	26.50 ± 3.56
	Relative humidity (%)	59.12 ± 12.70	67.91 ± 10.43	53.31 ± 11.81	61.67 ± 12.93	50.21 ± 2.95
	Wind Speed (ms ⁻¹)	1.23 ± 0.64	0.95 ± 0.56	1.43 ± 0.40	1.63 ± 0.61	0.60 ± 0.31
	Wind Direction (deg.)	121.14 ± 64.00	129.77 ± 67.88	157.96 ± 54.05	113.10 ± 62.66	67.64 ± 20.41
2024	Temperature (°C)	27.28 ± 8.57	15.53 ± 4.27	28.98 ± 6.56	34.25 ± 2.88	29.62 ± 3.25
	Relative humidity (%)	60.33 ± 14.48	68.90 ± 11.41	43.93 ± 8.24	65.02 ± 14.30	59.77 ± 5.31
	Wind Speed (ms ⁻¹)	0.72 ± 0.52	0.62 ± 0.32	0.78 ± 0.63	0.75 ± 0.67	0.73 ± 0.19
	Wind Direction (deg.)	122.29 ± 80.82	118.94 ± 72.56	76.14 ± 52.01	117.97 ± 96.65	194.41 ± 49.28

± Standard Deviation

Figure 2
Meteorological Parameters During the Study Period 2019-2024



Methodology & Data Analysis

The Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System (CAAQMS) of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), New Delhi, provided continuous datasets for the AQI, particulate matter (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$), temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, and wind direction for the 6 years from January 2019 to December 2024. To evaluate regional and temporal fluctuations in pollution levels, data from multiple years were combined, annual averages were calculated, and daily pollutant concentrations were examined at Anand Vihar, one of the CPCB monitoring stations.

The AQI is a method for efficiently and clearly conveying air quality to the general public. It simplifies complex air quality data from multiple pollutants into a single numeric value and a corresponding colour code. The AQI levels ranged from 0 to 500, as per the National Air Quality Index of the CPCB, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India. This range is divided into several categories of air quality indicators, each denoted by a distinct colour and associated with possible effects on human health: 0-50 (category 1), 51-100 (category 2), 101-200 (category 3), 201-300 (category 4), 301-400 (category 5), and 401-500 (category 6) representing the air quality as good, satisfactory, moderate, poor, very poor and severe, respectively. The AQI categories and ranges, along with their health impacts, are shown for reference (Table 1).

Table 2

CPCB Prescribes Different Categories of AQI and Their Health Impacts

AQI Value	AQI Category	Colour Code	Health Impacts
0 – 50	Good	Light Green	Minimal impact
51 – 100	Satisfactory	Green	Minor breathing discomfort to sensitive people
101 – 200	Moderate	Yellow	Breathing discomfort for people with lung diseases, asthma, and heart diseases
201 – 300	Poor	Orange	Breathing discomfort to most people on prolonged exposure
301 – 400	Very Poor	Red	Respiratory illness on prolonged exposure
401 – 500	Severe	Maroon	Affects healthy people and seriously impacts those with existing diseases

Source: <https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=110654>

A time-series analysis using a least-squares trend line was employed to examine pollution trends and levels over the study period, which were subsequently illustrated in bar graphs to depict pollution variations in Anand Vihar, Delhi. Based on the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), the pollution trends for 2019–2024 were analysed. By formulating a straight-line equation, $Y = a + bX$, where a and b are constants that indicate the relationship between the variables and help forecast future values, this method is quite successful at identifying long-term trends.

Additionally, the Exceedance Factor (EF) method (Equation 1), adopted by CPCB, was applied to evaluate temporal variations in air quality (Firdaus, 2010; Haque et al., 2017). The EF is the ratio of the annual average concentration of a pollutant to its corresponding regulatory standard of the NAAQS. According to EF values, air quality was classified as low, moderate, high, or critical.

EF of the $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} is calculated using the following formula:

$$EF = \frac{\text{Observed annual mean concentration of } PM_{10} \text{ \& } PM_{2.5}}{\text{Annual air quality standard of } PM_{10} \text{ \& } PM_{2.5}} \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

According to the EF values, there are four categories of air pollution:

1. Critical pollution (CP): when the EF value is equal to or more than 1.5;
2. High pollution (HP): when the EF value lies between 1.0 and 1.5;
3. Moderate pollution (MP): when the EF value lies between 0.5 and 1.0;
4. Low pollution (LP): when the EF value is equal to or less than EF 0.5

The EF compares the measured concentrations to Indian standards (NAAQS) to categorize pollution as low, moderate, high, or critical. It is a better indicator of how bad the air is than pollutant levels alone. When EF is identified as moderate, high, or critical, the pollutant is above the permitted limit, albeit to varying degrees, and poses a severe threat to people and the environment, requiring urgent action. On the contrary, a low EF category indicates that the pollutant is within the standards but may exceed them soon, necessitating preventive actions to maintain control (Sharma et al., 2019; Roy & Singha, 2020).

Results & Discussion

In this study, levels of ambient particulate pollutants, AQI, and meteorological parameters were compared across the pre-COVID-19, COVID-19, and post-COVID-19 periods from 2019 to 2024. The annual and seasonal meteorological parameters, such as temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$), relative humidity (%), wind speed (m s^{-1}), and wind direction (deg.), are shown in Table 2 for the study period from 2019 to 2024. Fig. 2 depicts the trend of all meteorological parameters from 2019 to 2024. Table 3 shows the observed annual and seasonal variation of PM_{10} , $\text{PM}_{2.5}$, and AQI during the study period from 2019 to 2024. In comparison, the data revealed a significant decrease in PM levels before, during, and after the lockdown.

Annual Variation of PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$

Fig. 3 depicts the time-series analysis of PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) during the study period from 2019 to 2024. Fig. 4 illustrates the year-wise trends in the annual mean concentrations of PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$), represented as bar graphs. The order of inter-annual average concentrations of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) was: 2024 (~ 136) > 2021 (~ 129) > 2019 (~ 128) = 2023 (~ 128) > 2022 (~ 124) > 2020 (~ 115) and PM_{10} ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) was: 2022 (~ 317) > 2024 (~ 314) > 2023 (~ 297) > 2021 (~ 274) > 2019 (~ 272) > 2020 (~ 206). Although the concentrations varied somewhat between years, the general trend shows that PM levels continually exceeded the NAAQS of India, i.e., $40 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and $60 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ for PM_{10} , emphasizing ongoing air quality concerns throughout the study period. According to inter-annual trends, significant declines in PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations were observed in 2020 compared to 2019, with reductions of almost 25% and 11%, respectively. The results showed consistency with a decrease in human-driven activities such as vehicular traffic and industrial activities during the COVID-19 lockdown period. However, after 2021, PM levels rose, suggesting that the decline was only transitory and that PM pollution remains predominantly attributable to anthropogenic activities.

Figure 3
The Time Series of Yearly Concentration of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ ($\mu g\ m^{-3}$) During the Study Period 2019-2024.

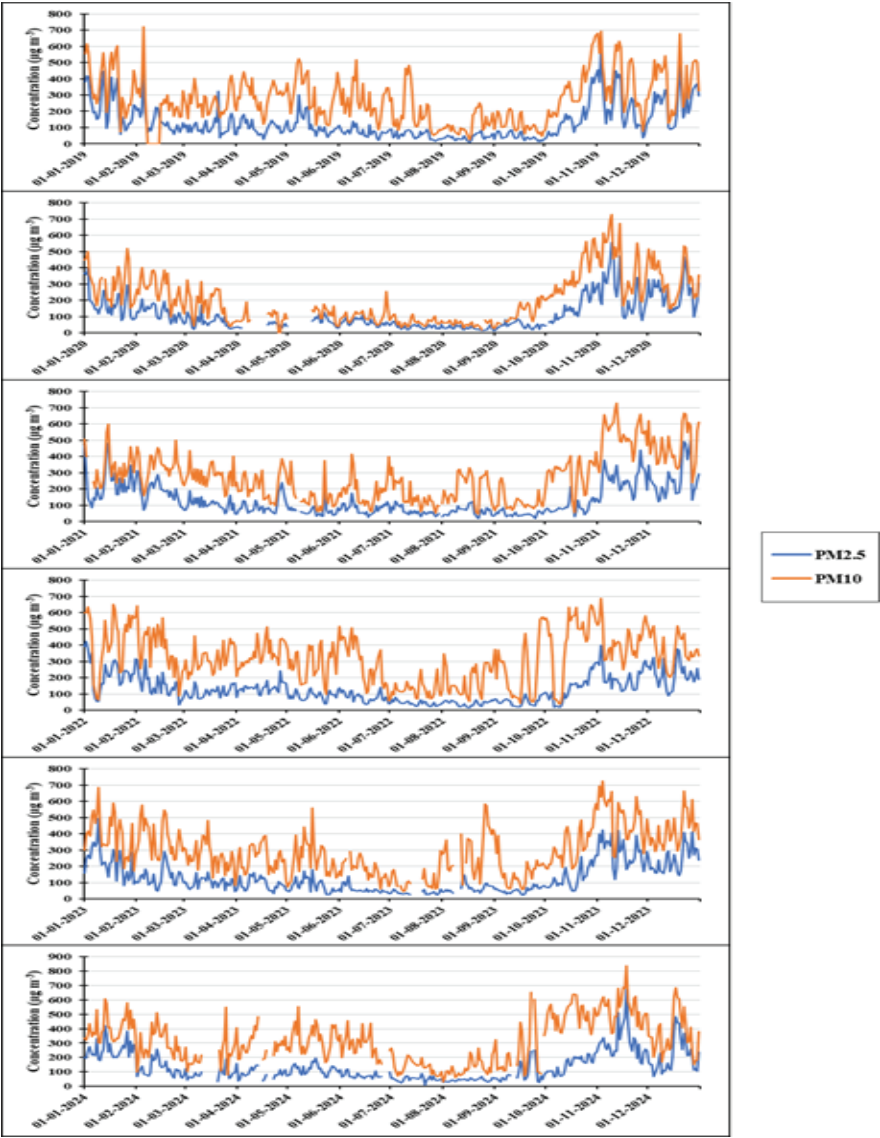


Table 3

The Annual and Seasonal Variation of PM_{10} , $PM_{2.5}$, and AQI During the Study Period from 2019 to 2024

Year	Annual		Winter		Pre-Monsoon		Monsoon		Post-Monsoon	
	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$
2019	272.40 ± 144.58	128.48 ± 104.69	351.13 ± 140.60	209.77 ± 108.58	281.37 ± 93.41	105.55 ± 50.50	171.97 ± 104.92	52.93 ± 25.48	353.91 ± 161.38	194.26 ± 130.76
2020	206.39 ± 149.48	114.57 ± 99.58	298.05 ± 105.39	183.25 ± 88.83	135.10 ± 70.63	64.52 ± 30.69	86.77 ± 46.51	44.41 ± 20.46	381.64 ± 144.30	205.62 ± 117.72
2021	274.02 ± 148.28	128.69 ± 97.16	380.73 ± 117.40	228.21 ± 98.86	218.55 ± 89.20	89.75 ± 45.77	168.00 ± 82.73	62.99 ± 27.47	413.98 ± 149.11	169.61 ± 100.72
2022	317.32 ± 133.47	124.15 ± 83.59	391.52 ± 138.19	202.42 ± 85.48	314.50 ± 83.87	111.97 ± 35.33	210.40 ± 132.29	53.96 ± 26.69	425.91 ± 158.45	167.42 ± 82.99
2023	296.63 ± 146.63	127.87 ± 94.94	395.38 ± 109.94	203.54 ± 88.49	252.44 ± 91.43	90.77 ± 36.64	189.55 ± 110.80	54.13 ± 22.99	408.94 ± 147.65	207.52 ± 106.05
2024	313.69 ± 158.91	136.04 ± 100.95	351.94 ± 121.79	196.28 ± 97.88	287.34 ± 99.52	100.34 ± 36.65	190.56 ± 115.37	62.89 ± 37.44	519.52 ± 95.63	228.51 ± 116.21

± Standard Deviation

Figure 4

The Inter-Annual Concentration of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ ($\mu g\ m^{-3}$) During the Study Period 2019-2024

Seasonal Variation of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$

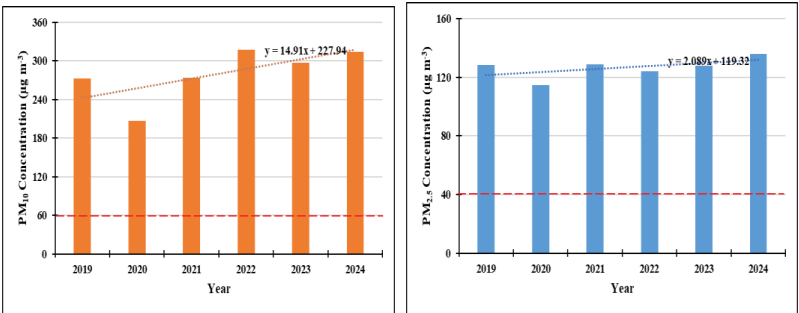
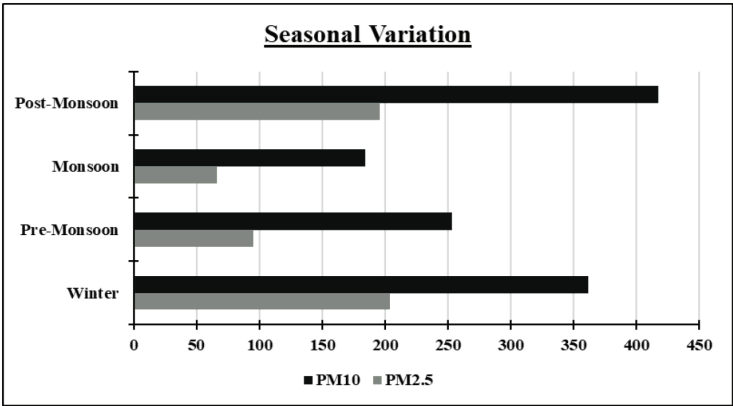


Figure 5

The Seasonal Variation of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ ($\mu g\ m^{-3}$) During the Study Period 2019-2024

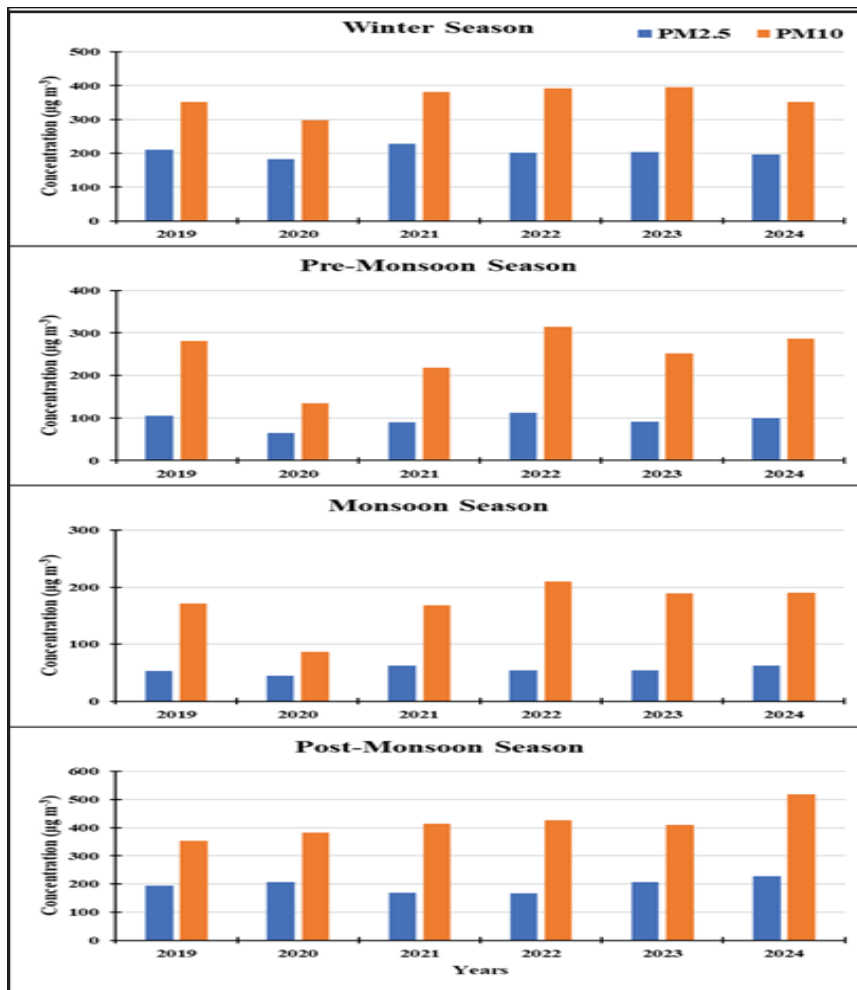


During the six-year study period, the overall order of seasonal average concentrations of PM_{10} was found to be: post-monsoon ($417.32\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > winter ($361.49\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > pre-monsoon ($252.96\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > monsoon ($183.94\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$); and $PM_{2.5}$: winter ($203.86\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > post-monsoon ($195.46\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > pre-monsoon

($95.33 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) > monsoon ($66.10 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$). The overall order of seasonal average concentrations of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) was: post-monsoon \approx winter > pre-monsoon > monsoon. A similar trend was observed in various studies, like Dhaka et al. (2024), Chetna et al. (2022), Singh et al. (2020), Sharma et al. (2018), and Tiwari et al. (2015).

Figure 6

The Interannual Concentrations of PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$) During the Winter, Pre-Monsoon, Monsoon, and Post-Monsoon Seasons from 2019-2024



During winters, the inter-annual trend of PM_{10} concentrations was recorded as $2023 > 2022 > 2021 > 2024 > 2019 > 2020$; whereas for $PM_{2.5}$, the concentration was observed as $2021 > 2019 > 2023 > 2022 > 2024 > 2020$. According to meteorological “deweathering” studies for Delhi by Verma et. al. (2025), winters tend to elevate and reduce $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} by around $17 \mu g m^{-3}$ and $7.8 \mu g m^{-3}$, respectively. It suggests that year-round weather changes, such as variations in inversion strength, changes in boundary-layer height, biomass burning, and lower wind speeds, influence particulates in distinct ways. Jain et al. (2020) indicated that during winters, $PM_{2.5}$ is predominantly affected by local biomass and stubble burning, while PM_{10} comprises a greater proportion of dust from local re-suspension activities, including construction and pavement dust. The lowest concentration of pollutants was observed in 2020, likely attributable to COVID-19 lockdowns that reduced construction activity and traffic, leading to a decline in pollutants influenced by regional emissions and transport.

During the pre-monsoon period, the peak concentrations recorded in 2022 for both PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ were probably due to a swift resurgence of unrestrained anthropogenic activities, coupled with adverse meteorological conditions such as reduced wind speeds or elevated temperatures that promote atmospheric accumulation and the formation of secondary aerosols. The observed PM_{10} trend ($2022 > 2024 > 2019 > 2023 > 2021 > 2020$) varies with the $PM_{2.5}$ trend ($2022 > 2019 > 2024 > 2023 > 2021 > 2020$), which is mainly driven by emissions from combustion sources such as vehicular or industrial, because the pre-monsoon season typically has higher temperatures and a lower level of relative humidity.

During the monsoon, the inter-annual trend of PM_{10} concentrations was recorded as $2022 > 2024 > 2023 > 2019 > 2021 > 2020$; whereas for $PM_{2.5}$, the concentration was observed as $2021 > 2024 > 2023 > 2022 > 2019 > 2020$. The fundamental reason for such reduced concentrations during the monsoon season is the mechanism of wet accumulation of particulate matter and the effective washing of pollutants by precipitation (Singh et al., 2020; Murari et al., 2017).

During the post-monsoon season, the inter-annual trend of PM_{10} concentrations was recorded as $2024 > 2022 > 2021 > 2023 > 2020 > 2019$; whereas for $PM_{2.5}$, the trend was $2024 > 2023 > 2020 > 2019 > 2021 > 2022$. PM_{10} is highly fluctuating

because it is primarily driven by local emission sources such as road dust, construction, and industrial smoke, which explained its highest concentrations in 2024 and 2022, when activity related to construction, dry weather, and dust re-suspension was elevated, while lower levels in 2019-2020 illustrate stricter regulations and COVID-19 restrictions. However, $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations are highest in 2024 and 2023 due to regional combustion processes such as stubble burning in Punjab, U.P., and Haryana, secondary aerosol formation, and urban emissions, particularly under low wind speeds and low mixing layers. One notable finding was that $PM_{2.5}$ levels in 2022 contributed the least to fine-mode pollution, even lower than in 2020, while PM_{10} levels in 2022 contributed significantly to coarse-mode pollution. This disparity may be explained by the fact that while regional combustion-related sources of $PM_{2.5}$, particularly stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana, were comparatively weaker in 2022, intense local activities like construction, re-suspension of road dust, and industrial smoke contributed significantly to coarse particles.

Table 4

The Annual and Seasonal Values of the $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ Ratio During the Study Period from 2019 to 2024

Year	Annual	Winter	Pre-Monsoon	Monsoon	Post-Monsoon
2019	0.43 ± 0.16	0.60 ± 0.12	0.38 ± 0.15	0.33 ± 0.08	0.51 ± 0.13
2020	0.55 ± 0.16	0.60 ± 0.15	0.47 ± 0.18	0.56 ± 0.18	0.50 ± 0.16
2021	0.45 ± 0.15	0.60 ± 0.14	0.42 ± 0.11	0.40 ± 0.11	0.39 ± 0.15
2022	0.39 ± 0.14	0.52 ± 0.13	0.36 ± 0.08	0.30 ± 0.12	0.40 ± 0.12
2023	0.41 ± 0.15	0.50 ± 0.13	0.36 ± 0.09	0.33 ± 0.16	0.48 ± 0.11
2024	0.43 ± 0.17	0.54 ± 0.13	0.37 ± 0.19	0.37 ± 0.14	0.43 ± 0.16

± Standard Deviation

Table 5

The Annual and Seasonal Values of AQI During the Study Period from 2019 to 2024

Year	Annual		Winter		Pre-Monsoon		Monsoon		Post-Monsoon	
	AQI Value	AQI Category	AQI Value	AQI Category	AQI Value	AQI Category	AQI Value	AQI Category	AQI Value	AQI Category
2019	239	Poor	325	Very Poor	236	Poor	149	Moderate	308	Very Poor
2020	217	Poor	320	Very Poor	149	Moderate	117	Moderate	321	Very Poor
2021	248	Poor	355	Very Poor	198	Moderate	156	Moderate	328	Very Poor
2022	273	Poor	341	Very Poor	271	Poor	185	Moderate	344	Very Poor
2023	258	Poor	344	Very Poor	216	Poor	172	Moderate	332	Very Poor
2024	272	Poor	328	Very Poor	246	Poor	165	Moderate	394	Very Poor

Table 6

The Annual Exceedance Factor of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ During the Study Period from 2019 to 2024

Year	Annual		Number of days							
			Critical Pollution (CP)		High Pollution (HP)		Moderate Pollution (MP)		Low Pollution (LP)	
	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$
2019	2.1	3.2	281	182	35	88	39	70	2	25
2020	1.9	2.9	185	149	39	53	85	93	55	71
2021	2.1	3.2	266	180	55	84	37	58	7	11
2022	2.1	3.1	297	213	31	59	34	63	3	30
2023	2.1	3.2	295	188	30	61	26	93	14	23
2024	2.3	3.4	281	193	35	69	25	78	25	26

PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ Ratio & its Correlation

The PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratios showed significant seasonal variation when examined to assess particle-size effects. This variation could be explained by the chemical composition of aerosols, which varies depending on natural, human-driven, and meteorological factors. The annual and seasonal values of the PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratio during the study period from 2019 to 2024 shown in Table 4. While smaller PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratios (<0.5) indicate the presence of more coarse-sized particles in particle pollution, primarily emitted/generated from natural sources like long-distance transport sand, soil and fugitive dust, re-suspension of road dust from construction and agricultural activities; higher PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratios >0.5) indicate the predominance of fine particles contributed by anthropogenic sources like vehicular exhaust, industrial processes, burning of biomass, and the production of secondary aerosols (Drăgoi et al., 2025; Tiwari et al., 2015; Bamola et al., 2024; Fatima et al., 2022).

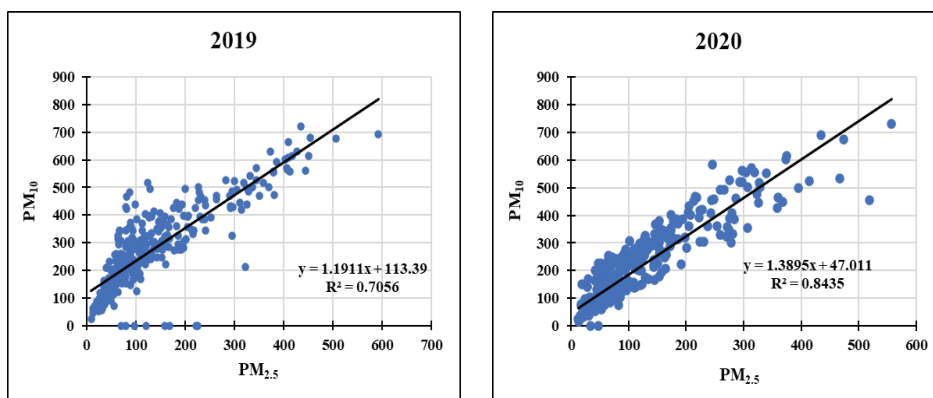
The annual PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratios ranged from 0.39 to 0.55, with the highest ratio in 2020, followed by 2021, 2019, 2024, 2023, and 2022. It suggests a mixture of both fine- and coarse-mode combustion aerosols, which constituted 39–55% of respirable fine particles and total PM, posing a significant health risk. The highest annual average was observed in 2020, indicating fewer coarse-particle emissions despite pandemic-induced restrictions and the continued presence of emissions from combustion sources. Seasonally, significant variation in the PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratio was observed at 0.50–0.60 (winter), 0.36–0.47 (pre-monsoon), 0.30–0.56 (monsoon), and 0.39–0.51 (post-monsoon), indicating distinct patterns influenced by meteorology and emissions processes. Lower PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratios (< 0.40) were observed during the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons, predominantly influenced by crustal sources and wind-driven dust from the re-suspension of road dust, construction activities, and industrial emissions, while rainfall effectively scavenges fine particles. A recent study of Tiwari et al. (2025) reported similar observations across 17 monitoring stations in Delhi and Haryana. On the contrary, higher ratios (> 0.55) were reported during the winter and post-monsoon seasons, reflecting contributions from fine particulates emitted by stubble burning in neighbouring regions, biomass burning, residential heating, vehicular emissions, and secondary aerosol formation. A consistently high PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀ ratio recorded throughout winter from 2019–2024, favouring entrapment of fine particles due to low boundary

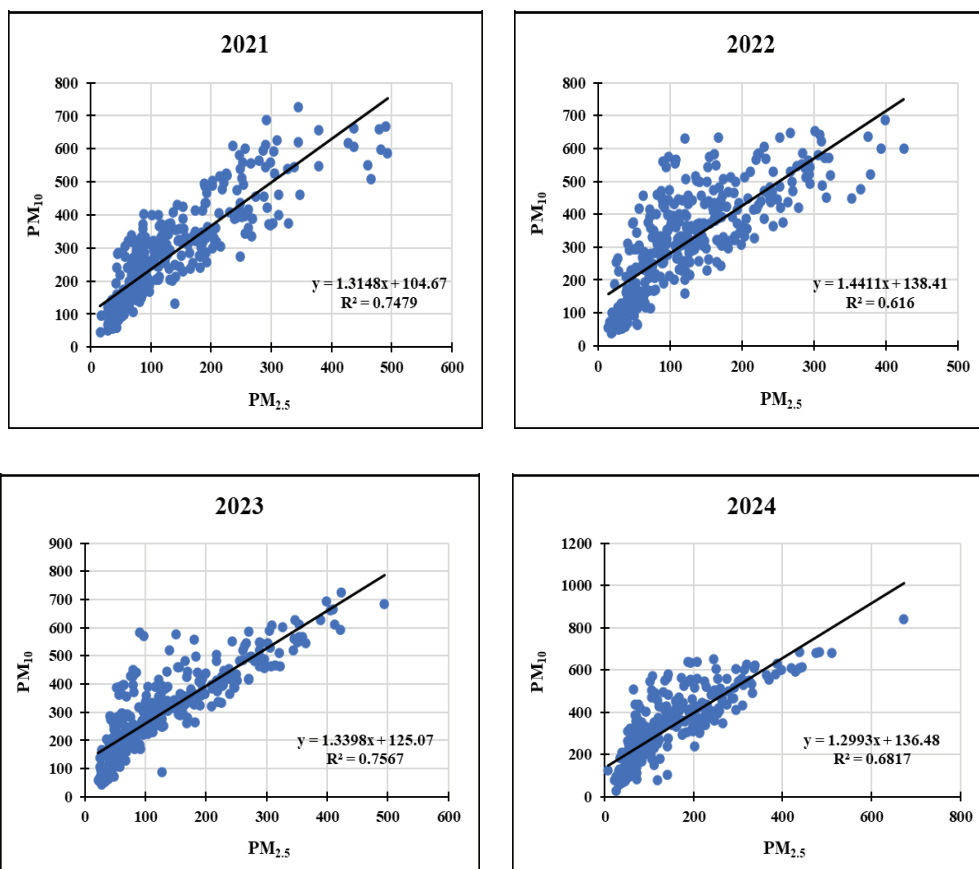
layer height emitted by human activities such as automotive exhaust, residential heating, power plants, biomass burning, and industries (Singh et al., 2013). Furthermore, due to stagnant atmospheric conditions in the post-monsoon season, deposition (wet and dry) of aerosols contributes to the accretion of $PM_{2.5}$, which ultimately leads to the formation of secondary aerosols in the atmosphere. Similar observations were reported by Fatima et al. (2022) at three sites: Alipur (residential), Okhla (industrial), and Pusa Road (traffic).

Overall, the observed order of correlation between $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 was 0.84 (2020) > 0.76 (2023) > 0.75 (2021) > 0.71 (2019) > 0.68 (2024) > 0.62 (2022). A strong correlation between 0.6 and 0.8 of both pollutants ($PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10}) was observed, showing the prevalence of fine particulates at the study site. A strong correlation ($r^2 = 0.84$) was observed in 2020 between $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} , suggesting that the concentrations of both pollutants are primarily dependent on emissions from vehicular exhaust, industrial sources, biomass burning, road dust, and construction activities, which are ubiquitous sources at the study site. Kumar and Priyanka (2021) also reported the good correlation between $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} during 2018-2020 in Delhi.

Figure 7

The Correlation Analysis Between $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} ($\mu g\ m^{-3}$) During the Study Period from 2019 to 2024





AQI Analysis

Comparing AQI data from 2019 to 2024, we observed significant seasonal and annual variations. The annual AQI values varied between 217 (2020) and 273 (2022) over the course of the six-year study period, consistently falling into the Poor category with only a slight improvement in 2020, which was probably due to reduced human activities during COVID-19 lockdowns, followed by an upsurge due to higher pollution levels in subsequent years. As a result, the data obtained showed that the ambient air quality of Anand Vihar, Delhi, is still worsening.

It is clearly evident from Table 5 that during winter and post-monsoon seasons, the AQI displays the most severe deteriorating air of Anand Vihar, Delhi, persistently lying in the Very Poor category (ranging from 320 (2020) to 355 (2021) during winters and 308 (2019) to 394 (2024) during post-monsoon) throughout the 6-year study period. During the pre-monsoon season, the AQI is in the Poor category, ranging from 149 (2020) to 271 (2022), except in 2020 and 2021, which may be attributed to the COVID-19 lockdowns that began in March 2020. On the contrary, the monsoon season falls within the Moderate AQI category, ranging from 117 (2020) to 185 (2022), suggesting a washout effect on pollutants.

Collectively, the data indicate that, despite yearly variations, air quality in every season—except the monsoon—remained above acceptable levels, with winter and the post-monsoon seasons posing the most significant health risks. The ongoing prevalence of Poor to Very Poor AQI categories underscores the urgent need for improved air-quality mitigation strategies, especially those that target seasonal emitters and weather factors.

Exceedance Factor (EF) of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$

CPCB widely used the EF to define pollution episodes, and the intensity and severity of Delhi's persistent and severe air pollution were examined at Anand Vihar from 2019 to 2024. Table 6 shows the annual and seasonal EF of $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} , along with the number of critical, high, moderate, and low pollution days. The annual EF values of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ were highest in 2024 (2.3 and 3.4, respectively) and lowest in 2020 (1.9 and 2.9, respectively), indicating 2024 as the most polluted and 2020 as the least polluted year during the 6-year study period at Anand Vihar. Both pollutants fell into the critical pollution (CP) category ($EF > 1.5$) during the study period, with PM_{10} EF values ranging from 1.9 to 2.3 and $PM_{2.5}$ EF values ranging from 2.9 to 3.4. The number of CP days of $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} varied from 185 and 149 days in 2020, respectively, to a peak of 213 and 297 days in 2022, respectively. Long-term exposure to such severe pollution indicates long-term environmental stress in the region, which frequently worsens during winter inversions, intensive construction activities, and heavy vehicular emissions. Despite the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, the number of CP days of $PM_{2.5}$ remained high (149 days), indicating significant

impacts from regional ambient pollution and local non-traffic sources. However, there were very few days with a low pollution (LP) category during the study period. Low-pollution days for $PM_{2.5}$ ranged from 11 in 2021 to 71 days in 2020, whereas PM_{10} persisted below 55 days in all of the years.

The lack of LP days underscores the persistent average particulate concentration, which seldom falls below standard limits. As a result, the findings suggest that prolonged exposure to such extreme PM levels has severe adverse health effects, particularly on respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses.

Conclusion

This study presents an inter-annual and seasonal progression of $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} from January 2019 to December 2024, at Anand Vihar, Delhi, as follows:

- The interannual average concentrations of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ were highest in 2022 and 2024, respectively. Although the concentrations varied daily (24-hr) and between years, the general trend shows that PM levels continually exceeded the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) of India, emphasizing ongoing air quality concerns throughout the study period.
- During the six-year study period, the overall order of seasonal average concentrations of PM_{10} ($\mu g\ m^{-3}$) was found to be: post-monsoon ($417.32\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > winter ($361.49\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > pre-monsoon ($252.96\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > monsoon ($183.94\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$); and $PM_{2.5}$: winter ($203.86\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > post-monsoon ($195.46\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > pre-monsoon ($95.33\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$) > monsoon ($66.10\ \mu g\ m^{-3}$).
- The seasonal inter-annual trend of PM_{10} concentrations was recorded as highest during winter (2023 and 2021), pre-monsoon (2022 for both), monsoon (2022 and 2021), and post-monsoon (2024 for both); and lowest in 2020, except in post-monsoon (2019 for PM_{10} and 2022 for $PM_{2.5}$). It suggests that year-round weather changes, such as variations in inversion strength, changes in boundary-layer height, biomass burning, and lower wind speeds, influence particulates in distinct ways. The lowest concentration of pollutants was observed in 2020, likely attributable to COVID-19 lockdowns that reduced construction activity and traffic.

- The annual $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratios ranged from 0.39 to 0.55, with higher ratios in 2020 and lower in 2022, suggesting a mixture of fine- and coarse-mode combustion aerosols, which accounted for 39–55% of $PM_{2.5}$ relative to total PM, a major health risk. Seasonally, significant variation in the $PM_{2.5}/PM_{10}$ ratio was observed at 0.50–0.60 (winter), 0.36–0.47 (pre-monsoon), 0.30–0.56 (monsoon), and 0.39–0.51 (post-monsoon), indicating distinct patterns influenced by meteorology and emissions processes.
- A strong correlation between 0.6 and 0.8 of both pollutants ($PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10}) was observed throughout the study period, showing the prevalence of fine particulates at the study site. The observed interannual correlation between $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} was highest in 2020 and lowest in 2022, with values of 0.84 and 0.62, respectively.
- The annual AQI values ranged from 217 (2020) to 273 (2022) over the six-year study period, consistently falling into the Poor category, with only a slight improvement in 2020, likely due to reduced human activity during COVID-19 lockdowns. Seasonally, winter and post-monsoon seasons showed higher AQI values than pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons.
- The annual EF values of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ were highest in 2024 (2.3 and 3.4, respectively) and lowest in 2020 (1.9 and 2.9, respectively), indicating 2024 as the most polluted and 2020 as the least polluted year during the 6-year study period at Anand Vihar, Delhi.

The study of air quality trends in Anand Vihar, Delhi, shows that temperature inversions, crop residue burning, and emissions from Indian festivals cause recurring pollution peaks during the winter and post-monsoon seasons, with monsoon rains offering only momentary relief. According to the findings of this study, stronger interventions, such as stricter vehicle limitations, controlling dust at construction sites, industrial emission enforcement, collaboration between regions for stubble burning mitigation, and improved transportation connectivity, are of paramount importance. In the coming decades, the burden of particulate pollution in Anand Vihar, Delhi, is expected to remain very high in the absence of targeted, sustained interventions.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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Nitish Kumar's Leadership in Bihar: Balancing Social Justice with Development-oriented Governance

Dilip Kumar

Abstract

This study provides a critical analysis of Nitish Kumar's leadership in Bihar, who has emerged as a significant regional leader in Indian politics since the 1990s. His political journey, marked by frequent shifts in alliances and an emphasis on governance, provides a significant case study for understanding leadership in the context of India's fragmented party system. This article attempts to investigate the interaction between charisma and institutional strategies, the interface between populism and policy-oriented governance, as well as changing patterns of coalition-building in Bihar.

Keywords: *Good governance, Identity politics, Politics of patronage, Social equity, Social justice*

Introduction

Nitish Kumar's political journey has extended over four decades, commencing with his participation in the Jayaprakash Narayan movement during the 1970s, advancing through his ascent within the Janata Dal, and culminating in his numerous terms as Chief Minister of Bihar. His standing as a leader who introduced 'sushasan' (good governance) to the state and significantly altered Bihar's political narrative in the mid-2000s. His ability to integrate governance

reforms—such as enhanced infrastructure, law and order, and women’s empowerment—with pragmatic coalition politics distinguishes him as a notable figure among India’s regional satraps (Thakur, 2015).

However, Nitish Kumar’s leadership is not devoid of contradictions. Although he projected himself as ‘*Sushasan Babu*’ at the beginning of his term, from 2005 to 2013, his frequent shifts in position – alternating alliances with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) – were seen as a sign of political opportunism rather than ideological coherence (Jha, 2017). Thus, an examination of Nitish Kumar’s leadership is significant as his leadership reflects a distinctive combination of pragmatism, social justice politics, and developmental vision, positioning him as an important figure for understanding how regional leaders negotiate complex caste hierarchies, coalition politics, and governance challenges. By analyzing Nitish Kumar’s political trajectory, this article attempts to investigate the interaction between charisma and institutional strategies, the interface between populism and policy-oriented governance, as well as changing patterns of coalition-building in Bihar.

Here a few questions crop up for consideration: How has Nitish Kumar balanced social justice politics with the agenda of development-oriented governance? Does his leadership reinforce democratic values in Bihar or perpetuate patronage-based politics? In what ways has his leadership reshaped caste-based politics in Bihar? To what extent has coalition politics contributed to sustaining his leadership? In this article an attempt has been made to answer these questions.

Why Study the Leadership of Nitish Kumar?

The newly exalted position of the states and state-level parties within the Indian political framework has shifted attention towards the significant power and influence held by state-level political leaders (Kumar, 2013). Renowned scholar Atul Kohli (1987) has established key links between political leadership and economic development, revealing that the implementation of pro poor policies is contingent on the different political regimes of states. Furthermore, Harriss (1999) posits that this scenario serves as a ‘laboratory’ for comparative policy analysis, highlighting “the growing importance of state-level politics in the face of India’s economic reforms” (p. 3367).

Nevertheless, leadership as a study remains surprisingly understudied, particularly with regard to state-level leadership. Banerjee (2010) identifies three reasons for this oversight. First, the dominant focus has been on national leaders who supposedly influenced India's postcolonial trajectory. Second, this dominance of the nationalist narrative diminishes the importance of 'regional' leaders. Finally, the authors argue that the vigorous promotion of identity politics in the context of elections obscures discussions about individual leaders by presenting them as part of a broader group phenomenon.

The influence of such a leader is significantly enhanced by his or her solid support among the numerically and economically dominant community or group of communities in the state or region to which that leader is associated. Given that the nature of democracy in India remains patrimonial, patronage and clientelism continue to prevail even after elections (Chandra, 2004). This phenomenon explains why castes and communities, functioning as "political" entities, tend to remain loyal to their "own" leader, regardless of the political party to which they belong, with the realistic expectation of receiving both direct and indirect allocations of public funds (Kumar, 2013, p. 103). In Bihar, a significant increase in a caste's or community's share in public employment, government contracts, lucrative positions, and service delivery has been observed when a leader of that caste or community successfully assumes the position of prime minister or even minister.

Focusing on Nitish Kumar's leadership is particularly instructive for several reasons. First, Nitish Kumar, a prominent state-level leader from a regional party with national aspirations, has attracted attention for his remarkable electoral successes and reputation as an effective administrator (*vikas purush*). Kumar has received widespread praise for orchestrating a transformation in a state previously considered a 'failed state' by many, including its own citizens. Secondly, an analysis of Nitish Kumar's leadership inevitably brings to light the significant political changes that have transpired in Bihar over the past two decades. It is important to remember that Bihar, once viewed as a well-administered and peaceful state during the era of Nehruvian India, has since transformed into a region characterized by extreme poverty and economic stagnation, social inequalities, caste and communal strife, political greed, pervasive corruption, and criminal activities. The pervasive fear of lawlessness in the 1990s deterred many from traveling through Bihar (Nambisan, 2008).

Cultural decline, along with political and electoral violence, was widespread (Das, 1992). Thirdly, once labeled by the media as 'India's cesspool' due to its 'extreme poverty, caste conflicts, chaotic politics, corruption, and lawlessness', Bihar has also been identified as the leading Bimaru (sick) state (Mitra, 2006). Past practitioners of caste-driven divisive politics effectively governed a regime often referred to as 'Jungle Raj'. The transformations in Bihar under Nitish Kumar's administration, regardless of whether they have occurred in political or economic spheres to the extent frequently asserted, have undeniably shaped the public's view of the state's standing on a national scale. Nitish Kumar is recognized as an 'unconventional leader' in Bihar, having successfully established a broad-based secular constituency focused on reforms and development, even while depending electorally on similar lower castes and a core minority support base.

Moreover, there is an urgent need for a deeper and more realistic assessment of Nitish Kumar's leadership approach. Considering the vital impact of leaders at the state level, it can be argued that scrutinizing their actions, principles, rhetoric, policies, and strategies yields valuable insights into the comprehension and elucidation of political transformation and progress within a particular state during the leader's tenure (Kumar, 2013). Furthermore, investigations into leadership contribute to the analysis of the evolving social composition of the political elite and the traits of representation within the relevant state (Jenkins, 2004).

Finally, it is important to note that Nitish Kumar has adopted a more insightful and strategic method for managing caste dynamics and social engineering, effectively bridging social divides. His partnership with the BJP has provided the support of powerful upper castes, especially Bhumihars and Rajputs, while also drawing in backing from the most backward castes among Hindus (Extremely Backward Class) as well as Pasmanda Muslims, who were formerly aligned with the earlier regime. The Kurmis and Koeris, two upper backward castes, constitute his 'natural' constituency.

The Concept of Leadership

Prior to examining the leadership of Nitish Kumar and the diverse theoretical and practical dimensions associated with it, it is pertinent to first explore the concept of 'leadership'. It is widely recognized that leaders have a profound

impact on political outcomes, governance structures, and social transformation. Leadership goes beyond simply holding a position; it embodies a dynamic relationship between leaders and their followers within a socio-political context (Bass, 1985).

Leadership has been interpreted in various ways by scholars, yet there is a shared understanding that it signifies the ability to affect others. James MacGregor Burns defines leadership as the “reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers” (1978, p. 425).

Harold Lasswell (1965) characterizes leadership as “the interplay of power and personality” (p. 19). In a similar vein, F.E. Fiedler (1967) underscores the organizational dimension, defining leadership as the process of directing and coordinating group activities. These viewpoints underscore leadership as both a psychological and political phenomenon, integrating authority, persuasion, and decision-making.

Leadership of Nitish Kumar

Nitish Kumar's leadership in the perspective of politics of social justice and development-oriented governance warrants examination across three major theoretical dimensions i.e Max Weber's framework of charismatic, traditional and legal-rational leadership, James MacGregor Burns transformational and transactional leadership and Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony- because his political career exemplifies the relationship between personality, power, and institutional structures in Indian democracy.

Good Governance and Nitish Kumar's leadership

First of all, it seems appropriate to look at Max Weber's model of authority so that Nitish Kumar's leadership can be examined within that theoretical framework. Weber's (1978) classification of authority into charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational types offers a valuable framework for assessing Nitish Kumar's leadership. Kumar's leadership is predominantly legal-rational, gaining legitimacy through compliance with institutional delivery (road, electricity, law and order), effective governance, and bureaucratic proficiency. His initiatives aimed at enhancing infrastructure and maintaining law and order

illustrate a commitment to rule-based administrative authority, rather than depending exclusively on personal charisma. His leadership strategy as Witsoe (2013) writes, focused on revitalizing bureaucracy, which served as a stabilizing element against the dominance of political class. His governance framework is heavily based on the belief that ‘good governance’ could evolve into ‘good politics’. This viewpoint became particularly apparent during the ‘Nyay Yatra’, which took place before the 2005 assembly elections. The campaign embodied the call for governance and development, establishing the principle that effective governance should correspond with sound political practices (Jha, 2022). Nitish Kumar’s direct engagement with the populace during the Yatra underscored these fundamental realities. As a result, governance-centered politics emerged as the foundational structure for the state’s development agenda.

During his initial term in office (2005-2010), Nitish Kumar gradually redirected the political idioms/vocabulary of the State from ‘backward caste empowerment’ to ‘development.’ Although he began his political journey with a socialist perspective focused on social justice, he progressively aligned himself with more liberal economic principles, especially after forming an alliance with the BJP. While Lalu’s political discourse centered on dignity and social justice, Nitish Kumar’s emphasis was on *Sushasan* (good governance), illustrating the influence of neo-liberal rhetoric. As a leader who evolved from socialism to a neo-liberal, development-focused stance, Kumar viewed pro-business policies as crucial for promoting economic growth and reducing widespread poverty (Jha, 2022).

In light of Nitish Kumar’s focus on ‘Good Governance’ as part of his policy agenda, the media fondly referred to him as ‘*Sushasan Babu*,’ which translates to the man of Good Governance. Drawing from the neo-liberal perspective that ‘good governance is crucial for development,’ Nitish Kumar promoted the idea of ‘development with social justice’ through ‘*Sushasan*’ (good governance), which he envisioned would lead to a ‘Resurgent Bihar’(Sinha, 2011). During his second term in 2010, Nitish Kumar reiterated his commitment to governance by introducing an extensive initiative for *sushasan* (good governance), which was officially released in the Bihar Gazette on December 16, 2010. The Government under the leadership of Nitish Kumar pledged to ensure greater transparency, implemented the Right to Public Service Act in 2011, and adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption. Weber emphasises that “under legal-

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rational leadership the authority of the most rational type is based on the belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands” (1978, p. 217). This perspective aptly fits Nitish Kumar's governance style.

In contrast to previous administrations, Nitish's leadership focused on four essential areas: improving administrative efficiency by selecting reliable officers; reinstating law and order through the establishment of fast-track courts; expediting infrastructure development, especially in road connectivity; and creating channels for direct feedback and communication between citizens and political leaders (Mukherjee & Jha, 2017). These initiatives aimed to render governance more attuned to the populace's needs.

The paradigm of governance under the leadership of Nitish Kumar exemplified a development strategy led by the state. This governance framework was predominantly top-down, with political leadership of Nitish Kumar steering the bureaucratic apparatus to work around the core areas. Hence, development initiatives were crafted to demonstrate a departure from previous political practices and to focus on specific areas which were neglected (Kumar, 2013). Nitish Kumar has been advocating for the concept of Bihari Asmita (Bihari Identity), with the objective of fostering pride through effective governance and development. This represented a notable shift away from politics driven by caste to moving towards a framework centered on governance.

Furthermore, reforms targeting law and order were implemented to dismantle entrenched political-criminal ties, while initiatives such as “Jaankari,” an ICT-enabled governance innovation, were launched, allowing individuals from any region of Bihar to submit an RTI application by calling the Jaankari call center to enhance transparency. In spite of encountering resistance, Nitish Kumar's resolve and political will fostered momentum for continuous governance reforms in Bihar. These reforms have received enthusiastic support from the urban middle class within the state and have also been positively embraced by a considerable segment of the rural poor, as evidenced by Kumar's significant electoral mandate in the 2015 and 2020 elections. This challenges the dominant notion that casteism is the only factor influencing political success in Bihar.

Nitish Kumar has consistently demonstrated his commitment to transformation (parivartan) and development (vikas). Among the various administrative

reforms aimed at promoting effective governance within the state, the most notable has been the creation of a rapid trial mechanism intended to restore law and order in a state where kidnapping and extortion had become entrenched ‘industries’ due to the collusion of politicians, law enforcement, and criminals (Thakur, 2015). The Government has initiated measures to improve policing, which include new recruitment efforts, enhanced training, the provision of advanced weaponry, and the establishment of model police stations. As noted by Abhay Singh (2022), the restoration of law and order has created a more favorable environment for private capital investment, the execution of developmental projects, and the encouragement of tourism. Furthermore, it has inspired contractors to undertake the construction of roads and bridges that connect Bihar’s rural areas with urban centers.

Corruption has emerged as a considerable obstacle to development, as public resources are frequently underutilized or misappropriated due to deeply rooted corrupt practices. The implementation of the Right to Information Act and the Right to Service Act signifies a dedication to improving transparency and fostering a level of accountability. Initiatives have been launched to identify corrupt officials possessing disproportionate assets, alongside efforts to confiscate their real estate holdings (Jha, 2014).

From the above discussion, it is obvious that Nitish Kumar’s leadership style since he became the chief minister in 2005 and down to the present (2025) reflects a blend of legal-rational and charismatic traits and these traits set him apart from leaders who predominantly depend on, to put in the words of Max Weber, personal charm or traditional patronage systems.

At this juncture, it needs to be remembered that the concept of *sushasan* in Bihar became closely associated with Nitish Kumar’s leadership following 2005. His governance was initially viewed in stark contrast to the previous Lalu-Rabri regime characterized by ‘jungle raj.’ Initially, Nitish Kumar’s dependence on bureaucracy was praised as a corrective response to a politically biased administration. Nevertheless, as the years went by, this bureaucratic centralization diminished participatory decision-making and limited institutional independence. Sanjay Kumar argues that governance in Bihar became excessively reliant on the Chief Minister’s Office, sidelining local institutions and diminishing citizen involvement in policy formulation. The

discourse surrounding good governance increasingly conflicted with the reality of a closed and centralized system (Kumar, 2018).

Data from the State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB) indicate that the overall crime rate in Bihar has risen markedly since 2015, with an 80% increase in the number of crimes recorded from 2015 to 2024, in contrast to a 24% increase observed nationally during the same timeframe (Das, 2025). Likewise, violent crime, particularly homicides, has also escalated: for instance, between January and June 2025, there were roughly 1,376 murders, averaging 229 per month, compared to a total of 2,786 murders in the entirety of 2024 (The Economics times, 2025).

The liquor prohibition policy enacted in 2016 was presented as a moral and social reform. However, its ineffective implementation resulted in the emergence of illegal liquor networks, rampant corruption within enforcement agencies, and substantial revenue losses (Tiwari, 2022). Instead of reinforcing the *sushasan* narrative, prohibition became a symbol of political maneuvering overshadowed by unintended repercussions (Times of India, 2024). Despite the advancements in infrastructure, electricity, and education attributed to Nitish Kumar's administration, Bihar still falls short in terms of industrial development, healthcare services, and job creation. The ongoing migration of youth remains a significant socio-economic issue.

The erosion of good governance under Nitish Kumar illustrates the challenges of maintaining a reform-driven governance model without accompanying institutional changes. Although his 2005 to 2013 period in office marked a departure from Bihar's tumultuous history, the following years revealed several shortcomings: political opportunism, concentration of authority, unsuccessful initiatives such as prohibition, and a failure to implement structural economic reforms. Consequently, Nitish Kumar's legacy embodies both the potential and the vulnerabilities of governance-focused politics in a state grappling with entrenched socio-economic difficulties.

Nitish Kumar: Transformational and Transactional leadership

Nitish Kumar's leadership is frequently associated with transformational and transactional leadership, a concept developed by James MacGregor Burn (1978).

Transformational leaders motivate their followers to adopt a collective vision and strive for enduring societal transformation, while transactional leaders focus on alliances/shifting coalitions and caste balancing to keep social groups aligned. It is indeed true that since the 1990s, the political landscape of Bihar has been significantly influenced by the assertion of backward and marginalized castes. Lalu Prasad Yadav's discourse on social justice emphasized the symbolic representation of OBCs and Dalits, although it frequently encountered criticism regarding governance shortcomings. In contrast, Nitish Kumar presented himself as an alternative leader committed to the principle of *Nyaya ke saath Vikas* (development with justice). Nitish integrated the Mandal logic with what Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph refer to as "the politics of development" (2008, p. 221), thereby creating a hybrid political framework. His approach specifically targeted non-Yadav OBCs and EBCs, commonly known as the 'Most Backward Classes,' thus broadening the social justice agenda beyond the Yadav-centric base of Lalu Prasad Yadav.

At this point in the analysis, it is important to note that the Bihar Jaati Adharit Ganana (2023) has shown that Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constitute 27.13% and the extremely backward classes sub-group accounts for 36%, together making up an impressive 63% of the state's total population of 13.07 crore. In contrast, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) combined represent just over 21%. Considering this fact, Nitish Kumar's engagement with Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) signifies a Post-Mandal phase of caste politics in Bihar. His approach to social engineering has transformed backward class politics by redirecting attention from dominant castes to the most marginalized groups within the OBC category. By integrating welfare governance with caste-based inclusion, Nitish Kumar has established EBCs as a vital political constituency.

It is relevant to mention here that Nitish Kumar's leadership demonstrates transformational qualities in his emphasis on developmental reforms, including enhancements to public infrastructure, the expansion of electricity access, and initiatives aimed at empowering women. It is worth noting that programs such as the 'Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana' and 50 percent reservation for women in local governance not only met immediate demands but also articulated a wider vision for social advancement, thereby establishing legitimacy that transcends mere short-term political benefits. These women-

centric welfare policies reflect Amartya Sen's (1999) concept of development as the expansion of capabilities, particularly for marginalized communities. By connecting social justice with gender empowerment, Nitish set himself apart from the strictly caste-based mobilization strategies of his predecessors.

Nitish Kumar merged redistributive justice with a focus on governance and infrastructural enhancement. His administrations prioritized reforms in law and order, rural road development, electricity provision, and educational improvements. This approach resonates with Partha Chatterjee's differentiation between 'political society' and 'civil society,' as Nitish endeavored to reconcile clientelist politics with technocratic governance (2004, p. 40). Unlike Lalu's performative approach to social justice, Nitish's strategy aimed to provide reassurance to both marginalized castes and the aspirational middle classes, thereby broadening his political coalition.

In the theory of distributive politics, political leaders allocate benefits to specific groups to ensure loyalty. Nitish Kumar's focus on prioritizing 'Bihar youth' in employment aligns with this principle. It is important to note that in Bihar, many candidates, often young graduates, view government teaching positions as limited, stable, and desirable, and have advocated for preferential treatment (or exclusive rights) for those identified as Bihar domiciles. In 2020, the Nitish Kumar government introduced a domicile policy for the recruitment of schoolteachers, fulfilling part of his electoral commitments. However, this policy was abolished in 2023, resulting in widespread protests. By mid-2025, the Nitish Kumar administration publicly announced the reinstatement of domicile preference for teacher recruitment, which is scheduled to be implemented from TRE-4 onwards (The Indian Express, 2025). Indeed, Nitish Kumar's reference to domicile in the context of teacher recruitment reflects transformational rhetoric yet remains transitional in its application.

Moreover, in the past few months, Nitish Kumar has launched a variety of initiatives designed to enhance the welfare of the underprivileged and marginalized groups within society. These initiatives encompass the formation of a commission focused on the holistic socio-economic development of sanitation workers, the implementation of a program that provides 125 units of complimentary electricity to around 1.86 crore consumers, and an improvement of the State's journalist pension scheme, which has been increased from

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Rs.6,000 to Rs.15,000 monthly. Furthermore, there has been a rise in salaries and honorariums for grassroots public service providers; for example, ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers will now experience a monthly increase from Rs.1,000 to Rs.3,000. In a similar vein, Mamata workers, who provide assistance during childbirth at government health facilities, will see their remuneration for each delivery increase from Rs.300 to Rs.600 (The Hindu, 2025).

In a similar context, the NDA government in Bihar, led by Nitish Kumar, has raised the monthly honorarium for midday meal cooks in government schools from Rs.1,650 to Rs.3,300. Additionally, physical education and health instructors have seen their monthly salaries increase from Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 16,000. On July 3, 2025, the Cabinet of the Nitish Kumar administration approved the Mukhyamantri Kalakar Pension Yojana (Chief Minister Artiste Pension Scheme), which provides Rs. 3,000 per month to senior artists facing financial difficulties who have made notable contributions to Bihar's cultural heritage (The Hindu, 2025).

Nitish Kumar exhibits transactional leadership within the realm of coalition politics. His calculated partnerships with the BJP, RJD, HAM and LJP illustrate calculated exchanges of political backing and authority, placing electoral survival above ideological steadfastness. Let us explore the intricate fabric of his political decisions and partnerships to understand the complexities that have shaped Nitish Kumar's political leadership.

The multiparty federal system in India often requires regional leaders to engage in strategic coalition-building to maintain their power (Kumar, 2019). Kumar's skill in managing these alliances showcases his adaptive leadership, as he balances ideological stances with pragmatic considerations. It is remarkable to note that following his split from Lalu Prasad Yadav in 1994, Nitish Kumar sought to gain support from the Left parties, which ultimately rejected him. He contested his initial election in coalition with the CPI(ML) in 1995, but subsequently aligned with the BJP-led NDA, which enabled him to assume the role of chief minister in 2005 (Apoorvanand, 2022). In 2005 and 2010 Nitish Kumar's had headed a JD(U)-NDA coalition government.

The JD(U)-BJP coalition regained control in the Bihar assembly elections of 2010. During this period, Nitish Kumar developed his image as 'Sushasan

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Babu'. Nevertheless, in 2013, he severed his 17-year relationship with the BJP in response to the party's choice to nominate the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi as their candidate for Prime Minister (Aron, 2025). It is important to acknowledge that Nitish Kumar's partnership with the BJP from 2005 to 2013 not only enabled governance reforms but also required the integration of right-wing national policies.

In the general elections of 2014, Nitish Kumar opted for the JDU to run independently. However, he was compelled to resign on ethical grounds after the JD(U) suffered a defeat in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, subsequently appointing Jitan Ram Manjhi as his successor. Yet, within a year, conflicts emerged between the two leaders, prompting Jitan Ram Manjhi to leave the JDU and form his own party, the Hindustani Awam Morcha (Aron, 2025). Nitish Kumar regained the position of chief minister on February 22, 2015, just eight months before the forthcoming assembly elections.

To counter the influence of the Modi wave, Nitish Kumar formed an alliance known as the Mahagathbandhan with the Congress party and Lalu Prasad Yadav's RJD during the assembly elections of 2015. This coalition once again secured him the chief ministership in 2015 (Sinha, 2024). His temporary partnership with the Mahagathbandhan from 2015 to 2017 enabled him to counteract BJP dominance while preserving electoral viability. This showcased his adaptive leadership, where flexibility and pragmatic coalition-building allowed him to retain power. However, two years later in 2017, he set aside his opposition to Modi and rejoined the NDA. The JDU-BJP coalition also participated in the state assembly elections of 2020 under the NDA banner. This alliance regained power on November 20, 2020. However, five years later in August 2022 Nitish Kumar quit the NDA and joined the Mahagathbandhan, only to rejoin NDA in 2024 (Aron, 2025). Thus, his leadership can be viewed as transactional and survivalist, prioritising political longevity over ideological clarity.

Nitish Kumar's leadership: Looking through the Prism of hegemony

Since the early 2000s, Nitish Kumar has emerged as one of Bihar's most influential leaders, exercising a form of leadership often described as hegemonic. His leadership extends beyond elections and policy implementation to shaping public consent, forging new social coalitions, and altering the state's political

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narrative. Using Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, Kumar's leadership can be understood as a mix of persuasion, coercion, and ideological dominance, which has redefined Bihar's sociopolitical landscape for nearly twenty years.

Gramsci's idea of hegemony emphasizes not just control but also the ability of leaders to secure widespread acceptance by making their vision appear natural to society. Nitish Kumar's leadership fits this frame as he legitimized his rule through the themes of *sushasan* (good governance), social equity, and inclusive growth—blunting caste-based hostilities and weakening opposition.

By incorporating women, Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), Mahadalits and segments of upper castes into his political coalition, Kumar has forged a hegemonic bloc that contests the traditional dominance of Yadavs and Muslims under Lalu Prasad Yadav's RJD (Kumar & Chaurasia, 2024). In contrast to the previous prevalence of caste-based mobilization, Nitish Kumar aimed to validate his leadership through the concept of 'sushasan' (good governance). His focus on infrastructure development, enhancement of law and order, initiatives for girls' education, and rural electrification fostered a narrative of development that served as a cohesive ideology across various caste groups. This governance narrative acted as a unifying force, enabling Kumar to rise above limited caste identities and present himself as a leader of modernization.

As mentioned in above paragraphs, Nitish Kumar's shifting alliances—with the BJP-led NDA and subsequently with the RJD-Congress Mahagathbandhan and then NDA—illustrate his pragmatic approach to politics. Nonetheless, these shifts also highlight his capacity to maintain his hegemonic coalition within Bihar by negotiating power with national entities while preserving his regional authority. His fluctuation between 'Hindutva politics' and 'secular alliances' signifies a strategic maneuver aimed at ensuring the stability of his coalition in a politically fragmented environment.

Despite his achievements, Nitish Kumar's hegemonic initiative has encountered obstacles. The revival of the RJD under Tejashwi Yadav, and the changing tone and tenor of leaders like Jitan Ram Manjhi, Chirag Paswan and Upendra Kushawaha present significant challenges to the stability of his coalition. Furthermore, an over-reliance on developmental rhetoric without consistent implementation threatens to undermine his consensual legitimacy.

Conclusion

Nitish Kumar serves as a prime example of the intricacies involved in regional leadership within the context of India's federal democracy. He does not fit neatly into the categories of a strictly ideological leader or a purely populist figure; instead, he embodies a pragmatic politician who skillfully navigates governance narratives while employing survival strategies in the realm of coalition politics.

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